

# Automatic registration pilot evaluation

The Welsh Government set up pilots with four local authorities (Carmarthenshire, Gwynedd, Newport and Powys) to test if locally-held data could be used to register voters without application – referred to here as automatic registration. We were required to evaluate the pilots.

## Summary

- The pilots identified and automatically added just over 14,500 new electors to the registers. This represented 2 – 8% of the register in each local authority area.
- Around 1,500 attainers were also registered through the pilot (in two local authorities). The Office for National Statistics estimates that in each of Gwynedd and Powys there are approximately 2,700 / 2,800 people aged 14 – 15 years. The numbers added in the pilots therefore represent between 16 – 37% of all potential attainers in those areas.
- From the evidence available, nearly all of these additions to the register appear accurate, i.e. the register entries relate to a person living at that address. Only a small proportion (by mid-November 2025) were removed during the annual canvass, indicating that the person no longer lived at the address.
- Council tax data is the largest dataset available to Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) and identified the largest number of potential electors. Additional datasets were important in contributing further unique names and providing the required second matching result. Education datasets are particularly valuable in allowing single matches to be registered and in identifying attainers and younger electors who we know are less likely to be registered. In future implementation, care will be needed in the timing of the use of student data in relation to the end of university terms when significant numbers of students will change address.
- We know from our [previous research](#) that over half of people in Great Britain think automatic registration would be an improvement on the current registration system. In these pilots there was also no significant concerns raised about the process though ongoing care is needed in relation to electors who wish to register anonymously. However, improvements could be made including reducing the length of the opt-out period, and streamlining the process by which an automatically registered elector can also register, if eligible, for UK general elections.
- The automatic registration process did not require action from individual electors unless they chose to opt out. However, it did mean significant work and resource for EROs and their teams – mainly in relation to the data matching processes. For any wider implementation of automatic registration, based on local data matching, it is important that the efficiency of the data matching software available to EROs is maximised and that they have appropriate resources to manage the process.
- These pilots suggest that automatic registration could be rolled out in Wales and could have a positive impact on the completeness of the electoral registers.

However, before taking a final decision on whether to implement automatic registration we suggest that the Welsh Government should:

- **Consider final data from the annual canvass to assess the matching accuracy:** we have received some data from canvasses which shows how many automatically registered electors were removed during the canvass. However, at time of publication it has not been possible to include final canvass data. The Welsh Government should assess this data in order to satisfy themselves that our conclusions here are supported.
- **Consider the resources needed to ensure EROs and their teams can deliver a new automatic registration system:** the data matching process can be time consuming and labour intensive with significant manual work required after the automated matching. In addition, there are costs associated with the volume of invitations to register (ITRs) which are sent out to electors as a result of the data matching. The experience of the pilots will not necessarily be representative of all local authorities in Wales and the Welsh Government should consider what additional resourcing would be needed by EROs across Wales.
- **Make an assessment of the overall cost of implementation alongside the likely benefits:** we cannot draw conclusions, from the pilot costs, about the total cost of a Wales-wide implementation of automatic registration. Some costs, such as Electoral Management Software (EMS) development, would not need to be repeated in full. Others, including the resourcing point above, could vary significantly for different local authorities. A final assessment will also depend on the timing and frequency of the registration processes which are put in place.
- We are also making recommendations intended to support the successful implementation of automatic registration:
  - **Automatic registration timing:** the Welsh Government should consider the optimal timing and frequency of an automatic registration process – particularly in relation to other aspects of election teams’ work, such as the annual canvass and scheduled elections. This could be carried out each year between the conclusion of the annual canvass and ahead of any scheduled May elections. In years without scheduled polls it would be beneficial also to carry out an exercise ahead of the canvass.
  - **Notification period:** the Welsh Government should consider a reduction in the notification period from 60 days. A shorter period would offer more flexibility around the timing of an automatic registration exercise. It could also mean less opportunity for elector confusion about whether they are registered to vote or not – particularly in the event of by-elections.
  - **Notification format:** EROs should be required to send the first notification of automatic registration in hard copy to the elector’s address, rather than by email. In the event of inaccurate matching, a contact with the address offers the opportunity for existing residents to flag this to the ERO.
  - **Avoiding voter confusion:** An ITR should be included with the notification letter. This would streamline the process, help to mitigate voter confusion and could reduce costs. Auto-registered electors must be sent an ITR at some stage because the ERO cannot be sure, from local data matching, if they should also be registered for UK general elections.

