

## EXETER CITY COUNCIL

EXECUTIVE  
10 DECEMBER 2013

### INDIVIDUAL ELECTORAL REGISTRATION

#### 1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report sets out the time scales and resource implications relating to the forthcoming implementation of Individual Electoral Registration (IER) and also gives an update on other matters relating to Electoral Registration and Elections in the foreseeable future.

#### 2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Political Parties and Elections Act 2009 introduced the concept of IER into legislation. Following this, the Electoral Registration and Administration Act was passed in January 2013 and brought into place the necessary legislation to enable the transition from Household to Individual Electoral Registration, from 2014.
- 2.2 IER aims to increase public trust in the system and encourage people to take individual responsibility for their vote. It also aims to enable the introduction of online registration and reduce the perception of electoral fraud, whilst maximising completeness and accuracy of the register.
- 2.3 Accurate and complete electoral registers are essential for elections. However, electoral registers are also used for other important civic purposes, including selecting people for jury service and calculating electorates to inform Parliamentary and local government boundary reviews. Those not registered are not counted for these purposes. Registers are also used by credit reference agencies to confirm addresses supplied by applicants for bank accounts, credit cards, personal loans and mortgages.
- 2.4 However, much of the practical detail with regard to IER has yet to become fully understood. The appropriate Regulations have yet to be finalised and a final Ministerial decision regarding whether or not IER will go ahead in 2014, is due to be made by the end of November.(A verbal update on this will be given at the meeting).
- 2.5 Nevertheless significant preparation and planning has to be undertaken to give us any chance to allow IER to 'go live' from 1 July 2014, and work is already underway in this respect.
- 2.6 The project is primarily driven by the Cabinet Office, which has appointed County Leads and Regional Delivery Managers to assist Electoral Registration Officers (ERO's) to implement IER. However, it is the ERO's responsibility to ensure that IER is fully implemented within the timescales set out in law and that local authorities ensure sufficient resources are made available to achieve this.
- 2.7 The Government has set aside £108 million for additional costs relating to the implementation of IER. However, legislation requires each Local Authority to continue to fund the ERO's costs, as is currently the case.

### **3. INDIVIDUAL ELECTORAL REGISTRATION**

- 3.1 Currently, Exeter City Council (ECC) undertakes an annual electoral registration canvass each September and publishes a revised register on 1 December each year. The canvass involves sending a registration form to each household and relies upon someone from that household completing the form on behalf of all residents. The form requires name, address, nationality and date of birth where appropriate and requires each person to decide whether they wish to opt out of the edited version of the register. The form is signed by one person.
- 3.2 ECC currently has 52,000 properties and an electorate of 90,000. The current system requires that, following the issue of the initial canvass form, a reminder form is sent and then a personal visit made by a canvasser. ECC issues around 20 – 22,000 reminder forms and makes household visits to around 13,000 properties. The canvass currently underway has been delayed by legislation to try to ensure that the last register published before IER is introduced, is as accurate as possible. This register will be published on 17 February 2014.
- 3.3 From mid-June 2014, almost immediately following the combined ECC and European Parliamentary Elections due on 22 May, the transitional IER canvass will begin. The transitional canvass arrangements will be slightly different than they will be when IER becomes the normal system.
- 3.4 From 10 June 2014, each new resident must register individually, providing the information currently required but also providing their National Insurance Number (NINO) and date of birth, although the requirement for a signature will be removed.
- 3.5 However, anyone who is already on the register at 1 July will not need to provide personal identifier information. They will however need to be verified, with their details being cross checked with the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) database. If successful, their details will be 'passported' onto the new register. If they subsequently move they will then need to provide NINO and date of birth information.
- 3.6 The Cabinet Office have created a Digital Design and Delivery Project, which will provide support to IER and enable online registration and confirmation of existing entries through data matching and verification. They have also created an IER Digital Service to facilitate the checking of information.
- 3.7 In July 2014, ECC will send the registration data it holds, via the IER Digital Service, for matching with the DWP database. Each elector will be given a match indicator of red, amber or green. Anyone with a green match will be confirmed and automatically added to the register. A confirmation notice will be sent to each elector in this category. Red or amber matches will require follow up work, and an invitation to register or a Household Enquiry Form (HEF) will be sent. Anyone who has a postal or proxy vote must either be a green match or respond to an invitation to register to continue with an absent vote arrangement. Any new elector, or anyone changing address, will be required to register individually from 10 June 2014.
- 3.8 A data transfer test run, conducted in July 2013, gave a green match rate of 72% for ECC, against a national average of 78%. If these results are repeated in the 'go live' data, this will mean that 63,000 electors will be confirmed and will be sent a letter confirming that they will be included in the next register. Around 22,000 electors will

