

# Briefing

# The Electoral Commission

## The Electoral Registers – December 2015

Tuesday 8 December 2015

### Overview

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On 1 December 2015, Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) across England, Wales and Scotland will have revised their electoral registers following the conclusion of the annual canvass and the end of the transition to Individual Electoral Registration (IER).

EROs were required by law to revise the registers by 1 December 2015 except in cases where there had been a Parliamentary or local authority by-election in their area since 1 July 2015, in which case they may choose to delay publication until up to 1 February 2016.

The Commission will analyse the 1 December registers as the information becomes available from each of the EROs and will publish its initial findings to Parliament as quickly as possible after 1 February next year. This briefing sets out what will now happen to improve the completeness and accuracy of the electoral registers, focussing in particular on the activity planned before 18 April 2016 - the registration deadline for participating in the important range of elections scheduled across the UK for next May. **At the end of this briefing we have included ideas for how you can help.**

Individual Electoral Registration will help improve the security of our electoral system against electoral fraud; however, this does not mean that we can relax our vigilance against such criminal activity. This briefing also sets out the work that EROs, the Police and the Electoral Commission are doing to prevent, investigate and prosecute fraud.

The Commission will issue further briefings before the elections in May 2016 to set out the detail of its registration campaign plans and with further information on how you can get involved to support this work in the New Year.

## The end of the transition to IER

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On 27 October 2015, a Government Order to bring forward the end of the move to Individual Electoral Registration (IER) from December 2016 to December 2015 was passed in the House of Lords.

The Commission [published a statement](#) at the time, highlighting that the Commission's focus would now be on ensuring that as many people as possible are registered before the important set of polls scheduled for May 2016.

The Commission had previously reported that the electoral registers used in May 2015 contained 1.9 million entries that were being retained under the transitional arrangements in place for the move to IER from the previous household system.

However, it is anticipated that the annual canvass activity that was undertaken by Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) between July and November this year will have significantly reduced this figure, although the scale of this will not be known until the Commission reports on the 2015 canvass and the size of the registers, which it plans to do as quickly as possible after 1 February next year. Subsequently we will conduct a further study on the accuracy and completeness of the December 2015 registers that will be published in summer 2016. This report will give us a more detailed picture of the registers, allowing us to see whether certain groups have been more affected by the end of the transition than others. This will also allow us to better identify and target any under-represented groups for future public awareness work

## What happens now?

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Any entry on the electoral register that had yet to be confirmed and moved onto the IER registers by 1 December 2015 will have been removed.

EROs will continue to work up until the May 2016 polls to ensure their registers are as accurate and complete as possible and that any elector who may have been taken off the register as a result of this decision is contacted and encouraged to re-register. The Commission will be supporting this work and will be working with all EROs to assist with planning to target the groups that are most likely to be missing from the registers alongside our own dedicated plans to ensure that as many people as possible are registered.

The 1 December registers will also be used to inform the upcoming review of Parliamentary boundaries. The reviews will be conducted by each of the respective Boundary Commissions across the UK. The Electoral Commission has no role in the creation of boundaries.

## Encouraging voter registration ahead of May 2016 polls

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Our work to encourage voter registration starts now and we are already working on plans to promote the registration message further including a national campaign across the UK ahead of the May 2016 polls.

We intend to run a mass-media public awareness campaign across a mix of TV, digital and social media, and we will be providing template resources and tools for EROs and ROs to use locally as part of their public engagement work. The main campaign will launch in Monday 14 March with advertising appearing on digital channels from Monday 1 February. We will keep you up to date with our plans as they progress. However there is some activity that can be started now to encourage voter registration and at the end of this briefing we have supplied some practical ideas on how to do this.

The national campaign will target all adults, with a focus on groups that our research has identified as being less likely to be registered to vote, such as people who have recently moved home, people who rent their home, students, young people, and people from some black and minority ethnic communities.

Some of this work is being undertaken in partnership with organisations and private companies that represent these communities or have a reach into them.

Following the Government's announcement to bring forward the end of the transition to IER, the Commission has also planned to conduct additional "booster" activity targeted directly at groups more likely to have been affected by the transition to IER such as home movers and students. We hope to build on the work we did with NUS, the Association of Colleges, Universities UK and other partner organisations before the General Election this year to get the registration message out.

## The Household Notification Letter (HNL)

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As part of our work supporting EROs to promote voter registration, we have issued guidance to EROs which clearly highlights that the period leading up to the May 2016 polls provides an opportunity to take steps to maximise the number of people included on the electoral registers by:

- encouraging those people missing from the register to apply
- checking that there are no inaccurate entries in your register

This 'household notification letter' should ask those who live at the address to:

- register to vote if their name is not included on the letter, emphasising the ability to register online
- notify the ERO if any information on the letter is incorrect

We are encouraging all EROs to use Household notification letters (HNLs), which show who is registered to vote at that particular address. We think using the HNL

has a number of clear benefits, all of which can contribute to helping EROs to ensure that their registers are as accurate and complete as possible ahead of the May polls:

- It will be a useful tool for prompting those who have not registered yet to do so.
- It will help to pick up those who have recently moved within or into the registration area.
- It will give residents an opportunity to check their details on the register are accurate.

## Electoral fraud

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The Electoral Commission has always taken the risk of electoral fraud extremely seriously. Although cases of proven electoral fraud are thankfully rare in the UK, any fraud has the potential not only to affect individual voters but also to damage wider public confidence in elections.

On 13 August 2015, the Government announced that Sir Eric Pickles, would be holding a review of electoral fraud as part of his role as Anti-Corruption Champion. We welcomed the review and on 1 October 2015 we submitted our written evidence, which we also published on our [website](#).

