

Electoral Registration Annual Report 2017

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Executive Summary

The purpose of this annual report is to provide an overview of the activities and outcomes of the work of the Electoral Registration Team throughout 2017 and to summarise the current status of the London Borough of Barnet's Register of Electors as at the 1 December 2017 (when statutory publication of the annual revision of the full register of electors took place).

It is widely reported that Barnet has one of the largest regeneration and house building programmes in London and one of the outcomes of this (along with a number of other significant factors), is that Barnet also has one of the fastest growing populations in the capital. Alongside this, the General Election that was unexpectedly called by the Prime Minister on 18 April and took place on 8 June this year saw a usual surge in registration applications (as well as many thousands of 'duplicate' applications – as seen since the introduction of online registration applications) that high profile national elections are renowned for. It is perhaps therefore not surprising that the Register of Electors is at a record high of 260,290 as at publication of the Full Register of Electors on 1 December 2017.

Overall the London Borough of Barnet's Electoral Services team has had a busy and eventful year in 2017 that has included:

- 41,356 successful applications to join the register of electors (including review and determination of over 20,000 'duplicate' applications)
- 20,198 deletions from the register of electors
- 102,252 amendments to elector records including; elector name changes, changes to voting arrangements, recording of additional contact details and changes to electors' 'opt-out' status with regards of the 'Open' register (e.g. whether or not they are showing on the portion of the register that can be purchased and used for any purpose)
- The full implementation of, and migration to, a new Elections and Electoral Registration Management System (EMS)
- Planning, preparation and delivery of the General Election held on 8 June 2017
- Completion of the statutory Annual Household Enquiry Form (HEF) Canvass between 1 July 2017 and 30 November 2017.

1 Introduction and Background Information

All electoral registration work is conducted in line with the appropriate legislation and is statutorily carried out on behalf of the borough's Electoral Registration Officer (ERO). The ERO has a duty to compile and maintain a register of parliamentary electors, a register of local government electors and 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' their details from 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 order to effectively carry out the multitude of administrative duties and processes required for electoral registration and the conduct of elections, electoral service teams in local authorities are wholly reliant upon a critical software system that the whole team uses (almost constantly) on a daily basis. This software system is typically referred to as an 'Elections Management Software System' (EMS) - this common name having arisen despite these systems generally being used more critically and for a greater period of time to manage electoral registration rather than actual elections. A key element of the statutory process within Individual Electoral Registration (IER) legislation is the requirement that EROs must attempt to verify all submitted applications using data held by central government and it is the EMS that has the highly secure, encrypted interface with the Government Digital Service's (GDS) relevant software system.

As the (four year) contract for the provision of the existing EMS was due to expire on 31 March 2017, a full procurement process was run between November 2016 and February 2017 in accordance with the London Borough of Barnet's Contract Procedure Rules. The outcome of this procurement process was to award the new contract to for an EMS system to a new supplier for four years from 1 April 2017. Although it was anticipated and planned that there would be a period of training and familiarisation in order for the Electoral Services staff to become fully productive on the new EMS, it was considered a relatively low-impact risk given that there were no scheduled elections due in the forthcoming year. However - given the unexpected event that followed (within two weeks of a critical 'no-return' point - when the single encrypted connection to GDS had been transferred between the old and new systems), the impact of having a new system upon the team was far greater than anticipated. However, with extra resource provided from teams across the organisation, additional support from the new supplier and high levels of management control, all of these pressures were managed to ensure successful outcomes were achieved.

On 18 April 2017, the Prime Minister called a general election that was held on 8 June 2017. Although this was the only statutory election to be held in the London Borough of Barnet during 2017, it was of course an exceptionally high-profile political and electoral event. Subsequently, it resulted in a significant level of applications being made by residents that wanted to join the electoral register. Between the calling of the election and the deadline for applications to be made in time to be included on the register of electors in time for polling day (22 May 2017), some 22,270 applications were submitted in Barnet. Of these however, 7,611

were actually identified as duplicate applications and were in fact made by applicants that were either already on the register or already had a submitted application being processed.

