

For general release

<b>REPORT TO:</b>	<b>Scrutiny and Overview Committee 6 September 2016</b>
<b>AGENDA ITEM:</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>SUBJECT:</b>	<b>Electoral Registration and Electoral Services Update</b>
<b>LEAD OFFICER:</b>	<b>Sarah Ireland, Director of Strategy Communities and Commissioning</b>
<b>CABINET MEMBER:</b>	<b>Councillor Simon Hall</b>
<b>PERSON LEADING AT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING:</b>	<b>Sarah Ireland/Lea Goddard</b>

<b>ORIGIN OF ITEM:</b>	This item forms part of the Scrutiny and Overview work programme 2016/17.
<b>BRIEF FOR THE COMMITTEE:</b>	To provide an update on Individual Electoral Registration, look at current registration figures broken down by ward and look at the methods of data matching for registration as an elector. Also to consider the preparations for the 2016/17 annual canvass, looking to maintain current registration levels

## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report provides an update on Individual Electoral Registration, current registration figures by ward and the preparations for the 2016/17 annual canvass.
- 1.2 The complete details of the numbers of individually registered electors, by polling district and ward as at 1 August 2016 is attached at Appendix A

## 2. Individual Electoral Registration update

- 2.1 The transition to Individual Electoral Registration (IER), which began in June 2014, was scheduled to end with publication of the electoral registers on 1 December 2016. At this point any entries for electors who had not registered under IER would be removed from the register.
- 2.2 The legislation allowed the Government to make an order to end the transition 12 months earlier and the Government duly did this and issued the Electoral Registration and Administration Act (Transitional Provisions Order) 2015. As a consequence, the IER transitional arrangements ended with the publication of the

electoral register on 1 December 2015. Electors who had not registered to vote under IER by 1 December 2015 were not included in the Register

- 2.3 The consequence of bringing forward the end of the transition to IER was that over 5,600 electors were removed from the Croydon Electoral Register on publication on 1 December 2015 when compared to the December 2014 register. The electorate figure at publication was 249,432.
- 2.4. A detailed summary of the electorate pan London to the end of the transition to IER is attached at Appendix B. The summary also provides a snapshot of electoral figures as at 1 May 2016, when electoral figures were at a high due to election activity.
- 2.5 To ensure the Register was as complete and as accurate as possible ahead of the 2016 Elections and Referendum, the electoral services team sent out Household Notification Letters (HNL) to all households in Croydon to prompt anyone not yet registered to do so. The HNLs were sent out in March 2016.
- 2.6 The sending out of the HNL, together with an extensive local publicity campaign , a national registration campaign run by the Electoral Commission and the publicity and electoral material generated at both the Greater London Assembly Elections and the EU Referendum ensured that electoral registration numbers for Croydon soon reached and then surpassed pre IER numbers.
- 2.7 As a result of all this activity the updated Electoral Register published on 1 July 2016 had a Parliamentary Electorate of 262, 207, an increase of nearly 13,000 electors from the December 2015 publication.

### **3. Annual Canvass 2016/17**

- 3.1 Under the Electoral Administration Act 2013 and the Representation of the People Act (England and Wales) Act 1983 and Amendments, the Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) has a legal duty to maintain the Electoral Register.
- 3.2 This involves sending Household enquiry forms (HEFs) to all households and to send out invitations to register (ITRs) to electors that have been added to the HEF, as well as follow up with any HEF and ITR non-responders.
- 3.3. The canvass must be carried out to a performance standards framework as set by the Electoral Commission. The overall objective of the performance standards framework is to support the ERO and to set key outcomes to ensure all eligible people are able to participate in the electorate process, and of achieving electoral registers that are accurate and complete as possible.
- 3.4 The ERO will have in place a robust project plan for the Canvass and has a clear understanding of the registration challenges for Croydon.

