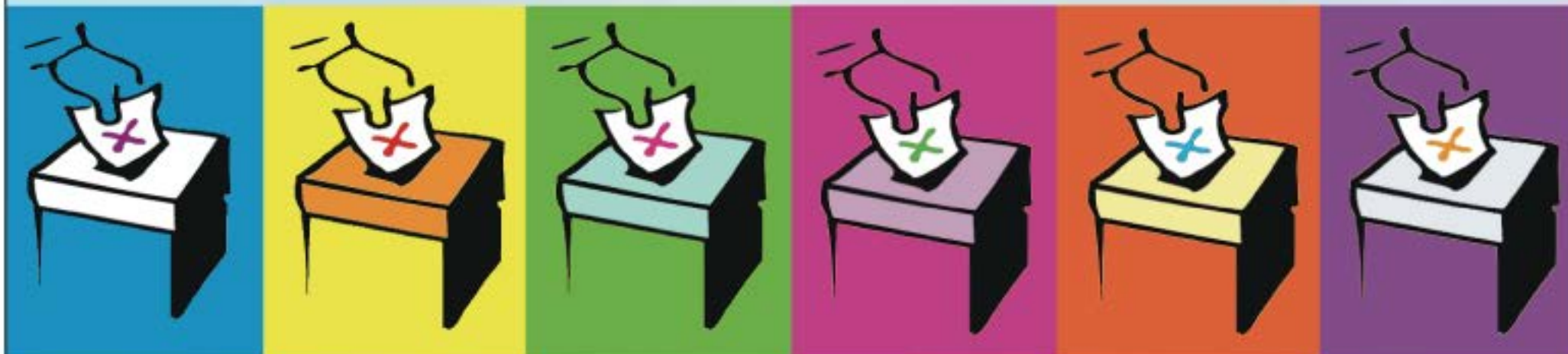


Promoting Electoral Engagement within the Community



December 2012



BASSETLAW
DISTRICT COUNCIL
NORTH NOTTINGHAMSHIRE

www.bassetlaw.gov.uk

Scrutiny is an independent, councillor-led function, working with local people to improve services.

Foreword

This subject was raised by members as worthy of scrutiny because of the lower turnout at recent local elections, as well as a renewed focus on voter engagement and participation as specified in the Corporate Plan 2012-15. On further research it was also felt that a key part of the work should focus on the changes coming in 2015, to the electoral registration system, from one person filling out the registration form for each household, to everyone being expected to fill in their own form. The new system will be called Individual Electoral Registration (IER). High priority within scrutiny was also given to the engagement of young people in the democratic process and it was thought that both could be addressed in this review.

According to research, three of the main 'hard to reach' groups in respect of registration are young people, people where English is not their first language and people with learning disabilities. We sought to find more information from local representatives of these groups as well as the current situation with respect to electoral services in Bassetlaw and how this might change with IER.

The scrutiny panel was cross-party and we worked hard to understand our brief, listen to witnesses and develop and agree recommendations. I believe this was undertaken in a friendly atmosphere and we were very ably supported by the Policy & Scrutiny Co-ordinator who should be commended for her hard work, dedication and commitment.

Representatives from the hard to reach groups described reasons why there were difficulties and offered some ideas about how this might be overcome. Improvements could be made by creating more accessible forms and information about the registration process as well as developing greater links with these communities.

The panel were concerned about the staffing situation and noted the disparity with other authorities in Nottinghamshire who do not hold annual elections as we do in Bassetlaw. Staff in post should be commended for their hard work. It was made clear that their work was characterised as 'fire fighting' and time should be made for the collection and analysis of data and the targeting of resources and more detailed strategic planning of the work programme for the service.

The electoral process is important to any democrat and the panel were dismayed to hear that very little time is available for promotion through the media. There are a number of internal recommendations around training, the enhanced use of existing systems and in raising electoral engagement at the point of customer contact.

Currently 91-94% of people in Bassetlaw register to vote. With IER, it is considered that this may drop to as low as 60% which was of great concern to panel members. The focus given by this Panel on this area gives the authority time to make improvements to current practices and to be alert to the challenges of IER. There may be minor changes to what is being proposed but what we heard was that the fundamentals will not alter – it is going to happen! It is therefore important that this subject is kept on the Council's radar, adequately resourced and that a plan is developed to counter the possibility of reduced registration and to do what is needed to maintain a high level of sign up.

This has been an important issue for scrutiny. It took place at a time when Police and Crime Commissioner Elections were being conducted and the markedly reduced level of engagement and voting apathy is a major challenge to us all. If we are committed to the legitimacy of the political process, it is incumbent on us all to include and involve every member of our community. Being registered as a voter is a starting point towards this goal.

Councillor Bill Barker
Chair of Select Panel 2

December 2012



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1. Executive Summary

1.1 Summary of Findings

Bassetlaw District Council's Select Panel 2 was tasked to review Promoting Electoral Engagement within the Community as part of the Annual Work Programme 2012/13. The topic was approved by Overview and Scrutiny Committee in June 2012.

The review addresses the ambitions of the Corporate Plan 2012-2015 as follows:

AMBITION 4: A WELL RUN COUNCIL

Priority 1 – Provide opportunities for participation in decision making

Two topics were initially put forward for the 2012/13 Scrutiny Work Programme:

- Electorate engagement and registration
Issues: Low voter turnout in May 2012 and the need for a more pro-active approach to engagement in the election process
- Promoting Links with Young People to the Council
Issues: Young Peoples' understanding of politics and how the Council works. Improvement in the ways in which Young People can be engaged in decision-making/informed of local issues.

Following lengthy discussions at the annual Work Programme Workshop, Members decided to join these topics together and for them to be presented to Overview & Scrutiny Committee as part of the shortlist for consideration. At the first meeting of the Panel, Members again had a lengthy discussion as to how best to ensure both elements could be addressed as it was felt that while they were related, there were only certain elements that aligned. After assessing the background information as to activity already undertaken by the Council, it was felt that the issue of wider engagement of young people in decision-making was being addressed via the Children and Young People Action Plan, work with schools, and the Bassetlaw Youth Council. It was agreed that a smaller discrete scope would allow a more focussed scrutiny review with clear outcomes. Consequently, Members agreed to a brief focussed on electoral registration and how this can be maintained/improved further, with specific emphasis on underrepresented groups (including young people), and how this would be further impacted upon by the introduction of Individual Electoral Registration (IER).

Information gathered from internal officers both in the Elections Unit and in Communications highlighted that there were neither current plans to support publicity of registration, nor any dedicated communications support prior to an election. Officers acknowledged that this was a significant gap in service planning as without it the Elections Unit were unable to commission support from Communications. Furthermore, when officers were asked to supply information to enable statistical analysis of electoral registration rates and turnout, it became apparent that the software system in use by the authority had not been used to its full capacity, nor had staff been trained on all elements of it. The data supplied showed a decrease in registration rates across a number of wards within the District over a three year period 2009-2011. When questioned how this was being addressed again, it became apparent that there has been limited capacity for strategic planning due to the workload of the Unit.

Bassetlaw District Council is the only authority in Nottinghamshire that elects by thirds, and a benchmarking exercise carried out by the lead officer shows we are also the least resourced in this service area. The Manager post 'Electoral Services Officer' has been reduced to a part-time post in the last two years, due to the previous officer's request, however Members feel that this has led to insufficient capacity to allow for development work in the service, including use of communications as a means of gaining wider public engagement; strategic planning in relation to the annual canvass; development of performance measures; integration with GIS; and insufficient training and succession planning. One of the main recommendations of the Panel is that the manager post is recruited to, if possible prior to the elections in 2013, as a full-time post. This will increase capacity in the service to allow for the required development work to improve the Council's current approach to key processes. It is also vital if the authority is to successfully plan for and implement IER from 2015, without significant detriment to our registration rates.

A key focus for members was how we communicated as an authority with residents both during the annual canvass (registration) and prior to polling day during an election. The panel also chose to focus on how we engaged with specific groups known to be at risk of lower engagement levels, based on national research:

- Young people 16-25
- Those with English as a second language
- Those with a learning disability

The evidence gathered showed that there are potentially a large proportion of young people not engaging, mostly due to not feeling that 'voting' is relevant to them/something that adults do. It was noted that where a concerted effort is made to engage them i.e. via local democracy week and UK Youth Parliament, it is easier for them to engage and understand the need to be democratically engaged.

In relation to engagement of those with English as a second language, it is apparent that many do register to vote and where there is a language barrier residents will seek help from within their own community in order to complete the forms. What is more apparent as an impact on voter turnout, which was not a main area of focus for the review, is the issue of being able to align to one of the candidates as representative of the migrant community. There seems to potentially be poor understanding of what the parties stand for and how this relates to the political parties in their national country. It was felt that if there was a candidate that was very involved in the migrant community or someone actually from the community, this could impact on voter turnout.

Finally, in relation to those with learning difficulties it is apparent that there will only be a small number that can truly engage in the process due to the level of understanding required to make the decision to register to vote and who to vote for. While we are using the current household form approach there is less of an issue with registration as their carer is likely to ensure they are registered. When we move nationally to individual registration there will be more of an issue as they will need to be more involved in completion of the form. This will require a certain level of understanding, they will need support where they do not know other information, for example their National Insurance number (NINO), and will need to be able to sign the form.

Research into the engagement of this group, also raised wider questions about the impact of literacy levels generally on the ability to engage in the process as evidence gathered when looking at young people's engagement noted that they can find forms complicated and confusing, especially where they have trouble reading and writing. Members agreed that the Council needs to give some thought as to how the current forms can be improved through design and layout to help break down this issue as a barrier to engagement.

In relation to IER the panel posed a range of questions to the Cabinet Office, who are dealing with the implementation of IER and have a dedicated team supporting this piece of work (see Appendix 1). It is clear that the government are prepared to cover all costs associated with the transition to IER and that this would be considered on a case by case basis. This is essential to Bassetlaw District Council (BDC) as an area that has more pressures than most in Nottinghamshire due to elections by thirds, and the lowest staffing levels in the county. All trials have been agreed and a full evaluation is taking place to ensure that sufficient learning is available for local authorities to structure their services as required. However, Members still had a number of concerns regarding the impact on staffing capacity, the payment of the grant from central government, councillor awareness and officer engagement in the process, and enforcement of non-registration by the authority and have made recommendations accordingly.

As a result of the evidence gathered during the review, members have agreed four key recommendations as detailed further at 1.4 and in section 4 of this report:

- **That staffing levels within the Unit are increased at the earliest opportunity through recruiting to the post of Electoral Services Officer prior to the end of the financial year as a full-time post, and that succession planning/training is put in place in light of the implementation of IER.**
- **That the Elections Unit agrees a set of performance indicators to be added to the Council's suite of indicators for 2013/14.**
- **That Equality Impact Assessments are completed in relation to the canvass process and access to information prior to an election (notice of poll, polling stations etc.) and a follow-up plan for targeted engagement is put in place.**
- **That the s.31 grant received for implementation of IER is ring-fenced by the authority for that purpose.**

An Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out for this review. This can be viewed at www.bassetlaw.gov.uk under the Equality Section or by contacting the Policy and Scrutiny Unit on 01909 533189.

1.2 Scope of the Review

As outlined above, Members decided at the Scoping meeting to keep the review quite focussed on electoral engagement, as it was felt that there was other activity already in place in relation to young people and wider involvement in decision-making.

Our Ambition for the Review:

To maintain and potentially improve current levels of electoral registration within recognised disengaged groups and following the implementation of Individual Electoral Registration (IER).

Our Scope:

- Examine the current approach by BDC to the annual canvass, information provided prior to an election and approaches used for the hard to reach groups identified (young people 16-25; those with learning difficulties; those with English as a second language). Compare with best practice approaches.

- Consult representatives from the hard to reach groups identified to establish view points on current electoral engagement and possible improvements
- Explore the impact of IER on the Council and propose a framework for the authority to ensure current canvass return levels are maintained.

