

Electoral Registration Annual Report 2016

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The purpose of this annual report is to provide an overview on the activities of the work of the Electoral Registration Team throughout 2016 and to summarise the status of the Register of Electors throughout the London Borough of Barnet upon the publication of the Full Revised Register of Electors on 1 December 2016.

This first annual report on the Electoral Register has been produced in accordance with the accepted recommendations of the 'Review of the London Borough of Barnet's Registration and Elections Services' as undertaken by Dr Dave Smith and reported to the Council's General Functions Committee in November 2016. During the London Mayoral and GLA Assembly elections on 5 May 2016, voters in Barnet experienced problems with voting during the morning of the elections as a result of incomplete electoral registers being sent to Polling Stations across the borough. This led to a number of voters not being able to cast their vote during the morning of the 5 May 2016. A detailed independent review was immediately undertaken into the circumstances surrounding the error and the action taken to rectify the error during polling day. This review, undertaken by Mark Heath in May 2016, made a number of recommendations, including for a wider review of Barnet's electoral and registration service which was the review conducted by Dr Dave Smith.

The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 (ERA 2013) legislated for the introduction of Individual Electoral Registration (IER) in June 2014. Since that date all new applications to the register of electors has been the responsibility of each individual and can no longer be completed by a single 'head of the household' for everybody at a single address. The transition to a final IER register was only fully completed upon the publication of the Full Revised Register of Electors of 1 December 2015 (when all remaining non-verified individuals still on the register had to be removed). Therefore, 2016 has been the first full year in which all electors on the register were matched (whether as part of the initial IER confirmation exercise or subsequently by way of an individual verification) against other data held by the Department of Work and Pensions, or failing that have had to produce additional evidence of their identity (including in a few rare instances 'attestation' by another registered elector).

The London Borough of Barnet has a diverse and growing population and by extension the Register of Electors continues to grow. However, it should be noted that there are a number of significant factors, explained in more detail within the body of the report, that mean that the correlation of numbers between estimated population statistics and the actual number of electors on the register is not directly comparable.

The current Register of Electors in Barnet as published **1 December 2016** is at the highest it has ever been upon publication of the full revised register and contains **241,737 elector entries**. This is an increase of 4.69% (10,738) over the 1 December 2015 when all non-IER electors were removed. This is a little above the average increase across London boroughs (based upon 23 boroughs for which figures have been reported to date), which stands at 3.54%.

In summary, as Barnet has one of the largest electoral registers in London, it subsequently performed amongst the highest number of total additions, amendments and deletions to its register of all the boroughs at 93,942 (as recorded by the Elections Management System) in 2016.

Contents

- 1. Introduction and Background Information**
- 2. Key Activities of the ER Team in 2016**
- 3. Analysis of Barnet's Full Revised Register of Electors**
- 4. Priorities for Electoral registration in Barnet in 2017**

1. Introduction and Background Information

In England, the council of every district and London borough is required to appoint an officer of the council to be the Electoral Registration Officer (ERO). As is standard practice across London, the officer appointed to be the ERO in Barnet is the Chief Executive. All Electoral Registration work is then conducted in line with the appropriate legislation and is statutorily carried out on behalf of the borough's ERO.

The ERO has a duty to compile and maintain a register of parliamentary electors and a register of local government electors, as well as a register of relevant citizens of the European Union entitled to vote at European Parliamentary elections. These registers contain the details of all those who are registered to vote and must be combined so far as is practicable – this combined version of the register is the 'full register'. In addition the ERO must also produce a version of the register called the 'open register' (formerly known as the 'edited register') which contains only the names and addresses of those on the full register who have not taken the decision to opt out of their details appearing on the open register. All references to 'the register' or 'the register of electors' in this report should therefore be taken as referring to the combined totals of the full register unless otherwise stated.

