



London Borough of Barnet
2023 Electoral Services Report
January 2024

Introduction

This report gives a high-level summary of the essential work that took place within Barnet's Electoral Services team to maintain the Register of Electors to a high level of accuracy and completeness throughout 2023.

Information is provided about the regular registration work that is undertaken throughout the year, including the preparation and delivery of the Annual Canvass between July and December. The report also details the range of activities that have been undertaken to promote democratic engagement across the borough with specific groups that are typically under-registered.

Updates are also provided on the ongoing implementation of the Elections Act 2022 (EA22). As well as the full introduction of Voter ID (and the subsequent right of electors to apply for a ¹Voter Authority Certificate), EA22 also introduced a number of other ²significant changes to electoral registration that came into force during 2023.

There were 264,894 electors on Barnet's Register of Electors on 1 December 2023. Whilst this figure is very similar to that on 1 December 2022 (up by 1,185 or 0.4%), it hides the huge number of additions, deletions and amendments that have taken place on the electoral register throughout the year.

Despite having no borough-wide elections in Barnet in 2023, the following figures illustrate the overall volume of work undertaken by the Electoral Services team:

- 31,943 initial applications to register were received across all channels (this figure includes significant numbers of 'duplicate' applications)
- 23,419 electors were added following to the register across the year - following a successful application to register.
- 21,831 electors were removed from the register, either due to information that they had registered elsewhere, information from them that they were moving out or following the provision of other information that they were no longer resident.
- Over 97,000 amendments made to information held on the Register of Electors since 1 December 2022.

Finally, the report provides an oversight of the scope of work that the Electoral Services team will be undertaking in the year ahead. With two high-profile elections expected and more elements of EA22 still to come into force, it is already anticipated that it could be one of the busiest years that the team has ever faced.

¹An elector that does not possess a form of Voter ID (stipulated as acceptable within EA22) is able to apply to the ERO for a 'Voter Authority Certificate' that can be used as Photo ID when voting in-person at a polling station. EA22 allows any elector to apply for a VAC.

² Further elements of EA22 will come force in 2024 (such as the removal of the '15 year rule' for Overseas Electors) and there continues to be ongoing developments to the processes that have been introduced for online Absent Vote applications (i.e. Postal and Proxy applications).

1. Key Activities of the Electoral Services Team in 2023

The table below provides a high-level timetable of some key electoral registration activities that were undertaken by Barnet Electoral Services during 2023:

Period:	Description of Activities
January – March	Statutory refresh of Absent Vote Personal Identifiers – over 5,600 Letters and reminders sent to electors that had an absent vote in place for over 5 years. This was the last Absent Vote Refresh to take place before changes introduced by the Elections Act '22 legislation came into force.
February	Planning and delivery of the Golders Green by-election on 16 Feb '23 – Almost 9,000 electors across Golders Green ward were eligible to vote at this by election. The count was held at the Council Offices at 2 Bristol Avenue and overall turnout was 27% (and 55% amongst postal voters).
February – March	Household Notification Letter (HNL) sent to all residential properties – Personalised HNLs posted to over 160,000 properties and individual processing of all subsequent registration amendments and requests. An information flyer was included with the HNL to inform all electors and residents about the introduction of Voter ID for voting at polling stations in future elections.
June 2023	Edgware Business Improvement District Bid – The first Business Improved District (BID) Ballot took place in Edgware which broadly matched the SPD boundary, spanning the A5 into the London Borough of Harrow. This resulted in a cross-boundary BID Ballot. As the majority of the BID area was located within Barnet, both geographically and by number of businesses, it was recommended by officers at both Barnet and Harrow Councils that the London Borough of Barnet would act as Lead Authority. The BID was carried out by an external provider, Civica, under instruction of the RO, and all ran successfully.
June - December	Print Contract Procurement – a joint procurement in partnership with London Borough of Harrow took place and a new print supplier, FDM, has been awarded the contract for three years (plus the option to add a further year if required). The new contract commenced on 8 January 2024.
August – November	Interim Polling District and Polling Place Review 2023 – following more than eight weeks of public and internal consultation and multiple venue assessment visits, changes were made to polling arrangements across 10 wards and more than 25 polling districts. The Licensing and General Purposes Committee approved the proposed new arrangements for polling districts and polling places on Wednesday 8 November (Agenda for Licensing and General Purposes Committee on Wednesday 8th November, 2023, 7.00 pm (modern.gov.co.uk) – Item 6.)
October – November	Preparation and implementation of Online Absent Vote Applications – implementation of new online portal for electors to apply for an absent vote. Training has been undertaken by all core team provided by AEA (Association of Electoral Administrators), DLUCH (Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities) and the Electoral Management System (EMS) software provider Democracy Counts. Further training and development will take place once the portal has gone live on 16 January 2024.
July – November	Annual Canvass – a full data-matching exercise between Barnet's electoral register and DWP records (in June 2023) resulted in an overall match rate of 94%. Following this, approx. 69,000 Household Enquiry Forms ('CCBs') were sent out in July to households across Barnet, where all elector data did not match (Route 2) from which a response was required by law . A further 90,000 Household Enquiry Forms ('CCAs') were sent

