



**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 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
Direct mail	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
Face to face	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.

Channel	Communication opportunity	Incoming or Outgoing	Activity	Priority addressed / audience reached	Evaluation measures
					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
Telephone	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)		
Intranet	General message to staff	Outgoing	General messages about IER and where to find out more for staff who are local authority residents. Messages about where to direct enquiries regarding IER	Council employees, General audience through contact with council employees	Number of residents reached
Internet	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
Social Media	Local Authority Facebook/Twitter	Outgoing corporate 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
Via elected representatives (Councillor/MP etc)	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
PR/Media			
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		