

Individual Electoral Registration (IER)

1 Introduction

A fundamental change to electoral registration is taking place.

Under the old system, one person in every household was responsible for registering everyone else who lives at that address. Now each person is required to register to vote individually.

Under Individual Electoral Registration electors will need to provide their date of birth and national insurance number, when applying to register.

2 Transitional arrangements

We can transfer many electors from the old electoral roll onto the new roll. We can do this where the details we have on electors match the details held by the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) on those individuals.

Electors will be deleted from our electoral roll if they have not:

- been transferred automatically in a matching of the electoral roll with DWP data
- responded to the 2013/14 canvass
- subsequently responded to requests to register under the new IER system.

3 Data transfer - live run

Lewisham Council was one of the first to transfer its electoral roll data to DWP for matching. Some councils have yet to do this. The results were marked as red (no match) amber (weak match) and green (match). Our results were 68.73% green; 4.67% amber and 26.60% red.

The DWP does not tell us why a person has not matched. It may occur, for example, because a person's name or address is expressed slightly differently on the DWP and electoral roll. Because of this, it is possible that some members of the same household will be automatically included on the new electoral roll and others may not. A red result is likely to mean there is no match at all, probably because the person has moved. A high number of reds for this reason is to be expected in a borough like Lewisham with a large transitory population.

On a second match conducted by Electoral Services using local data, the percentage of green matches in Lewisham reached 76.78%.

4 July activity

Confirmatory letters – We wrote to everyone automatically transferred onto the new register (approx 152,000) to confirm that.

Invitation to Register (ITR) – We invited all the people on our electoral register whose data did not match the DWP data (approx 46,000) to register on the new electoral roll under the new rules. These people must provide a date of birth and National Insurance number to register. If they do not respond we will send reminders and then knock on doors.

Household Enquiry Forms (HEF) – Where electors did not respond to the last canvass, or where properties are shown as void on our database, we sent an enquiry form to those households asking for details of who lives there (approx 21,000). Once we have that information we send an invitation to register to the individuals concerned. If there is no response to the enquiry form, we will send reminders and then knock on doors.

Electoral Services are now processing the responses to the ITR and HEF forms. There are many thousands and additional temporary staff have been recruited to handle what is a much more heavily paper based and bureaucratic system to administer.

5 Canvass

We will employ canvassers to door knock from the beginning of September until 24 November 2015 prior to publication of the new register on 1 December 2015.

6 General election and absent voters

Those not registered under transitional provisions or the new regime will not fall off the register before the General Election and so will be able to vote provided they can do so in person. Unmatched absent voters will not be able to vote by post or proxy. They must either be matched or registered under the new system to do so. They will however be able to vote at the polling stations.

7 Removal from the register

After the transitional period, those who have not been automatically transferred nor registered under the new system will be removed from the electoral register. The law states that this will be in November 2016, though it is expected that this may be brought forward to 2015.

8. Annual canvass

Once the transitional arrangements are complete, in future years we will conduct an annual canvass by sending out household enquiry forms to all households, and where there is a change, sending invitations to register under the new system.

9. Maximising registration

There is a real risk that numbers on the electoral roll will fall because of this new process and so we have put in place a plan to encourage registration, particularly where registration rates are low. Table 1 shows the match results as returned by the DWP by ward, and Table 2 shows the match rates after local matching. Many of the wards with low match rates have a high student population and 5 of them are in the Lewisham Deptford constituency.

10. Timing

Prior to 22nd May this year, the energies of Electoral Services, both locally and across London were understandably focussed on the European, Mayoral and local elections. This was an approach encouraged by the Electoral Commission so as not to confuse electors prior to the election. Very shortly after that, on 13th June, Lewisham was among the very first to be called on to transfer its electoral data to DWP. As results came back from DWP, Electoral Services have been heavily engaged in local matching, and in mid July sent out approximately 67,000 household enquiry forms and invitations to register to those not automatically transferred to the new register. Where enquiry forms are returned, we are sending out individual invitations to register. To date there have been thousands of

responses which we are currently processing. We are required by the Cabinet Office by 1st September to have processed all the responses and sent out all confirmatory letters where appropriate.

