

Analysis of electoral registration data for Great Britain

Electoral registration in 2013: the last household canvass

June 2014

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1 Summary

1.1 In March 2013, the Commission published a report on [preparedness for Individual Electoral Registration](#) (IER) which recognised that while significant progress had been made, there was still more work to be done to prepare for the start of the transition.

1.2 Since then, the Government have addressed our outstanding concerns and have confirmed to Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) that the required contingency arrangements and IT systems are in place, and have made EROs aware of the technical support that will be available to them.

1.3 As the transition to IER is now under way in England and Wales (and will commence from 19 September 2014 in Scotland), the focus turns to ensuring that it is delivered effectively in practice. EROs have already undertaken significant work to prepare for the transition and, as we reported in March, all have the necessary strategies and plans in place to be prepared to meet the challenges of IER in their local area.

1.4 Monitoring the performance of EROs will continue throughout the transition. In addition to collecting data from all EROs at key points in the process, we will be working closely with those EROs we have identified as likely to need more support to be able to deliver the transition effectively to ensure they are delivering their engagement strategies and keeping their plans under review, making sure they remain appropriate.

1.5 EROs' data will demonstrate how effectively the implementation of IER as a whole is being delivered, and will help the Commission to answer key questions at three separate points during the transition:

- Following conclusion of **the confirmation process** we will be able to identify the local authorities and individual electoral wards which have the lowest rates of matched electors and are therefore the immediate pressure points. We will also know the extent of postal voters who have failed to match and so are at risk of losing their absent vote at the UK General Election in May 2015.
- After the conclusion of **the write-out and 2014 canvass**, we will know, at a local authority level, the numbers of electors on the registers who have not been confirmed and have not yet registered individually.
- In **June 2015**, we will report on our assessment of the effectiveness of the transition up to that point, with a view to informing the Ministerial decision, which will need to be taken very soon after the UK General Election in May 2015, on whether to bring the end point for IER transition forward from the current date in December 2016 to December 2015. Our assessment will be underpinned by a clear understanding of what the effect on the registers would be of ending the transition in December

2015 and therefore removing those electors not yet registered individually.

2013 canvass

1.6 In preparation for IER and to reduce the period of time between the completion of the canvass and the start of confirmation,¹ the 2013 canvass was postponed so that it began in October 2013, and EROs were required to publish their revised registers by 17 February 2014 in England and by 10 March 2014 in Scotland and Wales. The more accurate and complete the registers are before confirmation, the greater the number of electors who we expect will be confirmed as individually registered without needing to do anything further. This will in turn help to reduce the number of electors that EROs will need to follow up with and invite to register individually.

1.7 We asked all EROs following conclusion of the canvass to provide us with data which demonstrates the outcomes of the canvass in their area and which enables us to make a better-informed assessment of each ERO's performance against our household registration performance standards.

1.8 Further to the report we published in March 2014, we have now concluded our analysis of the detailed canvass data and based on these checks we have updated our March assessments of performance, in particular in relation to carrying out house-to-house enquiries.

1.9 The data indicates that the key outcomes from the canvass were similar to those recorded in previous years:

- The overall level of response to the canvass was 94% (i.e. 94% of all households had their details confirmed or changed via one of the available response channels). Since 2007, the overall response rate has been between 92% and 94%.
- The percentage of electors carried forward at the conclusion of this canvass was lower than that recorded in any year since 2007.² Overall, 2.7% of entries (approximately 1.2 million) on the February and March 2014 registers were retained by carry forward. This compares to between 3.2% and 4.2% in previous years.

1.10 The ability for EROs to carry electors forward is a power, not a duty. It is for each individual ERO to decide whether to exercise that power at the end of

¹ 'Confirmation' is the name for the first stage in the transition – a data-matching exercise which will compare existing electors' details with the details held on the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) database. Where an existing elector's details are 'confirmed', that person will be individually registered by the ERO and will not need to take any further steps.

² The 'carry forward' is a mechanism which enables EROs to retain entries of individuals who has have not responded to the canvass but where the ERO does not have sufficient information to remove the electors currently registered at an address.

the annual canvass. EROs will make their decision based on their individual, local circumstances, and in reaching this need to balance off the competing risks of retaining electors about whom they have no information to confirm they are still resident and so may no longer be eligible to be registered at that address, and removing electors who are in fact still eligible, meaning they are potentially disenfranchised.

1.11 The decline in the use of carry forward on conclusion of the 2013 delayed canvass can be explained by a decision by some EROs not to exercise their power to carry forward entries in preparation for the transition to IER, when electors who are currently on the register but have been carried forward, will need to go through a separate process in order to remain registered and cannot be automatically transferred to the new IER register following confirmation.

