

To: Communities and Partnership Scrutiny Committee

Date: 30<sup>th</sup> January 2013

Item No:

Report of: Head of Law and Governance

Title of Report: Enfranchisement and Empowerment Panel

### Summary and Recommendations

**Purpose of report:** To update the Communities and Partnership Scrutiny Committee on the work carried out to date by the Scrutiny Panel that is investigating this topic.

**Scrutiny Lead Members:** Councillors Darke, Jones and O'Hara

**Executive Lead Member:** Councillor Price

### Introduction: Extract from the Work Programme:-

1. The Panel's starting point was the Communities and Partnership Work Programme, which said:-

*The first report on the census is due shortly this will show the proportion of people who did not complete the form without at least 1 reminder.*

*The annual update of the electoral register also showed a number of households with no one registered to vote.*

- *Do we have a good understanding of the varied and complex reasons for this?*
- *Do we understand the extent of the demographic deficit created by this?*
- *What does it mean for services, funding and the understanding of our communities?*
- *What effects does this have on community cohesion and engagement?*

*What can we reasonably do to understand and improve the situation?*

## Background.

2. The Panel began by looking at the two documents concerned; the electoral register and the information currently available from the 2011 Census. The Census and the Electoral register are two documents which, although similar on the face of it, have very different purposes.

## The Census

3. The Census gathers detailed data on individuals within a household. First it counts how many people are resident within a property and it details the nature of the property (house, flat, number of rooms within it). Then it gathers information about an individual's age, income, work, work patterns, basic health, sexuality, religion and so forth.
4. Although initially a single form is sent to each household, individuals within that property can then ask for a separate form for their own use.
5. The Census is used to help the Government plan for major services and infrastructure over the next decade. It needs to know how many people are resident within the UK, and what their likely needs (for example in terms of housing, education and health care) are going to be.
6. The Census estimated there to be 151,900 'usual residents' living in Oxford. 'Usual residents' are people who have lived or intend to live in an area for 12 months or more, and does include university students who are counted at their term-time address.
7. The Census estimate is a combination of two things. Firstly, a count of residents who are included on completed Census forms - 140,700 residents were counted on a Census form. Secondly, a 'coverage survey' is undertaken in a sample of postcodes in each local authority to estimate how many people were not included on a Census form. As a result of this process there were estimated to be 11,200 'usual residents' who were not included on a completed Census form. Because the estimate derives from surveying a sample of the population there is an associated margin of error, which is +/- 3,000 residents for Oxford.

This means that the true number of Oxford residents on Census day was likely to be between 148,900 and 154,900.

## People who were not included on the Census Form

8. There are estimated to be 11,200 usual residents who were not included on a Census form. These may be people living in households who did not complete a form, or people living in households where not everyone living in the household was included on the form. The Census Area Manager indicated that all households that did not complete a form had a reminder in the form of someone knocking on their door at least once. At present it is not possible to obtain information about why households did not fill out forms, but it may be possible to get this information from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) when this is available.

9. There were 61,000 residential addresses at the start of field operations recorded on the address register in Oxford. This does not include new addresses identified during the census field operation or communal establishments (such as boarding schools and student halls). During field work 3.9 per cent (2,400) of addresses were deactivated. Addresses were deactivated if the field staff could not find the address/didn't exist, the property was derelict or demolished or it was a duplicate.
10. The household return rate for Oxford was 90.1 per cent. This is calculated using all households who returned a questionnaire divided by all active household addresses. This includes blank questionnaires returned, or where no usual residents live at the address. Non residential, duplicate and demolished addresses are excluded. There were 58,600 households on the active household address list and 52,800 households returned a census questionnaire, either by internet or in the post. This suggests that prior to any analysis of the returns there were 5,800 households in Oxford from which no questionnaire was returned. Where a household questionnaire was not returned, a collector would usually fill out a dummy form. The purpose of the dummy form was to collect information about the address, most importantly whether the address contained residents on census night. Collectors were instructed to use their best judgement about whether the property was occupied and to indicate a reason for non-return – such as a refusal, non contact or vacant household. The information on reasons for non-return was based on the collector's best judgement and was not always completed because there was no information upon which to base a judgement. For example, a block of flats where no contact is made it is very difficult to ascertain whether the apartment is vacant or occupied. As a result information on the reasons for non-return will not be published.

