

**Manchester City Council
Report for Information**

Report to: Resources and Governance Scrutiny Committee - 30 June 2016
Subject: Electoral Registration Update
Report of: The Chief Executive

Summary

To provide an update on electoral registration trends and patterns over the past twelve months and to report on work undertaken by Greater Manchester to develop and submit pilot proposals to government to improve the national electoral registration system.

Recommendations

The Committee is requested to note and comment on the report.

Wards Affected: All

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Background documents (available for public inspection):

The following documents disclose important facts on which the report is based and have been relied upon in preparing the report. Copies of the background documents are available up to 4 years after the date of the meeting. If you would like a copy please contact one of the contact officers above.

Cabinet Office: Vision for electoral registration. Turning Local Authority proposals into Pilots. September 2015
Cabinet Office Business Case guidance, January 2016
Business Cases: North West canvass pilots and Manchester movers' pilot, February / March 2016

1.0 Overview

- 1.1 This report provides an update on electoral registration since the end of the transition to Individual Electoral Registration (IER) and lessons learned from the 2015 annual registration period ('the canvass'). The report also provided details of registration activity and trends in advance of both the local elections on 5 May and the EU Referendum on 23 June and details of Greater Manchester's proposals to central government to make the registration process more efficient, cost effective and elector focused.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 As the Committee will be aware, IER was first introduced in June 2014. The government's objectives for changing the registration system were:

- To reduce electoral fraud and increase public confidence in elections and electoral registration
- To ensure that citizens are responsible for their own registration
- To make registration more convenient for electors by allowing citizens to register online

- 2.2 In summary, every person in Great Britain who wishes to make a new application to register to vote must provide their National Insurance number (NINO) and date of birth (DoB). These details will be verified by Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) data or other local data sets before any addition to the register can be made. An exceptions process exists for any person who is unable to provide personal identifiers or whose personal identifiers do not match with DWP records. Since 2014, individuals have been able to register to vote online via the government's national electoral registration portal, removing the previous legal requirement for a wet ink signature.

- 2.3 It was recognised from the outset that IER would be challenging for cities such as Manchester with significant population churn and also that it would have a disproportionate impact on certain under registered groups such as young people and those living in private rented accommodation. Both government and Electoral Commission reporting on IER, and registration trends since 2014 confirm that individuals who are less likely to be registered under IER are primarily young people and those who move house frequently, groups which make up a large part of Manchester's population. As anticipated, Manchester's electorate has therefore fluctuated significantly from 381,000 in June 2014 to as low as 335,000 following the completion of the statutory deletions process arising from the 2015 canvass.

3.0 The 2015 Household and IER Canvass

- 3.1 The annual registration process (known as the canvass) is retained under IER but is significantly more complex than under the previous registration system.

Transitional arrangements to smooth the introduction of IER ended on 1 December 2015, following the first full IER canvass.

- 3.2 The 2015 household canvass, which was the first complete canvass since the introduction IER, commenced on 8 July 2015. The prescribed legal steps that the Electoral Registration Officer was required to undertake for the new Canvass include:-
- Sending a Household Enquiry Forms (HEFs) to every address, followed by two reminders and a household visit if no response was received
 - Sending Invitations to Register (ItRs) to any person named on a HEF who is not currently registered, followed by two reminders and a household visit if no response was received
 - Making contact by such other means as the ERO thinks appropriate, with persons who do not have an entry on the register
 - Inspecting records held by any persons which the ERO is permitted to inspect.
- 3.3 The IER Canvass requires every household to respond to a HEF and for those at the property who are not registered to vote to reply to a separate subsequent Invitation to Register form.
- 3.4 222,894 HEFs were initially sent out (one to every household), followed by 143,818 reminders and 89,299 final reminders. 84,621 ItRs were sent, followed by 43,959 reminders and 35,167 second reminders.
- 3.5 The personal visit element of the canvass comprised visits to 120,000 properties in to secure responses to either HEFs and/or ItRs. Every one of these properties was visited at least once in line statutory obligations and second and third visits were undertaken in areas with low HEF responses (below 75%) and with known high levels of churn where there were significant numbers of ItRs outstanding. Private student houses and students in Halls of Residence were subject to a separate targeted canvass. In all cases ItRs were completed on a mobile device on the doorstep wherever possible.
- 3.6 Activity concluded on 20 November 2015 in line with the legal deadline for applications and the revised electoral register 1 December 2015. The table below shows the number of electors on the published registers, compared to previous years.