As part of the review Members agreed to assess current performance levels including:

- gathering current election turnout figures
- gathering current canvass return figures
- comparing figures with other 'like' authorities

Who and how shall we consult?

| Who | How |
|--|-------------------------------|
| BDC Elections Services | Invite to Day 1 |
| BDC Communications | Invite to Day 1 |
| Rotherham MBC – Scrutiny | Invite to Day 1 |
| Vale Royal BC – Scrutiny | Written evidence |
| Crawley BC – Scrutiny | Written evidence |
| Bassetlaw Youth Council | Via BDC CYP Member Ambassador |
| Speaker on IER – possibly AEA or Electoral Commission | Invite to Day 1 |
| Representative for young people – NCC and community | Invite to Day 2 |
| Representative for those with learning difficulties – NCC and community | Invite to Day 2 |
| Representative for those with English as a second language – NCC and community | Invite to Day 2 |
| Bassetlaw residents | Hard copy/online survey |

Our key proposed outcomes:

- Ensure that BDC has a clear framework for delivery of IER
- Ensure an improved approach to how residents are communicated with in relation to elections
- Maintain and where possible improve the canvass return

1.3 Membership

The membership of the Panel was as follows:

- Councillor Bill Barker (Chair)
- Councillor Rebecca Leigh (Vice-Chair)
- Councillor Hugh Burton
- Councillor Alan Chambers
- Councillor Ian Campbell
- Councillor Patricia Douglas (resigned after second meeting due to other work commitments – not replaced)
- Councillor Michael Gray
- Cllr Michelle Gregory (replaced as of 01.11.12 by Councillor White)
- Councillor Tracey Taylor
- Councillor Jo White (as of 01.11.12)

1.4 Summary of Recommendations

The key recommendations are in bold.

| | Recommendation | Responsible Officer | Financial Implications | Delivery Timescale | Risks to delivery/ Officer Comment |
|----|---|---|--|--------------------|--|
| 1. | That staffing levels within the Unit are increased at the earliest opportunity through recruiting to the post of Electoral Services Officer prior to the end of the financial year as a full-time post, and that succession planning/training is put in place in light of the implementation of IER. | Steve Brown, Senior Manager Support Services | £17,984 to move post from 3 days to 5 days | June 2013 | Approval for the post to be made full-time is subject to a Service Review in early 2013. This will require Cabinet approval. Dependent on Cabinet timescale it is unlikely a new post-holder would commence before Summer 2013. Interim support arrangements are being reviewed pending the May 2013 election. |
| 2. | That the Elections Unit agrees a set of performance indicators to be added to the Council's suite of indicators for 2013/14. | Steve Brown, Senior Manager Support Services | Officer time | March 2013 | This will take place as part of service planning and target-setting for 2013/14. |
| 3. | That a revised approach is taken to the annual canvass process based on statistical analysis of the data held in the Xpress Software System, leading to a targeted deployment of canvassers in areas of low/declining registration rates. The GIS Unit should be used to support this process. | Steve Brown, Senior Manager Support Services Lesley Bianco, Information Services Manager | Officer Time. Software costs for Elections and GIS are covered via existing budgets. | July 2013 | This is seen as a key area of development for the service which we welcome. |

| | Recommendation | Responsible Officer | Financial Implications | Delivery Timescale | Risks to delivery/ Officer Comment |
|----|--|---|--|----------------------------|---|
| 4. | That the Elections Unit commissions the Communications Unit to provide dedicated publicity support during the annual canvass and prior to polling day during any election period, to include use of social media where appropriate. | Steve Brown, Senior Manager Support Services | Press coverage – officer time only. Adverts – approx. £300 per qtr page, per publication – covered by Service budget | April 2013 onwards | At present there is no budget for publicity/promotions but we will look to maximise existing communications channels and ensure a communications plan is developed. |
| 5. | That the Elections Unit provides all necessary information required by the GIS Unit at the earliest opportunity to ensure that revised processes are in place prior to the next elections in May 2013 i.e. polling district boundaries, polling station locations, electoral register responses. | Steve Brown, Senior Manager Support Services Lesley Bianco, Information Services Manager | Officer Time. Software costs for Elections and GIS are covered via existing budgets. | March/April 2013 | This is seen as a key area of development for the service which we welcome. |
| 6. | That staff within the Elections Unit receive targeted training on both the Xpress Software System (to enable full usage), and the implementation of IER. | Gillian Blenkinsop, Corporate Development and Policy Manager | Officer Time Corporate Training budget – Express Training, 1 day (£150), 2 day (£300) plus travel and accommodation | 2013/14 training programme | A number of training programmes have been identified following the PCC Elections to ensure staff members knowledge of the Xpress system is refreshed which will be put forward for approval as part of the normal training and development process. |

| | Recommendation | Responsible Officer | Financial Implications | Delivery Timescale | Risks to delivery/ Officer Comment |
|----|---|--|--|--|--|
| 7. | That BDC agrees a partnership arrangement with A1 Housing to ensure that electoral registration is part of the tenancy agreement process for new tenants, and that support from A1 Housing Officers is explored during the canvass period where non-returning properties are identified. | Steve Brown, Senior Manager Support Services | Officer Time – BDC and A1. Minimal printing costs – within existing BDC budgets | February 2013 onwards | We are aware that this is something that A1 Housing has considered recently. On further discussion we are aware there is initial support to including electoral registration as part of the tenancy agreement process. Other aspects of a partnership approach will be explored. |
| 8. | That Equality Impact Assessments are completed in relation to the canvass process and access to information prior to an election (notice of poll, polling stations etc.) and a follow-up plan for targeted engagement is put in place. | Steve Brown, Senior Manager Support Services | Officer Time for EIAs | February 2013 | This will be completed in line with organisation policy on equalities. |
| 9. | That a process for measuring customer satisfaction be put in place so that following an election/canvass period a sample of residents are contacted to assess their satisfaction with the Council's processes. To include measures for recording complaints referred to the Electoral Commission where appropriate. | Steve Brown, Senior Manager Support Services | Officer Time. Cost of calls/printing of surveys – dependent on approach taken. | Subject to the timing of the next annual canvass | Polling stations are inspected regularly and reports are received from Presiding Officers following elections to assess improvements required. Due to current staff capacity we would not be able to carry out detailed resident surveys to gauge satisfaction with processes. |

| | Recommendation | Responsible Officer | Financial Implications | Delivery Timescale | Risks to delivery/ Officer Comment |
|-----|---|--|---|-----------------------------|--|
| 10. | That BDC arrange a series of Members briefings on IER to clarify implementation and the impact on the authority | Steve Brown, Senior Manager Support Services | Officer/ Member Time | March 2013 – December 2014. | This will be a key part to BDC's approach to IER implementation. |
| 11. | That the senior manager for elections ensures that BDC is fully engaged with colleagues involved in the national roll-out of IER (due to BDC staff changes) and that Cabinet is kept informed of policy developments. | Steve Brown, Senior Manager Support Services | Officer time | On-going to December 2014 | Officers from the service have ensured representation at key AEA and IER meetings following the departure of the Elections Manager. Once further policy information is available, reports will be submitted to Cabinet in respect of the authorities approach to IER transition. |
| 12. | That BDC consider what enforcement measures can be put in place in line with the national civil penalty agreed for IER, to ensure registration levels are maintained. | Steve Brown, Senior Manager Support Services | To be determined in Cabinet report once national IER penalties have been clarified. | March 2014 | A report will be submitted to Members on the enforcement implications of IER for Cabinet consideration. |

| | Recommendation | Responsible Officer | Financial Implications | Delivery Timescale | Risks to delivery/ Officer Comment |
|-----|--|--|--|-------------------------|---|
| 13. | That BDC employ additional canvassers during the transition period to ensure registration levels are maintained, to include a review of pay rates. | Steve Brown, Senior Manager Support Services | To be determined based on requirements following data matching process mid-2014. | July 2014 | Indications from Cabinet Office are that dedicated funds will be provided to aid the transition process covering all associated costs. |
| 14. | That the s.31 grant received for implementation of IER is ring-fenced by the authority for that purpose. | Mike Hill, Head of Finance and Property Services | Central govt. grant to cover IER implementation. Costs incurred outside of initial allocations will be recorded and receipts/invoices submitted to the Cabinet Office for reimbursement. | April 2014 – March 2015 | The ring-fencing of a dedicated grant such as this is standard practice within the authority, regardless of whether it is deemed 'ring-fenced' by central government. The money will be protected for IER implementation. |

2. Background

Bassetlaw District Council's Select Panel 2 was tasked to review Promoting Electoral Engagement within the Community as part of the Annual Work Programme 2012/13. The topic was approved by Overview and Scrutiny Committee in June 2012.

The review addresses the ambitions of the Corporate Plan 2012-2015 as follows:

AMBITION 4: A WELL RUN COUNCIL

Priority 1 – Provide opportunities for participation in decision making

Two topics were initially put forward for the 2012/13 Scrutiny Work Programme:

- Electorate engagement and registration
Issues: Perception of low voter turnout in May 2012 and the need for a more pro-active approach to engagement in the election process
- Promoting Links with Young People to the Council
Issues: Young Peoples' understanding of politics and how the Council works. Improvement in the ways in which Young People can be engaged in decision-making/informed of local issues.

Following lengthy discussions at the annual Scrutiny Work Programme Workshop, Members decided to join these topics together and for them to be presented to Overview & Scrutiny Committee as part of the shortlist for consideration. The combined topic was chosen for referral to Panel. At the first meeting of the Panel, Members again had a lengthy discussion as to how best to ensure both elements could be addressed as it was felt that while they were related, there were only certain elements that aligned. The review was then narrowed to focus on electoral engagement in the registration process, with a focus on specific resident groups, how the service communicates with the public at key times during the year and how the council should approach the implementation of Individual Electoral Registration (IER) (detailed scope outlined at 1.2). It was agreed that a focus on turnout would not prove as beneficial as this was not something that the authority had a huge influence over and was more the remit of the individual parties in encouraging voter turnout.

As part of the scoping meeting the Members of the panel considered a variety of background information including election statistics, scrutiny reviews carried by other local authorities, detail of activity within current Service Improvement and Development Plans and the Corporate Plan 2012-2015 and current information available from the Cabinet Office in relation to IER.

Bassetlaw District Council is one of 67 two-tier district councils where councillors are elected for four-year terms by thirds; that is, at each election, a third of the councillors (or as near as possible) are elected. Elections are held every year except in the year when the County Council election is held. There are two other approaches – elections by halves (not in the year of the County Council election) and whole council elections once every four years (mid-term of the County Council elections).

Election Statistics – turnout

On analysing the turnout at Bassetlaw elections from 2003 to 2012 the following variations were found:

- 2012: between 24-38% (District)
- 2011: between 33-54% (District)
- 2010: 64.57% (General) and between 50-68% (District)
- 2009: between 31-40% (County)
- 2008: 20-51% (District)
- 2007: 22-46% (District)
- 2006: 21-46% (District)
- 2005: 58.5% (General); figure for County turnout not available.
- 2004: 33-55% (District)
- 2003: 17-47% (District)
- Lowest turnout is consistently Worksop South East
- Highest turnout is consistently Clayworth or East Markham (in 2006 and 2010 it was Everton)

The results show that it does not necessarily follow that turnout will be higher locally following a General Election, but that turnout is generally higher for County elections than District. What was useful was the comparison of areas where turnout was at its lowest on each occasion, as this gives a clear indication as to which localities are less likely to engage in voting and possibly in registration. Members hoped that statistics in relation to registration levels could also be analysed as part of the review.

Young People

As part of the information presented to panel members, it was acknowledged that the authority has previously supported Bassetlaw District Youth Assembly, a Nottinghamshire County Council (NCC) Initiative. Bassetlaw District Council has run activities during Local Democracy Week since 2003, in conjunction with NCC Youth Service and BDC Councillors. In addition, a Scrutiny Review of Services for Young People took place in 2007/08 which led to a number of recommendations that have shaped how BDC currently approach service delivery in this area. This includes engagement with schools, designated Officer and Member leads, an action plan for the authority and greater integration between services with contact with young people.

Activity within current Service Improvement and Development Plans and the Corporate Plan 2012-2015

There are a number of actions within both the current Corporate Plan and Service Improvement & Development Plans (SID):

| Community Engagement & Performance SID | Support Services SID | Corporate Plan |
|---|-----------------------------|-----------------------|
| C.SID-CEP.04 | C.SID-SS.01 | CP3-PID 01.1.04 |
| C.SID-CEP.09 | C.SID-SS.01.01 | CP3-PID 01.1.04a |
| C.SID-CEP.12.2 | C.SID-SS.01.02 | CP3-PID 01.1.04b |
| C.SID-CEP.13 | C.SID-SS.01.03 | CP4-PID 01.3 |

- Activity has been delivered as part of Local Democracy Week since 2003 linked to the previous Youth Assembly initiatives run by Nottinghamshire County Council (C.SID-SS.01.02).
- The approaches to school engagement in relation to elections and decision-making have been in place since the last Scrutiny Review (C.SID-SS.01.03).
- There is activity aimed at increasing the Council's interaction using social media (C.SID-CEP.13).
- The BDC Consultation & Engagement Officer liaises as required with North Notts College and attends open days to ensure a BDC presence (C.SID-CEP.04).
- BDC Communications Unit is linked to the PLUGGED event aimed at young people (C.SID-CEP.04).
- For the first time, activity in relation to encouraging voter registration and voter participation has been included in the Corporate Plan (CP4-PID 01.3).

Individual Electoral Registration (IER)

Individual Electoral Representation aims to modernise and improve the electoral registration system, ensuring better protection against electoral fraud and a more convenient approach for eligible citizens to register to vote. This new approach to electoral registration is due to be in place by the end of 2014. The aim is to have IER fully operational by the 2015 General Election.

