

## CAMBRIDGE CITY COUNCIL

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REPORT OF: Chief Executive

TO: Civic Affairs Committee

17/2/2016

WARDS: All

### **UPDATE ON INDIVIDUAL ELECTORAL REGISTRATION**

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#### **1 INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1. At its last meeting in September 2015, this Committee requested a further update on the effect of Individual Electoral Registration (IER) in Cambridge following the end of the transition period in December 2015.
- 1.2. IER commenced in June 2014 with the combined aims of making voter registration a more secure and robust system thus reducing the risk of fraud and providing for greater register accuracy. It also places the responsibility of registering to vote on the individual rather than the 'head of household'. The introduction of IER also provided the ability for applicants to register to vote online for the first time.
- 1.3. In order to ensure that those already registered were not disenfranchised at the May 2015 UK Parliamentary election, a transition period allowed the old and new registration systems to run alongside one another. Following the May 2015 elections, the Government decided to end the transition period on 1 December 2015, resulting in those electors who had not re-registered under IER to be removed from the register.
- 1.4. The register of electors is the responsibility of the Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) and a separate function from the local authority. The register is the property of the ERO, not the council and the ERO in Cambridge is the Chief Executive.

#### **2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 To note the current registration situation in Cambridge, along with the work already carried out and that which is planned in the lead up to

the May 2016 City Council and Police & Crime Commissioner elections.

### 3. **BACKGROUND**

- 3.1. Upon the publication of the 1 July 2014 register update, the first under the new IER system, the register of electors in Cambridge totalled 93,339 electors.
- 3.2. These elector's details were matched against the database held by the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) and those that could be verified were automatically transferred to the new IER system without any action required on the part of the elector.
- 3.3. In Cambridge 65,904 electors were transferred, representing a match rate of 70%, against a national average of 87%. This difference was attributed to the high number of students resident in the city, whose details would not match against DWP because that record would show their home address and not their term-time address. This was consistent with other authorities with high student numbers, for example, Oxford recorded a match rate of 71%. Across England & Wales, match rates varied from 61% in Hackney to 97% in Epping Forest.
- 3.4. Between June 2014 and December 2015 (the end of the transition to IER) electoral services have taken a number of steps to encourage those electors who did not match, as well as targeting residents who are less-likely to register by:
  - Carrying out local data matching to verify the registration entry
  - Attempting to contact the elector:
    - Writing on nine separate occasions
    - Six attempts to call at the address by our canvassing staff
    - Where we have an e-mail address, by that method also
  - Providing information in Cambridge Matters and Open Door, on our website, social media posts and issuing news releases
  - Sending direct e-mails to all students and registration prompt cards left in their college pigeon holes
- 3.5 This has been in addition to the activities carried out as part of the service's IER engagement strategy, such as:
  - Providing guidance and information to 6<sup>th</sup> form colleges, including interactive talks and registration events

- Working with the student unions of Cambridge University and Anglia Ruskin University to support registration events and provide information
  - Establishing regular meetings with residential and nursing homes and distributing registration packs to new residents
  - Building good relationships with homeless and other charities, such as Wintercomfort where monthly registration events are held
  - Liaison with Cambridgeshire Alliance (an umbrella organisation who work with and support disabled people) and their partners, such as Cam Sight, to provide information and support
  - Targeted advertising opportunities, such as distributing bike seat covers and an ad-bike and ad-van touring the city to highlight the pre-election registration deadline
- 3.6 This work has been managed alongside the Electoral Commission's national awareness campaign on TV, radio, online and in newspapers, which ran throughout the eighteen month transition period.
- 3.7 The last update to the register under the transition was made on 1 September 2015 when 97,104 electors were registered to vote in Cambridge. This comprised electors registered under both old and new schemes.
- 3.8 At the start of IER, the number of electors whose details could not be matched was 27,705. By the end of the eighteen month transition period, this figure had been reduced to 12,251.
- 3.9 On 1 December 2015, the transition to IER ended and those electors who could not be verified and who had failed to re-register under the new scheme were removed from the register. The new electorate stood at 81,128.

#### 4. KEY STATISTICS

##### 4.1 Electorate figures through IER transition

<b>Electorate at 17 February 2014</b>	last register under old system	93,159
<b>Electorate at 1 July 2014</b>	first update of IER transition	93,339
<b>Electorate at 1 December 2014</b>	first revision of IER transition	91,232

<b>Electorate at 1 September 2015</b>	last update of IER transition	97,104
<b>Electorate at 1 December 2015</b>	first complete IER register	81,128
<b>Electorate at 1 February 2016</b>	Most recent statistic	81,395

4.2 Register changes from 1 December 2014 to 30 November 2015

<b>Additions</b>	<b>Deletions</b>	<b>Amendments</b>
17,125	11,618	2,484

4.3 Register changes from 1 December 2015 to 1 February 2016

<b>Additions</b>	<b>Deletions</b>	<b>Amendments</b>
1,832	1,626	70

4.4 As can be seen above in tables 4.2 and 4.3, work continues throughout the year to maintain the accuracy of the register. Updates to the register are made each month between January and September, although these are suspended during the annual audit of the register in the autumn prior to the publication of the revised register on 1 December each year.

