

# Increasing responses to the annual canvass in Hackney and Hull

Final report

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## Acknowledgements

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## Executive Summary

### Background

The electoral register lists the names and addresses of everyone who is registered to vote in public elections. It is used primarily for electoral purposes but is also used to check credit applications, detect fraud, and call individuals to jury service.

The electoral register is managed at a local level, and it is the duty of Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) to ensure that the register is as *accurate* and *complete* as possible.<sup>1</sup> However, recent studies have shown that there remain gaps in the register's completeness, particularly among younger people, non-home-owners, certain ethnic minorities, EU and Commonwealth citizens, and those classified in the lowest social grades.

In order to keep the electoral register accurate and complete, each ERO conducts an annual canvass, in which Household Enquiry Forms (HEFs) are sent to every household in their jurisdiction in order to confirm the details of those living at the property.

54 percent of households did not respond to the HEF initially during the 2015 canvass.<sup>2</sup> In these instances, local authorities are required by law to send reminders and carry out a door to door canvass. If initial response rates to the HEF were increased, local authorities could save time and money. And if response rates by the end of the canvass were increased, both the accuracy and completeness of the register could be increased.

The Behavioural Insights Team partnered with the Electoral Commission to design and test alternative communications with the aim of increasing HEF response rates. This report presents results of a large-scale randomised controlled trial (RCT) that took place during the 2017 annual canvass in Hackney and Hull.

### Results

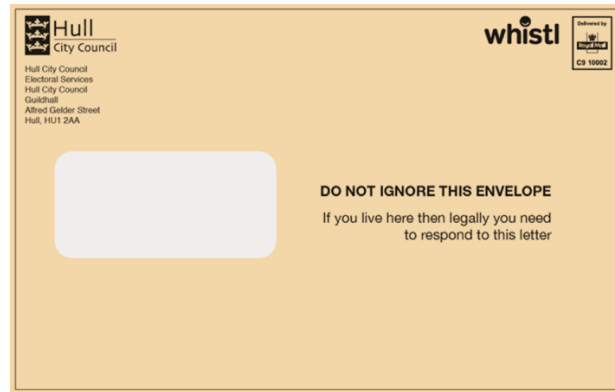
We find that low-cost (or no-cost) changes to HEF communications significantly increase response rates and savings for local authorities.

Our most effective intervention was a modified envelope. Hull and Hackney made different modifications to these envelopes; in Hull, where the envelope was most effective, the envelope was brown, featured the local authority logo on the front, removed all "Your Vote Matters" campaign content, and included a specific note on the front ("DO NOT IGNORE THIS ENVELOPE. If you live here then legally you need to respond to this letter").

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<sup>1</sup> If a register is *accurate*, it contains no false entries. If a register is *complete*, every person living within that jurisdiction who is entitled to have an entry in the register is registered.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/our-work/our-research/research-report-library#registration>



If scaled in a local authority with 100,000 properties, we estimate that the modified envelope would bring forward an additional 3,400 HEF responses and save £5,000 in reminder and canvassing expenses.

Promisingly, exploratory subgroup analysis suggests that the Envelope tested in Hull was **particularly** effective for harder-to-reach households. Of households that did not return the HEF initially in the previous year, initial HEF response rates were 25% higher when they received the Envelope compared to the business-as-usual HEF materials.<sup>3</sup>

While we find a significant increase in initial HEF responses, we find no effect of our interventions on HEF response at the end of the canvassing period or on additions to the register. This suggests that reminder letters and door to door canvassing are effective at bringing households into compliance, and that other interventions may be necessary to increase registrations.

## Recommendations for EROs

1. We **strongly** recommend using our **Envelope** intervention to send HEFs. Specifically, this envelope should...
  - Be brown (if possible)
  - Include a *specific* note on the front of the envelope that highlights the action required (e.g. DO NOT IGNORE THIS ENVELOPE. If you live here then legally you need to respond to this letter)
  - Feature the local authority logo on the front of the envelope
2. Additionally, we recommend using one of the following HEF cover letters:
  - **Easy** – associated with more electronic responses and significantly lower costs.
  - **Costs or Hassle** – associated with higher rates of initial response.

<sup>3</sup> For this harder-to-reach group, note that we do not find a similar significant effect in Hackney, or when we pool the data together across both local authorities. Still, we are confident highlighting this Hull result: the result is highly significant ( $p < 0.01$ ), we have a large sample size ( $N > 11,000$ ), and the Envelope tested in Hull is different from the Envelope tested in Hackney.

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## I. Introduction

### Voter registration and the annual canvass

The electoral register lists the names and addresses of everyone who is registered to vote in public elections. It is used primarily for electoral purposes and helps to ensure that only those eligible can cast votes in elections. Outside of electoral purposes, the register is also used to check credit applications, detect fraud, and call individuals to jury service.

The most recent estimates from December 2017 suggest that 7.8 – 8.3 million people were not correctly registered. The distribution of registration is not random – there are systematic gaps in the completeness of electoral registers across the UK, particularly among younger people, non-home-owners, certain ethnic minorities, EU and Commonwealth citizens, and those classified in the lowest social grades.<sup>4</sup>

In order to keep the electoral register accurate and complete, local authorities conduct an annual canvass, in which Household Enquiry Forms (HEFs) are sent to every household in their jurisdiction in order to confirm the details of those living at the property. Any individuals listed on returned HEFs who are eligible to vote but are not registered will be invited to register.

54 percent of households did not respond to the HEF initially during the 2015 canvass.<sup>5</sup> Local authorities are required by law to send reminders and carry out a door to door canvass, which targets any households that have not returned a HEF. Although the door to door canvass is effective at encouraging HEF responses, it is significantly more expensive than solicitation via letters. There is therefore a strong case for the use of behavioural insights to modify materials provided to local authorities in such a way that the proportion of residents requiring reminders and canvassing is reduced.

### Background to the project

In 2015 the Electoral Commission (EC) partnered with the Behavioural Insights Team (BIT) to develop and trial alternative communications to increase Household Enquiry Form (HEF) response rates in local authorities. Whilst updating the electoral register is the responsibility of local authorities, the HEFs are governed by regulation and provided by the EC. The EC also provides local authorities with templates for the cover letter and envelope. The objective of this project was to develop an evidence base which could inform the design of those templates.

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<sup>4</sup> [http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0005/213377/The-December-2015-electoral-registers-in-Great-Britain-REPORT.pdf](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0005/213377/The-December-2015-electoral-registers-in-Great-Britain-REPORT.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/our-work/our-research/research-report-library#registration>

## THE BEHAVIOURAL INSIGHTS TEAM ♦

The project drew on BIT's prior experience and knowledge of interventions to increase response rates to public communications, and included a literature review which explored additional communications-based approaches to increasing HEF response rates and voter registrations more broadly.

Following the literature review, we worked with the EC, the local authorities of Hull and Hackney, and Professor Peter John – who has pioneered the use of experiments to understand voter behaviour and previously worked with both the Cabinet Office and the EC on initiatives to increase voter registration and turnout – to develop changes to the HEF materials.

