



## GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE REPORT

Report Title	INDIVIDUAL ELECTORAL REGISTRATION
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**AGENDA STATUS:** PUBLIC

<b>Committee Meeting Date:</b>	7 <sup>th</sup> July 2015
<b>Within Policy:</b>	YES
<b>Policy Document:</b>	NO
<b>Directorate:</b>	Chief Executive
<b>Ward(s)</b>	All

### 1. Purpose

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- 1.1 This report updates the Committee on progress towards the implementation of Individual Electoral Registration (IER) on Northampton in light of the Motion passed at Full Council on the 8<sup>th</sup> June.

### 2. Recommendations

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- 2.1 The Committee is recommended to note the actions being undertaken by officers to pursue the ongoing implementation of IER in Northampton and to recommend any action arising from the Motion passed at Full Council.

### 3. Issues and Choices

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#### 3.1 Report Background

- 3.1.1 Since June 2014 the transition from the old system of household electoral registration to the new system of individual electoral registration (IER) took place. Prior to then, “dry runs” and testing were carried out of the systems

involved, co-ordinated at national level by the Cabinet Office and the Electoral Commission.

- 3.1.2 In Northamptonshire the County Electoral Services Officers have supported each other in implementation. This has been assisted by the fact that most Councils in the County use the same IT system to support IER and other Election duties.
- 3.1.3 In implementing IER, and in addition to the Annual Canvass, the Council has carried out significant publicity and work. This has included:
- Advertising on the back of pay and display car park tickets
  - Bookmarks and postcards distributed via a number of outlets including the major sports clubs
  - Advertising on the back of a high street retailer's receipts
  - JC Decaux street furniture advertising
  - Working with students on promoting registration on campus and in the Market Square on National Register to Vote Day
  - Year round visiting officer support, of 5 officers employed on a casual basis, in addition to the visiting officers employed at Canvass time.
- 3.1.4 A measure of the effectiveness of the new system and the level of public awareness of the system is the number of "unconfirmed" electors at any one time.
- 3.1.5 An elector may be "unconfirmed" for a number of reasons. One is that they have sought to register at an address but when the IER system matches that data to national databases at the DWP there is no match. This can for example come about by an elector moving into an area and therefore no national data being held on their location at that address. In such cases the Council seeks identity confirmation, and at any one time there will be a number of such electors in process. How long it takes for someone to be confirmed will depend on the number of checks required and the speed with which information to confirm identity is received and verified.
- 3.1.6 The unconfirmed electors will also include those who were registered under the household registration system who have not yet registered under the IER system.
- 3.1.7 We can therefore expect that at any one time there will be a number of electors in the unconfirmed category and over time as IER is implemented this figure will reduce significantly. We can also expect that levels of "unconfirmed" electors will be higher in areas with higher proportions of electors who are likely to be transient or higher levels of population turnover.
- 3.1.8 In June 2014, before the 2014 Canvass, the number of unconfirmed electors stood at about 16,700 in Northampton. On June the 25<sup>th</sup> 2015, just ahead of

the 2015 Canvass, the number stands at just over 7,100. That is 4.6% of the total number of electors on the Register. Of these, an estimated approximate 4,000 are understood to be electors who were registered under the household system and are yet to be confirmed under the IER system despite repeated reminders to date.

3.1.9 In the 2015 General Election and Local Elections, the first main election since the introduction of IER, electors who were still registered under the previous household method were able to vote.

3.1.10 The 2015 IER Canvass is about to commence, which will lead to the updated Register based on the Canvass being published in December 2015.

3.1.11 It was considered that the final transition to IER would be completed for the December 2015 Register, but the Electoral Commission has decided not to recommend full implementation on that date. This therefore means that following the 2015 Canvass it will still be possible for those registered under the household system from 2013 to vote in elections. The final transition to IER will therefore be completed in December 2016.

3.1.12 It is understood that should the intention to deliver a review of Parliamentary Constituency boundaries in 2018 be implemented then the December 2015 Electoral Register will form the basis of the electorate figures used to carry out that boundary review.

## **3.2 Issues**

3.2.1 The Motion passed at the Council meeting on the 8<sup>th</sup> June 2015 contained the following passage:

*“We need to do further work to ensure maximum numbers of our citizens are registered to vote, particularly with full implementation of IER”*

3.2.2 Officers are currently initiating the 2015 Canvass and have the following plans for further public information, engagement and publicity:

- Advertising on the receipts of a different high street retailer at 2 stores
- Advertising on televisions at Trilogy gyms
- JC Decaux street furniture advertising
- Information distributed in College and University induction/fresher packs
- Information distributed at public locations including the One Stop Shop, Libraries, health facilities etc...
- Further activity with students subject to discussion with students in the autumn

- Distribution of information to local resident groups etc...with a particular focus on getting information to areas where there are understood to be higher levels of population movement.
- Looking to despatch information on IER to residents when they register to pay Council Tax at a new address.
- Use of the Council's social media outlets
- Enhanced visiting officer capacity, ensuring that all addresses are visited if they have not made a return under IER.

3.2.3 It has also been resolved by the Council that we should investigate activity for 2015 Local Democracy Week in October (12<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup>) and this will be incorporated into this work. The Committee's views on that are invited.

3.2.4 Mobile technology was also deployed in 2014, for use by the Visiting Officers and we are looking to enhance this in 2015. A number of options are under discussion.

3.2.5 Members can play a significant role in supporting and making people aware of the Canvass.

3.2.6 The Committee is requested to indicate ways in which the Committee would wish to add to this work to meet the aspirations outlined in the Motion passed by Council.

### **3.3 Choices (Options)**

3.3.1 The process of IER is laid down by Statute and must be followed. The Electoral Commission has issued clear guidance on these matters and are monitoring performance nationally and locally in Northampton.

3.3.2 There is no option but to continue to positively promote IER in Northampton and it is clearly the view of the Council that this should be the case.

3.3.3 It is possible to do more promotion but all such promotion also comes at a price and officers would need to separately identify funds to carry out enhanced activity.

## **4. Implications (including financial implications)**

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### **4.1 Policy**

4.1.1 There are no new policy implications

### **4.2 Resources and Risk**

4.2.1 The Council has a budget to conduct Electoral Registration and has received a grant of £77,293 to carry out work on implementing IER in 2015/16. These funds can only be spent on IER. The Council can make a case for additional funding but there are no guarantees that this would be available.

### **4.3 Legal**

4.3.1 There are no new legal implications as a result of this report. The requirements of IER have previously been reported to this Committee.

### **4.4 Equality and Health**

4.4.1 Officers are considering how to target some publicity in a manner to make it more accessible to those with particular communication and access needs. Any suggestions from Members in that regard would be very welcome.

### **4.5 Consultees (Internal and External)**

4.5.1 There has not been any consultation on this report other than within the Council's officer team working on IER.

### **4.6 How the Proposals deliver Priority Outcomes**

4.6.1 The Council's work on IER delivers on a key legislative requirement.

## **5. Background Papers**

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5.1 Electoral Commission guidance on IER

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