

CABINET DECISION

Corporate Management and Finance – Lead Cabinet Member – Councillor David Harrington

INDIVIDUAL ELECTORAL REGISTRATION (IER) – UPDATE ON IMPLEMENTATION

1. Summary

This report provides an update on the implementation of IER and the proposals for implementing the changes, including their impact and the likely resource implications for 2013 to 2016.

2. Recommendations

It is recommended that the current position regarding the introduction of IER and resource implications be noted.

3. Reasons for the Recommendations/Decision(s)

To advise Cabinet of the implications of the introduction of IER which will require significant changes to business systems, IT infrastructure and existing interfaces with the electorate, contractors and third parties.

4. Members' Interests

Members (including co-opted Members) should consider whether they have a personal interest in any item, as defined in **paragraphs 9 and 11** of the Council's code of conduct and, if so, declare the existence and nature of that interest in accordance with and/or taking account of **paragraphs 12 - 17** of the code.

Where a Member regards him/herself as having a personal interest, as described in **paragraph 16** of the code, in any business of the Council he/she must then, **in accordance with paragraph 18** of the code, consider whether that interest is one which a member of the public, with knowledge of the relevant facts, would reasonably regard as so significant that it is likely to prejudice the Member's judgement of the public interest and the business:-

- affects the members financial position or the financial position of a person or body described in **paragraph 17** of the code, or

- relates to the determining of any approval, consent, licence, permission or registration in relation to the member or any person or body described in **paragraph 17** of the code.

A Member with a personal interest, as described in **paragraph 18** of the code, may attend the meeting but must not take part in the consideration and voting upon the relevant item of business. However, a member with such an interest may make representations, answer questions or give evidence relating to that business before the business is considered or voted on, provided the public are also allowed to attend the meeting for the same purpose whether under a statutory right or otherwise (**paragraph 19** of the code)

Members may participate in any discussion and vote on a matter in which they have an interest, as described in **paragraph 18** of the code, where that interest relates to functions of the Council detailed in **paragraph 20** of the code.

Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

It is a criminal offence for a member to participate in any discussion or vote on a matter in which he/she has a disclosable pecuniary interest (and where an appropriate dispensation has not been granted) **paragraph 21** of the code.

Members are required to comply with any procedural rule adopted by the Council which requires a member to leave the meeting room whilst the meeting is discussing a matter in which that member has a disclosable pecuniary interest (**paragraph 22** of the code).

AGENDA ITEM

REPORT TO CABINET

27 NOVEMBER 2013

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF LAW AND DEMOCRACY

INDIVIDUAL ELECTORAL REGISTRATION (IER) – UPDATE ON IMPLEMENTATION

SUMMARY

This report provides an update on the implementation of IER and the proposals for implementing the changes, including their impact and the likely resource implications for 2013 to 2016.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the current position regarding the introduction of IER and resource implications be noted.

DETAIL

Background

1. Further to reports to CMT and Cabinet in May 2013, this report provides a further update on implementation in respect of this three year project which will require significant changes to business systems, IT infrastructure and existing interfaces with the electorate, contractors and third parties.
2. IER includes the following key changes:
 - Every elector will need to register individually to be included on the register
 - During the transition, existing register entries will be matched with records held by the DWP. Where electors match against DWP records, they can be transferred to the IER Register. Where information provided does not match, further investigation will need to be carried out by the Electoral Registration Officer (ERO)
 - From 10 June 2014, any new applications to register will need to be on an individual basis with personal identifiers confirmed against DWP records
 - Under the proposals, electors will also have the ability to apply to register on-line although this service is not digital end to end
 - The system will run over two annual canvasses from 2014 putting in place a safeguard for the General Election in 2015 so that existing electors who fail to register under IER in 2014 are not removed from the register until after the General Election
 - From 2015 (and in future years) a two stage process will be in operation. The first stage will be for the ERO to send a Household Enquiry Form (HEF) to every residential property to ascertain who is living at the property. Any new electors identified by this will then be followed up individually by the ERO by an invitation to register
 - In addition, new electors will be able to register on an individual basis throughout the year under rolling registration; non-confirmed electors (i.e. those electors

whose details do not match against DWP records) will need to be written to at least twice and visited by a canvasser if they do not respond.

Transition Update

3. Implementation continues to run alongside other elections and related activities, including the normal canvass process.

