

ELECTIONS COMMITTEE		
Report Title	CANVASS 2010	
Key Decision		Item No. 5
Ward		
Contributors		
Class	Part 1	Date: 18 October 2010

1. Purpose

- 1.1 This report provides the Committee with a review of Lewisham's Electoral Registration processes particularly the Annual Household Registration Audit , commonly known as the Canvass, and reviews the steps taken to address completeness and integrity in compiling the register.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 The Committee is asked to note the report.

3. Background

- 3.1 Increasing registration levels has been an objective for many years. However interest has been heightened in completeness and integrity of the annual canvass as the Register published at 1 December 2010 will be used as the basis of the forthcoming Parliamentary boundary review, proposed by the Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Bill currently before Parliament.

4. Legislative Framework

- 4.1 The Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) is required by The Representation of the People Act 1983 (RPA), as subsequently amended by the Electoral Administration Act 2006 (EAA), to conduct an annual canvass of all Households in the London Borough of Lewisham (LBL).
- 4.2 Included in the EAA was a new section 9A which set out the steps that must be taken by EROS to identify people eligible to register as voters. These are
- 4.2.1 Sending more than once to any address the form to be used for the canvass
 - 4.2.2 Making on one or more occasions house to house inquiries on those properties that have not responded to the form
 - 4.2.3 Making contact by such other means as the registration officer thinks appropriate with persons who do not have an entry in the register
 - 4.2.4 Inspecting any records held by any person which he is permitted to inspect under or by virtue of any enactment or rule of law.

- 4.3 The form of canvass to be sent to households is prescribed in law under Representation of the People (Form of Canvass) (England and Wales) Regulations 2006. It is a household registration form addressed to the occupier. Registration and other amendments can be completed by one resident on behalf of others by signing the form acknowledging the declaration required. There is a legal obligation to respond to the form. (Regulation 23 (3) Representation of the People Regulations 2001). LBL's canvass form is attached at Appendix A.

5. Lewisham's Canvass process 2010/2011

- 5.1 Lewisham complies with and in some circumstances exceeds the steps outlined in the legislative framework detailed in section 4 above.
- 5.1.1 The canvass period runs from the end of August until 1 December. As at the 8 October 2010 we are approximately half way through the period.
- 5.1.2 All 118,220 households in LBL were sent a canvass form via Royal Mail over the August bank holiday weekend. Households were given the opportunity to respond to the form by telephone, internet, or SMS text, using pre-designated security codes, if they did not need to make any changes to the form. As at 8 October 2010 we had a 49% response rate, 26% by post and 23% by telephone, internet and SMS text. LBL has a high proportion of empty properties. These are canvassed, and if confirmed empty by comparison with Council Tax records they are included in the returns to the Electoral Commission. These average between 13%-15% of the properties on our data base. If incorporated into the response rate we would currently be running at a return rate of 64% . However these properties are excluded until the close of canvass.
- 5.1.3 A reminder form was sent to non responding properties on 27 September with a covering leaflet (Appendix B) pointing out the householders legal obligation to respond to the form. The leaflet also reminds them that they might lose their right to vote in the proposed referendum on the Parliamentary Voting System next May if they do not respond to the form.
- 5.1.4 On the 29 October our house to house visits commence on all non responding properties. We are employing 109 canvassers each covering a polling district. We provide our canvassers with a translation pack covering 25 languages
- 5.1.4.1 The Canvassers are provided with specific training with additional training being given to those canvassers covering Ladywell polling districts, as although they commence their canvass after the cut off date for registration (20 October 2010) for the by election on the 4 November, they will probably be faced with people trying to register for that election.
- 5.1.4.2 Special care is being taken to ensure that all Ladywell registrations and absent voting requests are processed as a priority.
- 5.1.4.3 Canvassers are remunerated on a success basis and their performance is monitored daily by reviewing return statistics for their area.
- 5.1.4.4 A copy of the training slides and training pack detailing canvassers remuneration and responsibilities are given in Appendices C and D respectively