	<p>to those households where all elector data was matched (Route 1), and <i>a response was only required if there are changes that the household</i> needed to inform Electoral Services about. Over 1,200 bespoke communications were sent out to properties in various special categories (such as Care Homes and Student Accommodation) where a single response is required on behalf of multiple residents. For the first time E-Comms (19,547) were sent as a reminder to electors in Route 2 properties, where we held email addresses.</p> <p>The personal canvass door knock and telephone canvass took place during October and November for all Route 2 properties where no response had been received.</p> <p>A final Canvass Form (CF) was sent to the remaining non-responding households (23,624) on Route 2 in November.</p>
November - December	Preparation for Overseas Elector application changes – A new section of the online portal went live on 16 January 2024. Essential training has been carried out by the core team provided by AEA, DLUHC and the EMS software supplier Democracy Counts
December	Publication of the Electoral Register – distribution of the register to all relevant parties, credit agencies and British Library.
January - December	Democratic Engagement Activities – detailed in section 2 below.
All year BAU	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data provided from Tell Us Once and the Registrar deceased lists • Contacting potential electors to encourage them to register to vote (ITRs) • Processing applications to register to vote (including special category electors) and sending relevant comms of confirmation. • Contacting electors with queries regarding their applications and requesting further evidence if required. • Processing registration reviews and deletions of electors and sending relevant comms of confirmation. • Processing absent vote applications and sending relevant comms of confirmation. • Address management of new or demolished properties • Overseeing viewing of the electoral register on request • Monthly publication and distribution of the electoral register • Processing 'Voter Authority Certificate' (VAC) applications

Whilst the table above details some headline activities of Electoral Services during the periods outlined, regular day to day activities and processes have continued to be delivered for individual citizens and residents. These processes are of considerable importance to the individuals involved, as well as their ensuring that their democratic franchise is maintained, in many circumstances the information on the electoral register affects individual's credit rating, pensions or tenancy rights.

All correspondence to electors and households, and especially during key times such as HNL letter and the annual canvass, knocks on to extra processes for the core team including email and telephone correspondence, plus in person contact at the council offices.

2. Democratic Engagement Activities

In 2023 the Electoral Services team have been able to attend more democratic engagement activities, due to there not being a major election, to promote registration and Voter ID. Many community groups were contacted early in the year the year, with additions throughout the year, to arrange access to events being held. Learning points have been recorded from each

event to assess the suitability and effectiveness of resources. The team will build on and add to this list of contacts throughout 2024, with the main focus being on the election in May and all the changes which are taking place for electors.

Organisation	Target group	Activity	When
Mencap	Adults with learning difficulties and/or mental health conditions	The team have attended two events carrying out workshops - 'why does my voice matter' and a mock polling station run through. Discussions and demonstrations took place on how to vote, the procedure for showing Voter ID and why voting was important to the group.	August and September 2023
Registrars - Citizenship Ceremonies	New British citizens	The team have attended most citizenship ceremonies to encourage attendees to amend their Electoral Register entry or complete a new application now that they have British citizenship. Flyers are now added to all attendee packs and posters are displayed around Hendon Town Hall	From September 2023
Middlesex University	Students (age 18 -24)	Attended Freshers week session to encourage students to register to vote and promote Voter ID	September 2023
Barnet Together Alliance Conference	Barnet community groups	Two of the team attended the event to promote registration and Voter ID. It was a great networking event and some further organisations agreed to promote electoral activities from this.	20 October 2023
Barnet Communities, Adults and Health	Elderly in care homes	After meeting some of the team at the Barnet Together Alliance Conference we have been able to add information to the regular newsletters which are sent to all care homes in the borough.	October 2023
Libraries / Age UK	Over 55s	Attended drop-in session at St. Margaret's Church in Edgware to assist the over 55s with tech queries and issues to promote registering to vote and VAC applications using the online services.	2 November 2023
The Romanian Centre	Romanian nationals	Two of the team attended an event held by The Romanian Centre to speak to attendees about registering to vote and Voter ID. Flyers were handed out and posters taken to be displayed around the building.	30 November 2023
Barnet Fraud Team - Fraud awareness week	General residents	The team attended Brent Cross shopping centre for one of the Fraud Awareness Week activities. The general public were spoken to regarding registering to vote and Voter ID	November 2023