The project comprised of three stages:

1. A behavioural literature review, to inform the design of HEF cover letter and envelope templates.
2. The design of several possible templates, in partnership with the EC, for either the cover letter or the envelope which accompany the HEFs.
3. A randomised controlled trial of 10 variants of the templates, across two local authorities.

### Background to the Behavioural Insights Team

The Behavioural Insights Team (BIT) is a social purpose company. We are jointly owned by the UK Government; Nesta (the innovation charity); and our employees. BIT started life inside 10 Downing Street as the world's first government institution dedicated to the application of behavioural sciences. Our objectives have remained the same:

- ♦ making public services more cost-effective and easier for citizens to use;
- ♦ improving outcomes by introducing a more realistic model of human behaviour to policy; and wherever possible,
- ♦ enabling people to make 'better choices for themselves'

We do this by redesigning public services and drawing on ideas from the behavioural science literature. We are also highly empirical; we test and trial these ideas before they are scaled up, so we can understand what works and (importantly) what does not work.

### Outline of the report

This report summarises the work and findings across the three stages of the project. First, we present the interventions that we designed.<sup>6</sup> We then present an outline of the trial procedure and evaluation, and a summary of the results. Finally, the conclusion

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<sup>6</sup> These interventions were driven by findings from the literature review, which can be found in the appendix.



draws together insights from the project as a whole and recommendations for next steps.

## II. Trial

We used the findings from the literature review alongside the existing research and expertise of both the EC and BIT to design a series of adaptations to the communications accompanying the HEF. We then partnered with two local authorities (LAs), Hackney and Hull, to run a trial testing the impact of these changes on subsequent registration rates.

Both Hackney and Hull had initially low response rates to the HEF but dissimilar demographic profiles – Hackney with a young, ethnically diverse population and Hull with a significantly older, 90 per cent white population. Further information on the demographic breakdown and previous HEF response rates in both Hackney and Hull can be found in the appendix.

### Intervention design

Building on the findings of the literature review, as well as on research conducted by the EC and BIT's prior work, we developed a long-list of possible adaptations to the HEF materials sent by local authorities. The changes were primarily focused on changes to the cover letter accompanying the HEF, with possible adaptations to the envelope also presented.

In consultation with both Hackney and Hull we reduced these to nine alternatives which would be trialled against the business as usual "control" communications. One of these – including a testimonial from a local icon – was only trialled in Hull as Hackney did not identify a candidate for the testimonial. This led to ten variants (including the control) being trialled in Hull and nine variants being trialled in Hackney.

The adaptations trialled were the following:

- |                    |                                   |
|--------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1. Control         | 6. Call to action                 |
| 2. Envelope        | 7. Costs                          |
| 3. Hassle          | 8. Voting picture                 |
| 4. Friendly hassle | 9. Social norms                   |
| 5. Easy            | 10. Local testimonial (Hull only) |

A description of each adaptation trialled is below, with copies of the materials used in the appendix.

## 1. Control

Hackney and Hull LAs have slight differences in their HEF cover letters, but broadly the language and messaging used is comparable. Both letters mention the possibility of a £1,000 fine for non-response, and Hackney's letter notes that being on the electoral register can improve one's credit rating. However, neither form lists a due date.

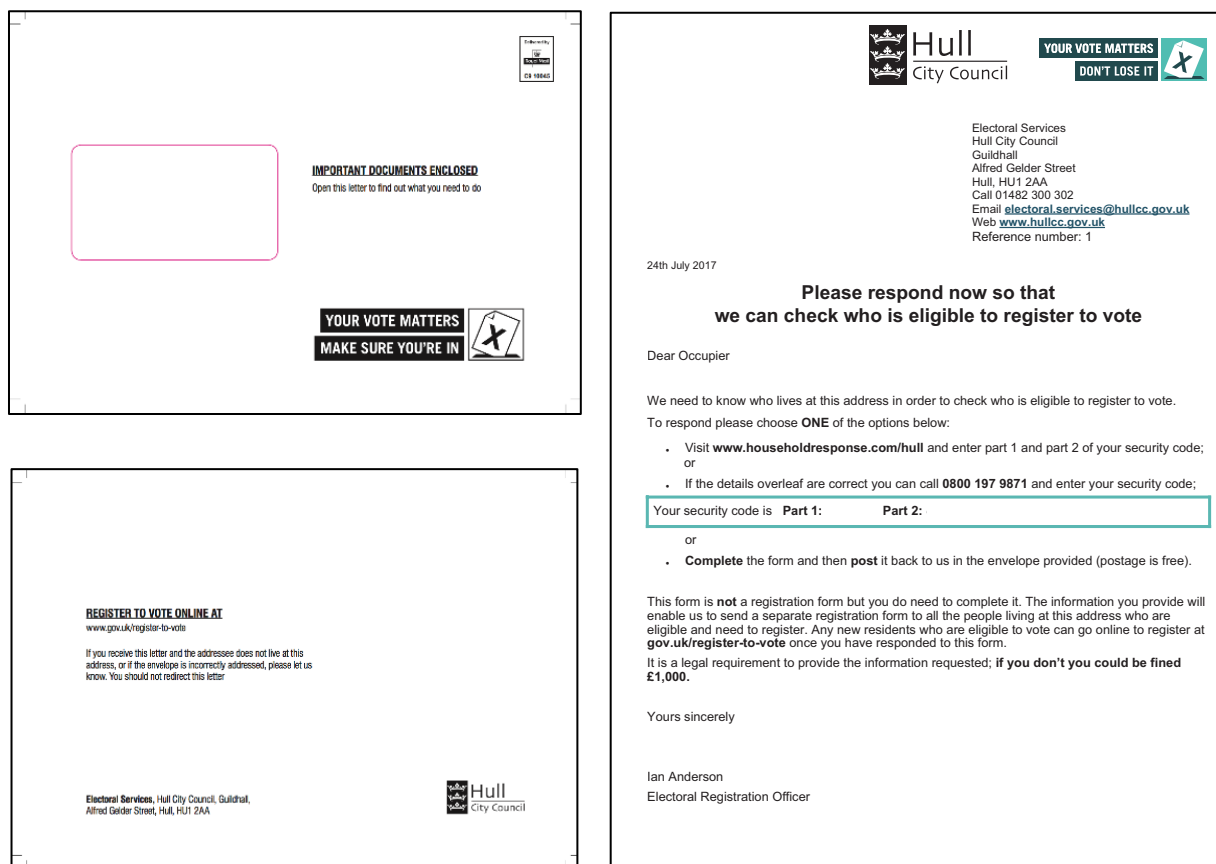
Both boroughs use white envelopes. For Hackney, the envelope uses the LA logo on the front and a "Your Vote Matters" logo (and related text) on the rear. Hull's envelopes feature the "Your Vote Matters" logo on the front and the LA logo on the rear, with additional text on the front reading:

### **IMPORTANT DOCUMENTS ENCLOSED**

Open this letter to find out what you need to do

All adaptations to the letters will contain most (if not all) of the content in the control letter, and all (except the Envelope condition) will use the standard envelopes used by the respective LA. Examples of the letters and envelopes used by Hull are below, more detailed versions of both Hull and Hackney can be found in the appendix.