- 5.1.4.5 Canvassers are asked to visit a property and if they get no response leave a card at the property with details of when they will call back. Thus each non responding property will have been visited at least twice.
- 5.1.5 Different arrangements are put in place for houses in multiple occupation such as care homes and student halls of residence. Forms are sent direct to the Accommodation Officer and the Officer in charge of the care homes. If we do not get a response one of the Electoral services team visits the property.
- 5.1.6 There is a legal requirement to remove electors who have not responded to the canvass for two years. This exercise is completed shortly before publication of a revised register by 1 December.
- 5.1.7 The canvass period ends with the publication of the revised register by 1 December 2010.

6. Inspection of records

- 6.1 The ERO is currently only able to inspect those records for the authority which appointed him. The Electoral services team has direct access to and does inspect council tax records. The team also receives reports from Street naming and numbering and Registrars.
- 6.2 These records are accessed throughout the year not just during canvass. Under proposals for the introduction of Individual Elector Registration (IER) this is likely to change with EROS being able to conduct data matching with neighbouring authorities and national data bases, such as those held by the Department of Work and Pensions. However this is not possible unless and until IER comes into effect, currently scheduled for 2014.

7. Integrity of the Register

- 7.1 The ERO has limited powers of investigation and in the main has to accept signed canvass forms or voter registration forms received during the rolling registration period at face value. However, where multiple registrations are received from a household or suspicions arise that persons are not entitled to be registered, the ERO can seek further information. If the person under suspicion is on the register the ERO follows the review process under Regulation 31 of the Representation of the People Regulations 2001. The ERO can either seek additional information and/or send a notice to the property citing the reasons that they do not believe the person is eligible to be registered, giving them 14 days to respond. If the elector does not request a hearing they can be removed from the register. We do not use this process lightly having used it only five times with no challenges made.
- 7.2 Integrity of the Register is maintained throughout the year. It is not just an issue for canvass, it goes on throughout the Rolling Registration period and involves continuous monitoring of records mentioned in paragraph 6 above.

8. Lewisham's canvass performance

- 8.1 Our response for the annual canvass for 2009 was 92% despite the incidence of postal strikes around canvass time. Appendix D London table 1 shows how we compare to other London Authorities. The table is a summary of

data provided to the Electoral Commission as part of its review of ERO performance standards.

- 8.2 We do undertake other registration activity throughout the year. Outside the canvass period a rolling registration programme is conducted. As there were major elections in May 2010 we sent out confirmation letters to all households in February this year - a form of mini canvass asking people to check their details and register.
- 8.3 Canvass performance is a measure of household response. Electorate levels also need to be examined. The ERO compiles various registers, the two of interest here are Local Government Electors and Parliamentary Electors. The proposed Parliamentary Boundary review to be conducted prior to the next scheduled Parliamentary election in 2015 will focus on the Parliamentary elector number. Below is a 10 year history of the Parliamentary and Local Government electoral registration statistics that are submitted as of the close of canvass each year to the Office of National Statistics.

Year	Local Government Electors	Parliamentary Electors
Dec 00	180428	176879
Dec 01	180012	175793
Dec 02	182035	177526
Dec 03	171968	167205
Dec 04	179584	173699
Dec 05	179275	172479
Dec 06	179756	171872
Dec 07	180931	171750
Dec 08	181805	170373
Dec 09	180159	167913
July 10	184734	172226*

*The Parliamentary Elector total is purely the number of Parliamentary electors on LBL's register. It excludes the Electors in the Lewisham West and Penge Constituency that are on the London Borough of Bromley's register in the three wards of Clock House, Crystal Palace and Penge and Cator.