- **Guidance on data usage:** the Welsh Government ensure there is appropriate guidance on data quality and usage as part of a roll out of automatic registration. Guidance could give EROs additional confidence about which data sources they can or should not use beyond examples like council tax.
- **Electoral management software system development:** successful delivery of any electoral registration process relies on the functionality of EMS systems. Development will be needed for those EMS providers not involved in these pilots and there are also lessons to learn from the pilots. The Welsh Government implementation plans will need to agree a permanent register 'marker' for automatically registered electors as well as exploring improvements to the data matching processes – particularly in relation to how results from different datasets are combined.
- **Future UK-wide alignment:** the Welsh Government should consider how a form of automatic registration introduced in Wales is best implemented in order to allow for efficient future integration with any UK-wide system. The UK Government should engage with and take account of the Welsh Government's plans as they develop a UK-wide approach. Several automatic registration systems in the UK are unlikely to be value for money, and risk confusion for voters and EROs.

**Table 1 Summary data**

	<b>Carmarthenshire</b>	<b>Gwynedd</b>	<b>Newport</b>	<b>Powys</b>
<b>Number of potential electors identified by two or more data sources</b>	1,897	1,119	2,485	1,342*
<b>Number of potential electors identified by education data</b>	3,322	6,601	N/A	3,055
<b>Number of automatic registration notices sent</b>	-	7,432	2,485	5,395
<b>Number of people who asked to be removed from the auto-registration process</b>	-	16	94	28
<b>Number of people automatically registered</b>	-	7,092 (8%)	2,123 (2%)	5,361 (5%)
<b>Number of attainers registered</b>	-	424	0	1,052
<b>Number of auto-registered electors</b>	-	68	317	1,146

## who registered for parliamentary franchise

\* This is the minimum number matched with two data sources – some additional matches were manually added where the system failed to correctly identify them.

Note: These figures represent the state of play in later October / mid-November. Some data, e.g. the number of people who asked to opt out or the number registering for the parliamentary franchise, could be subject to change.

## Background

The Welsh Government, working with four local authorities, set up pilots to establish the most effective, and accurate, way of registering voters without application – referred to here as automatic registration. The pilots were also intended to establish the most effective way of communicating with electors and ensuring vulnerable electors are safeguarded, e.g. avoiding adding electors who would prefer to register anonymously via the standard registration route.

There were three pilot models, summarised below.

**Table 2 Pilot models**

<b>Model</b>	<b>Summary</b>
<b>Pilot 1</b> <i>Carmarthenshire</i>	Desk-based local data match, to try to match those already on the register and to identify potential electors
<b>Pilot 2</b> <i>Powys</i> <i>Newport</i> <i>Gwynedd</i>	Automated local data matching, supplemented by manual checks, to identify potential electors. Where people could be identified by two data sources (or one education data source), the new elector would be issued with a notice of registration. Where this was not possible, the potential elector would be sent an ITR as per the usual registration route.
<b>Pilot 3</b> <i>Gwynedd</i>	In addition to the approach in Pilot 2, this pilot uses outreach and formalised partnership work to access harder to reach groups.

We were required to evaluate the pilots. Our evaluation is based on the information and data that could be reasonably and practically captured during the pilots. It was not the intention of this evaluation to measure the direct impact of the pilots on the accuracy and completeness of the electoral registers – this would have required significant additional costs and a longer timetable.

## Data matching

The local authorities could use existing, locally-held data in these pilots. They did not have access to data held at a UK-level, for example the Department for Work and Pensions database.