1.12 The decisions taken by EROs at the end of the 2013 canvass will change the nature but not the scale of the challenge facing them in the transition to IER. In each case, while the administration process will vary, they will still need to carry out work to target all individuals in their area who are not registered individually, and these individuals will all need to take some action in order to be included on the revised register published on the conclusion of the 2014 canvass.

1.13 The absolute number of entries on the UK registers has declined slightly. However, the data indicates that the canvass was overall well run, and the decline can be largely attributed to the lower level of electors carried forward by EROs. Indeed, if the level of carried forward electors had been within the range recorded in previous years, there would not have been a decline in the overall numbers.

1.14 Our analysis of the data has also identified that in addition to the 5 EROs who reported to us that they did not meet the house-to-house enquiry standard in 2013, there are in fact a further 17 EROs who did not ensure that during 2013 all non-responding properties were canvassed in person.

1.15 Although the precise use of house-to-house enquiries under IER will be different than under the household registration system – particularly in the unique circumstances of the 2014 write-out and canvass period – it is a key area of ERO performance which will continue to be of significant importance in ensuring registers are as accurate and complete as possible.

1.16 The write-out to electors will commence from 1 July 2014 in England and Wales (1 October 2014 in Scotland), and from this point house-to-house enquiries will be used to follow up with electors who have not responded to an invitation to register, and also to pursue non-returned household enquiry forms. In the remaining time leading up to this, we – along with the Cabinet Office's Regional Delivery Managers – will continue to work with those EROs who did not meet standard 3 in 2013 to ensure they have arrangements in place to carry out house-to-house enquiries as required under IER, and will continue to monitor their progress to ensure that they deliver this in practice.

1.17 In the event that an ERO does not put in place arrangements to carry out the necessary house-to-house enquiries or where we identify that they are not being carried out in practice, we will consider all options available to us to ensure that EROs are carrying out their duties in full. This could include making a recommendation to the Secretary of State to issue a direction to the ERO to require them to make improvements to their performance in the discharge of their functions. Discussions are already under way between Commission and Cabinet Office officials to confirm the process to be followed in any such situations, ensuring that action can be taken quickly in the event of any issues emerging.

2 2013 Canvass data

Data collection

2.1 In each year since 2007, the Commission has collected registration data from Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) following the publication of the revised registers at the conclusion of the annual canvass. This data demonstrates the outcomes of the canvass in their area and enables us to make a better-informed assessment of each ERO's performance against our household registration performance standards.

2.2 The timing of the most recent data collection exercise was different to previous years as the annual canvass was delayed. Ordinarily EROs must carry out an annual household canvass and publish the revised register by 1 December each year. However, in preparation for IER and to reduce the period of time between the completion of the canvass and the start of confirmation, the 2013 canvass was postponed so that it began in October 2013, and EROs were required to publish their revised registers by 17 February 2014 in England and by 10 March 2014 in Scotland and Wales.

2.3 EROs in England were asked to complete their canvass data return by 28 February 2014, and EROs in Scotland and Wales by 21 March 2014.

2.4 The data submitted by EROs included:

- overall registration rates
- the annual canvass response rate
- levels of electors carried forward
- numbers of changes to the electoral register
- numbers of households which had not had entries confirmed by taking steps under Section 9A of the Representation of the People Act 1983, including through making house-to-house enquiries

The [full dataset for the 2013 canvass](#) has now been published and is available on the Commission's website.

2.5 This was the final data collection exercise conducted in relation to the household registration system. However, the Commission will continue to collect data on electoral registration under IER as part of its work in monitoring the impact of the change to the system across Great Britain.

2.6 This data will allow us, at several points during the transition, to answer important questions on how the change is progressing, including on the results of the confirmation live run, the impact of the write out following confirmation and the total number of electors on the registers who have not been confirmed or applied to be registered under IER (and who are therefore at risk of being removed from the registers at the end of the transition period).

2.7 EROs will also need to consider this data as part of their evaluation of their local public engagement strategies as this will help them to understand the progress they are making with registering people under IER, which will enable them to keep their plans under review and revise their activities as appropriate to build on what is effective and address what is not working so well.

Analysis

2.8 This section sets out an analysis of the key data from the 2013 annual canvass.

Total registered electorate

2.9 The total registered electorate in Great Britain has fallen slightly from the December 2012 registers.

2.10 The total number of UK parliamentary electors on the February and March 2014 registers was 46,139,900, a fall of -0.5% from December 2012.

2.11 The total number of local government electors on the February and March 2014 registers was 47,691,800, a fall of -0.1% from December 2012.

2.12 England recorded a decline in both local government and parliamentary electors, while Wales recorded a decline in parliamentary electors but a small increase in local government electors. Scotland recorded an increase in both.

2.13 Levels of increase or decrease varied significantly between local authority areas. This is usual, and the areas recording large increases or decreases can change substantially year-on-year. Levels of increase or decrease can be due to administrative practices such as the way the canvass is conducted or the level of carry forward employed, with EROs keeping their canvass plans under review and making amendments each year to try to maximise response rates.

