

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY ELECTORAL REGISTRATION OFFICER AND RETURNING OFFICER

TO:	POLICY COMMITTEE		
DATE:	30 NOVEMBER 2015	AGENDA ITEM:	16
TITLE:	ELECTORAL REGISTRATION AND ELECTIONS - UPDATE		
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1. PURPOSE AND SUMMARY OF REPORT

- 1.1 Further to Minute 88 of the Policy Committee of 16 March 2015, this report reviews the UK Parliamentary, Local Borough and other Elections held on 7 May 2015 and sets out the arrangements for the 2015 annual canvass, which started on 24 July and will run until 20 November 2015.

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 That the position be noted.

3. POLICY CONTEXT

- 3.1 This is the thirteenth report reviewing the election and canvass processes.

4. UK PARLIAMENTARY AND LOCAL BOROUGH ELECTIONS - 7 MAY 2015

4.1 General

- 4.1.1 The UK Parliamentary and Local Borough Elections were held on Thursday 7 May 2015.

- 4.1.2 The UK Parliamentary Elections were held in two constituencies, Reading East and Reading West. The Local Borough Elections were by thirds, for one Councillor in 15 of Reading's 16 wards. Mapledurham ward has only one Councillor and the next time this ward is due for a Local Borough election is 2016. Mapledurham ward did have a UK Parliamentary Election within the Reading East constituency.

- 4.1.3 The UK Parliament was dissolved on Monday, 30 March 2015. Writs in respect of Reading East and Reading West constituencies were received and signed for by Reading Borough Electoral Services on Tuesday, 31 March 2015. The Notices for the UK Parliamentary Elections in both constituencies were published following receipt of the Writs later on the same day, Tuesday 31 March 2015.
- 4.1.4 The Notices in respect of the Local Borough Elections were published on Friday, 27 March 2015. This was when the local election purdah period commenced.
- 4.1.5 The deadline for the delivery of nomination papers for the UK Parliamentary Elections and Local Borough Elections was 16.00 on Thursday 9 April 2015.
- 4.1.6 The last day for new or changed registrations was midnight on 20 April 2015; and for new or changed applications for new postal votes was 17.00 on 21 April 2015.
- 4.1.7 Postal ballot packs were issued on 22 April 2015 and a second issue went out on 24 April 2015.
- 4.1.8 Poll cards were issued on or around 1 April 2015 in order to allow electors reasonable time to contact the Electoral Services team to make late requests for postal votes by 21 April 2015. Postal poll cards were issued to people with postal votes. This year, the postal poll cards were coloured pink to enable speedy responses over the telephone to postal vote queries.
- 4.1.9 Following the Elections, representations were received from election agents in relation to the agents attending Darwin Close for the agents briefing, scrutiny of the postal vote administration and the delivery of nominations. Having considered the above representations the Electoral Registration Officer is hoping that the agents briefing will take place at the Councils Civic Offices in future.

## 4.2 Turnout

- 4.2.1 The UK Parliamentary total eligible electorate was:

Reading East:	73,232
Reading West:	72,567

- 4.2.2 The Local Borough Elections total eligible electorate was: 108,344

- 4.2.3 The UK Parliamentary Election total turnout was:

Reading East:	50,685
Reading West:	48,523

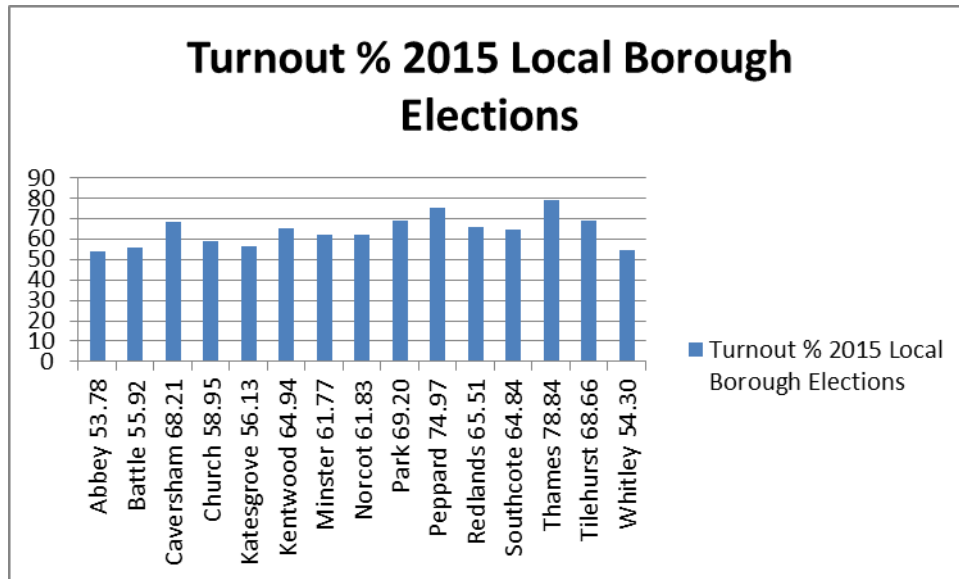
- 4.2.4 The Local Borough Elections total turnout was: 68,991

- 4.2.5 The percentage turnout totals were therefore, as follows:

Reading East:	69.21%
Reading West:	66.87%
Local Borough:	63.86%

4.2.6 In the Local Borough Elections, the highest turnout (78.8%) was in Thames ward, and the lowest (53.8%) turnout in Abbey ward. Please see Table 1 under:

Table 1 - Local Election Turnout



### 4.3 Postal Votes

4.3.1 For the 2015 Elections, a total of 42,691 postal votes were issued, as follows:

Reading East: 12,553 postal votes  
 Reading West: 11,998 postal votes  
 Local Borough: 18,140 postal votes

4.3.3 A total of 35,010 postal votes were received and put forward for verification:

Reading East: 10,398 (82.8%)  
 Reading West: 9,822 (81.9%)  
 Local Borough: 14,790 (81.5%)

4.3.4 Table 2, setting out the take-up of postal votes, is broken down into Wards in respect of the Local Borough Election:

Table 2

Ward	Eligible Electorate	PVs issued 2015	%	PVs received	% of no. issued	% of total electorate	Total rejected at Verification	% of no. issued
Abbey	8,601	1,351	15.70	1,055	78.09	12.26	27	1.99
Battle	7,496	929	12.39	710	76.42	9.47	32	3.44
Caversham	7,296	1,359	18.62	1,160	85.35	15.89	23	1.69
Church	6,752	1,078	15.96	907	84.13	13.43	18	1.66
Katesgrove	6,734	862	12.80	690	80.04	10.24	13	1.50
Kentwood	7,220	1,257	17.40	1,058	84.16	14.65	21	1.67
Minster	7,353	1,263	17.17	1,056	83.61	14.36	21	1.66

Norcot	7,378	1,258	17.05		1,036	82.35	14.04		33	2.62
Park	6,660	919	13.79		766	83.35	11.50		13	1.41
Peppard	7,563	1,485	19.63		1,263	85.05	16.69		14	0.94
Redlands	6,064	804	13.25		671	83.45	11.06		13	1.61
Southcote	6,538	1,376	21.04		1,169	84.95	17.88		23	1.67
Thames	7,386	1,670	22.61		1,504	90.05	20.36		17	1.01
Tilehurst	7,110	1,198	16.84		1,022	85.30	14.37		14	1.16
Whitley	8,203	1,331	16.22		1,073	80.61	13.08		34	2.55
TOTAL RECEIVED	108,355	18,140	16.74		15,140	83.46	13.97		316	1.74