Since the election on 8 June 2017, it has been reported by the Electoral Commission (EC) that the electorate for this general election was in fact the highest ever for an election within the UK, with some 46.8million individuals being registered by the time of the publication of the final register to be used on polling day¹. This situation was clearly reflected in Barnet, where the total number of registered electors reached a record high for the borough at 254,220.

As outlined in the executive summary above, the London Borough of Barnet has a growing population and by extension the Register of Electors understandably also continues to grow. However, it is worth re-stating that there are a number of significant factors that mean that the correlation of numbers between population statistics, that to an extent must always be estimated, and the actual number of electors on the register is not directly comparable. Barnet is an extremely diverse borough and this includes many residents whose nationality means that they cannot join the register of electors (as they do not have the franchise to vote in any statutory election). Some common examples of residents who cannot be on the electoral register are those with Turkish, American, Japanese, Iranian or Afghan nationality. In addition, whilst 16 and 17 year olds can be recorded on the register as 'attainers' (i.e. somebody that will attain eligibility to vote upon turning 18), anybody below 16 years of age is not captured and again, Barnet is known to have a significant and fast growing population of young residents in this category. From the perspective of the Register of Electors any household that contains only individuals that are ineligible is termed 'empty' (as in empty of electors) along with those that have no occupants at all (thus statistics from Electoral Services typically state a far higher number of 'empty' properties when compared to those from other services)

Two further factors that have a considerable impact upon how complete and accurate 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 (especially more than once in a calendar year) are much less likely to register than other residents. Both of these factors are of particular significance within specific Wards (and even polling districts) within Barnet.

¹ https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0003/238044/The-administration-of-the-June-2017-UK-general-election.pdf

2 Key Activities of the Electoral Registration Team in 2017

In accordance with electoral legislation, all amendments to the register are published on specifically determined dates between January and September (often still termed ‘rolling registration’) and then the full revised version of the register is published each year on 1 December. Following the introduction of IER in June 2014, the Electoral Commission has continually made the point that even the annual publication of the Full Register of Electors on 1 December each year must be seen as a ‘snapshot’ of the register as there are still always many electors (or even ‘households’) at different stages of the various processes and chase cycles that EROs must follow before they can make additions to or deletions from the register of electors.

As outlined in the previous section of this report, there were some significant events that took place within 2017 that made it a busy year for the Electoral Services team. However, alongside these particular events there were still the more usual activities that must be administered within the normal cycle of electoral registration, such as the statutory Annual Household Enquiry Form (HEF) Canvass between July and December, to maintain the Register of Electors. Brief details and the timings of the most significant electoral registration periods and activities undertaken in 2017 are summarised in the following table:

Period:	Description of Activities
January - March 2017	Refresh of 5 year Absent Voter’s Personal Identifiers (Letters and Reminders to approx. 5,500 PV electors) – Post Votes are deleted for some electors where no new personal identifier is supplied.
March - April 2017	Installation of new Elections Management System – including the migration of the entire ERO database and the transfer of the encrypted connection with Government Digital Services.
April - June 2017	Increased registration applications, postal vote applications and other processes in relation to the 8 June general election.
July - December 2017	Planning and management of the statutory Annual ‘Household Enquiry Form’ (HEF) canvass – 156,000 Initial HEFs (followed by reminders) and then over 50,000 personal visits to non-responding properties throughout the borough.

However, the bulk of the work of the Electoral Registration team to maintain the accuracy and completeness register of electors is relatively constant and spread throughout the year. Whilst the IER legislation introduced in June 2014 increased the security of the register and reduced the opportunities for fraud, it did mean that in virtually all cases, the processes to maintain the register lengthened and increased in complexity. 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
- processes to ensure that duplicate entries are not added to the register for individuals that have submitted multiple applications (these are even more common during election periods when registration campaigns are focussed on messages encouraging individuals to ‘make sure that they are registered’ in time to vote)
- identifying individuals that may be eligible to register but have not applied and contacting them, followed by statutory Invitation to Register (ITR) forms (whilst the new

EMS system does mean that many of these are now sent by email, where email addresses are not available posted A3 forms still have to be despatched)

- 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 almost all instances, two pieces of evidence must be obtained before a verified elector can be removed from the register)
- operating as a front line service to deal with the high quantity of queries received directly from electors (including overseas electors), residents and other people that have an interest in the register of electors or a specific request in relation to it.