*Figure 1: Standard envelope and letter for Hull*



## 2. Envelope

If recipients don't open the envelope, it is impossible for them to respond to the HEF. We therefore trialled the impact of changing the envelope design. There were two key changes:

### 1. Brown envelopes (Hull only)

Qualitative research commissioned by the EC in 2014 concluded that a brown envelope, when compared with the standard white envelope that contained electoral materials, "attracted immediate attention from almost everyone because it was brown."<sup>7</sup> Hackney's printers were not able to process the brown envelopes, and so brown envelopes were used in Hull and white envelopes in Hackney.

### 2. Changes to the content of the envelope

In order to make clear to residents that the contents of the letter required a response, we added the following message to the front of the envelope:

**DO NOT IGNORE THIS ENVELOPE**

If you live here then legally you need to respond to this letter.

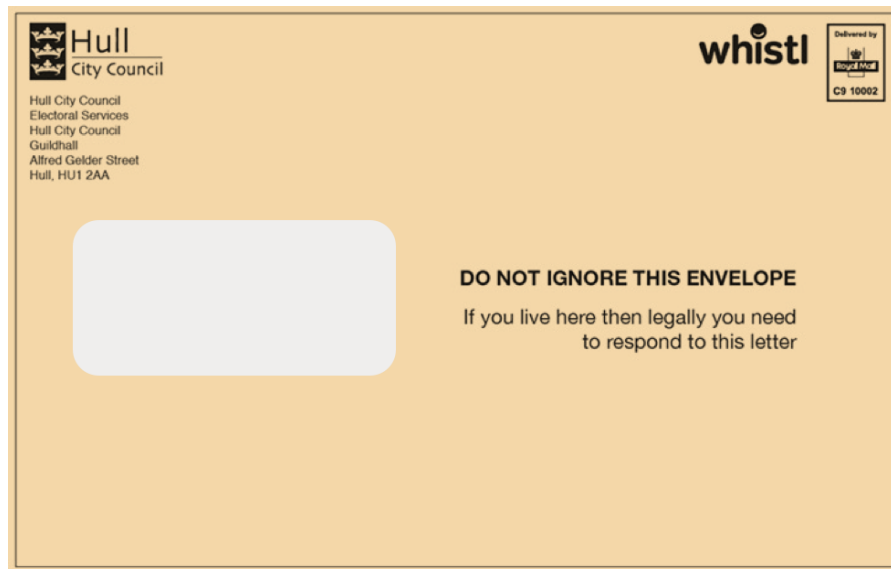
In addition, we moved Hull's council logo from the back of the envelope to the front (Hackney already used their logo on the front). This was guided by findings from the EC's qualitative research that recipients preferred to know where the correspondence was coming from and that correspondence which looked more official would hold greater appeal.

Finally, Hull removed all content related to the "Your Vote Matters" campaign. Hackney retained this content, which was located on the back of the envelope.

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<sup>7</sup> [http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0005/167153/IER-Letter-testing-Qualitative-research-Report.pdf](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0005/167153/IER-Letter-testing-Qualitative-research-Report.pdf)

Figure 2: Example envelope used in Hull



### 3. Hassle

Procrastination is a major obstacle to the timely completion of many tasks, including the completion of forms such as those necessary for voter registration. This is usually characterised as a problem of self-control where people prioritise activities that provide immediate gratification rather than ones with longer-term payoffs. We hypothesised that by making the future hassle created by failing to complete the form more salient, individuals would be more likely to prioritise completion of the form.

This adaptation added the following message to the standard letter:

All households are legally required to respond to this letter. **If you don't, we are required by law to send you two reminder letters. If we still don't receive a response we are then required to send someone to your address to collect the necessary information.**

### 4. Friendly hassle

Looking again at reducing procrastination, we tested the alternative hypothesis that emphasising the ending of the task and how quickly it could be completed could lead individuals who might otherwise procrastinate to instead complete the task as quickly as possible to get it over with and move on to other, more enjoyable, activities. The language used in this message also adopted a friendlier tone, with the following message added to the standard letter:

Hull City Council spends months finding out who is eligible to vote, sending multiple pieces of mail to non-respondents and even making door-to-door visits. **You can get this process over with by completing a single action today. Do it now to save both you and us the hassle!**

## 5. Easy

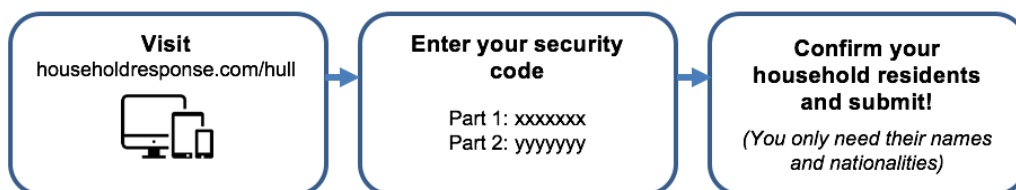
We hypothesised that perceived task difficulty may be causing residents to put off responding to the HEF, potentially forgetting about it altogether. In this adaptation we made it easier for the recipient to identify the steps required and emphasised how easy it was to complete the task in a number of ways:

1. The adaptation features a simplified “call to action”. It highlights the easiest method of HEF return: online return.
2. The adaptation tells recipients that it takes just 3 minutes to complete.
3. The adaptation contains an image that captures the (minimal) steps involved in completing and submitting the HEF online. It notes only names and nationalities of household members are needed.

The message still notes other methods of returning the form and which methods are appropriate depending on whether the details on the form are correct or require updating.

The following message was added to the standard letter:

The easiest way to complete the form is online. **It takes just 3 minutes:**



You can also complete the form by post (postage is free). If your details are included on the form and are correct, you can confirm them in one step by phone or text message. For details, see the “How do you want to respond?” section at the top of the form.

## 6. Call to action

Similarly to the above, this intervention letter separates out the call to action in order to make the response choices clearer. For those whose form is correct, the process is extremely easy (and they have more options about how they can respond); for those who need to update details, they can reply by post or online.

In addition, it draws on reciprocity, noting that the form has been pre-filled where possible in order to reduce the effort required by households. LAs are hoping that, in return, households will feel more compelled to complete the form.

The following text was added to the standard letter:

To make responding as easy as possible, we have pre-filled a form with the details of who is currently registered to vote at your property.

### If the form is correct...

You can confirm this with us easily. Please choose one of the following options:

- **Online:** Visit [www.householdresponse.com/hackney](http://www.householdresponse.com/hackney) and enter your security code
- **Text** NOCHANGE followed by your security code to **80212**
- **Call 0800 197 9871** and when prompted enter your security code
- **Post:** Sign the form and then post it back to us in the envelope provided (postage is free)

### If you need to update your household details (or if the form is blank)...

You can do so **online** at [www.householdresponse.com/hackney](http://www.householdresponse.com/hackney) or by **post** (see the form for details).

## 7. Costs

Making costs salient for individuals can influence behaviour, even when costs are distributed amongst taxpayers and not borne solely by the individual. A BIT trial that included information about the cost of missing a hospital appointment in the UK significantly increased compliance rates (i.e. reduced missed appointments).

