

NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCIL

COUNCIL

INDIVIDUAL ELECTORAL REGISTRATION - AN UPDATE

1. OBJECT AND KEY POINTS IN THIS REPORT

- 1.1 To inform council about changes which will be made to the Electoral Registration system when Individual Electoral Registration (IER) is introduced nationally in July 2014.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 2.1 In 2010, the coalition government announced its intention to implement Individual Electoral Registration (IER). On 31 January 2013, the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 received Royal Assent. This Act and subsequent future secondary legislation will pave the way for the introduction of IER from 1 July 2014.
- 2.2 From the summer of 2014 the Returning Officer and his staff will be required to begin the transition from the current rolling and household registration system to IER. This will be the most significant change to the Electoral Registration system for many years. The changes are aimed at modernising and improving the system, creating one as a better protection against fraud and that is more convenient for citizens to register to vote.
- 2.3 IER is being overseen by the Cabinet Office working with the Electoral Commission who will provide guidance and support for all local authorities. It will affect 46m electors, 380 local authorities and will have a total budget of £108m.

The Current Registration System

- 2.4 The current system of registration is based on each household responding to the annual canvass by a single return per household which registers all eligible individuals within the household. Outside of the canvass period a smaller number of people register via rolling

registration, where individuals are responsible for completing and signing their own individual registration form.

The IER Registration System

- 2.5 From 1 July 2014, IER will commence and will require electors to register individually rather than by household. Under IER, an individual will have to provide personal information such as their National Insurance Number and Date of Birth so that the application can be verified against the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) database. For the majority of current electors, it is proposed to simplify the transition to the new system by matching the final (pre IER) Electoral Register with DWP records. Those that can be matched will automatically be confirmed on a new register and the Electoral Registration Officer will write to those who are correctly matched to let them know they are registered under IER and that the recipient need take no further action other than to check their details. Evidence from pilots carried out by the Cabinet Office during 2011 suggested that an average of 70% of electors could be confirmed in this way and would therefore not have to do anything to stay on the register.
- 2.6 For those electors not matched the Electoral Registration Officer will carry out a further secondary match against local data census held by the council and again if there is no match or the Electoral Registration Officer is not satisfied of the elector's residence or eligibility, letters will be sent to individuals inviting them to supply personal identifiers so they can be registered individually and therefore added to the new IER register. Those electors would be required to individually provide their name, National Insurance number and date of birth. These personal identifiers will then be checked against the DWP data before registering the elector under IER. Ongoing work will be carried out to ensure that as many people as possible are registered with the first full IER register to be published on 1 December 2014 in advance of the Parliamentary and other elections in 2015.

Preparation for the changes

- 2.7 Nationally the Cabinet Office has made much progress in relation to IER. The necessary legislation is in place and consultations have taken place around the proposed funding arrangements. It has also piloted successfully with 20 local authorities key elements of the new business processes around IER, as well as prepared the digital service for testing using live data. This year the Cabinet Office is focusing on testing the digital service in all local authorities, working closely with the Electoral Management software suppliers and on achieving a state of readiness in every local authority by 8 November 2013.
- 2.8 IER will have a significant impact on electoral services in every local authority. It is not just a shift to a system that requires action by individuals rather than households but the introduction of an integrated

digital application service. The Cabinet Office is fully funded to ensure a successful transition during this year and particularly 2014/2015 but that success will depend on a concerted effort to achieve readiness by November by a range of partners, including local authorities, the Department for Work and Pensions and the Electoral Commission. Local Authority Chief Executives and their staff are key to the successful implementation of IER in each authority.

2.9 The Cabinet Office has indicated that funding will be provided to cover the additional costs incurred by local authorities over and above the cost of the present method of electoral registration. This funding will be done through non-ring fenced Section 31 Grants. Funding allocation mechanisms have been put in place which will designate a specific amount of money for each local authority to successfully implement IER. Where local authorities are able to demonstrate that these amounts are not sufficient local authorities will be able to bid for additional funds on a business case basis. The transition to IER will put significant resource pressures on electoral services teams and it is crucial therefore that the changes are well understood as well as the demands being made on staff. To date North Lincolnshire Council has received an allocation of £8,202.71 for IER. Further funding will be allocated in the year 2014/2015.