3.5 The table below gives the timetable for the 2016/17 canvass

Date	Activity
26 August	Send out HEF to all households
26 August	First press release regarding the canvass Feature on home page of website Links tweeted to the above piece Tailored messaging to Twitter and Facebook to target young people
23 September	Reminder HEF's (throughout the canvass period ITRs will be sent out as and when required)
23 September	Second press release and associated media activity
21 October	Door-to Door canvass begins for collection of unreturned HEFs
7 November	Door to Door canvass to every non-responding address to collect non-returned HEF's and ITR's
21 November	End of door-to-door canvassing
1 December	Publication of new Electoral Register.

#### 4. Registration Monitoring

4.1 The details of the numbers of individually registered electors, by polling district and ward as at 1 August 2016 is attached at Appendix A.

4.2 Now that applications to register must now be made individually, measurement of the progress of the canvass cannot be compared to previous years. The Electoral Commission acknowledges that the published register is simply a snapshot of the number of electors on the date of publication of the register and that numbers will constantly change as residents chose to register on-line on an ongoing basis.

4.3. However what is known is that at the conclusion of the last canvass 84.5% of households in Croydon responded with information as required on the HEF

4.4 On commencement of the 2016/17 canvass the ERO will be able to measure the total number of households that have either responded in writing, telephone, internet or text to information requests as detailed on the HEF.

4.5 Detailed analysis of the reports available to the ERO will enable the electoral services team to be flexible in approach to target poor responding areas and to target such areas as and when required to maximise registration levels.

4.6 Following publication of the register more work will be done to identify and target potential new electors on an on-going basis, utilising the Councils resources as part of the joined up approach to communicate with residents as they move into the borough.

## **5. Promoting Registration**

- 5.1 A Communications Plan is being put together in partnership with the media team to include press releases and articles to coincide with key points in the canvass to maximise publicity and to increase local awareness of the canvass.
- 5.2 There will be a community engagement strategy throughout the canvass to promote registration using social media and targeted registration and publicity aimed at traditional hard to register groups.
- 5.3 In addition we will be engaging directly with residents and working with internal and external partners, including community groups to promote registration.

## **6. Electoral registration-Further Work**

- 6.1 Interest in the European Referendum has boosted the Electoral Roll and Croydon has achieved the highest level of voter registration in recent years. Further work is currently underway to build on this and Government funding has been secured to target those groups that have been previously underrepresented and the Council are designing a range of approaches. This will provide a platform for maintaining registration rates going forward.
- 6.2 Analysis of registration rates in England and Wales by the cabinet Office (July 2013), found that the following demographic characteristics were associated with lower registration rates: Private renting; Social renting; Residents born outside the UK (although this will also be due to ineligibility; some Commonwealth and EU citizens are also eligible to register and vote in their country of origin which may affect their registration rates in the UK); 18 – 24 year olds and students. It concluded that registration activities targeting these groups will have a higher likelihood of reaching unregistered electors and therefore succeeding in increasing the size of the electoral register than untargeted activities.
- 6.3 Because of the multiplicity and diversity of under-registered groups a range of approaches are being developed to increase registration rates. This includes, for example, Schools Outreach activities aimed at registering attainees. The Council are also considering local factors in designing further targeted activity to increase rates.
- 6.4 As highlighted above the recent European Union Referendum has led to increased interest in the democratic process and higher levels of registration with the average registration rate in Croydon now around 91% of the adult population. However there remain areas of the borough where rates are significantly lower, particularly in those areas where there is currently a more transient population. It is considered that one of the outcomes from the level of development and regeneration activity taking place in the Town Centre and elsewhere will be an increase in home ownership and a more stable population. However the Council

has also recently been granted additional funding for more targeted activity to increase registration rates which will enable increased canvassing and promotional activity in those areas and groups where registration remains lower.