In 2016 there were two borough-wide polling days – the first on 5 May for the election of the Mayor of London and the members of the London Assembly and then, six weeks later on 23 June 2016 for the Referendum on the UK's membership of the European Union. The EU referendum has been widely acknowledged as one of the most significant electoral processes to have taken place in a generation and it encouraged an almost unprecedented interest within the general population to ensure that they were able to participate. Indeed, a national late surge in online applications to join the register of electors caused the government's individual registration portal to crash and lead to a decision by the Prime Minister and Parliament to extend deadline for registering to vote in time to take part by 48 hours (albeit in Barnet less than 100 additional applications were made during this extended registration period).

The London Borough of Barnet has a diverse and growing population and by extension the Register of Electors is expected (and does) also continue to grow. However, it should be noted that there are a number of significant factors that mean that the correlation of numbers between estimated population statistics and the actual number of electors on the register is not always directly comparable. From the perspective of the Register of Electors (and the Electoral Registration Team) any household that contains only individuals of ineligible nationality will be considered 'empty' (as in empty of electors). Additionally, although 16 and 17 year olds are recorded on the register as 'attainers' (i.e. somebody that may obtain eligibility upon turning 18 within the period that the current register is in force), anybody below 16 years of age is not captured. Two further factors that have a considerable impact upon how complete and accurate or 'up-to-date' the register is able to be at any specific point in time are; 1) the redevelopment and creation of housing – obviously when new housing is built, but just as importantly where existing properties are being demolished and 2) the growing prominence of properties that are being rented by residents on a short term basis, as it is well documented that individuals that move frequently or even more than once within a shorter time period are far less likely to register than long term residents. Both of these factors are of particular significance in a number of Wards and Polling Districts within Barnet.

2. Key Activities of the Electoral Registration Team in 2016

In accordance with electoral legislation, all updates to the register are published on specifically determined dates between January and September and then the full revised version of the register is published each year on 1 December. Following the ERA 2013 and the introduction of IER from June 2014, the Electoral Commission has regularly made the point that even the publication of the Full Revised Register on 1 December each year must be seen as a 'snapshot' of the register as there will still always be numerous electors (or even 'households') at different stages of the various processes that EROs must follow in order to make additions to or deletions from the register of electors.

Throughout 2016 the Electoral Services Team had a number of key activities that it undertook specifically in relation to maintenance of the register of electors and the timings of a number of these activities during 2016 are summarised in the table below:

Period:	Description of Activities
Jan – Mar 2016	Refresh of 5yr Absent Voter's Personal Identifiers (Letters and Reminders to approx. 5,500 PV electors) – PV deletion where no response received.
Mar – May 2016	Increased registration activities in relation to the 5 May GLA elections (including the management of Absent Vote arrangements in line with the statutory election timetable)
May – June 2016	Increased registration activities in relation to the 23 June EU Referendum (including the management of Absent Vote arrangements in line with the statutory election timetable and the applications from a significant number of Overseas Elector)
July – Sept 2016	Full tender process for the procurement of Mobile Tablet Devices and software for use during the annual HEF canvass 'personal visits' stage (scheduled to commence on 10 October 2016).
July – Nov 2016	Planning and management of the statutory Annual 'Household Enquiry Form' (HEF) canvass – 151,000 Initial HEFs sent out 8 Aug – 85,000 Reminder HEFs sent out 12 Sept
Oct – Nov 2016	Management of the Personal Visits (and 2 nd Reminder) stage of the Annual Canvass to approx. 54,000 non-responding properties
Oct – Dec 2016	Full tender process for the procurement of a new 'Elections Management Software System' (EMS) to be awarded in line with current contractual commitments and take affect from 1 April 2017.

All key electoral registration activities throughout 2016 were supported by use of public awareness and engagement campaigns. The aim of these public awareness campaigns is always a 'call for action' from any eligible residents (not yet registered) to ensure that they are on the register of electors and thus able to participate as they wish in democratic processes being conducted within the borough. An overview of the public engagement activities is given in the following table:

Description of Engagement Activities:	Timescale and Rationale:
EC approved A5 Leaflet on voter registration delivered to all households along with their Council Tax demands.	These were sent out in March and delivered to all households. The message on the leaflet was targeted at residents that had moved in the past year.
<u>5 May GLA Elections</u> ~'Empty Property Poll Card' sent to all properties where no electors are registered. ~Full Page 'advert' in Barnet First – delivered to all LBB properties ~Bus Shelter and Street Posters campaign – using London Elects artwork (with LBB logo incorporated)	~March 2016 – sent at same time as elector poll cards to encourage registration ahead of the GLA Elections on 5 May (ensures any non-registered eligible residents do not think their poll card is simply late). ~This magazine was delivered in March to all Barnet residential properties and so ensured that the 'Have Your Say' message was received in every household. ~This campaign ran in the second half of March in support of the London-wide advertising being undertaken by London Elects (which ran through until 17 April) in support of the May elections.

