



**South  
Derbyshire  
District Council**

# **Individual Electoral Registration Public Engagement Strategy**

## **1. Introduction**

The Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) has a general duty to promote participation in the electoral process. The introduction of Individual Electoral Registration (IER) in the summer of 2014 presented the ERO with key challenges in this regard. Maximising the number of electors registered under IER relied on an effective local public engagement strategy and robust processes to support it. One of the key challenges in the transition was to encourage residents to take the required action to join or remain on the register, and where appropriate to ensure that they could vote by post or by proxy if they so wished.

The challenge of getting people to take action under an unfamiliar system took place in the context of wider challenges for electoral registration. These included general voter disengagement, transient populations and other registration challenges that exist in our area. However, the new system opened up new channels by which people could register, including the introduction of online registration.

Effective public engagement activity early in the transition period hopefully reduced the reliance on follow-up activity and therefore helped to reduce additional resources that would have been required.

Effective public engagement involved input from across the local authority and with partner organisations.

## **2. Background**

In the past, a resident who wished to be included on the register of electors had to complete a rolling registration application form or add their details to the annual canvass form. The annual canvass form was signed by just one member of the household.

In June 2014, to facilitate the transition to IER, the register was data matched against Department for Works and Pensions (DWP) records. Those electors who matched were automatically 'passported' to the new register and were sent a confirmation letter to that effect. No further action was required by those electors.

Those electors who either partially matched or failed to match at all were required to complete an application to register. In most instances, they were required to provide their National Insurance Number and date of birth as part of their registration. The ERO was required to send such electors an Invitation to Register (ITR). This information was then verified against DWP records.

The ERO was also required to send Household Enquiry Forms (HEFs) to properties with no electors registered requesting information as to who was living there. Any names supplied were then sent an ITR.

### **3. Objectives of strategy**

The objectives of this strategy are to:

- Provide information on IER to all residents;
- Raise awareness of IER across the District;
- Inform people how to register;
- Increase the accuracy and completeness of the register; and
- Target the harder to reach groups and groups which traditionally exhibit lower registration rates i.e. students.

### **4. Target audiences**

Many of the activities will be aimed at the whole of the electorate / residents of the South Derbyshire area. There will also be targeted activities at known groups and areas of low registration.

- All existing electors;
- Home movers and new residents;
- Officers and Members;
- Attainers aged 16 and 17;
- Students;
- Young people aged 18 to 24;
- The elderly;
- People with second homes;
- Private and social renters; and
- Areas identified from returns with lower than average registration rates.

### **5. Key messages**

Key messages likely to be used will include those listed below. Every effort will be made to ensure that the messages, branding and resources developed by the Electoral Commission (EC) are fully utilised.

The EU Referendum demonstrated the power of people who were registered, exercising their right to engage in the democratic process, by voting in large numbers.

- Changes have been made to how you register to vote;
- Don't lose your right to vote;
- Help us to save Council Tax payers money by returning your form (or registering online) immediately;
- Register online;
- If you do not have web access you can register in libraries or at the Council offices;
- If you are not on the electoral register, it could reduce the chances of you getting credit.

## **6. Evaluation**

The engagement will be evaluated through a number of channels:

- Impact on response rates at the various stages of the transitional canvass;
- The number of returned HEF and ITR forms;
- Feedback from canvassers calling at non-responder properties as to whether residents are aware of the changes and what they should be doing;
- Changes to enquiry levels both on the telephone, in person, in writing and through our website.

## Action Plan

| Activity  | Target Group (s)                    | Timing         | Leads                               | Completed |
|---|-------------------------------------|----------------|-------------------------------------|-----------|
| Develop the information available on the Council's website regarding IER  | All electors and potential electors | As appropriate | Elections staff                     | Ongoing   |
| Engage with the local media to raise awareness of the changes   | All electors and potential electors | As appropriate | ERO                                 | Ongoing   |
| Produce regular press releases to promote the return of IER related forms and new ways of registering to vote   | All electors and potential electors | As appropriate | ERO                                 | Ongoing   |
| Include article in Better magazine to raise awareness amongst staff, in terms of both their personal perspective and in respect of advising customers | All electors and potential electors | As appropriate | ERO                                 | Ongoing   |
| Produce a list of frequently asked questions to deal with queries from electors and potential electors – to be used by Electoral Services staff       | All electors and potential electors | As appropriate | Legal & Democratic Services Manager | Ongoing   |
| Design and distribute posters and leaflets to local community groups, Council venues, notice boards etc.  | All electors and potential electors | As appropriate | Legal & Democratic Services Manager | Ongoing   |