4.3.5 Table 3 breaks down the take-up of postal votes by constituencies in respect of the UK Parliamentary Election.

Table 3

Constituency	Eligible Electorate	PVs issued 2015	%		PVs received	% of no. issued	% of total electorate		Total rejected	% of no. issued
Reading East	73,232	12,553	17.1		10,610	84.52	14.48		204	1.62
Reading West	72,567	11,998	16.5		10,064	83.88	13.86		241	2.00

4.3.6 The Electoral Administration Act 2007, accompanying regulations, and updates, include provision for the receipt and opening of postal vote ballot packs. Sections 10ZC and 10ZD of the Representation of the People Act 1983 also include IER postal vote guidance. Any new applicant for a postal vote must be registered individually in order for their application to be determined and accepted.

4.3.7 The postal vote packs are opened, the contents checked to ensure ballot paper(s) and the completed postal vote statement are included in each and every pack, and then 100% of postal vote statements are submitted for verification by electronic scanning. The personal identifiers for individual postal voters held on the Council's electoral database are compared. Four checks are made:

- To confirm the signature and date of birth have been completed
- To confirm that the date of birth is the same
- To confirm that the signature is the same
- To match the barcode on the postal vote statement with the database address record.

4.3.8 This worked very successfully at the May 2015 Elections, and as a result we were able to scan 100% of all postal votes received, through the establishment of a scanning hub at Floor 4, 2-4 Darwin Close, staffed by 2 Northgate and 5 Council staff on every scanning day. On Polling Day a reduced number of staff was made available to open and verify postal votes.

4.3.9 As a result of this exercise, and as shown in Tables 2 and 3 above, a total of 316 Local Borough Election postal statements were rejected, a total of 204 Reading East UK Parliamentary postal statements were rejected, and a total of 241 Reading West UK Parliamentary postal statements were rejected. The rejected ballot papers did not go forward to the Verifications and Counts.

4.3.10 Incomplete packs were subject to the “orphaned ballot paper” check, whereby a statement/ballot paper without a ballot paper/statement were checked electronically in order to match them for verification, and paired up where possible.

4.3.11 Tables 4 below give a detailed breakdown of reasons for rejection of postal votes after submission for verification by scanning, in respect of the UK Parliamentary Election and Local Borough Elections 2015, respectively. In addition, Table 4(b) gives the total numbers of incomplete packs received before submission for electronic verification by scanning:

**Table 4(a) - UK Parliamentary Elections 2015 (Breakdown by Ward)**

UK Parliamentary Elections - Reason	Reading East	Reading West
Signature		
▪ <i>No signature</i>	14	11
▪ <i>Unmatched</i>	85	105
Date of Birth		
▪ <i>No DoB</i>	4	8
▪ <i>Unmatched</i>	54	59
Signature and Date of Birth		
▪ <i>No signature and no DoB</i>	32	27
▪ <i>Both mismatched</i>	15	31
Postal Vote Statement		
▪ <i>No Statement</i>	5	2
Ballot Paper		
▪ <i>Not returned</i>	3	3

**Table 4(b) - Local Elections 2015 (Breakdown by Ward)**

Local Borough Elections Reason	Ab	Ba t	Ca v	Ch	Ka t	Ke n	Mi n	No r	Pa r	Pe p	Re d	So u	Th a	Til	Wh i
Signature															
▪ <i>No signature</i>	2	2	2	2	0	1	0	1	0	3	1	3	2	0	0
▪ <i>Unmatched</i>	10	18	12	9	5	8	10	16	4	6	5	5	9	6	17
Date of Birth															
▪ <i>No DoB</i>	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	1
▪ <i>Unmatched</i>	9	8	6	3	6	1	8	8	3	2	3	10	4	3	11
Signature and Date of Birth															
▪ <i>No signature and no DoB</i>	6	0	2	4	2	5	2	6	2	2	2	3	0	2	2
▪ <i>Both mismatched</i>	0	3	1	0	0	5	1	1	4	1	2	1	1	2	3
Total rejections at scanning:	27	32	23	18	13	21	21	33	13	14	13	23	17	14	34
Postal Vote Statement															
▪ <i>No Statement</i>	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	3	2	0	0
Ballot Paper															
▪ <i>Not returned</i>	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0
Total rejections - incomplete postal vote pack.	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	3	2	1	0

4.3.12 I was responsible, as Returning Officer, for the quality checks of the postal vote issues which were undertaken by me and one of my DROs. The quality checks demonstrated that the postal vote packs were accurately printed and of good quality, before being issued. Also, as Returning Officer, I checked each of the unmatched or invalid returns, in the postal vote hub. In this task I was supported by a Deputy Returning Officer, who has previously held the role of Returning Officer at past elections. The postal vote opening process was open to Candidates and Agents to attend.

4.3.13 Having undertaken these tasks, it is my view that there was no evidence of systematic fraud in the issued and returned postal votes. In the majority of cases, the rejections seemed to reflect confusion by the voter in completing the statement.

4.3.14 As shown in Table 4(b), the wards with the largest number of rejections were Whitley (34), Norcot (33) and Battle (32). The wards with the smallest number of rejections were Katesgrove (13), Park (13), and Redlands (13).

4.3.15 Following the elections, as in 2014, Electoral Services wrote to the postal voters whose postal votes had been rejected. This was to inform them that their vote was not included in the Electoral Counts and to request their personal indicators again to ensure that those held were correct. Both in 2014 and 2015 no complaints were received.

#### 4.4 Polling Stations

4.4.1 On polling day, 110 polling stations were opened, across Reading East and Reading West boundaries, including Reading Borough wards that were located in Reading East and Reading West constituencies. In Reading Borough there were 75 polling stations, in 51 polling places (some of which had more than one polling station). Of the 51 polling places in the Borough, 24 were schools.

4.4.2 Reading East constituency had a total of 56 Polling Stations, based within the following wards:

Reading Borough Wards, Reading East:

Abbey  
Caversham  
Church  
Katesgrove  
Mapledurham  
Park  
Peppard  
Redlands  
Thames

Wokingham Borough Wards, Reading East:

Bulmershe & Whitegates  
Loddon  
South Lake

4.4.3 Reading West constituency had a total of 54 Polling Stations, based within the following wards:

## Reading Borough Wards, Reading West:

Battle  
Kentwood  
Minster  
Norcot  
Southcote  
Tilehurst  
Whitley

## West Berkshire District Wards, Reading West:

Calcot  
Pangbourne  
Purley-on-Thames  
Theale  
Westwood  
Birch Copse

4.4.4 The elections followed last autumn's review of polling districts and places, so all polling stations within Reading East and Reading West boundaries had been confirmed as accessible and suitable for purpose. All polling stations were open from 7.00am to 10.00pm.

