

Electoral Registration Annual Report 2018

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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 2018 and to summarise the current status of the London Borough of Barnet's Register of Electors as at the 1 December 2018 (when statutory publication of the annual revision of the full register of electors must take place).

As at 1 December 2018, there are 258,832 electors on the London Borough of Barnet's Register of Electors. This is a decrease of 1,458 (-0.56%) electors in comparison with the electoral register published on 1 December 2017. This small decrease is below the average reduction for electoral registration across London which currently stands at -0.95%¹ and is primarily due to the reduction in registered 'Overseas' electors. As there were no national elections or referendums held in 2018 that overseas electors would have been eligible to vote in, it is not unusual that the majority of overseas electors chose not to renew their electoral registration in Barnet (as they must do every year under current legislation). In Barnet, the number of registered overseas electors fell from 2,463 on 1 December 2017 to just 787 on 1 December 2018 (a drop of 1,676).

In addition, although the Local Government Elections took place on 3 May 2018 and did cause an increase in voter registration applications in the lead up to the deadline day for voting, this was not on the scale of the surge in applications that was seen for the UK-wide Parliamentary elections and the EU Referendum in recent years.

Overall the London Borough of Barnet's Electoral Services team again had a very busy year in 2018 and this included:

- 30,071 successful applications to join the register of electors (plus an additional review and determination of over 15,000 duplicate and failed applications)
- 33,698 deletions from the register of electors
- Over 96,000 amendments to Barnet's Register of Electors (includes; changes to voting arrangements, elector name changes, recording of additional contact details and changes to electors' 'opt-out' status with regards of the 'Open' register etc.) throughout the year
- Planning and delivery of a borough-wide 'Household Notification Letter' (HNL) campaign (including a full communications campaign) during February and March to all residential properties
- Planning, preparation and delivery of all registration activities for the Local Elections held on 3 May 2018
- Planning and delivery of the statutory Annual Household Enquiry Form (HEF) Canvass between 1 July 2018 and 30 November 2018 on all residential properties - achieving a completion rate of 98.6% (with responses were received from 83.2% of households)

¹ Based upon 26 London boroughs that have provided their December 2018 data as at 24/12/18

1 Background Information

All electoral registration work is conducted in compliance with relevant electoral legislation and is 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 - 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 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.

Between January and September, all amendments to the register of electors are published on specific statutory dates (usually the first working day of the month) and this period is generally referred to as 'rolling registration'. The fully revised and renumbered version of the register is then published each year on 1 December, following the statutory annual canvass period from 1 July to 30 November. Since the introduction of Individual Electoral Registration in June 2014, when additional processes designed to improve the security of the electoral register were introduced, it is important to note that even the annual publication of the Full Register of Electors on 1 December each year can only ever be the latest 'snapshot' of the status of the register. At the point of the annual publication, there are many electors and applications that are 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.

Barnet is rightly proud of the diverse nature of its population, but this does mean that there are some significant numbers of residents whose nationality means that they cannot join the register of electors (as they do not have a franchise to vote in any statutory election). Whilst estimated figures for nationality groups do exist, under GDPR legislation it is not possible for the ERO to hold data about individuals that is not required for electoral purposes (whether current or historic). Therefore, Electoral Services cannot hold or calculate data on the number of residents in Barnet that are ineligible to register. However, it is known from population estimates, whilst usually based upon ethnicity rather than nationality, that there are large communities of residents in Barnet with (amongst many others) the following ineligible nationalities; Turkish, American, Israeli, Japanese, Afghan and Iranian. In addition, although 16 and 17-year olds can be recorded on the register as 'attainers' (i.e. somebody that will attain eligibility to vote as soon as they turn 18), the ERO cannot hold data on anybody below 16 years of age. 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).

To effectively carry out the multitude of administrative duties and processes statutorily required for electoral registration and elections, Electoral Service teams in local authorities are reliant upon a complex software system, that the core team use constantly each day. This software system is typically referred to as an 'Electoral Management System' (EMS). A key component of the statutory process within electoral registration legislation, is the requirement for EROs to securely and electronically send key data about every individual that applies to register, to the Government Digital Service (GDS). The GDS use this data to verify whether the identity of each individual applicant matches against central government records (most particularly, data from

the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) is used). As the EMS contains the highly secure, encrypted interface with the GDS's central software system it is used for this process daily (matching and verification processes are carried out overnight by the GDS system). Barnet's Electoral Services team have continued to work closely with the supplier of the current EMS to further develop the system and to utilise new and developing functionality and citizen communications. This work has been particularly focussed on improving the speed and effectiveness of the numerous communications that are required with applicants and registered electors and on improving the use of data matching processes and data analysis that can reduce or better target communications and reduce printing and postage costs to the council.