## The pilots used a range of local data sources

**Table 3 Data sources used by pilot area**

	Carmarthenshire	Gwynedd	Newport	Powys
<b>Adult Services</b>	-	-	-	X
<b>Concessionary Passes</b>	-	-	-	X
<b>Council Tax</b>	X	X	X	X
<b>Current Employees</b>	-	X	-	X
<b>Schools/Colleges</b>	X	X	-	X
<b>University</b>	-	X	-	-
<b>Housing Benefits</b>	X	-	X	X
<b>Housing</b>	X	X	-	X
<b>Library</b>	-	-	-	X
<b>My Account (Carmarthenshire)</b>	X	-	-	-

Election teams did not report any significant problems in accessing this data. The datasets are held by the local authority and, in the majority of cases, are already accessed to support existing canvass data matching processes.

### Local data cannot be used to re-create the electoral register

Carmarthenshire's pilot aimed to test whether the existing electoral register could be re-created from available local data. The results below show that around 60% of existing electors could be found on the datasets used in the pilot. Nearly all were identified via council tax.

**Table 4 Carmarthenshire matching statistics by dataset**

	% Properties matched	% Existing electors matched
<b>Council tax</b>	95%	58%
<b>Education</b>	5%	1%
<b>Housing benefits</b>	5%	3%
<b>Housing</b>	10%	4%
<b>My Account</b>	0%	0%

## Total unique matches

95%

60%

Of the datasets tested, council tax is the most likely to contain a majority of the population. However, this still means that many individuals will not appear in it. Some local authorities have started to add the details of all residents to council tax databases but in most cases only the bill payer(s) are listed. In addition, many tenants are not included where a landlord pays council tax directly.

### Local data can identify new electors

As the results show, the datasets used by the piloting authorities are not 'universal' – they do not contain the details of all or nearly all of the population in an area. Therefore, all of the pilots combined different datasets to identify as many unique new electors as possible.

Education datasets will also not contain the majority of the population but these are valuable because they are specific to younger electors and are likely to contain details which do not overlap with a broader dataset, such as council tax.

Gwynedd was the only pilot to access student data (from Bangor University) in addition to the data from schools/colleges also used by Carmarthenshire and Powys. The data in Table 5 shows that Gwynedd had twice the number of potential electors found via education data. This suggests that the university data was particularly effective at identifying unregistered electors.

With the exception of educational data, it is clear that there was overlap between some datasets (e.g. council tax and housing tenants). However, in areas that used a larger number of datasets (e.g. Powys), the evidence shows that they also added value by identifying additional unique individuals. For example:

- of the potential electors initially identified from Adult Services data in Powys, over 80% were not found on the council tax database.
- of the potential electors initially identified from concessionary travel pass data, 96% were not found on the council tax database.

While these individuals could not be registered from only one dataset, it indicates that there is potential in using multiple datasets which can both identify unique electors and provide a second data match for others.

**Table 5 Data matching summary data**

	Carmarthenshire	Gwynedd	Newport	Powys
<b>Number of potential electors identified by two or more data sources</b>	1,897	1,119	2,485	1,342*
<b>Number of potential electors identified by education data</b>	3,322	6,601	N/A	3,055

\* This is the minimum number matched with two data sources – some additional matches were manually added where the system failed to correctly identify them.

## **Some datasets are more accurate than others**

One of the key qualities of any dataset is how accurate and up to date it is. This varies between different datasets and between the same type of data (e.g. council tax) across different local authorities.

This will depend partly on what the dataset is for. For example, it is less important that library data is up-to-date (e.g. having old data removed) compared to council tax or housing benefit. In their pilot, Carmarthenshire discovered that their MyAccount data (council website accounts for local residents) was not useful because it was not maintained as a current database, i.e. old data was not being removed.

Local authorities can also have different lag times in processing data which can mean a council tax dataset from one area is more likely to be up to date at any given time.

In the case of university data, one of the key considerations should be the timing, and frequency, of the data matching process. A student dataset could be highly accurate on 1 June but significantly less so by 1 August when students in university accommodation or short-term rentals are likely to have left that address.

These issues do not present a fundamental issue for a roll out of a more automatic registration process. However, this does mean that EROs would need to carefully consider which local data would be most suitable for automatic registration, including when and how often it should be used. Including an unsuitable dataset in a matching exercise can create significant, labour-intensive work, e.g. in sorting and cleaning the results.