This intervention highlights the costs of non-compliance to the taxpayers during the annual canvass and frames the amount in terms of another council expense that people care about – in Hull’s case, homecare for elderly, sick or disabled people in Hull.

In Hull, the following message was added to the standard letter:

All local authorities are required by law to send reminder letters and pay visits to households that don’t return this form. Last year this cost us **over £100,000**. The same amount of money could buy **7,000 hours of homecare for elderly, sick or disabled people in Hull**. Please return this form so we can spend our money on local services such as these instead.

Hackney council were concerned about giving a specific figure for the cost of the canvass, so in Hackney the following message was added to the standard letter:

All local authorities are required by law to send reminder letters and pay visits to households that don’t return this form. This costs Hackney Council time and money. **Please return this form so we can devote these resources to local services instead.**

### 8. Voting picture

Images are a salient and fast way of conveying information. Previous BIT trials have demonstrated that adding images to otherwise identical communications can influence behaviour significantly. For example, an email trial with HMRC found that adding an image of a colleague that donates through payroll giving more than doubled the likelihood that an employee signed up for payroll giving.<sup>8</sup>

In this adaptation we added the below photo of a polling station to increase the attention paid to the letter and quickly convey its purpose.



### 9. Social norms

We anticipated that residents would have fairly low expectations in terms of the proportion of households that actually return the HEF, and that by informing them of what the return rate actually is, we may boost initial HEF responses.

We used the 2016 national HEF return rate after all canvassing activities, including door-to-door canvassing, have concluded. This return rate was 87.8%, or roughly 9 out of 10. The following message was added to the standard letter:

Local authorities send out forms every year, and last year **9 out of 10 households in England returned this form.**

### 10. Local testimonial (Hull only)

Many partisan and nonpartisan political campaigns leverage the power of celebrity to encourage voter participation (e.g. "[Rock the Vote](#)", political endorsements from other candidates).

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<sup>8</sup> BIT (2013). Applying behavioural insights to charitable giving. Cabinet Office.  
[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/203286/BIT\\_Charitable\\_Giving\\_Paper.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/203286/BIT_Charitable_Giving_Paper.pdf)

Previous BIT trials have shown that messages delivered through trusted messengers increase take-up of pro-social behaviours, including donations to charity.<sup>9</sup>

Hull will test whether a testimonial from a well-known, respected resident (the Bee Lady<sup>10</sup>) increases response rates and voter registrations. The following was added to the standard letter:

**Jean Bishop, Hull's iconic and much-loved Bee Lady, had this to say about voting:**

*"I have lived in Hull all of my life and have voted in every election I could. I have always felt that it is important to have my say in elections as it's a chance for my voice to be heard. Every single vote can make a difference to the way our city and country is run."*

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<sup>9</sup> Sanders, M., 2017. Social influences on charitable giving in the workplace. *Journal of Behavioral and Experimental Economics*, 66, pp.129-136.


<sup>10</sup> For background on Jean Bishop, see <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/uk-38623179/jean-bishop-has-collected-100000-for-charity-by-dressing-as-a-bee>



## Summary table of interventions

We summarise the interventions tested below.

Condition	Description / supplementary text
1. Control	<p>This will be the standard cover letter currently sent by each LA. All letters will contain most (if not all) of the Control content.</p> <p>The HEF and cover letter will be sent in a white envelope with either: the Hackney logo on the front and the "Your Vote Matters" logo (and related text) on the rear (Hackney); or the "Your Vote Matters" logo on the front and the Hull logo on the rear (Hull).</p>
2. Envelope	<p>The front of the envelope contains the LA logo and the text:</p> <p><b>DO NOT IGNORE THIS ENVELOPE</b> If you live here then legally you need to respond to this letter.</p> <p>In Hull, brown envelopes were used instead of white, and all "Your Vote Matters" content was removed. The reverse of the envelope has standard text from LA.</p>
3. Hassle	<p><b>All households are legally required to respond to this letter.</b> If you don't, we are required by law to send you two reminder letters. If we still don't receive a response we are then required to send someone to your address to collect the necessary information.</p>
4. Friendly hassle	<p>Hull City Council spends months finding out who is eligible to vote, sending multiple pieces of mail to non-respondents and even making door-to-door visits. <b>You can get this process over with by completing a single action today. Do it now to save both you and us the hassle!</b></p>
5. Easy	<p>The easiest way to complete the form is online. <b>It takes just 3 minutes:</b></p>  <pre> graph LR     A[Visit householdresponse.com/hull] --&gt; B[Enter your security code Part 1: xxxxxx Part 2: yyyyyy]     B --&gt; C[Confirm your household residents and submit! (You only need their names and nationalities)]   </pre> <p>You can also complete the form by post (postage is free). If your details are included on the form and are correct, you can confirm them in one step by phone or text message. For details, see the "How do you want to respond?" section at the top of the form.</p>
6. Call to action	<p>To make responding as easy as possible, we have pre-filled a form with the details of who is currently registered to vote at your property.</p> <p><b>If the form is correct...</b> You can confirm this with us easily. Please choose one of the following options:  <b>Online:</b> Visit <a href="http://www.householdresponse.com/hackney">www.householdresponse.com/hackney</a> and enter your security code  <b>Text</b> NOCHANGE followed by your security code to <b>80212</b>  <b>Call</b> <b>0800 197 9871</b> and when prompted enter your security code  <b>Post:</b> Sign the form and then post it back to us in the envelope provided (postage is free)</p> <p><b>If you need to update your household details (or if the form is blank)...</b></p>

	You can do so <b>online</b> at <a href="http://www.householdresponse.com/hackney">www.householdresponse.com/hackney</a> or by <b>post</b> (see the form for details).
7. Costs	<p><b>Hackney:</b> All local authorities are required by law to send reminder letters and pay visits to households that don't return this form. This costs Hackney Council time and money. <b>Please return this form so we can devote these resources to local services instead.</b></p> <p><b>Hull:</b> All local authorities are required by law to send reminder letters and pay visits to households that don't return this form. Last year this cost us <b>over £100,000</b>. The same amount of money could buy <b>7,000 hours of homecare for elderly, sick or disabled people in Hull</b>. Please return this form so we can spend our money on local services such as these instead.</p>
8. Voting picture (generic)	
9. Social norms	Local authorities send out forms every year, and last year <b>9 out of 10 households in England returned this form.</b>
10. Local testimonial	<p><b>Jean Bishop, Hull's iconic and much-loved Bee Lady, had this to say about voting:</b>  <i>"I have lived in Hull all of my life and have voted in every election I could. I have always felt that it is important to have my say in elections as it's a chance for my voice to be heard. Every single vote can make a difference to the way our city and country is run."</i></p> <p>(This was only tested in Hull.)</p>

## Trial design

### Sample and randomisation

All households in Hackney Council and Hull City Council, excluding special properties (e.g. nursing homes, student halls, etc.), were included in the trial. Special properties comprise 1.5% of households in Hackney and 3% in Hull; these were excluded due to IT constraints (rather than concerns that they would not respond). This meant our final sample was 110,569 households in Hackney and 115,955 households in Hull.