| Activity  | Target Group (s)  | Timing         | Leads                         | Completed |
|---|---|----------------|-------------------------------|-----------|
| Undertake targeted direct mail activity and personal visits to households and/or individuals who have not returned HEFs or ITRs   | Electors who will fail to be included in the register                               | As appropriate | Elections staff<br>Canvassers | Ongoing   |
| Utilise Council building receptions, libraries, community centres, surgeries, schools, colleges, church halls, community groups, etc. to display information about IER              | All electors and potential electors   | As appropriate | Elections staff               | Ongoing   |
| Identify local organisations and community groups interested in helping raise public awareness and work with them to actively promote IER   | All electors and potential electors, particularly those from harder to reach groups | As appropriate | Elections staff               | Ongoing   |
| Provide support to all groups identified as representing residents in the District, including the supply of relevant information, to enable them to assist in the transition to IER | All electors and potential electors, particularly those from harder to reach groups | As appropriate | Elections staff               | Ongoing   |

| Activity  | Target Group (s)  | Timing         | Leads                               | Completed |
|---|---|----------------|-------------------------------------|-----------|
| Ensure residents in harder to reach groups (including older people, schools, and colleges) are provided with relevant information through contact with local community groups and the Council | All electors and potential electors, particularly those from harder to reach groups and those in social housing | As appropriate | Elections staff                     | Ongoing   |
| Include relevant information in new council tax bills   | All electors and potential electors, particularly those from harder to reach groups                             | Ongoing        | ERO                                 | Ongoing   |
| Maintain a record and evaluate the effectiveness of activities undertaken both by the Council and jointly with external organisations and groups  | All electors and potential electors   | As appropriate | Elections staff                     | Ongoing   |
| Liaise with nursing homes/residential homes   | Elderly and those with long term disabilities   | As appropriate | Elections staff                     | Ongoing   |
| Engage with Members to raise initial and ongoing awareness of the changes   | All electors and potential electors   | As appropriate | Legal & Democratic Services Manager | Ongoing   |

## Channels: Direct Contact

Use this section to list the ways that you can contact residents directly. This should include incoming contact (e.g. when residents contact the ERO or the local authority directly when accessing other services) and outgoing contact. The template contains some examples of the types of direct contact and how messages about IER may be disseminated through these channels.

| Channel             | Communication opportunity | Incoming or Outgoing                       | Activity   | Priority addressed / audience reached                    | Evaluation measures  |
|---------------------|---------------------------|--|--|--|--|
| <b>Direct mail</b>  | Canvass                   | Outgoing from ERO                          | To send HEF's, set out what happens next and encourage them to take action where they need to                      | All properties   | Response rates. Number of telephone calls and emails if produced                   |
|                     | HEFs and ITRs             | Outgoing                                   | To identify potential electors and encourage them to register  | Unconfirmed and unregistered                             | Number sent out/response rates   |
| <b>Face to face</b> | Elections office          | Incoming from visitors to elections office | Brief staff. Ensure capacity at peak times (write-out, general election advertising, transition end)               | General audience, those finding registration challenging | Number and nature of enquiries   |
|                     | Customer services centre  | Incoming to use other services             | Briefing for frontline staff (poster/leaflet also displayed). Support to assist residents to complete forms/online | Unconfirmed  | Number of services engaged. Conversations with services to assess uptake interest. |