<p><u>23 June EU Referendum</u></p> <p>~‘Empty Property Poll Card’ sent to all properties where no electors are registered.</p> <p>~Leaflet drop to every LBB household of an EC Approved A5 ‘You Can’t Miss It’ (national branding) leaflet.</p> <p>~Full Page registration deadline ‘advert’ taken out in Barnet’s local newspapers</p> <p>~Bus Shelter and Street Posters campaign – using Electoral Commission artwork</p>	<p>~May 2016 – sent at same time as elector poll cards to encourage registration ahead of the referendum, to ensure that non-registered eligible residents do not simply think that their poll card is late.</p> <p>~Late May – to ensure that the Registration Deadline message was in every household.</p> <p>~This full page advert was run over two weeks (19 & 26 May) to raise awareness of the deadline for registering in time to vote in the referendum.</p> <p>~This campaign ran in the second half of May in support of the nationwide advertising being undertaken by the EC and detailed the registration deadline date.</p>
<p>Annual Canvass</p> <p>~Bus Shelter and Street Posters campaign – using adapted Electoral Commission artwork resources</p>	<p>~Sept 2016 – this poster campaign ran to coincide with the 1st Reminder HEFs being sent out. It asked residents to respond to the HEF they had received by post.</p>

However, the bulk of the work of Barnet’s Electoral Registration Team to maintain the accuracy and completeness register of electors is constant, ongoing and spread throughout the year. In virtually all cases, under IER the processes to maintain the register have lengthened and increased in complexity, due to the legislation introducing measures to increase the security of the register and reduce the opportunities for fraud. Amongst the most common activities undertaken on a daily basis by the Electoral Officers in relation to the register are:

- processing applications to join the register - including as required the follow up on incomplete or initially unsuccessful applications, to request further evidence or information that will allow the application to be correctly determined
- tasks to ensure that duplicate entries are not made on the register for individuals that submit multiple applications (especially through central government’s online registration application portal)
- identifying individuals that may be eligible to register but have not applied and contacting them, followed by the issuing of statutory posted Invitation to Register (ITR) forms and reminders
- managing the processes to delete individuals on the register that are no longer resident, or for which information has been received that means they may no longer be eligible to be on the register (in virtually all instances two pieces of evidence must be obtained before a verified individual can be removed from the register of electors)
- operating as a front line service to deal with the high quantity of queries received directly from electors (including overseas electors), residents and a variety of other people that have an interest in the register of electors or specific information about entries on it

