

REPORT TO Executive

Date of Meeting: 1 December 2015

Report of: Corporate Manager, Democratic & Civic Support, Electoral Registration Officer and Returning Officer

Title: STAFFING WITHIN THE ELECTORAL SERVICES TEAM

Is this a Key Decision?

No

Is this an Executive or Council Function?

Council

1. What is the report about?

- 1.1 This report sets out a proposal to increase the staff within the Electoral Services team (to replace a part time member of staff) to assist with the continually increasing workload associated with the introduction of Individual Electoral Registration (IER).

2. Recommendations:

- 2.1 That the Council be recommended to agree the permanent increase in the establishment of the Electoral Services Team

3. Reasons for the recommendation:

- 3.1 A part time member of staff (0.5fte) within the Electoral Services Team has tendered his resignation with effect from 31 January 2016.
- 3.2 This has given the Corporate Manager, Democratic & Civic Support, in his role as Electoral Registration Officer (ERO), the opportunity to review the workload and staffing within the team paying particular attention to the continually increasing workload associated with IER which has brought about a large increase for the Electoral Services Team.
- 3.3 As Members will be aware, an area of particular and on-going concern is the difficulty in ensuring that the large number of eligible students in the City (estimated to be somewhere in the region of 11,000) apply to be on the register of electors in Exeter.
- 3.4 Whilst a series of initiatives have been employed by staff in conjunction with the University, its various departments and Students Guild, the actual number of registrations by students in Exeter, still falls short of that expected.
- 3.5 As is the case with many areas of local government, there is also an increasing number of performance standards, against which the Council is judged and from which performance standards are made. An increasing number of these will be subject to on-going monitoring by the Electoral Commission and have to be completed continually rather than waiting for the end of a particular time period. Electoral Services is no exception to this and it is suggested that some additional support within the team is required to ensure that the ERO meets his statutory requirements.

3.6 By increasing this post to full time, an additional resource within the team would be identified to specifically work even closer with the University and other under-represented groups in an attempt to further drive up registration, and also assist with the ERO's performance standards.

3.7 As Members will be further aware, for the past few years the Council has received a specific grant towards the costs associated with the introduction of IER – this has, until now, been ring fenced for this purpose.

3.8 The Government has recently brought forward the end of the transition period for the introduction of IER to this year, which has given rise to some uncertainty as to the future of this ring fenced grant. However, the Government recognises the additional costs of IER and has indicated that the Revenue Support Grant will be increased accordingly in future years to take this into account.

3.9 As indicated above, the current postholder has tendered his resignation with effect from 31 January 2016, and it is felt that sufficient evidence of additional workload has been seen to warrant this increase in the staffing establishment.

4. What are the resource implications including non financial resources.

4.1 This would increase the staffing of the team by 0.5 fte at a cost of approximately £13,000 (including on costs).

5. Section 151 Officer comments:

5.1 The proposal suggested within this report would increase the Council's base line revenue budget by approximately £13,000 per annum

6. What are the legal aspects?

6.1 The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 places the responsibility on the Council to introduce IER and to ensure that sufficient staffing resources are in place to do so.

6.2 The Representation of the People Act 1983 places the responsibility on local authorities to provide sufficient staffing to meet its statutory electoral registration responsibilities.

7. Monitoring Officer's comments:

7.1 This report raises no issues for the Monitoring Officer.

8. Report details:

8.1 The introduction of IER has increased the workload in the Electoral Services team due to the requirement for all electors to individually apply to be on the electoral register, rather than this being done on a household basis as was previously the case.

- 8.2 This means that all new applicants in Exeter have to supply their date of birth and national insurance number so that their identity can be confirmed with the Department of Work and Pensions. There is also a requirement to obtain proof from two different sources to delete an elector, where this is not from a prescribed source.
- 8.3 Whilst approximately 80% of applicants are confirmed immediately, the remaining 20% have to either be chased to provide their information (approximately 14,000 home visits were made in the Autumn of 2015), or they have to provide some other form of information to confirm their identity.
- 8.4 Whilst the initial stages of registration can be done on-line (and there has been a relatively successful take-up of this), all other stages have to be done manually thereby increasing the workload of the team quite considerably in both volume and complexity.
- 8.5 On introduction of the new legislation, the Government was aware of the initial increase in workload this would bring to Councils and provided grants to each to assist with the transition to the new arrangements. This grant was particularly to cover the costs associated with the printing and postage of all the necessary forms, the door to door canvassing which would be needed as well as additional staffing. A similar grant has been achieved for 2015/16.
- 8.6 The Government has recently brought forward the end of the transition period for the introduction of IER to this year, which has given rise to some uncertainty as to the future of this ring fenced grant. However, the Government recognises the additional costs of IER and has indicated that the Revenue Support Grant will be increased accordingly in future years to take this into account.
- 8.7 The experiences associated with the introduction of IER have been what were expected, and are considered to be the way in which electoral registration will continue in the future. As such, it is therefore requested, that the establishment of the Electoral Services team be permanently increased by 0.5 full time member of staff (making a total of 5fte). The costs of this would be in the region of £13,000 per annum (including on-costs).

9. How does the decision contribute to the Council's Corporate Plan?

- 9.1 This decision will help ensure that efficient and effective delivery of services is maintained.

10. What risks are there and how can they be reduced?

- 10.1 If appropriate staffing resources were not provided to carry out this statutory responsibility, the Council could find itself being legally challenged which could invalidate election results in the City thereby incurring additional costs if they had to be re-run.
- 10.2 If the Council fell behind in its electoral registration responsibilities, it would be identified by the Electoral Commission as "under-performing" which could lead to further actions being taken against the Council and Electoral Registration Officer.

11. What is the impact of the decision on equality and diversity; health and wellbeing; safeguarding children, young people and vulnerable adults, community safety and the environment?

11.1 The legislation ensures that the ability to register to vote is made available to all aspects of society, including those who are disadvantaged. Appropriate levels of staffing are therefore required to undertake these responsibilities.

12. Are there any other options?

12.1 Not that are considered appropriate bearing in mind the statutory responsibilities placed on the authority.

**John Street
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Electoral Registration Officer and Returning Officer**

**Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1972 (as amended)
Background papers used in compiling this report:-**

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