### 4.5 Access

4.5.1 The Electoral Commission works closely with Mencap in the build up to the registration deadline and on polling day. They jointly designed a voting factsheet which was placed both on the Electoral Commission and Mencap websites and was circulated to all partners via their fortnightly Bulletin.

4.5.2 Reading polling station staff were made aware of dealing with all people attending the polling station in order to vote. During their training briefings, polling staff were made aware of the importance of:

- Setting up a polling station for complete accessibility for all.
- Attending a voter who is visually impaired. Every Presiding Officer in their ballot box has a tool to enable a visually impaired elector to vote in privacy.
- Awareness of special needs of any voter, including any companion attending with the voter with special needs.

4.5.3 In addition, an Elections Officer also works with the Shared Lives Scheme, which facilitates placements in non-professional carers own homes for vulnerable adults. The primary service user group is for adults with learning disabilities. Electoral information is actively made available for carers and service users, as carers are expected to advocate for their service users. As an example, the Elections Officer has informed me that they had a query from one of the carers and they specifically met on a one-to-one basis about registering to vote and supporting the carer to actively get voter registration forms completed. This Elections Officer was available on the elections phone lines for the duration of Polling Day in order to give support to any Presiding Officers calling in if they had any questions about supporting people with a learning difficulty to vote.

- 4.5.4 As part of the Mencap “Hear My Voice” campaign, Reading Mencap hosted a day for service users to discuss the upcoming election. On 23 March 2015, Reading Mencap campaigners met at Alexandra Road with three parliamentary candidates for Reading in the upcoming general election. These were Victoria Groulef (Labour), Meri O’Connell (Lib Dem) and Rob White (Green). A member of the Electoral Services Team attended the event on behalf of the Reading Elections Team and spoke to service users about how to vote. In particular, some of the attendees with learning disabilities had a meeting with the Electoral Services Officer, towards the end of the event. The officer also took their details to check that they were registered to vote. Please see: <http://www.readingmencap.org.uk/hear-my-voice/416-hmv3-ppcs> for further information about the event.
- 4.5.5 The Talkback group also gave support as part of the Mencap day and leading up to the election. For more details you can contact the Talkback group: [Talkbak-uk.com](http://Talkbak-uk.com).
- 4.5.6 A team of two Council Officers canvassed Care Homes and Supported Living Homes in advance of the 2015 Elections. One of the Officers used to be the Adult Disability Team Manager and the other works for the Shared Lives Scheme, both of which support Adults with Learning Disabilities. This experience helped the officers to advocate for people and make certain the people got themselves registered to vote.
- 4.5.7 In addition, the officers used their knowledge of residences in Reading to ensure they had a comprehensive and up-to-date list of all such residences within Reading Borough boundaries. The adults with learning disabilities living in these residences were therefore registered correctly to vote in advance of the 2015 Elections, having had the details explained to them as shown to them in the guides.
- 4.5.8 In addition to the event referred to above, Election Officers spoke to one of the organisers from Mencap and signposted her to various resources to help them support their service users including accessible registration forms.
- 4.5.9 Reading Borough Council utilises the Handbook for Polling Station Staff supplied by the Electoral Commission which includes guidance and instruction in respect of people with disabilities. These handbooks are distributed to all Presiding Officers in advance of all elections at training and are included in their ballot boxes for use on Polling Day.
- 4.6 Ballot Box Receipt
- 4.6.1 The receipt of ballot boxes, at close of poll, was held in the Thames Suite of the Rivermead Leisure Centre. The success of the Verifications and Counts seriously depended upon the correct number of ballot boxes being received from the respective wards. Two receiving teams of two people each, including the Electoral Services Manager and the Electoral Services Deputy Manager, using their ballot box number matrix to double check ballot boxes received as the Ballot Box Receipt progressed. This tightly run exercise ensured that all ballot boxes were received safely. In addition, the Head Floor Controllers in the Count Halls were responsible for ensuring that the received ballot boxes were set next to the correct relevant Ward Count Tables. Given the complications of the numerous and different elections’ ballot boxes being received, this controlled system worked excellently, even when there were delays with receipt of some ballot boxes and some Presiding Officers came through alternative entrances to the Count venue.

4.6.2 There were 12 Ward Count Tables in Reading East and 13 in Reading West. Postal vote ballot boxes were brought to the Ward Count Tables in advance of the Verifications (postal ballot papers verified by scanning in advance) and during the evening as the postal vote packs brought to polling stations on Polling Day had been opened, scanned and verified.

#### 4.7 Verification and the Counts

4.7.1 The first stage in any count is to verify the number of ballot papers in each ballot box, against the total recorded on the ballot paper account for the polling station. Overnight on 7-8 May 2015 we were verifying the ballot papers for seven elections, from 22.01 onwards on Thursday, 7 May 2015:

- Reading East UK Parliamentary - Reading Borough, Reading East Wards and Wokingham Council, Reading East Wards - White ballot papers
- Reading Borough Local Elections, Reading East Wards - Yellow ballot papers
- Wokingham Local Elections, Reading East Wards - Yellow ballot papers
- Wokingham Parish Elections, Reading East Wards - Green ballot papers
- Reading West UK Parliamentary - Reading Borough, Reading West Wards and West Berkshire Council, Reading West Wards - White ballot papers
- Reading Borough Local Elections, Reading West Wards - Yellow ballot papers
- West Berkshire Local Elections, Reading West Wards - Yellow ballot papers

4.7.2 The Verifications and Counts were held in the Bowls Hall for Reading East, and the Sports Hall for Reading West at Rivermead. Verifications commenced at 22.01 on Thursday, 7 May 2015. The UK Parliamentary Counts commenced by 01.30 on Friday, 8 May 2015. The Local Borough Elections were held in the Sports Hall at the Rivermead from 12.00 noon on Friday, 8 May 2015.

4.7.3 Verification of all seven elections' ballot papers was required to occur simultaneously in order to ensure that each ballot paper was submitted to the correct electoral Count. "Rogue" ballot papers - ballot papers mistakenly placed by the elector in a ballot box not pertaining to the one they were voting in - is an occurrence that has to be constantly adjudicated for in the Verification procedures.

4.7.4 Legislation required that the Count proper for the UK Parliamentary Election commenced within 4 hours of the commencement of the Verification process. Reading ensured that this requirement was met by organising commencement of *the* separation of ballot papers by candidate at Mapledurham Ward Count Table in Reading East and Pangbourne Ward Count Table in Reading West. These are both very small wards and allowed for completion of the Verification quicker than other Ward tables. The UK Parliamentary Election Counts therefore successfully commenced in Reading by 01.30 on both of these Count Tables.

4.7.5 The UK Parliamentary Election Counts were completed by 07.30 on Friday, 8 May 2015.

4.7.6 The Electoral Commission has since confirmed that Reading Borough Council's Electoral Services Team has met all of its Electoral Commission Performance Standards in administering the 2015 elections. Given the complexity of the Verifications and Counts, I am satisfied that the timings of the declarations of results in both Count Halls ensured as speedy and as thorough Verifications and Counts as possible, also given the added complications of:

- cross-boundary polling stations;
- cross-boundary postal votes;
- the fact that there was seven elections to verify;
- the tiredness but efficiency of staff;
- the necessarily complicated Ballot Box Receipt procedures.

