

**MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL RESPONSE TO THE PROPOSALS  
PUBLISHED IN THE UK GOVERNMENTS WHITE PAPER – INDIVIDUAL  
ELECTORAL REGISTRATION**

**Overarching comment.**

The Council would firstly like to thank the Government for an opportunity to comment on its proposals for a significant change in the legislation relating to Electoral Registration. The Council supports the Governments commitment to the introduction of individual Electoral Registration and sees it as an important step forward to securing the electoral system in Great Britain against potential fraud in the system. The Council is also pleased to note the Governments commitment to speeding up the timetable for implementation and making it a permanent change from the outset rather than having a voluntary phase at first.

The Council also supports the intention to undertake data matching pilots to assist the transition and to test what other data might be useful to Electoral Registration Officers in creating and maintaining registers within this new system. These pilots are currently ongoing in a number of local authorities across Great Britain and this Council looks forward to the evaluation of this pilot activity and from that evaluation the determination of whether it would be appropriate to extend this activity across the country to improve the completeness and accuracy of the Register. The Council also welcomes the intention with these changes to reduce fraud and to make the registration system more accessible to under represented groups and to those with special requirements including disabled people.

The Council supports the Governments approach to the annual canvass which is to review the outcomes of the 2014 and 2015 canvass and the evaluation of the data matching pilots indexing before determining the future of the Annual Canvass beyond 2015. The Council also supports the change in start date to 1 July as this Council already starts its canvass in July.

**Specific Comments**

1. Without the requirement for a signature it would be impossible to prove who had completed the Individual Electoral Registration (IER) form. Most people have access to their partner / children's National Insurance Number (NINO) and know their date of birth. It would be simple for one person to complete all the necessary forms for the people in their house. A signature would prove who had completed the form. Additionally it will be more difficult to obtain the NINO at the door which will result in fewer forms collected at the door and a detrimental impact on the total return.
2. A signature should be required from everyone who does not wish to be chased for a completed form. Otherwise at election time they will deny that they completed the form to this effect and we will have no proof.
3. The IER forms that are sent out personally addressed to existing electors

will be redirected by Royal Mail if that person has moved away and had their post redirected. It will be impossible to know whether a form has actually been delivered to the property it is sent to. If someone who has moved away returns the form for their previous address it will cause significant problems.

4. People will not bother to return IER forms addressed to former occupants. They will bin the forms and in many cases not bother to request a form for themselves.
5. It is felt that there will be a drop in the number of electors registered to vote. It is quite possible that the electoral register will lose a minimum of 10%. Without the threat of a fine and with the option to choose not to register and the ability to stop us from chasing up non-responders Electoral Registration Officers will have no power or authority to act. As they stand these proposals rely upon people wanting to register to vote. Experience has shown that there are a significant percentage of people who do not want to register to vote. The first form has a response from approximately 70% of households. The canvassers and the second form have a response from approximately 12 – 15% of households. The final form which is accompanied by a letter detailing the fine for not providing the information required has a response from approximately 7 – 10% of households. 2 – 3% are included from information from Council Tax. A response is never obtained from approximately 4 – 5% of households. It is felt that the 7 – 10% response to the letter will be completely lost, the 4 -5% who never register will continue not to register and those people who only complete the form because they know there is a legal requirement to do so will now stop completing the form. This will not affect the 2014 register as all non-responders will be carried over. However the 2015 register will be significantly affected with possibly only 80 – 85% of electors having registered under IER.
6. Using the example of the Northern Ireland (NI) experience is only relevant if the demographic and culture of registering to vote and voting is the same in England, Wales and Scotland. It is felt that the culture in Northern Ireland is not the same as here where apathy and a sense of distrust and detachment between voters and politicians are the overriding issues. Therefore it is felt that you cannot draw comparisons between the experience of NI in moving to IER and what will happen when it is introduced to the rest of the country.
7. The Council welcomes that funds will be included within the spending review settlement in 2014 / 15 to fund electoral registration officers making contact with each elector individually and equally that they accept that if the data matching pilot schemes are rolled out across Great Britain, additional funds could be made available for that process as well. However, it would be helpful to know how the costs were worked out in order to arrive at the figure of £85m within the spending review and a total cost of £108m.

The Council also welcomes that beyond 2014 the Government accepts there will be an annual cost of £31.8m and accepts as the Government

has indicated that if the annual canvass was stopped that the costs of compiling the register would reduce significantly. Again, it would welcome how these figures have been worked out.

The Council also considers that in order to provide a successful implementation of the new system, it is important that the funding provided for this service is identified and set aside for this purpose within the spending review settlement.

### **Proposals**

1. It is suggested that the requirement for a signature is included on the IER form only to provide a further check on fraud. This would still allow significant online and telephone registration in later years.
2. The IER form sent out should be clearly identified for return to the ERO, if the person has moved, rather than being redirected by Royal Mail. This could be dealt with direct with Royal Mail in light of the quantity of post involved.
3. The current offence (with a fine of up to £1000) to fail to comply with a request for information from the ERO should be retained which will allow the existing letter, from which this Council receives 7-10% of the total electorate response rate, to be continued to be used.