Along with all other London Boroughs, Barnet held Local Government Elections on 3 May 2018. Whilst voter turnout in Barnet was above the London average and was significantly higher than at the last Local Elections in 2014², these elections did not attract the same number of new applications to vote (from eligible but non-registered residents) as seen at the General Elections in 2015 and 2017 or at the EU Referendum in 2016.

A key decision that was taken, following detailed discussion with the ERO, was to send a discretionary Household Notification Letter (HNL) to every residential property within the borough in late February. The HNL provided the household with details of all electors registered to vote (or, where relevant, stated that nobody was registered to vote) at that address and also showed the individual voting arrangements in place for each elector. The form and its timing were designed to ensure that all residents were clear about who was on the register and how they would be able to vote in the forthcoming local elections. As a discretionary form, residents did not have to provide a response to confirm anything when all details were correct, but residents that wanted to add, delete or amend the information for any electors registered at their address could use either an online portal, email or telephone to inform Electoral Services of the requested changes.

Although different types of elections and the level of public interest that they generate can be difficult to compare, the evidence from the HNLs was that residents were prompted to deal with their registration and voting enquiries much earlier in advance of the elections. In addition, the level of applications and contacts that Electoral Services had to process in the lead up to the various relevant deadlines for the Local Elections in May was greatly reduced.

From the publication of the Notice of Election (27 March 2018) and the deadline for applications to be made in time to vote on polling day (17 April 2018), 8,141 applications to join the electoral register were submitted in Barnet. Of these however, approx. 1,540 were classed as duplicate applications and were made by residents that were either already on the register or already had an application being processed. In addition to this, during the same period, over 2,800 electors applied for and received either a postal or a proxy vote for the May Local Elections (this was in addition to the more than 48,000 postal and proxy voting arrangements already in place at that time).

² Voter turnout for Local Elections in Barnet: **2018** = 43.7% (109,124 voters) / **2014** = 40.5% (95,944 voters).
London-wide turnout for Local Elections in 2018 = 38.9% (2,315,166 voters)

2 Key Activities of the Electoral Registration Team in 2018

As referred to in the previous section of this report, there were some particularly ‘busy’ registration periods that took place during 2018. To maximise the effectiveness and response rates for the most important registration periods, Electoral Services worked with the Barnet Communications Team to develop and implement three dedicated electoral registration public awareness campaigns throughout the year. These campaigns were specifically designed (using consistent and recognisable graphics and messages) to enhance the connection between the events and the mandatory documents that households were being sent. Brief details and timings of the most significant registration activities - as opposed to other key Electoral Service activities such as elections, polling and boundary reviews etc. - undertaken throughout 2018 are summarised below:

Period:	Description of Activities
January - March	Statutory 5-year refresh of Absent Voters’ Personal Identifiers - Letters and Reminders sent to over 5,000 electors with an absent vote in place for over 5 years. Absent Vote arrangements must be cancelled where new personal identifiers are <u>not</u> supplied.
February - March	Household Notification Letters to all residential properties – HNL mailed out over 156,000 properties and individual processing of all responses and requests. Comms Campaign: HNL ‘Are you Registered’ 19/2/18 – 20/3/18
March - May	Registration applications, postal vote applications and other registration processes for the 3 May Local Elections - Over 12,000 individual applications to register or change voting arrangements. Almost 10,000 telephone and email enquiries handled by the Elections Call Centre and the core Electoral Services team. Comms Campaign: Elections ‘Register to Vote’ 21/3/18 – 23/4/18
July - December	Planning and management of the statutory Annual ‘Household Enquiry Form’ (HEF) canvass – over 156,000 Initial HEFs, 80,000 Reminder HEFs and 20,000 Invitations to Register (ITRs) posted out. Over 45,000 personal (canvasser) visits to non-responding households throughout the borough. Comms Campaign: HEF ‘Don’t Lose Your Vote’ 17/9/18 – 6/11/18

Alongside these periods, there were still the regular day to day activities and processes that must be delivered within the normal annual cycle of electoral registration - and that will be of considerable importance to the individual residents and electors that instigate them or that they affect. Throughout the year, including during the periods outlined above, the work of the Electoral Registration team to maintain the accuracy and completeness of the register of electors in such a populous and diverse borough as Barnet is quite understandably, consistently busy and ongoing.

