

# FAREHAM

## BOROUGH COUNCIL

### **Report to Licensing and Regulatory Affairs Committee**

**Date**                    **18 March 2014**

**Report of:**            **Director of Regulatory and Democratic Services**

**Subject:**              **INDIVIDUAL ELECTORAL REGISTRATION**

#### **SUMMARY**

The current system of electoral registration will be replaced by individuals making an application to register individually and providing personal identifiers such as date of birth and national insurance number. This report sets out the fundamental changes to the current registration to vote system that becomes effective from June 2014.

#### **RECOMMENDATION**

The Committee is recommended to:

- (a) Note the proposed changes to the current electoral registration system;
- (b) Consider whether a briefing should be arranged to advise all members of the Council of the forthcoming changes to electoral registration;
- (c) Identify opportunities to assist in the implementation and promotion of the IER scheme;
- (d) Agree that a further report be presented to the Committee to review the implementation of IER following the publication of the register of electors on 1 December 2014.

## **INTRODUCTION**

1. In 2010, the Coalition Government announced its intention to accelerate the implementation of Individual Electoral Registration (IER). The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 received Royal Assent on 31 January 2013.
2. From 10 June 2014, the Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) will be required to begin the transition from the current rolling and household registration to IER. This will have a significant effect on the registration of electors in England, Wales and Scotland by changing the household based system to one that requires each individual to be registered individually. IER was introduced in a slightly different format in Northern Ireland in 2002.
3. The Government recognises that the transition to IER will be an extremely challenging task as it is the most significant change to the electoral registration system for many years. The changes are aimed at modernising and improving the electoral registration system, creating one that has a better protection against fraud and that is more convenient for citizens to register and vote.

## **THE CURRENT REGISTRATION SYSTEM**

4. The vast majority of electors currently register via the annual household canvass where a form is sent to the “the occupier(s)” of each borough address. One person signs and returns the form on behalf of everyone living in that household. No changes to the form can be recorded by one person confirming details by internet, phone or SMS. Outside the canvass period, a smaller number of people register via rolling registration, where individuals are responsible for completing and then signing their own registration form.

## **THE IER REGISTRATION SYSTEM**

5. From 10 June 2014, the system of IER will commence. All individuals registered on the final update of the electoral register published on 1 July will go through a process of data-matching against Department of Work and Pension (DWP) data to confirm existing electors for addition to a new IER register.
6. Only those elector records that exactly match name and address with DWP data will be added to the register at this stage. The ERO will write to those who are successfully matched to let them know they are registered under IER and that the recipient need take no further action other than to check their details.
7. For those electors who are not matched, the ERO will attempt a further match against local data sets held by the Council such as Council Tax records. If again there is no match, the ERO will write to each elector inviting them to supply personal identifiers so they can be registered individually and therefore added to the new IER register. These electors will be required to provide their name, national insurance number (NINO) and date of birth. These personal identifiers will be checked against DWP data before registering the elector under IER.
8. Electors who do not return their invitation to register will be sent at least two reminders and in the event of non-response, be personally canvassed by a representative of the Council.
9. All eligible electors once invited will be required to register by law. If they fail to

comply, they may be liable to be fined through a Civil Penalty Charge Notice. This would be administered by the local authority but the proceeds would be sent to central government.

