



## **ASSOCIATION OF ELECTORAL ADMINISTRATORS**

# Elections and Individual Electoral Registration - The challenge of 2015

July 2015

## **Executive summary**

The Association of Electoral Administrators (AEA) is a non-governmental and non-partisan body founded in 1987 to represent the interests of electoral administrators in the United Kingdom.

The AEA strongly supports and advocates the principle that all those with a role in organising elections should consider the voters' interests above all other considerations.

Electoral administrators continue to deliver elections within an increasingly complex and challenging environment even when the odds are stacked against them. This was clearly the situation for the complex elections held on 7 May 2015 following the introduction of Individual Electoral Registration (IER). Electoral administrators and suppliers were stretched beyond belief during the 18 months before polling day with the introduction of IER and the complexities and bureaucracy it brought with it. Preparations for the elections were behind as a result of the impact of the introduction of IER and electoral administrators were exhausted before the election timetable even started.

The AEA is acutely concerned that, unless the issues identified in this report are properly considered and addressed, the structures, processes, available resources and people delivering electoral administration will not be able to cope with the additional burdens being continually placed upon them.

However, despite everything, yet again electoral administrators successfully delivered complex elections following the most significant changes to electoral registration in over 100 years - but at what cost?

This report provides an account of the experience of electoral administrators in delivering IER and the polls on 7 May 2015 and offers recommendations for improvements to the framework for electoral administration in the UK.

The recommendations outlined in this report will require urgent joint action by those with a role in shaping electoral policy and practice in electoral administration. The AEA looks forward to actively working with Government, the Electoral Commission and other key stakeholders in moving this agenda forward.

Our key recommendations:

- The UK Government should undertake a thorough and UK-wide review of funding, staffing structures (including career progression) and other resources required to deliver core professional electoral services, with the aims of delivering a coherent and efficient

structure across the UK, cost effectiveness over time and ensuring that funding for new responsibilities reaches electoral services. (Paragraph 2.23)

- Fees and Charges should cover the additional costs of administering the electoral registration process in the run up to an election, including absent voting applications and related matters. (Paragraph 2.15)
- The UK Government should bring forward a single Electoral Administration Act in accessible language setting out the high-level framework governing electoral registration, elections and referendums in the UK, with the operational detail of registration, absent voting, and elections contained in secondary legislation, all with the key aim of achieving the simplification and consistency of rules across all electoral administration matters. (Paragraph 2.35)
- Except in cases of unforeseen emergencies, changes to election law should not be applicable to any elections within a six-month period from the date the legislation comes into effect. (Paragraph 2.39)
- The UK Government should design and implement a clearer and local system of accountability and challenge through the introduction in election law of a formal complaints system as outlined in the Law Commissions' provisional proposal 13-17. (Paragraph 2.42)
- The UK Government and/or the Electoral Commission be asked to investigate the possibility of establishing a national framework of electoral print suppliers in the interests of securing efficiency, resilience and operational certainty for future elections. (Paragraph 4.9)
- The UK Government should review the registration of students and care homes under IER, with a view to making legislative changes to allow EROs to directly register people at "institutions". (Paragraph 5.8)
- The UK Government should carry out a review of IER processes and IER during the UK Parliamentary General Election (UKPGE), with a view to implementing legislative changes to improve such processes, including as to whether there is still a need to continue with an annual canvass if all local authorities were provided with

software functionality to easily data mine local authority and government databases. (Paragraph 5.26)

- The UK Government should continue to provide sufficient funding directly to EROs to administer IER to ensure an accurate and complete register is maintained. (Paragraph 5.11)