The UK Government already provide [guidance](#) on selecting local data sources for data matching during the annual canvass. The Welsh Government should ensure there is appropriate guidance on data quality and usage as part of a roll out of automatic registration. For example, guidance could give EROs additional confidence about which data sources they can or should not use, beyond examples like council tax.

## **Data matching and handling processes can be improved**

Overall, election teams are now familiar with data matching processes – they regularly do it as part of the annual canvas. In these pilots, there were no significant issues in relation to the matching processes (three areas matched data directly through their EMS system, one used a separate, existing local authority system).

However, improvements that can be made to the process will reduce the time needed later to manage and interpret the results.

- **Unique property reference numbers (UPRNs):** not all local data contains unique property reference numbers. Without a UPRN, the data matching process needs to use the text of an address to match properties (before going on to match people at that address). This type of text-based matching is more likely to fail and to generate errors compared to matching using unique codes. This creates additional work for elections staff in manually adjusting the matching results.
- **Matching using names:** Any text-based matching of names will encounter problems with changes of name (e.g. after marriage), if people use their first and

middle names differently on different datasets (e.g. George Charles Smith and Charlie Smith) and if people in the same household have the same or similar names (e.g. fathers and sons). In some cases, elections teams spent considerable time checking and cleaning the automated results before being confident using the data to contact electors. Some of the causes of these issues are difficult to avoid in the absence of additional details which can be used in the matching (e.g. a unique number or another reference like date of birth). However, as part of any roll out of automatic registration, it would be important for the matching process within EMS systems to be made as efficient as possible.

- **Efficient combination of results from datasets:** In these pilots, people could only be added to the register if they were found on at least two datasets (except for a single match using education data). This meant that the data matching results needed to be efficiently combined to identify unique individuals. This was an added complexity on top of the issues with matching raised above – if there were problems in the original matching, then the challenges only increased when data was combined.

Any wider implementation of automatic registration would need to consider the capacity of existing electoral services teams to manage the additional work. The experience of the four areas in these pilots may not be representative of all local authorities in Wales.

## Contacting electors

The summary data below sets out the key outcomes of this process. It shows that relatively large numbers of electors were added to the registers as a result of automatic registration – roughly between 2% and 8% of the registered electorate. Only a small number opted out of the process.

We know from [2011 and 2021 census data](#) that between 9 – 10% of the population in Wales change address in any 12-month period. These results indicate there would be benefit in a regular and frequent automatic registration process which could register a significant proportion of these people.

**Table 6 Automatic registration summary data**

	Gwynedd	Newport	Powys
<b>Number of automatic registration notices sent</b>	7,432	2,485	5,395
<b>Number of people who asked to be removed from the auto-registration process</b>	16	94	28
<b>Number of people automatically registered</b>	7,092 (8%)	2,123 (2%)	5,361 (5%)
<b>Number of attainers* registered</b>	424	0	1,052

## Number of auto-registered electors who registered for parliamentary franchise

68

317

1,146

\*Attainers are aged 14 – 15 and can be added to the electoral register ahead of turning 16 and becoming eligible to vote.

We do not know if particular types of people were more likely to be picked up by the automatic registration process. Although it is reasonable to assume that many will be relatively recent home movers who have, for example, registered for council tax but not for voting. The exception is those identified using education data where it will mainly be younger people being added to the register.

The figures on attainer registration are particularly notable. The Office for National statistics estimates that in each of Gwynedd and Powys there are approximately 2,700 / 2,800 people aged 14 – 15 years. The numbers added in the pilots therefore represent between 16 – 37% of all potential attainers in those areas. The pilots also resulted in many 16 or 17 year olds being registered with 366 added in Gwynedd and 245 in Powys.

### **Available evidence suggests that automatic registration did not negatively affect the accuracy of the registers**

We cannot make a precise assessment of the accuracy of the data matching and automatic registration process, e.g. what proportion of the people contacted and registered were resident at that address, at the time. Although the need for two dataset matches clearly increases the likelihood that they are current residents.

The best evidence from these pilots is in the proportion of the automatically registered electors that were later removed during the annual canvass. This is also not a precise measure as it requires someone at a property to respond to the canvass indicating that a listed elector does not live at the address – we know that not everyone will do that. However, it does give a good sense of the overall level of accuracy in the matching.