4.7.7 The Local Borough Election Counts commenced at 12.00 noon on Friday, 8 May 2015. Key staff were able to take a brief break, following the UK Parliamentary Election Counts and before the Local Borough Election Counts, whilst set-up staff ensured the Ward Count Tables were prepared in time for their return. The Local Borough Election Counts were completed and all Ward results declared by 14.20.

4.7.8 Detailed and thorough project planning and preparation from as early as June 2014, meant that the complicated electoral events progressed as smoothly and professionally as possible. The advanced project planning involved early site visits to the Count Centre, the IT requirements and specifications were discussed with Northgate IT and agreed in advance, the Count Spreadsheets were excellently designed and competently used by the Top Tables, ensuring accurate results. Count Table Folders and Top Table Folders were prepared immediately following Nominations week, once candidates' names had been confirmed. Additional halls, tables, chairs, crash barriers, storage rooms, security, refreshments, microphones, stationery, counting staff and floor plans and project planning arranged were arranged in detail as early as September 2014.

#### 4.8 Election Debriefs - IER Registration of new Electors and new Postal Voters

4.8.1 The Electoral Commission published a national report on the 2015 elections in July 2015. This stated that the 2015 Elections were well run and electors were able to participate either by voting in person at a polling station, appointing a proxy to cast a vote on their behalf, or by completing and returning a postal vote.

4.8.2 The Electoral Services Team is represented on the national Association of Electoral Administrators (AEA), which has produced its own debrief report following the 2015 Elections. This presents, in the view of election practitioners, a more challenging view of this year's elections, the first to be run following the move to Individual Electoral Registration (IER). The report's introduction states:

"Electoral administrators continue to deliver elections within an increasingly complex and challenging environment even when the odds are stacked against them. This was clearly the situation for the complex elections held on 7 May 2015 following the introduction of Individual Electoral Registration (IER). Electoral administrators and suppliers were stretched beyond belief during the 18 months before polling day with the introduction of IER and the complexities and bureaucracy it brought with it. Preparations for the elections were behind as a result of the impact of the introduction of IER and electoral administrators were exhausted before the election timetable even started. The AEA is acutely concerned about the issues identified in the report and would like them to be properly considered and addressed, the structures, processes, available resources and people delivering electoral registration and elections."

4.8.3 I agree with the AEA's comments regarding the more complex run-up to an election that will now always be required in order to meet the IER legislation. In the past, for example, it was routine for the Electoral Services team to move from registration activity to election activity after polling day - 6, (28 April 2015) that is, once the

register is confirmed and can be printed for use at Polling Stations. The more complex method of registering to vote under the IER system has meant that anyone who submitted a registration application, either online or by returning a completed registration form, on the last day to register (20 April 2015) had to remain off of the register until their details had been matched with the Department of Work & Pensions (DWP) database, through the national IER-DS computer link, before that applicant's details could officially be placed on the electoral register.

4.8.4 In turn, this meant that anyone with a postal vote application, in such circumstances, would not be entitled to a postal vote until they had been registered and until the statutory 5 day determination period had passed. Their postal ballot paper pack could not be posted out therefore until on or after 28 April (polling day - 6), in case any objections were received during the determination period. As a result, this had implications for electors going on holiday, or overseas electors who had registered on the last day but requested their postal vote to be sent abroad. This meant that in some cases there were only six days for the postal vote pack to be posted out abroad, completed and returned in order for it to be counted.

4.8.5 This is a national challenge. The AEA debrief report has also acknowledged that:

“The processing of checking IER documentary evidence and the attestation process up until day - 6 had significant staff resource implications at a time when at previous elections those staff would have moved off registration to prepare for the elections after day -12.”

4.8.6 One of the practical implications, experienced for the first time at the 2015 Elections, was that we had to delay the printing of the Polling Station Registers so that the hard copy registers were as up-to-date as possible when collected by the Presiding Officers. However, new electors were being added to the Registers after this, right up to Polling day, as DWP confirmation of individual electors was received. This required further registration updates after the printing of the Polling Station registers, which had to be securely emailed to the Presiding Officers, showing qualifying electors' names, addresses and poll numbers on them, in spreadsheet format, so that the newly registered electors would be enabled to vote in the 2015 Elections. The registration administration continued up to and during Polling Day, when it became necessary to phone the Presiding Officers if a new name needed to be added/deleted/amended to the register. Electors qualifying for a postal vote at this late stage had to have their entry on the Polling Station register noted that they were absent voters, not polling station voters.

4.8.7 In practice, this meant that any new postal vote application forms received and processed on or by the deadline date of 21 April 2015, (a date that is both 5 working days before the date of determination and the deadline for receipt of completed postal vote application forms, known as polling day -11) in respect of newly registered electors, or electors awaiting a positive match from the IER-DS database, did not have a postal vote pack automatically printed for them by Electoral Reform Services (ERS), our printers.

4.8.8 Once a person who had applied to register and to vote by post had confirmation from synchronisation with the IER - DS database that they could be registered under IER, and could therefore receive a postal vote, the Electoral Services Team were then obliged to make up a postal vote pack for them from blank stationery and then be responsible for ensuring that the postal vote pack could be delivered on time to the elector.

4.8.9 The activities described in the above three paragraphs were new this year, and the direct result of the introduction of IER. They required the adoption of additional resource- and time-consuming administrative procedures to keep on top of them. They also generated an increased number of enquiries and complaints from electors who did not understand, or appreciate, that they Council was prevented by the IER Regulations from processing their new registration or postal vote applications to a quicker timescale (as would have been the case in previous years).

4.8.10 As a consequence, the Electoral Services Team successfully arranged, and fully staffed in advance, a total of four Electoral Services Teams, in addition to the postal vote opening team and the postal vote hub:

- *The IER Registration Team* - [dealing with] *processing and approving* registration applications received before deadline but not yet matched under IER. This continued up to and including Polling Day. In total, Reading Electoral Services Team received, scanned and processed a total of 9,246 changes in registration, of which 4,405 were new registration applications, from 12 March 2015 until 20 April 2015. Approximately half of these were received in the last week before the final deadline. Processing by matching with the IER-DS database continued until Polling Day. In addition, a total of 648 new postal vote application forms were received, scanned and processed actually on the deadline day of 21 April 2015. Again, further processing of postal votes continued up to and during Polling Day, with the last postal vote packs being delivered by hand at 18.00 on Polling Day.
- *The Postal Vote Pack Creation and Delivery Team* - based both in the Civic Offices Reception booth and at Darwin Close. These teams worked closely together and created and delivered postal vote packs once the determination date had passed, and once new registrations were confirmed, then delivered them by hand to Reading addresses. They also undertook these tasks in respect of lost and spoiled replacement postal votes. This required queueing in the Post Office for stamps for the overseas electors' postal votes so that they could receive them in good time. They continually procured postal stamps and attended Post Offices in order to continue to send local postal vote packs. As Polling Day approached, these teams got into cars and delivered postal vote packs around Reading.
- *The Election Preparation Team* - based at Darwin Social Club. They prepared the ballot box documents and met and advised the Presiding Officers when they collected their ballot boxes. They prepared Ballot Box Receipt briefing notes, check lists and signs, Verification and Count Trays and Folders, Top Table Folders, Polling Station Inspector documents, Head Floor Controller and Floor Controller instructions, and Count Supervisor instructions. They received and distributed ballot papers and Corresponding Numbers Lists to Reading Borough, Wokingham (Reading East) and West Berkshire (Reading West).
- *The Emergency Proxy Application Team* - based at Floor 2, Darwin Close. One of my DRO's kindly supported this function, allowing legitimate approval of any claims. A total of 9 emergency proxy votes were allowed for Reading East and an additional 9 for Reading West for the 2015 Elections. A total of 19 were allowed in respect of the Local Borough Elections.

