

**To the Chair and Members of the  
ELECTIONS AND DEMOCRATIC STRUCTURES COMMITTEE**

**ELECTORAL SERVICES REPORT**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

1. This report provides an update to Members on a number of key work streams being undertaken by the Electoral Services team in relation to future elections and changes brought about by the implementation of Individual Electoral Registration (IER)

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

2. The Committee is asked to,
  - i) Note the report and make any additional comments in relation to the contents;
  - ii) Note the decision of the Returning Officer to use the Racecourse as a count venue until after the Mayoral and all out Council Elections in 2017.

**BACKGROUND**

3. The Terms of Reference of this Committee provide for taking an overview of electoral services issues. Set out below is the current position in respect of current activity, preparing for IER and future elections.

**Postal Vote Refresh**

4. The postal vote refresh usually takes place in January to March each year for all registrations more than 5 years old. The statutory timetable for 2014 was brought forward to August 2013 due to the implementation of IER. Initial forms were sent out to 4,434 electors on 1 August 2013. Reminder forms were sent out to 1,860 electors on 22 August and 1,106 cancellation notices were sent out on 17 September. A postal vote application form was included in every mailing including the final notice. The total number of electors currently registered for a postal vote is 58,269.

## Individual Electoral Registration (IER)

5. Individual Electoral Registration (IER) is being described as the biggest change to electoral administration for almost a century. This three year project will require significant changes to business systems, IT infrastructure and existing interfaces with the electorate, contractors and third parties. Under IER electors will be registered individually and will have to provide personal identifiers (date of birth and national insurance number).
6. The timeline for implementation of IER resulted in disruption to the usual timetable of registration activities. The postal vote signature refresh was brought forward from January 2014 and took place from August to October 2013. The Electoral Registration annual canvass was delayed from August 2013 and began on October 2013 with the new electoral register being published in February 2014. The polling district, place and polling district review timetable commenced on 1 October 2013 and must be completed by 31 January 2015. The Local and European elections will be held on 22 May 2014.

### Key dates for the implementation of IER -

7. **October 2013 to February 2014:** to carry out the final old style household canvass from 1 October 2013. The new Register will be published on 17 February 2014. This register will be used to cross reference with the records of the Department of Works and Pensions (DWP).
8. **1 October 2013 – January 2015:** Polling district, place and polling station review.
9. **17 Feb 2014:** Publish Register of Electors.
10. **Feb 2013 – April 2014:** Improve match rates by data matching with local records and targeting areas identified as low match areas based on the results of the confirmation dry run in August 2013 and the canvass.
11. **Thursday 22 May 2014:** Local and European elections.
12. **July to August 2014:** Continue confirmation of existing electors as far as possible, via data-matching.
13. **Summer 2014:** Transition begins; existing register entries will be matched with records held by the DWP.
14. If details can be matched, electors will be confirmed on the register and sent a confirmation letter. If details cannot be matched, citizens will be asked to make an individual application supplying name, address, date of birth and national insurance number; the application can be made in hard copy or online. People will be reminded more than once and if they still do not respond will be visited by a canvasser.

15. There will be a safeguard in place for the General and Local Elections in 2015 so that existing electors who fail to register under IER in 2014 are not removed from the register until after the General Election
16. Electors who do not supply the relevant details will be automatically carried forward from the register published in 2014 to the following year to enable the maximum number of electors to vote in the General and Local Elections in May 2015.
17. However, it is important to note the postal or proxy vote will be deleted for anyone who has been carried forward and they will need to go to the polling station to vote in 2015 unless they register individually and complete a new postal vote application.
18. Electors who do not match automatically will be reminded in 2014 and 2015 to provide the relevant information and will have until December 2015 to register under the new system when anyone who has not registered to vote individually before December 2015 will be removed from the register.
19. In **December 2014**: to publish a new register, including all electors confirmed under IER and those electors automatically carried forward.
20. In **January to March 2015**: to carry out targeted activity to invite further missing electors and those who may have moved, to update their registration. Also write to people encouraging those not on the register to apply.
21. **From 2015** (and in future years) a two stage process will be in operation. The first stage will be for the ERO to send a Household Enquiry Form (HEF) to every residential property. Any new electors identified by this will then be followed up individually by the ERO
22. In addition, new electors will be able to register on an individual basis throughout the year under rolling registration; non-confirmed electors will need to be written to at least twice and visited by a canvasser if they do not respond.