This new approach will involve individual registration rather than via a head of household and additional personal data will be required i.e. NI number for identity verification. There will be a civil penalty for those failing to register following reminders but the penalty is yet to be agreed. The criminal penalty for failing to return the household canvas remains.

While there is cross-party support around the need to move to IER (we are the only western nation still using the household registration form), a number of key issues have been highlighted. Data disclosure and management is key as it is highly likely that use of personal information is a current cause of non-registration. The Electoral Commission estimates that up to 6.5million are currently not registered to vote, and all are in agreement that this should not be exacerbated by the move to IER. There is also concern in certain areas that there could be a significant drop in the electorate in some areas.

The annual household canvas will remain but residents will be individually responsible for confirming details/applying to register to vote. Local Authorities are expected to support the process of moving to IER by planning appropriate resources and organisational change as well as promoting public awareness from mid-2013. Research has been carried on in relation to current under-represented groups and barriers to registration – attitudes, awareness and understanding of the process are seen as key factors to the likelihood of an individual registering and subsequently voting.

The Cabinet Office has carried out consultation through the development of IER and acknowledges that there are groups at risk of low engagement:

- Young people – lack of knowledge, family influence from those who are apathetic/have negative views
- Those who are apathetic/hold negative view on politics
- Those with English as a second language
- Those with learning difficulties

The government has allocated £108million to cover the costs associated with transition to the new system which will be transferred to authorities through grants under section 31 of the Local Government Act 2003.

Members agreed that this development needed to be explored further as part of the evidence gathering process and a contact at the Cabinet Office was sought. The response is examined at section 4.3 and Appendix 6.1.

Analysis of other similar Scrutiny Reviews

As part of the background research, a search of the Centre for Public Scrutiny library was carried out to assess what other scrutiny reviews had taken place covering a similar topic. The following three reviews were examined as part of the scoping meeting to help panel members to define what the focus of the review should be. A précis of each has been provided.

Rotherham – Electoral Registration and Voter Turnout in Local Government

- Scope of the Review:
 - To identify the policies, practices and services and any identifiable barriers which impact upon Electoral Registration in Rotherham in order to improve the level of registration.
 - To identify the reasons for lower voter turnout in elections and to propose practices which this authority could undertake to improve the situation.

They assessed current policies and practices, examples of best practice, partnership working, resource allocation and requirements to increase voter turnout. They surveyed their Resident's Panel as part of a process to gauge views on improvements to the voting process in order to improve turnout. They met with young people, BME groups, those with learning disabilities and representatives from other authorities. Examples were gathered from best practice authorities (see pages 19-21) that included:

- Intensive door to door canvassing – essential where there is a high turnover of electorate
- Registration reminders sent to all void properties
- A Voters Guide (Hammersmith and Fulham)
- Larger poll cards with additional information
- Use of community outreach staff to talk in schools, clubs, voluntary organisations
- Access to an interpreting service for presiding officers and canvassers to help residents unclear about the process. Polling staff with language skills are also placed appropriately based on the population of the area.

- Recommendations included:
 - Consideration of small community outreach teams to undertake education and information events about electoral matters.
 - Publicity related specifically to registration
 - Availability of registration forms
 - Multi-lingual publicity/support/ canvassing teams
 - Encouragement of staff to take on election support roles i.e. Poll Clerk, DVD on voting process from start to finish
 - A booklet 'How to exercise your vote'
 - Work with schools around running campaigns/voting as part of the Citizenship curriculum

Vale Royal – Enhancing Local Democracy Task Group

- Scope of the Review:
 - To look at community/resident participation in the democratic process, including elections
 - To identify if the current procedures meet the needs of residents, to look at how communication and procedures can be improved to gain greater community involvement.

This is a wider scope and looks at general engagement in the decision-making process. Members felt that this was too wide a scope for the purpose of our review, particularly as there was other work already in place in relation to engagement of young people and improved/increased communications in relation to involvement in decision-making.

- Recommendations included:
 - A guide to services provided by each tier of local government (we know this is an issue locally)
 - Councillor/Officer/Mayoral visits to schools and colleges in relation to democracy, elections and conveying key messages.
 - Increased public engagement by Councillors prior to meetings
 - Improved publicity on how to stand for election/the democratic process
 - Greater Publicity/review of the Forward Plan and Committee papers

Crawley – Electoral Turnout Scrutiny Panel

- Scope of the Review :
 - Improving electoral registration and turnout

As part of their review they considered the review by Rotherham mentioned above, and also looked at London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham which at the time had the highest registration in London. They also gathered other best practice ideas used at other authorities as recommended by the Electoral Commission:

- Annual confirmation of registration sent to all households
- Forms available in different languages
- Promotion of registration outside annual canvass period
- All year round canvass
- Sending households a general voter's guide and information on absent voting
- Providing an "am I registered?" on-line enquiry service
- Obtaining names and addresses of newly naturalised British citizens
- Send poll cards in envelopes
- Recommendations included:
 - Improved working between elections/council tax/benefits for new properties or new residents
 - Increased face to face canvass through the recruitment of additional canvassers
 - Greater publicity via website/print (newspaper wrap around) prior to an election
 - An informal Elections Forum
 - A voters guide for all new electors
 - Use existing council mailshots to send information to all households e.g. annual council tax demand
 - Improve connections of officers and Members with schools/colleges and Youth Council
 - Consider alternative publicity methods e.g. cinema, lamp post banners, bespoke press campaigns
 - Consider use of targeted mailshot with poll card and other election publicity in an envelope (possible cost implications)

Members were keen to receive follow up information from the three authorities as part of the evidence gathering. However, Vale Royal BC ceased to exist on the 31 March 2009, due to the recent creation of new unitary authorities and is now part of Cheshire West and Chester. This follow-up information is contained within section 4.1.

3. Method of Review

3.1 Summary of Review Meetings

It should be noted that due to the availability of witnesses, Members agreed to switch the planned witnesses for the two daytime sessions around

| Meeting | Witnesses | Evidence Gathered |
|---------------------------------------|---|---|
| 11 th September 2012 | None | Background detail on current council activity; scrutiny reviews undertaken by other authorities. Agreed scope of the Review |
| 25 th September 2012 | None | Agreed witnesses for both daytime sessions and possible lines of questioning. Further background information presented from the Elections Unit. |
| 25 th October 2012 – Day 1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mr Marcin Wasiak, local polish resident• Ms Jan Harding, Bassetlaw Learning Disability Association• Ms Michelle Fayer, Centre Place | Resident experience from the three ‘low engagement’ groups identified; analysis of canvass return statistics 2009-2011; further comparison with other authority areas that have completed a similar review. Agreement of questions for Day 2. |
| 1 st November 2012 | None | Agreed questions for Cabinet Office in relation to IER. |
| 8 th November 2012 – Day 2 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Jonathan Brassington, Communications Manager• Steve Brown, Senior Manager Support Services | Clarified how the communications service works with the authority and how it is currently used to support the work of the Elections Unit. Clarified the current work of the Elections Unit, approaches to the annual canvass and election periods, staffing capacity, planning processes, possible impact of IER. Members agreed the recommendations of the panel based on evidence to date, pending information from the Cabinet Office on IER |
| 5 th December 2012 | None | Feedback from Cabinet Office analysed. Final wording of the recommendations agreed. |

3.2 Residents' Survey

Members agreed to carry out a residents' survey following on from the questions posed to witnesses attending Day 1 of the review (see Appendix 2 for the survey and results report). The survey was carried out during November 2012 and was available online and in hard copy from Worksop and Retford One-Stop Shops; Harworth Information Centre; Tuxford Mine of Information; Bassetlaw CAB; 2 Shires Credit Union and Parish Councils. The survey was also publicised on the council's Facebook page

The survey received a limited response and could not be classed as a representative sample based on Bassetlaw's population/the current electorate – 69,280 (May 2012).

Nevertheless, the results of the survey showed that on the whole residents understand the need to be registered to vote and that there are different ways to do this. However, it is clear from some responses that further information clarifying the candidates standing; where to vote; and how to vote would be of benefit. This supports the information gathered from the witnesses attending Day 1 of the review and is reflected within the recommendations of the panel.

4. Addressing the Scope: Evidence Gathered for Recommendations

4.1 Examine the current approach by BDC to the annual canvass, information provided prior to an election, and approaches used for the hard to reach groups identified. Compare with best practice approaches.

Current Approach to Annual Canvass

From evidence gathered on Day 2 of the review it is apparent that currently there is no canvass plan in place. The service does not currently use the Communications team to assist in publicity at key points to encourage registration, and the situation is the same in relation to the period prior to an election.

For the 2012 canvass the initial form was mostly hand delivered by canvassers, with a small proportion postal where there was no cover by canvassers. The first reminder was posted to all required households. The final reminder was again a mixture of staff canvassers, where cover was available, and postal to the remaining areas. BDC have a regular pool of canvassers, some involved for around 30 years and the efficiency of the canvassers is regularly checked. Where there are any concerns with the ability of an officer they are not re-recruited to subsequent canvasses.

Officers noted there was no specific approach for those with learning disabilities or low literacy and those with English as a second language, and there had never been requests for an alternative version of the form. However, as part of the response to Q16 on Day 2 (see section 4.2), officers noted that there was a potential reliance on support workers in care homes to ensure completion of forms.

Where there is a nil return from a household two years in a row, a letter is sent to say that they are being removed from the list for circulation of registration forms. This includes a form should the resident want to add themselves to the register at any time. Officers noted that it was costly to prosecute and as such this avenue was not pursued at present due to staff capacity/resources available.

The Electoral Commission monitors return rates submitted and would follow up a low registration rate with the authority if this happened. It was noted that BDC receive a pot of money to support the annual canvass which is a fixed budget.

When questioned about the frequency of use of the different response formats for the household canvass, officers felt that residents wanted a choice and that all options were used, although some more than others.

Analysis of Canvass Statistics

As part of the review we had access to a number of reports generated from the Xpress software system. This included detailed reports on the canvass returns from 2008-2011. On further examination the statistics for 2009-2011 were deemed suitable to be analysed in detail (see Appendix 6.4). Approximately 67% of polling districts had decreased their return rate during the three year period, which Members felt did not bode well in relation to the implementation of IER.

Councillors commented that registration was down in some areas that they have put concerted efforts in to. They felt the rates did not reflect the work of political parties at a local level and were concerned how whole communities were affected in some cases. They agreed that a wider discussion was needed prior to the next canvass, regarding the figures and why this information did not seem to be used to influence service planning with regard to completing the canvass.

| Canvass Returns | | | | |
|-----------------|--------|--------|--------|---|
| 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 |
| 94.01% | 93.20% | 90.79% | 93.36% | 89.31% (to date, canvass in progress at time of research) |

Members agreed that there needed to be additional capacity within the service to allow for strategic planning for key work areas such as the annual canvass, as current arrangements did not seem to allow for this. Use of analysis similar to that completed by the panel would enable targeted deployment of canvassers to areas with a decrease in registration/known low response areas, and this approach is used by a number of the authorities researched as part of the review.

As part of the questioning during the review and on Day 2 to the officer representing the service, it is clear that mapping of electoral information does not currently take place. A number of authorities have links on their websites which residents can use to see a map of the location of their polling station, and some place a small map on the poll card circulated prior to an election. This information could be easily mapped by our GIS team and is something that they have wanted to develop for a while. It is likely that they would also be able to map registration responses allowing further targeted approaches to the annual canvass, or reminder mail-outs prior to an election for un-registered households. This would also be a useful tool, once the transition to IER is complete as it would allow any under-registration to be addressed/targeted communications to newly registered voters to take place.

In relation to this area, Members made the following recommendations:

Recommendation:

That a revised approach is taken to the annual canvass process based on statistical analysis of the data held in the Xpress Software System, leading to a targeted deployment of canvassers in areas of low/declining registration rates. The GIS Unit should be used to support this process.

That the Elections Unit provides all necessary information required by the GIS Unit at the earliest opportunity to ensure that revised processes are in place prior to the next elections in May 2013 i.e. polling district boundaries, polling station locations, electoral register responses.

Use of Publicity to support the canvass process/encourage voter turnout

Discussion was had by Members regarding how the Council could provide reminders to residents at the time of annual canvass and elections. Through our research we have found that Crawley BC has a link on their website to a service offered by the Electoral Commission:

Voting Reminders:

The Electoral Commission has set up a system to remind people either by SMS or email.

Once you have signed up you can select for reminders to sign up to the electoral register before it closes, return your postal vote or vote on polling day itself.

To sign up for this free service please go to www.electionalarmclock.com

As noted above, Members learned that the service does not have an official Canvass Plan or any programmed publicity at key points during the year. This would be something that could easily be commissioned from the Communications team; however, guaranteed editorial adverts/advertorials would be at a cost from the service budget which is currently not in place. Members also discussed with officers from the service/communications about the possibility of joint publicity campaigns with neighbouring

authorities. The Communications Manager noted that this process had been put in place for the Police Commissioner elections and he felt it could work for other elections that impacted across the county. Members also suggested that in relation to radio, it may be possible to work with Doncaster MBC as Trax FM covers both areas.