We have also now published our proposals for a scheme that would require all voters at polling stations to show photographic identification bringing the rest of the UK in line with the position in Northern Ireland. [You can view the report here](#).

## Our work in this area ahead of May 2016 polls

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We work proactively with Returning Officers, police authorities, parties and campaigners to offer practical advice and assistance in preventing and detecting fraud as far as we are able to.

The police are responsible for investigating allegations of electoral fraud and we work closely with both the police and electoral administrators throughout the year. Through our work we have identified 18 areas of the country which are more likely to see allegations of electoral fraud and we work with the police to help ensure there is extra vigilance in these areas<sup>1</sup>. We will continue to work with both the police and electoral administrators in the run up to the May 2016 elections to make sure that plans are in place that represent an effective response to tackle the risk of fraud.

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<sup>1</sup> Birmingham, Bradford, Blackburn with Darwen, Burnley, Calderdale, Coventry, Derby, Hyndburn, Kirklees, Oldham, Pendle, Peterborough, Slough, Tower Hamlets, Walsall, Woking, Luton, Bristol

We will also continue to make sure that similar plans are in place across the rest of the UK, from issuing joint guidance with the College of Policing to developing tools for administrators to use locally to raise awareness of fraud and help them tackle it. Before the General Election last May, we also worked in partnership with Crime Stoppers to raise awareness amongst the public about how they could report concerns about fraud anonymously and this is something that we will be doing again ahead of the polls in May 2016.

We also work with the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC), Police Scotland and the Police Service of Northern Ireland, to collect and publish an annual summary of cases of alleged electoral fraud which we publish on our website.

## The role of political parties and candidates

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The evidence shows that in most instances when electoral fraud is attempted, or committed, it is by candidates and their supporters – voters are the victims. This is demonstrated through our collection of fraud data which continually shows the highest number of alleged cases relate to campaigning, rather than voting.

Parties from across the political spectrum have seen electoral fraud cases involving their candidates or supporters: it is not something which is confined to small or local parties.

We already work with political parties to help them ensure their candidates and supporters campaign within the law. We publish and regularly update a code of conduct setting out what is, and is not, acceptable behaviour by campaigners, and we work with Returning Officers to remind candidates from all parties (and independents) of their responsibilities.

We have also recently written to all of the declared candidates standing for London Mayor inviting them to publically commit to the Code of Conduct. Those who agree will be listed on our website showing voters that they are committed to tackling unacceptable campaigning behaviour.

## Questions for your local ERO

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Should you wish to get more involved in electoral registration or to find out what is happening in your area to combat fraud, contacting your local ERO (based at your local authority) could be a useful next step. You may want to ask your local ERO(s) about their engagement strategies, fraud prevention and registration plans.

### **How activity is being targeted in your area**

- Please talk me through your public engagement strategy and registration plan.
- What are the key stages of the work you are doing between now and May 2016 to engage with existing and new electors, and when are they taking place?
- How do you plan to target attainments to maximise the number of eligible 16 and 17 year olds included on the electoral register?

- Do you have sufficient resources to deliver your plans effectively, including carrying out personal visits where necessary?
- How can I support your work using my local intelligence and networks?
- How can I stay updated on registration activity in my area?
- How are you using local records to identify and target new electors?
- What plans do you have in place to detect and prevent fraud, including personation on polling day?
- How do you work with the police locally to ensure that cases are properly identified and, if needed, investigated?
- Do you feel that you get the co-operation and support that you need from the police to detect and prevent electoral fraud?

## Other ways you can help

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As well as working with your local ERO there are some very practical steps you and your offices can take to support the campaign and increase the number of people registered to vote.

### **Below are five ideas for how you and your offices can get involved:**

- **Add a link to your website** - Something as simple as adding a link to the online registration page to your website is a good way of encouraging your constituents to register.
- **Include an e-mail banner** – Adding an e-banner with a link to the online registration page to your e-mails is a good way to raise awareness. This can be set up in your automated responses, for example.
- **Put up a poster** - It is quick and easy to put up a poster in your constituency office or other advice surgery venues. Posters - including those tailored at audiences such as students and home-movers - can be downloaded from our website.
- **Raise at local meetings** – It is also worth highlighting registration through any forums or partnerships that meet in your local community. For example, you could add registering to vote as an item on a future agenda
- **Include an article in your e-newsletter** – Information on registration could be dropped into an e-bulletin or newsletter.
- **Sign up to the Commission's Code of Conduct for Campaigners** – our voluntary code helps campaigners to understand acceptable campaigning practices.

We have developed a variety of resources to help promote voter registration that are available to download from our [website here](#).

In addition to this activity, National Voter Registration Day will take place in early February 2016. We will be supporting the drive to get more young people registered to vote and we hope that you will also take part. We will be updating our website with further resources specifically tailored to help others to support National Voter Registration Day alongside all our other resources in the New Year.

It is also important to ensure that voters are registered in time to take part in the referendum on the UK's membership of the European Union, including British citizens overseas who are eligible to take part.

As part of our overall public awareness plans, we will be running a dedicated day of activity targeting overseas voters. We are planning to build on the success of the last Overseas Voter Registration Day that we held ahead of the 2015 UK Parliamentary general election. This is an additional area where your support would be appreciated and we will announce a date for this, once the date of the referendum is known.

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For further information, please contact **Megan Phillips** in our public affairs team on 020 7271 0704 or [mphillips@electoralcommission.org.uk](mailto:mphillips@electoralcommission.org.uk)