11. Engagement activities to date

Efforts to engage locally complement those being taken or to be taken nationally and we are focussing our efforts to dovetail with wider Electoral Commission initiatives. We have been given £27,000 by the Cabinet Office to conduct engagement initiatives for IER. Because of the timing issues set out above, our engagement strategy, though under way, will gain more momentum after the 1st September as until then, the main emphasis in Electoral Services has to be on the significant and previously unseen operational demands of implementation. Even so, to date we have carried out or arranged the following activities with a view to maximising registration:-

a) analysed matching data by ward to identify areas of low registration and profiled issues on a ward basis.

b) carried out local matching with Council Tax records and are currently pursuing more matching with tenancy and benefit files where possible.

c) attended (and continuing to attend) citizenship ceremonies regularly to encourage registration at that point.

d) attended a stall at Lewisham People's Day in July 2014 with information on IER and how to register, with leaflets, posters, badges and mugs with contact numbers freely available to the public. We took names and addresses of those without access to the internet and followed up.

f) produced an article in August Lewisham Life about IER and how to register, with one to be included in each of the next 3 editions of Lewisham Life.

g) promoted IER by inclusion of information about it in the "Welcome to Lewisham" pack which is sent to every new resident.

h) provided a promotional button on the Council's website containing information about IER and links to relevant sites.

i) We have joined a partnership with 25 other London boroughs to run an advertising campaign for IER – each borough contributing approximately £3000. This will include posters at key transport interchanges and on buses. This joint initiative will also have adverts in the Metro and Evening Standard. The first 1st phase coincides with the first phase of IER from 4th to 14th August. The second will happen as the canvassers are going out to knock on doors, in early to mid September.

j) Posters are being distributed to libraries, community centres and other information sites in August.

k) We have promoted IER on the Lewisham email news letters to which there are currently approximately 22,000 subscribers, with take up increasing by about 800 per month

l) Electoral Services currently receive a list from Council Tax every month of people who have recently registered for Council Tax. We follow up by sending information and registration forms to the newly registered Council Tax payer. From Autumn, this will be modified to reflect the new registration system.

We recognise that the wards with the lowest match rates have high concentrations of student population, who frequently move both within, and in and out, of the borough. So we have also put in place a number of initiatives targeted at the student population. These include:-

m) meeting with the Registrars at both Goldsmiths and Lewisham College to arrange for Electoral Services attendance at their Freshers Fairs with information about and to promote registration at the beginning of the academic year in September/October.

n) agreed to attend a registration event at Goldsmiths in the Autumn focussing on the students' general interaction with the Council. At this event it is anticipated that there will be an incentive for students to attend as it will also give practical advice on claiming Council Tax discount and exemption.

o) the link to the Register to Vote website is to be produced at the end of student enrolment documents at Lewisham College and Goldsmiths, and a leaflet explaining IER is to be included in student registration packs.

p) We will be attending secondary schools in the Autumn term to encourage registration by those aged 16 year and over.

q)At the Young Mayor election in October, we generally hand out oyster card holders which feature a design on the front promoting registration generally. This year the design will focus on IER with contact details and website address. Information on IER will be available for young people as they attend to vote.

r) The Young Mayor manifesto will carry details of IER and urge those reading it to register under the new system with relevant advice on how to do so, including website addresses.

s) It is current practice to send a birthday card to people on the register reaching the age of 18 years informing them of their right to vote. We intend to modify the message for those not automatically transferred onto the new register urging them to register under the new system or lose their newly acquired right to vote. We will provide information on how to register under the new system including relevant web addresses.

12 Future engagement activity

The initiatives listed above are only the start of our attempts to maximise registration. We realise that we will need to make determined efforts to minimise the risk of people disappearing from the electoral register. In the very near future, we intend to implement a range of further activities to include:-

- Liaise with Lewisham Homes, Phoenix and other housing associations operating in the borough to ask them to include IER promotional material in their new tenancy packs.
- Visit care homes in the borough to encourage residents to register under the new system.
- Approach voluntary and community organisations in the borough to seek their help in getting the message across to hard to reach groups, particularly those with English as a second language.

- Ask the Young Mayor and advisors for their ideas about the best way to reach young people and encourage them to register under the new system, recruiting their assistance and using social media where possible.

13 Further information

Available from Malcolm Constable ext 46907 or Kath Nicholson ext 47648

August 2014