In relation to the council's website, Members also noted the following improvements that could be made based on approaches used elsewhere. The following issues were noted for improvement:

- No full explanation of Proxy voting
- No full list of current Polling Stations – this could be mapped by GIS
- Electoral Registration 'page': Needs explanation of rolling registration
- Form available on the website is different to the one supplied by the service – there needs to be a consistent use of forms.
- Aware of issue raised by public re accessibility of documents on website i.e. use a compatible version of word, copy of adobe reader available for download
- Polling Stations 'page': Page refers to 2011 instead of 2012.
- No guide to voting as used by other authorities

Work with Partners

This is discussed in more detail subsequently, however, in the absence of a council publication, due to the removal of Bassetlaw News, Members feel that the service should look to make use of A1 Housing publications e.g. In Touch magazine as a means of communicating as a minimum with council tenants with regard to electoral registration.

Links to Electoral Commission Material

Cheshire West and Chester, the authority that Vale Royal BC is now part of, has a link to a video which walks the voter through the entire process. This is ideal for both newly registered electors and those that are on the register but have never voted as every step of the process is explained. They also make clear links to GIS allowing the resident to search for their polling station. The mapping of our polling stations to enable such a tool is something that officers have been looking at, but to date the project has not been completed. The way the elections team work with GIS in the future is seen as a key issue for Members and the mapping of elections data, including access to a search tool for polling stations is seen as essential.

Rotherham MBC also has links to specific forms on the Electoral Commission site for those in the armed forces, which again would be a useful addition to our website.

As such Members have agreed the recommendation below and this should be seen in conjunction with a review of the website by staff members from the team and the service web content editor.

Recommendation:

That the Elections Unit commissions the Communications Unit to provide dedicated publicity support during the annual canvass and prior to polling day during any election period, to include use of social media where appropriate.

Performance Management

As part of the questioning to the service on Day 2, Members sought to clarify how performance is monitored.

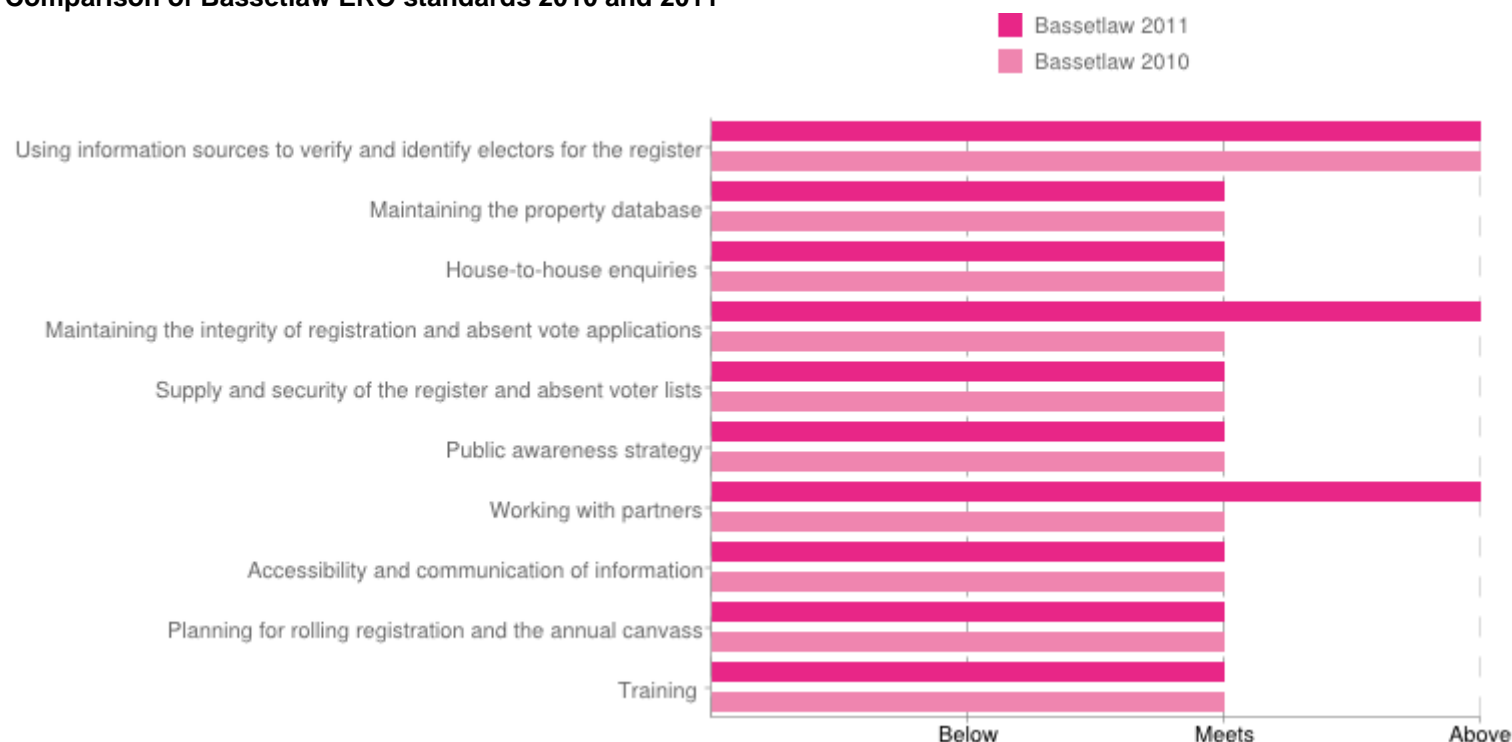
*Q5. Have you considered monitoring any PIs for the Service in line with the approach taken by other authorities?
Q6. How do we perform in relation to the Electoral Commission's Performance Standards?*

The officer attending the review acknowledged that this was area they wanted to develop once the new manager is in post and that they would be happy for PIs to be trialled during 2013/14. PIs chosen could be similar to the canvass return rate used by Three Rivers District Council, or those used by Wealdon District Council:

- Response rates to annual electoral registration canvass
- Election costs per elector
- Electoral Registration costs per elector
- Turnout at last local election
- % of telephone calls answered in less than 15 seconds
- % of emails replied to within one working day
- Number of letters replied to within five working days
- Errors found on Register of Electors

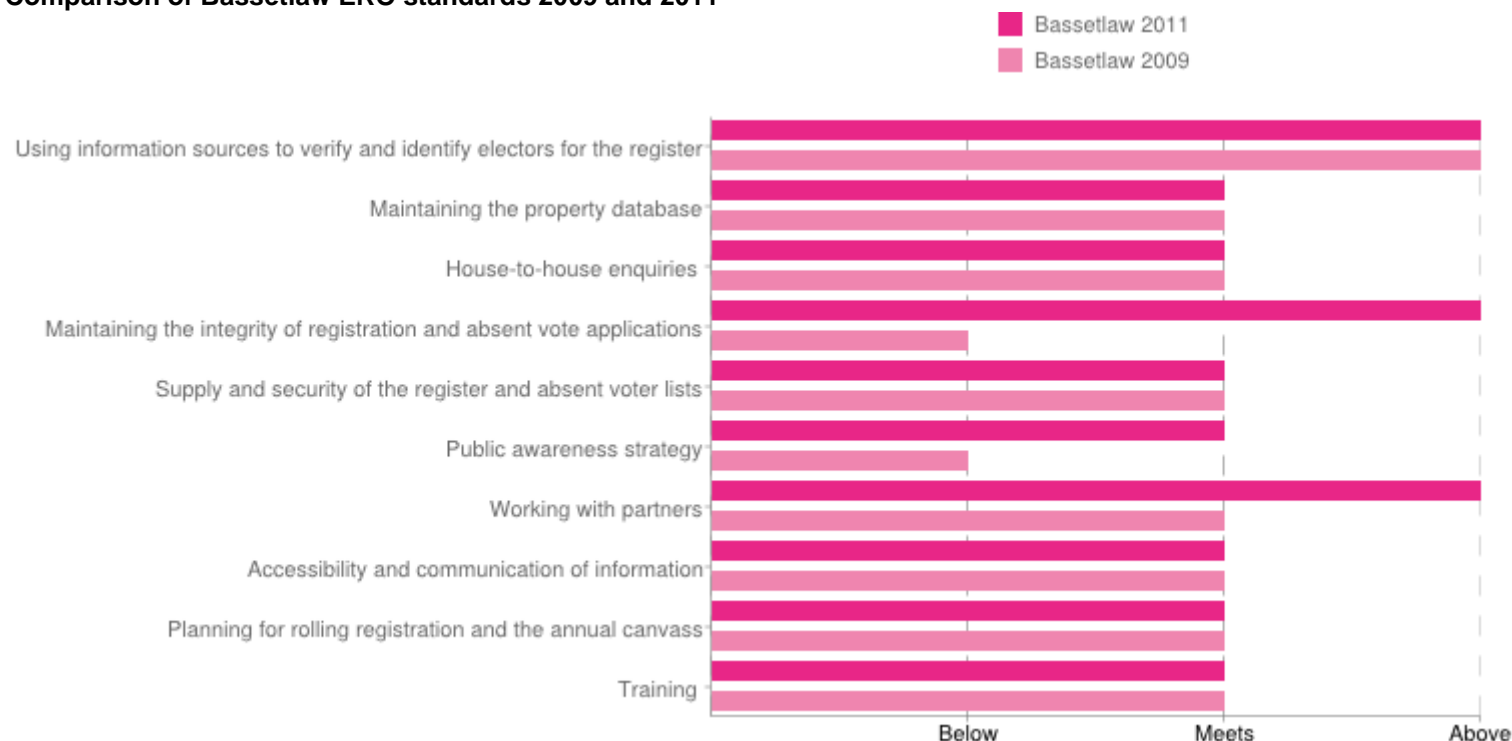
In relation to Electoral Commission standards (see Appendix 6.5), it was acknowledged that there is a weakness in relation to Standard 6 (see Figures 2 and 3 below) and that there needed to be more work with partners. Partnership Working is discussed further below.

Figure 1: Comparison of Bassetlaw ERO standards 2010 and 2011



As of 2010, Bassetlaw DC was considered as meeting all the performance standards monitored by the Electoral Commission. However, as we are aware that there is still no targeted use of support from the Communications Unit, it is felt that this is still an area of risk.

Figure 2: Comparison of Bassetlaw ERO standards 2009 and 2011

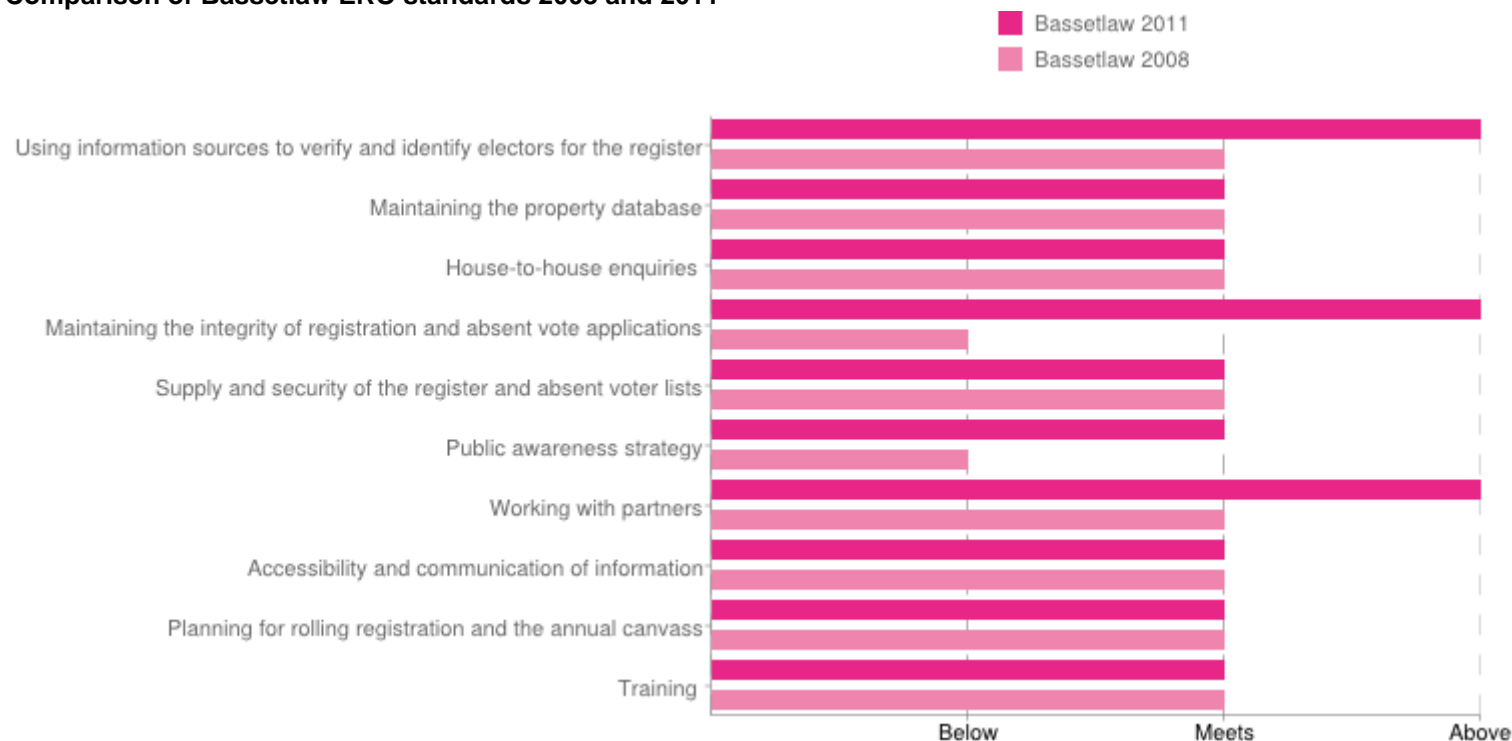


This table shows that Bassetlaw was still below standard in the same two areas in 2009 as 2008 (see Figure 3).