In summary, as Barnet has the largest electoral register in London², it is to be expected that it will also therefore perform amongst the highest number of total additions, deletions and other amendments to its register. A combined total 102,252 of these amendments were performed on Barnet's Electoral Register in 2017 (as recorded by the EMS system).

² This is based upon the registers published for the General election held on 8 June 2017. Information on the register sizes for all London boroughs at publication on 1 Dec 2017 is not available at the time of writing.

3 Analysis of Barnet’s Full Revised Register of Electors

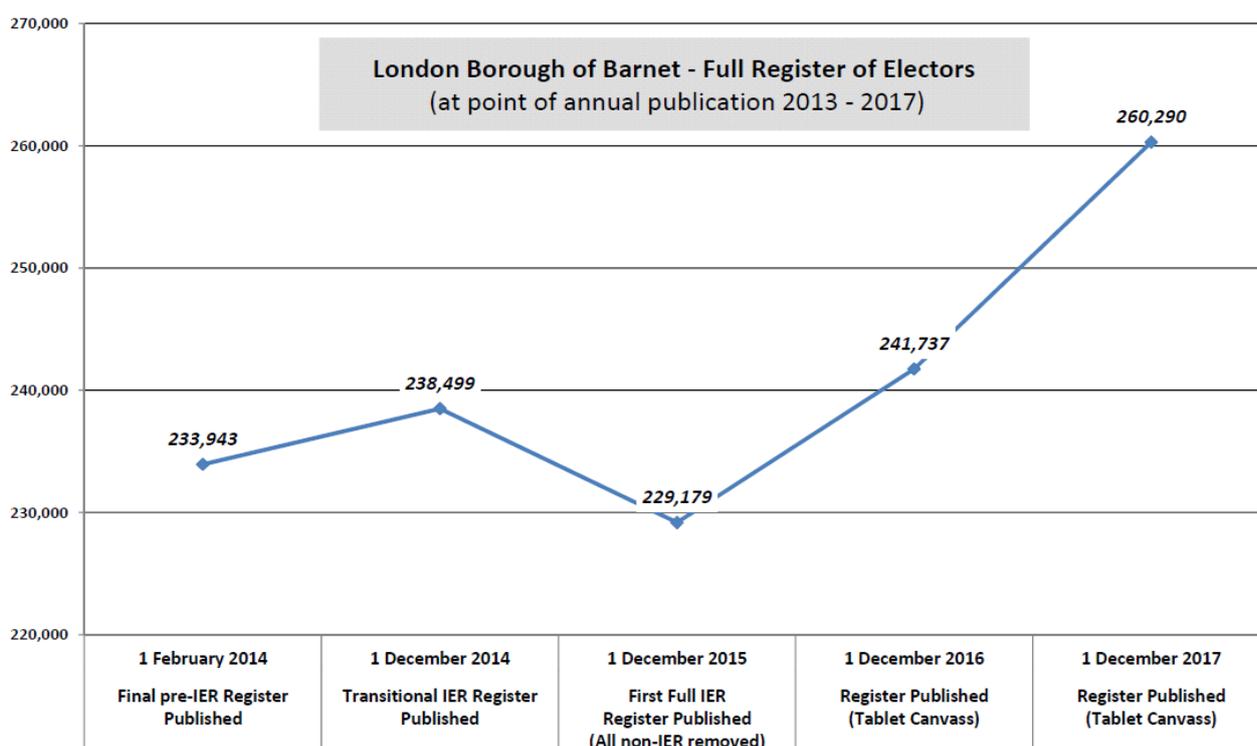
Last year the first annual report on the Electoral Registration in Barnet³ provided some key data to illustrate the growth trend for the overall register and also offered information to enable indicative identification on those Wards within the borough where registration rates may be lower than the borough average.