Annual Register Update	Local government	Parliamentary
1 December 2015 (following full canvass under IER)	369,904	345,675
1 December 2014 (first register post IER transition)	368,286	346,107
17 February 2014 (final register pre IER register using household canvass)	381,081	358,373

Learning from the 2015 canvass

- 3.7 The HEF canvass achieved an 87.16% response rate. However, individuals cannot be added or removed from the electoral register as a result of a Household Form instead, individuals are required to undertake a further process to be added to the register. As a result, for the 2015 IER canvass 46,012 electors were added and 23,907 electors were deleted from the electoral register. This is a reduction of nearly half the number of additions and a third of the number of deletions compared with household registration, when in 2013/14 100,743 people were added to the register and 97,271 people were deleted. These figures more accurately reflect ONS statistics for the amount of internal churn within the city each year.
- 3.8 As outlined above, when new unregistered electors are listed on a returned HEF, individuals are sent an ItR for completion either using the paper form or online through the digital service. During the canvass period the response rate to these ItRs was only 25%, suggesting that many electors did not understand the purpose of the Invitation to Register, and that they had in fact registered by completing the HEF and do not take the required actions as a result. In addition, new electors identified from HEFs during the door knock stage of the canvass do not always have time to complete their registration journey before the register is published. As a result, 15,000 individuals who had been sent an ItR as part of the canvass had not responded by 1 December 2015 and a further 2,500 had made an application but had not provided the necessary evidence of identity to complete their registration journey.
- 3.9 The statutory process for deletions from the register under IER provides that an elector deleted on a HEF cannot be removed from the register without a second source of evidence to prove that they should no longer be on the register at that address. The door knock canvass provided the secondary source of evidence in some circumstances; but at the same time it also identified further electors who had moved away.
- 3.10 Prior to the publication of the register, the ERO was required by law as part of the end of the transition to remove 14,399 electors from the register who did not match during the confirmation process in 2014 and had not subsequently re registered to vote.
- 3.11 Due to the complex nature of the canvass under IER, the 1 December 2015 register was viewed as a snapshot rather than a definitive position. Ongoing

activity has therefore taken place throughout 2016 to continue to update the register, including targeting those who did not complete their registration in time to be included for 1 December and reviewing the entitlement of the 27,000 electors in the system where there was reason to believe they were no longer eligible to be registered at their current address, in line with the statutory process. Local data matching has also been used to make the registration process more effective and efficient whilst operating within the legal framework. In addition to this activity, a comprehensive communications and public awareness campaign ran across Greater Manchester to encourage registration from March 2016 onwards (see 4.0 below).