Amongst the most common registration activities undertaken each day by the Electoral Service’s Officers are:

- following up on incomplete and unsuccessful applications to register to vote - this includes contacting the relevant individual and requesting further documentary evidence or information that can allow the application to be determined as successful
- reviewing all instances where a potential duplicate application to join the register has been made or where an individual has actually been registered twice (these are even more common during election periods when national/regional registration campaigns often inadvertently appear to tell electors *already registered* that they must 'register by the deadline in order 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 Barnet's EMS system can send these by email, where no email address is known statutory A3 forms still must be posted to the identified individuals)
- 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)
- managing the processes to annually 're-invite' Overseas electors to renew their entry on the register of electors (Overseas electors must renew the registration each year and confirm an address within Barnet where they were previously registered within the past 15 years)
- operating as a front-line service to deal with the high quantity of queries received directly (via email, telephone and post) from electors, residents, elected officials and other people and organisations that have an interest in the register of electors or make a specific request in relation to it.

As Barnet has the largest population and electoral register in London³, it is to be expected that it will also perform amongst the highest number of total additions, deletions and other amendments to its register. A combined total of over 96,000 amendments⁴ were made to Barnet's Electoral Register in 2018.

³ Data from 26 London boroughs has been shared with Barnet as at 24/12/18. Based upon recent years, when data is available from all London boroughs, Barnet will have first or second largest register of electors.

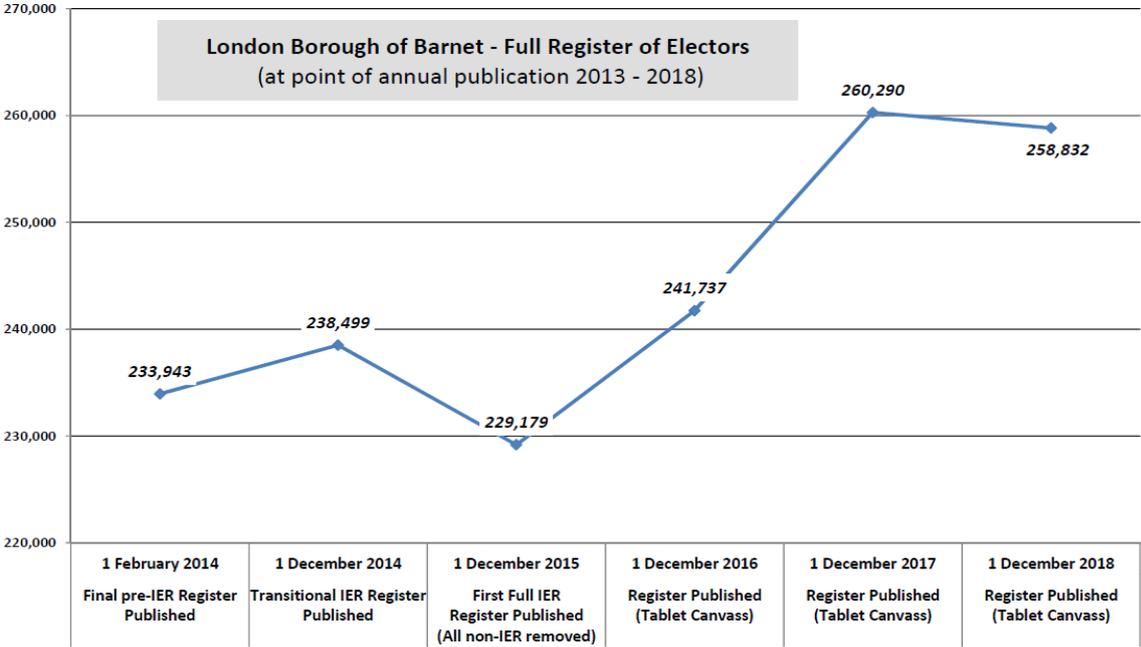
⁴ Figure includes: additions, deletions, elector detail changes and voting preference changes - does not include thousands of updates to the property database (maintained for registration purposes) or processing of 'no-change' responses to HEFs or ITRs

3 Analysis of Barnet’s Full Revised Register of Electors

There are many factors that can affect registration rates by Ward and polling district, such as, 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, due to 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 to the council for other, non-electoral, reasons.

