

11 September 2014

Individual Electoral Registration

Wards: All

Portfolio: Councillor K. Chambers – Personnel & Business Support

Executive Summary:

Electoral Services is responsible for the management of all elections and referenda within the borough and also all electoral registration. This is an update on the transition to Individual Electoral Registration.

Recommendation:

That the report be noted.

What is IER? Why is it being introduced?

In 2010, the Coalition Government announced its intention to accelerate the implementation of Individual Electoral Registration (IER). The introduction of IER is a switch from the previous household registration to a system that encourages people to take responsibility for their own votes, introduce more convenient channels for registration, and reduce the risk and perception of electoral fraud, whilst maximising completeness and accuracy.

What is the timetable for introduction? What is the impact of the PCC by-election?

IER went live on the 10th June 2014. From that day if you moved house or weren't on the electoral register you were required to register individually. This would be either on line, or over the phone with your Local Authority Elections Office (if the service was offered, Walsall do provide this service) or by completing a paper application. This involved the new requirement to provide additional personal identifier (date of birth and National Insurance number). For everyone else already registered we took the 1st July register and data matched it with the DWP through the Governments new digital Service. Those that matched (89%) in Walsall (above the national average) simply pass ported over. We wrote to these people in August to advice them they had been added to the new Individual Electoral Register and that they did not need to do anything unless they moved.. Those that didn't match (approx 19,500) were also written to and advised how they could register individually.

For those not individually registered their names will **not** be removed if they fail to register until after the Parliamentary Election in 2015. However, if they are postal voters they will lose their postal vote at the end of 2014 if they have not registered

individually by this time. Similarly, proxy voters who are not registered individually will lose their proxy vote at the same time.

Special category electors such as members of the Forces, British Citizens living overseas and anonymous electors who complete a declaration when they register are working to a different timetable, and those already registered by means of a declaration will not be required to register individually until their declaration expires. These are done either annually or every 5 years.

PCC Election

At the time of the PCC election anyone registered, whether pass ported over or not, was able to vote in the election. All new applicants to register had to do so individually. If someone was not passported over and requested a postal or proxy vote then they would have been asked to register individually. Anyone that requested a proxy would have required both the elector and the proxy to be individually registered.

For the PCC election there was 1 person who was contacted to request that they register individually before we could accept their postal application and one applicant for proxy that was declined because their proxy was not individually registered.

In summary the only affect for the PCC election or any subsequent election until December 2015 is that unless you are on the Individual Electoral Register you cannot have a postal/Proxy vote, you must vote in person unless you undertake to register individually.

What does the Council and voters have to do?

Following the DWP data match with the 1st July 2014 register The council was required to Write Out to all individuals currently registered and advice them of their state. For those that did not passport over they were sent an initial Invitation to Register. They will also receive a reminder and a final reminder followed up by a personal visit to encourage registration.

All current households showing as empty on the electoral database have been sent a Household Enquiry Form (HEF). This will be followed up with a visit, reminder and final reminder. Where we receive information from a completed Household Enquiry form we then proceed to invite any named persons on the form with an Invite to Register (Initial form, Reminder, Final reminder, visit).

There will be no annual Canvass this year just the WRITE OUT August to tell the electorate their current status. There will be a canvass in 2015 again with each Household receiving a Household Enquiry Form detailing the information we hold for their property. Again there will be three forms and a visit. As a result of a returned HEF we will add new names to the register and send the 3xforms if necessary to invite registration followed by a house visit.

This work will have a significant impact on electoral services. We have currently survived the workload by using our temporary staff that normally work into the office at election time and annual canvass to help us process the current transition. It is thought in the future we may need to recruit further permanent staff. We will most certainly need to recruit special canvassers to carry out visits to care homes, establishments and follow up on the Invitation to register forms. We have been given a grant this year of approximately 63,000 with a further 16,000 to use for maximising registration. We have been told there will be further funding next year but at this stage we don't know how much and we don't know how long this extra top up funding will be provided. It may be in the future that the annual canvass will be ceased or perhaps conducted every 10 years at the moment the decision has been left open.

The legislation is very clear on the fact that forms must be posted, meaning that we cannot reduce costs by making use of alternative channels (for example emailing). There will also be an increase in forms being sent due to the need to chase up non returned forms throughout the year.

What is the predicted impact on numbers on the electoral roll?

In the short term the numbers are likely to be artificially inflated, due to people not being removed if they haven't individually registered, meaning there is potential for more people to be carried over to the new register in the short term.

I believe that the numbers on the electoral roll will possibly increase; I certainly see no reason for them to decrease. There is now a duty on Electoral Registration Officers to promote registration. We have already begun to attempt to maximise registration in several ways. We currently receive lists from Council Tax of new occupants and we write to them to invite them to register. We seek new electors by data mining various council and housing data. We have carried out extra door to door canvassing in the Wards less responsive to the annual canvass. We have attempted to raise awareness through the Media. Again in order to carry out this duty to its full potential we will need to receive additional funding from the Government.

Conclusion

It is early in the process but the introduction of new channels for registration seems to have made a positive impact with the electorate and I am sure once the initial software glitches have been ironed out will be a great improvement for the accuracy, completeness and integrity of the Electoral Register.

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