

# **Report to the Finance and Performance Management Cabinet Committee**



**Epping Forest  
District Council**

**Report reference: FED-022-2011/12**

**Date of meeting: 16 January 2011**

**Portfolio: Support Services**

**Subject: Electoral Registration – Review Report**

**Responsible Officer: Ian Willett (01992 564243).**

**Democratic Services Officer: Rebecca Perrin (01992 564532).**

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## **Recommendations/Decisions Required:**

**To consider this review report on the electoral registration service and associated costs.**

### **Executive Summary:**

This report responds to the request made by the Committee on 17 January 2011 for a review of costs in respect of electoral administration. At the meeting the Committee considered that the cost quoted at the meeting was too high (£166,010).

This review report submits (a) an outline of the service; (b) an analysis of costs; (c) cost comparisons with other authorities of equivalent size as requested by the Committee; (d) performance information; (e) comments on likely future developments.

No recommendations are submitted. The Committee is invited to indicate any further action which members wish to pursue.

### **Reasons for Proposed Decision:**

To respond to the Committee's previous request.

### **Other Options for Action:**

None.

### **Report:**

14. The Electoral Commission monitors national performance in respect of electoral registration. This is carried out on an annual basis in respect of the following standards to which are detailed in Appendix 2. The performance for this Council in 2010 is as follows:

(a)	Using information resources to verify and identify electors.	Exceeds standard.
(b)	Monitoring Property Database.	Meets standard.
(c)	House to House Inquiries (Canvass)	Below standard *
(d)	Maintaining Integrity of registration/ Absent voters.	Exceeds standard.
(e)	Supply and security of register and absent voter lists.	Exceeds standard.
(f)	Public awareness strategy.	Meets standard.
(g)	Working with partners.	Meets standard.
(h)	Accessibility and communication of information.	Meets standard.
(i)	Planning for rolling registration and the annual canvass.	Meets standard.
(j)	Training	Meets standard.

\*NOTE: This Council failed to achieve the required standard in respect of house to house visits in the years 2008, 2009 and 2010. In 2011, the canvass was augmented by door to door visits both by the Council's own canvassers and a private company.

15. Electoral Commission data shows that for this Council the annual canvass return rate over recent years was as follows:

Canvass	Return (%)
2008	95.7%
2009	95.8%
2010	94.8%
For 2011, the figure is 97%.	

### Budget Provision

16. Appendix 3 to this report sets out comparative costs for electoral registration in respect of the 2008/9 financial year. Unfortunately, no more recent data has been published by the Electoral Commission. This report has been delayed in the expectation that data for 2009/10 would be available during Autumn 2011 but this has not proved to be the case.

17. Appendix 3 shows District Councils with electoral register totals of between 90,000 and 100,000 electors. For this Council, these cover the following:

- (a) employee costs – includes core team and casual staff plus N.I. and superannuation costs;
- (b) premises, transport and supplies – postage, stationery, advertising, training;
- (c) third party payments – this is not a heading used by this Council these appear under support services;

18. These expenditure totals are offset by income and the overall net cost expressed in net cost per elector. There are 20 Councils listed and EFDC would be ranked 11 of 20 with a cost per elector of 1.565p.

For 2007/8, the cost per elector was 1.23p.

19. As indicated above, there is no comparative data after 2008/9. Budgets for this Council in the subsequent years are set out in Appendix 4. The position regarding cost per elector is as follows:

Register	Net Budget	Electors	Cost Per Elector
2009	£157,586	97,125	1.62p
2010	£149,133	97,618	1.53p

### Staffing

20. Core staffing for the Electoral Services Section equates to 2.75 FTE. Three staff are involved:

Senior Electoral Services Officer (Grade 8) (F/T)  
 Senior Electoral Services Assistant (Grade 4) (P/T)  
 Electoral Assistant (Grade 3) (P/T)

The two assistants work at certain times of the year linked to (a) elections – February to June; and (b) the electoral canvass: Sept-Dec. The staffing costs shown in Appendix 3 include the cost of casual and temporary staff employed as canvassers.

21. No comparative data on staffing numbers is available after 2007/8. At that time, the staffing numbers (FTE) for those Councils listed in Appendix 4 were as follows:

Horsham	2.2	Eastleigh	2.2
Reigate & Barnstead	2.0	Pembrokeshire	3.0
Stafford	2.0	Elmbridge	3.0
Newcastle-Under-Lyme	2.5	Vale of White Horse	2.5
Epping Forest	2.2	Havant	2.2
Swale	2.4	Vale of Glamorgan	N/D
Amber Valley	N/D	Halton	N/D
East Ayrshire	4.4	Wycharon	3.5
Stratford Upon Avon	2.1	Waveney	2.5
South Norfolk	1.7	Ashfield	3.1

N/D = No data.

These figures relate to core electoral staff not other casual and temporary appointments.

### Future Issues – SVR

22. The most significant single item will be single voter registration. This will involve a number of key changes to the electoral registration process:

(a) registration will no longer be on the basis of households forms but individual elector forms;

(b) evidence of date of birth, signature and national insurance number will be checked as part of the registration process;

(c) planned transitional arrangements for the change from household to voter registration.

23. There are currently households in the District, each of which receives a registration form. Under SVR, the number of individual forms will increase to 99,060, based on the current register (2011). The introduction of checks on identity will add to the complexity of the process and the need for progress chasing with voters so as to maintain current return rates.

24. Costs are likely to rise, especially in terms of printing and whether existing staffing is sufficient is still to be fully assessed.

#### **Future Issues – Door to Door Canvassing**

25. The Electoral Commission's performance measures are based on an interpretation of the Electoral Administration Act 2006 that requires EROs to arrange door to door visits in respect of all non responders. This has been undertaken for the first time in the 2011 canvass at a cost of £1,509 (visits by canvassers) and £960 (visits by commercial concerns). This cost has been accommodated within other budgets by utilising underspends.

26. With the advent of SVR, door to door visits will be more time consuming and therefore costly in that several forms relating to individuals may be involved. This may reflect in canvassing costs, once SVR has come into operation in 2014.

27. The improved return figure for the 2011 register has been achieved mainly by new process for cross checking the register against Council Tax and housing information and is a policy which must be pursued in the future. This has reduced the need for forms in the final stages of the canvass and thereby reducing printing and postage costs. Although work by canvassers has assisted with follow ups, the benefits have been less marked.

#### **Legal and Governance Implications:**

Various statutory duties are set out in the report.

#### **Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications:**

None.

#### **Consultation Undertaken:**

Portfolio Holder for Support Services.

#### **Background Papers:**

None.

**Impact Assessments:**

Risk Management

N/A

Equality and Diversity:

Did the initial assessment of the proposals contained in this report for relevance to the Council's general equality duties, reveal any potentially adverse equality implications? No

Where equality implications were identified through the initial assessment process, has a formal Equality Impact Assessment been undertaken? No

What equality implications were identified through the Equality Impact Assessment process? N/A

How have the equality implications identified through the Equality Impact Assessment been addressed in this report in order to avoid discrimination against any particular group?

N/A