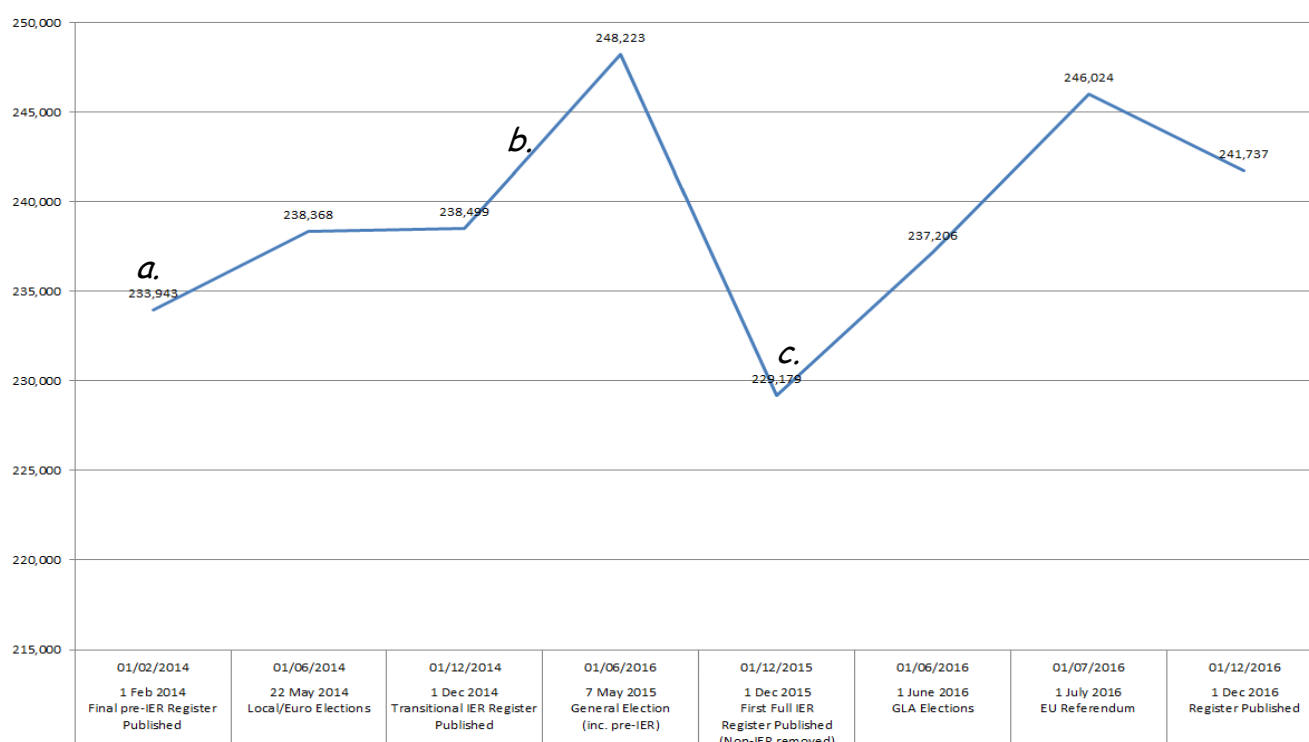
By virtue of having such a large population and electorate, the number of movements and amendments made to the London Borough of Barnet’s Full Register is of course significant. In total there were 43,995 additions, 32,739 deletions and 17,208 amendments (93,942 total elector changes) made to the register of electors in 2016.

3. Analysis of Barnet's Full Revised Register of Electors

In analysing the Full Register of the London Borough of Barnet the information within this report is focussed on data that appears to identify those areas where opportunities to improve the completeness of the register are most apparent.

3.2 Register Totals 2013 to 2016 (Pre-IER to date)

This graph (full size at Appendix A) shows the total number of registered electors as at the date that the register of electors was published, either upon final Notice of Amendment before a borough-wide election or as the annual publication of the Full Revised Register. It illustrates how the implementation and transition to IER has affected the Register and also how high profile national elections drive additional registration applications.



Notes:

- The final publication of the annual Full Revised Register of Electors, before IER became law in June 2014, was delayed from 1 December 2013 to the 1 February 2014. This decision was taken by government to ensure that registers were as accurate as possible prior to the initial 'confirmation' process whereby all electors on the register had their information compared to data held by DWP.
- The Transitional IER Register and the Register for the General Election on 7 May 2015 both still included all electors that had either not been verified against DWP data or had still not provided further documentary evidence to verify their identity.
- Following a ministerial direction (as legislated under ERA 2013) all electors not verified in accordance with IER were removed from the register immediately prior to the publication of the Full Revised Register of Electors on 1 December 2015. In Barnet approx. 9,000 entries were removed for this reason.

3.2 Electors per Property

Although affected many other variables (e.g. demographics of nationality, age, social housing etc.), comparing the number of registered electors against the known number of residential properties can be very effective in highlighting those areas where registration rates appear to be lower. Based upon the 1 December 2016 Full Register, Barnet currently has 1.61 electors per property. This compares with an average for London (based upon 23 boroughs for which figures are available) of 1.67 electors per property, which given other statistics regarding

population density across London (Barnet is in a lower-mid range for density at 4,400 per km²) does not suggest that there are large numbers of non-registered electors in the borough. However, as illustrated by the table below, across the borough's wards there are some significant differences in this figure (to illustrate, the two highest and lowest figures have been underlined).