By providing comparable data, this year’s report is able to show not only how the electorate is growing as a whole across the borough, but also allow further analysis by Ward to show where electorate sizes are changing outside of the borough average. When the change in the number of residential properties by Ward is also taken into account, this information will also help Electoral Services to identify where there may still be opportunities to improve the accuracy and completeness of the register.

There are of course many other factors that affect registration rates by Ward (and even polling district), such as for example, higher densities of ineligible residents by nationality or the willingness of individuals to apply to register for non-electoral reasons (e.g. frequent movers or students etc.). It is therefore useful to factor in any relevant local knowledge when reviewing registration rates across the Wards of the borough. The electoral register does not (and cannot in order to comply with data protection legislation) hold any data that is not considered essential for use in the processes of electoral registration and elections – this would include many possible fields that might contain data about individuals, even if these might be useful for non-electoral reasons.

3.1 Full Register totals at annual publication 2014 to 2017 (Pre-IER to date)

This graph (shown 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.



³ Presented to General Functions Committee on 20 March 2017.

3.2 Electors by Ward and Electors per Household (EPH) at annual publication

This table compares data from the 1 December registers published this year and last year - so the change in electorates by Ward across the borough is illustrated. In addition, although affected by many other variables (e.g. demographics of nationality, age, social housing etc.), comparing the number of registered electors against the current number of residential properties (and includes those properties that are 'empty' in electoral registration terms) can be effective in highlighting Wards where registration rates are below the borough average (**two highest and **two lowest figures underlined*):

Ward	Electors 2017	Electors 2016	+/- % '17 vs. '16	Households	EPH 2017	EPH 2016
High Barnet	12115	11412	+6.16%	7251	1.67	1.64
East Barnet	12240	11637	+5.18%	7057	1.73	1.70
Brunswick Park	12555	11985	+4.76%	6476	<u>*1.94</u>	<u>*1.91</u>
Coppetts	12539	11522	+8.83%	7385	1.70	1.61
Oakleigh	12315	11742	+4.88%	6854	1.80	1.78
Totteridge	10709	10080	+6.24%	6421	1.67	1.66
Underhill	12162	11640	+4.48%	6958	1.75	1.72
Woodhouse	12916	12037	+7.30%	7779	1.66	1.64
East Finchley	12215	11162	+9.43%	7268	1.68	1.61
Garden Suburb	11381	10634	+7.02%	6912	1.65	1.58
Childs Hill	13493	12236	+10.27%	9455	<u>**1.43</u>	<u>**1.36</u>
Golders Green	11699	10907	+7.26%	7457	1.57	1.57
Finchley Church End	11985	11125	+7.73%	7341	1.63	1.62
West Finchley	11553	10522	+9.80%	7389	1.56	1.51
Hale	12623	11916	+5.93%	6584	<u>*1.92</u>	<u>*1.85</u>
Mill Hill	14087	12935	+8.91%	8245	1.71	1.69
Hendon	12377	11376	+8.80%	8246	1.50	1.44
West Hendon	12200	11023	+10.68%	7542	1.62	1.57
Colindale	14682	13078	+12.26%	11352	<u>**1.29</u>	<u>**1.27</u>
Burnt Oak	12285	11478	+7.03%	6922	1.77	1.67
Edgware	12159	11290	+7.70%	6881	1.77	1.69
LBB TOTALS:	260,290	241,737	+7.67%	157,775	1.65	1.61

**Based on information from the 2011 census, we know that Colindale Ward has the highest percentage of residents from BAME groups and that Childs Hill has the highest number of residents that privately rent their homes (both of these are recognised as groups within the community that have a higher tendency not to be registered).

4 Priorities for Electoral Registration in Barnet in 2018

There are a number of statutory activities that electoral registration offices (on behalf of their ERO) must complete at specific times throughout the year and ensuring that these are completed in full compliance with legislation remains an ongoing priority for the Electoral Services team. There is currently one borough-wide election scheduled to take place in Barnet in 2018 - although an ongoing review of arrangements to mitigate some of the potential pressures should another general election be called at short notice is being maintained.