2.14 Table 1 below sets out the 10 local authority areas with the largest increases in local government electorate between the December 2012 register and the revised register published following the 2013 delayed canvass.

Table 1

Rank	Local government area	Total local government electorate (thousands)		% change 2012/13
		December 2012	February/March 2014	
1	Tower Hamlets	161.5	179.8	11.3
2	Wycombe	123.4	130.0	5.3
3	Cambridge	88.4	93.1	5.3
4	East Lindsey	101.7	106.6	4.9
5	Edinburgh, City of	344.9	358.5	4.0

6	Huntingdonshire	125.4	130.2	3.8
7	Aberdeenshire	193.6	200.8	3.7
8	Hertsmere	76.0	78.7	3.7
9	Moray	69.7	72.1	3.4
10	Basingstoke and Deane	128.9	133.2	3.3

2.15 The large increase in the electorate in Tower Hamlets should be seen in context. Firstly, the authority recorded the largest decrease in electorate following the previous canvass, which can be largely attributed to the ERO's decision on the 1 December 2012 register not to carry forward electors from non-responding households, and as a result they may have found it proportionally easier to record an increase this year. Registration activity throughout the year prior to the latest canvass also saw a net increase in the number of electors in the borough, with 14,378 electors added to the register under the rolling registration provisions between 1 December 2012 and 1 November 2013, and 7,085 electors deleted from the register in the same period. The canvass activity carried out by Tower Hamlets resulted in a further net increase of 9,710 electors, with 46,747 names being added and 37,037 being deleted.

2.16 Secondly, the data gathered by the Commission suggests a particularly thorough canvass in Tower Hamlets. For example, while their overall response rate was roughly average at 90% they recorded a very high proportion of returns by personal canvasser (74% of all households that responded did so via a canvasser, which compares to an average of 13%). The main reason for this is that postal responses to canvass forms in the Borough have in the past proved to be very low. Tower Hamlets undertook a wide range of public awareness activities to make residents aware that the canvass was happening. The ERO also employed 161 canvassers to conduct house to house enquiries for all properties in the area for around 10 weeks. Follow-up personal visits were then carried out after a reminder stage for all the areas with a low response. In order to check for accuracy, further personal visits were made to all properties that contained more than 6 residents to verify that all residents still lived at the property and secondary checks with other council records were then carried out on the non-responding properties towards the end of the canvass period and before publication of the revised register and a much higher return is achieved through personal canvassing at the initial stage and then supplemented by a postal canvass, with further follow-up personal visits undertaken at later stages.

2.17 Table 2 below shows the ten local authority areas with the largest decrease in electorate.

Table 2

Rank	Local government area	Total local government electorate (thousands)		% change 2012/13
		December 2012	February/March 2014	
1	Taunton Deane	85.8	78.2	-8.8
2	Allerdale	74.9	69.0	-7.9
3	Maidstone	120.3	111.0	-7.7
4	Northampton	159.3	147.4	-7.4
5	Isles of Scilly UA	1.8	1.6	-6.5
6	Newham	205.8	192.6	-6.4
7	East Devon	104.3	97.7	-6.3
8	Wellingborough	55.6	52.2	-6.0
9	Tonbridge and Malling	91.4	86.0	-5.9
10	Hastings	65.0	61.2	-5.8

2.18 As we reported in March, Taunton Deane carried out a postal canvass comprising sending an original form and two reminders and, where they did not receive a response, carried out check of council tax records to see whether electors were still resident and so entitled to remain registered; but they did not carry out house-to-house enquiries. Their overall canvass response rate was 81% (compared to 94% in 2012) and this, coupled with the fact the ERO took the decision not to exercise their power to carry forward electors, explains the decrease in the number of registered electors.

2.19 Looking ahead to IER, Taunton Deane have developed a joint IER implementation plan with West Somerset – another of the EROs who reported not meeting standard 3 in 2013 - reflecting the fact that they now operate shared electoral services. This plan demonstrates that they are planning for all necessary house-to-house canvassing to be carried out under IER, and we will continue to engage with the authorities to ensure that this is delivered in practice.

Canvass response rate

2.20 The average canvass response rate across Great Britain was 94%. This is similar to the average recorded for previous years since 2007 which has ranged between 92% and 94%.

2.21 Average response rates differ slightly by electoral region as shown in the table below. The highest average response rates were recorded in the South West and the West Midlands while the North East and Yorkshire & the Humber had the lowest average response rates.