## **7. Data-Matching**

- 7.1 Under IER every potential new elector must supply their full name, date of birth and national insurance number for checking against records as kept by the Department of Works and Pensions. (DWP). If records match the elector will be verified and the application approved. If there is some discrepancy in the data the ERO will undertake further investigative work to try and verify the elector details to allow the application.
- 7.2 The Electoral Services Team has access to some of the data as held by public authorities under the National Fraud Initiative (NFI). This power is used as and when required to help assist with the verification process for any potential elector.
- 7.3 In addition the Electoral Services database is also routinely matched with the Council Tax database and work is ongoing to try to join up with other data held by the council to help assist with data matching.
- 7.4 There are a wide variety of data sources available to the ERO that will be suitable for data matching. As the Council develops new processes to achieve a joined up approach on data sets, such as My Account, the ERO will be part of this dissuasion to investigate all possibilities on data-matching to achieve maximum electoral registration rates with a cost effective solution.
- 7.5 No application to register is allowed until the elector has provided all the required information and the data provided matches either local or national records, or that in following up any registration application, the ERO is satisfied as to the identity of the elector. This is normally established on the submission of evidence submitted by the elector.

## **8. Digital Transformation**

- 8.1. A deep dive project is underway looking at electoral registration processes to consider channel shift and best practice in achieving cost-effective, digital transformation where the legislation allows, increasing opportunities for self-service and exploring new channels for customer engagement.

## **9 . FINANCIAL AND RISK ASSESSMENT CONSIDERATIONS**

- 9.1 The 2016/17 budget for electoral registration is £406,000 and the Council is fully committed to supporting the electoral registration process with the democratic aim of ensuring that all eligible residents are included on the electoral register.
- 9.2 Due to the uncertainty with the level of funding, the IER central government grant income was not budgeted. The current forecast from central government for 2016/17 IER grant income is £64,000.

9.3 During 2015/16, central government funding of £116k was received from the cabinet office as part of the government’s commitment to assisting local authorities during the transformation to IER. The government has given further assurance that further funds will be made available up to 2020 to allow for IER.

#### 9.4 Revenue and Capital consequences of report recommendations

	Current year	Medium Term Financial Strategy – 3 year forecast		
	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
<b>Revenue Budget available</b>				
Expenditure	406	408	410	413
Income	0	0	0	0
<b>Effect of decision from report</b>				
Expenditure	0	0	0	0
Income	0	0	0	0
<b>Remaining budget</b>	<u>406</u>	<u>408</u>	<u>410</u>	<u>413</u>
<b>Capital Budget available</b>				
Expenditure	0	0	0	0
<b>Effect of decision from report</b>				
Expenditure	0	0	0	0
<b>Remaining budget</b>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>

#### 9.5 The effect of the decision

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

#### Risks

Not applicable to this report.

#### 9.6 Options

Not applicable to this report.

#### 10 Future savings/efficiencies

Not applicable to this report.

Approved by : Zulf Darr, Interim Head of Finance, Resources and Place

#### 11. COMMENTS OF THE COUNCIL SOLICITOR AND MONITORING OFFICER

11.1 The acting Council Solicitor comments that under the Electoral Administration Act 2013 and the Representation of the People (England and Wales) Act 1983 and Amendments, the duty is on the ERO to take all necessary steps to maintain

the register (Section 9). Regulation 32ZB requires the annual canvass to be undertaken, including making house-to house enquires. If no information has been received, second and third forms HEFs or ITRs must be issued and at least one visit to address must take place.

(Approved by: J Harris Baker, Acting Council Solicitor and Acting Monitoring Officer)

## **12. HUMAN RESOURCES IMPACT**

12.1 There are no human resources implications arising from this report.

## **13. EQUALITIES IMPACT**

13.1 The Electoral Registration process must be open to all and the ERO must take all reasonable steps, in accordance with the law, to ensure that all eligible electors are given all possible assistance to register as an elector.

(Approved by: Sharon Godman, Head of Strategy and Communities)

## **14. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT**

14.1 There are no environmental impact considerations arising from this report.

## **15. CRIME AND DISORDER REDUCTION IMPACT**

15.1 There are no crime and disorder reduction impacts arising from this report.

### **Appendices**

*The complete details of the numbers of individually registered electors, by ward is attached at Appendix A.*

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**CONTACT OFFICER:** Lea Goddard, Head of Elections and Civic Services

**BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:** None