

Resources Policy Development & Scrutiny Panel Elections workshop 14th Dec 2011

Members Pre –brief

Policy Development & Scrutiny

This brief provides details of the current practice for individual Electoral registration (IER) and key changes/ provisions to IER. It also provides details of the statutory review into Poling districts and place review being undertaken by Electoral services. Notice Date for consultation 1st Dec - 3rd January 2012. It is anticipated that the findings from the workshop will help feed into the consultation element of the review. Attached is a copy of the schedule for the day.

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1. Individual Electoral Registration

CURRENT PRACTICE

At present electoral registration is a combination of annual household registration and individual registration.

Between September and November the local electoral registration officer sends an annual canvass form to every household in his registration area. The householder (or a named person) is required to complete and return the form on their own behalf and on behalf of anyone else who lives in the household and is eligible to vote. The completed form must contain details of those resident and eligible to vote on a prescribed date (15 October). Changes notified in this period are added to the register when it is published on 1 December.

After the publication of the register, between December and August, an individual can amend his/her registration details by completing an application form on a voluntary basis. At the beginning of every month the electoral registration officer publishes a notice of alteration to the published register, which lists any additions, deletions and amendments made during the previous month.

INDIVIDUAL ELECTORAL REGISTRATION (IER)

In 2003 the Electoral Commission published a series of reports, in which they recommended that the basis of registration should move from the current system to a system based entirely on individual registration. The *Political Parties and Elections Act 2009* made provision for the phased implementation of a system of individual registration, which the Coalition Government intends to complete by December 2015. A White Paper, *Individual Electoral Registration*, which was published in June 2011, sets out how the government plans to implement the new system.

Key changes under IER

- All applications to register need to be made individually.
- All applications need to be verified before electors are added to the electoral register.
- Annual household registration will change from 2014 with special transitional arrangements in that year for eligible electors who are not registered under IER.

Applications to register under IER

- Electors must provide evidence in order to register: likely to be NI number and date of birth, but other means might be possible.
- Evidence is only required once, unless circumstances change.
- Exceptions process for those unwilling/unable to provide NI number.
- Potential to use alternative channels for applications in future.

IER in 2014

- First canvass from 1 July 2014.
- Registered electors receive personally addressed IER applications with insert to identify any additional occupants (who are then sent individual IER applications).
- Properties with no registered electors receive a Household Enquiry Form.
- Persons entered on a Household Enquiry Form are sent individual IER applications.

- Those who fail to respond and are deemed eligible will be carried forward to enable participation in 2015 General Election.
- Electors can indicate that they wish to receive no further invitations during that canvass.
- Electors must be registered under IER to act a postal vote or act as a proxy.
- New register must be published by 1 December 2014.

IER in 2015 and beyond

- Canvass from 1 July 2015.
- Household Enquiry Form sent to all properties, pre-printed with any existing electors who have made individual applications under IER – these simply confirm that they are still present by making a household return.
- Any additional occupants added to the Household Enquiry Form are sent individual IER applications.
- Electors can indicate that they wish to receive no further invitations during that canvass.
- Following 2015 canvass, the electoral register will consist only of electors who have made individual applications under IER.
- New register must be published by 1 December 2015.

Offences

- Registration under IER will be a personal choice.
- The current penalty will apply to those who fail to respond to a Household Enquiry Form.
- Individuals who fail to respond to an IER request will not have committed an offence.
- A new offence relating to disclosure of any information provided for verification purposes will be introduced.

Provisions for specific groups

- Special category electors including Service Voters will be invited to register through IER at the time of being next invited to renew their registration.
- Impact on elderly, disabled or those in care: the Cabinet Office particularly welcome input from organisations representing these groups as detailed implementation plans are developed.

Data matching pilots

Around 20 pilot schemes are proceeding comparing register data with data from other public authorities including:

- Department for Work & Pensions
- Department for Transport
- Department for Education
- HM Revenue & Customs
- Department for Business, Innovation & Skills
- Ministry of Defence

2. Review of Polling Districts and Polling places in Bath & North East Somerset.

1. Legal background

- 1.1 Under the Representation of the People Act 1983 local authorities are required to divide their area into polling districts, to designate polling places for those polling districts, and to keep the polling districts and polling places under review.
- 1.2 The Electoral Administration Act 2006 introduced an additional requirement whereby local authorities must review all polling districts and polling places on a regular four-yearly cycle. The first review was conducted in 2007.

2. Aim of the review

- 2.1 By conducting this statutory review, local authorities must seek to ensure that
 - all electors in the constituency have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances;
 - so far as is reasonable and practicable, all polling places are accessible to all their electors, including those with disabilities.
- 2.2 In addition each parish shall, in the absence of special circumstances, be a separate polling district.
- 2.3 The polling place shall be an area in the polling district, except where special circumstances make it desirable to designate an area wholly or partly outside the polling district.

3. Areas not covered by the review

- 3.1 The following are not covered by the review:
 - the boundaries of UK parliamentary constituencies;
 - the borders and names of local authorities, and electoral areas within local authorities.

4. The review process

- 4.1 The procedure to be followed by a local authority in undertaking the review may be summarised as follows:
 - (1) The authority gives public notice of its intention to undertake a review, and invites comments and submissions from any interested parties.
 - (2) The authority considers all submissions received and formulates draft recommendations for the new polling districts and polling places structure. However, there is no requirement to change any existing arrangements.

- (3) The draft recommendations are publicly advertised and sent to all original consultees to invite further comments.
- (4) The authority considers all comments received, and decides whether or not to modify the draft recommendations.
- (5) The authority produces final proposals for new polling districts and polling places.
- (6) The Council must agree on the final proposals, and then publish the outcome of the review.

5. Responsibilities

- 5.1 The responsibility for dividing the parliamentary constituencies into polling districts and for designating polling places rests with the Council.
- 5.2 The Returning Officer is charged by law with personal responsibility for deciding on the number and location of polling stations.

6. Definition of terms

- 6.1 A **polling district** is a geographical sub-division of an electoral area, i.e. a UK parliamentary constituency, a European parliamentary electoral region, or a ward.
- 6.2 A **polling place** is a geographical area in which a polling station is located. As there is no legal definition of what a polling place is, the geographical area could be defined as tightly as a particular building or as widely as the entire polling district.
- 6.3 A **polling station** is the actual area where the process of voting takes place, and must be located within the polling place designated for the particular polling district.

3.Meeting structure and timings

Session One	
Time	Item
9:30	Arrivals
10:00	Introduction to the morning session (15 minutes)
10:15	Discussion One: (30 minutes) Voter experience of access to the electoral process <i>Ease of access to the wider electoral process e.g. was written information available in alternative formats/languages</i>
10:45	Discussion Two: (30 minutes) Voter experience of access to polling stations <i>Were polling stations easy to get to? Were there any accessibility issues at polling stations?</i>
11:15	Discussion Three: (30 minutes) Operations of the polling day <i>Ballot boxes, ballot papers and information provided to voters</i>
11:45	Summary of session one (15 minutes)
12:15	Lunch (30 minutes)
Session Two	
Time	Item
12:45	Introduction to the afternoon session (15 minutes)
13:00	Discussion Four: (30 minutes) Information provided to candidates/agents <i>Was enough information provided to candidates/agents? Was it easy to understand?</i>
13:30	Discussion Five: (30 minutes) Counting systems <i>Was the counting system clearly explained? Was enough information provided about the system?</i>
14:00	Discussion Six: (30 minutes) Review of polling districts <i>Are any extra polling stations needed within specific polling districts?</i>
14:30	Summary/close (15 minutes)