The second half of the year is, as ever, largely taken up with the statutory Annual HEF Canvass that must be conducted between the 1 July and 30 November. However the Local Government Boundary Commission for England has already notified Barnet's Chief Executive that they will be conducting an electoral review of Barnet in 2018/19 and that the work on this will commence in September 2018. In all, this means that there is in place already a reasonably full calendar of events that Electoral Services must deliver to ensure that the register of electors is consistently maintained and as accurate and complete as ever.

The first key activity to be undertaken (and which must statutorily commence) in January is the Absent Vote Refresh. This is to comply with the legislative requirement that any elector that has had a permanent absent voting arrangement in place for five years, must provide new personal identifiers (i.e. re-submit their date of birth and a fresh copy of their signature). Due to the very high number of postal voters within Barnet (over 50,000 at present), this activity will require that in the region of 10,000 postal voters are contacted by letter (and subsequently sent reminders where appropriate) who must then respond within six weeks or have their postal vote arrangement removed.

As has already been touched upon, Barnet (along with all other London boroughs) has its Local Government elections scheduled to take place on 3 May 2018. Within the current political climate it is anticipated that these will be of significant interest to the borough's residents. Therefore, to make sure that all of the borough's residents have as up to date information as possible regarding whether or not they are on the Register of Electors, the ERO has taken the decision to send a discretionary Household Notification Letter (HNL) to every residential property in the borough in the second half of February. Whilst residents cannot be legally obliged to respond to this letter, it is anticipated that it will have a positive effect in prompting those eligible residents that are not registered to take appropriate action and submit an application to join the register of electors. In addition, it is also expected the Electoral Registration team will also receive a lot of useful information from households where there are individuals registered that are no longer living at the address.

Despite the whole borough activity with HNLs in February, the run up to the election on 3 May is still expected to bring a significant increase in registration applications and changes to voting arrangements as the deadlines to register in time to vote at the elections (Tuesday 17 April 2018) and to apply for a new postal vote (5pm Wednesday 18 April 2018) approach. A reasonably high turnout, relative to other local elections, is considered likely and is being prepared for.

Notwithstanding any currently unscheduled elections being called, the Annual HEF Canvass will be planned for after the May elections and then conducted - starting with the mailing of a HEF to of all residential properties (which conceivably could have exceeded 160,000 properties by