Figure 3 shows a weakness in public awareness, which due to the questioning on Day 2 Members are aware of. This performance data from the Electoral Commission adds further weight to Recommendation 4 noted above around commissioning work by the Communications Unit:

That the Elections Unit commissions the Communications Unit to provide dedicated publicity support during the annual canvass and prior to polling day during any election period, to include use of social media where appropriate.

Figure 3: Comparison of Bassetlaw ERO standards 2008 and 2011



Members have agreed the following recommendations in relation to this area:

Recommendation:

That the Elections Unit agrees a set of performance indicators to be added to the Council's suite of indicators for 2013/14.

That a process for measuring customer satisfaction be put in place so that following an election/canvass period a sample of residents are contacted to assess their satisfaction with the Council's processes. To include measures for recording complaints referred to the Electoral Commission where appropriate.

Partnership Working

As mentioned above partnership working was also an area of concern for Members and part of the questioning on Day 2.

Q11. Do we have any arrangement in place with A1 Housing and their local Housing Officers re support to the registration process? (This could be via the A1 welcome Pack/Newsletters)

The officer attending the review meeting acknowledged that there was no arrangement in place at present and partnership working was an area for development. Members have found from research that the use of Council Tax mailshots and work with Housing Officers seems an obvious area for collaboration.

It is suggested that the Elections service seeks to ensure a reminder re registration is included in the Council Tax mail-out in March and to any mail-out to new residents.

In relation to work with A1 Housing, it became apparent during the review that links to electoral registration were being considered by A1 Officers. On further research it is clear that Officers would be supportive of including the registration form as part of the tenancy signing process. It would then be seen as standard part of the council process, and could be returned via internal mail at no cost to the new tenant. Further discussions would need to take place directly with Housing Officers' team in respect of support during annual canvass as this may require special visits which would need to be accounted for, perhaps similar to the costs of a canvasser.

Recommendation:

That BDC agrees a partnership arrangement with A1 Housing to ensure that electoral registration is part of the tenancy agreement process for new tenants and that support from A1 Housing Officers is explored during the canvass period where non-returning properties are identified.

Staff Capacity and Development

The current staffing situation where the Manager post is vacant is less than ideal at a time of austerity, as the cost of an AEA consultant is significantly more than the cost of the member of staff. Analysis of the different aspects of the service's work has shown that there is limited capacity for strategic planning of key work tasks, leading to what can only be described as a 'fire-fighting approach to service delivery. Alongside rolling registration which requires a monthly register and weekly amendments, there are unforeseen work pressures such as by-elections (District and Parish), the Committee process (for officers that support both service elements, and limited knowledge of the software system aside from the previous manager, who on the evidence has not used the software to its full potential.

As mentioned previously we are the only Nottinghamshire authority to elect by thirds which provides an increased workload for the staff members. Any change to this approach would require a decision by Full Council and is not on their current agenda. Although information gathered from the service suggests that cost saving benefits could be limited as the cost is simply split across the three years rather than one lump sum, allowing for better deals to be continually negotiated rather than dealing with increased prices every four years. There may also be benefits in a less frequent turnover in local councillors as all out elections could result in a dramatic change in those elected leading to a loss of experienced and knowledgeable councillors, regardless of political persuasion.

The current staffing situation had further highlighted the need for succession planning and increased staff training to ensure a spread of knowledge across staff. Nationally a number of staff have retired recently or are due to retire, which could be inflating wages as authorities seek to retain experienced staff.

Nottinghamshire Benchmarking Exercise

The exercise has shown that we are the least resourced authority in Nottinghamshire in terms of staffing capacity:

- Ashfield – 4 FTE
- Bassetlaw – 2.36 FTE (this was originally reported as 2.1 but clarification has amended this to 2.36. This does not include ad-hoc support from Democratic Services Officers)
- Broxtowe – 2.77 FTE
- Gedling – N/A
- Mansfield – 3 FTE
- Newark & Sherwood – 2 FTE plus manager
- Rushcliffe – 3 FTE plus manager

While there is a current trend to consider shared services approaches, Members are uncertain as to its benefits in this situation due to how the authority conducts elections and the development work that needs to take place, as highlighted in this report. To share a manager across two authorities would potentially result in a service across both, and this would cause issues when both authorities were conducting elections.

The existing manager post of three days per week has clearly not allowed sufficient capacity for development work and as such Members would strongly support recruitment to a full-time post, as was the original case prior to a flexible retirement arrangement with the previous post-holder.

There was also acknowledgement that IER may trigger the need for a further service review to increase staffing capacity, however, this cannot be quantified at this stage.

Recommendation:

That staffing levels within the Unit are increased at the earliest opportunity through recruiting to the post of Electoral Services Officer prior to the end of the financial year as a full-time post, and that succession planning/training is put in place in light of the implementation of IER.

That staff within the Elections Unit receive targeted training on both the Xpress Software System (to enable full usage); and the implementation of IER.

Comparisons with other Authority reviews

Feedback was sought from both Crawley BC and Rotherham MBC in relation to the success of implementing their reviews. A response was received from Crawley BC as follows in relation to specific recommendations, but overall most of the recommendations were implemented:

| Crawley Recommendation | Comment on Implementation | Comment from Panel members |
|--|--|---|
| Recommendation 7 – Informal Elections Forum | This was not agreed. | N/A |
| Recommendation 5 – Newspaper wrap around | This was easily delivered and met the desired outcomes i.e. informative, eye-catching; however there was no marked difference in election turnout therefore officers felt it was difficult to measure its true impact. | Issue of publicity still deemed important and that such approaches should be considered by the service when commissioning support from the Communications Unit. |
| Recommendation 4 – recruitment of canvassers | The authority has had a significant drop in the canvass return following the review up until last year, following a review of their process. They have now redirected the budget they had for publicity/ newspaper coverage to recruiting extra canvassers. The canvassers now have smaller areas and they have increased the pay available - £2 per form if a 98% return rate is met. They now only send one postal version of the form and have cut the second mailshot. They went to a 96% return rate from 89%. The calibre of canvassers was felt to be key to the success of the canvass. Information is still placed in the Council magazine and press releases are still used but these tend to lead to very brief coverage in the local press. | Recruitment of additional canvassers with the right skill set can clearly have an effect and should be considered by the service as part of future canvass planning. This is particularly key when assessing the impact of IER and how the council will respond to the transition and subsequent registrations/ annual canvass. |
| Recommendation 13 | This was not implemented. | |
| Recommendation 12 | This was deemed too expensive. | |

Additional feedback from Rotherham MBC was not available. Other authority reviews considered included London Borough of Merton and Bromsgrove DC. An analysis of how their recommendations relate to our reviews' scope is below. This discussion took place on Day 1 of the review and helped the Members to shape their line of questioning for Day 2 witnesses. Links to the documents are contained within the Bibliography and hard copies are available on request.

London Borough of Merton

Scope: The review focussed on democratic engagement and electoral services in the run up to the 2010 General election in an effort to improve voter turnout.

Recommendations that would link with the scope of our Review include:

1. Links to GIS – this could be done and isn't done currently.
2. Possible question for S Brown on the 8th Nov.
4. Possible question for S Brown re Countywide approach to publicity.
8. Members could suggest a review of the website based on current content.
10. This has been agreed as an action however it has not been fully completed.
- 16 and 17 could be explored further with J Brassington on the 8th November.
18. This would support greater involvement of young people in the scrutiny process (a recommendation of past reviews) and improve links with the Cabinet/Council.
19. This is a line of questioning for S Brown in relation to Bassetlaw DC (BDC) current activity, and a possible area for further improvement.
22. We do already have a calendar but this could be used by BDC Elections Service if a promotional campaign was agreed.

Bromsgrove District Council (June 2010)

Scope: The review looked at engagement in both elections and the wider decision-making process. It also looked at the 'duty to promote democracy'

Recommendations that would link with the scope of our Review include:

3. Promoting Democracy – use of market stalls/community events.
4. Cyber Democracy – website content, specific pages for democracy.
6. Young Citizens Webpage – aimed at explaining democratic process/ involvement.
8. Citizenship – schools engagement and supporting citizenship curriculum.
9. Schools Councils – support to facilitating school's arrangements and how they can link to local bodies.
- 11, 13, 14, 15 and 16. Democracy Year Campaign – Could be considered by the BDC Youth Ambassador.
12. A Member Democracy Champion – Could be considered by the Youth Ambassador.

Recommendations 3 and 11-16 would have a financial implication for Bassetlaw DC should we follow a similar line.

4.2 Consult representatives from the hard to reach groups identified to establish view points on current electoral engagement and possible improvements

As part of the Day 1 session, Members sourced representatives from three groups identified in Individual Electoral Registration (IER) literature as at risk through IER implementation, to assess how BDC currently cater for their needs and what may need to be put in place in the future when IER is implemented. The following summaries are a response from each of the three groups considered:

- Those with English as a second language
- Those with learning difficulties
- Young people 16-25

‘English as a second language’ – Local Polish resident Mr Marcin Wasiak

The community representative that attended the review noted that he had raised the questions sent to him with his work colleagues (both local residents and from Yorkshire/Mansfield areas) and with friends within the Bassetlaw community.

He noted that most do not engage in actual voting as they do not see the relevance and do not have affinity to the candidates as representative of their community. As such, this affects their choice of whether to register or not as they do not see any benefit to voting when the time arrives. Although he did note that most understood the need to register.

Where language is a barrier to understanding the forms received the resident would seek support from a work colleague/community member who had better language skills. This potentially negates the need to have forms in other languages, although it would help. He noted that if the BDC website had a translation tool enabling it to be viewed in other languages it would be easy for the council to ensure that an explanation of the process was at least available in languages known to have high usage in the District. This should be considered by the authority as a means of improving engagement with this resident group.

He noted that the Polish community was quite ‘closed’ as a group partly by choice and partly because they do not feel welcomed. He felt that they would benefit from having a clear spokesperson and that he would be happy to take on such a role with the Council where opportunities arise.

He noted that he had voted twice since being in the UK, once by postal vote. He noted that he had voted once in Poland since leaving because he was on holiday there at the time. He strongly believed it was important to vote in the country of residency, and noted that others he had spoken to take a similar view.

He felt that the current information available is clear but the main issue for migrants is not knowing who to vote for; what they stand for; and being able to relate to a candidate that will represent them as migrants. He felt that if there was a Polish candidate this would change things.

Young People (16-25) – Michelle Fayer, Centre Place

Centre Place provide a range of support and advice services including housing needs or homelessness, benefits advice, help with bills or budgeting, debt management advice, help finding or maintaining education, employment or training and social support.

The officer from Centre Place noted that a lot of young people that they work with are not registered as it is not something they prioritise. They would not be aware of the legal requirement to register or links to their credit rating. Most did not have experience of voting and are not interested in the process as they do not see a benefit to them voting. They do not feel they can have an impact. She felt that the main hurdle is making voting relevant to them and ensuring they have a good understanding of the process and reasons for voting, in order for them to register and ‘turn out’ on polling day.

She commented that it is likely that as most still see it as something ‘adult’ and in reality they view themselves as ‘dependent/children’, despite being over 18, it is a transition they are not ready for. She did note however, that she was aware of some of their young parents who did register and vote which would fit with this theory.

It was noted that use of social media could help in terms of promoting registration etc. as it was well used by this age group. While there is a lot of information should they choose to vote, most do not like filling in forms and this is something which Centre Place help with a lot. Also literacy levels are an issue for some (this could also be said of some adults), and it was not clear how this issue was being taken account of by the council in relation to form design/support to those registering.

