



The Association of Electoral Administrators

Policy Position Paper – Sale of the Register of Electors

1. Introduction

This paper outlines the Association of Electoral Administrators' (AEA) views of, and highlights issues related to, the publication and sale of the register of electors and fees that can be charged.

2. AEA Policy Position

- We believe the electoral register should only be compiled for electoral and statutory purposes and should **not** be sold for commercial purposes.
- If the Government continues to allow the register of electors to be sold, fee rates should be reviewed and must reflect the cost of both preparing the register and the value of the data. Fees should also be reviewed for copies of the marked register of electors and lists which are available after an election.
- We believe that the open register should be abolished. If it is retained, electors should be asked whether they wish to opt in, rather than having to opt out.

3. Background

3.1 Versions of the electoral register

All Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) are required to publish two versions of the register of electors; the electoral register and the open register. In the Representation of the People Regulations (Reg 26 RPR 2001), the electoral register is referred to as the full register and the open register as the edited register.

Electors may choose to have their details withheld from the open register. This is commonly known as opt out.

The electoral register lists the names of everyone who has registered to vote. Access to it is strictly controlled.

The open register lists the names of all electors who have not 'opted out'. Access to the open register is not restricted. It is available for sale to any person who wishes to buy a copy and the data in it may be used for any purpose.

The open register is updated monthly to reflect any changes to the electoral register and any specific requests from electors to change their choice to be excluded from, or included in, the open register.

While the electoral register is updated using notices of alteration, the open register is re-published each month to incorporate any changes from the previous version. As a result, there are no notices of alteration to previously published or sold open registers, only re-published versions.

Credit referencing agencies are legally able to commercially sell details of any elector appearing on the open register.

The Association of Electoral Administrators

3.2 Statutory supply of electoral registers

The electoral register is supplied free of charge:

- in connection with electoral purposes;
- to facilitate the democratic process; and
- for the purposes of research, security, law enforcement and the prevention and detection of crime.

The electoral register may be sold to:

- government departments (for similar purposes to those outlined above); and
- credit reference agencies providing credit reference services (for money laundering and credit assessment checks).

The letter Z must be shown against all opted-out electors on sale copies (Regs 113 and 114 RPR 2001).

Specific restrictions apply to the use of the electoral register and these are detailed in Part VI of the RPR 2001.

4. Statutory fees and the costs to local authorities

The current statutory fees for the full or open versions of the electoral register have not been reviewed or changed since they were introduced almost 20 years ago (Regs 110 and 111 RPR 2001):

- Data: £20.00 plus £1.50 per thousand entries (or part);
- Paper: £10.00 plus £5.00 per thousand entries (or part).

These rates also apply to the sale of monthly alterations to the electoral register.

The current statutory charges for a copy of the whole or any part of the marked register or lists (Reg 120 RPR 2001) after an election are:

- Data: £10.00 plus £1.00 per thousand entries (or part);
- Paper: £10.00 plus £2.00 per thousand entries (or part)

The fees for purchasing the register are low in comparison to the costs of producing the electoral register. Local authorities raise a small amount from selling the full register, usually exclusively to credit referencing agencies, but rarely make any budgetary gain from selling the open register.

The following table outlines this point with information taken from councils across the country

The Association of Electoral Administrators

	Local Authority A	Local Authority B	Local Authority C	Local Authority D	Local Authority E	Local Authority F
Electors on the full register	421,000	95,000	230,500	160,000	154,000	119,000
Electors on the open register	177,000	29,000	77,000	60,000	49,000	37,000
Costs of conducting the annual canvass	£320,118	£75,888	£150,000	£132,800	£193,750	£71,500
Income from the sale of the full register	£10,157	£2,855	£6,000	£1,900	£2,558	£2,968
Income from the sale of the open/edited register	£433	£0	£1,000	£0	£140	£77

5. Key Issues

- Fees do not reflect the actual cost to the public purse in producing the registers. In practice, money received by the local authority from the sale of the full and open registers does little to offset the cost of producing registers (full costs comparisons available above).
- Credit reference agencies are able to make a significant profit from full electoral registers sold to them for a low statutory fee; using the data in their credit checking reports for the financial industry and others and selling on data from the edited register. In effect, local government is subsidising credit reference agencies. We believe that a more appropriate fee structure should be charged, representing the true costs of producing the electoral register.
- Following the introduction of individual electoral registration in 2014, electoral register data is now verified against DWP records. It could be argued that this makes electoral register data even more valuable and reliable as a credit checking tool. However, despite this change, no increase in the fees paid by credit reference agencies or others was introduced to reflect this.
- Paper copies should be charged at a significant premium compared to a data copy as they cost significantly more to produce.
- With recent changes in Data Protection legislation, the sale of the open register appears incompatible from a citizen's perspective (i.e. selling people's personal data to anyone who is interested in buying).



The Association of Electoral Administrators

- Potential electors may be deterred from registering by the prospect of having their details sold on.
- There is often a misconception from the public that local authorities are profiting from the open/edited register, rather than credit referencing agencies and third parties.

6. Further Information

The Association of Electoral Administrators was founded in 1987 and is the professional body representing the interests of electoral administrators in the United Kingdom. We are a non-governmental and non-partisan body with just under 2,000 members, the majority of whom are employed by local authorities to provide electoral registration and election services. Eleven regional branches of the Association cover the United Kingdom.

Further details on the legislative background connected to this policy position are available on request.

If you require any further information, please contact Angela Holden, AEA Policy Manager – angela.holden@aea-elections.co.uk or 07545 939190.

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