Households were individually randomised to one of the ten intervention arms (nine in Hackney). Randomisation was conducted separately for Hackney and Hull and was stratified on (1) the number of people registered at the household at the start of the trial, and (2) whether the household returned the HEF last year without a reminder. This ensures that the intervention groups were balanced along these characteristics.

### Outcome measures

Our **primary outcome** is whether a household returned the HEF before the first reminder was sent (this was one month in Hackney and 7.5 weeks in Hull). Increasing initial responses to the HEF was deemed to be the most important goal of the project, with the most potential to save local authorities time and money spent on the annual canvass.

However, we used several secondary outcome measures to evaluate other, more specific, impacts that the interventions may have had. These were:

- ◆ Whether the HEF was returned at all (by 1<sup>st</sup> December, following all canvassing activities)
  - This will tell us if letters increased responses overall or simply brought responses forward.
- ◆ Whether the HEF was returned electronically
  - Paper forms are costly for local authorities to process. Increases in electronic responses (e.g. online, SMS, phone) can be processed at by local authorities at lower cost, so increasing these types of responses is beneficial.
- ◆ Whether the HEF was returned and had no change
  - There might be a misperception of who needs to return the form. If we find increases in these types of responses, the materials may be successful in terms of clarifying what the desired behaviour is.
- ◆ The number of additions/deletions to the electoral register per property

- Increasing voter registrations (additions) and improving the accuracy of the register (deletions) are goals of all parties involved.

### Analytical strategy

Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regressions were used to test the effect of the treatments on our outcome measures.

Our primary analysis model for HEF returns took the following form:

$$\text{ReturnedHEF}_i = \alpha + \text{Letters}_i \Gamma + \beta_1 \text{HEFlastyr}_i + \beta_2 \text{Registrations}_i + \beta_3 \text{Hackney}_i + \varepsilon_i$$

Where:

*ReturnedHEF<sub>i</sub>* is a binary variable that captures whether or not household *i* returned the HEF before the first reminder;

*Letters<sub>i</sub>* denotes a vector of binary variables that indicating the intervention group for household *i*;

*HEFlastyr<sub>i</sub>* is a binary variable that indicates whether the household returned the HEF after the initial prompt in 2016;

*Registrations<sub>i</sub>* is a count variable that captures how many individuals living at the property were fully on the electoral register at the start of the trial;

*Hackney<sub>i</sub>* is a binary indicator that takes the value of 1 if the household is from Hackney (this term captures LA fixed effects); and

*ε<sub>i</sub>* is a heteroskedasticity robust error term.

To account for the fact that we were performing significance tests across ten treatment arms we made adjustments for multiple comparisons using the Hochberg Step-Up procedure. This raises the threshold required for a result to be deemed significant. The cut-offs used can be found in the appendix.

## Results

### HEF forms returned

When analysis was conducted by LA, the Envelope was the only intervention for which there was a positive and statistically significant effect on HEFs returned before further canvassing began. It is notable that this effect is larger in the case of Hull, with a 5 percentage point increase (10%) in HEF response compared to a 1.9 percentage point (7%) increase in Hackney.

Figure 3: Likelihood of returning the initial HEF within 7.5 weeks (Hull)

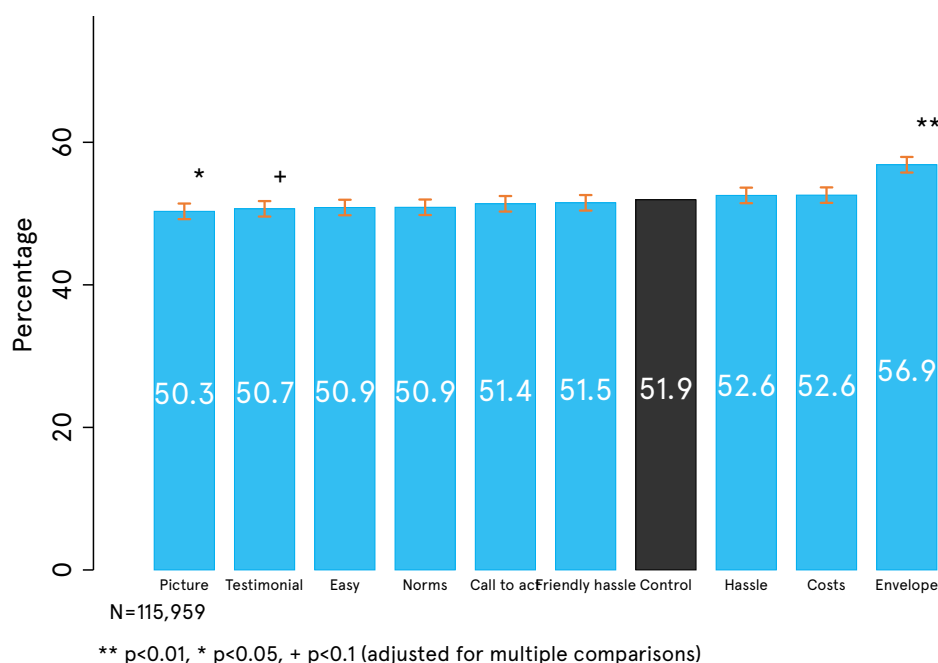
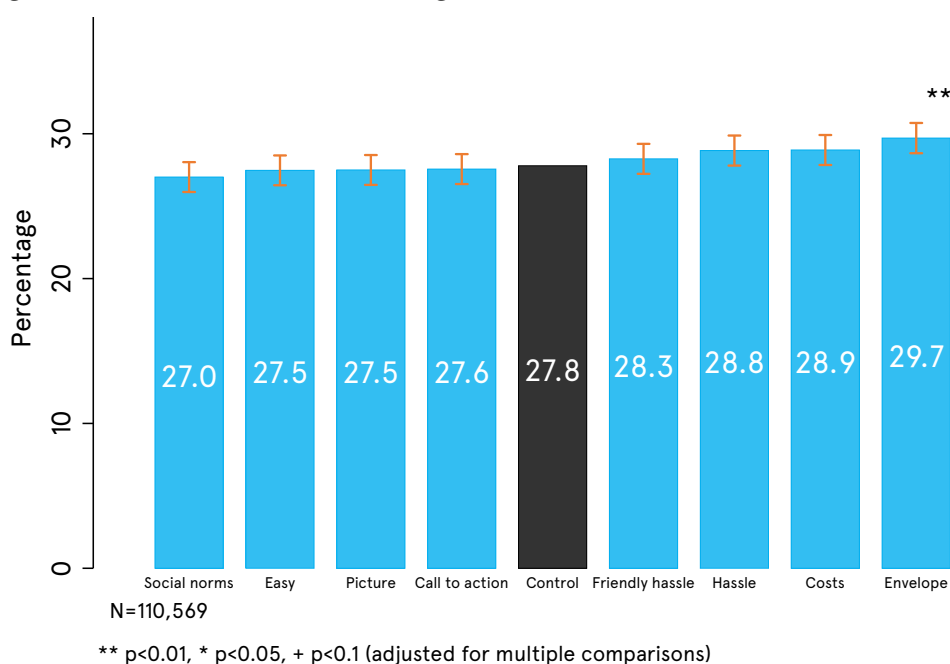
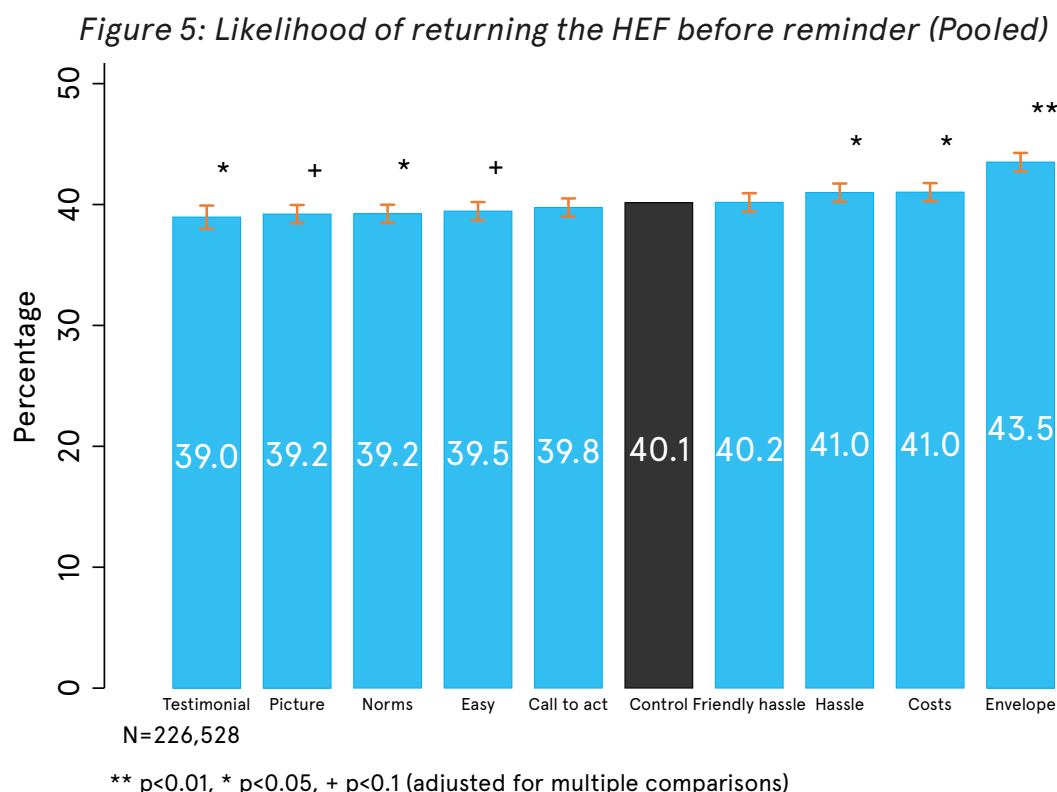