3.1 Full Register totals at annual publication 2013 to 2018

This graph (shown full size at Appendix A) shows the total number of registered electors at the statutory annual date of publication of the revised Full Register of Electors.



3.2 Headline statistics on Barnet’s Electoral Register 2018

Whilst many electors remain static upon the register of electors and do not change their voting arrangements, there are some metrics about the electorate that can be compared with last year (and shared by the ERO):

- 1,301 eligible 16 and 17-year olds (‘attainers’) are registered across Barnet and will be able to vote as soon as they are 18 - this is up from just 693 last year
- There are 31,131 EU nationals registered to vote in Barnet (12% of the total electorate), up from 28,816 last year (11% of electorate)
- 787 Overseas Electors were registered on 1 December 2018 - a near 70% fall from the 2,463 Overseas Electors that were registered on 1 December 2017
- 173,325 electors (67%) are ‘Opted Out’ of appearing on the Open Register (version of the register that can legally be purchased by anyone). This figure has grown each year as awareness of the opt-out option grows (was at 62% last year)
- 50,470 electors choose to vote by post. At 19.6% of electors, this is similar to last year’s figure of 19.5% and still above the London average which stands at 14.9%

3.3 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 (includes those properties that are 'empty' in electoral registration terms) can be useful for highlighting Wards where registration rates are outside the borough average (*two highest '↑' and lowest '↓' EPH figures indicated*):

Ward	Electors 2018	Electors 2017	+/- % '18 vs. '17	Households	EPH
High Barnet	12,008	12,115	-0.88%	7,158	1.68
East Barnet	12,098	12,240	-1.16%	6,971	1.74
Brunswick Park	12,451	12,555	-0.83%	6,337	1.96↑
Coppetts	12,307	12,539	-1.85%	7,235	1.70
Oakleigh	12,166	12,315	-1.21%	6,831	1.78
Totteridge	10,787	10,709	0.73%	6,565	1.64
Underhill	12,110	12,162	-0.43%	6,934	1.75
Woodhouse	12,957	12,916	0.32%	7,615	1.70
East Finchley	11,843	12,215	-3.05%	7,039	1.68
Garden Suburb	11,170	11,381	-1.85%	6,843	1.63
Childs Hill	13,305	13,493	-1.39%	9,331	1.43↓
Golders Green	11,890	11,699	1.63%	7,692	1.55
Finchley Church End	11,737	11,985	-2.07%	7,067	1.66
West Finchley	11,272	11,553	-2.43%	7,262	1.55
Hale	12,529	12,623	-0.74%	6,517	1.92↑
Mill Hill	14,215	14,087	0.91%	8,197	1.73
Hendon	12,151	12,377	-1.83%	8,204	1.48
West Hendon	12,053	12,200	-1.20%	7,478	1.61
Colindale	15,405	14,682	4.92%	12,365	1.25↓
Burnt Oak	12,060	12,285	-1.83%	6,838	1.76
Edgware	12,318	12,159	1.31%	6,777	1.82
LBB TOTALS:	258,832	260,290	-0.56%	157,256	1.65

**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 are recognised as groups within the community that have a higher tendency to not be registered.

4 Priorities for Electoral Registration in Barnet in 2019

There are many statutory activities that electoral registration staff must undertake on behalf of the ERO at specific times throughout the year. Ensuring that these are completed in full compliance with relevant legislation will remain a priority for Barnet's Electoral Services team. This is particularly important when legislation changes or when electoral arrangements within the Borough change. The following paragraphs outline some of the key activities within Barnet's electoral registration workplan for the coming year.

The first key annual registration activity that will 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 over five years, must provide new copies of their personal identifiers (i.e. submit a fresh copy of their signature and confirm their date of birth). Due to the very high number of postal voters within Barnet (over 50,000 at present), this year this activity will require that over 13,000 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.