### **Register of Electors Annual Canvass 2013**

23. The annual canvass was delayed nationally from the summer this year, it began in October 2013 and runs until February 2014.
24. Almost 132,000 canvass forms were delivered by Royal Mail on 8 October and so far we have had in the region of 67,680 returned. Reminder forms are due to be delivered by Royal Mail on 15 November. Canvassers are scheduled to start going door to door from mid-December until mid-January.
25. Please see return statistics by ward at **Appendix A**.
26. An improved approach is being employed at this year's canvass, with the aim of increasing the overall registration rate achieved at the

annual canvass from the current 86%. We also have a plan and target to achieve at least a 50% return rate across all areas of the Borough as detailed below;

i) The canvassers job description and person specification has been updated and we are developing a recruitment drive to attract more canvassers. The canvassers' payment structure is now performance based as an added incentive to encourage higher returns. Canvassers' training will now be more practical and will include a hints and tips session from our most successful canvassers.

ii) Specific areas, such as historically low response areas, travellers' sites and houses of multiple occupations will be canvassed by a separate specialist team who will begin canvassing door to door. Rather than employ traditional canvassers in these areas, we are exploring the use of neighbourhood workers who know the areas and communities to maximise registration.

iii) The Population and Community Structures report highlights the wards of Adwick, Bentley, Central, Thorne, Town Moor and Wheatley as the areas that show the biggest difference in having less people on the electoral register than in the actual population. Statistics from the previous canvass show that these wards, with the exception of Thorne ward, have a lower than average response rate to the annual canvass. These wards, with the exception of Thorne ward, will not be sent a reminder form and the door to door canvass will begin in the last week of November. This approach means canvassers' will have a longer period of time to obtain registrations.

### **Plans to Increase Voter Registration**

27. The Population and Community Structures report compares the number of electors and population statistics in Doncaster. The information highlights some differences between the actual population (18+) provided in the census and the number of people on the electoral register. There are some residents not eligible to register to vote including Turkish and Middle East and Asian populations but this does not explain the full difference in figures.
28. Because we also know that young people are underrepresented in all wards, our plans also include specific engagement with schools, colleges and apprenticeship programmes.
29. This work will not end with the production of the Electoral Register in February 2014; we will continue to increase the accuracy of the register by matching our data with other council data and targeting areas throughout the year.

### **Verification and count procedure**

30. As members are aware the verification and count for the Police and Crime Commissioner Elections in November 2012 and the Mayoral

Election in May 2013 was held at Doncaster Racecourse. The space available at the Racecourse meant the count layout worked well. There was additional space to verify unused ballot papers and stationery from the polling stations was sorted and securely packed.

31. The ability for Presiding Officers to deliver the ballot boxes, postal vote wallets, unused ballot papers and all official stationery to the count meant that all boxes were delivered by 11pm. Postal votes handed in at the count were taken to the Mary Woollett Centre and were processed and returned by 11.45.
32. The Returning Officer has decided to use the Racecourse as a count venue until after the Mayoral and all out Council Elections 2017 to enable effective forward planning.

### **Responses to issues raised**

33. Councillor Phil Cole asked for clarity as to the meaning of the reference in paragraph 13 of the Mayoral Election 2nd May 2013 evaluation report, to the 'total number of rejected postal envelopes';

The number of postal vote envelopes returned is noted and an audit trail is maintained throughout the opening process. Some envelopes may contain only a ballot paper or only a statement. Each scenario is recorded separately and matches made wherever possible but the description 'total number of rejected postal envelopes' covers statements that are rejected and the ballot paper is also rejected on that basis. The term also includes the statements and ballot papers that are returned alone and are provisionally rejected and are then rejected after the final opening session when no match has been made.

34. At the last meeting it was suggested that the Electoral Commission be asked to agree to defer the Polling District, Place and Polling Station Review as this could prove to be abortive work in the light of the Electoral Review being undertaken.

Unfortunately we cannot postpone the review as the timetable is set in legislation. The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 introduced a change to the timing of compulsory reviews of UK Parliamentary polling districts and polling places. The next compulsory review must now be started and completed between 1 October 2013 and 31 January 2015 (inclusive).

35. In referring to the canvass, Councillor Phil Cole explained that Barnsley Council had been offering unemployed people in its area the opportunity to undertake the canvass in order to provide them with meaningful work and he asked whether a similar arrangement could be introduced for the next canvass in Doncaster.

Barnsley were approached and gave the following response;

"The council are reviewing the scope of using volunteers in general. Elections could be an area to consider. At the moment there are no specific council proposals, and in relation to elections and registration and this year's canvass there are not any plans".