4.8.11 In addition, a Deputy Returning Officer (DRO) worked with the above teams to respond to complaints received which the Electoral Services Team passed on to me for

resolution. In total, I responded directly to 14 complaints about this year's election process, a surprisingly small number given the complexities of IER described above. I believe that this reflects the thorough and efficient project planning and operational methods employed by the Electoral Services Teams.

#### 4.9 Cross-boundary Issues

4.9.1 In running the Parliamentary elections in Reading East and Reading West, the Council had to work with the Electoral Services in Wokingham and West Berkshire. This was a common pattern across the country. The AEA debriefing report stated that:

“Parliamentary elections bring with them cross-boundary issues because a large number of parliamentary constituencies cross over local authority boundaries. The impact of cross boundaries includes the giving and taking in of electors from other local authority areas which can have implications for the administration of the elections, such as software systems, poll cards, postal votes, ballot papers, polling station staff appointments and training, delivery of ballot boxes and the count. Combined polls also add to the complexity of dealing with cross-boundary issues. EROs and ROs agree and adopt a contract or some form of memorandum of understanding in relation to the administration of cross-boundary elections and work closely together in partnership.”

4.9.2 Reading liaised closely with Wokingham and West Berkshire. We attended three meetings at Wokingham, with Berkshire colleagues; and hosted one meeting at Reading with Wokingham and West Berkshire colleagues, in advance of the elections. The issues faced were:

(1) The numbering of polling stations and ballot boxes.

The system of a prefix and number was agreed at an early stage between all Berkshire authorities and, in Reading, this system worked well with Wokingham. Unfortunately, West Berkshire changed the order of their ballot box numbering at a late stage in the process, which caused a delay in producing ballot box documents and Count Folder documents.

(2) The transfer of postal vote elector data between authorities.

All three authorities now use the same software system - Xpress. However, despite receiving assurances from the software company that the data could be transferred electronically with ease, this did not happen in practice, and we had to revert to the employment of data USBs, at the third attempt. The impact here was to delay the scanning of returned postal vote packs from Wokingham and West Berkshire postal voters. The pressure upon the postal vote hub was huge, but I am pleased to report that the excellent staff employed opening and scanning postal votes managed to cope in a calm and pragmatic manner with this challenge, and successfully scanned in 100% of postal vote statements in time to return the last scanned-in postal votes during the Count and before completion of the verification and counting of polling station and other postal vote ballot papers.

(3) Ballot Box Receipt from cross-boundary Presiding Officers.

Two ballot boxes from West Berkshire were late in delivery to Rivermead, which prevented this important stage of the count process, and the delivery of all ballot boxes to the Count Hall, before 02.00 on 8 May. This in turn impacted on the Reading West count as the postal vote packs received with the late ballot boxes

were late in being taken to Darwin Close for opening and scanning before being returned to the Count Hall for verification and counting.

(4) Polling Station Inspector visiting and collection of postal vote packs handed in at cross-boundary Polling Stations

Both Wokingham and West Berkshire had issued separate postal ballot packs for their local and parish elections. Where these packs were handed by electors into polling stations in Reading East or Reading West, they were returned with the ballot boxes to the Reading count at Rivermead, and separate arrangements had to be made with Wokingham and West Berkshire for them to collect them for inclusion in their local counts on the Friday.

#### 4.10 Ballot Box Receipt leading into the Verifications and Counts

4.10.1 The professionally focussed and detailed project planning in advance of Ballot Box Receipt meant that all ballot boxes were accounted for and all relevant documents collected. Specialist staff were used to move ballot boxes, on receipt, to the correct Ward Count Tables in the Count Halls as quickly as possible. As mentioned above, the late arrival of two West Berkshire ballot impacted upon the time of the final declaration of result in the Reading West Hall. The Reading East Hall had District and town council elections in Woodley and Earley to verify, which impacted upon the final declaration time in Reading East Hall.

4.10.2 The complications of the Verifications and Counts due to the high number of elections being dealt with meant that staff already tired from pre-Count duties were required to concentrate on more complicated organisational requirements. The use of experienced Head Controllers and Floor Controllers helped the proceedings progress smoothly. The two Top Tables staffed by experienced Auditors and Accountants meant that no re-counts were necessary and the results were accurate.

4.10.3 Reading successfully used its 'mini-count' system again this year. Reading uses the Ward names on its Count Tables so the Verification and Count exercises can be divided down into smaller parts, thus being able to constantly audit and double check the totals of ballot papers as the Verifications and Counts progress. A change in legislation this year allowed for the separation by candidate and counting of UK Parliamentary ballot papers to begin before all other ballot papers had been verified and this complemented Reading's mini-count system.

4.10.4 Preparation for the 2015 elections by the Electoral Services in its new location at Darwin Close, proved challenging for the first set of elections from the new location, however the issues raised seemed to be mostly logistical ones and I generally received feedback that, by the second year of being located at Darwin, with some changes, the location has proved itself to be election-worthy. In respect of access to stationery and equipment, the stores are now located closer to Electoral Services than they had been, so this was an advantage to the smooth transfer of polling booths, ballot boxes etc.

4.10.5 Changes that have been put into place for the planning of the 2016 Elections are:

- 2 polling staff training sessions to be held at the Civic Offices.
- Parking outside the Darwin Social Club to be better organised regarding the use of bollards.

