

**Haringey** Council

Report for:	Corporate Committee	Item Number:	
-------------	---------------------	--------------	--

Title:	Individual Electoral Registration
--------	-----------------------------------

Report Authorised by:	Chief Executive <i>N. Waller</i>
-----------------------	-------------------------------------

Lead Officer:	George Cooper, Head of Electoral Services
---------------	---

Ward(s) affected: All	Report for Key/Non Key Decisions: Non-key
-----------------------	--

**1. Describe the issue under consideration**

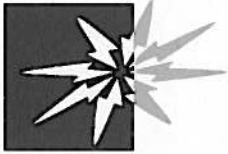
To bring to the attention of the Committee the broad changes being planned for Electoral registration in the transition to Individual Electoral Registration under the terms of the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013, and to particularly note arrangements being made under secondary legislation to postpone the annual autumn registration campaign and the consequences of this.

**2. Cabinet Member introduction**

NA

**3. Recommendations**

That the changes to Electoral Registration processes required by the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013, including a postponed Annual Registration Canvass, be noted and that endorsement be given to the measures being planned to maintain and enhance registration levels through this postponement including:



- 3.1 First posting of registration forms at earliest permitted opportunity ( first week of October 2013).
- 3.2 At least one reminder round.
- 3.3 Recruitment and training of canvassers on the basis of a contract that will extend to February 2014 and involve a longer than usual campaign period.
- 3.4 Development of a campaign with Corporate Communications to raise awareness of the changed timetable for registration and of the importance of being registered for elections to be held in May 2014.
- 3.5 Dispatch of registers to entitled parties and persons at the earliest opportunity after their publication on 17 February 2014.

#### 4. Alternative options considered

The parameters of electoral registration activity remain essentially fixed by legislation but Electoral Registration Officers ( EROs) have the responsibility on the ground to implement these to best effect.

#### 5. Background information

5.1 In December 2011 I reported to this Committee on national proposals to fundamentally change the system of Electoral Registration from a Household-based to an individual application- based one.

5.2 That report outlined the essential features of the likely changes, which in principle had support across the aisle of the House of Commons, and we were asked to return to Committee in due course once legislation was embedded. This has now happened and includes:

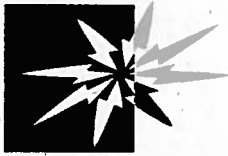
5.3 A transition to full Individual Registration over the period 2014 – 2016;

5.4 Registration to be based ultimately not on a list of eligible residents compiled or confirmed by any one householder, but on applications by individuals taking responsibility for their own registration;

5.5 Such applications to include National Insurance numbers (NINOs) and dates of birth;

5.6 Given the use of NINOs, registers to be initially populated and data-matched for accuracy with a wider range of data-sets including, primarily, that of the Department of Work and Pensions;

5.7 The key purpose of the change being to reduce the possibility of any electoral fraud;



**Haringey Council**

5.8 The capacity, for the first time, for any elector to make a complete application for registration online ( as opposed to the present situation where only "no changes" can be recorded via text or SMS or in which forms can be downloaded in hard copy); and

5.9 A transitional phase of registration in which electors canvassed onto the 2014 register may "carry over" into 2015 if data-matching and individual application processes do not retain them.

5.11 The legislation governing these changes has now passed into law as the Electoral Registration and Administration (ERA) Act 2013.

5.12 Secondary legislation is still being developed to finalise the data-matching and Online aspects of IER, but is in place to take forwards preparations for the rest of this year and to postpone the conduct of the annual autumn electoral registration campaign nationally ( but n.b. Northern Ireland already has a form of IER).

5.13 The next stages of IER are, then:

5.14 The transfer of a copy of all Registers in July 2013 to the Cabinet Office for a Data-matching test the against the DWP database ( the "Confirmation Dry Run.") . This seeks to measure just how much overlap there is between an electoral register and records held by DWP. Pilots in two London Boroughs suggest it is between 55% and 71%.

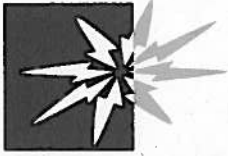
5.15 An assessment at local and national level of these results to inform future planning and resource implications of the change to IER.

5.16 The commencement, from June 2013, of formal training and support for Electoral Administrators across the country in respect of the new requirements and the appointment of Regional Development Managers by the Cabinet Office to support this;

5.17 The postponement of the annual registration canvass to a defined period, being 1 October 2013 to 17 February 2014 in England, this latter being the new register publication date ( ie instead of 1 December 2013);

5.18 An amendment via the ERA Act to also postpone proposals to re-draw new Parliamentary Boundaries ( i.e. the Parliamentary General Election scheduled for May 2015 will take place on existing boundaries.);

5.19 In November 2013, a Ministerial level decision on whether to go ahead or delay IER implementation ( there is provision in the Act to put back the process by a year if necessary.)



