

FAREHAM

BOROUGH COUNCIL

Report to Licensing and Regulatory Affairs Committee

Date **17 March 2015**

Report of: **Director of Finance and Resources**

Subject: **REVIEW OF IMPLEMENTATION OF INDIVIDUAL ELECTORAL
REGISTRATION (IER)**

SUMMARY

To provide an update on progress made since the introduction of Individual Electoral Registration (IER) on 10 June 2014.

RECOMMENDATION

That members of the committee note the progress made to date in relation to the transition to IER.

INTRODUCTION

1. A report outlining the planning and governance arrangements for the implementation of Individual Electoral Registration (IER) was considered by this committee on 18 March 2014. This included details of planned measures to encourage under-represented groups to register.
2. This report provides an update on the progress made since the introduction of IER and outlines plans for the future.

CONFIRMATION LIVE RUN AND WRITE OUT TO ALL ELECTORS

3. The Confirmation live run took place in June 2014 when the electoral register was sent to the Department of Works and Pensions for data matching against names and addresses held on their database. The results showed a match rate of 87% which means those electors were automatically transferred to the new register without having to do anything. All these electors received a confirmation letter explaining the new system of individual registering.
4. Those electors who did not transfer automatically to the new register were invited to register and as part of the new requirements, sent two reminders and canvassed in person to encourage them to apply. The results did not show a large deviation across the wards but the higher risk areas were identified by the wards with larger numbers of rented properties which results in a higher rate of residency churn. The results have informed on-going activity including community engagement described below.

PUBLICATION OF THE NEW REGISTER

5. A new register was published on 1 December 2014, which comprised all electors confirmed by data matching, all those who have made successful individual applications and those on the previous register who have not yet reapplied.
6. It is important to note that all electors with an absent vote (postal or proxy) must be verified against DWP records. Failure by any elector to provide their personal identifiers resulted in them losing their absent vote arrangements (but not their entitlement to vote) on publication of the new register. A total of 20 electors lost their entitlement to vote by post or proxy and all the electors have been advised and sent forms to individually register and reapply for an absent vote, if they wish to do so.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

7. The Electoral Commission ran a media campaign in the summer of 2014 to inform residents of the change to IER and the elections team has encouraged registration by carrying out the following activities:
 - Providing an effective information strategy by working with the Communications team to promote IER by providing information on the front page of the website and a link for easy access to the portal. Regular postings are broadcast through Fareham Borough Council social media sites and Fareham Today.
 - Providing a link to the portal on the PC situated on the ground floor to enable anyone visiting the Civic Offices to register online.
 - Working with other departments to ensure residents can be informed about

registering by including a leaflet about registration with every new Council Tax form. Housing officers also now incorporate assisting people to register whilst they are in the office discussing potential claims.

- As part of National Registering to Vote day in February 2015, to send a letter to all households reminding residents whether they are on the register and their current form on voting, i.e. in person at the polling station, by post or proxy. New residents can complete an online registration form or choose to be sent a paper copy to complete.
- Working with local colleges to engage young people to register to vote.
- Disseminating IER facts to Members to enable them to assist in publicising and provide information to the electorate.

ELECTORAL SERVICES

8. Electoral Services have experienced a significant increase in its workload since the introduction of IER and all staff have been fully trained to cope with the inevitable questions arising from new legislation. Many changes have been made to the software holding the registration data which has resulted in regular upgrades to the system and new procedures to follow. Registration is now an all year process and involves sending reminders and conducting a personal visit in the event that a resident fails to respond. In addition, if a person fails to be matched, further evidence is required such as obtaining a copy of a current passport or other proof of identity. This has led to an increase in the number of procedures to follow the number of different workstreams underway at any time and an increase in documents to produce in comparison to the previous registration system.
9. The increased workload has been covered by the existing election services team without any additional staffing but a specialised electoral printing company, able to print the A3 size forms required, has been employed to send forms directly to electors. Funding for this and the additional community engagement work has been provided by the Cabinet Office.

THE NEXT PHASE

10. Up until March 2015, there will be a focus on completion of the transition of voters, with targeted activity focusing on those existing electors who have not been successfully verified with the DWP records, identifying further missing electors and encouraging new applications. This is in order to ensure that the electoral register is as accurate as possible for the Parliamentary election on 7 May 2015.
11. In the autumn of 2015, a Household Enquiry Form (HEF) will be sent to every household in the borough to confirm who lives at the property and anyone new will be invited to register individually. After the publication of the register on 1 December 2015, it is expected that the new system will be fully embedded.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

12. Funding for the forthcoming Parliamentary election will be largely met by the Cabinet Office. The government has met the additional costs of the implementation of

Individual Electoral Registration by providing funding of £30,976.68 in 2014/15 which enabled the purchase of a scanner to process the A3 size forms, additional software to check entries against Council Tax records, printing of leaflets and flyers in addition to new forms, postage and staff training costs. Further transitional funding will be available in 2015/16 of £25,857. It is anticipated that the costs of electoral registration will increase as other costs such as postage rise, although it is difficult to project these additional costs with any certainty until activity during the transition phase is fully evaluated, including the take up of registration online.

RISK ASSESSMENT

13. The Electoral Registration Officer has a statutory duty under the Representation of the People Act 1983, as amended by the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 to maintain a complete and accurate Register of Electors.

CONCLUSION

14. This report sets out the progress made with the introduction of Individual Electoral Registration and the procedures developed to ensure the adjustments have been implemented to date by well-trained officers, able to assist electors in a professional manner when dealing with questions about a new system.

Background Papers:

The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013.

Reference Papers:

None.

Enquiries:

For further information on this report please contact Elaine Wildig (Ext 4587).