

# Use of tablets in electoral registration

## Key considerations

- EROs are required to take specified steps to follow up non-responses to HEFs, including issuing two reminders and making a personal visit where necessary.
- Potential new electors (such as where a name is added to a returned HEF) need to be sent an ITR and EROs are required to take specified steps to follow up any non-responses to ITRs, including issuing two reminders and making a personal visit where necessary. This process continues throughout the year.
- A number of EROs are issuing canvassers with electronic tablets to meet these challenges.

## Potential benefits

- Reduction in paper applications and consequent processing time
- Streamlining of the HEF and ITR processes on the doorstep resulting in reduced postage costs as there is no need to post an ITR when residents apply to register online
- Real time monitoring of canvassing activity
- Improved data security – no risk of loss of completed forms
- Can be used throughout the year
- Increased response rate through personal canvassing
- Significant ongoing savings meaning tablets can quickly become cost neutral (due to reduction of postage, processing, and printing)
- Health and safety and HR benefits from being able to track lone workers

## Experiences of others

- Using tablets created a more professional image on the doorstep and people were more likely to provide information as a result (**Mid-Devon District Council**)
- Residents happier with fewer complaints, and are more willing to provide information, including National Insurance numbers, compared to paper forms (**London Borough of Camden**)
- Increase in the response rate of personal canvassing (**London Borough of Tower Hamlets**)
- A mobile canvassing app provided by the software provider allowed seamless integration and reduced processing time to a minimum (**Wycombe District Council**)



### Increased efficiency and oversight

**Bristol City Council** have found that the use of tablets has had a positive effect on canvassers, with fewer drop-outs than before. Tablets have given Bristol real-time monitoring, which provides an overview of how canvassers are progressing. Lists of non-responding properties/individuals are subject to 'live' updates meaning canvassers do not undertake unnecessary visits to households/individuals. In the event of a problem, office staff can log into the tablet and see the same screen as the canvasser themselves, and provide advice accordingly.



## Increased engagement with residents

**Solihull Borough Council** consider that using tablets means canvassers can devote more time to their doorstep engagement with householders. They can perform their door-knocking role more easily and quickly as there is no need to carry significant quantities of paper forms or for these to be returned to the office once completed. Canvassers can be allocated a higher number of properties as a result so there is potential to ultimately reduce the number of canvassers required. Solihull also highlight lone worker protection as a benefit since the tablets' GPS facility means they know where canvassers are at all times.

## Challenges

- There is likely to be an initial purchase cost; though this could be offset through savings made from their use as early as year one
- In rural areas there can be issues with mobile internet connectivity
- The new equipment and processes involved will require additional training for staff
- If canvassers are encouraging the completion of a HEF through your online portal or of applications to register through the gov.uk website on their tablet, these may not be recorded in your electoral management software (EMS) system as having been done as the result of the personal visit

## Experiences of others



### Overcoming the cost barrier

A sound business case is required in order to justify the initial financial outlay required to obtain the tablets. **Bristol City Council and London Borough of Tower Hamlets** have conducted some analysis of cost savings versus procurement costs which they are happy to share.<sup>1</sup>

To help develop a business case you could consider the following:

- Highlight the savings/efficiencies achieved by other councils. See for example, the [Tower Hamlets case study](#) from their trial of tablets in 2015. *Details of the further savings they have made from expanding this trial to all their canvassers in 2016 are available on request.*
- Conduct a small trial in part of your registration area. This will provide a direct comparison against using paper forms and allow you to better demonstrate the efficiencies
- Use of tablets for other electoral services functions, for example, by polling station inspectors.
- Explore sharing devices and the costs with other council services who may also be able to utilise tablets
- Try to get a senior elected representative to act as a champion for your case. Having buy-in from a Cabinet/Executive member before presenting your business case may help to pave the way to securing agreement from your decision makers.

<sup>1</sup>To contact Bristol please email - [electoral.services@bristol.gov.uk](mailto:electoral.services@bristol.gov.uk)  
For Tower Hamlets please email - [electoralservices@towerhamlets.gov.uk](mailto:electoralservices@towerhamlets.gov.uk)



### Connectivity issues

In areas where mobile internet connectivity is an issue you may wish to consider operating the programme in 'offline mode' if this feature is available. This will enable canvassers to collect the information they need and upload this to your EMS when a connection becomes available.



### Training

Training works better in smaller groups, and the canvasser needs to be open to learning and using the technology (**London Borough of Camden**)

## Resources



[Part 3 – Canvass](#) provides general guidance to EROs on managing the canvass process.

For information on how the London Borough of Tower Hamlets has successfully used tablets, see the case study: '[Tower Hamlets: Using tablets at the canvass](#)'.

Information on planning for personal canvassing, including on deploying canvassers, can be found in our '[List of questions to inform canvass planning](#)'.

## Get in touch

If you have issued canvassers with tablets, we would very much like to hear about your experiences. Please get in touch with your [local Commission team](#). Alternatively if you would like to speak directly to any of the authorities referenced in this resource then please let us know and we will be happy to help with this.