Table 3

Electoral region	Average canvass response rate
South West	95.2%
West Midlands	95.1%
East Midlands	93.7%
Eastern	93.6%
London	93.6%
North West	93.6%
Wales	93.1%
Scotland	93.0%
South East	93.0%
Yorkshire & the Humber	92.3%
North East	92.0%

2.22 Response rates for individual local authority areas ranged from 79% to 100%. This variation is likely caused by a combination of factors including the character of the local authority areas (for example, demographics, the nature of the housing stock (such as high rise or gated communities), etc.) and the particular registration practices followed by each ERO.

2.23 There are several ways in which households can respond to the canvass. If there is no change required to the details on the electoral registers a household can, in many areas, respond online, by text message or by phone. They can also respond by returning the canvass form by post or to a canvasser on the doorstep. Any household which needs to make a change to the details held on the register must return the form by post or via a canvasser.

2.24 Table 4 below shows that, on average, the majority of canvass forms are returned by post with returns by canvasser, telephone and online recording similar levels of use.

Table 4

Response method	Overall percentage of households using this method of response
Post	53%
Canvasser	13%
Online	13%
Telephone	11%
Data checking	5%
Text message	3%
Confirmed vacant	3%

2.25 The introduction of online registration should see an increase in the levels of electors engaging with the registration process online, with all individuals able to make changes to their details and register themselves at a new address through the internet, rather than this being restricted to areas

where the ERO offers the facility and even then only for households to confirm existing details.

2.26 The existing use of data checking is also relevant to the transition to IER as local data matching (against locally-held data sources such as council tax records) can be used to confirm electors on the registers and to verify the identity of those applying to be registered individually. During the 2013 household canvass, 21 EROs retained 10% or more of electors on their registers through local data checking. Of these, two - Birmingham and Dundee City - retained over 30% of electors through checking against local records.

2.27 Following the dry run of the confirmation process in summer 2013, many EROs conducted further work in order to determine how their confirmation rate could be improved by further matching with local data. The results from this exercise suggested that there could be substantial benefit to EROs in carrying out a local data matching stage once they have received the results of their matching against the DWP database. Among those that reported data to the Commission, the average increase in their overall confirmation rate was 6-7%, although there was significant variation in the results. In response to a survey issued by the Commission, 91% of EROs said that local data matching would be important during live confirmation.

Carry forward

2.28 EROs have the power to retain entries of individuals who have not responded to the canvass for one year. The level of electors 'carried forward' at the conclusion of the 2013 canvass is lower than that recorded in any year from 2007. Overall, 2.7% of entries (approximately 1.2 million) on the February and March 2014 registers were retained by carry forward. This compares to between 3.2% and 4.2% in previous years.

2.29 As explained in [chapter 1](#) above, the decline in the use of carry forward on conclusion of the 2013 canvass can be explained by a decision by some EROs not to exercise their power to carry forward entries in preparation for the transition to IER when electors who are currently on the register but have been carried forward, will need to go through a separate process in order to remain registered and cannot be automatically transferred to the new IER register following confirmation.

2.30 Table 5 below shows the average carry forward rate for each electoral region.

Table 5

Electoral region	Average carry forward rate
North East	4.3%
Wales	3.5%
Yorkshire & the Humber	3.5%
North West	3.2%
South East	3.0%
Scotland	2.7%

Eastern	2.5%
London	2.3%
East Midlands	2.1%
South West	1.1%
West Midlands	0.6%

2.31 The highest average level of carry forward was seen in the North East (4.3%) and the lowest in the West Midlands (0.6%). There is greater variation between individual EROs, with 72 local authority areas not carrying forward any electors at all - and a further 33 carrying forward so few entries that their overall percentage is below 0.1% - while seven carried forward more than 10% (Blackpool, Bolton, Castle Point, Ceredigion, Cheshire East, Inverclyde and Maidstone).

Additions to the register

2.32 The annual canvass is currently the most effective mechanism for updating the registers. This can be seen in table 6 below, which shows the volume of additions to the registers recorded as a result of the canvass compared to the number of additions picked up through rolling registration during the rest of the year.

Table 6

Electoral region	Local authority average % of electors on the February 2014 register who were added as a result of the annual canvass	Local authority average % of electors on the November 2013 register who were added during the rolling registration period
East Midlands	11.2%	2.6%
Eastern	11.8%	3.5%
London	16.3%	3.9%
North East	10.9%	1.8%
North West	11.0%	2.8%
Scotland	12.5%	3.9%
South East	11.9%	3.4%
South West	12.5%	2.8%
Wales	11.6%	3.1%
West Midlands	11.5%	2.5%
Yorkshire & the Humber	10.9%	2.4%

3 The last household canvass: ERO performance

3.1 Further to the report we published in March 2014, we have now concluded our analysis of the detailed canvass data and have used this to check our March assessments of performance against standard 1: information sources and standard 3: house-to-house enquiries.