Individual Electoral Registration may reduce registration further if the young people are not given access to the post/option to fill in the form by their parents. She also noted that most are likely to be influenced by their parents’ involvement in the electoral process and how they vote, or not as the case may be.

Members acknowledged that while the young people supported by Centre Place are not typical 16-25 year olds, the issue of form filling is possibly a barrier for many.

Learning Disabled – Jan Harding, Bassetlaw Learning Disability Association

Key issues discussed were the range in ability of local residents within this group. Those who were 'more able' could vote but would benefit from a more pictorial approach when completing forms. It was noted that it would help to see a picture of the candidate once at the polling station as it is likely they would remember a face if they had spoken to a candidate prior to the election. In addition, if the forms could be in a minimum of 12 font size or even 14 that would help with visual impairment and confusion with letters.

Most live in supported housing or with their own families. As such the registration forms can be completed under the current household approach easily. However, the form is not helpful as there is no way of indicating that the person is not able to vote/do jury service. It was noted that very often this is hand written on next to the name.

It was noted that most residents in this group would be easily influenced in the process which makes it questionable if they would have a true vote. Postal vote would possibly be better but they would still be open to potential influence.

It was also noted that the County Council are trying to introduce the Somerset Symbols system to have a co-ordinated approach to paperwork to improve understanding for the user group. It was recommended that this be looked at as part of any review of the paperwork required to register.

As part of the line of questioning to the service area on Day 2, panel members sought clarity on the Council's current approach to these groups.

Q16. What is your current approach to the engagement of hard to reach groups we have identified, in the electoral process? (Young People, Learning Difficulties, English as a second language)

The officer we spoke to for the service noted that in relation to young people, BDC have the citizenship programme as part of the Children and Young People Action Plan, and the birthday card but resources limit the work we can do. He also noted that staff in the service do not see an issue with the language barrier for migrant residents. In relation to learning difficulties it was noted that the council have not put specific resources to this and may be reliant on support in care homes. It was noted that the service had not had any requests for forms in an alternative format i.e. large print, Braille, another language, and while this was not covered in the printing contract for the annual canvass forms, it was felt that the company would be able to help in such a circumstance albeit at an additional cost. The 2011 Census will be available soon for a figure for the numbers of migrants and it was felt that it was possible to easily monitor numbers within all of these resident groups, in relation to developing any targeted service in the future.

It was noted that there will be national guidance for the IER roll-out which should clarify any targeted approach to be used with specific resident groups.

Panel Members feel that as part of our equalities screening the forms currently used should be assessed and the possibility of adapting them explored in line with comments received from the witnesses noted above. Specifically this would relate to:

- Font size
- Use of images for key questions i.e. address, phone number
- Availability in another language (as a minimum that the website should have a translation tool to enable migrant residents with limited language skills to view advice and guidance)

In addition, the service may wish to consider targeted engagement of residents within these groups to ensure registration levels remain high following the transition to IER.

Recommendation:

That Equality Impact Assessments are completed in relation to the canvass process and access to information prior to an election (notice of poll, polling stations etc.) and a follow-up plan for targeted engagement is put in place.

4.3 Explore the impact of IER on the Council and propose a framework for the authority to ensure current canvass return levels are maintained.

Individual Electoral Registration (IER) aims to modernise and improve the electoral registration system, ensuring better protection against electoral fraud and a more convenient approach for eligible citizens to register to vote. This new approach to electoral registration is due to be in place by the end of 2014. The aim is to have IER fully operational by the 2015 General Election.

This new approach will involve individual registration rather than via a head of household and additional personal data will be required i.e. NI number (NINO) for identity verification. There will be a civil penalty for those failing to register following reminders but the penalty is yet to be agreed. The criminal penalty for failing to return the household canvas remains.

Members of the panel have examined the Cabinet Office Implementation Plan alongside reports from the Electoral Reform Society which have explored the key issues noted in the Executive Summary of this report. Data disclosure and management is a key consideration when predicting possible registration rates following transition. When looking at this alongside our analysis of the canvass statistics, and the drop in registration already evident, panel members wish to stress to officers in the service that the need for a more targeted approach is required for the annual canvass. Members hope that recruiting to a 'full-time' manager post will give sufficient capacity for the strategic planning required now and during the transition period.

As part of the questioning for Day 2, members established that the Communications team is not currently commissioned to support the service with key public messages during the annual canvass and prior to elections. As part of the transition programme local authorities are expected to support the process of moving to IER by planning appropriate resources and organisational change as well as promoting public awareness from mid-2013. As such, it is vital that the service works with the Communications team at the earliest opportunity to establish support not only at a local level for local elections and the household canvass, but also in relation to support to the national roll-out of IER.

Panel members submitted a range of questions to the Cabinet Office (CO) to seek further clarification on a number of issues (see Appendix 6.1 for the detailed responses).

We are aware that the CO have carried out a range of consultation exercises and that they have heeded the reports of the Electoral Reform Society amongst others, and the concerns raised in relation to a reduction in registration rates and the level of engagement by specific resident groups. During the review, Members queried whether it would be possible to change our current forms to ask for a residents NINO prior to the transition to IER. Members acknowledged that the CO noted there would be no legal support for this as it was not required under the present system, but felt that it was a shame not to 'normalise' the request.

Members also noted that in response to question 9, there will be reliance on a general national publicity campaign by the Electoral Commission, rather than a targeted approach i.e. in schools (for new voters). Members felt that it was vital that IER is mentioned by officers as part of the existing citizenship programme.

While it is clear that Bassetlaw cannot be part of any trials in the period prior to transition, Members are keen that BDC is fully engaged in the roll-out process and are aware that other officers are now attending meetings in the absence of the Manager post. However, there is still concern around awareness of both Members and officers within the organisation and the panel agreed that this needed to be addressed.

In addition, in light of the predicted drop in registration rates following transition to IER, Members feel it is important that the council consider possible enforcement measures in relation to non-registration. This could be something that is in place as standard, or something that is triggered if Bassetlaw rates drop below a certain point i.e. 10% below 2011 levels. There would still need to be at least three attempts to secure a completed registration form, including at least one face to face visit. The scheme could be run similar to that of parking fines and research during the review has found examples of such schemes. This may be something that could be dealt with as part of a shared service approach across neighbouring authorities to achieve a cost effective service. While this would be voluntary it may be that if there is a significant drop nationally, a scheme such as this would be put in place regardless.

Furthermore, as the benchmarking research carried out across Nottinghamshire authorities shows, we have low staff capacity compared to our neighbours. The government has allocated £108million to cover the costs associated with transition to the new system which will be transferred to authorities through grants under section 31 of the Local Government Act 2003. This is being transferred as a non-ring fenced grant according to information available to Chief Executives and AEA officers, which has raised concerns for Members. Cabinet Office advice clearly states their desire for the s.151 officer to ensure that monies transferred for IER using s.31 are used for that purpose and that authorities ensure that they can meet all the usual duties arising from the Representation of the People Act 1983 (as amended 2014/15) from local authority budgets in the usual way.

We feel that it is paramount that BDC takes full advantage of this resource to ensure that the transition runs as smooth as possible. If this requires additional, temporary staffing/new permanent staffing, additional canvassers, or IT resources, then it is important that BDC plan to have sufficient financial resource available to support all aspects of the transition, pending any reimbursement via the s.31 grant by way of submission of receipts/invoices.

Members agreed the following recommendations in relation to IER:

Recommendation:

That BDC arrange a series of Members briefings on IER to clarify implementation and the impact on the authority.

That the senior manager for elections ensures that BDC is fully engaged with colleagues involved in the national roll-out of IER (due to BDC staff changes) and that Cabinet is kept informed of policy developments.

That BDC consider what enforcement measures can be put in place in line with the national civil penalty agreed for IER, to ensure registration levels are maintained.

That BDC employ additional canvassers during the transition period to ensure registration levels are maintained, to include a review of pay rates.

That the s.31 grant received for implementation of IER is ring-fenced by the authority for that purpose.

5. Conclusion

Research and analysis during the review highlights the need for greater emphasis on the engagement of young people, those with learning disabilities, those with English as second language, and where living in multiple occupancy properties – the elderly/disabled.

Increased staffing capacity and training of staff is key if the service is to develop its processes to meet the needs of IER. In addition, closer working with other areas of the council – Council Tax, GIS and A1 Housing Bassetlaw Ltd will provide clear benefits.

Both officers and Members need to be fully briefed on the IER implementation process to ensure that the authority is prepared for transition and how the service will run from December 2014 once the new system is fully in place. This is critical bearing in mind the General Election which is scheduled for May 2015.

If the service takes a revised approach to strategic planning and performance management, and works more effectively with partners and the Communications team, it should hopefully negate any negative impact of IER on registration rates and be able to deal with any drop in rates efficiently in line with Electoral Commission standards.

6. Appendices

6.1 Appendix 1: Cabinet Office Response to Select Panel Questions in relation to IER

1. Has the work of the Electoral Reform Society changed the Governments' line of thinking in any way?

A – We took into account all responses to our consultation on the draft secondary legislation, and have been speaking to stakeholders throughout.

2. What is the current thinking in relation to the use of NINO's (National Insurance number) as an identity check? This is of particular concern where the resident may not know it.

A – If an individual does not know their NINO, communications will be clear as to where it can be found. If they genuinely cannot provide their NINO, alternative verification routes are set out in the proposed draft secondary legislation. Details can be found here: <http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/resource-library/individual-electoral-registration-draft-secondary-legislation>

3. What is the current timetable for roll-out of IER, including any trials?

A – The IT roll out begins in April 2013, which will prepare electoral teams for the full transition in 2014. For further details, please see the implementation plan which was published on the Cabinet Office website and can be found here: <http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/resource-library/implementation-plan-individual-electoral-registration>

4. Has there been an analysis of cost implications to District councils to implement IER and how will implementation be paid for?

A – There has been an analysis of cost implications to District councils to implement IER. The Minister will be writing out to you in December 2012 with our final funding mechanism and again in March 2013 detailing specific financial allocations.

5. We gather that the new approach will require a trial – what form will this take and have areas been identified for this? What have been the criteria for agreeing 'trial' areas?

A – We have been pleased to conduct piloting with local authorities who volunteered to help us from a range of different demographics and localities.

6. Will pilot areas receive financial support to be part of the trial?

A – The local authority will be fully reimbursed if they are a part of any data matching pilot scheme.

7. In light of discussions relating to the threat of a £1000 penalty for non-registration and it's possible removal, has there been any further consideration of this?

A – There is no £1000 penalty for non-registration. The existing penalty for failing to provide information to an ERO when required to do so will remain for the household canvass form, and a new civil penalty (amount to be decided) will be introduced for individuals who fail to make an application when required to do so.

8. If the £1000 penalty remains, will Councils still be compelled to enforce non-registration given the costs of this enforcement process or will it remain discretionary?

A – The imposition of a requirement to apply to register, and the civil penalty, may be imposed by EROs, but they are not required to do so.

9. Will there be a focus on the need to register to vote within schools as part of the national curriculum, given the move to a new approach?

A – There will be a National Publicity campaign run by the Electoral Commission.

10. Could the Council adapt its current registration form to ask for NINOs as part of the process now, in an attempt to embed the question as standard, so as to placate the chance of resident's querying its necessity when IER is formally rolled out?

A – There is no legal cover for this to be done.

11. Will there be national monitoring of registration rates once the new scheme is implemented?


A – The Electoral Commission currently hold a statutory role in monitoring the accuracy and completeness of registers in Great Britain.

6.2 Appendix 2: Review of Electoral Engagement – Questionnaire and Survey Results

Review of Electoral Engagement

Your Views are Vital

BASSETLAW
DISTRICT COUNCIL



NORTH NOTTINGHAMSHIRE

Councillors are currently carrying out a review of the Elections Service, focusing on how the Service engages with the public when they register to vote and prior to elections.

The main aim is to maintain and potentially improve current levels of electoral registration within Bassetlaw. In particular Councillors would like to ensure that we are doing everything possible to engage all residents including specific groups such as young people (16-25), those with English as a second language, and those with learning difficulties.

Councillors will also make recommendations as to how the Council should prepare for the planned changes to electoral registration in 2015. This will see all those eligible to vote registering individually rather than using the current 'household' form.

We are interested in the general experience of our residents and have a short survey for those interested to complete.

All questions marked with '*' require an answer.

