

CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S DEPARTMENT

REPORT TO:	Council
DATE OF MEETING:	2 April 2014
TITLE:	Individual Electoral Registration
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1.0 Purpose of Report

1.1 To outline arrangements for the implementation of Individual Electoral Registration in Bury.

2.0 Background

2.1 Individual Electoral Registration (IER) was first introduced in the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2009. The Coalition Agreement included a commitment to accelerate the introduction of IER and this was passed in January 2013. Further detailed provisions for IER are set out in the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 (Transitional Provisions) Order 2013 laid on 18 July 2013. The Minister responsible for IER is the Rt. Hon. Greg Clark MP, Minister of State for the Cabinet Office (Cities and Constitution).

3.0 Decisions Required

None

Purpose of Electoral Registration

A citizen is entitled to register to vote in Bury if they are:

- 16 or over (although they cannot vote until they are 18)
- A British, Irish, EU or qualifying Commonwealth citizen who has leave to remain or does not require such leave
- Resident in Bury

The other key statutory use of the Electoral Register is to call people for jury service in England and Wales. The most common non statutory use of the Register is for credit referencing and as a check of an individuals' identity.

The Electoral Registration Officer (ERO), the Chief Executive has a statutory duty to compile and maintain the Register of Electors for Bury. An accurate and complete Register is fundamental to the effective operation of democracy as it lists the names and addresses of those people in Bury who are eligible to vote in local, national and European elections and referenda.

The Current System of Registration

The registration of electors is carried out each year by means of an annual canvass. A member of the household completes the canvass form giving details of all those eligible to vote living at that address. This information is used to add and remove people from the electoral register. Electors may also register themselves during the year (rolling registration) by applying to the ERO.

The government delayed the date of the 2013 canvass to ensure that the register was as up to date as possible for the transition. The last canvass under this system prior to the transition started on 1 October 2013 and ended on 17 February 2014 when the Register was published.

Individual Electoral Registration

From June 2014 the current system of household registration will be replaced by one of individual registration. Every person in the UK who wishes to make a new application to register to vote must provide their National Insurance Number (NINO) and date of birth (DOB). These details will be verified by Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) data or other local data sets before being added to the Register. There will be an exceptions process for any person who is unable to provide personal identifiers.

For the first time electors will be able to register to vote online via a government portal, removing that requirement for a 'wet ink' signature. Citizens will also be able to register by submitting a paper form, via telephone, or face to face by providing their details, including personal identifiers, to a member of the ERO's staff.

As with the current process of household registration, the Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) ultimately has the power to issue a fixed penalty notice to any person who does not register under IER. However, this is a sanction that has not been used in Bury and rarely has across the country.

The Transition Stage

Those already on the Register

Electors already on the register whose details exactly match DWP or local records will automatically be confirmed through to the new IER Register. They will be sent a letter confirming their inclusion and that they need take no further action.

Any person whose details do cannot be confirmed will individually be sent an Invitation to Register, which will require their NINO and DOB. The ERO will be required to issue a reminder to individuals who do not respond to this initial invitation and to undertake a personal canvass to those who do not respond to the reminder.

Anyone who does not respond to their Invitation to Register by 1 December 2014 will be carried forward i.e. remain on the Register until 1 December 2015 to ensure that they can vote in the 2015 General Election. Those who have a postal vote who do not match and who do not register by December 2014 will lose their postal vote until they register under IER.

Those already on the Register who have existing absent voting arrangements

Any person who is confirmed onto the new register who has an absent vote (postal or proxy) retains that absent vote. Any person who is not confirmed across must register under IER by 1 December 2014 or their absent vote entitlement will be removed. If this happens, the elector will remain on the Register under a special carry forward provision and will be able to vote in a polling station. In order to vote by post or proxy at the 2015 Parliamentary and Local Elections, an elector must be registered under IER.

New Applications to Register

From July 2014 all new applications will need to provide a NINO and DOB which must be verified as will all those who move house within Bury.

Addresses with no one registered

Addresses where there is no record of anyone living there must be sent a Household Enquiry Form to establish occupation. When this is returned, each person will be sent an Invitation to Register. If this does not illicit a response a reminder will be sent followed by a household visit.

Post Transition

After the transition stage the ERO will identify potential new electors or home movers based on other records (for example where there is a change to details for paying Council Tax) and will be required to send such individuals an Invitation To Register. Again any individual who does not respond to this invitation must be sent a reminder and then a personal visit, meaning canvassing activity will take place all year round.

Once the transition period ends, as well as a continuing canvass of those who we believe may be resident, there is also a requirement to undertake an annual canvass of households by sending out Household Enquiry Forms to all properties asking for details of who live there and to send Invitations To Register to occupants who are not registered to vote at that address.