#### Implications for Funding

11. Non-completion of census forms should not have an implication for funding, because an adjustment has been made for people who did not fill out a Census form. This adjustment should be an accurate one because ONS has made a number of improvements since the 2001 Census, principally: (i) ensuring that the household address register was comprehensive and up to date; (ii) organising fieldwork teams so that more resources were directed towards areas with lower expected response rates; and (iii) making special arrangements to count university students and other 'communal establishment' residents. This meant that, contrary to expectations, the response rate was higher in 2011 (93%) than it was in 2001 (90%).

#### People who are hidden from contact with official bodies.

12. One key tenet of the Census method is that every resident has at least a small probability of being included either on a Census form or in the subsequent coverage survey. In practice there is probably a small proportion of the population who has effectively zero probability of being included because they are hidden from contact with official bodies. This is however considered by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) to be a

small proportion of the population however, and certainly within the margin of error.

### Definition of “usual residents”

13. There is an issue with the definition of 'usual resident' which is included in the Census. It is important that such a definition exists, but it does have implications for funding as the Census counts 'usual residents', which is not necessarily the same as 'population present', so will not include all the people who could be calling on public services. In particular, these are:-
- second homes: every resident is only counted in **one** location, so people who have said that their Oxford home is their second home will be counted elsewhere. According to our Council Tax data there were 800 second homes on Census day. ONS will be releasing Census data on second homes in due course;
  - short-term residents: i.e. people who are here for less than 12 months. For the first time the 2011 Census gave an estimate of short-term residents. Oxford was estimated to have 4,000;
  - short-term residents, the 4th highest rate in England & Wales. These people are not included in official population estimates, so are not taken account of in resource allocation (and couldn't have been before now, as this is the first time we've had an official estimate).

(Census information supplied by Mark Fransham, Social Research Officer)

### The Electoral Register

14. The electoral register has only one purpose; to ensure that everyone eligible to vote is listed, and thus able to exercise their right to vote. It may be used for other things, such as to provide a reference to obtain credit, but that is not its real intention. *Its intention and purpose is to list voters.*
15. The electoral registration form asks for names and nationalities, and the dates of birth of any young people who will be 18 within the period that the register is in force. It asks if people want a postal vote or if they are over 70 (because over 70s are ineligible for jury service). It has been normal practice for a single form to be sent to a household, regardless of the number of occupants, although with the advent of individual voter registration this will change.
16. Eligibility to vote is the only criteria for inclusion on the electoral register. The register does not list separately people who are resident in Oxford but who are, for one reason or another, not eligible to vote, nor does it detail for what reasons a property might not have any eligible voters within it.

## Why properties might not have any electors

17. There are several reasons why a property might be electorless:
- property shown empty (and form returned during the annual canvass) because it is under reconstruction (quite common, even around the start of the new academic year),
  - second home/pied à terre – also quite common in Oxford, especially around the railway station;
  - occupied entirely by ineligible nationals (People from Britain and Ireland, the EU, and Commonwealth countries are eligible to vote in some or all elections), such as Americans, Japanese, Russians and Chinese, for example, are not eligible to register to vote in the UK. They would not therefore be entered on the electoral register. A list of eligible nationalities is attached at **Appendix A**
  - occupied by students who say that they are all registered at home. The Council encourages registration by students here, even where they say they are registered at home (students are allowed to register in two places), but it cannot force them to register twice so, in the end, that property is shown as “empty”.
  - there has been no reply from a property. The Council employs some very determined canvassers, but even so, despite their best efforts, there may be no reply from a property even after several attempts.
  - some properties are subdivided, but when that occurs, each becomes a separate property for electoral purposes, and for that reason we cannot say how many subdivided properties there are in the city.
18. Each property receives an initial form (with an explanatory leaflet), a reminder on no reply (with a leaflet again) and then personal visit, again if no reply has been received. The canvasser will carry out at least two visits (usually more).
19. Then the canvasser will look at other sources of information (principally the council tax and housing registers) to see if the form can be signed off – only if the information on the council tax / housing registers is the same as on the electoral roll. If after all these processes no information can be ascertained then the property will be left empty.

