

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET MEMBER FOR CORPORATE SERVICES

REPORT OF HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

Report prepared by Neil Harris
Date Issued: 5 October 2011

1. RESPONSE TO GOVERNMENT CONSULTATION PAPER ON INDIVIDUAL ELECTORAL REGISTRATION

1.1 Key Issue for Decision

1.1.1 To consider the draft response to the Government Consultation Paper on Individual Electoral Registration.

1.2 Recommendation of the Head of Democratic Services

1.2.1 That the draft response to the Government Consultation Paper on Individual Electoral Registration as set out in Appendix A to the report be agreed.

1.3 Reasons for Recommendation

1.3.1 Currently the system of registering to vote is undertaken by an annual canvass at which point a registration form is sent to each household and 1 individual in each household takes responsibility for its completion and return. This system has been in place for over 100 years and has a potential for fraud as the information supplied has no corroborating evidence like a signature, National Insurance Number(NINO) or date of birth(DoB). Therefore, the Electoral Commission and others have been pushing for change. As a result the previous Government had agreed to introduce individual electoral registration but intended first introducing it on a voluntary basis before making it compulsory. The new Coalition Government agreed to bring forward the program and make it compulsory from the outset and have decided to introduce the new system in 2014 so it is in place for the 2015 General Election. The strength of this system is that each individual takes responsibility for their entries and the proposed new system has introduced corroborating evidence such as the NINO and DoB. A White Paper setting out the draft legislation and the proposals for individual electoral registration has been issued and comments have been sought from relevant bodies by Friday 14 October 2011. The White Paper is attached at Appendix B to the report and a draft response to the proposals has been attached at Appendix A.

1.3.2 The response supports the principle of the introduction of individual electoral registration but expresses concerns over a number of technical issues such as there being no need for a signature. Concern was also expressed about the potential loss of electors registered to vote which is felt would be a minimum of 10%.

1.3.3 Additionally, like any new legislation, there will be a financial impact from the introduction of such a proposal and the Government in the Paper have indicated that they will provide an additional £85m in the spending review settlement 2014 – 2015 to fund registration officers to make contact with each potential elector individually inviting them to register. Additionally, the Government will provide ongoing additional registration costs of £31.8m after the first year as the work required in future years is less than the first year.

1.4 Alternative Action and why not Recommended

1.4.1 The Council could decide to not put its comments in relation to the changes on the introduction of individual electoral registration, but to do so would not give the Council an opportunity to influence changes to the proposed legislation.

1.5 Impact on Corporate Objectives

1.5.1 In addition to minimizing risk of potential fraud in the election system it would improve the service to the customer and provide a more robust service for all those people voting thereby improving customer excellence for all residents in Maidstone.

1.6 Risk Management

1.6.1 There are no risk management issues arising out of responding to the draft legislation on individual electoral registration.

1.7 Other Implications

1.7.1

1. Financial
2. Staffing
3. Legal
4. Equality Impact Needs Assessment
5. Environmental/Sustainable Development

X
X

6. Community Safety
7. Human Rights Act
8. Procurement
9. Asset Management

1.7.2 As indicated earlier the government has agreed that £85m will be provided for all local authorities across the country for the introduction of individual electoral registration and that this will be included in the spending review settlement. However, the spending review settlement is not ring-fenced and there is therefore no guarantee that this resource will be allocated for this purpose. However in anticipation of this change the Council has set aside a sum of £100k in the budget strategy for 2014. Having examined the proposal set out in the draft legislation and compared it to the existing method of compiling the electoral register it has been possible to make an initial calculation of the potential additional costs for compilation of the electoral register under the new system.

1.7.3 In 2014 it is expected that with the additional stages and literature to be sent out and the need to send a form to and seek registration of every individual elector the additional cost of the introduction of this new system is estimated at £90k. The system for 2015 and beyond does not require the same level of activity and therefore the additional costs of this is estimated at £50k per annum. However, it must be remembered that these figures are initial calculations and will be subject to change as more detail is fleshed out on the proposals and equally as legislation becomes law.

1.7.4 The legal implications are detailed in the body of the report.

1.8 Conclusions

1.8.1 None

1.9 Relevant Documents

1.9.1 Appendices

1.9.2 Appendix A – Draft Response

1.9.3 Appendix B – Government consultation paper on individual electoral registration

1.9.4 Background Documents

1.9.5 None

IS THIS A KEY DECISION REPORT?

Yes

No

If yes, when did it first appear in the Forward Plan?

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This is a Key Decision because:

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Wards/Parishes affected:

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How to Comment

Should you have any comments on the issue that is being considered please contact either the relevant Officer or the Member of the Executive who will be taking the decision.

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