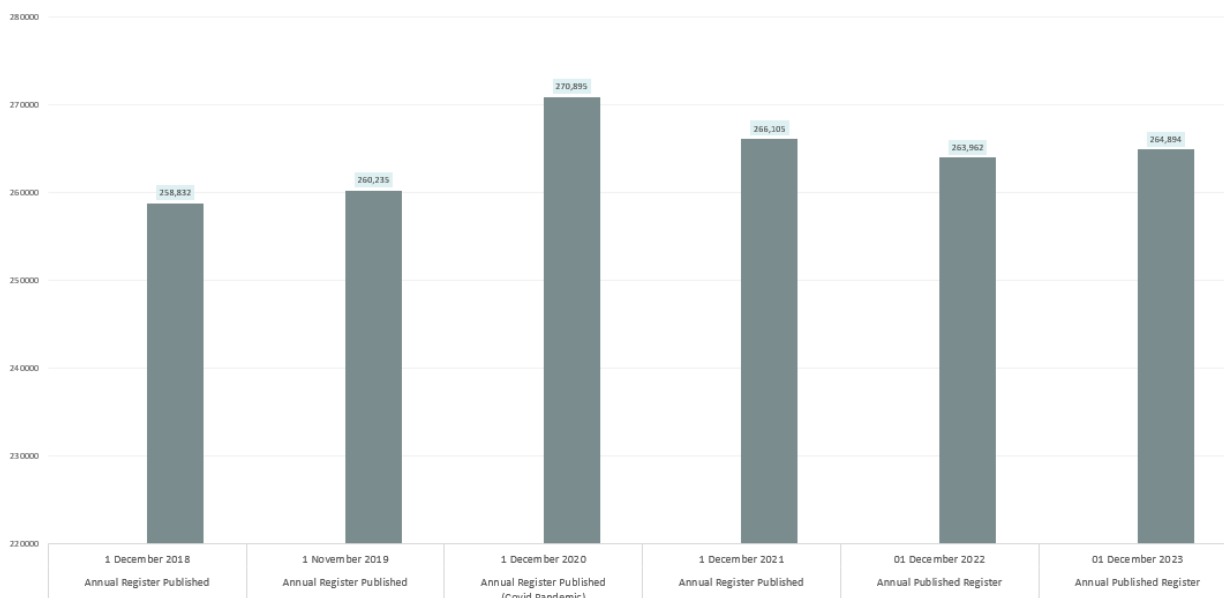
Analysis of Barnet’s Register of Electors

As has been acknowledged by the Electoral Commission; public interest in the UK’s major electoral events, combined with an accessible online registration process, increasingly drives high volumes of registration applications to occur just before elections. It has been true for a long time that it is elections, and particularly high-profile national elections that have wide media coverage, that drive people to register. By contrast, The Annual Canvass is better at removing people, especially those no longer eligible or that have moved out from households, from the register.

The graph below illustrates the movements of Barnet’s Register of Electors, based upon register publication, over the past six years, including Covid.

Full Register totals at Elections and Annual Publication 2018 to 2023

This graph (shown full size on page 9) shows the total number of registered electors at the annual date of publication of the Full Register of Electors and at last ‘Notice of Alteration’ before borough-wide elections.



2.1 Snapshot statistics from Barnet’s Electoral Register

- The number of electors on the register publication on 1 December 2023 was 264,894.
- 665 eligible 16 and 17year olds (‘attainers’) are currently registered across Barnet and will be able to vote as soon as they are 18.
- 30,665 EU nationals are currently registered to vote in Barnet – *32,554 on 1 December 2023 published register.*
- 54,513 electors in Barnet currently have a postal vote (*55,430 on 1 December 2023 published register*).
- 225 electors in Barnet currently have a proxy vote.
- 26 electors in Barnet currently have a postal proxy vote.

- 188,784 (71.3%) electors are 'Opted Out' of appearing on the Open Register (the version of the register that can legally be purchased by anyone).
- 321 Overseas Electors are currently registered in Barnet.
- 229 applications for a Voter Authority Certificate (VAC) were received between the launch in January 2023 until 31 December 2023.
- 135 new applications to vote by post were received on the new online portal since the launch on 31 October to 31 December 2023.
- 7 new applications for a proxy vote were received on the new online portal since the launch on 31 October to 31 December 2023.