Cost of the Canvass

- 3.12 The full canvass under IER is more complex and relies on individuals taking action to maintain their own registration status whilst still prescribing the number of forms and letters the ERO must send, including two postal reminders at each stage. Consequently, there is no longer a clear correlation between activity and outcomes or the levels of funding allocated.
- 3.13 At present, the additional costs of IER are funded by the government in accordance with the new burdens doctrine and in addition to their funding allocations, local authorities able to submit justification led bids where spending is greater than monies allocated. For the 2015/16 Financial Year, the cost of the annual canvass under IER excluding supervisory and core staff was £838,634. The ERO received initial allocations of £254,567 and £31,798 based on a national formula and successfully bid for additional justification led funding of £221,729, meaning the Council's contribution remained to budget at £330,539. This overall cost is more than double the cost of the last annual canvass under the previous registration system, which was £392,972 excluding supervisory and core staff. A significant proportion of this increase relates to postage costs, which have increased to nearly £220k from c£90k due to the number of forms and letters that the ERO is legally required to send to households and individuals. Options put to government to reduce the cost of Electoral Registration are set out in section 5 below.
- 3.14 It should be noted that although the transitional period of IER ended on the 1 December 2015, the government have announced that Manchester will receive an additional £302,456 for registration activity 2016/7 with a mechanism to submit a further justification led bid should this allocation not cover the additional costs of the canvass.
- 4.0 Public Awareness and Registration Activity in advance of the 5 May Local Elections and 23 June Referendum**
- 4.1 For every city wide poll, the Electoral Registration Officer runs a public awareness campaign to promote awareness of elections and registration. For the 2015 Local Elections, this campaign was coordinated by Manchester City Council's Communications Team on behalf of Greater Manchester, supplemented by local activity. In anticipation of a June Referendum, the

campaign also sought to raise early awareness of the need to be registered to vote for both polls. The objectives of this campaign were as follows:

- 4.2 To increase the number of registered voters across Greater Manchester:
- Particularly focussing on under-registered groups to drive awareness of the need to register and encourage direct response to register to vote.
 - Encourage people to register early and prior to 18 April 2016 to enable them to vote in the local elections on 5 May 2016, and in future elections and referenda
- 4.3 To support public awareness of the Local Elections and Referendum to support EROs to discharge their statutory duty to promote participation including:
- How and where to vote
 - Where to get further information on the democratic process
 - Information on the candidates
- 4.4 The 2016 campaign was divided into three phases:
- Phase 1 Late-Feb/March 2016:** To focus on registration and participation ahead of the local election with reference to the Referendum, working with the national campaign coordinated by the Electoral Commission.
- Phase 2 April/early-May 2016:** Public awareness of the local elections and the practicalities of voting to ensure electors have all the information they need to participate.
- Phase 3: Early May- 26 May 2016:** Public awareness of the need to be registered to vote to participate in the Referendum and methods of voting, including postal and proxy voting for those unable to attend their polling station on 23 June
- 4.5 In addition to the general public awareness campaigns across Manchester, the ERO undertook further work targeted work with students with dedicated canvass activity. All unregistered students were sent personalised ItRs, supported by visits to student halls of residence and private student properties. Links with the Universities and Student Unions to promote registration messages through campaigns, ongoing engagement and digital messages continues. Although the number of students registered to vote increased, it is estimated that approximately 50% of Manchester's students are registered as many students continue to opt not to register to vote at their term time address.
- 4.6 Appendix 1 shows monthly registration levels by Ward, from December 2015 through to July 2016. This reflects the significant increase in applications to register, particularly in the last month and during the extended registration period.

- 4.7 On 5 May 2016, the government announced that additional funding would be available to Electoral Registration Officers in the 40 local authority areas with the highest levels of under registration. In accordance with legal restrictions which prohibit central and local government from promoting participation in advance of referendums, all registration activity was required to conclude by no later 26 May. The communications and public awareness strategy was amended as a result of this additional funding and the following measures were implemented:
- Publicity:** Paid for advertising included radio advertisements on Capital, Radio X, Gold Unity, Key 103; MEN Online, Facebook and Twitter messaging plus digital screens across the City Centre.
- Direct Mail:** In addition to poll cards to all registered electors, a post card was sent to every property in the city using the Electoral Commission national creative with simply messaging about registration and how to vote. The Electoral Registration Officer also wrote to every elector registered to vote as an EU Citizen (c23,000) to explain that they are not eligible to vote in the referendum because of the franchise set by Parliament.
- Registration hubs** were established in a number of district libraries providing an accessible service to support registration from the date of publication of the Notice of Referendum (17 May) until the close of poll on 23 June. The hubs also provided an important function on polling day itself by supporting the management of electors, including those who have not completed the registration journey;
- 4.8 The deadline for individuals to register to vote for the Referendum was originally midnight on 7 June, 2016. However due to widely reported issues with the government registration portal at around 10pm on that evening which prevented people from registering to vote, the government passed legislation to change the deadline to 12 midnight on 9 June. The deadline for applying for a postal vote remained unaffected. The government has advised that additional funding will be made available to Electoral Registration Officers for the administrative costs of this new legislation.
- 4.9 As demonstrated by the figures contained in Appendix 1, there was a significant increase in registration in the month leading to the EU Referendum across the city, with large increase in areas with high churn such as the City Centre and Hulme wards. Appendix 1 sets out ward level information about the number of parliamentary electors and local government electors which includes EU Citizens, who were not eligible to vote in the referendum. Although the net increase between these two polls is relatively small at less than 2,000, appendix 1 demonstrates an increase of nearly 20,000 additional registered electors between the start of communications activity for the 5 May election in February 2016 and the deadline for registration for the referendum in early June.