## 5. STUDENTS

5.1 The fall in registration numbers in Cambridge is primarily due to the high proportion of students that make up the population. Students can choose to register at either their home address or their term-time address, at both, or at neither and unfortunately, legislation no longer allows us to bulk register students direct from the University lists.

5.2 As mentioned above, we have been working with the universities and their student unions to inform students of the new responsibility to register themselves to vote. There are some difficulties communicating messages to the 35 separate colleges/halls of Cambridge University and responses have been better from some than others, so we have found that working with the student union has been more productive in reaching the wider student population.

5.3 Difficulties communicating with the large number of contacts at Cambridge University may explain why registration rates amongst some colleges/halls are better than others. An example of this is that we are reliant on the admin manager at each of the 35 sites to distribute e-mails directly to students on our behalf.

- 5.4 We have also found that Anglia Ruskin's student union have been more engaged with us and reliant on our support for their registration initiatives, while Cambridge University student union have worked more independently from us. Ultimately we can only provide support to such events where we are able to.
- 5.5 Information provided to us from the Universities, shows that there are currently just over 22,250 students studying in Cambridge and that 60% of these are living in university accommodation. However, we have been unable to obtain information on the nationality of these students and so do not know exactly how many are entitled to be registered.
- 5.6 Using data from pre-IER registers, we can estimate that around 10% of students are not eligible to vote and would therefore expect to be registering a maximum of around 20,000 students. As we can only identify the 60% of students who live in university accommodation (because we do not know where those in private rented accommodation are) we should have a recorded student register of around 12,000.

## **6. GOING FORWARD**

- 6.1 The business-as-usual work of electoral services continues to identify anyone who is not registered and invite them to do so, as well as establishing those electors who have moved away in order to remove them from the register.
- 6.2 In the lead up to the May 2016 elections, engagement activities will continue and an early focus will be National Voter Registration Day on Friday 5 February. This is organised by the national campaign group Bite the Ballot and we will be running events at three college sites: Hills Road 6<sup>th</sup> form, Long Road 6<sup>th</sup> Form and Cambridge Regional College. This work will be supported by an officer from South Cambridgeshire District Council's electoral office, as they too have a large number of residents attending at those college sites.
- 6.3 We will also be organising further promotional activities with both Cambridge and Anglia Ruskin Universities and their student unions.
- 6.4 We will again be distributing bike seat covers in the lead up to the election registration deadline of 18 April, as well as a cycle and a van touring the city to advertise the elections and the registration deadline.
- 6.5 We have been working with the Cabinet Office and John Penrose MP, the Minister responsible for IER, to work through the challenges

that the new system has placed on local authorities. We are actively engaged in working towards modifications to the IER system, which will result in increased registration rates and less bureaucratic administration processes; one result of this could be participation in a pilot scheme, although this is unlikely to take place before 2017.

## **7. CONSULTATIONS**

No consultations are required.

## **8. OPTIONS**

This report is for information only.

## **9. CONCLUSION**

9.1 Cambridge has a population turnover similar to much larger cities, mainly due to the student population. Pre-IER, around one third of the register would change annually and this has not changed with the introduction of IER. The register year 2014/15 saw 31,227 changes made to the register lists.

9.2 Electorate numbers in Cambridge have been reduced as a result of the introduction of IER. This is primarily due to students either choosing to register at home, or not at all, and is further compounded possibly, by a lack of understanding of the new system by residents or their continued disinterest in registration and voting generally.

9.3 Continuation of the work that began during the IER transition is vital to ensure that the register remains as complete and accurate as possible. The electoral services team have worked hard to maintain the registration database, while encouraging registration and engaging under-registered groups in the city. The story of IER in Cambridge is no different to that in authorities with similar populations and we have been working with those authorities to share ideas and good practice. The transition to IER may have ended, but the work to engage, educate and enrol Cambridge residents will continue.

## **10. IMPLICATIONS**

### **(a) Financial Implications**

At the start of the transition to IER, the Government granted funding to all authorities to manage the transition process and due to the 70% match rate we recorded at the start of IER we have received extra funding to cover our costs. This has been used to cover the increased cost of IER; such as the increase in volume of printing and

postage that IER legislation imposes. We have further used the funding to cover outreach work, training and advertising costs.

Crucially, the funding has allowed us to recruit a post to organise the extra engagement activity and assist with the extra administration of IER. The Electoral Services Support Officer was recruited in October 2014 and is currently contracted to October 2016. Without this post, engagement activity would not have been possible and the extra administration from IER would have proved challenging to the existing team.

(b) **Staffing Implications**

There are no staffing implications.

(c) **Equality and Poverty Implications**

An equality impact assessment has been carried out.

(d) **Environmental Implications**

Nil: the proposal has no climate change impact.

(e) **Procurement**

No procurement is required.

(f) **Consultation and communication**

This report will be available to the public through the usual council channels and will be distributed to local political party election agents for information.

(g) **Community Safety**

There are no community safety implications.

**11. BACKGROUND PAPERS:** The following are the background papers that were used in the preparation of this report:

- Equality Impact Assessment: Electoral Services - Registration
- Analysis of the Confirmation Live Run in England and Wales, a report by the Electoral Commission, October 2014
- Update on IER and the End of the Transition Period, a briefing for Members, December 2015

To inspect these documents contact Vicky Breeding on extension 7057.

The author and contact officer for queries on the report is Vicky Breeding on extension 7057.

Report file:

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