Taking into account the figures above, and the additions and deletions detailed in the Introduction, there have been over 97,000 amendments made to Barnet's Register of Electors since 1 December 2022.

3. Priorities for Electoral Services in 2024

It is clear that 2024 will be an extremely busy year for the Electoral Services Team. The Mayor of London and GLA elections will take place on 2 May 2024 (already unique, as they will utilise a manual count for the first time at these specific elections) and of course, a General Election must also take place within the next twelve months.

In addition, extra statutory duties have been brought in by the Elections Act 2022 that must already be applied across the work that the team does. Most of the changes were detailed in the report brought to Licensing and General Purposes Committee in November 2023 and include the key changes to absent vote applications, absent vote handling, overseas elector eligibility, the rights of EU citizens, accessibility requirements and, perhaps most significantly, the changes regarding Voter ID (including Voter Authority Certificates (VACs)).

- The project to deliver the Mayor of London and GLA elections in May 2024 has already commenced. There are a huge range of activities that go into delivering a high-profile borough-wide election, including election staff recruitment and training, procurement of the many polling and other election venues and of course, the publicity and other work that must take place with electors and residents (typically kicked off by the despatch of poll cards in March).
- Legislation dictates that there must be a UK Parliamentary General Election (UKPGE) held by 28 January 2025. Whilst there is much speculation about the date of the next election, the exact date is unknown, with the Prime Minister having the authority to call a Parliamentary election with as little as 25 working days' notice. Due to this, much preparatory work has already commenced (with particular consideration of a possible 'combined election' on 2 May 2024) and will continue throughout the year, to ensure the highest possible level of readiness for when the date is announced.
- Elector engagement will be a huge priority for the Electoral Registration Team in conjunction with the Communications Team for 2024. There has not been a major election in London since EA22 introduced Voter ID and the many changes to Absent Voting processes and rule, so these will be key messages. In addition, it is always important to prioritise awareness of registering to vote, along with where and how electors can vote (including recent changes to polling stations). We will work in

partnership with London Elects (the GLA's election communications team) and the Electoral Commission to promote these critical election messages ahead on 2 May 2024.

- In January, the Absent Vote Refresh commenced. Due to the change in legislation, brought in by the Elections Act, only electors with an existing proxy vote prior to 31 October 2023 were required to be written to for the 2024 process. The refresh process is now replaced by a renewal process, where electors must reapply for a proxy vote if required. The deadline to respond to the renewal letter is 31 January 2024, and any current proxy votes, who have not completed a new application, will be cancelled. Any elector whose proxy vote has been cancelled will then receive a letter informing them of this change.
- On 16 January 2024 the new online portal for overseas elector applications went live. As the previous '15-year rule' on eligibility has been removed under EA22, this is likely to add a huge demand upon the resources of the Electoral Services team. There has already been a spike in applications from overseas citizens (many of whom would not have previously been eligible), but this work will become particularly challenging once the date for the UK General Election is announced. The number of ex-pats now eligible to vote is estimated to have tripled with this change in law and over 1,500 overseas applications were received in Barnet at the last General election in 2019. Full training is already being undertaken by the core team – and this will continue as changes and enhancements are made to the portal (which is managed and maintained by central government).
- In February, as for the previous six years, Electoral Services will again conduct a full 'Household Notification Letter' (HNL) campaign. The HNL will be sent to every property in the borough and will include a flyer to promote new legislation such as Voter ID and the changes to applying for an absent vote. During this period, to supplement the daily and weekly processes that check for duplicate applications to join the electoral register, a full review is undertaken to identify and remove any duplicates that may occur (e.g. where different permutations of surname and forename, or use of middle names or initials may have been previously missed).
- In late May 2024 (after the May polls) another wave of EA22 legislation will come into force, this time regarding voting rights of EU Citizens. This will comprise of a two-stage process to review the eligibility of all already registered EU citizens, including a data matching process and then contacting any non-matched but registered EU citizens by correspondence and/or a personal visit.
- In June it will again be time for the borough-wide data matching exercise that now precedes the start of the annual household canvass.
- The Annual Canvass process will again take place for the whole borough between July and December 2024 (although this may be affected by the date of the UKPGE). We will aim to use more E-Comms for 2024 to increase response rates, while reducing printing and postage costs.

Appendix A

Registration figures 2018 - 2023