Performance standard 1: Information sources

3.2 This standard aims to ensure that EROs use appropriate sources of information to verify records on the register of electors and to identify and contact potential new electors throughout the year. EROs are entitled to inspect any records held by the council that appointed them, such as council tax records and housing records, and can also inspect records produced by the registrar of births and deaths. Access to these records serves a dual purpose: to identify potential new electors; and to check that registered electors continue to be eligible to be registered.

3.3 Using local data will be particularly important under IER in order to:

- supplement the confirmation process
- identify new potential electors and invite them to register
- identify where an elector may no longer be eligible to be registered (for example, because they have moved out of the area)
- support the process of verifying an elector's identity when they make a new application to register³

3.4 Our analysis of the canvass data has identified that while the level of registration reviews undertaken to date varies significantly between local authority areas, there is nothing in the information available to us which would lead us to revise the assessment of any ERO in relation to this standard.

3.5 As in 2012, all EROs reported that they were either meeting or exceeding this standard in 2013 and were proactively identifying and using the records they are entitled to inspect, throughout the year, including during the annual canvass period, to verify and validate data held on the electoral register - and we can now confirm these assessments.

³ People applying to register individually are required to provide their national insurance number and date of birth, which must be verified by checking against DWP data. If the person's identity cannot be verified through this process, EROs can also carry out local data-matching using reliable and robust local data sources to verify the applicant's identity.

3.6 However, given the increased significance of reviews⁴ under IER – with these becoming the main mechanism by which redundant entries will be removed from the electoral register – the number that will need to be carried out will increase significantly for all EROs, which will present new practical challenges. As a result, working closely with the Elections, Referendums and Registration Working Group, we will develop supplementary guidance and resources to sit alongside our comprehensive core guidance for EROs which will support EROs with carrying out reviews in practice.

Performance standard 3: house-to-house enquiries

3.7 This standard aims to ensure that properties which have not responded to the annual canvass and where the ERO is not otherwise satisfied that eligible electors are resident will be subject to house-to-house enquiries on one or more occasions. House-to-house canvassing is a crucial element in ensuring the registers are as accurate and complete as possible, and will continue to remain a key aspect of ERO activity throughout the transition to IER.

3.8 In March we reported that, based on the information they provided to us in advance of and during the canvass, five EROs did not meet standard 3: Mid Devon, Taunton Deane, Torridge, West Devon and West Somerset.

3.9 We have subsequently analysed the data from the 2013 canvass to identify whether all other EROs did in fact make the necessary house-to-house enquiries. Where the data indicated that this may not be the case, we followed-up with the EROs in question to establish what happened in practice and why, including what supplementary follow-up activities they undertook with those households that did not receive a personal visit from a canvasser to identify whether electors were still resident and entitled to remain registered.

3.10 In confirming our assessment of performance against this standard we have taken into account:

- the extent of house-to-house enquiries that were carried out
- what, if any, other methods were used in addition to the steps specified in Section 9A of the Representation of the People Act 1983
- the outcomes of the canvass

⁴ A review is the process an ERO undertakes to initiate the removal of an individual's entry from electoral register where they have reason to believe that they are no longer entitled to remain registered at that address. Further information on reviews under IER can be found in the Commission's guidance to EROs:

http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0011/162578/Part-4-Maintaining-the-register-throughout-the-year.pdf.

3.11 As was the case in 2011 and 2012, our analysis has identified additional EROs who did not, in practice, carry out house-to-house enquiries with all non-responding households and so who did not meet standard 3.

3.12 In total, there are a further 17 EROs who did not meet this standard in 2013. Appendix 1 sets out who these EROs are and summarises the situation in each case.

3.13 Taken together with our assessment of ERO performance in our March report, this means that a total of 22 EROs (6%) did not meet standard 3: house-to-house enquiries in 2013 (30 EROs did not meet the same standard in 2012).

3.14 The main reasons given by EROs for not carrying out the necessary house-to-house enquiries with all non-responding households were:

- **Budget constraints:** as a result of reduced budgets for electoral services and council services more generally, some EROs explained that they prioritised the allocation of resources to carrying out house-to-house enquiries in areas where they believed they would get the highest returns, while accepting that this meant they would not be able to visit all non-responding properties. While we recognise the increasing budget pressures facing local authorities, which force them to make difficult choices between competing statutory services, a lack of resources does not exempt EROs from complying with the law.
- **Being unable to recruit enough canvassers:** the timing of the delayed 2013 canvass meant that activity to follow-up non-responding households was carried out later than would ordinarily be the case - generally over December and January – and EROs reported particular difficulties in recruiting sufficient numbers of canvassers as a result, and in some cases found that even experienced canvassers were unwilling to carry out work at this time of year, when the majority of visits would need to be carried out in the dark and often in poor weather conditions. Again, while recognising the challenges facing EROs, contingency plans should be in place to respond to instances where sufficient canvassers cannot be recruited or where canvassers drop out before the work is completed. Additionally, it is not necessarily the case that all house-to-house enquiries needed to be carried out within this period; the duty to take all necessary steps applies throughout the year.
- **High canvass return rates:** a number of EROs stated that they did not carry out house-to-house enquiries with all non-responding households as they achieve higher than average canvass return rates, and in some cases these EROs said they also used alternative and less expensive methods, such as telephone canvassing, to follow up with non-responding households. While EROs should take into account the methods that are likely to be most successful and cost-efficient in planning their canvass activity, they should nonetheless have plans in place to make house-to-house visits where there is no response to

contact made via other methods, or where it is not possible to use alternative methods (for example, where there is no telephone number available).