***1. Do you know how to register to vote?**

Yes

No

If 'No' please explain why:

***2. Do you know that you are required by law to register?**

Yes

No

Promoting Electoral Engagement within the Community

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***3. If you are registered and eligible to vote (over 18), do you feel that you receive enough information prior to an election to be able to vote? (i.e. where your polling station is, how to vote on the day, where to find information on candidates)**

| |
|-----|
| Yes |
| No |

If 'No' please tell us what information you would like to receive:

***4. Do you understand that there are different ways to vote and how to use them? (Please tick all the ways you have heard of)**

| | |
|--------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Postal Vote |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Proxy Vote |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | No Fixed Address (Declaration of local connections) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Armed Forces Personnel |

***5. If you are not currently registered or do not currently vote, what would help you to be more involved in the electoral process (i.e. what could we improve)?**

| |
|--------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> |
|--------------------------|

Not applicable

Please explain how we could improve things:

***6. Would you be able to provide your National Insurance number as part of the registration form if required?**

| | |
|--------------------------|-----|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Yes |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | No |

7. If you are a foreign national and choose not to vote in British elections, please tell us why (you can choose more than one answer).

| | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|

Vote in national
country elections

Unable to identify with
a candidate

Not registered to vote

Language barrier

Other (please explain):

***8. To help us improve our services to specific groups could you please tell us your age?**

| | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|

16 – 25

26 – 35

36 – 45

| | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|

46 - 55

56 – 65

66 and over

Please send your completed forms to: Policy & Scrutiny Unit,
Bassetlaw District Council, Queen's Buildings, Potter Street,
Worksop, Notts S80 2AH.

1. Do you know how to register to vote?

| Answer Options | Response Percent | Response Count |
|----------------------------|------------------|----------------|
| Yes | 100.0% | 13 |
| No | 0.0% | 0 |
| If 'No' please explain why | | 0 |
| answered question | | 13 |
| skipped question | | 0 |

2. Do you know that you are required by law to register?

| Answer Options | Response Percent | Response Count |
|--------------------------|------------------|----------------|
| Yes | 91.7% | 12 |
| No | 8.3% | 1 |
| answered question | | 13 |
| skipped question | | 0 |

3. If you are registered and eligible to vote (over 18), do you feel that you receive enough information prior to an election to be able to vote? (i.e. where your polling station is, how to vote on the day, where to find information on candidates)

| Answer Options | Response Percent | Response Count |
|---|------------------|----------------|
| Yes | 75.0% | 9 |
| No | 25.0% | 3 |
| If 'No' please tell us what information you would like to receive | | 3 |
| answered question | | 12 |
| skipped question | | 1 |

Number If 'No' please tell us what information you would like to receive

| | |
|----------|--|
| 1 | There is never any information provided on the candidates standing or even where to find this information. If the council provided more information rather than just a poll card perhaps more people will be interested in voting. |
| 2 | Information posted in the libraries |
| 3 | Information on candidates is generally not forthcoming. |

4. Do you understand that there are different ways to vote and how to use them? (Please tick all the ways you have heard of)

| Answer Options | Response Percent | Response Count |
|--|------------------|----------------|
| Postal Vote | 100.0% | 13 |
| Proxy Vote | 91.7% | 11 |
| No Fixed Address (Declaration of local connection) | 8.3% | 1 |
| Armed Forces Personnel | 50.0% | 7 |
| answered question | | 13 |
| skipped question | | 0 |

5. If you are not currently registered or do not currently vote, what would help you to be more involved in the electoral process (i.e. what could we improve)?

| Answer Options | Response Percent | Response Count |
|--|------------------|----------------|
| Not applicable | 100.0% | 13 |
| Please explain how we could improve things | | 0 |
| answered question | | 13 |
| skipped question | | 0 |

6. Would you be able to provide your National Insurance number as part of the registration form if required?

| Answer Options | Response Percent | Response Count |
|--------------------------|------------------|----------------|
| Yes | 83.3% | 11 |
| No | 16.7% | 2 |
| answered question | | 13 |
| skipped question | | 0 |

7. If you are a foreign national and choose not to vote in British elections, please tell us why (you can choose more than one answer).

| Answer Options | Response Percent | Response Count |
|-------------------------------------|------------------|----------------|
| Vote in national country elections | 0.0% | 0 |
| Unable to identify with a candidate | 0.0% | 0 |
| Not registered to vote | 0.0% | 0 |
| Language barrier | 0.0% | 0 |
| Other (please explain) | | 0 |
| answered question | | 0 |
| skipped question | | 13 |

8. To help us improve our services to specific groups could you please tell us your age?

| Answer Options | Response Percent | Response Count |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| 16 - 25 | 8.3% | 1 |
| 26 - 35 | 0.0% | 0 |
| 36 - 45 | 0.0% | 0 |
| 46 - 55 | 50.0% | 6 |
| 56 - 65 | 41.7% | 6 |
| 66 and over | 0.0% | 0 |
| <i>answered question</i> | | 13 |
| <i>skipped question</i> | | 0 |

6.3 Comparison of election turnout figures

| <u>Election Turnout 2003-2012</u> | | | | | | | | | | | |
|-----------------------------------|--------|--------|------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|-----------------------------|--------|--------|
| | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | By- Elections 2010/11 | 2011 | 2012 |
| Bassetlaw (MP) | | | | | | | | 64.57% | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | | | |
| County | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Blyth & Harworth | | | | | | | 34.13% | | | | |
| Misterton | | | | | | | 42.52% | | | | |
| Retford East | | | | | | | 37.30% | | | | |
| Retford West | | | | | | | 34.25% | | | | |
| Tuxford | | | | | | | 40.72% | | | | |
| Worksop East | | | | | | | 30.65% | | | | |
| Worksop North | | | | | | | 31.37% | | | | |
| Worksop North East & Carlton | | | | | | | 36.26% | | | | |
| Worksop West | | | | | | | 33.26% | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | | | |
| District (Ward) | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Beckingham | | 51.81% | | | | 40.98% | | | | | 36.36% |
| Blyth | 30.82% | | | | 38.40% | | | | | 44.41% | |
| Carlton | 30.64% | 45.47% | | 33.93% | 37.30% | 35.17% | | 65.00% | | 47.94% | 35.63% |
| Clayworth | | 55.18% | | | | 51.85% | | | | | 38.58% |

| <u>Election Turnout 2003-2012</u> | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|--------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|
| | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | By- Elections 2010/11 | 2011 | 2012 |
| East Markham | 47.24% | | | | 47.70% | | | | | 54.23% | |
| East Retford East | 30.78% | 46.02% | | 37.26% | 32.90% | 36.88% | | 65.20% | | 46.15% | 37.25% |
| East Retford North | 30.60% | 44.83% | | 36.91% | 37.43% | 34.68% | | 63.60% | | 47.47% | 36.41% |
| East Retford South | | 41.36% | | 33.19% | | 30.03% | | 63.70% | | | 34.90% |
| East Retford West | | 39.07% | | 28.81% | | 25.78% | | 57.50% | | | 31.13% |
| Everton | | | | 46.70% | | | | 72.86% | | | |
| Harworth | 22.75% | 37.80% | | 25.21% | 25.90% | 27.07% | | 57.90% | 27.53% | 34.95% | 28.01% |
| Langold | | | | 26.35% | | | | 62.40% | | | |
| Misterton | | | | 33.11% | | | | 68.40% | | | |
| Rampton | 33.86% | | | | 38.23% | | | | | 50.77% | |
| Ranskill | | | | | | | | | | 47.02% | |
| Sturton | 44.41% | | | | 43.43% | | | | | | |
| Sutton | | 48.06% | | | | | | | | | 30.93% |
| Tuxford & Trent | | 45.83% | | 33.81% | | 31.53% | | 65.53% | | | 31.55% |
| Welbeck | 39.56% | | | | 41.06% | | | | | 51.28% | |
| Workshop East | 29.13% | 43.80% | | 30.43% | 32.50% | 31.67% | | 61.37% | | 40.61% | 31.07% |
| Workshop North | 20.76% | 39.64% | | 25.97% | 27.80% | 27.13% | | 61.67% | | 37.07% | 25.88% |
| Workshop North East | 25.58% | 45.95% | | 32.33% | 34.17% | 34.31% | | 67.20% | 32.09% | 44.34% | 32.88% |
| Workshop North West | 21.88% | 38.89% | | 26.37% | 27.50% | 28.07% | | 60.88% | | 36.18% | 26.78% |
| Workshop South | 26.90% | 45.07% | | 34.63% | 33.15% | 32.00% | | 64.42% | 28.50% | 43.70% | 33.05% |

| <u>Election Turnout 2003-2012</u> | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|--------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|
| | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | By- Elections 2010/11 | 2011 | 2012 |
| Worksop South East | 17.79% | 33.37% | | 21.27% | 22.29% | 20.76% | | 50.88% | | 33.58% | 24.91% |

6.4 Analysis of Bassetlaw District Council canvass statistics 2009-2011

| Polling District code | | Polling District | Ward | % response | | | | | No. of Polling District's 'down' |
|-----------------------|---|------------------|--------------------|------------|--------|--------|-------|--|----------------------------------|
| | | | | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | Trend | | |
| A | A | Beckingham | Beckingham | 97.66 | 97.48 | 95.20 | down | | 1 |
| A | B | Saundby | Beckingham | 91.89 | 91.43 | 94.29 | up | | 0 |
| A | C | Walkeringham | Beckingham | 98.35 | 95.04 | 94.04 | down | | 1 |
| A | D | Blyth | Blyth | 95.11 | 93.85 | 96.95 | up | | 0 |
| A | E | Scrooby | Blyth | 92.20 | 91.49 | 97.14 | up | | 0 |
| A | F | Styrrup/Oldcotes | Blyth | 100.00 | 94.12 | 94.12 | down | | 1 |
| A | G | Styrrup/Oldcotes | Blyth | 97.30 | 95.27 | 97.30 | | | 0 |
| A | H | Styrrup/Oldcotes | Blyth | 94.26 | 92.62 | 94.26 | | | 0 |
| A | J | Carlton | Carlton | 99.32 | 96.01 | 93.04 | down | | 1 |
| A | K | Carlton | Carlton | 97.52 | 71.43 | 69.15 | down | | 1 |
| A | L | Carlton | Carlton | 97.50 | 94.58 | 90.77 | down | | 1 |
| A | M | Carlton | Carlton | 99.25 | 91.25 | 90.50 | down | | 1 |
| A | N | Wallingwells | Carlton | 100.00 | 100.00 | 100.00 | | | 0 |
| A | O | Clarborough | Clayworth | 98.38 | 96.54 | 94.92 | down | | 1 |
| A | P | Clayworth | Clayworth | 100.00 | 97.92 | 95.17 | down | | 1 |
| A | Q | Hayton | Clayworth | 100.00 | 97.52 | 96.25 | down | | 1 |
| A | R | Wiseton | Clayworth | 97.44 | 94.87 | 92.31 | down | | 1 |
| A | S | Retford East | East Retford East | 85.59 | 86.65 | 89.94 | up | | 0 |
| A | T | Retford East | East Retford East | 80.22 | 85.92 | 80.68 | up | | 0 |
| A | U | Retford East | East Retford East | 95.89 | 97.26 | 93.62 | down | | 1 |
| A | V | Retford East | East Retford East | 85.68 | 90.54 | 82.01 | down | | 1 |
| A | W | Retford East | East Retford East | 98.76 | 97.61 | 98.46 | down | | 1 |
| A | X | Retford East | East Retford East | 100.00 | 99.76 | 99.76 | down | | 1 |
| A | Y | Retford East | East Retford East | 100.00 | 100.00 | 100.00 | | | 0 |
| A | Z | Retford North | East Retford North | 98.85 | 98.27 | 96.00 | down | | 1 |

| Polling District code | | Polling District | Ward | % response | | | | | No. of Polling District's 'down' |
|-----------------------|-------|------------------|--------------------|------------|--------|--------|-------|--|----------------------------------|
| | | | | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | Trend | | |
| B | A | Retford North | East Retford North | 97.85 | 97.00 | 95.71 | down | | 1 |
| B | B | Retford North | East Retford North | 96.55 | 93.91 | 94.30 | down | | 1 |
| B | C | Retford North | East Retford North | 96.14 | 94.85 | 96.55 | up | | 0 |
| B | D | Retford North | East Retford North | 95.63 | 92.33 | 93.76 | down | | 1 |
| B | E | Retford North | East Retford North | 89.74 | 84.62 | 76.28 | down | | 1 |
| B | F | Retford South | East Retford South | 99.60 | 93.39 | 96.59 | down | | 1 |
| B | G | Retford South | East Retford South | 99.42 | 88.60 | 93.96 | down | | 1 |
| B | H | Retford South | East Retford South | 99.75 | 89.90 | 95.64 | down | | 1 |
| B | J | Retford South | East Retford South | 98.36 | 90.34 | 97.93 | down | | 1 |
| B | K | Retford West | East Retford West | 95.35 | 92.05 | 72.41 | down | | 1 |
| B | L | Retford West | East Retford West | 99.64 | 100.00 | 87.82 | down | | 1 |
| B | M | Retford West | East Retford West | 96.18 | 95.65 | 83.33 | down | | 1 |
| B | M (a) | Retford West | East Retford West | N/A | N/A | 70.62 | | | 1 |
| B | N | Retford West | East Retford West | 94.48 | 91.28 | 84.60 | down | | 1 |
| B | O | Retford West | East Retford West | 96.59 | 96.64 | 86.73 | down | | 1 |
| B | P | Everton | Everton | 98.58 | 93.73 | 95.53 | down | | 1 |
| B | Q | Gringley | Everton | 98.99 | 93.24 | 97.70 | down | | 1 |
| B | R | Misson | Everton | 90.70 | 87.00 | 97.69 | up | | 0 |
| B | S | Scaftworth | Everton | 87.50 | 87.50 | 100.00 | up | | 0 |
| B | T | Harworth | Harworth | 95.08 | 86.63 | 83.48 | down | | 1 |
| B | U | Harworth | Harworth | 96.08 | 87.44 | 87.48 | down | | 1 |
| B | V | Harworth | Harworth | 95.52 | 90.33 | 85.41 | down | | 1 |
| B | W | Harworth | Harworth | 95.76 | 91.81 | 82.72 | down | | 1 |
| B | X | Harworth | Harworth | 91.14 | 84.65 | 72.84 | down | | 1 |
| B | Y | Harworth | Harworth | 94.83 | 89.50 | 81.64 | down | | 1 |
| B | Z | Harworth | Harworth | 92.21 | 87.82 | 77.22 | down | | 1 |
| C | A | Hodsock | Langold | 97.22 | 94.44 | 85.29 | down | | 1 |