	EU Referendum (as at 17 June, 2016)	Parliamentary General Election May 2015	Increase
Parliamentary Electors	341,346	340,035	1,321
Local Government Electors	364,332	363,298	1,034
Postal Votes	61,348	55,760	5588
Proxy Voters	1,550	578	972
Overseas Electors	1,402	751	651

4.10 From 9 May to the revised statutory registration deadline of 9 June, 34,850 applications to register were made. Between 31 May and 7 June 2016 (the original deadline for registration) 10,997 applications were made and in the extra two days a further 3,623 were received. In total for the whole month period this resulted in 17,869 electors being added to the register. It should be noted that the majority of applications received (circa 60%) were duplicate applications with many electors believing they were required to register to vote specifically for the referendum.

4.11 The table also shows that the number of absent voters (postal and proxy voters) has also increased significantly between the 2015 general election and the Referendum. This can in part be attributed to the timing of the referendum being at the start of the holiday season but is also indicative of the level of interest in the referendum across the city.

4.12 As this report will be published before 23 June, Officers will report turnout for the referendum and any relevant registration issues to the Committee on 30 June.

5.0 The Future of IER and Cabinet Office pilot proposals

5.1 The government's 2015 Spending Review highlighted the critical role for public services to shift to digital and improve use of data is key to delivering efficiencies over the next three years.

5.2 The Minister for Constitutional Reform outlined his vision for the future of Electoral Registration in late 2015:

- By 2020 electoral registration should be quick, convenient and as easy as possible to use, particularly by under-represented groups or those likely to have inaccurate entries (such as house movers).
- As a new approach takes hold, we should look to progressively remove existing mandated processes and output-based regulations.

- Registering should be simpler (for example - ending the current two stage annual canvass process), more digital (e.g. removing paper notifications where possible), more data driven (to identify eligible electors and ineligible entries), and more efficient (costing less than the 2014 baseline).
- Registration drives should use open methodology and publish public, measured, auditable and repeatable outcomes to establish a peer-reviewed body of expertise and drive improvement.

5.3 The Cabinet Office subsequently invited Electoral Registration Officers to bring forward proposals for changes to the registration system to achieve these aims. Greater Manchester Electoral Registration Officers therefore developed a suite of practical administrative proposals for changes to the legal framework to increase the completeness and accuracy of electoral registers by making electoral registration as convenient as possible and to reduce costs and increase efficiency, including:-

Automatic Change of Address: Using verified local and national datasets to update electoral registration records, allowing electors to consent to sharing their updated address information, removing the need for those already IER registered to reregister every time they move house. EROs have provided a detailed business case outlining the registration and costs benefits of this change, however Cabinet Office have indicated that such a change may not be supported as they do not consider that it aligns with the principals and objectives of IER.