If we do examine this further, a risk assessment would need to be undertaken to ascertain the additional further risks regarding data protection. There may also be a low take up due to loss of benefits.

## **OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

36. All of the above are statutory duties and must be carried out in accordance with statutory requirements.

## **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

37. Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013
38. Political Parties and Elections Act (2009) – Provision of identifying information and data to EROs.
39. Representation of the Peoples Act 1983 – EAA 2006 statutory duty to maintain an accurate and complete electoral register.
40. Representation of the Peoples Act 1983 Section 9A requiring an ERO to take all necessary steps to comply with the general duty of maintaining the register, including sending the canvass form more than once, making house to house inquiries and inspecting records that the ERO is permitted to inspect

## **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

41. An up-front formula grant allocation of £11,600.22 was released to the Electoral Registration Officer on 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2013 in relation to the funding of IER for the 2013/14 financial year. This up-front grant was to enable EROs to carry out work in relation to change management and the confirmation dry run.
42. Councils have recently been provided with their 2014/15 indicative funding allocation for the transition to Individual Electoral Registration. Doncaster's upfront allocation will be: £91,053. If we give an assurance to continue to meet the current level of costs for electoral administration in our authority the Cabinet Office will further increase our allocation by 25% to £113,817.
43. The Cabinet Office expects this allocation to cover all costs in the majority of authorities but they recognise that a generic national formula may not cover all eventualities for all authorities. The Cabinet Office will therefore consider individual cases to fund additional costs if they are precisely and strongly evidenced and have not already been recognised.

44. We are currently working on a cost analysis to estimate the full cost of IER. Printing, postal and staffing costs (including door to door canvassing) will be significant based on the data matching estimates and estimates of the unconfirmed population. Residents will need to be written to more than once and canvassed if necessary.

45. Even when transition to IER is completed, data matching will be required for all new electors and home movers; non responders will need to be reminded more than once and canvassers will need to be employed throughout the year to undertake house to house enquiries for non-responders.

## **RISK ASSESSMENT**

46. Sufficient resources will need to be made available to implement individual registration in order to ensure that the Council complies with its legal duties detailed above

## **EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

47. As part of the legislative process, an impact assessment of the introduction of IER was undertaken, including an equality impact assessment. The assessment states that the move away from a household electoral registration system should have an overall positive impact on equality, providing each eligible individual with the right and responsibility to register themselves to vote, rather than being dependent on another member of the household. This should empower individuals to take greater ownership of their franchise, however, this will also require a shift in behaviour if people are to take responsibility for their own registration.

48. Whilst the system will be as convenient and efficient as possible for all users, the impacts on the following groups of people were particularly considered as part of the assessment:-

- Those currently under-represented on the register
- Those who present a particular challenge in 2014
- Those who have special requirements

## **REPORT AUTHOR AND CONTRIBUTORS**

Linda Lawty  
Electoral Services Manager  
Democratic Services  
Tel: 01302 862045  
E-mail: [Linda.lawty@doncaster.gov.uk](mailto:Linda.lawty@doncaster.gov.uk)

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

The Population and Community Structures report.

**JO MILLER**  
**RETURNING OFFICER**





## APPENDIX A

### Electoral Register Canvass Statistics as at 5 November 2013 (Initial forms)

WARD	PROPERTIES	RESPONSE TO 5/11/13	% RESPONSE
Adwick	6,592	3,127	47.44
Armthorpe	6,361	3,369	52.96
Askern Spa	5,679	3,033	53.41
Balby	6,577	3,188	48.47
Bentley	6,461	2,829	43.79
Bessacarr & Cantley	6,678	3,738	55.97
Central	8,211	3,026	36.85
Conisbrough & Denaby	6,170	3,017	48.90
Edenthorpe, Kirk Sandall & Barnby Dun	5,970	3,823	64.04
Edlington & Warmsworth	6,191	3,254	52.56
Finningley	6,692	3,828	57.20
Great North Road	6,650	3,701	55.65
Hatfield	5,746	3,017	52.51
Mexborough	7,245	3,117	43.02
Rossington	5,783	2,800	48.42
Sprotbrough	5,193	3,220	62.01
Stainforth & Moorends	5,790	2,772	47.88
Thorne	6,217	3,380	54.37
Torne Valley	5,696	3,658	64.22
Town Moor	6,140	3,038	49.48
Wheatley	6,679	2,745	41.10
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>132,721</b>	<b>67,680</b>	<b>50.99</b>