| Polling District code | | Polling District | Ward | % response | | | | | No. of Polling District's 'down' |
|-----------------------|--------|------------------------------|-----------|------------|-------|--------|-------|--|----------------------------------|
| | | | | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | Trend | | |
| C | B | Langold | Langold | 88.51 | 81.47 | 80.00 | down | | 1 |
| C | C | Langold | Langold | 85.99 | 91.05 | N/A | | | 0 |
| C | D | Misterton | Misterton | 97.27 | 95.31 | 94.01 | down | | 1 |
| C | E | West Stockwith | Misterton | 93.75 | 92.31 | 90.28 | down | | 1 |
| C | F | Mattersey | Ranskill | 95.38 | 89.23 | 96.09 | up | | 0 |
| C | F (A) | Mattersey Thorpe | Ranskill | N/A | N/A | 96.60 | | | 1 |
| C | G | Ranskill | Ranskill | 95.72 | 93.73 | 95.85 | | | 0 |
| C | H | Torworth | Ranskill | 95.50 | 93.75 | 91.15 | down | | 1 |
| C | J | Bole | Sturton | 89.83 | 86.44 | 90.00 | up | | 0 |
| C | K | North Leverton/Habblesthorpe | Sturton | 95.51 | 93.74 | 87.22 | down | | 1 |
| C | L | North Wheatley | Sturton | 95.73 | 91.94 | 93.49 | down | | 1 |
| C | M | South Wheatley | Sturton | 95.56 | 95.56 | 97.78 | up | | 0 |
| C | N | Sturton Le Steeple | Sturton | 91.39 | 91.83 | 93.27 | up | | 0 |
| C | O | West Burton | Sturton | 90.00 | 90.00 | 100.00 | up | | 0 |
| C | P | Babworth | Sutton | 89.11 | 86.72 | 86.21 | down | | 1 |
| C | Q | Barnby Moor | Sutton | 93.69 | 89.47 | 97.41 | up | | 0 |
| C | R | Lound | Sutton | 94.61 | 93.20 | 94.20 | down | | 1 |
| C | S | Sutton | Sutton | 94.57 | 94.57 | 95.57 | up | | 0 |
| C | T | Carburton | Welbeck | 100.00 | 97.14 | 88.89 | down | | 1 |
| C | U | Clumber/Hardwick | Welbeck | 83.72 | 95.35 | 87.80 | up | | 0 |
| C | V | Cuckney | Welbeck | 96.15 | 92.31 | 98.08 | up | | 0 |
| C | W | Elkesley | Welbeck | 97.89 | 85.79 | 89.18 | down | | 1 |
| C | X | Elkesley | Welbeck | 98.14 | 78.88 | 81.99 | down | | 1 |
| C | Y | Holbeck | Welbeck | 94.23 | 89.42 | 87.38 | down | | 1 |
| C | Z | Nether Langwith | Welbeck | 90.91 | 90.43 | 85.78 | down | | 1 |
| D | A | Norton | Welbeck | 91.18 | 91.18 | 98.53 | up | | 0 |
| D | B | Welbeck | Welbeck | 92.00 | 75.00 | 95.00 | up | | 0 |

| Polling District code | | Polling District | Ward | % response | | | | | No. of Polling District's 'down' |
|-----------------------|---|---------------------|---------------------|------------|-------|-------|-------|--|----------------------------------|
| | | | | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | Trend | | |
| D | C | Workshop East | Workshop East | 89.78 | 86.65 | 91.63 | up | | 0 |
| D | D | Workshop East | Workshop East | 94.59 | 91.11 | 80.00 | down | | 1 |
| D | E | Workshop East | Workshop East | 97.07 | 93.41 | 92.53 | down | | 1 |
| D | F | Workshop East | Workshop East | 87.60 | 73.17 | 87.80 | up | | 0 |
| D | G | Workshop East | Workshop East | 95.93 | 96.80 | 92.44 | down | | 1 |
| D | H | Workshop North | Workshop North | 92.35 | 89.08 | 92.48 | up | | 0 |
| D | J | Workshop North | Workshop North | 96.15 | 93.19 | 95.85 | down | | 1 |
| D | K | Workshop North | Workshop North | 88.54 | 86.91 | 87.76 | down | | 1 |
| D | L | Workshop North | Workshop North | 89.96 | 95.59 | 94.82 | up | | 0 |
| D | M | Workshop North-East | Workshop North-East | 96.26 | 88.67 | 79.45 | down | | 1 |
| D | N | Workshop North-East | Workshop North-East | 97.63 | 93.63 | 88.89 | down | | 1 |
| D | O | Workshop North-East | Workshop North-East | 99.28 | 99.04 | 98.55 | down | | 1 |
| D | P | Workshop North-East | Workshop North-East | 97.81 | 85.25 | 87.68 | down | | 1 |
| D | Q | Workshop North-East | Workshop North-East | 95.69 | 91.87 | 93.36 | down | | 1 |
| D | R | Workshop North-East | Workshop North-East | 98.92 | 94.62 | 95.16 | down | | 1 |
| D | S | Rhodesia | Workshop North-West | 96.58 | 73.84 | 92.70 | down | | 1 |
| D | T | Shireoaks | Workshop North-West | 98.41 | 96.15 | 97.46 | down | | 1 |
| D | U | Workshop North-West | Workshop North-West | 85.54 | 70.67 | 76.22 | down | | 1 |
| D | V | Workshop North-West | Workshop North-West | 76.91 | 69.86 | 86.38 | up | | 0 |
| D | W | Workshop North-West | Workshop North-West | 92.96 | 88.20 | 79.23 | down | | 1 |
| D | X | Workshop North-West | Workshop North-West | 95.25 | 93.59 | 93.26 | down | | 1 |
| D | Y | Workshop South | Workshop South | 95.82 | 94.63 | 94.42 | down | | 1 |
| D | Z | Workshop South | Workshop South | 94.83 | 90.90 | 92.23 | down | | 1 |
| E | A | Workshop South | Workshop South | 97.63 | 97.80 | 97.97 | up | | 0 |
| E | B | Workshop South | Workshop South | 91.30 | 92.63 | 89.43 | down | | 1 |
| E | C | Workshop South | Workshop South | 83.18 | 79.77 | 77.15 | down | | 1 |
| E | D | Workshop South-East | Workshop South-East | 78.87 | 85.07 | 83.84 | up | | 0 |

| Polling District code | | Polling District | Ward | % response | | | | | No. of Polling District's 'down' |
|-----------------------|-------|----------------------|--------------------|------------|-------|--------|-------|--|----------------------------------|
| | | | | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | Trend | | |
| E | E | Worksop South-East | Worksop South-East | 66.27 | 79.23 | 82.31 | up | | 0 |
| E | F | Worksop South-East | Worksop South-East | 74.70 | 87.17 | 77.20 | up | | 0 |
| E | G | Worksop South-East | Worksop South-East | 91.21 | 88.54 | 81.71 | down | | 1 |
| E | H | Worksop South-East | Worksop South-East | 89.57 | 89.35 | 79.39 | down | | 1 |
| E | J | Worksop South-East | Worksop South-East | 78.83 | 71.86 | 82.18 | up | | 0 |
| E | K | Worksop South-East | Worksop South-East | 94.40 | 92.92 | 81.71 | down | | 1 |
| F | A | Askham | East Markham | 94.87 | 93.51 | 92.21 | down | | 1 |
| F | B | Bevercotes | East Markham | 100.00 | 85.71 | 57.14 | down | | 1 |
| F | C | Bothamsall | East Markham | 94.59 | 93.20 | 87.39 | down | | 1 |
| F | D | East Markham | East Markham | 97.00 | 93.01 | 91.25 | down | | 1 |
| F | E | Eaton | East Markham | 97.67 | 95.45 | 91.11 | down | | 1 |
| F | F | Gamston | East Markham | 90.57 | 88.68 | 88.89 | down | | 1 |
| F | G | Haughton | East Markham | 88.89 | 83.33 | 100.00 | up | | 0 |
| F | H | West Drayton | East Markham | 94.59 | 91.89 | 94.59 | | | 0 |
| F | J | West Drayton/Rockley | East Markham | 86.54 | 90.20 | 84.31 | down | | 1 |
| F | K | West Markham | East Markham | 93.24 | 90.54 | 94.59 | up | | 0 |
| F | L | Cottam | Rampton | 95.12 | 82.93 | 82.50 | down | | 1 |
| F | M | Grove | Rampton | 95.92 | 82.93 | 96.00 | up | | 0 |
| F | N | Headon-cum-Upton | Rampton | 96.47 | 91.84 | 89.16 | down | | 1 |
| F | O | Rampton | Rampton | 92.73 | 91.76 | 92.86 | up | | 0 |
| F | O (a) | Woodbeck | Rampton | 97.61 | 89.01 | 83.08 | down | | 1 |
| F | P | South Leverton | Rampton | 100.00 | 95.67 | 90.95 | down | | 1 |
| F | Q | Stokeham | Rampton | 95.92 | 94.44 | 94.44 | down | | 1 |
| F | R | Treswell | Rampton | 93.75 | 92.86 | 91.92 | down | | 1 |
| F | S | Darlton | Tuxford and Trent | 95.53 | 95.92 | 96.00 | up | | 0 |
| F | T | Dunham-on-Trent | Tuxford and Trent | 99.02 | 82.74 | 96.07 | down | | 1 |
| F | U | East Drayton | Tuxford and Trent | 90.48 | 98.04 | 95.05 | up | | 0 |

| Polling District code | | Polling District | Ward | % response | | | | | No. of Polling District's 'down' |
|-----------------------|---|--------------------|-------------------|------------|-------|-------|-------|--|----------------------------------|
| | | | | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | Trend | | |
| F | V | Fledborough | Tuxford and Trent | 94.16 | 90.48 | 80.95 | down | | 1 |
| F | W | Laneham | Tuxford and Trent | 86.54 | 89.92 | 93.15 | up | | 0 |
| F | X | Marnham | Tuxford and Trent | 89.51 | 81.48 | 74.07 | down | | 1 |
| F | Y | Normanton-on-Trent | Tuxford and Trent | 80.49 | 87.50 | 87.59 | up | | 0 |
| F | Z | Ragnall | Tuxford and Trent | 94.87 | 82.93 | 86.57 | down | | 1 |
| G | A | Tuxford | Tuxford and Trent | 93.29 | 94.34 | 93.33 | up | | 0 |
| G | B | Tuxford | Tuxford and Trent | N/A | 93.61 | 92.22 | down | | 1 |

| | |
|--|-------------------|
| | 5% or more down |
| | Between 3-5% down |
| | over 5% up |

95
95 out of 140 Polling Districts = 67.85714286
(67.86% of polling districts are down)

6.5 Electoral Commission Performance Standards for Electoral Registration Officers (EROs)

The 10 performance standards for Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) are grouped within four broad subject areas:

- Completeness and accuracy of electoral registration records (standards 1–3)
- Integrity of the registration process (standards 4–5)
- Encouraging participation in the registration process (standards 6–8)
- Planning and organisation (standards 9–10)

Completeness and accuracy of electoral registration records

- Performance standard 1: Using information sources to verify entries on the register of electors and identify potential new electors
- Performance standard 2: Maintaining the property database
- Performance standard 3: House-to-house enquiries

Integrity

- Performance standard 4: Maintaining the integrity of registration and absent vote applications
- Performance standard 5: Supply and security of the register and absent voter lists

Participation

- Performance standard 6: Public awareness strategy
- Performance standard 7: Working with partners
- Performance standard 8: Accessibility and communication of information

Planning and organisation

- Performance standard 9: Planning for rolling registration and the annual canvass
- Performance standard 10: Training

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