## Why do some people fail to return their form?

20. The reasons for people not returning the forms are many and varied. Some of those given to canvassers include “I’m not going to vote, so why should I register?” and not wanting to give out personal information on the door. Even stressing that being on the electoral roll is an important part of any credit reference check often doesn’t encourage completion of the form. Anecdotally canvassers say that more and more people simply

don't answer the door, even though the canvasser can see someone is in.

21. Any person who isn't caught by the annual canvass can register at anytime of the year. It should be noted that the advent of Individual Elector Registration (IER) may have a significant impact on the City Council's work, not least because of the need to ensure that each individual receives a registration form. Unfortunately, because IER is still to clear the parliament, it's not possible to make concrete plans. However, we are thinking about how any system will be introduced in Oxford and the challenges it poses. These thoughts are necessarily light on specifics at this time. Although we are thinking about how we would encourage registration by students (both in halls and out) and, more generally, the challenges of getting forms returned from people in the private-rented sector, particularly those in multiple-occupation. Under IER as currently proposed there would still be a household form on which people would be included. If any new names are added on that household form then the council would send an individual form to each new person for them to supply their identifiers.
22. The government has promised that extra funding will be made available to councils. IER is due to be started properly in July 2014 and when the legislation is finalised we will be able to draw up firmer plans. As the new system has yet to be finalised we are not clear about what the eventual costs might be. As mentioned earlier the government has promised to cover the transition costs (in 2014) and that on-going funding (2015-on) will be made available to councils. An announcement by the Treasury is due on ongoing funding early in 2013. When that is made and the legislation enacted we will be able to judge whether we require any additional funding from the council.
23. Under the proposals as currently before parliament the annual canvass will continue, and be conducted by the council. Northern Ireland has had for some years a version of IER which included continuous registration, i.e. no annual update. A recent review (Continuous Electoral Registration in Northern Ireland – Electoral Commission, November 2012) of that system recommended the re-introduction of the annual canvass as not to have one seriously impairs the accuracy of the register.
24. Even after all these processes the Council is unable to obtain a reply from around 3.8% of properties during the canvass period, despite its best efforts. For an all-urban authority like Oxford this is an excellent result. In the Electoral Commission's latest report on electoral registration rates (The Completeness and Accuracy of Electoral Registers in England 2010 – Electoral Commission) the average for English authorities was 92.7%, with towns like Cambridge, Canterbury, Nottingham and Warwick (all university towns) and all falling below 90%.
25. Oxford's churn during the most recent canvass was 53.2%. That is 53.2% of the properties had some changes to the pre-printed details. Some of these changes could be minor, say, deciding to opt out of the edited register. And of course there are movements amongst the student population. But the majority will be changes to the people to be registered. For comparison, the churn rate at Cambridge was 47.4%, at

Southampton it was 34.3%, at Exeter 33.9%, at Haringey 19.7% and at West Oxfordshire 17.3%.

(Information supplied by Martin John, Principal Electoral Services Officer)

#### What does this mean for Oxford?

26. The Panel was satisfied that Oxford was achieving a very high rate of return on its annual electoral canvass. The Panel questioned whether or not there would be value in pursuing further the missing people in order to register them. On balance the Panel considered that the expense of so doing was likely to outweigh any advantage gained.
27. The Panel was interested to see a breakdown of population and electoral registration broken down by ward, showing the non-return of electoral canvass forms and the voter turnout for each ward. This information is attached as **Appendix B**. A further breakdown of population by ward and age group is attached at **Appendix C**

