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Minister Phelan launches public consultation on modernisation of electoral register process

- Proposal to introduce simplified registration procedures including optional online access
- Improved identity verification to improve security, accuracy and integrity
- Proposed reforms would represent the most significant modernisation of the electoral registration process since 1918
- Public consultation process runs until 15 March 2019

17 December 2018

The Minister of State for Local Government and Electoral Reform, John Paul Phelan, T.D., today (17 December, 2018) launched a public consultation on a series of proposals to modernise the electoral registration process. The proposals include the introduction of a simplified registration process; a reduction in the number of application forms; online registration as an optional alternative to paper-based registration; and the move from household-based to individual registration. Verification of identity through the possible use of Personal Public Service Numbers (PPSNs) is also proposed. The proposals arise from a commitment in the Programme for a Partnership Government to examine the voter registration process.

Launching the public consultation, Minister Phelan said: “The current system has served us well and will continue to do so. However, the proposals on which we are asking people’s views today are aimed at enabling people to register in simpler yet secure ways. These changes, if implemented, would be the most significant reform of the electoral registration process since 1918. As well as removing an excessive number of steps involved in applying to be included on the electoral register, the proposals would further increase the register’s ability to keep up to date with changing individual circumstances and, therefore its integrity.

“Reducing the number of different registration forms; allowing people to register online; and introducing a process of continuous or rolling registration would make the registration process much more user-friendly and similar to the way people interact with other State services. These changes reflect changes in how we live today. Having a registration process that recognises and facilitates more frequent changes of address is crucial in maintaining an accurate register.”

The proposals on which the Minister is asking the public for their views include:

1. **A more streamlined, simplified electoral registration process**, with a single, simplified form.
2. **Rolling, or continuous registration** – rather than the current draft, live and supplement versions of the register – this will provide for a single, live register at all times.
3. **The introduction of online registration** as an **optional** alternative to paper-based registration - currently people must complete paper application forms and send them to their local authority.

4. **Individual registration only** - currently the use of household forms could potentially result in people being included on the register or their registration details being amended without their explicit consent.
5. **The establishment of a single, national electoral register database** to be used by all local authorities to standardise data formats and processes; help prevent and remove duplicate entries and ensure standardised data protection and management procedures.
6. **Improvements to the system of identity verification**, including through the possible use of PPSNs, to streamline the system by minimising the need to present documentation to a local Garda station and minimise the potential for duplicate entries or erroneous amendments.
7. **The possibility of data sharing between public bodies and electoral registration authorities to maintain details.** Data sharing could involve the automatic updating of someone's address details for electoral registration purposes when they change address with another public body.

On the public consultation process, Minister Phelan said: "Many of these proposals have been made previously, most recently in 2016 by an Oireachtas Joint Committee. Now the Government is keen to get the views of the public. My department will engage with groups with a particular interest in this area as part of the public consultation process and I would urge everyone to participate in our consultation by the 15th of March 2019.

"Public confidence in any reform of the electoral registration process is paramount as the system affects all of us. The outcome of this consultation process will inform the development of detailed proposals for implementation. That is why I encourage everyone to consider these proposals and have their say."

Another related development of note is the Voter.ie project currently being undertaken by the Dublin local authorities, led by Dublin City Council and supported by the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, in which they have developed proposals for an enhanced system of voter registration. The aim of this project is to introduce an IT system to improve the efficiency and accuracy of the Register of Electors and allow users to maintain and update their details online at their own convenience.

ENDS

Notes for Editors

- The public can find information on the proposals at www.registerreform.gov.ie
- People can give their views by email to: registerreform@housing.gov.ie or by post to:
Electoral Registration Project Consultation
Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government
Custom House
Dublin 1
D01 W6X0
- Responses to the public consultation will be accepted until 15 March 2019.
- The process to modernise the electoral register is expected to take 2-3 years to complete.
- The issue of reform of the electoral registration process has been addressed in a number of reports: two joint Oireachtas committee reports (in 2008¹ and 2016²) and a UCD report in 2008³. A range of

¹ <http://opac.oireachtas.ie/Data/Library3/Library2/DL044618.pdf>

²

<http://www.oireachtas.ie/parliament/media/committees/archivedcommittees/environmentcultureandthegaeltacht/Report-on-Electoral-Commission-Final-20160113.pdf>

bodies such as the County and City Management Association and Local Government Management Agency have also called for the proposals contained in the Department's consultation document.

- Census 2016 showed 219,995 people over the age of 15 had moved house in the previous year, compared with 74,001 in 1996. These proposals have been designed taking into account these and other demographic changes in Ireland.

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³ <https://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/migrated-files/en/Publications/LocalGovernment/Voting/FileDownload%2C19472%2Cen.pdf>