| <b>Channel</b>   | <b>Communication opportunity</b>   | <b>Incoming or Outgoing</b>            | <b>Activity</b>   | <b>Priority addressed / audience reached</b>                               | <b>Evaluation measures</b>     |
|------------------|------------------------------------|--|---|--|--------------------------------|
|                  |                                    |  |   |  | Feedback forms at events.      |
|                  | Vulnerable/supported service users | Incoming to receive additional support | Support to assist residents to complete forms/online registration through home visits   | Disengaged households, disabled residents, residents aged 80+              | Number of residents supported  |
|                  | Council Staff road shows/events    | Outgoing                               | General messages about IER and where to find out more for staff who are local residents. Messages about where to direct enquiries regarding IER | Council employees, general audience through contact with council employees | Number of residents reached    |
| <b>Telephone</b> | Elections office                   | Incoming - IER query/service request   | Brief staff answering calls using EC briefing document. Ensure capacity at peak times (write-out, general election advertising,                 | General audience, those finding registration challenging                   | Number and nature of enquiries |

| Channel         | Communication opportunity | Incoming or Outgoing | Activity  | Priority addressed / audience reached                                      | Evaluation measures         |
|-----------------|---------------------------|----------------------|---|--|-----------------------------|
|                 |                           |                      | transition end)   |  |                             |
| <b>Intranet</b> | General message to staff  | Outgoing             | <p>General messages about IER and where to find out more for staff who are local authority residents.</p> <p>Messages about where to direct enquiries regarding IER</p> | Council employees, General audience through contact with council employees | Number of residents reached |
| <b>Internet</b> | Local Authority           | Outgoing             | General messages about IER and where to find out more. Based on template EC text. Post standard FAQs to try to reduce avoidable contact.                                | General audience   | Number of hits to Web Pages |

| Channel  | Communication opportunity           | Incoming or Outgoing                        | Activity  | Priority addressed / audience reached | Evaluation measures                    |
|--|-------------------------------------|---|---|---------------------------------------|--|
| <b>Social Media</b>                                    | Local Authority<br>Facebook/Twitter | Outgoing corporate<br>Incoming enquiries    | Ensure queries about IER are answered within specified period - passing queries from individuals for resolution by Elections office. Track any patterns in queries. Direct users to online registration. Work with web officer who manages the Twitter account to identify opportunities for monitoring Twitter activity relating to the authority on IER | General audience, young people        | Number and nature of enquiries         |
| <b>Via elected representatives (Councillor/MP etc)</b> | Face to face, email, letter         | Incoming enquiry to elected representatives | Councillors/MPs have information about where to direct residents for further information and contact details for elections office to deal with specific query.  | General audience                      | Conversations with councillors and MPs |

## Channels: Media and Advertising

Use this section to list the media and advertising channels available to you to promote messages about Individual Electoral Registration and who and how many people these channels reach. Some examples are provided below

| Digital Channels        | Activity  | Audience reached and priorities met          | Evaluation opportunities  |
|-------------------------|---|--|---|
| Local authority website | Put links and banner advert on our website, provide comprehensive information, place links on areas of site visited by target groups and portals where users submit address changes | General audience, service users, home movers | Hits on web pages   |
| Social Media            | Tweet around key activities – Initial HEF drop, registration deadline, PR activity. Post on Facebook page and share online advertisements run by EC and partner organisations       | General audience, service users              | Number of Followers, Likes, Shares, number of direct queries answered |
| <b>PR/Media</b>         |   |  |   |
| Press releases          | Around key activities - Initial HEF drop, registration deadline, PR activity. Post on Facebook page and share online advertisements run by EC and partner organisations             | Confirmed, Unconfirmed                       | List publications and circulation                                     |
| Publicity events        | To run themed stall at events during write-out  | General audience                             | Measure interest  |
| Special press/media     | To contact community press and Student newspapers   | Students, young people, home movers          | Circulation   |
| Residents news letters  | Submit articles to coincide with write-out and ahead of postal voting deadline  | General audience, postal voters              | Circulation   |

| Digital Channels          | Activity          | Audience reached and priorities met | Evaluation opportunities |
|---------------------------|-------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Free advertising channels |                   |                                     |                          |
| Posters, flyers           | Our Notice boards |                                     |                          |