#### Questions

28. The Panel then had the following questions and further information is being obtained where possible on these:-
  - (1) Is there a correlation between electoral register response rates and the age profile of the ward?
  - (2) Is there a correlation between non-response rates and voter turnout? Do high canvass response rates translate into actual voting?
  - (3) Should we be content that between 15% and 20% of our community, contributing to our economy, paying taxes, and using our services, do not have the vote?
29. The Panel noted that the current Census information is already out of date with the survey having been conducted in early 2011, while in the mean time there had been two annual canvass updates of the electoral register (autumn 2011 and summer 2012).
30. The Panel recommended that, should the Committee decide that it wishes to further this work, the best method would be by taking two or three wards as a case study, analysing further the data available, and assessing if anything of significance could be deduced from that.
31. There is a difference between enfranchisement, which is giving an individual the right to vote, and empowerment. The dictionary defines empowerment as *the act of making an individual able to exercise a particular right, action or privilege*. We need to ask what we are seeking to do when we speak of “empowering” –
  - To access services such as health and housing;

- To speak up on an issue, to be a community voice;
- To take control of and responsibility for their own lives and own choices, giving them the confidence and tools needed;
- To feel fully a member of the community that they have come to live in;
- Or all of the above?

### Interim Conclusion

32. The Panel did not feel that there was much value in pursuing the missing 3.8% of properties from which no electoral canvass registration form was received. Although it would be possible to chase this figure down, it would require significant resources, which the Council did not have, for little return. The advent of IER poses significant challenges which will be addressed in due course.
33. The Panel felt that the focus should now move towards the empowerment of those people who:
- were on the register but whom, for whatever reason, chose not to vote and who could not determine the value of being able to vote;
  - may be disadvantaged in some way by not understanding the helping and social agencies around them;
  - lacked the knowledge and confidence to play a full part in their local community particularly if reluctant to register to vote, ignorant of their right to do so, or in eligible to register.
34. The Panel acknowledged the particular difficulty of engaging with hard to identify and hard to reach groups (whether through ignorance of the demographics or lack of engagement with community leaders). Empowerment of hard to reach groups is if anything more urgent. There would be value in inviting community leaders to the Select Committee. The Panel also wished to undertake some specific case study work on a selection of wards.

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**List of background papers: 2011 Census data**  
**Version number: 2**



## APPENDIX A

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Antigua and Barbuda</li> <li>2. Australia</li> <li>3. The Bahamas</li> <li>4. Bangladesh</li> <li>5. Barbados</li> <li>6. Belize</li> <li>7. Botswana</li> <li>8. Britain</li> <li>9. Brunei</li> <li>10. Canada</li> <li>11. Cameroon</li> <li>12. Cyprus</li> <li>13. Dominica</li> <li>14. The Gambia</li> <li>15. Ghana</li> <li>16. Grenada</li> <li>17. Guyana</li> <li>18. India</li> <li>19. Jamaica</li> <li>20. Kenya</li> <li>21. Kiribati</li> <li>22. Lesotho</li> <li>23. Malawi</li> <li>24. Malaysia</li> <li>25. Maldives</li> <li>26. Malta</li> <li>27. Mauritius</li> <li>27b Mozambique</li> <li>28. Namibia</li> <li>29. Nauru</li> <li>30. New Zealand</li> <li>31. Nigeria</li> <li>32. Pakistan</li> <li>33. Papua New Guinea</li> <li>33b Rwanda</li> <li>34. Saint Christopher &amp; Nevis</li> <li>35. Saint Lucia</li> <li>36. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines</li> <li>37. Seychelles</li> <li>38. Sierra Leone</li> <li>39. Singapore</li> <li>40. Solomon Islands</li> <li>41. South Africa</li> <li>42. Sri Lanka</li> <li>43. Swaziland</li> <li>44. Tanzania</li> <li>45. Tonga</li> <li>46. Trinidad and Tobago</li> <li>47. Tuvalu</li> <li>48. Uganda</li> <li>49. Vanuatu</li> <li>50. Western Samoa</li> <li>51. Zambia</li> <li>52. Zimbabwe</li> </ol> <p><b><u>British Dependent Territories</u></b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Anguilla</li> <li>2. Bermuda</li> <li>3. British Antarctic Territory</li> <li>4. British Indian Ocean Territory</li> <li>5. British Virgin Islands</li> <li>6. Cayman Islands</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>7. Falkland Islands and Dependencies</li> <li>8. Gibraltar</li> <li>9. Monserrat</li> <li>10. Pitcairn, Henderson, Ducie and Oeno Islands</li> <li>11. St Helena and Dependencies (Ascension and Tristan da Cunha Islands)</li> <li>12. Turks and Caicos Islands</li> <li>13. HONG KONG</li> </ol> <p>Although Hong Kong is no longer a British Dependent Territory, all Hong Kong born people (who may or may not be already British citizens) resident in the United Kingdom on the qualifying date (15th October) are entitled to be included as they are de facto Commonwealth citizens regardless of their class of British or other Commonwealth citizenship</p> <p><b>Please remember that all the above countries and the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland have full voting rights and must be included in the register if resident (or away for less than six months) on 15th October.</b></p> <p><b><u>OTHER EUROPEAN UNION COUNTRIES</u></b></p> <p>Austria Belgium Bulgaria Cyprus (see note below) Czech Republic Denmark Estonia Finland France Germany Greece Hungary Italy Latvia Lithuania Luxembourg Malta (see note below) Poland Portugal</p> <p><b>Romania</b></p> <p>Spain Slovakia Slovenia Sweden The Netherlands</p> <p>Citizens of these countries can register to vote at local elections in the U.K. To register to vote at U.K. European Parliamentary elections as well, they should ask the elections office for an additional form.</p> <p>(Note: Cyprus and Malta are Commonwealth countries and as such their nationals already have full voting rights in the UK)</p>
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**EMPOWERMENT AND ENFRANCHISEMENT  
POPULATION AND ELECTOR ANALYSIS**