Positively, by early to mid-November 2025, a small number of electors added during automatic registration had been marked for removal as a result of the annual canvass – 17 in Powys and 66 in Gwynedd.

Given the timing of this report, it has not been possible to include final data on removals from the annual canvass. The Welsh Government should request this data from the pilot areas in order to satisfy themselves that our conclusions here are supported.

### **Initial notification letters should be sent to the property**

People identified using education data or more than one of the other datasets, were sent a notice of registration. This informed them that they would be added to the register in 60 days and be eligible to vote in Senedd and local government elections. Those who wished to opt out were asked to contact the pilot authority within 60 days.

The communications used in the pilots were designed and tested by the Behavioural Insights Team with the aim of making them as clear and understandable as possible for electors.

The pilot legislation allowed for these communications to be sent either by post or by email. However, in the pilot all of the notifications were sent by post. As part of any wider

implementation, we recommend that EROs are required to send the first notification in hard copy to the elector's address, rather than by email. In the event of inaccurate matching, a contact with the address offers the opportunity for existing residents to flag this to the ERO.

### **There were challenges in managing the different franchises**

Electors automatically registered through this pilot were added to the register for devolved elections in Wales (Senedd and local government). They could not be automatically registered for reserved elections (UK general elections or Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs)).

Feedback from local authorities was mixed on the practicalities of managing the different franchises if automatic registration was rolled out. Some felt that adding electors for only one franchise, when they may be eligible for both, was an unhelpful complexity. Others felt that the complexity, in terms of different franchises, already exists. However, they did think it would be important for their EMS systems to be able efficiently to manage these requirements.

This means EROs being able to clearly identify the automatically registered electors on their registers. An electoral register for an area is a single database with 'markers' placed against individual electors to allow different eligible electorates to be generated, depending on the poll in question.

Some electors, e.g. some EU citizens, are already flagged (with a 'B' or 'G' marker) to show they can vote in Senedd, local and PCC elections but not in UK general elections. However, ahead of these pilots, there was no existing marker which could be used to accurately distinguish those who were automatically registered. The need to agree a suitable marker caused some delays in the pilots. If automatic registration is rolled out, a permanent approach should be settled. This could be the continued use of the temporary 'J' marker used in the pilots.

Importantly, and unlike the EU citizen markers, this marker will tell EROs that they may be missing information about the elector – specifically their nationality and that they may still be eligible to register for other polls (and should be contacted).

Ultimately, avoiding confusion for voters is crucial. Without the effective management of the different franchises there is a risk of voters not being made aware of the need to register for upcoming election. By-elections present a specific challenge because they can take place at almost any time in the year. This would be exacerbated if the by-election was for a reserved poll where the automatically registered voters would definitely not be registered for that election (but may believe they were).

### **Initial notifications should give information on how to register for different franchise**

The notifications sent in the pilots clearly told voters that they would need to register separately for certain other elections but did not include an ITR. In some areas, reminders were sent during the 60 day period which also included information for electors on the possibility of registering for the parliamentary franchise. But no ITRs were sent out to these electors within the 60 day period.

The auto-registered electors must be sent an ITR at some stage because the ERO cannot be sure if they should also be registered for UK general elections. In any future roll-out of

automatic registration, combining the notification and ITR would streamline this process, help to mitigate voter confusion and could reduce costs.

### **Limited concerns were raised by the people contacted**

The reaction of the people contacted about automatic registration was an important aspect of the pilot. We know, from our [previous research](#), that over half of people in Great Britain think automatic registration would be an improvement on the current registration system. Positively, the local authorities received limited inquiries and few complaints. As above, we know that not everyone contacted will have fully engaged with the information provided and that may be one factor in the lack of response. However, the limited response does indicate the absence of a widespread concern about the approach of registering electors without an application.

