

15th March 2016

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

INDIVIDUAL ELECTORAL REGISTRATION (IER) PROGRESS REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. This report provides an update to Members on Individual Electoral Registration, annual Canvass and the publishing of the full register on 1st December 2015.

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR THE CITIZENS OF DONCASTER?

3. Individual Electoral Registration will improve the accuracy of the register and help to counter fraud. Having a complete and accurate register is key to public engagement in the democratic process.

BACKGROUND

4. The Terms of Reference of this Committee provide an overview of Electoral Services issues. Set out below is the current position in respect of recent and current activity.

INDIVIDUAL ELECTORAL REGISTRATION (IER) JULY–1ST DECEMBER 2015

5. The annual Canvass began in July 2015, and we sent out Household Enquiry Forms (HEF) to 135,061 properties within Doncaster and received 51,986 responses (38.49%). Reminders were issued to 83,094 properties increasing the response to 82,781 (61.29%). A further reminder was issued to 52,299 properties which were then canvassed by telephone or personal visit. As of 1st December 2015 anyone who wasn't registered under the new IER rules had to be removed from register.
6. At the start of IER in June 2014 there were approximately 12,697 unconfirmed electors, this was reduced significantly to 3,287 individuals being removed from the register on the 1st December 2015 as a consequence of a failure to provide a national insurance number and/or date of birth. We have written to those persons that were removed and invited them to re-register although they have had at least six letters through the course of the canvass requesting further information. Therefore it was deemed that they had probably re-registered at another address, moved out of the borough or were deceased.

7. To help increase the response to the annual canvass and avoid as many people as possible being removed from the register under the new IER rules we were proactive by undertaking new ways to ensure people of Doncaster were on the Electoral Register and didn't lose their right to vote.

- **Telephone Canvassing**

We were the first Authority in South and West Yorkshire and one of the few within the country undertaking a Telephone Canvass. This was a great way to contact hard to reach areas/electors. We are now adapting this method to use all year round focussing on 'Invitation to Register' (ITR) information such as a National Insurance Number or Date of Birth to try and obtain the information there and then over the phone; we also have a dedicated phone line for electors to call us back with their information should they not have it to hand.

- **Care Homes & HMO's**

We had dedicated Canvass Team Leaders which canvassed every care home and homes with multiple occupancy within the borough by arranging an appointment with the manager/building and maintaining a close working relationship to ensure we are kept up to date on the frequent residential changes.

- **Targeting hard to reach/unapproachable areas**

Following risk assessments we recruited a group of specialist officers to canvass in small groups where there were village conflicts and also targeted those areas by telephone.

- **School/Colleges**

We attended the local college with limited success, given that they do not have halls of residence and most of the students live at home. However, we were able to campaign within Schools and Colleges through their social media links by providing schools with adverts and information to put on their social media to try and increase the number of attainers.

- **Social Media**

We constantly update our website and social media with up to date information. We had a paid advert on Facebook to put an advertisement campaign out to every person who is registered on facebook as a Doncaster resident with a pop up link to the register-to-vote website to encourage and boost registration.

8. We published our new full register on the 1st December and Doncaster's Electorate was 216,547 plus 251 overseas electors. Despite removing the unconfirmed electors under IER the register had grown by 5,812 electors since the last fully published register on 1st December 2014, the electorate was 210,986. A full electorate breakdown is provided at Appendix A.

CURRENT ELECTORAL PROACTIVE ACTIVITY

9. A proactive approach is required throughout the year and not just during the canvass period in order to maintain an accurate and complete register, ensuring as far as possible that all eligible persons are on the register and

that all non-eligible persons are removed. To ensure this is met we are currently carrying out the following initiatives.

- **Invitation to register - Canvass**

Between the 15th February to 7th March 2016, we carried out a personal visit canvass to approx. 4,000 individuals that had not registered under IER. These individuals were identified in the 2015 annual canvass and had been written to on three occasions without success. Therefore, at least one canvasser in each ward visited each person at least twice to try and obtain their national insurance number and/or date of birth. The outcome has been a great success and we will continue to carry out ITR canvassing throughout the year.

- **Home movers**

- With the borough's annual Council Tax bills sent out recently, we have added information to the Council Tax website. This encourages anyone who has moved house recently to ensure they also remember to move addresses on the electoral register.
- A leaflet is also currently being designed to send to every property that receives a new/amended council tax bill advising them to update the electoral register.
- The National Association of Estate Agents have agreed to begin to promote registration and we are currently engaging with local companies to see how we can support promotion of registration.

- **National Voter Registration Day**

The Government and the Electoral Commission campaigned to encourage people to register on National Voter Registration Day – 5th February 2016. To encourage people to register and help raise awareness through Facebook and Twitter we used the Councils page MyDoncaster to promote the online registration website - www.gov.uk/register-to-vote

OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED OPTION

10. 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

11.

	Priority	Implications
	We will provide strong leadership and governance, working in partnership.	An accurate and well planned Canvass improves accuracy, help counter fraud and meets the necessary arrangements to meet the Electoral Commission's Performance Standards.

RISKS AND ASSUMPTIONS

12. Sufficient resources will need to be made available to run two Elections so close together and to continue to drive individual registration in order to ensure that the Council complies with its legal duties detailed above.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

13. 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

14. The costs associated are carried out within existing budgets .

REPORT AUTHOR AND CONTRIBUTORS

Trina Barber
Interim Team Leader
Electoral Services
Legal & Democratic Services
Tel: 01302 724398
E-mail: Trina.Barber@doncaster.gov.uk

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Previous EDSC reports

Jo Miller
Returning Officer/Electoral Registration Officer