WARD	PROPERTIES (1)	POPULATION (2)	ELECTORS (3)	UNDER 19'S (4)	CANVAS NON- RETURN (5)	VOTER TURNOUT CITY ELECTIONS
Barton & Sandhills	2899	7202	5187	2073	79 = 2.73%	22.54%
Blackbird Leys	2351	6077	4225	1865	48 = 2.04%	20.81%
Carfax	1509	6361	4380	1463	26 = 2.03%	20.27%
Churchill	3858	7303	5068	1857	212 = 7.66%	21.62%
Cowley	2514	6562	4608	1625	81 = 3.23%	26.84%
Cowley Marsh	3054	6977	4998	1582	64 = 2.37%	27.77%
Headington	2909	5764	4446	1031	212 = 7.30%	41.35%
Headington Hill & Northway	3383	6224	4693	1966	83 = 4.29%	25.24%
Hinsey Park	2727	5944	4620	1117	73 = 4.09%	32.34%
Holywell	305	5425	3627	1588	11 = 5.95%	21.82%
Iffley Fields	2279	5713	4110	1200	149 = 6.58%	42.49%
Jericho & Osney	3192	6820	4993	1124	237 = 8.01%	30.53%
Littlemore	2846	6441	4827	1500	79 = 2.78%	24.44%
Lye Valley	2922	7372	5101	1837	136 = 5.08%	22.86%
Marston	2562	6259	4717	1412	32 = 1.25%	40.41%
North	2049	5809	4598	1315	71 = 3.78%	34.82%
Northfield Brook	2705	6991	4477	2430	27 = 1.21%	17.51%
Quarry & Risinghurst	2706	6308	4858	1400	83 = 3.08%	36.56%
Rose Hill & Iffley	2649	6500	4518	1701	79 = 3.04%	31.58%
St. Clement's	2340	5952	5019	786	102 = 4.51%	26.29%
St. Margaret's	2122	5497	4167	1504	83 = 4.09%	31.89%
St. Mary's	1935	5330	4025	816	115 = 6.14%	27.88%
Summertown	3086	7209	4985	2159	151 = 5.17%	36.34%
Wolvercote	2710	5866	4663	1332	50 = 1.85%	41.91%

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- Note:
- (1) Figures taken from Summer 2012 Electoral Register update
  - (2) Figures taken from 2011 Census
  - (3) Figures taken from 2013 Electoral Register published on 16<sup>th</sup> October 2012
  - (4) Figures taken from 2011 Census
  - (5) Figures taken from 2013 Electoral Register update process, completed on 15<sup>th</sup> October 2012 (These figures do not include college and care home properties (5798))

City Elections, May 2012 – Overall turnout – 29.37%

Electoral Register Annual Update (Canvass) City wide non-return rate of 2283 properties = 3.71%