

**REPORT OF CORPORATE DIRECTOR POLICY, PLANNING AND
CORPORATE SERVICES****INDIVIDUAL ELECTORAL REGISTRATION PILOT****Purpose of the Report**

1. To seek agreement for the County Council to participate with Mansfield District Council on a pilot scheme to test the value of matching the Council's data on young people with data held by the electoral registration officer.

Information and Advice

2. Each district council in Great Britain appoints an Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) who has responsibility for compiling an accurate and complete electoral register for their area. Accuracy means there are no false entries on the register, ie accurate entries relate to verified and eligible voters who are resident at that address. Inaccurate register entries may relate to entries which have become redundant (for example, due to people moving home), which are for people who are ineligible and have been included unintentionally, or which are fraudulent. Completeness means that every person who is eligible to vote is included on the register at their current address.
3. Accurate and complete electoral registers are essential for elections. However, electoral registers are also used for other important civic purposes, including selecting people to undertake jury service, and calculating electorates to inform Parliamentary and local government boundary reviews. Those not registered are not counted for these purposes. In addition, registers are used by credit reference agencies to confirm addresses supplied by applicants for bank accounts, credit cards, personal loans and mortgages
4. The electoral register is primarily completed through the annual canvass undertaken each autumn, although under the rolling registration arrangements individual electors can register to vote throughout the year. The annual canvass involves delivering a registration form to each household and following up those households who do not respond via postal reminders and personal visits. Most EROs use other locally held data, such as council tax and housing records, to improve the effectiveness of their registration activity.
5. The Political Parties and Elections Act 2009 (PPE Act) allows for the phased introduction of individual electoral registration (IER) in Great Britain. The PPE Act also included provisions to allow data matching pilot schemes to be carried out, with a view to establishing which national public databases might be useful to EROs in helping maintain electoral registers during the transition to IER.

6. The Electoral Registration and Administration Bill, introduced in the House of Commons on 10 May 2012, is intended to speed up the implementation of IER in Great Britain. The new system to be implemented from 2014 will require each elector to register individually (unlike the current system where registration takes place predominantly by household) and to supply personal information for verification.
7. In 2011 with the support of the Cabinet Office some 22 local authorities took part in pilot data-matching exercises alongside the annual canvass. This data-matching was intended to use national databases (such those operated by the Department for Work and Pensions) to identify people missing from the electoral register who could be invited to register
8. Evaluations of the pilots suggested that national databases were of limited value in adding to information already available to EROs. However, the most useful databases in terms of adding people to the registers seemed to be those which targeted specific under-registered groups (e.g. 16-17 year-olds) such as the National Pupil Database and the Individual Learner Record. The Electoral Commission notes that under IER, unlike in the current household system, individual attainers might need to complete their own form (rather than being registered by adults in the household). It is therefore possible that the number of registered attainers will fall. The ability to use data in order to target them in this way may therefore be a more useful tool for EROs in the future.
9. In its response to pre-legislative scrutiny and public consultation on individual electoral registration and amendments to electoral administration law published in February 2012 the Government indicated its intention to run further data matching pilots. Consequently the Cabinet Office approached EROs looking for volunteers to take part in further data matching schemes in 2012 using a refined process and methodology or developing and piloting some other electoral registration initiatives. One of the aims of this second round is to pilot local data matching between tiers, to assess its usefulness and inform a decision on changing the law that currently prevents the routine exchange of such data.
10. Mansfield DC indicated its interest in taking part in the pilot and approached the County Council to take part in a project to test data-matching in two-tier areas. Following preliminary discussions with the Cabinet Office and Mansfield DC it is considered that the County Council can make the biggest contribution by providing data to identify young people who should become 18 within the life of the register. It is intended to focus on three groups:
 - The general school population. This will address young people living within Mansfield District.
 - Students with SEN. These students may attend specialist establishments outside the County not maintained by the local authority.
 - Looked after Children. Because of their circumstances these young people are frequently disadvantaged in engaging with civic life. Although many of them should be picked up by the two categories above some may only be matched through the Council's social care records.
11. The intention would be for the County Council to provide a list of young people known to the Children, Families, and Cultural Services Department in the above categories to the ERO for Mansfield who would match against the electoral register. The supplier of the district

council's electoral registration software would also be involved in the pilot to advise on the technical issues.

12. The Cabinet Office intends to make an Order which would permit data sharing for the matching pilot. The Order would expire at the end of the pilot phase.
13. The evaluation of the pilot will consider whether use of County Council data contributes to a more complete electoral register. It will also address the particular flavour suggested above – ie ensuring that young people who otherwise are most at risk of being missed off the register (ie those with special needs and looked after) are picked up.
14. The Cabinet Office will fund any additional costs necessary to deliver the pilots (eg if it is necessary to employ specialist data analysts). However at this stage it is considered that any additional costs will be minimal, the main costs falling on the County Council will be the costs of existing staff in the CFCS data management team which can be absorbed within existing budgets.

Other Options Considered

15. The Council could decline to participate in the pilot.

Reason for Recommendation

16. The introduction of individual electoral registration could increase the risk of young people, especially the more disadvantaged, failing to register and not engaging with civic life. The Council's participation in the pilot should enable it to contribute to the development of IER and to maximise the opportunities for young people to register.

Statutory and Policy Implications

17. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of finance, equal opportunities, human resources, crime and disorder, human rights, the safeguarding of children, sustainability and the environment and those using the service and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

RECOMMENDATION/S

The Council participates in the data matching pilot with Mansfield DC along the lines set out in the report

Jayne Francis-Ward
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Constitutional Comments ([initials and date SLB 08/01/13])

18. Policy Committee is the appropriate committee to consider the content of this report. It is responsible for those functions relating to elections and local democracy which are not reserved to Full Council.

Financial Comments (MB 07/01/13)

19. The financial implications are outlined in paragraph 14 of the report.

Background Papers

None

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

All divisions in Mansfield