Across the three pilots, between 0.2% (Gwynedd) and 4% (Newport) of those sent automatic registration notifications asked not to be added to the registers. There were some common elements within this group:

- For the pilots using education data, and therefore registering attainments aged 14 – 15, they did receive some contacts from concerned parents/guardians. In many cases, this was parents checking whether it was correct that a 14- or 15-year-old should be added to the electoral register. Often, following an explanation from the electoral services team, the query was resolved and the elector was registered. In other cases, they opted out of the automatic registration process.
- The pilots also received a small number of queries from people who did not want to appear on the electoral register for safety reasons. They were understandably concerned by the information that they were about to be registered. The electoral services teams were able to offer the option of using the existing anonymous registration process, rather than being automatically added. However, in nearly all cases, the individuals were not reassured by the anonymous registration provisions and preferred to remain unregistered.
- Some people did raise more general concerns. They were often strongly held, e.g. where they actively wished to remain unregistered or did not like the idea of being identified through other data sources. But this was only a proportion of the small number overall who asked to opt out.

While overall volumes of contacts were relatively low, and the local authorities did not increase their staffing as part of the pilot, handling these enquiries did require staff time. As part of any roll out, individual authorities would need to assess their ability to handle enquiries depending on the volume of automatic registration letters they were sending out and their existing staffing situation.

### **Contacting people identified by one data source requires resources**

Currently, EROs must send individual 'invitation to register' forms (ITRs) to potential electors identified by, for example, direct contact from individuals or by local data matching. A single match against a dataset was not sufficient to automatically register an individual in these pilots but it is enough to require an ITR to be sent.

Legally, once an ITR is sent EROs must also take additional steps to encourage a response, including sending postal reminders, making a visit to the property and/or sending a personal email follow up.

Where pilot areas issued ITRs to these electors during the pilot period, they confirmed that this was a resource intensive activity both in terms of issuing the ITRs and in handling responses. For example, Powys issued nearly 7,000 ITRs to potential electors in the pilot. This would have been over 12,000 ITRs but they sent an initial letter to this group which encouraged many to register online and also identified inaccuracies in the data matching.

This therefore has the potential to be a significant commitment of resources for all EROs if automatic registration is rolled out in Wales.

The Welsh Government will need to consider how any automatic registration process will interact with these existing commitments in relation to ITRs and ensure that EROs have the resources needed to adapt to this increased workload.

### **The timing of any future automatic registration process needs to be considered**

Any implementation of automatic registration should consider the timing and frequency of data matching and elector contact, particularly in relation to other aspects of election teams' work, such as the annual canvass and scheduled elections. It is also important that it is clear to EROs whether this process is to be mandatory or at their discretion.

The pilots tested a single process of matching and registration within a year but depending on the availability of data and the efficiency of the process, it could happen more frequently. A single process could be carried out each year between the conclusion of the annual canvass and ahead of any scheduled May elections. In years without scheduled polls it would be beneficial also to carry out an exercise ahead of the canvass.

However, this would only be viable if the matching processes were as efficient as possible and if EROs have sufficient resources to conclude the work within the available time:

- **Automatic registration activity needs to be completed, and not overlap with, the annual canvass:** experience from the pilots indicates that running the automatic registration process into the annual canvass period creates issues. For example, whether and how to represent automatically registered electors on the household canvass forms. There are advantages and disadvantages to how the canvass could be used. A canvass following automatic registration would offer another opportunity to tell automatically registered electors that they are registered for certain elections and encourage them to register 'fully'. A process following the canvass, and ahead of scheduled polls, could pick up new electors that were missed by the canvass or who have moved more recently.
- **The process must also be completed well ahead of scheduled polls:** In order to avoid elector confusion about whether they are registered or not, the process (including the period between notification and registration) should be completed well in advance of a scheduled election. Clear communications and an agreed approach to handling electors in relation to any unscheduled by-elections are also needed.

The question of timing also depends on the approach to the notification or 'waiting period'. In these pilots the legislation required there to be 60 days between the issuing of a notice of registration and the elector being added to the registers.

We recommend that the Welsh Government should consider a reduction in the notification period. A shorter period would offer more flexibility in relation to the timing of an automatic registration exercise. It could also mean less opportunity for elector confusion about whether they are registered to vote or not – particularly in the event of by-elections.

While the 60 days did not present significant issues for the pilot areas, there is also no specific reason why this period should be 60 days – it does not relate to existing electoral registration processes, e.g. registration reviews or the rolling registration periods.

