



Our Ref: NMP633928

Your Ref: DE

Damian Eaton
Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council
Town Hall
Stockport
SK1 3XE

Dear Mr Eaton,

27 November 2015

Thank you for your letter of 3 November, about Individual Electoral Registration (IER). As you'll know, on 27 October Parliament took the decision to end the transition to IER in December 2015. To quote the AEA's Chief Executive John Turner, "It is crucial to have the most accurate register possible and have confidence that everyone on the register is who they say they are. For those reasons, the Association of Electoral Administrators supports the transition to Individual Electoral Registration ending in 2015."

Completing the transition to IER is an essential part of our plan to tackle electoral fraud, the importance of which was highlighted all too clearly by the flawed elections in Tower Hamlets last year. Under the old system the "head of household" could register anybody in a property with no ID needed. Under IER, everyone now has to apply individually and provide a date of birth and National Insurance number which are used to check the applicant is who they say they are.

The transition was successful: 96 out of every 100 electors were confirmed as genuine and transferred to the new registers without having to take any action. The remaining four out of every one hundred entries have been targeted intensively since summer 2014 to confirm whether they are real voters or 'ghost' entries for people who have moved, died or were registered fraudulently. In summer 2015, the Government made a further £3 million available to local authorities to help fund targeted activities to review remaining ghost entries.

By the end of the transition to IER, unverified entries on the registers will have been contacted at least nine times, including at least two personal visits. The chances of these remaining entries being real voters rather than ghost electors is vanishingly small. Yet as long as they remain on the register, there is a real risk that they could be exploited by fraudsters seeking to influence the outcome of elections.

It is important that we are removing ghost entries now, before the 2016 Boundary Review starts work. Leaving ghost entries on the rolls means some constituencies may appear bigger or smaller than they ought to be, stopping votes in one part of the country having the same weight as others. This is particularly unfair to Northern Ireland, which completed the switch to IER years ago.

I recognise there are concerns about electors who have not yet been registered. However, retaining inaccurate entries on the electoral register does not solve this problem. Instead the answer is a strong and effective registration drive. You can find more details in a speech I gave recently:

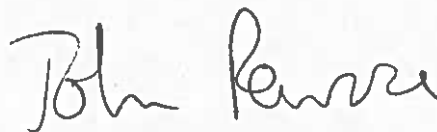
<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/vision-for-electoral-registration-speech-by-john-penrose>. I am very pleased that Stockport Council is resolved to ensure local residents are registered. My officials will contact officials at the Council to discuss the additional resources you mention to in your correspondence.

For those who have not yet registered under IER, the online system makes it easier than ever before. It is particularly popular amongst young people and other typically under-registered groups. The whole process only takes around three minutes. Nearly half a million applications were made on the deadline for registering for the 2015 General Election (96% online) – that's more applications than total number of application forms downloaded during the entire 2010 General Election campaign period.

These changes bring us into line with all other modern democracies and will ensure the highest standards of integrity at future elections.

Thank you for getting in touch and I hope this helps!

Yours ever



JOHN PENROSE MP