- **Rurality:** a significant number of those EROs not meeting the standard gave the fact that they serve a rural area as a key reason for not having visited all non-responding households, citing the financial unviability of the exercise, concerns related to the health and safety of lone workers and difficulties accessing properties in some rural areas. However, electors should not be treated differently solely on the basis of where they live and the rural location of a property is not, in itself, sufficient reason not to personally canvass the property.
- **Safety concerns:** some EROs reported that they were unable to visit parts of their registration area due to a potential risk to the personal safety of canvassers. In our guidance, we advise that the ERO should assess the potential for someone personally canvassing each property on a case-by-case basis, and not make blanket decisions on canvassing in particular wards or areas within the local authority. In situations where there is an acceptable reason for not canvassing – such as safety concerns relating to a particular address - we would expect the ERO to have an alternative strategy in place for each individual property to reach those residents.

House-to-house enquiries under IER

3.15 While the precise use of house-to-house enquiries under IER will be different than under the household registration system – particularly in the unique circumstances of the 2014 write-out and canvass period – it is a key area of ERO performance which will continue to be of significant importance in ensuring registers are as accurate and complete as possible.

3.16 The write-out to electors will commence from 1 July 2014 in England and Wales (1 October 2014 in Scotland), and from this point house-to-house enquiries will be used to follow up with electors who have not responded to an invitation to register, and also to pursue non-returned household enquiry forms. Where, for example, an existing elector has not been confirmed against DWP records, the ERO is required to invite them to register individually, and to follow-up where there is no response to an invitation to register by sending up to two reminder invitations; if no application is made in response to the third invitation, the ERO must make at least one visit for the purpose of encouraging an application to register to be made, if they have not already done so.

3.17 EROs will also continue to have a duty under Section 9A of the Representation of the People Act 1983 to take all steps that are necessary – including making house-to-house enquiries – for the purposes of maintaining the register.

3.18 We – along with the Cabinet Office’s Regional Delivery Managers – will continue to work with the EROs who did not meet standard 3 in 2013 to ensure they have arrangements in place to carry out house-to-house enquiries as required under IER, and will continue to monitor their progress to ensure that they deliver this in practice.

3.19 We have asked these EROs to provide us with an updated version of their IER implementation plans to confirm they have arrangements in place to carry out the necessary house-to-house enquiries, with a view to ensuring that by the point in the transition when they will need to undertake house-to-house enquiries, they are fully prepared and resourced to do so.

3.20 This activity has already established that a number of these EROs have advanced plans in place to carry out the necessary house-to-house enquiries under IER, and have identified and allocated the resources they will need to do this work.

3.21 In the event that an ERO does not put in place arrangements to carry out the necessary house-to-house enquiries or where we identify that they are not being carried out in practice, we will consider all options available to us to ensure that EROs are carrying out their duties in full. This could include making a recommendation to the Secretary of State to issue a direction to the ERO to require them to make improvements to their performance in the discharge of their functions. Discussions are already underway between Commission and Cabinet Office officials to confirm the process to be followed in any such situations, ensuring that action can be taken quickly in the event of any issues emerging.

Appendix 1: EROs not meeting performance standard 3

Broxbourne Borough Council

Broxbourne reported that being unable to recruit a sufficient number of canvassers to ensure personal visits could be made in all necessary cases prevented them from meeting the standard in 2013. While they had planned to carry out a full house-to-house canvass of non-responding properties, just under half of non-responding properties received a personal visit in practice. Broxbourne's overall canvass response rate was 93%.

Broxbourne have signalled their intent to carry out house-to-house enquiries in full as necessary throughout the transition, and their plans for the delivery of IER reflect this. We will continue to work with Broxbourne to ensure that this is delivered in practice.

Castle Point Borough Council

Castle Point reported that they focussed their house-to-house enquiries in particular wards: those with lower percentage return rates; those with higher proportions of typically hard to reach groups; and those where take up had historically been lower than the average across the Borough. While they did carry out some personal canvassing in all wards, they did not make arrangements for house-to-house enquiries for all non-responding households. Castle Point's overall canvass response rate was 90%.