Figure 4: Likelihood of returning the initial HEF within 1 month (Hackney)



In the pooled analysis, both the Hassle and Costs message were also found to have a positive, statistically significant effect, reflecting the fact that they outperformed the Control in both LAs. Other interventions, such as the Local Testimonial and the Social Norms message, led to significantly fewer HEFs returned before additional canvassing began.



To put these effects in more tangible terms, if the Envelope were scaled up in a local authority with 100,000 properties, we estimate that it would produce 3,400 additional initial HEF returns.

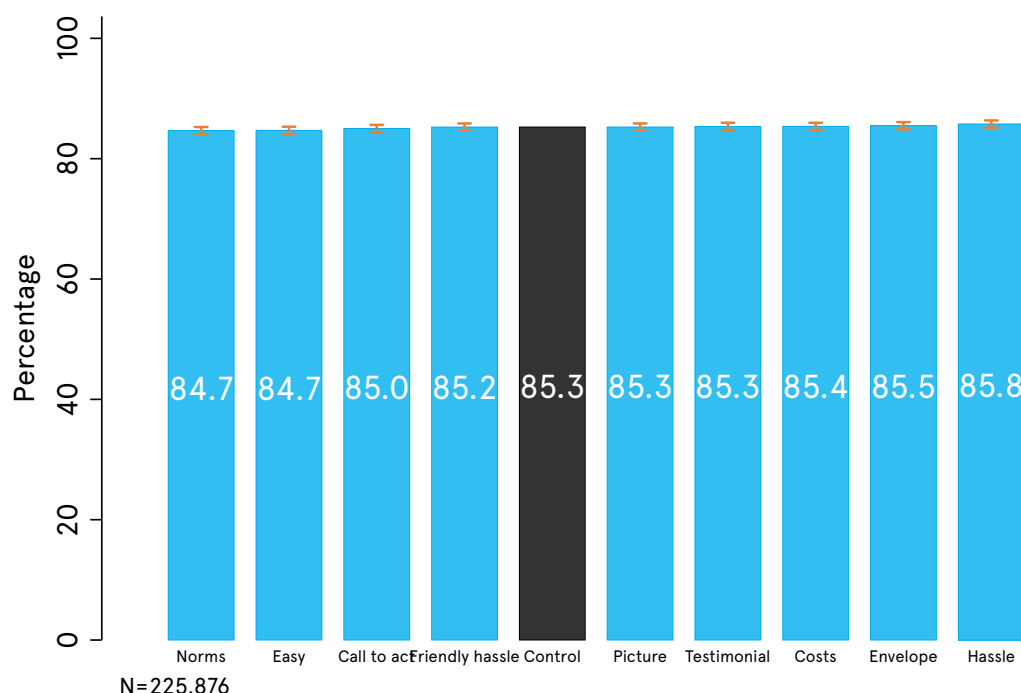
Promisingly, exploratory subgroup analysis revealed that the Envelope was particularly effective for households who did not respond to the HEF *initially* in the previous year in Hull.<sup>11</sup> The initial HEF response rate for households that did not respond initially last year and received the Envelope was 32.8%, while the same types of households receiving the Control had an initial response rate of 25.9% (p < 0.01). This represents a 25% increase in initial HEF response rates and suggests that some interventions may have a significant increase on harder-to-reach groups.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> While we are confident in this Hull result, given our large group sizes and the degree of statistical significance, it is worth noting that we do not find a significant effect of the Envelope for harder-to-reach groups in Hackney, or when the local authorities are pooled.

<sup>12</sup> We also conducted further exploratory analysis to test whether any interventions were particularly effective for properties that didn't return the HEF *at all* in the previous year. The Hassle message showed

Unfortunately, the impacts on HEF returns were only observed in the period before canvassing. Following the end of the canvass, there was no longer a significant impact of any of the interventions on HEF response, relative to the standard Control communications.<sup>13</sup> This suggests that our interventions simply brought responses forward, and that the reminders and door to door canvass are effective in terms of getting responses from households that are *initially* non-compliant.