#### 4.11 Staffing

- 4.11.1 For the May 2015 elections, the Elections and Electoral Services team had a permanent and temporary total establishment of 5.49 Full-time Equivalent staff plus up to seven casual "as and when" staff.
- 4.11.2 1400 jobs were successfully staffed by the Electoral Services Team, who had to commence the 2015 election staffing project early, in February 2015. The usual number of jobs for one local election is normally 500, so filling more than double this total number of jobs had been a complex and long-term task, successfully implemented.
- 4.11.3 The postal vote project was run in two parts. The opening of the postal vote statements and ballot papers project was run by two Legal Executives. The postal vote statement scanning verification project was run by a Senior Legal Executive with support from the Northgate IT Department and one Deputy Returning Officer. I was responsible for the final adjudication on postal vote statements.
- 4.11.4 I noted at the Electoral Services Debrief, held on 17 July 2015 that staff had performed highly successfully in very difficult and hectic circumstances. It was also noted that staff were generally tired during the Election period and especially once they had arrived at the Polling Day Verifications and Counts.
- 4.11.5 On Polling Day, Reading engaged a total of 75 Presiding Officers working within Reading Borough boundaries, broken down, as follows:
- |   |                       |
|---|-----------------------|
| Reading East within Reading Borough:              | 41 + 1 at Mapledurham |
| Reading West within Reading Borough:              | 33                    |
| Reading East within Wokingham Council boundaries: | 14                    |
| Reading West within West Berkshire boundaries:    | 21                    |
- The number of poll clerks employed was, as follows:
- |   |                       |
|---|-----------------------|
| Reading East within Reading Borough boundaries: | 89 + 3 at Mapledurham |
| Reading West within Reading Borough boundaries: | 79                    |
| Reading East within Wokingham boundaries:       | 34                    |
| Reading West within West Berkshire boundaries:  | 46                    |
- 4.11.6 We engaged 21 staff to open postal votes, at 9 sessions to receive the postal ballot packs. We had 5 staff plus 2 IT staff at 8 postal vote verification sessions. We had 140 staff involved in the UK Parliamentary Verifications and Counts, in various activities, together with Promotions and Rivermead staff. Please note - many of the staff involved in different processes were the same people.
- 4.11.7 I ran 6 training sessions for polling staff, and 3 for count staff. All people were paid for attending, and turnout was good. I chaired the training for the Top Table staff and Polling Station Inspectors. An experienced Presiding Officer ran a mop-up training session for polling station staff who could not attend other events.

4.12 Fraud

4.12.1 Concerns about fraud, in particular with postal votes, have been an issue in previous elections. This year there were no issues in relation to fraud, either perceived or actual.

#### 4.13 Website

4.13.1 The website uploads were received and uploaded successfully by the Promotions team. It worked well, with Notices of Election and Persons Nominated etc. plus declared results being published to deadline.

#### 4.14 Agents

4.14.1 I held a meeting with Agents before the start of the election period, to explain how I would be running the elections. The efficient planning of documents for the Agents' meeting well in advance worked well and this process will be used again in 2016.

4.14.2 Advanced preparation of Nomination Registers had meant that all agents received them before Nomination week commenced in Reading. Full Registers were made available from Civic Reception a week before the first due date of receipt of submitted Nominations forms.

#### 4.15 Poll Cards

4.15.1 A three-team process for poll-card proof-reading worked very well in 2015 and will be used again in 2016.

4.15.2 The Electoral Commission had informed Reading that we achieved its Performance Standard in respect of the poll card issue for 2015. Poll cards were combined and were issued in early April 2015. Reading Borough Council issued its own poll cards and the cross-boundary authorities issued their own poll cards.

#### 4.16 Nominations Processes

4.16.1 The Electoral Commission had informed Reading that it had achieved its Performance Standard in respect of the Nominations processes for 2015.

4.16.2 The Nominations week was hectic, given that Nominations were being received for the Local Borough Election wards, Reading East and Reading West constituencies. Electoral Services had project planned the Nomination period by allocating a team to input and check Nominations and an additional team to meet with Agents and liaise between the Inputting Team and Agents. Two DROs in addition to myself checked and proof read all Nominations, ensuring the correct documentation and complete forms were received in respect of each set of Nomination papers. Again, Reading was successful with its Nominations processes and procedures.

#### 4.17 Ballot Paper Proof Reading

4.17.1 The now established three team system of proof-reading ballot papers worked excellently with the DRO approval and my final approval as Returning Officer being achieved in situ, at Darwin Close.

4.17.2 Reading's party emblems were correct on the ballot papers we submitted to our printers, as they were the most up-to-date emblems uploaded to the Electoral

Commission website, thanks to the Reading Nominations Inputting Team. Reading directly accessed the party emblems from the Electoral Commission website for Reading's ballot papers. A national delay occurred in printing ballot papers because other authorities had not used the most up-to-date emblems, which the Electoral Commission had uploaded to its website as late as the day before Nominations began. This delay set back the date of receipt of ballot papers in Reading; however, by using good communication and liaison with the printers, enough staffing was available to receive and sort the ballot papers when they did finally arrive on May Day, Monday 4 May 2015.

#### 4.18 Telephone Contact and the Call Centre

4.18.1 The telephone call statistics were fully monitored. The following were worth noting:

- 944 calls were received directly by the Call Centre on Polling Day, with constant support of the Electoral Services Team, who were answering calls all day until 22.00, close of poll.
- 97.7% of the calls were answered within an average of 15 seconds.
- The majority of calls were received between 09.00 and 19.00.

4.18.2 The Electoral Services Team fully staffed their telephones from 06.00 until 20.00 on Polling Day, and team members were continually available on their mobile phones during the Verifications and Counts. An additional agent was located within the Electoral Services Team who was a highly experienced Presiding Officer, to deal with Presiding Officer queries. In the run-up to Polling Day, two additional agents in situ in the Electoral Services Team alleviated the constant pressure of working on IER registration and taking telephone calls at the same time.

4.18.3 It was acknowledged at the Electoral Services Debrief that the Call Centre and Electoral Services Teams did an excellent job answering calls. Calls were also answered directly by the Polling Station Inspectors and the Electoral Services Teams at the Civic and Count venues.

### 5. 2016 ELECTIONS

#### 5.1 Local and Police Commissioner Elections - 5 May 2016

5.1.1 The next Local Borough Elections are due to be held on 5 May 2016 and will include all of Reading's 16 wards. The Local Borough Elections will be run as usual with the "first past the post" being the candidate who is elected, per Ward.

5.1.2 In addition there will be a Police and Crime Commissioner Election held on the same date. The Police and Crime Commissioner Election for Reading will be held in the Thames Valley Police Area and will be run under the Supplementary Vote (SV) system, with two columns on the ballot paper and two counts being held. The successful candidate will have been the lead candidate in both counts, achieving the most votes in the first and supplementary columns on the ballot paper.

5.1.3 The Electoral Commission, in its Election Debrief report, stated that Polling stations in England, Scotland and Wales will be required to provide proof of voters' identity before being issued with a ballot paper and allowed to vote, as has been required in Northern Ireland since 2002. The Electoral Commission is continuing to develop detailed

proposals and costings for implementing an identification scheme in time for the May 2019 elections, and expect to publish their proposals by the end of 2015.

## 5.2 Referendum on the UK's membership of the European Union

5.2.1 The Government has confirmed that the EU referendum will not be held on the same day as the May 2016 polls, although the referendum must take place no later than 31 December 2017. The Electoral Commission has reported that significant planning is underway to ensure that the referendum is delivered and regulated effectively and that voters receive a consistently good service wherever they happen to live.

5.2.2 In the 2015 Queen's Speech, the Government set out its intention to abolish the current 15 year time limit on the voting rights of British citizens living overseas for UK Parliamentary and European Parliamentary elections. The UK Government also said that it would, 'make it easier for overseas electors to cast their votes in time to be counted'.

## 6. 2015 REGISTRATION PROCESS - 2016 REGISTER

### 6.1 Individual Electoral Registration (IER)

6.1.1 By law, the transition to Individual Electoral Registration (IER) in England, Scotland and Wales, which began in summer 2014, was scheduled to end with publication of the revised electoral registers in December 2016. At this point, any entries for electors who are not registered individually - that is, those who have not either been confirmed or successfully made individual applications to register to vote - would be removed from the registers.