Castle Point have signalled their intent to carry out house-to-house enquiries in full as necessary throughout the transition, and their plans for the delivery of IER reflect this. We will continue to work with them to ensure that this is delivered in practice.

Ceredigion County Council

Ceredigion reported being unable to canvass all of their non-responding properties due to a lack of budgetary provision for this activity. However, they also reported that plans were in place to undertake a review of the non-responding properties in each polling district following publication of the register, with a focus on recruiting canvassers to target the polling districts with the lowest response rates. Ceredigion's overall canvass response rate was 79%.

We have asked Ceredigion to supply to us a current version of their IER implementation plans and we – working with the Cabinet Office Regional Delivery Manager – will continue to work with them to ensure they have arrangements in place to carry out house-to-house enquiries as required

under IER, and will continue to monitor their progress to ensure that they deliver this in practice.

Durham County Council

Durham reported that, despite planning to do so, not all non-responding households were personally canvassed as a number of temporary canvassers employed specifically to target areas with low response rates withdrew prior to or a short time into the canvass with insufficient time left to replace them. The ERO took the decision at this point to write-out again to non-responding properties in areas with the lowest response rates. Durham's overall canvass response rate was 92%.

Durham are fully aware that all non-responding properties need to be canvassed, and their IER implementation plan shows that provision has been made for full personal canvassing to be carried out as required. We will continue to monitor their progress through the transition to ensure this is delivered in practice.

East Devon District Council

East Devon originally planned for house-to-house enquiries to be carried out as a part of the canvass, but none were conducted in practice. Their plans were later adapted to use telephone canvassing as a first step for non-responding properties, and the details of 39% of such properties were confirmed through this mechanism. The overall canvass response rate for East Devon was 95%.

East Devon's IER implementation plan indicates that they intend to recruit canvassers to undertake the necessary house-to-house enquiries as part of the 2014 write-out and canvass. We will continue to monitor their progress through the transition to ensure this is delivered in practice.

Gwynedd County Council

Gwynedd reported that they did not meet the standard as they were unable to employ the required number of canvassers following a change in the local authority's recruitment policy, which meant that a number of regular canvassers declined appointment, and there was also a poor response to attempts to recruit additional canvassers both internally and externally. Consequently, Gwynedd were unable to canvass every non-responding property and decided to prioritise their available resources in specific areas where they felt they could achieve the highest returns.

Gwynedd also has a number of sparsely populated rural areas where access to properties is restricted, and in these cases they did attempt - with some success - to contact these properties by other means, including telephone canvassing. Gwynedd's overall canvass return rate was 89%.

Gwynedd's IER implementation plan indicates that they have planned and allocated resources for the necessary house-to-house enquiries to be carried out. We – working with the Cabinet Office Regional Delivery Manager – will continue to work with them to confirm their arrangements to carry out house-to-house enquiries as required under IER, and will continue to monitor their progress to ensure that they deliver this in practice.

Kingston-upon-Hull City Council

The ERO reported that while they did personally canvass a significant proportion of their non-responding properties, a number of these were within city centre blocks of flats with security systems meaning access to the individual properties is difficult. Kingston-Upon-Hull's overall canvass response rate was 88%.

They are now reviewing their personal canvass strategy to ensure that they are able to get access to as many of their non-responding properties as possible. We – working with the Cabinet Office Regional Delivery Manager – will continue to work with them to confirm their arrangements to carry out house-to-house enquiries as required under IER, and will continue to monitor their progress to ensure that they deliver this in practice.

Maldon District Council

Maldon reported that they had plans in place for house-to-house enquiries to be carried out and had identified particularly poor return areas for on-going attention outside the canvass period. Although they were able to canvass over half of their non-responding properties, Maldon cited the fact that they are a predominantly rural area with a number of larger isolated residences and that this, coupled with high levels of sheltered housing, was why they were unable to complete a full personal canvass of all non-responding households. Maldon's overall canvass response rate was 92%.

Looking ahead to IER, Maldon have indicated that they intend to use an Electoral Engagement Officer in order to improve registration levels among harder to reach groups. Part of this role will involve building relationships with sheltered housing wardens to ensure that these properties can be canvassed, as part of their overall objective to carry out full personal canvassing where required. We will continue to monitor their progress through the transition to ensure this is delivered in practice.

Mid Sussex District Council

Mid Sussex reported that they had aimed to personally canvass all non-responding properties at the 2013 canvass. Canvasser recruitment was cited as the key reason for this not being achieved, supplemented by staff withdrawing close to commencement of the canvass, giving bad weather as the reason for their decision. Mid Sussex's overall canvass response rate was 92%.

Mid Sussex have signalled their intent to carry out house-to-house enquiries in full as necessary throughout the transition, and their plans for the delivery of IER reflect this. We will continue to monitor their progress ensure that this is delivered in practice.