On 5 February 2019, the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) will publish the draft recommendations for new Ward Patterns to be used across Barnet with effect from May 2022. At the same time, the LGBCE will open a 10-week consultation period upon these draft proposals and during this time, Electoral Services will need to thoroughly review all the proposed new ward boundaries. The aim of the Electoral Services review will be to ensure that the proposals are practical when viewed from the perspective of electors and residents and more critically, that the proposals do not present unacceptable logistical issues for the delivery of future elections (e.g. that boundaries do not inadvertently run through households, blocks of flats etc. or otherwise cut off small groups of electors from being able to access a suitable polling place). On 11 June 2019, the LGBCE will publish and subsequently lay before Parliament, their final recommendations for the changes that must then be made to Barnet's council size and ward boundaries. Although these changes will not come into effect for voters until 2022, there will be much work that Electoral Services will need to undertake to ensure that the Register of Electors is ready to correctly reflect the new arrangements. It will likely be necessary to create new polling districts across the entire borough - as all wards and Parliamentary constituencies must have coterminous polling districts. Following on from this, it will then be likely that a high number of different and additional polling venues will be required to those currently in use.

Although there are no elections scheduled to take place in Barnet in 2019, activities to ensure that the register is maintained to high levels of completeness and accuracy are being maintained. In particular, this is intended to minimise the inevitable surge in registration applications and inquiries should a general election or national referendum be called at short notice. One of the key components in these preparations will be to again utilise Household Notification Letters in early 2019. Following the successes apparent from the use of HNLs in advance of the Local Elections in 2018, the ERO has taken the decision to again send a discretionary HNL to every residential property in the borough in February 2019. Whilst residents cannot be legally obliged to respond to this letter, it is anticipated that this will again be highly positive in prompting those eligible residents that are not registered to take action and apply to join the register of electors. In addition, it is also expected that the Electoral Services team will again receive information from a high number of households where there are individuals registered that are no longer resident.

Given the current uncertainty around Brexit and the volatile national political picture, as well as the use of HNLs (to help ensure that the register of electors is complete and accurate ahead of any short notice elections), Electoral Services will also continue to take a highly pro-active approach towards maintaining a good level of readiness to deliver borough-wide elections or referenda within a short timeframe. This ongoing preparatory work includes; regular contact with polling, preparation and count venues, reviewing arrangements with electoral print and postage suppliers (including the full electoral print procurement exercise currently being jointly conducted with the London Borough of Harrow), ensuring election staff planning is ready and robust (this includes maintaining contact with previous election staff and assessing the need for further recruitment activity and awareness) and also working with senior staff within the council so that they are able to deliver key election duties (such as Deputy Returning Officer/Deputy Counting Officer) with limited notice.

