

FULL COUNCIL – 14 OCTOBER 2015

Written question from Councillor Geoff Lumley to Councillor Steve Stubbings, Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Adult Social Care Integration, Human Resources and Corporate Governance

At the last General Election it is estimated that 16% of the adult population was not registered to vote; some 8 million people, or 17,000 Islanders. A position exacerbated by the Government's new Individual Electoral Registration (IER) requirements. Together with the 36% of the population who were registered but did not vote this meant that less than half the adult population voted.

On the Island this meant that the MP was elected by just 23% of our adult population, though he had 41% of the turnout. To balance that statement, it would have meant that in 2013 I was re-elected to the Council with just 15% of the adult population in my ward, though I secured 61% of the turnout.

The new Government since the election has determined that the full requirements of IER should be introduced from this December's register; a year earlier than originally planned for. These full requirements require voters to provide National Insurance Numbers, if they cannot be matched against HMRC and/or DWP records, and is proving to be a deterrent. Again it has been estimated that the number of missing voters nationwide could be 10 million from next year - or 20,000 Islanders.

Can the Executive Member outline for Members what steps are taken by our Electoral Registration Officers to maximise voter registration on the Island, so that at all elections in future all adults have the choice whether to vote or not?

Can the Executive Member also commit to officers supporting local Members who initiate voter registration campaigns within their wards, as I intend to do?

Response

The annual canvass for the Register of Electors is now in its final stage, and this week some 40 electoral canvassers began the final stage of the compilation of the Register by commencing calls at those properties that have not yet responded to either of the initial forms that were sent out in late July and early September. By the end of this process every property that has not yet responded will have received three copies of the new Household Enquiry Form which the Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) uses as a basis to update the Register of Electors.

Whilst the new system of Individual Electoral Registration (IER) has, quite rightly, introduced extra checks to ensure that only those who are entitled to Register are added as Electors, it is important to remember that registration is now far more accessible than in the past, and residents can now apply to register on-line, 24 hours a day via a secure government website. Where residents do not have access to the

internet, then applications for registration can also be made via the telephone or indeed via a traditional paper form.

Between September 2014 and September 2015 there was, on the Island, a small drop in the number of registered electors of 515. This is to be expected as the new system of IER is more rigorous in removing new electors from their previous address, and so the number of inevitable duplicate entries on the register is reduced. In February 2015, prior to the General Election, the ERO trialled a new form of notification which saw a letter sent to every household on the Island confirming who was registered and what steps they needed to take in order to amend details if required. This notification was very successful, and subject to availability of funding it is intended that this notification letter be used again ahead of the Police and Crime Commissioner election which will be held in May 2016.

In conjunction with officers in our Revenues Section, the ERO sends out a flyer to all new residents who register to pay Council Tax giving details of how individuals can now apply to register as electors. If an individual has particular needs, or requires assistance with their application for registration, then officers will do all they can to ensure that the process is made as simple as possible.

Finally, the ERO and the Electoral Services Manager, Clive Joynes, are of course more than happy to offer support to any Member who may wish to carry out a voter registration campaign in their area, and if any Member would like further details than I would ask that they contact Mr Joynes directly.