

ITEM NO: 20

DECISION-MAKER:	COUNCIL		
SUBJECT:	INTERNET AND TELEPHONE REGISTRATION		
DATE OF DECISION:	16 TH JULY, 2008		
REPORT OF:	ELECTORAL REGISTRATION OFFICER		
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STATEMENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY

N/A

SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to invite Full Council to approve to the introduction of automated telephone and internet electoral registration systems.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- (i) That the principal of entering into an agreement with a provider for the provision of an automated telephone and internet electoral registration system be approved; and
- (ii) That the Electoral Registration Officer be authorised to enter into an agreement with such a provider for the provision of such a service and take all other actions necessary to give effect to the above recommendation and the contents of this report.

REASONS FOR REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

1. It is appropriate to consider introducing an automated telephone and internet registration system. This will provide additional simple and convenient means of electors confirming their personal details for the purposes of electoral registration.

CONSULTATION

2. None, save within the Council.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

3. The option of not introducing such a regime has been rejected by the Electoral Registration Officer for the reasons set out in the report.

DETAIL

4. Electoral Registration Officers are appointed by local authorities. The duties of the Electoral Registration Officer are set down as statutory functions related to the maintenance of a register of Parliamentary electors, a register of Local Government electors, and a register for European Parliamentary elections.
5. The Electoral Commission is, with support from Returning Officers, Electoral Administrators, Political Parties and the Government currently consulting on a comprehensive review of the structure of electoral administration in the United Kingdom. As part of that, a vision is being developed, which currently (in its draft form) identifies four main themes that support the delivery of quality electoral services:

- Integrity – a secure process for registration and voting
 - User focus – an easy and accessible process for candidates and electors
 - Professionalism – a clear and consistent approach to delivery
 - Value for money – efficient and effective service delivery
6. During the Autumn months, the Electoral Registration Officer, on behalf of the Council, carries out an annual canvass for the purposes of updating the Register of Electors. This requires forms to be sent to the 99,785 households within the City Council's administrative area.
 7. This report proposes the introduction of an automated telephone and internet electoral registration system which will enable those electors wishing to notify the Council that their electoral details have not changed to do so using these alternative channels.
 8. To gain access to the system, the household member would either log on to the web site or call the freephone number provided on their canvass form. After entering the security code, s/he would be given the opportunity to confirm that the electoral details held by the Council are correct. Additionally, there will be the chance to express the householder's wish to be excluded from the register, and also to request an application form to vote by post. Users could also exclude all, none or selected members of the household. This process would require some redesign of the format of the canvas form to ensure the security of the unique household security code.
 9. The service would be available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and the provider would monitor and audit all responses and would provide twice weekly updates to download straight into the Council's electoral registration system.
 10. This automated system offers a number of key benefits:
 - a. simple convenient access channels (available 24/7) to electors to confirm their electoral details;
 - b. increasing access for electors to the registration process;
 - c. helping the local authority work towards implementation of e-government;
 - d. the revision of the register would be quicker and easier; and
 - e. the system would provide an on-line reporting tool enabling registration details to be checked in real time and enhance management reporting.
 11. The lay out of the canvas form would need to be altered to incorporate the household reference number, e-mail address and freephone number. Potential providers have indicated that the service can be offered in up to 32 different languages.
 12. The Electoral Commission's recent Baseline Performance Report, to which 352 local authorities have contributed, identified that only 71 local authorities do not now use telephone / internet registration. Within the South East region only ten out of 56 do not use the system, and only eight out of 45 unitary authorities do not use this type of arrangement.

FINANCIAL/RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

Capital

14. None.

Revenue

15. Early discussions with a number of potential operators, as well as discussions with the other local authorities who use similar systems have indicated the cost of introducing these additional channels are met from the savings brought about by reduced bureaucracy, reduction of paper forms and all the processes associated with that. On that basis, there will be no revenue consequences from introducing this regime.

Property

16. None.

Other

17. None.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Statutory power to undertake proposals in the report:

18. Representation of the People Act 1983 and associated secondary legislation.

Other Legal Implications:

19. None.

POLICY FRAMEWORK IMPLICATIONS

20. None.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendices

1.	None
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Documents In Members' Rooms

1.	None.
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Background Documents

Title of Background Paper(s)

Relevant Paragraph of the
Access to Information
Procedure Rules / Schedule
12A allowing document to be
Exempt/Confidential (if
applicable)

1.	None	
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Background documents available for inspection at:

E-mail: @southampton.gov.uk

FORWARD PLAN NO:

KEY DECISION?

WARDS/COMMUNITIES AFFECTED: