

Report to the States on Reform of the Electoral Roll

Background

At the States meeting on 17 July the States considered and approved the following resolution

Reform of Electoral Roll

“In view of the long history of public dissatisfaction when some residents find that they are not included in the Register of Electors on Election day it is important to review the way in which the Register of Electors is replaced every two years. However hard the Chief Executive tries, a not insignificant number of people think that they remain on the Register from one election to the next. They forget that the Register is renewed every two years and that they have to reapply every two years. It is not good for anyone who could have been included in the Register to be turned away on Polling Day.”

The States directs the Chief Executive, as Registrar, to consider and consult as to the best options for changing the Government of Alderney Law, 2004 in order to achieve a system whereby electors who would otherwise qualify do not have to reapply for inclusion in successive registers of electors; and bearing in mind the date of the next election to report by the end of September 2013.”

The Returning Officer has consulted the Electoral Commission in the UK and the Law Officers. He also considered the current situation in Great Britain and Northern Ireland and concluded that the issue appears to be how the register of electors is maintained rather than a problem with the Government of Alderney law. A report was provided to States Members at the end of September 2013.

1. It seems that the main problem is that voters in Alderney who have registered to vote do not fully understand the need to re-register. The practice and procedure in Alderney has been to require all eligible voters to re-register, otherwise their name will not be included in the new register. The recommendation is that there should be two concurrent administrative process changes: firstly a higher profile programme of encouraging voters to register, and secondly a positive approach to those who have registered by updating the register rather than compiling a completely new register every two years.
2. For Alderney the register is kept accurate as a result of the very small community and the Chief Executive’s office staff who are able to make the appropriate enquiries about those who seek to register. Completeness is however not assured because it is not possible for staff to know every person on the island who might be eligible to vote, and of course there are those who choose not to register. There is no evidence of electoral fraud.

Continuous registration

3. In Alderney the Government of Alderney Law confers upon the Chief Executive the power to delete from the register the names of any persons who, in the opinion of the Chief Executive, are not entitled to have their names inscribed in it, and make such other corrections to the register as appear to him to be necessary. There are safeguards built into the law to challenge that action by petition to the Court of Alderney. (Section 34 (4) refers). It is therefore not recommended that any additional powers to seek data from other sources be sought or taken. Continuous registration with enhanced canvassing should deal readily with the problem identified by the billet submission.

Recommendation

4. To move to system of continuous registration, investigating the possibility of adopting electronic registration as an additional option for voters, and adopting a more vigorous programme of canvassing. There would be no need to amend the Government of Alderney law. States Members have indicated their support for the proposals made by the Chief Executive.