Reducing the period could increase the possibility of adding electors to the registers incorrectly (where a response could be received to say the elector is not resident) or when they do not want to be (where an opt-out response could be received). However, the pilots noted that the majority of responses tended to be received in the first 2 – 3 weeks of the 60 days.

Alongside the wider decision about the scheduling of automatic registration processes, the Welsh Government should consider a reduction in the notification period. This could bring it into line with existing review periods (14, 28 or 42 days depending on the specific circumstances) and also allow EROs to align the end of the period with a rolling register update.

## Targeted outreach activities

In Gwynedd, there was an additional element to the pilot focused on engaging people where the council would be unlikely to hold sufficient data on them for automatic registration. This might include people who move frequently, who do not have fixed addresses or have limited interactions with the council because of other barriers.

This element of the pilot aimed to:

- Build a model for partnership and collaboration between civil society and EROs
- Understand what gaps there may be in council data for a national roll out of AVR in Wales

This part of the pilot was co-ordinated by [Small Axe](#), a not-for-profit organisation. They initially contacted 86 civil society organisations and eventually worked directly with 14 to engage with communities through drop-in sessions and using materials (which were distributed both on and offline). In a post-pilot survey of civil society groups, 57% of respondents that did not participate said lack of resources was the main reason they did not take part.

### Contacting potential electors

The initial aim of this engagement was to encourage individuals to complete a contact form, expressing an interest in registering to vote. This form was kept as simple as possible in order to remove barriers to response. This meant that Gwynedd later needed to follow up with all respondents in order to gather the additional information that would be required to register them (e.g. national insurance number).

In total, 65 individuals were encouraged to express an interest via the initial form (although one provided a non-UK number):

- 59 responded to the request for further details, of which
  - 43 provided additional details required for data matching, of which

- 11 could be matched against one data source (10 of these were sent an automatic registration notification as one person was identified after the end of the pilot period)
- 14 could not be matched against any council held data
- 18 were found to be already registered (of which five had been registered through the pilot but prior to the outreach contact)

The overall impact of this pilot was therefore limited in terms of the numbers of people engaged. However, there are useful lessons which should be considered when thinking about this type of work in the future:

- **Hard-to-engage groups:** 23% (15 people) of those who initially signed up also responded to the follow up contact but refused to provide further personal details. This was despite the significant work of the civil society organisations to recruit them initially. Also, the majority of those who did respond, and provide sufficient information for data matching, needed multiple messages and calls to reach that point. This underlines the challenge presented by hard-to-engage groups – successful engagement often requires labour intensive, sustained and multi-step work. This may also have been made more difficult in the pilot by the lack of an upcoming electoral event to focus the engagement around.
- **Outreach did identify new electors:** 58% (25 out of 43) of those who provided details could not be matched with sufficient data to be automatically registered – while this was a disappointing result in terms of registration numbers, it does address one of the aims of the pilot in showing that the outreach work was identifying people who would not otherwise be picked up by locally held data.
- **Awareness is low:** Many people were not aware of whether they were registered or not. 42% of the contacts who also filled in a Small Axe feedback survey were already registered to vote but over three quarters of them believed that this process would have been their first time registering to vote.

Details on pilot costs are set out below. In relation to the outreach work in Gwynedd, an equivalent investment across all local authorities in Wales would represent a significant cost, particularly given the numbers of electors engaged and the lack of directly attributable registrations. However, the pilot did demonstrate that there is no simple answer here – the types of people engaged by this activity are less likely to be on existing local databases and are much less likely to proactively register themselves.

Further details on the results of the outreach work are available in the full evaluation produced by Small Axe.

## Costs

The Welsh Government funded the pilot activities for each local authority. The table below sets out the final costs by broad area of spending.

We cannot draw conclusions, from these costs, about the eventual cost of any Wales-wide implementation of automatic registration. Some costs, such as EMS development, would not need to be repeated in full. Others, such as staffing, would vary for different local authorities. Any changes to the processes between the pilots and implementation would also have an impact.

The costs set out below are based on financial claims received by the Welsh Government by 2 December 2026.

Item	Cost
<b>Electoral Management Software</b>	£887,493
<b>Staff</b>	£66,852
<b>Outreach</b>	£61,030
<b>Behavioural Insights</b>	£86,491
<b>Other (e.g. postage)</b>	£32,636
<b>Total</b>	£1,134,502

The most significant cost element related to the development work needed to ensure the EMS systems were able to support the automatic registration process. This underlines the importance of these systems in making it possible for electoral services teams to manage efficiently any new approaches to registration. New processes, established in legislation, will not work properly if the EMS systems do not have the functionality to deliver them.

## Conclusions and recommendations

These pilots suggest that automatic registration could be rolled out in Wales and could have a positive impact on the completeness of the electoral registers. However, before taking a final decision on whether to implement automatic registration we suggest that the Welsh Government should:

- **Request final data from the annual canvass to assess the matching accuracy:** we have received some data from canvasses which shows how many automatically registered electors were removed during the canvass. However, at time of publication it has not been possible to include final canvass data. The Welsh Government should assess this data in order to satisfy themselves that our conclusions here are supported.
- **Consider the resources needed to ensure EROs and their teams can deliver a new automatic registration system:** the data matching process can be time consuming and labour intensive with significant manual work required after the automated matching. In addition, there are costs associated with the volume of ITRs which need to be sent out to electors as a result of the data matching. The experience of the pilots will not necessarily be representative of all local authorities in Wales and the Welsh Government should consider what additional resourcing would be needed by EROs across Wales.
- **Make an assessment of the overall cost of implementation alongside the likely benefits:** We cannot draw conclusions, from the pilot costs, about the total cost of a Wales-wide implementation of automatic registration. Some costs, such as EMS development, would not need to be repeated in full. Others, including the resourcing point above, could vary significantly for different local authorities.

We are also making recommendations intended to support the successful implementation of automatic registration:

1. **Automatic registration timing:** the Welsh Government should consider the optimal timing and frequency of an automatic registration process – particularly in relation to other aspects of election teams’ work, such as the annual canvass and scheduled elections. This could be carried out each year between the conclusion of the annual canvass and ahead of any scheduled May elections. In years without scheduled polls it would be beneficial also to carry out an exercise ahead of the canvass.
2. **Notification period:** the Welsh Government should consider a reduction in the notification period from 60 days. A shorter period would offer more flexibility around the timing of an automatic registration exercise. It could also mean less opportunity for elector confusion about whether they are registered to vote or not – particularly in the event of by-elections.
3. **Notification format:** EROs should be required to send the first notification of automatic registration in hard copy to the elector’s address, rather than by email. In the event of inaccurate matching, a contact with the address offers the opportunity for existing residents to flag this to the ERO.
4. **Avoiding voter confusion:** An invitation to register (ITR) should be included with the notification letter. This would streamline the process, help to mitigate voter confusion and could reduce costs. Auto-registered electors must be sent an ITR at some stage because the ERO cannot be sure, from local data matching, if they should also be registered for UK general elections.
5. **Guidance on data usage:** the Welsh Government ensure there is appropriate guidance on data quality and usage as part of a roll out of automatic registration. Guidance could give EROs additional confidence about which data sources they can or should not use beyond examples like council tax..
6. **Electoral management software system development:** successful delivery of any electoral registration process relies on the functionality of EMS systems. Development will be needed for those EMS providers not involved in these pilots and there are also lessons to learn from the pilots. The Welsh Government implementation plans will need to agree a permanent register ‘marker’ for automatically registered electors as well as exploring improvements to the data matching processes – particularly in relation to how results from different datasets are combined.
7. **Future UK-wide alignment:** the Welsh Government should consider how a form of automatic registration introduced in Wales is best implemented in order to allow for efficient future integration with any UK-wide system. The UK Government should engage with and take account of the Welsh Government’s plans as they develop a UK-wide approach.

## Additional information

The purpose of this legislation is to allow piloting activity to take place in three local authority areas in Wales – Newport, Powys and Gwynedd. These authorities will pilot ways of registering electors without application as set out in sections 3 and 4 of the Elections and Elected Bodies (Wales) Act 2024 (the 2024 Act).

The Representation of the People (Electoral Registration without Applications) (Pilot Scheme) (Wales) Regulations 2025 are [available here](#).