

Subject: Individual Electoral Registration
Date of Meeting: 1 February 2011
Report of: Strategic Director, Resources
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Wards Affected: All

FOR GENERAL RELEASE

1. SUMMARY AND POLICY CONTEXT:

- 1.1 The Coalition's programme for government sets out its intentions for political reform, some of which could bring significant changes to elections and electoral registration. The proposals include:
- A review of Parliamentary Constituencies to be carried out by October 2013, with the creation of fewer and more equal constituencies.
 - Establishing five year fixed terms Parliaments, with the next General Election being held on the first Thursday of May 2015.
 - A referendum on whether the UK should move towards the alternative vote system for parliamentary elections. It is proposed that the referendum will take place on 5 May 2011, the same day as scheduled elections in other parts of the UK, including Brighton & Hove.
 - Introducing a 'Power of Recall' to allow electors to force a Parliamentary by-election.
 - More locally elected officials – elected Mayors and Police Commissioners.
 - Speeding up the introduction of Individual Electoral Registration, which will see an end to the traditional household form that only needs to be signed by one person per household.
- 1.2 On 15 September 2010, the Minister for Constitutional Reform, Mark Harper MP, made a statement to Parliament, announcing that the government intends to legislate to speed up the introduction of Individual Electoral Registration (IER) and introduce it in 2014.
- 1.3 This report considers the introduction of IER in more detail.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That the Committee notes the government's intentions and the implications of the introduction of IER.

3. RELEVANT BACKGROUND INFORMATION/CHRONOLOGY OF KEY EVENTS:

- 3.1 The current system of electoral registration is based on an annual canvass form being completed by the head of the household on behalf of everyone at the address – “household registration”. If electors move house or need to register outside the annual canvass period, they can register individually under the rolling registration process. But it is the system of “household registration” which has come under criticism in recent years because of its potential vulnerability to fraud.
- 3.2 The previous government made a commitment to introduce IER in the Political Parties and Elections Act 2009. The intention was to have a voluntary phase from August 2011, where electors would be asked for, but not compelled to give, their personal identifiers – signature, date of birth and National Insurance number. The plan was that IER would be compulsory by 2015.
- 3.3 There has been a significant shift in approach under the new government, and the Minister for Constitutional Reform, Mark Harper MP, made a statement to Parliament on 15 September 2010. There will no longer be a voluntary phase, and the intention is to implement IER in 2014. Electors who do not provide their personal identifiers in 2014 will be given “one year's grace”, and will not be removed from the register until after the 2015 General Election.
- 3.4 At the moment, there is little detail on how IER will be implemented. The Cabinet Office is consulting with stakeholders, and is selecting local authorities to take part in data matching pilot schemes, to ascertain whether the use of other public records will help in maintaining the accuracy of electoral registers.
- 3.5 The planned timetable for implementation is as follows:
- 2011 – Data matching pilots
 - 2011 – 2012 – Legislation
 - 2013 – Detailed design and regulations
 - 2014 – First IER canvass
 - 2015 – First post election canvass – electors not registered individually removed from the register
- 3.6 The practical, resource and cost implications of implementing IER are difficult to assess at the current time. However, the new system will require processing much more information and carrying out detailed validation checks with the Department for Work and Pensions and other records.
- 3.7 There is also concern that registration levels will drop generally, and particularly amongst certain groups such as students, socially and economically deprived

groups, and people with physical and learning disabilities. If a person does not provide their personal identifiers, or the Electoral Registration Officer cannot validate them, then they will not be registered to vote. The Minister has stated that it will not be a legal requirement to register, but that registration should be seen as a civic duty¹.

- 3.8 Another concern is the potential for confusion amongst the electorate, and it is clear that an effective publicity campaign will be key to the success of this change to the electoral registration system.
- 3.9 The Cabinet Office has committed to keep in contact with Electoral Registration Officers, providing regular progress updates on their thinking and as the policy develops.

4. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

Financial Implications:

- 4.1 It is too early to assess the full financial implications of IER, given that implementation is not expected until 2014. They will become clearer once some of the pilot exercises have been carried out next year. The Cabinet Office will keep us updated on progress.
- 4.2 A further report will come back when more detailed information is known, which will include details on the funding of associated costs.

Finance Officer Consulted: Mike Bentley

Date: 13/01/11

Legal Implications:

- 4.3 Existing arrangements for carrying out an annual canvass of electors for the purpose of maintaining a register are provided for in section 10 of the Representation of the People Act 1983 and associated regulations (SI 2006/1694). With reference to paragraph 3.2 above, section 30 of the Political Parties and Elections Act 2009 provides for the voluntary provision of identifying information in connection with conducting a canvass under section 10 of the 1983 Act, but is not in force.
- 4.4 In his statement to Parliament on 15 September 2010, Mark Harper MP asserted that “we will legislate to implement individual registration in 2014. We will drop the previous Government’s plans for a voluntary phase.” As regards timing, the MP went on to say “We will therefore seek to bring forward a draft Bill for pre-legislative scrutiny in the current session followed by a Bill to introduce individual registration from 2014.”

Lawyer Consulted:

Oliver Dixon

Date: 06/01/11

¹ Oral answers to questions, House of Commons, 15 September 2010

Equalities Implications:

- 4.5 There is a concern about under registration among certain groups, for example disabled and elderly electors. The Electoral Registration Office is committed to working with local organisations, and an Equalities Impact Assessment will be carried out, once further details about implementing IER are available.

Sustainability Implications:

- 4.6 There are no implications.

Crime & Disorder Implications:

- 4.7 There are no implications.

Risk and Opportunity Management Implications:

- 4.8 At this stage, there are no implications

Corporate / Citywide Implications:

- 4.9 At this stage, there are no implications.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Appendices:

None

Documents In Members' Rooms

None

Background Documents

None