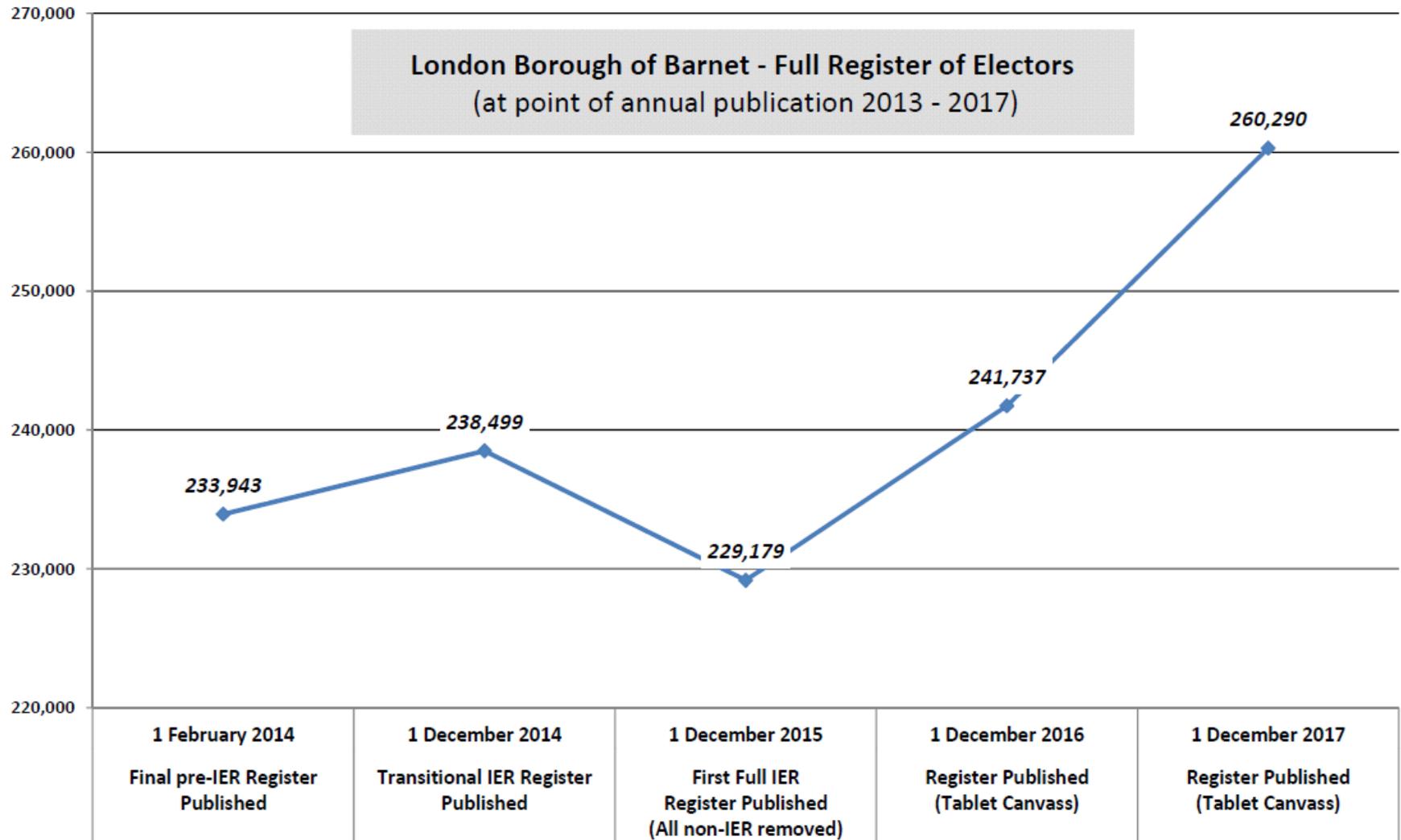
that point) on a date to be set between mid-July and mid-August. As per legislation this will then be followed with HEF reminders, HEF 2nd reminders and personal visits by canvassers to non-responding properties as appropriate.

Information shared from the results of the Cabinet Office's 2017 canvass pilots (these trialled different resident/household contact methods and strategies and also piloted new HEF documentation templates) that were conducted within a small number of local authorities across the UK, along with feedback from other London boroughs and Barnet's own canvass in 2017 will be reviewed and where suitable learnings are identified, these will be applied in order to improve the response rates and outcomes of the canvass.

In September 2018, Barnet's Electoral Services will work with the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) and assist them in their electoral review of the borough. The overview plan that has been shared so far sets out that the number of councillors to be elected at the May 2022 elections will be decided in September 2018, followed immediately by a consultation on the ward structure and boundaries within the borough that will last until December 2018. Further work on this electoral review will continue into the following year (2019), with final recommendations due to be published by the LGBCE in June 2019. The last electoral review of Barnet was conducted by the LGBCE in 1999, so by the time this review is concluded it will be 20 years since the last review.

In addition to the key pieces of work above, that will form the basis of the activities of the electoral registration team over the next twelve months; the London Borough of Barnet's Democratic Engagement Manager is also developing a running programme of public awareness and engagement activities that will be implemented throughout the year. This will start with the inaugural meeting of a newly formed and non-political 'Democratic Engagement Advisory Panel' (this will be a forum for sharing information on current activities for encouraging electoral registration and listening to feedback from key stakeholders. The group cannot have any decision making powers, but it is designed to help give useful information and suggestions to the Electoral Services team to help with their work to ensure that electoral register is as complete and accurate as possible).

Appendix A



Notes:

- Annual publication of the Full Register was delayed from 1 December 2013 to 1 February 2014 in preparation for the introduction of IER
- The Transitional IER Register published on 1 December 2014 included non-confirmed and verified electors carried over from the previous register
- All non-IER electors were removed immediately ahead of the publication of the first fully IER Register of Electors on 1 December 2015