receive an invitation to register and approximately 9,000 HEF's will be sent to properties that appear to be unoccupied. Every effort is therefore currently being made to increase the initial green matches, thereby decreasing the subsequent amount of work and consequential costs.

- 3.9 Evidence suggests that ECC's figures regarding green match rates are distorted by the number of students living in Exeter. Currently, students in Halls of Residence are registered centrally by the University Accommodation Office, in their role as householder. However, in the future they will only be able to provide the names of students and the ERO will be required to send invitations to register to each student.
- 3.10 The situation regarding the registration of students has been raised with the Cabinet Office, who have set up a working party to address these issues. ECC is part of a regional group engaged with this and we are actively talking with student accommodation providers to enlist their help.
- 3.11 The first IER register will be published on 1 December 2014 and will be in force for the UK Parliamentary Election of 7 May 2015. It is possible that there may be a fall in numbers registered in the short term, which could have an impact on the balance of electors across the City which would lead to further issues described in more detail at 6.2 (iii) below.
- 3.12 To counter this and to ensure that the register remains as accurate as possible during the five months between publication and the Parliamentary election, it is highly likely that targeted canvassing will be carried out.
- 3.13 The following canvass in Autumn 2015 will require a full IER process to be carried out, with HEF's being sent to every household. This will be followed by the issue of invitations to register, where new electors are identified.

#### **4. IER FUNDING**

- 4.1 As shown at 2.7 above, the Government has set aside £108 million for the implementation of IER. So far ECC has received a grant of £7,020.87. Further funding is due to be granted in April 2014 and we have been given an indication that this amount will be £52,066. A further grant of £13,016 will be available, provided that ECC's Section 151 Officer signs a statement giving an assurance that ECC will continue to fund electoral administration at the current level of costs – this has been done, therefore making a total grant of £65,082. There will also be funding for the financial year 2015/16 but there is, at the moment, no indication of what amount that will be, nor is it clear if any funding will be available after 2016 for the ongoing process of IER.
- 4.2 As has already been raised earlier in this report, it is envisaged that additional costs associated with the introduction of IER will be incurred primarily on printing, stationery and postage. It is estimated that these costs will be covered by this additional grant. However, it is unclear at the moment as to whether this grant will be sufficient to also cover any additional administration costs
- 4.3 The Cabinet Office also set aside £4.2 million for public engagement work but ECC (who submitted a joint application with all other authorities in Devon) was not successful in gaining any funding. A further grant may be available for additional canvass work after the publication of the 2014 register in February and the appropriateness of a further application, is currently being considered.

## **5. OTHER ELECTORAL CHANGES**

- 5.1 The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013, also introduced a number of changes to the conduct of elections, which are listed below:
- (i) The UK Parliamentary timetable will be extended from 17 to 25 working days, to bring it in line with other elections.
  - (ii) The timing of polling district reviews will be brought into line with the 5 year fixed Parliament timetable.
  - (iii) A Parliamentary candidate jointly nominated by two or more political parties will be able to use an emblem of one of the parties on the ballot paper.
  - (iv) Police Community Support Officers will be allowed to enter a polling station (as Police Constables can).
  - (v) The Electoral Commission can recommend Returning Officer fees are withheld or reduced for poor performance.
  - (vi) Gives powers for the annual canvass to be abolished.
  - (vii) Requires a person appointed as a proxy voter to be on the electoral register for the application to be granted.
  - (viii) The ERO will be required to write, after an election, to all electors whose postal vote has been rejected and give a reason.
  - (ix) A civil penalty will be introduced for failing to make a registration application, when requested to do so by an ERO.