2.10 The Cabinet Office, as previously indicated, intends by 8 November 2013 to make an assessment of each local authority's readiness to implement IER in 2014 which will then inform the government's decisions whether to lay the final pieces of legislation in December of this year. In the meantime all local authorities will have a great deal of work to do -

- Applying changes to their Electoral Management software to support the new integrated IER digital service, from April. This will enable data matching, online applications and the new business processes.
- From July the Cabinet Office will test match each local authority's register against DWP records using the IER digital service, which will allow the Cabinet Office to test whether it works in each authority and the proportion of their registers that can be automatically confirmed. In North Lincolnshire this will take place on 10 July.
- Developing resource and training plans for electoral services teams in relation to the impact of IER.

2.11 In North Lincolnshire preparations are well underway in relation to some of the issues referred to in paragraph 2.10. They include -

- IT team notified of changes which need to be made to systems in order to allow the Electoral Management System (EMS) to

connect to the authority's GCSX/PSN connection. Lead technical officer and named individual with a GCSX account (Electoral Services Management) identified and confirmed to the Cabinet Office.

- IT capability survey completed which confirms existing resource, hardware and software capability including security and connectivity.
- Successful PING test carried out. The PING test is a simple test and requires local authorities to confirm that they can access a pre-defined connection test web page served up by the IER digital service.
- The EMS system upgraded to conduct a connectivity test with live data.
- Bearer token connection test with around 1,000 electors completed successfully.
- Enhancements made to the EMS server and client PC's and Cabinet Office informed.
- EMS system currently being matched to Local Land and Property Gazetteer (LLPG).
- Local data matching to find new occupants and movers using suitable local data source i.e. council tax system currently being undertaken on a daily basis.

2.12 As part of the ongoing working around IER, the 2013 electoral canvass has been delayed. This will now take place between 1 October 2013 and ending on 17 February 2014. This is to ensure that the register is as accurate as possible before the Cabinet Office undertakes a confirmation exercise in the summer of 2014. As members will be aware the normal canvass takes place during the summer months with the new register being published in December.

2.13 The Cabinet Office is leading a programme of work to maximum electoral registration amongst groups identified as being unregistered or at risk of falling off the register during a transition to IER. It will look at how to support local authorities to ensure that registered electors transfer to the IER register and that people are aware of the transition to IER and the information they need to register. IER will thus be supported by a national publicity campaign run by the Electoral Commission and supported by the local awareness activity of electoral registration officers, targeted at the particular challenges faced in each local authority. Resources will be available from the national campaign that can be used locally to ensure all local communication about IER is easily recognised by voters.

2.14 The introduction of IER will have implications for council staffing and the council's procedures including -

- The difficulties of carrying out the canvass during the winter period following the decision to delay the canvass until October 2013 to February 2014.
- The overlap requiring staff to be trained to carry out IER whilst dealing with a different form of canvass which will include the trial validation and data matching tests.
- Changes to the council's computer systems to reflect the new requirements of IER some of which are referred to in paragraph 2.11 above.
- The need to prepare appropriate project and other plans to enable IER to be successfully implemented.

3. OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

3.1 There are no options associated with this report. The introduction and implementation of IER is a national requirement and all necessary work will be carried out to achieve its successful implementation.

4. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCIAL, STAFFING, PROPERTY, IT)

4.1 Financial - Funding will be provided to cover the additional costs incurred by local authorities in relation to IER and the first sum of money has already been received by the council as indicated in paragraph 2.9 above. However, officers will monitor the impact of IER as it develops over the coming 12 to 18 months.

4.2 Staffing - It has not yet been possible to quantify the impact on staffing in relation to IER but this will be monitored over the coming months. However, it is anticipated that the introduction and implementation will have some impact on staffing.

4.3 IT - There will be some implications in relation to the council's IT systems as detailed in paragraph 2.11 above.

5. OUTCOMES OF INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT (IF APPLICABLE)

5.1 The introduction and implementation of IER is a legal requirement. Its impact has been assessed nationally and therefore at a local level it is not necessary to carry out an integrated impact assessment.

6. **OUTCOMES OF CONSULTATION AND CONFLICTS OF INTEREST DECLARED**

6.1 The introduction and implementation of IER is a national legal requirement and consultations are taking place nationally in relation to its introduction.

7. **RECOMMENDATIONS**

7.1 That council notes the proposed introduction and implementation of individual electoral registration.

7.2 That further progress reports be submitted as the introduction and implementation of IER develops.

CHIEF EXECUTIVE

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Background Papers used in the preparation of this report - Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013.