Northumberland County Council

Northumberland reported that difficulties with recruiting a sufficient number of canvassers - as a consequence of the time of year of the canvass and because many properties are in isolated rural areas - was the key reason they were unable to visit all their non-responding properties. Northumberland's overall canvass response rate was 91%. They have also undertaken some further work subsequent to publication of the revised register, which has included a mini-postal canvass of the outstanding properties.

We have asked Northumberland to supply to us a current version of their IER implementation plans and we – working with the Cabinet Office Regional Delivery Manager – will continue to work with them to ensure they have arrangements in place to carry out house-to-house enquiries as required under IER, and will continue to monitor their progress to ensure that they deliver this in practice.

North Devon District Council

North Devon reported that despite intending to do house-to-house enquiries will all non-responding households, they later changed their plans and decided to prioritise resources by concentrating on poorer responding areas, with a view to moving beyond these if time allowed, which it didn't. Secondary checks on non-responders were carried out, including a check against council tax records, and consultation was carried out with parish clerks to check for any relevant information they might have. The overall canvass response rate for North Devon was 96%.

We have asked North Devon to supply to us a current version of their IER implementation plans and we – working with the Cabinet Office Regional Delivery Manager – will continue to work with them to ensure they have arrangements in place to carry out house-to-house enquiries as required under IER, and will continue to monitor their progress to ensure that they deliver this in practice.

North Dorset District Council

North Dorset reported that an inability to recruit sufficient canvassers was the key reason for not carrying out house-to-house enquiries with all non-responding properties. Instead, they prioritised house-to-house enquiries in the largest towns and in villages with the lowest response rates. They also checked entries against council tax records to send a targeted additional reminder letter. The overall canvass response rate for North Dorset was 96%.

In their IER implementation plan, North Dorset have indicated that they intend to use canvassers to undertake the necessary house-to-house enquiries as part of the 2014 write-out and canvass. We will continue to monitor their progress through the transition to ensure this is delivered in practice.

North East Lincolnshire Council

North East Lincolnshire reported that they were unable to recruit sufficient canvassers to be able to canvass all non-responding properties, and cited the fact that the canvass took place during the winter months as a particular factor contributing to this. This, in addition to staff sickness in the core electoral services team, resulted in them being unable to meet this standard. North East Lincolnshire's overall canvass response rate was 86%.

North East Lincolnshire's IER implementation plan contains provision for recruiting additional canvassing staff, which should enable them to make the necessary house-to-house enquiries going forwards. We will continue to monitor their progress through the transition to ensure that they deliver this in practice.

North Warwickshire Borough Council

North Warwickshire stated that they had planned and attempted to achieve a full house-to-house canvass of non-responding households, but were unable to recruit sufficient personal canvassers to be able to do so. The fact that this is a particularly rural area was also cited as a reason for not personally visiting all non-responding households. North Warwickshire had an overall canvass response rate of 95%.

We have asked North Warwickshire to supply to us a current version of their IER implementation plans and we – working with the Cabinet Office Regional Delivery Manager – will continue to work with them to ensure they have arrangements in place to carry out house-to-house enquiries as required under IER, and will continue to monitor their progress to ensure that they deliver this in practice.

Scarborough Borough Council

Scarborough reported that the rural moorland nature of parts of their area meant that they were unable to canvass all of their non-responding properties. Scarborough had an overall canvass response rate of 93%.

The ERO has provided us with an updated version of their IER implementation plan which contains provision for a permanent 'year round' canvasser which should enable them to conduct all necessary visits under IER. We will continue to monitor their progress through the transition to ensure this is delivered in practice.

Sedgemoor District Council

Sedgemoor reported that there are a number of small, remote rural areas that they do not canvass due to cost. While they visited a significant proportion of their non-responding households, the number of properties from which no information was obtained and which were not personally canvassed increased from the previous canvass. The overall canvass response rate for Sedgemoor was 94%.

We have asked Sedgemoor to supply to us a current version of their IER implementation plans and we – working with the Cabinet Office Regional Delivery Manager – will continue to work with them to ensure they have arrangements in place to carry out house-to-house enquiries as required under IER, and will continue to monitor their progress to ensure that they deliver this in practice.

South Staffordshire Council

Despite repeated requests to South Staffordshire since the deadline for submitting the post-canvass data return of 28 February, we are yet to receive this. As a result, we do not have sufficient information to be able to confirm that the necessary house-to-house enquiries were carried out in full across their area and so have revised their assessment of performance against standard 3 to 'not meeting'.

We have asked the ERO for South Staffordshire to supply to us a current version of their IER implementation plans and we – working with the Cabinet Office Regional Delivery Manager – will continue to work with them to ensure they have arrangements in place to carry out house-to-house enquiries as required under IER, and will continue to monitor their progress to ensure that they deliver this in practice.