10. Electors who return their invitations but fail the subsequent DWP match will be asked to resubmit. If the details are incorrect or the elector cannot provide the identifiers required, residents must supply other forms of identification to the elections office to prove their eligibility.
11. Whilst every individual who is on the pre-IER register who remains resident at their address will remain on the voting register during the transition to IER (including for the 2015 UK Parliamentary Elections) they will be removed if they have not yet been confirmed by the time the transition is complete in December 2015.
12. IER will be the only way to register for new entries from 10 June 2014.
13. Electors who currently vote by post or proxy but who are not confirmed by 1 December 2014 will lose their entitlement to an absent vote after that date. To re-apply, they must successfully register under IER first.
14. Throughout the transition period and beyond, all potential electors will need to be aware they must update their details if they move house or change name. A national awareness campaign will be run from 1 July – 8 August and local campaigns will be conducted such as attending CATS and local amenity group meetings. New applicants will be able to register either by contacting the elections office for a form or giving the details by phone or email or applying online through the direct.gov central government website.
15. New duties are required outside the canvass period and The Electoral Registration and Administration Act requires the ERO to take more active steps (two letters and a door knock) when they become aware of potential new electors, incurring a greater cost when electors do not respond immediately. Reviews must also be conducted before removing electors which may require personal visits. A proactive approach will be achieved by working with partners such as council tax, the registrar's office, housing benefits and the Council's "tell us once" procedure. In all instances those newly discovered residents will be invited to register individually.

### **PREPARATION, PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION OF IER**

16. A successful transition to IER will be achieved through planning, effective use of IT software and available data, well run processes and procedures to ensure a complete and accurate pre and post IER register and an effective public engagement strategy using the methods that will best reach the residents of Fareham.
17. To support the activities and initiatives required, a project management approach will be implemented for the transition. This will include a project plan, the establishment of a working party, a risk register, including a public engagement strategy and a training plan for all electoral administrative staff and key stakeholders involved in the process.

### **RESOURCE**

18. The transition to IER will result in electoral registration costs rising, certainly in the

short-term. The government has committed to funding this cost over and above the current cost of electoral registration.

19. Funding will be calculated using an algorithm across the country and distributed by direct payments via non ring-fenced grants under Section 31 of the Local Government Grant Act 2003. Several IER grants will be paid between 2013/14 and 2014/15. £6800 has already been allocated, which is currently being spent on new software, scanners to deal with A3 size forms and staff training. A further £4,500 will be allocated for local engagement projects, with a further £20,000 to cover increased local costs such as new, prescribed forms and envelopes, writing to every person rather than every household and additional staff required to process forms and make personal visits during the year.

## **CHALLENGES**

20. Fareham currently has an excellent register of electors in terms of both accuracy and completeness. The rate of return from the last canvas was 98.17%, which is in the top quartile in the country and is usually the best in Hampshire.
21. There is real concern that the completeness of the register will significantly fall on the move to individual registration as individuals will be unwilling, or unable to provide personal identifiers such as a national insurance number.
22. In 2013, a data matching dry run was undertaken across the country to ascertain the amount of work to be undertaken. Preliminary findings suggested an average match rate across the country was 70%. In Fareham, the figures were 84.4% green matches (75,509 electors), 14.4% amber (1,119) and 1.2% red (12,832). All green matches must be sent a confirmation letter in a separate envelope to each elector and all amber and red require further investigation and correspondence with the elector.
23. An additional challenge in terms of printing is the recent decision by the government to prescribe the new forms to be used in A3 size (A3 folded to A4 to form 4 pages). The wording of the front of envelopes is also prescribed. This will result in increased, ongoing, printing, scanning and postage costs.
24. It is therefore vitally important that Fareham plans to avoid a significant fall on its register of electors. It is believed this can be avoided by applying the following best practice measures:
  - Effective IT systems and expertise to enable data mining and matching for IER invitations and reviews;
  - Effective and well-co-ordinated public engagement and information strategies;
  - Well trained electoral administration staff and casual year round canvassing staff;
  - Clear forms, information and correspondence to the public;
  - Disseminating of IER facts to Members so they can assist in publicising and provide information to the electorate at meetings and surgeries etc.

## **RISK ASSESSMENT**

25. 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**

26. This report sets out the changes to be implemented with the introduction of Individual Electoral Registration. Procedures are being developed to ensure the adjustments can be implemented by well-trained officers, able to assist electors in a professional manner when dealing with inevitable questions arising during the transition period. Members may also consider a briefing arranged for all members may be appropriate as this will affect the whole Borough.
27. A further report will be prepared for members of this Committee to assess the impact after the register of electors is published on 1 December 2014.

### **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).