Activities completed/ on track to be completed by 31 October 2013 include:

- Analysis of the requirements of the new legislation, detailed project planning including working with Election Management Software (EMS) suppliers to implement changes to local IT systems
- Implementation of IT pre- requisites for transition
- Confirmation Dry Run - the purpose of the dry run was to test IT capability; the results also enable the Council to plan engagement activity and identify resource requirements. Funding for IER for individual Councils will be based on the match rate of electoral registers against DWP records
- A bid was submitted under Phase 1 of the Maximising Registration Fund to encourage registration of under-represented groups. Despite all Councils being encouraged to bid for up to £50,000 per Authority, only two North East bids were successful in securing funds. Stockton were not successful in securing funding
- The Electoral Registration Officer has been asked to give an indication of the Council's readiness for IER. The ERO has confirmed that Stockton's readiness for IER as certain.
- All Councils have been asked to return a first draft of their local Engagement Strategy to the Electoral Commission. The Strategy builds a profile of the registration area, identifies target audiences and identifies channels for engaging residents

Activities to be undertaken include:

4. Key activities in the next phase of implementation include
 - A comprehensive programme of engagement aimed at maximising registration based on the results of the Confirmation Dry Run
 - The final old style household canvass commenced on 1 October 2013 and the revised register will be published on 17 February 2014. The delayed canvass will mean that canvassing will take place over the winter/ Christmas period which may have a detrimental impact on registration levels
 - IER goes live nationally on 10 June 2014. The date for Stockton's Confirmation Live Run during summer 2014 is yet to be confirmed by Cabinet Office
 - Following transition to IER, the next register will be published on 1 December 2014 and we will carry out a mini canvass to invite further missing electors and those who haven't updated their registration
 - Following the May 2015 Elections, all Councils will carry out a full household canvass. Every household should be asked to confirm who lives there and anyone new will be invited to register individually. Electors from the March 2014 canvass, who were not confirmed automatically and have not yet re-applied by December 2015 will be removed from the register

Summary of Confirmation Dry Run Results (CDR)

5. In July, a Confirmation Dry Run exercise was carried out to match Stockton's Electoral Register against Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) records. The purpose of the dry run was to test IT capability as well as give an indication of the likely match rates when the Confirmation Live Run is carried out in the summer of 2014 and therefore the likely volumes and resource requirements.

6. For Stockton, a match rate of 83.2% was achieved. The results can be broken down into the following categories:

120,457 electors (Green) – matched
2003 electors (Amber) – minor "miss-match"
21,251 electors (Red) – not matched

7. The wards with the lowest number of red results are as follows:

Western Parishes – 351 (12.88% of electors in ward)
Northern Parishes – 389 (14.07% of electors in ward)
Fairfield – 474 (10.00% of electors in ward)

The wards with the highest number of red results are as follows:

Ingleby Barwick East 1239 (15.87% of electors in ward)
Ingleby Barwick West 1261 (16.07% of electors in ward)
Mandale and Victoria 1946 (24.87% of electors in ward)

8. The wards with the lowest number of red postal voters are as follows:

Western Parishes – 43 (1.58% of electors in ward)
Billingham South – 49 (0.99% of electors in ward)
Billingham East – 51 (0.96% of electors in ward)

The wards with the highest number of red postal voters are as follows:

Eaglescliffe – 159 (1.90% of electors in ward)
Ingleby Barwick East – 159 (2.04% of electors in ward)
Ingleby Barwick West – 180 (2.29% of electors in ward)

9. Whilst the spread of red and amber matches is fairly evenly spread across the Borough, a greater dip in registration levels may be experienced in wards where there is traditionally a lower return during the annual canvass as electors in these wards are likely to be slower to respond request to register individually.

Local Data Matching

10. In addition to matching against DWP records, Electoral Registration Officers are permitted to undertake local data matching. Again, as a test exercise, a further local data match was undertaken using our EMS software against the Council Tax National Fraud Initiative data file. This increased our match rate to 88.4%, as follows:

127,011 (Green)
1135 (Amber)
15565 (Red)

11. A breakdown by ward following local data matching is not available as this work was undertaken in a test environment. Further upgrades to the EMS system are expected next Spring which will enable further local matching against other Council data sets (e.g. Council Tax, Housing Benefits, payroll etc.). Further increases in match rates against other local data sets cannot be quantified at this time. However, purchase of the additional functionality is considered appropriate based on the increased match rate against the Fraud Initiative Data file alone. The initial purchase cost of the software is £1,500 and £500 annually for on-going licence costs.

What do the Confirmation Dry Run results mean for Stockton?

12. Whilst the dry run results are encouraging, this does not alter the fact that there will still be significant resource implications resulting from the transition and moving electors to the IER register following the confirmation live run.
13. All confirmed electors will need to be written to in order to confirm that they have matched and are registered individually. Any elector who cannot be matched (either against DWP records or through local data matching) will need to be invited to register individually by supplying their national insurance number and date of birth. If the elector does not respond, the ERO must send at least two written reminders and undertake a visit to the elector's property. Printing and postage volumes are being assessed based on the CDR results but cannot be estimated until the Cabinet Office have finalised the forms which EROs are to use which may run to several pages.
14. The Cabinet Office has invited all Councils to assess their IER resource implications by the end of October 2013. It should be stressed that, at this stage, estimates are an "educated guess" owing to uncertainties around form design and length and response rates from electors may well be lower than usual owing to the requirement to provide national insurance number and date of birth. In spite of the uncertainties, it is clear that printing and postal costs will increase significantly compared to business as usual activities. Stockton's initial assessment of transition to IER is that annual registration costs will increase by 38%.
15. Analysis of CDR results also reveals that many properties have mixed match rates within the same household. This has the potential to cause confusion; the Cabinet Office and Electoral Commission will be addressing this via the national public awareness strategy and which our local activities will tie in with. In addition, in order to minimise confusion, EC guidance has recommended that all communications to individual electors within the same household should take place at the same time.
16. Transition to IER will introduce more complex business process with more stages and at a greater cost. At the same time, we are likely to see a reduction in electorate.