Ward	Electorate	Properties	Electors per Household	Ward	Electorate	Properties	Electors per Household
High Barnet	11412	6978	1.64	Golders Green	10907	6954	1.57
East Barnet	11637	6863	1.70	Finchley Church End	11125	6858	1.62
Brunswick Park	11985	6260	<u>1.91</u>	West Finchley	10522	6973	1.51
Coppetts	11522	7169	1.61	Hale	11916	6430	<u>1.85</u>
Oakleigh	11742	6599	1.78	Mill Hill	12935	7675	1.69
Totteridge	10080	6077	1.66	Hendon	11376	7917	1.44
Underhill	11640	6755	1.72	West Hendon	11023	7023	1.57
Woodhouse	12037	7350	1.64	Colindale	13078	10305	<u>1.27</u>
East Finchley	11162	6942	1.61	Burnt Oak	11478	6857	1.67
Garden Suburb	10634	6722	1.58	Edgware	11290	6700	1.69
Childs Hill	12236	8976	<u>1.36</u>	TOTALS:	<u>241,737</u>	<u>150,383</u>	<u>1.61</u>

Based on information from the 2011 census, Colindale Ward has the highest percentage of residents from Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority (BAME) groups and Childs Hill has the highest number of residents that privately rent their homes (both of these are clearly identified as groups within the community that have a higher tendency not to be registered). In addition, the ongoing regeneration schemes in Colindale Ward regularly mean that large numbers of unoccupied properties are placed onto the electoral registration software system ahead of residents moving in and registering (and as a high proportion of these often appear to be short term lets, they are also then less likely to register).

