

SUBJECT: ELECTORAL REGISTRATION IN LINCOLN

DIRECTORATE: DIRECTOR OF RESOURCES

REPORT AUTHOR: STEVE SWAIN – PRINCIPAL DEMOCRATIC OFFICER

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To respond to members' concerns in respect of the canvassing of properties during the annual electoral register canvass and the numbers of properties with no electors.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 At the Audit Committee meeting held on the 10 December 2013 members expressed concern over the numbers of properties in the centre of the City without electors registered.
- 2.2 This report details the Electoral Registration Officer's duties and the work undertaken in Lincoln during the annual canvass. In addition information is also provided on the work which will be undertaken now that the canvass has been completed to ensure that individuals are aware of their current registration duties when they arrive in the city and the changes being made as part of the Individual Electoral Registration (IER) process.

3. The Electoral Registration Officer and The Canvass (ERO)

- 3.1 The ERO has a number of statutory duties including:
- duty to maintain a register of Parliamentary Electors, Local Government Electors and EU Citizens.
 - Conducting an annual canvass
 - Producing an Edited Register
- 3.2 Each year an annual canvass is held in Lincoln. The timing of this during the last two years has been changed due to the PCC Elections in 2012 and the transitional work of IER which will be the new way of registration from the 10 June 2014.
- 3.3 Approximately 45,000 properties are canvassed by 33 canvassers. All forms are hand delivered to properties by the canvassers who also try and make personal contact with the occupiers of non responding properties. Our average response rate is just over 98%, and this covers everything from eligible and non eligible voters to vacant properties. The small number of properties remaining, are ones which confirmation work has to be undertaken via Council Tax or by writing out to the properties to try and elicit a response.
- 3.4 Forms for the purpose built student accommodation blocks are left with the

accommodation officers for the blocks who arrange for the forms to be issued to students. It has not been possible to gain access to these properties so other means have been used to try and encourage the return of electoral registration forms e.g. Logon messages in respect of registration. Students unlike other electors have three options in the way that they can register:-

- At home
- At their term time address
- Or both

3.5 There are a number of reasons why properties may not have electors registered:-

- Second Homes
- Students registered at home address
- Non Eligible Citizens because of nationality
- Empty at the time of the Canvass

4. After the Canvass

4.1 To try and maintain the accuracy of the register on the run up to both the elections in May and the final transition to IER in June a number of initiatives are being undertaken as follows:-

- Empty Homes Canvass – Homes that are classed as empty on the Electoral Register database will be compared with the Council Tax database. Where there is evidence that the property may be occupied it will be canvassed to see if there are eligible electors requiring to be entered.
- Publicity – Electoral Commission posters have been distributed to premises in Lincoln with public noticeboards requesting them to be displayed. The posters remind electors of the need to register and signpost them to the Electoral Commissions website Aboutmyvote.com. The website provides application forms which can be downloaded.
- Specific mini – canvass's targeting certain groups eg Students, rising 18's via schools and the College and European Citizens.

4.2 Whilst we anticipated having to fund these initiatives ourselves we were aware that there was the possibility of the authority being awarded a "Maximising Registration" grant. We have now been advised by the Cabinet Office that we have been awarded a grant of £11,983.

4.3 In view of the significant amount of funding being made available to the Council Officers are discussing how best to utilise the funds. The funding has been provided to enable authorities to ensure that the register is as accurate as possible in advance of and during the transition to IER.

4.4 To assist local authorities the Association of Electoral Administrators are producing examples of good practice to assist local authorities in this process. A

further update on how the Council might use the funding will be given at the meeting.

5. Individual Electoral Registration (IER)

5.1 Individual Electoral Registration (IER) will go live in England and Wales on the 10 June 2014. A transitional canvass will be undertaken this year which will commence soon after this date consisting of the following parts:-

- Electoral data comparison with DWP data base
- All persons confirmed in the first part of the process will receive a letter confirming that they are on the register
- Outstanding electors will try to be confirmed using local data mining
- Properties with no electors will be sent a Household Enquiry Form (HEF). This form requests the details of current occupiers.
- On receipt of a HEF any elector detailed on the form will be sent an Invitation to Register Form (ITR)
- On receipt of an ITR or the person providing their details on-line the information will be compared with the DWP information. If the details match those held by the DWP then the person will be sent a confirmation letter.
- Any outstanding electors who cannot be confirmed will be dealt with through an exceptions process.

5.2 The City Council, like all authorities, was involved in a dry run comparison process in July 2013 and we achieved a 79% match rate. This was increased when a small amount of local data mining was undertaken. We anticipate that the match rate and local data mining to be undertaken in July will leave about 10% of the electorate to be the target of a personalised canvass.

5.3 Included within the 10% figure will be students living in purpose built accommodation including the Campus. Discussions have taken place with officers from the University to see how we can ensure that students are aware of their rights. The University has informally agreed to supply name, address and nationality of all students who enrol with them. The Council will treat this database as the Household Enquiry Form (HEF) and this will enable the Council to issue reminders to students who have not applied on-line. The University has also agreed to include the IER URL at the end of their on-line enrolment form.

5.4 The arrangements with the University have still to be formalised and will be the subject of a Data Sharing Protocol.

6. Organisational Impacts

6.1 Finance (including whole life costs where applicable) – Following the provision of a grant of £11,983 from the Cabinet Office sufficient funds are available to undertake a number of initiatives to maximise registration.

6.2 Legal Implications including Procurement Rules – None other than those detailed in the report in respect of the requirements of the Electoral Registration Officer.

7. Recommendation

7.1 That members note the contents of the report and make comments.

Lead Officer:

Steve Swain – Principal Democratic Officer
Telephone (01522) 873439