

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

ELECTORAL SERVICES UPDATE ON KEY ISSUES 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 Individual Electoral Registration (IER), the Polling District, Places and Stations Review and preparations for Parliamentary, General and Local Government Elections in May 2015.

RECOMMENDATION

2. The Committee is asked to note the report and make any additional comments in relation to the contents.

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 recent and current activity.

INDIVIDUAL ELECTORAL REGISTRATION

4. Following the successful 93.86% data match, Electoral Services sent out 210,546 confirmation letters and 10,674 invitations to register (ITR) to electors. In addition, 19,936 household enquiry forms (HEF) were sent to households where no one was registered and where electors had been carried forward at the end of the canvass in February 2014.
5. All households and electors have now been written to at least twice and the personal canvassers will shortly begin to visit those that have not returned HEF and ITR. The personal canvass was scheduled to begin in October but was inevitably delayed due to the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) by-election held on 30 October 2014. There is an option to delay the publication of the register until February 2015, due to the delay caused by the PCC by election.
6. Personal canvassers will visit the households who have not responded to the HEF from mid-November until mid-December. Individual electors who have not responded to the Invitation to Register (ITR) will be visited from mid-December until early January 2015.
7. Following publication of the new register, Electoral Services will carry out targeted activity inviting residents to update their registration and also write to people not on the register to apply.

REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS, POLLING PLACES AND POLLING STATIONS 2014

8. Members may recall that the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 stated that the compulsory review must be started and completed between 1 October 2013 and 31 January 2015 (inclusive). The review process, from the publication of the notice of the review until the publication of the documents at the end, must take place within the specified period.
9. The intention was to delay the start of this review until after the boundary changes of the Electoral Review were published. That proposal is no longer practicable as the Local Government Boundary Commission for England further extended the consultation period to accommodate additional proposals on ward boundaries consultations and this most recent extension only closed on 24 October 2014.
10. Whilst we still have the same imperative to conclude and implement the review in time for the 2015 elections, the further consultations have inevitably delayed the point at which final confirmation will be made by Parliament, with the commensurate reduction of the lead in time available for the May 2015 elections.
11. As the review of polling districts, polling places and polling stations must be completed by 31 January 2015, it must start soon to allow time for appropriate consultation to take place.
12. The review will need to start based on the current electoral boundaries, but will also have regard to, and anticipate, any new boundaries even though they are not yet in force. Wherever possible, any parts of existing electoral areas that are known to be split when the new boundaries come into effect will be made into separate polling districts as part of the review.
13. In the same manner, the Electoral Register will be constructed in a way that is capable of reflecting both the current and the new boundaries wherever possible. Again, this can be achieved by making any parts of existing electoral areas that will be split when the new boundaries come into effect into separate polling districts.
14. For the same reasons where the boundaries for different elections are no longer co-terminous with the Parliamentary boundaries those areas that are no longer co-terminous will also be made into separate polling districts.
15. A timetable and further information will available at the meeting.

Roles and responsibilities of the Review

16. The Council - The statutory responsibility for reviewing UK Parliamentary polling districts and places rests with each relevant local authority. As set out in the Council's Constitution, the decision on polling districts and polling places is the responsibility of the Elections and Democratic Structures Committee.

17. The Electoral Registration Officer - The ERO must amend the register of electors accordingly, which should be done to coincide with the publication of a notice of alteration/publication of a revised register.
18. The Returning Officer - The Returning Officer must comment during any review of UK Parliamentary polling districts and polling places on both existing polling stations and the polling stations that would likely be used if any new proposal for polling places were accepted.
19. Unlike polling districts and polling places which are fixed by the local authority, polling stations are chosen by the Returning Officer.
20. The election rules require the Returning Officer to decide how many polling stations are required for each polling place and they must allocate electors to the polling stations in such manner as they think most convenient.
21. The Electoral Commission - Once the local authority has published the results of its review, specified interested parties may make representations to the Commission to reconsider any polling districts and polling places. They may direct the authority to make any alterations to the polling places that they think necessary.

PARLIAMENTARY AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS

22. The Police and Crime Commissioner Elections held on 30 October presented the Returning Officer with an opportunity to test contingency plans and enhance procedures for the 2015 elections.
23. In particular, the count provided an opportunity to test an updated floor plan to accommodate all 3 constituencies whilst enhancing the amount of space that will be available to the media, given the likely extent of media interest.
24. The receipt of the ballot boxes was improved and the last box was delivered by 22:50. This meant the last postal vote packs handed in at the polling station and brought to the count by presiding officers were processed by 23:30.
25. Senior officers were recruited and trained as count supervisors and the count procedure will be further improved to aid an efficient but speedy count.
26. The Returning Officer has scheduled regular meetings with the Assistant Director of Legal and Democratic Services and the Electoral Services Manager, Head of Communications and other key officers. A recruitment and training strategy is in progress and will be implemented in January 2015 with the aim of completing staffing before notice of election.

OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED OPTION

27. All of the above are statutory duties and must be carried out in accordance with statutory requirements. This report is primarily for information only.

IMPACT ON THE COUNCIL'S KEY PRIORITIES

28.

	Priority	Implications
	We will provide strong leadership and governance, working in partnership.	By ensuring the necessary arrangements are in place to deliver well-run elections and improving our reputation by meeting the Electoral Commission's Performance Standards.

RISKS AND ASSUMPTIONS

29. Sufficient resources will need to be made available to run the combined Elections 2015 and to implement individual registration in order to ensure that the Council complies with its legal duties detailed above.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

30. The arrangements detailed in this report are designed to ensure compliance with a range of statutory duties including:

- Local Elections (Principal Areas) (England and Wales) Rules 2006
- Representation of the People Acts 1983, 1985 and 2000
- Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

31.

- The Cabinet Office has supplied additional funding for the transition to IER.
- The costs and shared costs arising from the Parliamentary election will be claimed from Government.
- The costs and shared costs arising from the parish elections will be reclaimed from the parish.
- The review of polling districts, polling places and polling stations will be carried out within existing budgets.

EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

32. 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.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

33. Previous EDSC reports.

REPORT AUTHOR

Linda Lawty
Electoral Services Manager
Democratic Services
Tel: 01302 862045
E-mail: Linda.lawty@doncaster.gov.uk

Jo Miller
Returning Officer/Electoral Registration Officer