- 8.4 There is a drop between December 02 and December 03 of about 10,000 in both local government electors and parliamentary electors. This is because in that year Lewisham "cleaned" the register. Regulations require electors who do not respond to the canvass for 2 consecutive years to be removed from the electoral roll. This had not been completed for several years before 2003, so the numbers on the roll were artificially high prior to that date.
- 8.5 The figures demonstrate that numbers on the local government electoral roll have recovered since then – and grown by over 13,500. However the number of parliamentary electors decreased steadily from December 2004 until 2009, recovering rather sharply this year because of the interest in the general election and efforts to promote registration.
- 8.6 The discrepancy between the number of local government electors and parliamentary electors, with the local increasing steadily since 2003 and being over 12,000 higher than the parliamentary which was in decline until

2009, can be explained by the different franchises. EU citizens living in the borough are entitled to vote in local but not parliamentary elections. We have over 12000 EU citizens on the register. The difference reflects the fact that our population has a high proportion of migrant EU citizens.

- 8.7 The overall canvass return of 92% for 2009 masks a disparity in returns from Wards and Parliamentary Constituencies shown in Appendix F. The Ward returns range from 85.18% in Evelyn to 98.69% in Grove Park. The three Parliamentary Constituency returns based on the new Parliamentary Boundaries are:

Lewisham Deptford	89.77%
Lewisham East	93.66%
Lewisham West & Penge	92.91%

9. Funding for Registration in Lewisham

- 9.1 Lewisham's spend per year on registration activity is an £2.59 per elector. Based on Electoral Commission figures, compared to other London Boroughs this puts Lewisham behind only Hammersmith and Fulham, Wandsworth and Westminster. The numbers are based on Local Government electors.

10. ERO Performance Standards

- 10.1 The Electoral Commission introduced performance standards for 2008/2009. There are 10 standards. LBL's performance against these standards is given in the table below. Whilst the performance standards are based on self assessment we are required to provide documentary evidence in support and also be available for inspection by the Electoral Commission.

Standard	Lewisham's ERO Performance Standards	
	2008/2009	2009/2010
Using information sources to verify entries on the register of electors and identify new electors	Met standard	Met standard
Maintaining the property database	Met standard	Met standard
House to house enquiries	Met standard	Met standard
Maintaining the integrity of registration and absent voting applications	Met standard	Met standard
Supply and security of the register and absent vote lists	Above standard	Above standard
Public Awareness strategy	*Below Standard	Above Standard
Working with Partners	*Below standard	Met Standard
Participation	Met Standard	Met Standard
Planning for rolling registration and the annual canvass	Met Standards	Met Standards
Training	Above Standard	Above Standard

*At time of making the return in 08/09, the Public Awareness and Outreach strategy were still in development. It has now been finalised and is being implemented.

11. Initiatives to improve registration rates

11.1 Apart from the specific processes detailed above for canvass and rolling registration the Elections Committee endorsed the Public Awareness Strategy presented to it in July 2009. This document is the basis on which cross council outreach initiatives are undertaken. The Electoral Services team were given a relatively small budget of £15,000 in 2009 to spend on outreach activities in support of the strategy. In the main this has been spent on, birthday cards sent to attainers on their eighteenth birthday, advertisements placed in the Primary Times, Lewisham Life, and promotional materials supporting Peoples Day , and registration drives at Freshers week for both Goldsmiths and Lewisham Colleges. We also advertise in Millwall Community Scheme publications. Forms were also provided to The Albany Theatre, in Deptford , in the run up to the May 2010 elections.

In addition to the above we take advantage, wherever possible, of free publicity on LBL's notice boards around the Town Hall, libraries, and website. We also provide registration forms at citizenship ceremonies. Council tax letters go out with a reminder to register printed on the envelope. We have also provided forms to housing associations.

11.1.1 In the year of major elections confirmation letters are sent to households in February to encourage people to check their details, the manner in which they vote and to register. This is an additional expense for the Borough and cannot be recovered from the Ministry of Justice. The total cost was £34,000.

11.1.2 During Local Democracy Week the Election team prepares and runs the Young Mayor election in conjunction with the Mayors Office. This costs just over £17,500. This year we have 35 polling stations, including 4 early voting stations, covering 26 different locations. There are 20,000 school children on the register. We have electoral registration forms available in all the polling stations and encourage 16 - 17 year olds to register.