Non respondents by December 2015 will be removed from the Register.

Confirmation Dry Run

In preparation for the transition to IER, a national test of the process was carried out in the summer of 2013 (known as the Confirmation Dry Run), matching names on the Electoral Registers against the DWP Customer Information Service database and using the exact processes that will be used in the live run.

The results showed which existing voters could passport onto the new register (flagged as a green match) without further action, as well as identifying amber flags (partial matches) and red flags (no match) where further investigation is required.

Nationally, green match results have varied between 47% and 87%. The main reason for such a variance relates to different demographic and area characteristics including population composition and housing tenure – for example areas with a large number of privately rented houses will have a lower match rate.

The results in Bury were 80.5% green matches (117043 electors) 2.5% amber 2533 (amber) 17% red matches (25751 electors).

Local Data matching

Legislation allows for subsequent data matching against data held by the local authority and other bodies, to either reject green matches it believes are inaccurate or to passport electors with a red or amber flag where local data shows these details are correct.

Implementation of IER in Bury

Factors influencing implementation

IER will have a disproportionate impact on certain groups of residents. It is known that some groups are already under registered – 16 and 17 year olds who will soon become eligible to vote, young adults, students and those living in private rented accommodation where there is high transience. BME communities and those that have been resident in the UK for a short period of time are also under registered. Reasons for this may be related to how established communities are – for example it could be that the head of the household model is better suited due to culture; there may be language or literacy issues, especially with those who don't read in their own language and therefore translations won't help; and fear of authority. Engagement must be aimed at gaining trust and explaining these new provisions in a way that can be understood.

IER could also negatively impact on other groups such as home movers, those without access to the internet, older people, those with low levels of literacy and troubled families who may not see registration as a priority. There may be a sizeable minority who will need reassurance about the use of personal data for registration purposes.

There are also broader policy implications. The Register is a key data set used to demonstrate the number of people living in Bury and therefore indirectly affects funding for public services. The Cabinet Office has yet to provide clarity around how registration statistics could be used in the future.

Electorate figures are the basis on which both the Parliamentary and Local Government Boundary Commission decide on ward and constituency boundaries with IER registers being used for this purpose from 2018.

As the Dry Run has confirmed on average about 20% of Bury electors will not be confirmed. Despite the activity to assure their registration, this could ultimately result in a reduction.

Consideration needs to be given to how 'mixed' households are dealt with (households with a combination of green, red and amber matches) to ensure that each individual is registered and minimise concerns that may be raised about the accuracy of DWP records.

The costs of ensuring that these electors are registered could be significant (up to £5 per elector), with the requirement to issue Household Enquiry Forms, Invitations to Register, reminders and personal visits as prescribed in legislation. However, introduction of online registration presents an opportunity towards more cost effective channels.

A national strategy regarding implementation will be published by the Electoral Commission in 2014 which will underpin local initiatives. Greater Manchester wide collaboration will be pursued where efficiencies can be identified and best practise shared.

Integration

Given the challenges of IER, a 'whole council' approach will be needed, not only during the transition but subsequently with Council business as usual so that the Electoral Register remains as complete as possible. We need to make registration a simple, integral part of the Councils transactions with residents by mainstreaming the process.

Finance and Funding

The government has committed £108 million for the transition nationally, paid via non ring fenced Section 31 Grant and has stated on a number of occasions that the transition will be fully funded.

Allocations were announced on 25 October, calculated on a formula which divided available funds between all local authorities based on a combination of standard and analysis led need. The initial transition grant is £48,401 and officers have sought and gained assurances that additional funding will be available for additional costs.

The government has confirmed that some transitional funding will be available in 2015/16 however this sum will be significantly less than the 2014/15 allocations. Further detailed financial modelling will be necessary as the process proceeds. It is clear at this stage that there will be significant additional costs through sending additional Invitations to Register. However the use of online registration could lessen the burden of additional costs.

Confirmation Dry Run Results By Ward

Wards	Red	Amber	Green
BESSES	1486	102	6793
CHURCH	1141	118	7297
EAST	1930	215	6066
ELTON	1527	106	7125
HOLYROOD	1674	183	7060
MOORSIDE	1803	236	7136
NORTH MANOR	1085	121	6990
PILKINGTON PARK	1425	111	6300
RADCLIFFE EAST	1628	134	6980
RADCLIFFE NORTH	1326	114	7490
RADCLIFFE WEST	1749	128	6777
RAMSBOTTOM	1585	139	7389
REDVALES	1640	207	7256
SEDGLEY	1754	201	7160
ST MARYS	1719	221	6184
TOTTINGTON	1249	119	6739
UNSWORTH	1030	78	6301
ALL WARDS	25751	2533	117043