Figure 6: Likelihood of returning the HEF by end of canvass (Pooled)



\*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05, + p<0.1 (adjusted for multiple comparisons)

## Return methods

In both Hackney and Hull, the proportion of households that returned the HEF electronically before any reminders or door-to-door canvassing was significantly increased by the Easy letter, which highlighted the online method of return. In Hackney, the Envelope intervention and the Call to Action also significantly increased initial electronic HEF returns.

some promise in terms of initial HEF response – while it was not particularly successful for households that did return the HEF in the previous year, it was more effective for households that didn't return the HEF previously ( $p = 0.09$ ). However, it is still not as effective as the Envelope for this hard-to-reach group – that effect is significant and positive across the board. Finally, note that we do not adjust for multiple comparisons in exploratory analysis.

<sup>13</sup> Results for Hull and Hackney presented separately can be found in the appendix

Figure 7: Likelihood of returning HEF electronically within 1 month (Hackney)

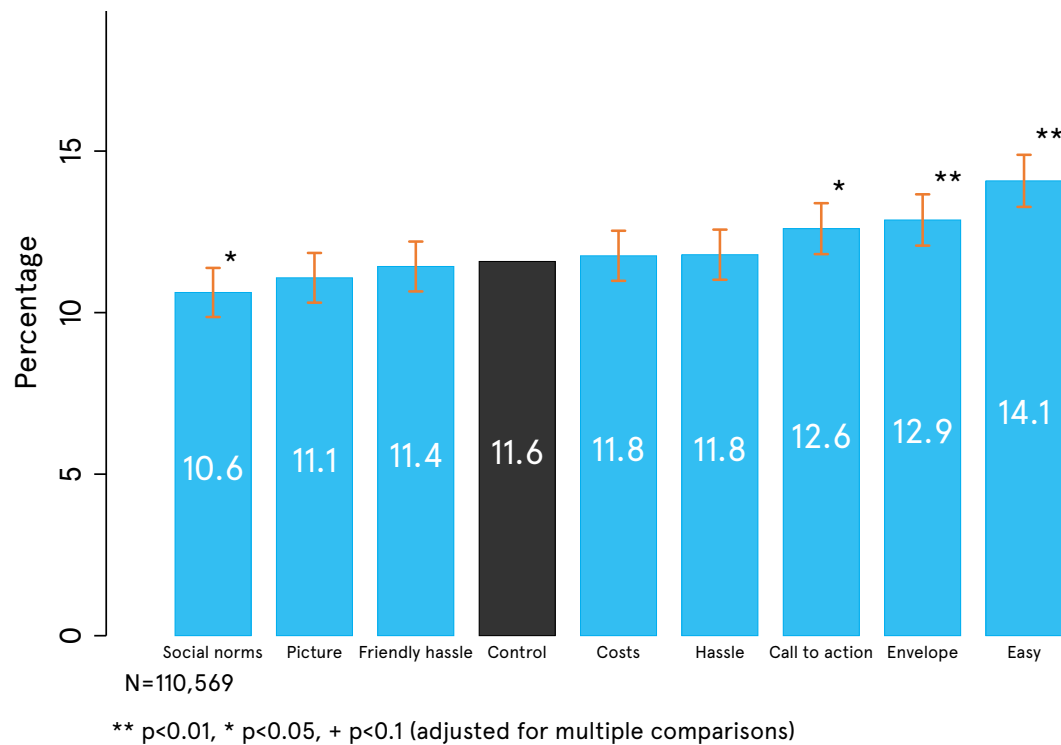
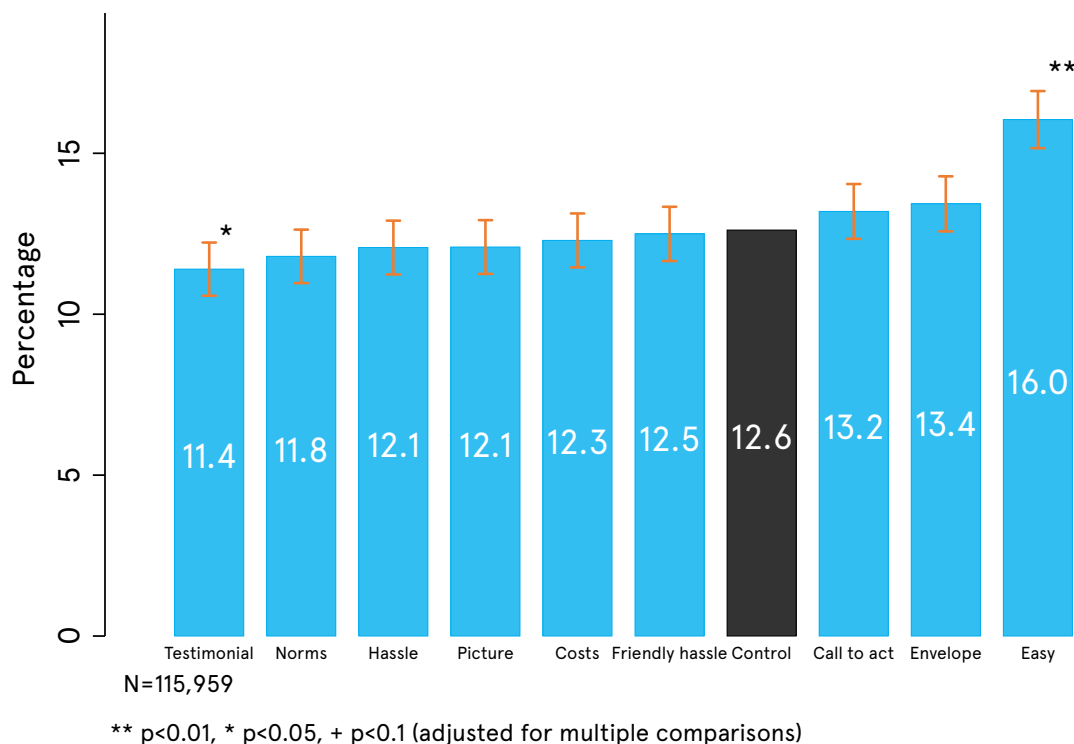