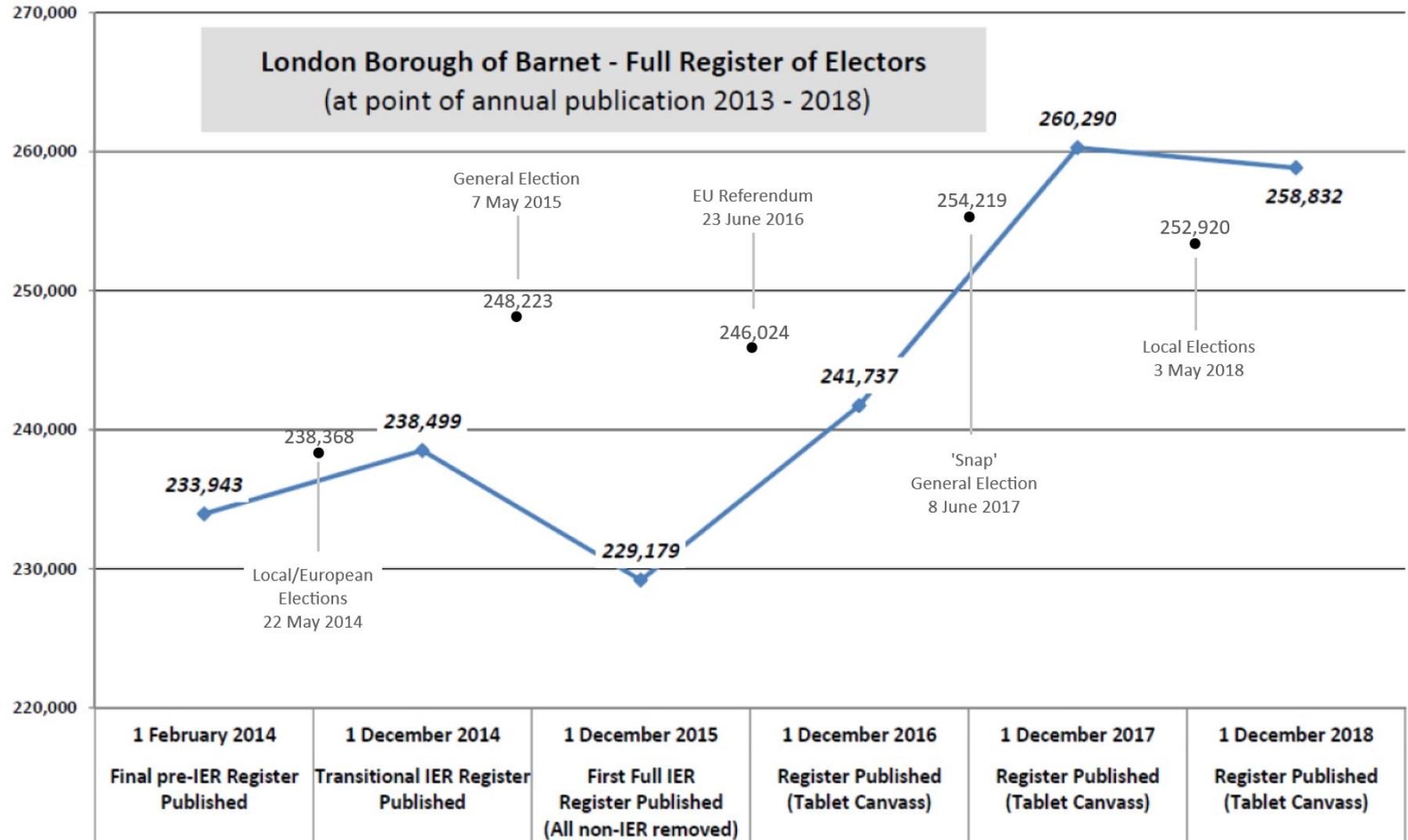
Also during 2019, the government's programme (being run from the Cabinet Office) to reform the activities necessary to conduct the statutory Annual Canvass is currently out for consultation with ERO's and is due to be brought into law using secondary legislation during the forthcoming year. In effect, this will mean that the 2019 Annual Canvass will be the last conducted under existing regulations and numerous changes will be brought in with effect for the 2020 Annual Canvass. Barnet's Electoral Services will continue to engage with the Cabinet Office on this reform programme as it reaches its conclusion and will work to ensure that Barnet is ready to work within the new legislation from the outset. It is becoming clear that data-matching activities⁵ will become a fundamental element of the reformed annual canvass process, so in preparation for this Electoral Services will work closely with other Barnet services and partners to extend the level of data matching that it currently utilises for electoral registration purposes.

The key focus of electoral registration activity during the second half of the year will still be the statutory Annual HEF Canvass, that must be conducted between the 1 July and 30 November. Notwithstanding any unscheduled elections being called, the Annual HEF Canvass will commence with the mailing of a HEF to of every residential property in July. These HEFs will then be followed, after suitable periods for residents to respond, with HEF reminders and personal visits by canvassers to all non-responding properties as necessary. Electoral Services will again build upon what worked well during the 2018 canvass and apply this so to ensure the best possible return rates for the canvass in 2019. However, there will also be consideration given to trialling greater levels of data matching and electronic communication with households to ensure local experience and fact-based evidence ahead of future years' canvass periods, all of which will have to be conducted under the new legislation that comes out of the Cabinet Office's 'Canvass Reform' programme referenced above.

In addition to the key pieces of work above, that will form the bulk of activities of the Electoral Services Team over the next twelve months, Electoral Services will further develop its programme of public awareness and engagement activities throughout the year. It is intended that this will include (in the absence of any short notice national elections being called) further meetings of the 'Democratic Engagement Advisory Panel' (that first met in January 2018). This forum will again be designed to share information on the current activities in Electoral Services and to facilitate collaborative work with stakeholder organisations and services in Barnet, with the overall aim of encouraging higher rates of electoral registration within those groups in the community where registration rates are known to typically be lower than average.

⁵ At present it is expected that there will be a legislative requirement for the Electoral Register to be matched with national data sets and for ERO's to be able to match with 'local' data sets at their discretion (and subject to showing that each local data set is of acceptable accuracy)

Appendix A



- Notes:
- Electorate figures shown for elections and referendums are for the 'full' electorate – so will be different to 'eligible' electorate figures published at the time, as these are based upon the relevant voting franchises that apply
 - 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