6.1.2 The legislation allowed the Government to make an Order (during a specified three-month period between June and August 2015) which would end the transition 12 months earlier, in December 2015. A statutory instrument containing such an Order would not need to be debated by the UK Parliament, but could be annulled by a resolution of either House of Parliament.

6.1.3 The Government has followed this process, and issued the *Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 (Transitional Provisions) Order 2015*, in July 2015. As a consequence, the IER transitional arrangement will end with the publication of the 2016 electoral register, on 1 December 2015, and electors who have not registered to vote under IER by the end of this autumn's annual canvass will not be included in the 2016 Register. Electors will be able to register until mid to late April 2016.

6.1.4 As a separate exercise, in January 2016 the personal indicators will again be refreshed for postal voters who have had a postal vote for five years. Postal voters will be asked to re-submit their signatures and dates of birth. Any postal voter not responding after the required two reminders will have their postal vote deleted.

### 6.2 Household Notification Letters

6.2.1 The Electoral Commission have identified sending a letter to all households listing who was registered to vote at that particular address as a key activity which could contribute to helping Returning Officers ensure that their registers were as accurate and complete as possible ahead of the May 2015 Elections. This 'household notification letter' (HNL) showed who was registered to vote at that address and prompted anyone

who was not yet registered to do so. Reading issued its HNLs in February 2015. It is likely that the Electoral Commission will recommend that this exercise is repeated in 2016, in advance of the May 2016 Elections.

### 6.3 2015 Annual Canvass

#### Timetable

- 6.3.1 The 2015 annual electoral registration canvass started on 24 July 2015, and ended on 20 November 2015. The 2015 canvass is to proceed under Individual Electoral Registration (IER). Household Enquiry Forms (HEFs) were sent out to 63,000 households in Reading, landing on doormats on or around 24 July 2015. The total number of responses received, either as a completed HEF or an on-line registration, as at 13<sup>th</sup> November 2015 totalled 60,443.
- 6.3.2 The new (2016) register will be published on 1 December 2015. Unlike the 2014 canvass, when 70% of Reading electors were automatically re-registered successfully against the IER-DS database, in 2015 all households for the 2015 canvass have been sent, and need to respond to, their Household Enquiry Forms. These were followed up with two reminders which were delivered and encouraged to complete by door to door canvassers. A further reminder HEF was sent for completion. Any additional or new residents noted on a completed HEF form were sent an Invitation to Register (ITR) letter (which is the registration form). Two reminders for non-responses to ITRs were also sent. At all points in the canvass, people were encouraged to register on-line. If no responses to HEFs were received at 31 October 2015, all electors were sent an ITR, for completion.
- 6.3.3 As explained below, in the 2015 canvass the Electoral Services Team will be without the advantage of automatic matching. It was also unlikely that University students will register individually, in particular those living in Halls of Residence where, in previous canvasses, the University registered them en bloc. Therefore it is unlikely that the 92.01% registration percentage achieved in 2014 will be matched. I currently estimate that, in spite of all efforts undertaken, as listed in this report, the 2015 registration percentage will again drop, to an estimate of approximately 89%.
- 6.3.4 The process of registering a person under IER requires the person's full names, address, National Insurance Number and date of birth. If there is no match, evidence is required.
- 6.3.5 As mentioned above upon publication of the register in 2014, the total percentage registered was 92.01%. This was a drop in the registration percentage from previous years. Table 5 below sets out the response rates for the previous four years:

Table 5

	End of canvass %
2014/15	92.01
2013/14	99.98
2012	99.88
2011	99.03

- 6.3.6 There are currently 64,263 properties currently on the Reading electoral register, which are not classified as void properties.

#### Door-to-Door Canvassing

- 6.3.7 Reading uses door-to-door canvassing to try to target the non-responding households. The first reminder HEFs were delivered to the Electoral Services office at 2-4 Darwin Close on 14 August 2015. Door-to-door canvassers attended training briefings and collected their boxes of HEFs. The first teams commenced on the weekend of 22/23 August 2015. Their last completed and returned forms will be due to be returned to the Electoral Services office by Friday, 20 November 2015: a total of up to 14 weeks. There are 22 teams of 2 undertaking the canvassing in 2015. They will cover the whole Borough.
- 6.3.8 In addition we have specialist canvasser teams dealing with student private property, Nursing Homes and requests for evidence in order to confirm registration that have not yet received a response.

#### Attainers - Rising Voters

- 6.3.9 Attainers are rising voters aged 16 and 17. Their details, along with all electors, must be matched with the IER-DS database in order to appear on the register. The Electoral Services Team will endeavour to have as many attainer details as possible entered on the register but, like students, they will need to register individually in order to be entered upon the register.

#### Promoting Registration

- 6.3.10 Electoral Services continues to promote participation in the democratic process in the following ways:
- Production of business cards encouraging registration on line circulated to all on the Promotion Team's circulation list (all RBC venues, libraries, leisure centres etc)
  - A press release to coincide with milestones in the Canvass
  - Targeted registration of university students
  - Posters printed in Polish and Urdu delivered to local shops and community centres
  - Door-to-door canvassers have translation booklets with them to enable a better understanding of the process
  - Door-to-door canvassers feedback about their experiences and an evaluation process follows to ensure lessons are learned
- 6.3.11 As in previous years, in 2014 Reading will be proactive in contacting Reading University and the Students' Union. Initiatives include:
- Putting information about electoral registration on the big screen in the Students' Union building
  - Including information about electoral registration in the Students Union newsletter
  - Putting the information on the University student home page
  - Encouragement to register on-line business cards inserted into Freshers' starter packs upon commencement at the University of Reading

- Including information about registration on the Students' Union web page
- Attendance at the Freshers' Fayre to promote personal registration by students

6.3.12 The timetable for the 2015 annual canvass and supporting promotional campaign is shown in the chart under. As mentioned above, in advance of the commencement of the 2015 annual canvass, given the uncertainty over when the IER transition period would end nationally, the Electoral Services Team prioritised action to reduce the number of unconfirmed electors in advance of the commencement of the canvass:

- Council Tax data was compared with return to sender communications and a review undertaken of approximately 5,000 unconfirmed elector details
- Where their personal indicators did not match, and they had not returned the usual completed forms, they were sent a letter stating that their details would be deleted from the register if no response was made to the review letter. In addition, non-responders to evidence request communications had specialist door to door canvassers knock on their doors in order to receive the requested evidence.