Movers Application: As an alternative to automatic change of address, GM have developed proposals for a simplified movers application. This would mean that residents would not have to complete a full IER application and have their identity verified each time and would instead allow their registration entry to be moved by opting into allowing the Council and other agencies to capture required information and provide to the ERO, for example when contacting the Housing Benefit and Council Tax Services regarding a change of address. The proposal would also assist students, with their registration entries being automatically transferred every time they move house throughout the duration of their studies. Specific feedback on the Manchester Movers' pilot has been received and we continue to work with the Cabinet Office to pursue this option in the longer term where Ministerial sign off for a proposal for permanent change can be achieved.

Household Notification Letters: GM and other EROs have proposed allowing EROs to have the discretion to send Household Enquiry Forms to properties instead of Household Notification Letters for areas of low transience/churn or where data indicates no change of occupancy. A Household Notification Letter lists the names of those registered to vote and their current method of voting (postal, proxy etc) and provides details of how those not listed can register to vote. Unlike a Household Enquiry Form, households would not be required to complete

and return a form to confirm no changes or changes at the property, significantly reducing the number of forms and visits to properties for little return.

Digital: Use of email for initial contact with households and individuals. Electoral Management Systems across Greater Manchester provide for the recording of email addresses where they have been provided through an application to register or the household canvass. These could be used to make initial contact with households and individuals to confirm there have been no changes at a property, thus reducing the number of forms and visits across the city.

5.4 Cabinet Office had initially indicated their intention to bring forward changes to legislation to enable individual and groups of EROs to demonstrate the impact of these changes on registers and reducing costs. However, they have subsequently confirmed that in 2016 only the EROs for Birmingham, Ryedale and South Lakeland will be able to pilot changes to the process, principally enhancement and tweaks to the existing framework. These pilots are still subject to parliamentary approval. It is disappointing that the range of pilot ideas designed by GM EROs to achieve the Ministers vision have yet to be adopted as pilots. However, EROs will continue to work with government at every opportunity to explore opportunities improve the registration process for individuals and to reduce the significant additional costs associated with the current IER process.

6.0 2016 Canvass

6.1 Early planning for the 2016 canvass has taken place, however, the timing of the EU Referendum has delayed guidance from the Electoral Commission on the process and the application of a limited number of legislative changes passed by the government since the last canvass. These changes include the use of email to invite people to register to vote and will enable an applicant to confirm that they are the only person aged 16 or over living at an address, with no requirement to canvass that address.

6.2 As the statutory framework remains fundamentally unchanged, the canvass process will by necessity repeat the 2015 process, following the statutory steps of Household Enquiry Forms, Invitations to Register, reminders and household and personal visits. However, due to the proximity of the 2016 canvass to the EU Referendum, electoral registers are considerably more complete and accurate than at any time since the introduction of IER and it is therefore anticipated that costs may be lower than 2015. It is also planned to start the 2016 canvass later than in previously years (late August rather than mid July) to prevent any confusion with the EU Referendum registration campaigns and to avoid 'registration fatigue' affecting response rates.

7.0 Conclusion

7.1 Members are asked to comment on current registration trends, registration activity and pilot proposals submitted to government.