Engagement Strategy

17. Based on the Electoral Commission template and guidance, an Engagement Strategy for Stockton has been drafted. This Strategy is underpinned by ward profiles which have been developed setting out:
 - Population Estimates
 - Other key demographic Information from Mosaic
 - Registration levels
 - The results of the Confirmation Dry Run
 - Engagement networks/ outlets within the ward
 - The proposed approach to demographic engagement within the ward

18. The strategy also builds on the extensive data mining activity which is undertaken by Electoral Services and national and local research on under registered groups.
19. Delivery of the local strategy has commenced with a view to raising registration levels and awareness raising relating to IER will commence following the European Elections next year in line with the national awareness campaign.

Member Drop-in Sessions

20. Drop in sessions for all Members are planned for November. At these sessions, Members will receive a briefing on the transition to IER and a copy of their ward profiles.
21. The sessions will provide an opportunity for Members to feedback on the proposed engagement activity in their ward and identify any resources which can be provided by Democratic Services to assist the ward Member with communication of the key messages relating to IER.

Funding

22. To date, Stockton have received an up-front formula grant allocation of £8,778.06 was released to the Council on 22/04/13 in relation to the funding of Individual Electoral Registration for the 2013/14 financial year. This up-front grant was to enable Electoral Registration Officers to carry out work under two headings:
 - Change management
 - Confirmation dry run
23. A bid has been submitted for further funding on the basis that the necessary hardware and software upgrades to support the confirmation dry run significantly exceed the funding allocation. Locally, the necessary hardware and software upgrades to support the confirmation dry run to date have totalled £17,324.30.
24. The outcome of the bid is still awaited, however, recent conversations with Cabinet Office would indicate that Stockton are unlikely to receive the full bid amount.
25. Cabinet Office have now informed Local Authorities of the indicative financial allocations for 2014/15. For Stockton, an upfront allocation of £42,825 has been made. With a declaration from the Section 151 of the Council, the upfront allocation will increase to £53,532. The purpose of the declaration is to confirm that the grant is intended to be supplementary funding to cover only the net additional cost of the new responsibilities arising from the Electoral Registration and Administration Act and that consequently it is not intended solely to replace the usual level of funding of registration to meet the duties arising from the Representation of the People Act 1983 (as amended) which it is intended will be met from local authority budgets in the usual way.
26. Where individual Local Authorities find that the generic national formula does not cover all eventualities, Cabinet Office will consider individual cases to fund additional costs if they are precisely and strongly evidenced. Resource modelling to date suggests that the allocation will be significantly insufficient to deliver IER successfully causing significant new burden which at the current moment in time does not appear to be fully funded and will need to be considered as part of the MTFP.
27. Funding for 2015/16 onwards is unknown, however, in line with the New Burdens Doctrine, the Government is committed to ensuring that local authorities are not left with unfunded burdens.

FINANCIAL AND LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Financial

28. Stockton's initial assessment of the move to IER is in line with the Cabinet Office impact assessment that the annual costs of transition are expected to increase by approximately 38%.

Legal

29. To comply with the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013
30. To comply with Political Parties and Elections Act (2009) – Provision of identifying information and data to EROs.
31. To comply with Representation of the Peoples Act 1983 – EAA 2006 statutory duty to maintain an accurate and complete electoral register.
32. Section 9A of the RPA 1983 requires an ERO to take all necessary steps to comply with the general duty of maintaining the register, including sending the canvass form more than once, making house to house inquiries and inspecting records that the ERO is permitted to inspect.

RISK ASSESSMENT

33. The main risks are loss of electors from the register and lack of resources to manage the transition and maintain the accuracy and completeness of the registers.

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY IMPLICATIONS

34. Stronger Communities

EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

35. The national Equality Impact Assessment states that the move away from a household electoral registration system should have an overall positive impact on equality, providing each eligible individual with the right and responsibility to register themselves to vote. It is not considered that a further assessment on behalf of the Council is required or necessary.

CONSULTATION

36. Discussions have taken place and will continue with internal ICT support services and also external providers (EMS system and external printers for electoral services). Electoral Services staff regularly attend briefings arranged by the Cabinet Office on the implementation of the project and regional meetings. The Cabinet Member for Corporate Management and Finance has been consulted. Drop In Sessions for all Ward Members will take place in November to present the Confirmation Dry Run results and ward profiles and discuss the proposed engagement activity planned for their wards.

Director of Law and Democracy

Name of Contact Officer: Margaret Waggott/ Judy Trainer

Telephone No: 01642 527064/01642 528158

Email Address: Margaret.waggott@stockton.gov.uk
judith.trainer@stockton.gov.uk

Education related? No

Background Papers

IER Implementation Plan

Engagement Strategy

Ward(s) and Ward Councillors

Not Ward Specific

Property

None