11.1.3 We also provide electoral registration forms to the ALMO and to the housing associations in the borough to provide to new tenants as they take up occupancy in the borough.

11.1.4 One further initiative involves the Head of Law attending at citizenship classes in local secondary schools (most recently Prendergast Hilly Fields) to explain the relevance of voting, the democratic process and to encourage pupils to register and vote.

12. The Civic Leadership Programme

12.1 The main objective of the Civic Leadership Programme is to address the under-representation of Lewisham's black and minority ethnic (BME) members within areas of civic and political life and ensure that BME communities are fully involved and have confidence in civic and democratic

processes. Individuals selected learn about civic engagement and through the programme develop an understanding and awareness of the key areas of public life and gain an insight into the route to public office. There are two goals. Firstly, to raise the level of awareness within Lewisham's wider BME population of civic opportunities and secondly, to give public life officials and the participating institutions a broader view of BME communities. Upon completion of the scheme, participants will be encouraged to seek public office or become more active in their communities.

- 12.2 Up to 40 individuals are selected to participate on the programme. It provides them with an opportunity to develop their understanding of five areas of public life through a range of observation sessions and through meetings with councillors, school governors and other public appointees. Individuals will have the opportunity to undertake 2-3 sessions per chosen public role, over a 7 month period.
- 12.3 The Civic and Political Leadership Programme is designed to unlock institutions enabling participants to better understand how they work. By the end of the programme, participants will be equipped with the skills, knowledge and confidence to apply to these bodies or become more active within Lewisham's civic society. All participants are encouraged to act as community ambassadors using their knowledge to inform and encourage others about how to get involved and the importance of democratic representation in our communities.
- 12.4 The work programme is devised by Operation Black Vote which comprises of observation sessions, meetings in the specific public life areas and two group leadership training sessions.
- 12.5 Whilst this initiative is not specifically targeted at electoral registration, it has provided a meaningful platform for BME communities to become involved in public life and elected roles. In the last year, the target number of participants was easily achieved and all those involved have become advocates for civic engagement, promoting the benefits of active citizenship through their own networks. The many examples of achievements include that 5 members of the group participated as candidates in the last local election, and one was appointed to a Safer Neighbourhood Panel.

13. Further Work

- 13.1 It is clear that there can be no complacency about voter registration, and that its significance this year is practically high. We will continue to make strenuous efforts to promote registration particularly among those groups least likely to register. These group are mainly young people and ethnic minority communities. (The Electoral Commission's report on "The completeness and accuracy of electoral registers in Great Britain" – March 2010)
- 13.2 An analysis of the ward figures shows that whilst there are pockets where registration rates might be improved, responses from Deptford wards are generally below the average for the borough. (See Appendix F)
- 13.3 To seek to improve registration, the ERO proposes a number of steps:

13.3.1 Promotion of registration through the local assemblies for the Deptford wards, and to seek out ideas from local people attending as to how within tightly constrained budgets they believe electoral registration can be improved

13.3.2 Further citizenship presentations at Deptford Green School

13.3.3 Ensuring best canvassers are used, if necessary moving them to areas where monitoring shows the registration rates appear to be relatively low, re-canvassing in November if necessary.

13.3.4 On the election of the new young mayor and advisers, the Head of Law to meet them to ask for their ideas how within tightly constrained budgets, as to how young people can be encouraged to register and vote, enlisting their help to do so.

14. Legal Implications

The legal provisions relating to the complication of the electoral register are broadly set out in the report. Members of the committee are reminded of the duty of the ERO set out in the EAA 2006 to take necessary steps to comply with his duty to compile the register.

15. Financial Implications

The expenditure on canvass in 2009 was £221,000 and there is a specific budget of £15,000 for outreach work. Any initiatives to promote enhanced registration will need to be contained within existing budgets which are largely committed.

16. Conclusion

The council has made strenuous efforts to increase registration, and will continue to do so to comply with its duty to promote participation. The ERO welcomes further suggestions as to how this might be achieved in addition to those set out in this report, bearing in mind the financial restraints.