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Parish Council Press Release

Individual Electoral Registration

The system for electoral registration has changed. You may have seen the national awareness campaign publicizing the changes. This note is to let you know how Herefordshire fits into this and to help you understand the law governing the changes as well as the timetable for change. We would also like to let you know how you can ensure as many electors are registered to vote as possible.

The changes were introduced by the *Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013*. The Act replaces the household registration system by providing for the introduction of Individual Electoral Registration (IER) in England and Wales since 10 June 2014. The system has been introduced to modernize the electoral register, making it more accurate, less vulnerable to fraud and available online, unlike the traditional household registration system. As of now, we can only process applications made individually, not on the basis of households. Individual applications involve a different system meaning that electors cannot register anyone else on their behalf, and must provide their date of birth and National Insurance number.

The role of electoral services is also changing with the new system. With the old system canvassing was only done once a year on a large scale. With the new system, canvassing will now be carried out on a smaller scale each month.

Transitional arrangements for the introduction of IER will be in place between June 2014 and November 2015, and these are explained in greater detail below. Whilst these transitional arrangements allow for the carry forward of electors who do not register as individuals in 2014 for 12 months (i.e. until after the May 2015 UK Parliamentary and Combined Local Government Elections), there are several caveats that will have a knock on effect for candidates at the 2015 elections.



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The Transition to IER

Since the 10th of June all applications to register have been processed individually and we have been unable to process any old household forms. With the introduction of IER, people can now also register to vote online. Online applications are considered more convenient for many users and remain quick and simple to complete, requiring less than five minutes. The stable link for the online system is as follows: <https://www.gov.uk/register-to-vote>

The paper based application form is an A3 form folded to A4. All applications require an applicant to provide their date of birth, national insurance number, and address. Paper forms also require a dated wet signature. If a form is not signed we cannot process it and must post it back.

In July 2014 the existing information of electors on the household register was checked against data from the Department for Work and Pensions. Electors whose information is matched between the two sets of data have been automatically enrolled into IER without having to provide any further information.

The remaining unmatched electors' information was then compared against local government records, notably Council Tax databases to maximize the number of electors automatically enrolled. This is called the 'confirmation' process. In total, 86% of Herefordshire's electors have been automatically confirmed and moved onto the new Electoral Register.

To ensure the remaining unmatched electors are moved onto the Individual register the Council will be launching an awareness campaign and writing to every unmatched elector in the authority in September 2014. They will each be sent an individual voter registration form via Royal Mail delivery and provided with details of the online registration system. In September 2014 just over 18,000 invitations will be sent out. If people do not respond to this write out, the letter will be followed with several reminders and house-to-house visits from canvassers.

Every voter who has been automatically moved onto the new register will also be receiving a letter telling them about the changes and that they do not need to do anything else.

To reach eligible voters not on the register, we will also be sending out new Household Enquiry Forms (HEF's) to properties where we have no registered electors or have been informed of a change in occupancy (e.g. from Council Tax). A HEF requests the names of the current occupiers, upon the return of which invitations to register will be sent to each individual named on the HEF.



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We will publish a new register of electors on **1 December 2014**. Anyone who hasn't registered individually by 1 December 2014 will remain on the register and able to vote for another 12 months.

This date is crucial for postal and proxy voters. Voters who are being kept on the register but have not registered individually will still be able to vote in the May 2015 election. However, if they have not registered with the new system they can **only** vote at a polling station. Therefore, if a postal or proxy voter has not registered individually before 1 December 2014 they **will not** be able to vote by post or through a proxy. To able to vote in the May 2015 election by post or proxy, a voter **must be registered individually**.

Timeline

- June-July 2014: confirmation
- September 2014: write out
- September/October 2014: House-to-house visits from canvassers
- October - December 2014: Care home visits and follow up canvassing

Key Issues

Public Awareness: The implementation of IER in 2014 is being supported by a significant national and local public awareness campaign to inform the public of the changes to the electoral registration system. National campaigning is ongoing but will reduce in significance over the next few months. Our local campaign in Herefordshire is being focused in a number of key areas:

- Postal, proxy, and other absent voters who are sent invitations to register will be reminded that they must register individually before 1 December 2015. Repeat reminders will be sent to non-responders as well as visits from canvassers. Given the rural nature of the authority, this is a major priority.
- Residents of Care Homes and similar establishments are at particular risk from having been removed from the register. We have specialist canvassers who will be visiting every care home and similar establishments in the authority to help maximize voter registration.



- It is vital that all candidates and agents contesting elections in 2015 are well informed about IER. Failing to use the correct forms when campaigning may result in supporters not being able to register. Moreover, the additional information requirements will considerably reduce the effectiveness of door-to-door registration campaigns. Given the sensitive nature of information such as National insurance numbers and dates of birth, eligible voters will be more reluctant to provide information over the door.
- The changes to the system have also brought attention to the open register, an edited version of the electoral register which we are legally obliged to make available for purchase for any person, company, or organization. Because of this, making people aware of how they can 'opt out' of the open register is a priority. People can opt out by selecting not to when asked on an application form or online application. People can also remove themselves from the open register if they chose to be included in the past, by ringing electoral services. More information on the open register can be found at: <https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/government-citizens-and-rights/democracy/elections-electoral-register/>

House-to-house Visits: These are a requirement for all properties who fail to respond to the HEF, and for all individuals who fail to respond to an invitation to register individually. The HEF can be completed by any adult member of the household in a similar manner to a household registration form, but it will be more difficult where we need to speak with a named individual. We will use our written communications to encourage people to apply using the online service where possible, especially if they want to avoid having to provide sensitive personal data to our staff.

What can I do to help?

With Parliamentary and Combined Local Government Elections approaching in May 2015 your parishioners may be more interested in registering to vote. If you are responding to queries, helping people to register, or running activities around the election there are a number of ways you can help:



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- The simplest way you can help is to help raise awareness of the changes and to help people understand what they need to do.
We have an FAQ and information page you can point people to found on the elections section of the Herefordshire Council website:
<https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/government-citizens-and-rights/democracy/elections-electoral-register/>
- Use the correct IER form/ web link if you wish to register new electors:
<https://www.gov.uk/register-to-vote>
Promoting the online registration system allows the reduction of costs and improves the efficiency of Council services.
- Reinforce to electors the need for them to respond to requests for information made by the ERO promptly and to keep us informed of any changes to elector details.

We are able to provide detailed guidance concerning registration and how to vote. If you have any further queries please do not hesitate to contact electoral services on 01432 260107.