Appendix 1

WARD	Dec-15		Jan-16		Feb-16		Mar-16		Apr-16		May-16		Jun-16		Jul-16	
	LOCAL	PARL	LOCAL	PARL	LOCAL	PARL	LOCAL	PARL	LOCAL	PARL	LOCAL	PARL	LOCAL	PARL	LOCAL	PARL
Ancoats & Clayton	13762	12526	13828	12577	12605	11486	12766	11626	12837	11682	12981	11810	13149	11991	13688	12532
Ardwick	10782	9792	10849	9853	9888	9011	10002	9105	10126	9211	10292	9354	10450	9516	10781	9832
Baguley	11302	10578	11316	10766	10826	10312	10867	10349	10883	10360	10921	10392	10949	10415	11080	10546
Bradford	12532	11483	12547	11492	11686	10731	11797	10816	11833	10846	11906	10911	11989	11003	12357	11365
Brooklands	10887	10501	10895	10508	10355	9996	10413	10049	10427	10066	10466	10095	10500	10133	10651	10303
Burnage	11123	10818	11152	10846	10673	10382	10732	10435	10742	10443	10792	10491	10856	10549	11021	10718
City Centre	10475	9474	10556	9541	9413	8527	9551	8637	9654	8750	9851	8936	9996	9091	10510	9630
Chorlton	11115	10818	11135	10837	10479	10243	10544	10287	10557	10299	10666	10409	10782	10549	11041	10838
Charlestown	10512	10060	10529	10070	10055	9615	10122	670	10162	9709	10211	9752	10261	9796	10475	9997
Chorlton Park	11701	11271	11710	11276	11021	10619	11112	10705	11154	10753	11280	10875	11435	11032	11749	11360
Crumpsall	11702	10545	11693	10532	11095	10019	11184	10097	11181	10095	11213	10117	11252	10146	11357	10250
Cheetham	15555	13718	15599	13752	14450	12788	14583	12898	14687	12972	14788	13042	14881	13119	15184	13410
Didsbury East	11067	10757	11076	10764	10423	10149	10467	10192	10490	10219	10541	10266	10606	10344	10790	10560
Didsbury West	10355	9934	10367	9946	9566	9178	9654	9251	9733	9339	9807	9410	9882	9508	10145	9817
Fallowfield	11246	10681	11344	10767	10664	10155	10719	10200	10830	10306	10975	10441	11157	10623	11415	10892
Gorton North	11285	10331	11298	10342	10726	9821	10829	9897	10891	9951	10950	10000	10995	10033	11170	10186
Gorton South	13395	12232	13398	12235	12627	11553	12703	11621	12735	11650	12819	11721	12893	11786	13161	12025
Harpurhey	12531	11195	12538	11196	11782	10535	11879	10593	11886	10595	11962	10655	12035	10708	12227	10875
Higher Blackley	10891	10297	10885	10290	10368	9796	10435	9848	10461	9874	10483	9896	10525	9935	10658	10072
Hulme	11265	10142	11277	10148	10206	9207	10274	9255	10341	9316	10472	9436	10607	9581	11087	10077
Levenshulme	11412	10745	11506	10824	10495	9894	10617	9998	10672	10051	10800	10177	10909	10290	11116	10503
Longsight	10653	9747	10679	9771	9892	9060	10006	9145	10035	9168	10134	9237	10252	9344	10476	9546
Miles Platting & N Heath	10715	10259	10725	10268	10255	9812	10303	9843	10343	9885	10391	9925	10425	9959	10630	10159
Moston	11542	11170	11541	11163	11053	10700	11096	10738	11111	10762	11136	10786	11165	10812	11316	10960
Moss Side	13678	12436	13721	12473	12611	11500	12706	11579	13084	11909	13272	12064	13442	12218	13749	12499
Northenden	11598	11065	11590	11057	11046	10549	11080	10572	11118	10607	11144	10643	11164	10671	11344	10845
Old Moat	11522	11005	11581	11056	10151	9700	10266	9804	10305	9846	10432	9964	10579	10130	10927	10490
Rusholme	10543	9743	10643	9826	9738	9031	9828	9106	9929	9197	10039	9284	10143	9392	10338	9584
Sharston	12079	11436	12104	11456	11518	10922	11585	10978	11607	11001	11662	11042	11687	11067	11806	11183
Woodhouse Park	10697	9931	10709	9930	10160	9457	10223	9498	10232	9510	10292	9566	10296	9568	10454	9715
Whalley Range	11407	10710	11418	10720	10748	10116	10830	10184	10881	10238	10964	10313	11062	10402	11355	10715
Withington	10575	10043	10590	10064	8856	8427	9014	8574	9313	8869	9498	9047	9783	9337	10274	9862
City Wide	369,904	345,443	370,799	346,346	345,431	323,291	348,187	316,550	350,240	327,479	353,140	330,057	356,107	333,048	364,332	341,346