#### Timetable - 2015 Canvass

Date	Activity	Comment
24 July	Send out registration forms to all households	63,413 sent
24 July	First press release regarding the canvass.  Uploading of a feature on the home page of the website <a href="http://beta.reading.gov.uk/">http://beta.reading.gov.uk/</a>  Links tweeted to the above piece. Tailored messaging on twitter and Facebook to target young people.  Further information regarding registration to vote on the Electoral page of the Reading website.	Reading has 11,000 followers on twitter.  Effective publicity tool.
W/C 17 August	Door to Door canvasser briefings and collection of HEF2s to take to properties. (1 <sup>st</sup> reminder).	
W/C 17 August	2 <sup>nd</sup> press release. Business cards "Do you want to register to vote?" to be circulated to doctors' surgeries etc. Business cards to be included in student starter packs.	Encouragement to Register. Publicity Strategy. <a href="http://www.gov.uk/register-to-vote">www.gov.uk/register-to-vote</a> .
22 September	HEF3s and ITR2s to arrive at Electoral Services offices. To be distributed to door to door canvassers for further door knocking. (2 <sup>nd</sup> reminder).  Tweet, Facebook and website updates.	
2 November	All non-responders to HEFs to be sent ITRs. ITRs to all students in halls.	
18 October	Start of door-to-door canvassing - delivering 2 <sup>nd</sup> reminder letter	

20 Nov 2015	End of door-to-door canvass	
1 December 2015	End of Annual Canvass. Publication of new Electoral Register.	

- 6.3.13 Following the end of the canvass, we will now be obliged to delete all electors from the register who are unconfirmed under IER, prior to the publication of the new register on 1 December 2015. We will then write (again) to each of the deleted electors to explain the action taken, and send them a new registration form so that they can get themselves back onto the electoral register.

#### Schools Elections

- 6.3.14 As Reading schools will hold their annual elections in October/November 2015, and with support from Electoral Services. The team continues to liaise regularly with the Youth Parliament regarding the electoral process.

#### 6.4 Manual and Automatic Data-Matching

- 6.4.1 The National Fraud Initiative (NFI) is a separate Government initiative to match data across different data bases held by public authorities, to identify and eradicate fraud. It has been run by the Audit Commission since 1996. The Serious Crime Act 2007 gave the Commission powers to extend the NFI to central government and the private sector and this includes electoral registration data. During the last canvass automatic data-matching occurred with the NFI and Electoral Services databases. It is planned for the data-matching to happen again during the current canvass.

- 6.4.2 The Electoral Services database is also routinely matched with the Council Tax database (Academy). This exercise happened again during the current canvass.

- 6.4.3 IER legislation requires that two forms of evidence are necessary before an elector is deleted from the register, so the Electoral Services Team routinely consult with the Academy database before placing an elector in pending delete work queue on the database.

### 7. THE CITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT DEVOLUTION BILL

Clause 20 of the Bill introduces an amendment to section 2 of the Representation of the People Act 1983: 16 year olds will fall within the definition of 'local government electors', and so will be entitled to vote in local government elections.

### 8. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

- 8.1 The electoral registration process, and elections, support the promotion of the participation of Reading people in local democracy.

### 9. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

- 9.1 I set out above the communications plan supporting the 2015 IER canvass.

### 10. EQUALITY IMPACT IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 Under the Equality Act 2010, Section 149, a public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to—

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
- advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
- foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

10.2 In this regard you **must** consider whether the decision will or could have a differential impact on: racial groups; gender; people with disabilities; people of a particular sexual orientation; people due to their age; people due to their religious belief.

10.3 In terms of the project planning for the elections, detailed consideration was given to access to the electoral process and polling stations, as set out in para. 4.5 above. For the annual canvass, posters have been printed in Polish and Urdu delivered to local shops and community centres; and the door-to-door canvassers have translation booklets with them to enable a better understanding of the process.

## 11. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

11.1 The electoral registration process is prescribed by the Representation of the People Act 1983, in particular Sections 8-17. Section 10 governs the maintenance of registers and the annual canvass. The ERO is required to carry out an annual canvass in order to ensure that the electoral register is as accurate and up-to-date as possible. All householders have a duty to complete and return the electoral registration form or register directly on-line: [www.gov.uk/register-to-vote](http://www.gov.uk/register-to-vote).

11.2 Section 10(A) - and Regulations 33 and 34 - provide for the carry forward and removal of names from the register. Where there is the inability to confirm a registration, during the annual canvass, that a registered elector was resident at an address, because the HEF or ITR was not returned or because s/he has obtained insufficient other information to indicate residence, then the ERO normally used to carry forward that elector's entry on the electoral register until the publication of the annual register following the next publication of the annual register. This means that where a canvass form was not returned during both the 2014 and 2015 canvass periods any relevant electors would cease to be registered after the completion of the 2015 canvass but not before. IER legislation dictates that once the transitional period has been completed any unconfirmed electors must be deleted from the register upon publication. As indicated above, the date of completion of the transition period was confirmed in August 2015. Please see paragraph 11.5 under.

11.3 The Electoral Registration Act placed a duty on the ERO to take all necessary steps to ensure that the electoral register is as complete and accurate as possible. Section 12(5)(b) of the Act has also given the ERO the power to determine that an elector is not entitled to be registered in respect of an address, or that the elector has ceased to be resident at the address, or has otherwise ceased to satisfy the conditions for registration. Under IER legislation, the elector becomes under review and a letter sent to them to this effect. If no further indication is received that the elector is resident, their details are deleted from the electoral register.

11.4 Individual Electoral Registration was introduced by the Electoral Registration & Administration Act 2013, and associated Regulation, which amended the Representation of the People Regulations. Under the Electoral Registration (Disclosure of Electoral Registers) Regulations 2013:

- there will be no automatic removal of electors from the electoral register in the run-up to the 2015 elections; but
- an absent voter must be registered under IER in order to keep their absent vote in 2015.

11.5 As explained in para. 6.1.3 above, under the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 (Transitional Provisions) Order 2015, issued in July 2015, the IER transition period will end on 1 December 2015. Therefore electors on the current register who have not registered under IER will be deleted from the new (2016) register.

## 12. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

12.1 The 2016/17 estimate for electoral registration is £296,400, and the estimate for elections is £98,000, giving a total budget for electoral administration of £394,400. In addition, IER funding will need to be claimed in 2016/17. In 2015/16 a direct grant from the Cabinet Office was received for: £84,000. Funding in respect of the upcoming 2016 Elections is also due. The draft maximum recoverable amount in respect of the Police and Crime Commissioner Election is currently: £132,500.

12.2 In 2015/16 the total cost of the door-to-door canvass was: £41,000. In 2013/14, the total cost of the door- to-door canvass was £46,242. In 2012, the total cost of the door-to-door canvass was £37,631. Payment continues to be by results: £2.00 per team for each completed form returned.

12.3 The total budget for the door-to-door canvass in 2014/15 and 2013/14 was the same as in 2010, that is, £50,000, plus £56,000 for postage. Additional IER funding has been correctly utilised to meet the increased costs of additional printing and postage since the introduction of IER in June 2014. The cost of the press activity was approximately £4,000 in 2013, £5,000 in 2014 and £6,000 in 2015.

12.4 Deposits of £500 per candidate were required in order to be nominated in the UK Parliamentary Elections. All deposits were collected and forfeited from the candidate if they did not receive 5% of the vote. All forfeited deposits were forwarded to the Electoral Commission.

12.5 Agents of all candidates in the UK Parliamentary and Local Borough Elections submitted their expenses claims by due deadline.

## 13. BACKGROUND PAPERS

2015 Debrief reports from the Electoral Commission, the Association of Electoral Administrators and Reading Borough Council Electoral Services.

### IER Further information

Electors are steered towards the register on line option and business cards to this effect are distributed. [www.gov.uk/register-to-vote](http://www.gov.uk/register-to-vote). If they would like to know more about the changes to the electoral registration system they are encouraged to visit the Your vote matters on Gov website.