



East
Northamptonshire
Council

Personnel Sub-Committee – 21 September 2015

Electoral Registration – Fees for Canvassers

Purpose of report

To consider the establishment of new rates of pay for canvassing activity undertaken on behalf of the Electoral Registration Officer following the transition to Individual Electoral Registration (IER).

1.0 Background

1.1 On 10 June 2014, the law in respect of electoral registration changed and individuals are now required to register themselves, rather than a nominal head of household registering all resident at a property. Since that time, a transitional arrangement has been in place to transfer the majority of electors to the new register. In July 2015, Household Enquiry Forms (HEFs) were issued to all properties in East Northamptonshire. HEFs are used to gather information about who lives in each household and their eligibility to register to vote. However, the completion of a HEF does not add an elector to the register. Once a completed HEF is received, any new eligible elector added to the HEF is sent an Invitation to Register (ITR), which must be completed to add their name to the register.

1.2 At the time of writing this report, 62% of properties had responded to the HEF in East Northamptonshire. It is anticipated that this figure will increase to well above 70% by the date of the sub-committee meeting, as reminder forms were issued at the end of August. For those properties that do not utilise the electronic response method or return the canvass form, the ERO is required to undertake a personal visit. This report details proposals for the payment of staff employed to canvass these properties and seeks approval of a fee structure for this year and future years' electoral registration canvass activity.

2.0 Canvass Staffing and Fees

2.1 Prior to the legislative changes governing electoral registration, the council, which is required to provide the ERO with the resources required to undertake his statutory duties, made the following payments:

Activity	Fee
Attendance at briefing with Electoral Services at commencement and end of canvass	£25.00
Visit per property	£0.15
Response per property	£0.75 (Urban properties) £1.00 (Rural properties)

2.2 This fee structure proved effective in recruiting and retaining canvass staff under the old registration system. However, it is no longer considered adequate for the additional responsibilities and burdens that the new regime will place on canvassing staff, who will be responsible for collating and returning sensitive data, such as dates of birth and national insurance numbers.

2.3 The duties and responsibilities of canvass staff are:

- To visit non-responding properties personally and assist with the completion of

the HEF

- To visit non-responding properties personally and assist with the completion of the ITR.
- To record details of eligible electors accurately and make notes of visits
- To collect forms and other materials and to return completed visit forms to Electoral Services

Staff will be required to attend a briefing session with staff from Electoral Services at the beginning and end of the personal canvass.

- 2.4 Having consulted neighbouring authorities within the county, there is no desire at present for a common scale of fees for Northamptonshire in respect of canvass activity given the different geography and demographics of each authority area. Consequently, it is proposed that the following fees structure be adopted for the canvass in East Northamptonshire:

Activity	Proposed Fee
Attendance at briefing with Electoral Services at commencement and end of canvass	£25.00
Administration Fee (to cover preparation of visits and return of paperwork to Electoral Services)	£0.10 per form for urban round £0.15 per form for rural round
Property visit	£0.60 per property
Mileage payable from first property visited to last property (not mileage from or to home)	£0.45 per mile

- 2.5 The key changes from the previous fee structure are the payment of £0.10 or £0.15 for an administration fee, rather than for a response for a property, and the introduction of a mileage payment which is an important consideration for canvassers working in the rural north of the district.
- 2.6 It should be noted that the authority is required to pay the National Minimum Wage in any event for any work undertaken. Staff will be invited to provide evidence to demonstrate that they have undertaken work which has not been remunerated under the fees structure set out above.
- 2.7 A key consideration in developing this proposal is the recruitment and retention of staff to undertake the canvass. The council routinely employs up to 40 staff to undertake the canvass, of whom around half are internal staff who undertake canvass work outside of their normal working hours. In recent years it has become more difficult to recruit and retain staff due to the uncertainty arising from the electoral registration system change and the timing of the canvass, which has varied from the summer to the Christmas and New Year period in the last three years. Whilst there has been a higher turnover in staff than would have been expected, there has been patience and good will from canvassers during the transition and it would be beneficial to provide a degree of certainty in respect of payments for canvass work for this and future years.
- 2.8 It is worth recording that an incentive for canvassers is the opportunity to have first refusal on the same rounds for the delivery of poll cards for electoral events. With a fee payable of £0.20 per poll card, this makes canvass work more attractive and is widely recognised as the “pay-off” to make the canvass more worthwhile.

3.0 Equality and Diversity Implications

- 3.1 There are no equality and diversity implications arising from the proposals.

4.0 Legal Implications

4.1 The authority is required under Section 8 of the Representation of the People Act 1983 to provide the Electoral Registration Officer with the resources required to fulfil his statutory duties under the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013. This report is submitted to enable the authority to meet its obligation.

5.0 Risk Management

5.1 There are no significant risks arising from the proposals in this report. Failure to agree the proposed fee structure may present a risk in respect of the ERO's capacity to undertake his duties if he fails to retain staff currently employed.

6.0 Resource and Financial Implications

6.1 It is anticipated that the proposed change can be accommodated within the existing electoral registration budget. A number of efficiencies through changes to process and electronic responses will have reduced the cost of office administration which would have been incurred under the previous registration system. This has cost up to £1,500 per canvass through the employment of staff to scan returned forms and to check that registrations had been entered correctly. The decision not to include a business reply envelope with the first delivery of HEFs has also saved approximately £4,000.

6.2 The staffing costs for the last similar canvass process in 2013/14 was £6,021. It is estimated that the maximum cost of the proposed fee structure is £7,000. This estimate is calculated using an assumption that 25% of properties will require a visit and, of that figure, 25% will be rural properties and remainder urban properties.

Summary of budget requirements:				
		Rural	Urban	Total
Total number of properties:	39,155			
Properties requiring personal visit - 25%	9,789	2,447	7,342	9,789
Cost of administration by canvasser		£ 367	£ 734	£1,101
Cost of visit - based on £0.60/visit		£1,468	£4,405	£5,873
Total budget required:		£1,835	£5,139	£6,974

This figure of £6,974 is higher than the cost of the 2013/14 canvass, but will be covered from savings made elsewhere in the administration of the canvass.

7.0 Constitutional Implications

7.1 This report is presented to Personnel Sub-Committee as it requires determination of a rate of pay for employees of the authority.

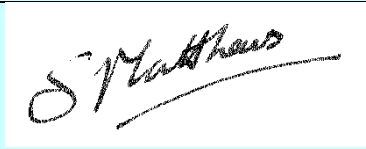
8.0 Corporate Outcomes

8.1 The proposal contributes primarily to the priority of Effective Management.

9.0 Recommendation

9.1 That the Sub-Committee approve the Fees Structure for Electoral Registration for the 2015 Canvass.

(Reason: to enable the ERO to undertake his statutory responsibilities.)

Legal	Power: Representation of the People Act 1983 Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013				
	Other considerations:				
Background Paper					
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