## **Haringey** Council

5.20 Starting in July 2014, *live* data– matching of the Register in force at that time against the DWP database, with all those who match being informed that they are registered and need take no further action;

5.21 Where there is no match, a Household Enquiry Form ( HEF) to be sent to such properties asking for a list of names of possibly eligible electors;

5.22 Once those names are received, individual “Invitations to Register” ( ITR) to be sent to those concerned and these may be returned in hard copy or Online.

5.23 Rolling Registration ( i.e. the right to register at any time notwithstanding the canvass period ) continues, but as with IER, will require NINOs and dates of birth from next summer.

5.24 This is, then, a very significant set of changes to registration. The system could depend on just one householder in any given property and was based largely on trust. In future, individuals will be the focus of registration and more evidence required that an elector is who they say they are.

## **6. Comments of the Chief Finance Officer and financial implications**

6.1 The extra processes of IER involved with IER are such that significant additional costs are effectively being pushed into Registration, but we are assured by Cabinet Office that transitional costs will be met via grant or, in the case of IT upgrades to specialist systems and certain training, directly by Central Government. IER is a £108million programme nationally. We have received a grant for additional activities for the remainder of this year in the sum of £10,306. Liaison on Grant levels in 2014-15 is ongoing.

6.2 Postponing the canvass creates several extra challenges. Cabinet Office have considered the canvass to be “business as usual” but just at a different time. They have indicated that additional requests for support will be considered if a compelling case is made and we believe that the “different time” will demonstrate noticeable additional cost.

## **7. Head of Legal Services and legal implications**

Electoral Registration remains on the same basis as hitherto until June 2014 although the timing of the annual canvass is postponed. The usual registration “relevant date” ( effectively a census date) of October 15<sup>th</sup> is abolished.

## **8. Equalities and Community Cohesion Comments**

The effect of individual, as opposed to household registration, remains to be seen in a London context ( there is some evidence from Northern Ireland) but



## **Haringey Council**

it must be our ambition to retain and maximise registration in every part of the Borough, both through the postponed canvass which is so fundamental to the 2014 elections and through new online and other processes thereafter. Absolute levels of registration fell markedly in Northern Ireland upon the introduction of Individual registration. This is well documented by the Electoral Commission. Maintaining the register will be no small challenge.

### **9. Head of Procurement Comments**

9.1 New contracts will be required for a markedly different set of Registration Form printing after June 2014. The format of registration forms may be localised to demonstrate the Council's identity but other than that, form design will in future be devised by the Electoral Commission ( testing is taking place currently.)

9.2 Online registration will be sourced via the Government Digital Service but, again, may be localised at the point of log-in and will not be retained centrally. This is being devised currently.

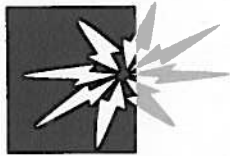
### **10. Policy Implication**

10.1 The most immediate and significant change to Electoral Registration is the postponed canvass. Taking place across the winter instead of across autumn will present major challenges to maintaining or enhancing the current level of registration. The theory is that the register so collected will both have the best chance of a high data match with DWP records

10.2 In common with many other London Boroughs, in Haringey we find we must chase up a considerable proportion of registration forms which are not returned via post, automated telephone or SMS by canvassing doors. Posting of both first forms and reminders has hitherto taken place in August and September, and non- responders have to be followed up during the course of October and early November ready for publication on 1 December.

10.3 This year, no posting activity is permitted before 1 October. This effectively means that the physical door-knocking stage will have to take place in December and January. This will require planning on a markedly different basis.

10.4 We have been assisting the Electoral Commission in preparing a risk assessment template for a winter canvass and there are real issues in terms of door- knocking during the darkest part of the year and the one which has a major holiday at its heart. From the point of view of what our canvassers have to do, there are significant implications for recruitment, availability, timetabling of activities, lone working, and payment. Our customers will not be expecting



## **Haringey Council**

us to undertake this work during the winter so there are communications and awareness issues.

10.5 We are now planning to revise our canvassing procedures to take account of all these factors in a way designed to maintain and maximise levels of registration. Thus, for example, the defined winter canvass period includes more weekends than the traditional autumn period and we will have to maximise activity during these wherever we can as one way of making up for the loss of daylight door-knocking hours. Where canvassing does take place in the hours of early darkness, it should be by teams of at least two canvassers, more visible and supported by a much more extensive public information profile such as on housing community information boards, in community halls, surgeries etc and through other press and media to let people know that we are out there and what we are doing.

### **11. Reasons for Decision**

11.1 The requirements of the new ERA Act 2013 and associated secondary legislation thus far, these being:

11.2 The Electoral Registration ( Transitional Provisions) Order 2013.

11.3 The Electoral Registration ( Disclosure of Electoral Registers) Regulations 2013

11.4 The Electoral Registration ( Postponement of 2013 Annual Canvass) Order 2013.

### **12. Use of Appendices**

NA

### **13. Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985:**