4. Priorities for Electoral Registration in Barnet in 2017

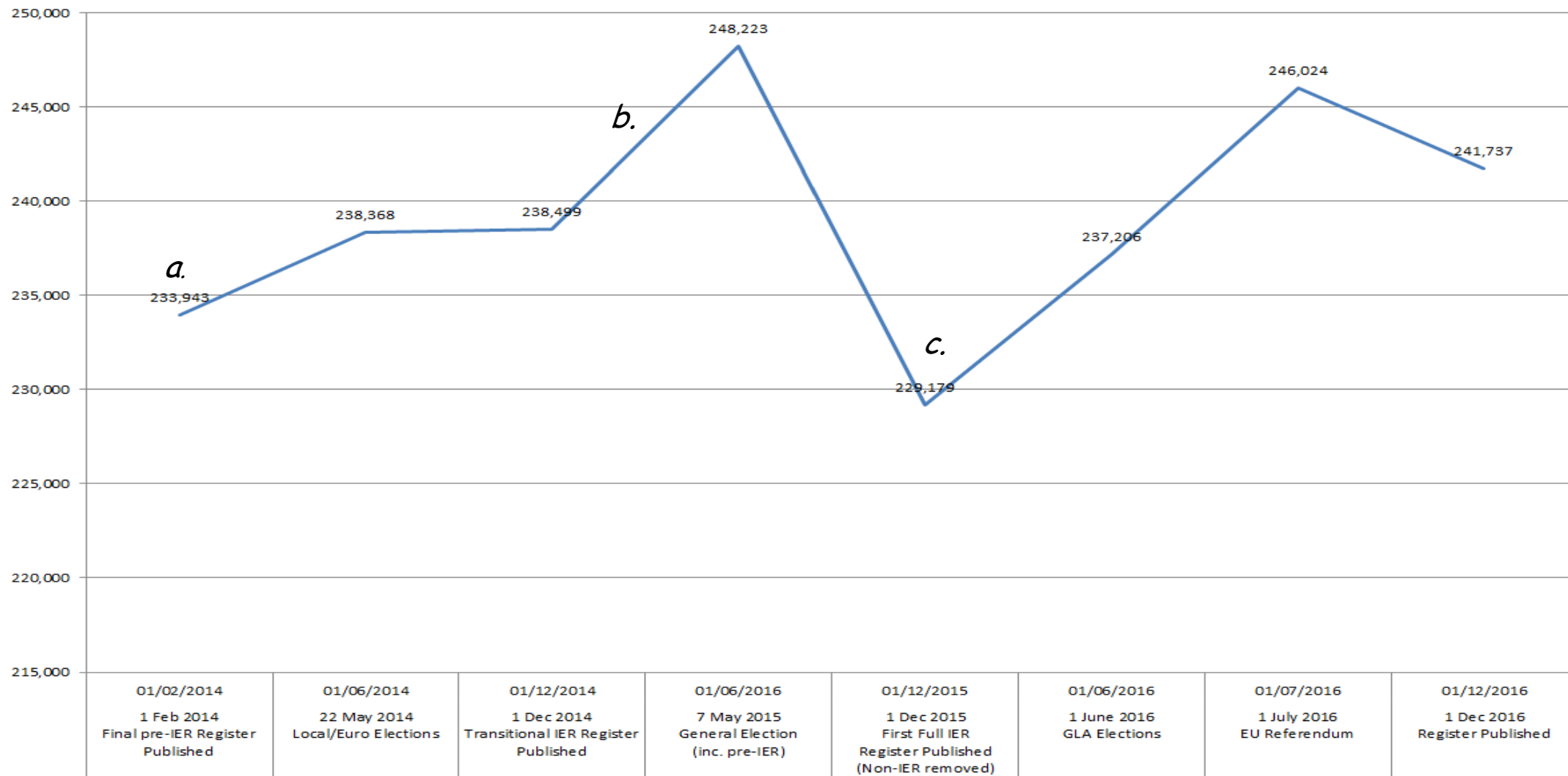
Due to electoral legislation, there are a number of key Electoral Registration activities that must be undertaken within specific times throughout the year. The most specific example of this is of course the Annual HEF Canvass of all Residential Properties, which the law requires must take place between 1 July and 30 November. The Full Revised Register of Electors must be published each year on 1 December following this canvass.

Following the recent procurement process and award of contract for a new Electoral Registration and Elections Management Software System (as required by the Contract Procedure Rules of Barnet's Constitution), the new system will be installed and tested during March 2017 ahead of the contractual go-live date of the 1 April 2017. There will then be a period of staff training and familiarisation with this new system, but indications from the competitive procurement process were that within a short while this new system should deliver improvements in efficiency and effectiveness in a number of key areas. Most specifically the new system should enable and exploit opportunities to correspond with existing and pending electors through a number of modern channels and reduce the reliance upon posted letters. This not only offers high potential cost savings, but should also help to significantly speed up a number of processes that might sometimes deter residents from joining the register.

Finally a key priority for this year is the implementation of the improvement recommendations resulting from the recent independent 'Smith' review. This work has begun and will progress throughout the coming year and into the run up to the Local Government elections scheduled for 3 May 2018. Additional reports on the progress of the implementation of the improvement recommendations will be provided to future meetings of General Functions Committee. More detailed planning has already been produced and opportunities to work closely with both the Electoral Commission and Association of Electoral Administrators (AEA) on good electoral practice have already been initiated. For example: Barnet is included amongst 20 local authorities' nationwide that have started working with the Electoral Commission to look at Election Count arrangements and processes and the Electoral Registration Manager will be joining an AEA London-wide 'working group' to identify and advise on effective registration activities in use across the city.

Appendix A

LBB Full Electorate – 2013 to 2016



Notes:

- d. The final publication of the annual Full Revised Register of Electors, before IER became law in June 2014, was delayed from 1 December 2013 to the 1 February 2014. This decision was taken by government to ensure that registers were as accurate as possible prior to the initial 'confirmation' process whereby all electors on the register had their information compared to data held by DWP.
- e. The Transitional IER Register and the Register for the General Election on 7 May 2015 both still included all electors that had either not been verified against DWP data or had still not provided further documentary evidence to verify their identity.
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