

## CAMBRIDGE CITY COUNCIL

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REPORT OF: Returning Officer

TO: Civic Affairs Committee

21/11/2012

WARDS: None directly affected

### **A REVIEW OF THE ANNUAL CANVASS AND PUBLICATION OF REGISTER OF ELECTORS**

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#### **1. INTRODUCTION**

At the request of the Chair and spokes, the purpose of this information report is to review the preparation and publication of the Electoral Register which followed a changed timescale as a result of the Police and Crime Commissioner Elections on 15 November. The Returning Officer at the committee meeting will give an oral report on the election itself.

#### **2. BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 Each year from mid-august through to the end of November, the Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) is required to canvass residential properties in the city in order to publish an updated register by 1 December each year.
- 2.2 Due to the Police and Crime Commissioner election being set for 15 November in 2012, ERO's were directed by the Secretary of State to publish the register early: on 16 October. The qualifying date for the annual register is 15 October each year, and as this is set in primary legislation, the newly updated register could not be published earlier than that.
- 2.3 The direction specifically stated that the canvass of properties should start no later than 2 July, and we therefore issued our first canvass forms over the weekend of 30 June.
- 2.4 We continue to employ 23 electoral canvassers to make all initial and first reminder deliveries, they then carry out essential personal calls

during the third stage of 'door-knocking'. This both allows them to become familiar with their allocated areas and gives them ownership of the task, encouraging them to collect as many household responses as possible.

- 2.5 We also produced an insert to the canvass form that gave information as to why the canvass was earlier than usual, and why it was important to respond as early as possible. Other mediums used to provide information were: our website, Cambridge Matters magazine and press releases

### **3. THE TIMETABLE**

- 3.1 The change to this year's audit timetable meant that although the usual sixteen week canvass period was only reduced by one week, the set tasks within the timetable were not the same. For example, door-knocking usually takes place in weeks seven to ten, but for this year it took place in weeks ten to thirteen, as it was necessary to make personal calls to non-responders as close to the qualifying date of 15<sup>th</sup> October as possible. One result of this late door knocking was that there was less time (two weeks instead of six) to process the forms collected on the door. Consequently, processing all the amendments in time for publication was unrealistic and not all amendments were made despite the hours worked by the electoral services team.
- 3.2 A further consequence of the shortened period post door-knocking, was that the proof reading of the register could not take place before publication. This has been done after publication and corrections made to the rolling registration update issue don 1 November

### **4. PROCESSING COLLEGES/STUDENTS**

- 4.1 This was an issue identified early in the canvass planning. In a normal year, the Cambridge University colleges and Anglia Ruskin University provide a list of their residential students during the last two weeks of October. This of course was not going to suit the newly imposed publication date of 16 October and would rely heavily on the student admin contacts providing the information much earlier than normal.
- 4.2 Hon Cllr. Dr. George Reid who has a central role amongst the collegiate administration, was approached at the start of the canvass planning and he agreed to approach college bursars and tutors with our requirements for registering students this year. Despite the fact

we were asking for student information a whole month earlier than normal, this tactic was successful in that we received practically no objections from student admin contacts. However, some colleges did not provide the initial list by the 14 September deadline, or provide the updated list in due course.

- 4.3 This, combined with the shortened end processing period mentioned in 2.1 above, resulted in five of the thirty-three colleges not being included in time for publication on 16 October.
- 4.4 A further issue that was recognised early on, was that those students living outside of college accommodation, would probably not be in residence during the door-knocking stage of canvass throughout September. To address this, three 'super canvassers' were employed to make personal calls in the first two weeks of October in areas known to have large student populations: namely, Market, Newnham and Petersfield. The super canvassers were out canvassing right up to the day before publication, but unfortunately the backlog of processing meant that the forms they collected were not processed in time for publication.

## **5. CANVASSING STAFF**

Three new canvassers were needed for the 2012 canvass and these were chosen from the list of those who had previously expressed an interest. As in previous years, canvassers were provided with a training session and written guidance, as well as e-mail updates and support from the electoral team.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

- 6.1 There is no doubt that the requirement to publish an early register on 16 October resulted in a less accurate and complete register as we would have liked at that time.
- 6.2 The earlier start to canvass meant that many householders were away from Cambridge at that time and responses during the early stages of canvass were not as high as previous years. Meaning that the greater workload of the canvass was concentrated towards the end.
- 6.3 The overall response this year was 81.4%, compared to 81.9% in 2011. Although this is not as low as predicted, low registration rates are still an issue and should continue to be addressed.

6.4 The table below shows how people responded to the canvass and other statistical information.

	<b>2012</b>	<b>2011</b>
Forms returned by post	19,806	19,384
Forms collected by canvasser	8,679	9,809
Forms collected by super canvasser	466	-
Responses via telephone	4,197	3,899
Responses via internet	6,455	5,570
People requesting a postal vote application	3,389	3,564
European electors sent further information	7,821	7,944
Forms returned because there was no signature	580	484
Forms returned because no nationality provided	40	66

6.5 The total number on the register able to vote on 15 November is 92,579. This is after updates published on 1 November and 8 November (a total of 4,553 additions). These additions were a combination of those registering from 16-31 October and those we could not process in time for the publication deadline of 16 October. We are planning to carry out a further exercise to review the register in the early spring, to ensure that it is as complete and up-to-date as possible ahead of the County Council elections in May.

6.6 After each election, the Electoral Commission requests feedback on the issues faced and we will be responding on the issues raised in this report.

## **7. IMPLICATIONS**

**Financial, Staffing, Equal Opportunities, Environmental Implications, Community Safety - none**

**BACKGROUND PAPERS:** There were no background papers used in the preparation of this report. The contact officer for queries on the report is Gary Clift 01223 457011 [gary.clift@cambridge.gov.uk](mailto:gary.clift@cambridge.gov.uk)