## **6. ADDITIONAL ELECTORAL ACTIVITIES DURING IER TRANSITION**

- 6.1 Over the next 3 to 5 years, electoral systems will undergo the biggest changes and reforms for generations, whilst experiencing some of the busiest times in the electoral calendar.
- 6.2 Listed below are the main activities which will be undertaken by the Elections Team in the foreseeable future.
- (i) September 2013 – February 2014:  
  
Continue with the last traditional canvass and publish register.  
Prepare for the implantation of IER, including training of staff, the formulation of a public engagement strategy, project plans and risk analysis.  
Preparations for combined elections in May 2014.
  - (ii) March 2014 – May 2014  
  
Conduct combined Exeter City Council and European Parliamentary elections on 22 May with verification & counts on 22, 23 and 25 May.  
Continue to prepare for IER, including system testing & contract negotiation.  
Begin data matching process.

(iii) June 2014 – December 2014

Begin a full statutory review of the suitability of all polling districts and places within the City.

Begin implementation of IER 'go live'.

Possible Local Government Boundary Commission ward boundary review, to establish and update the equality of electoral representation within the City.

Prepare for and conduct a Business Improvement District ballot.

(iv) 2015

Postal vote refresh

Prepare for and conduct ECC & UK Parliamentary elections due on 7 May

Begin first full IER canvass.

(v) 2016

Prepare for and conduct ECC and Police and Crime Commissioner elections due on 5 May.

#### **4 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 Whilst some of the costs relating to IER, such as software development and national publicity, will be paid directly by the Cabinet Office; given the significant additional and ongoing workload anticipated over the next 3 to 5 years, it is inevitable that additional resources will be required locally, both in financial and staffing terms.

4.2 However, much of the process of IER is as yet unknown. Some economies could be made if, for example, the uptake of online registration grows and processes may be refined as time goes on. It is highly likely that the costs of IT, postage and printing will rise and could potentially double, with much of this being covered by the additional grant. It is also fairly certain that the level of staffing will need to increase.

4.3 Due to the number of unknown factors involved, it would be wise to proceed cautiously in this respect. Even if the volume of transactions does not increase by as much as anticipated, it is almost certain that the complexity will rise. It is therefore suggested that one additional full time clerical post at Grade 3, is created on a fixed term basis from 1 April 2014 until 31 March 2016. This would equate to an additional cost of £20,000 per annum. This could prove an opportunity for deployment within the Authority, which could release a saving elsewhere. If this does not prove to be sufficient any remaining resource shortfall can be met from existing casual resources, until a consistent and more predictable work load becomes established, when a further report will be made to a future Executive.

4.4 As set out above, there is currently no certainty as to the level of funding, if any, which may be available for the 2015/16 financial year and beyond to assist with the additional costs associated with the introduction of IER. Bearing in mind the Council's obligation to ensure that the Electoral Registration Officer has sufficient resources available to continue with his responsibilities, this lack of uncertainty as to future funding may leave the authority with a requirement to fund this additional post if or when Cabinet Office funding ceases.

- 4.5 It is also possible that, under the new system, it will be necessary to carry out door to door enquiries throughout the year rather than just during the canvass period. Until the workload is fully established, it would be best to manage this by utilising current canvassers on a casual basis. Again, this will be monitored and reported to a future Executive.
- 4.6 Due to the fact that each individual will need to be directly communicated with, there is likely to be a significant increase in postage, stationery and clerical time. For example, specifically designed envelopes will be required when sending invitations to register and more time will need to be taken in follow up work where electors no longer appear to be resident. This is likely to impact more significantly in 2015, when we will be required to carry out a full IER canvass.

## **5 RECOMMENDED**

### **That the Executive RESOLVES**

- (1) To note the content of this report as to future pressures on the Democratic Services Elections Team.
- (2) To approve the appointment of a temporary Clerical Assistant post (fixed term contract to 31 March 2016) with further updates on the resource implications associated with the matters detailed in this report being presented to future meetings.
- (3) To note the other measures being taken to ensure the Council's legal obligations are observed with regards to Electoral Registration and Election issues.

**John Street**  
**Electoral Registration Officer**

#### **Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1972 (as amended)**

#### **Background papers used in compiling this report:-**

Titles of supporting documents

Date