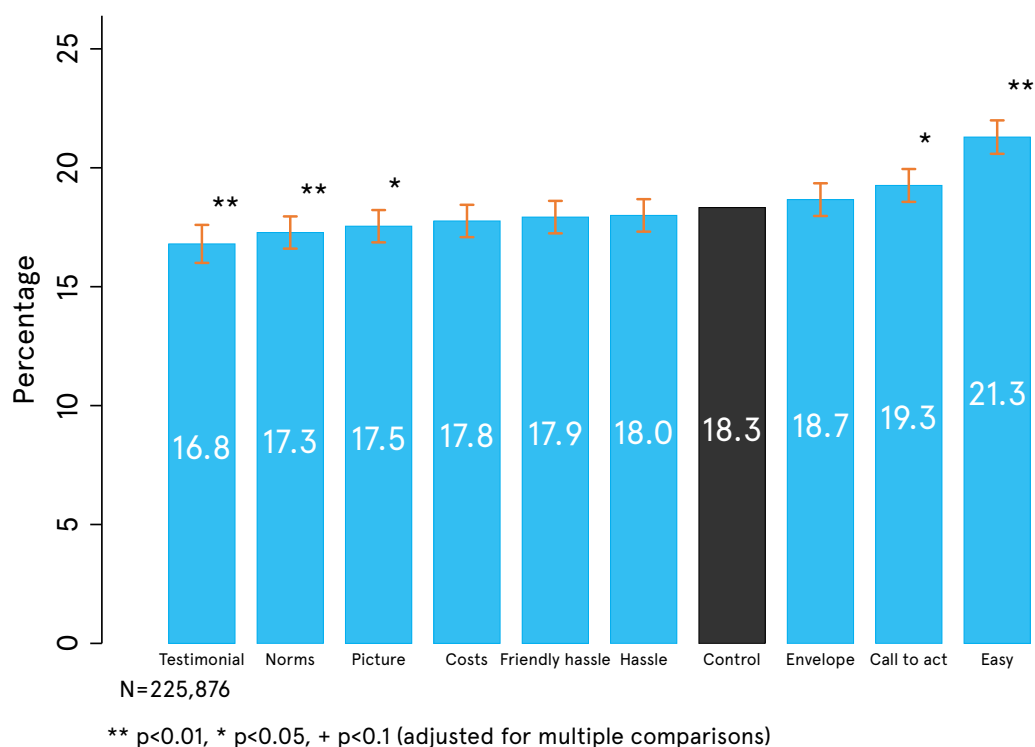
Figure 8: Likelihood of returning HEF electronically within 7.5 weeks (Hull)



At the end of the annual canvass, we find that the Easy and Call to action letters significantly increased electronic HEF returns. To put the size of the effect in tangible terms, if the Easy message were scaled up in a local authority with 100,000 properties, we estimate that it would result in an additional 3,000 HEFs submitted electronically.



Figure 9: Likelihood of returning HEF electronically by end of canvass (Pooled)

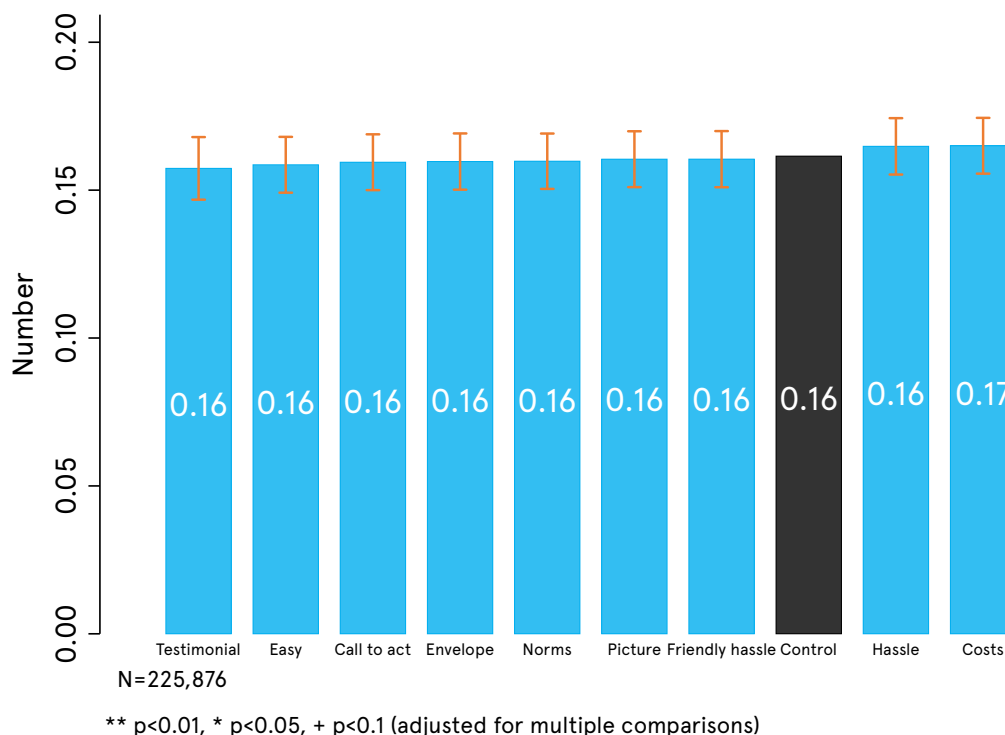


### Additions, deletions, and HEFs returned with no change forms

Unfortunately, we are unable to measure deletions to the register at the end of the canvassing period. Data on deletions was overwritten at the end of the canvassing period and we did not request data from the local authorities at the appropriate time.

In terms of additions to the register, we find no effect of any of our interventions.

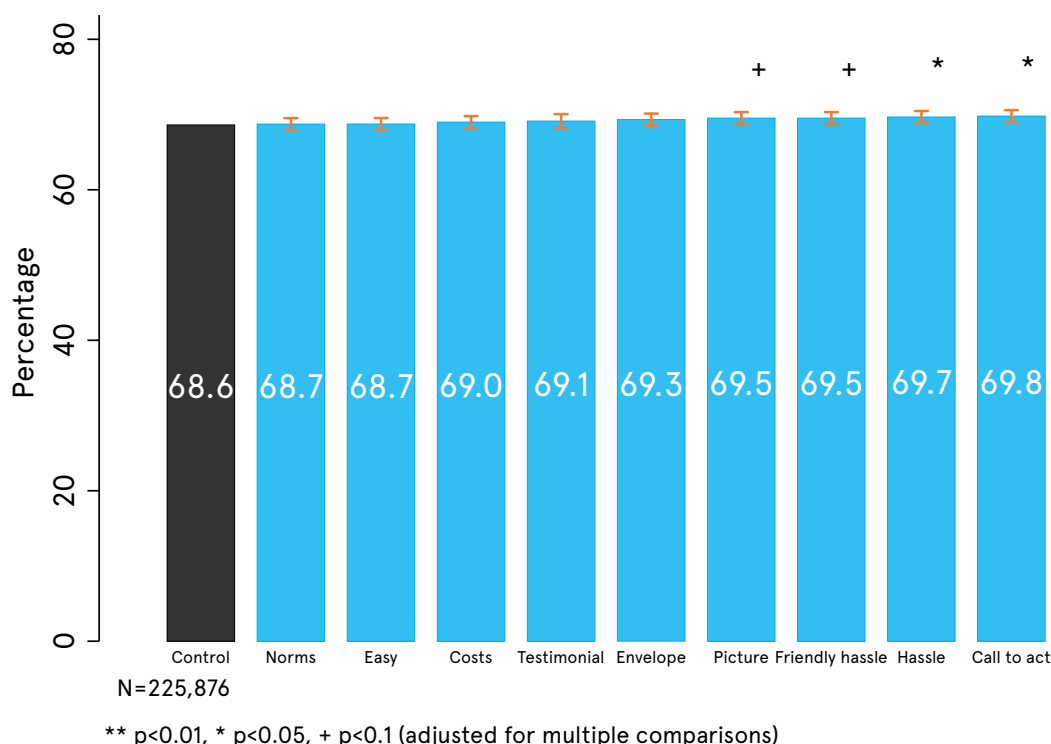
Figure 10: Number of additions to the register, per property, by end of canvass (Pooled)



The EC suspected that low responses rates to the HEF could potentially be explained by confusion over who should return it. Specifically, the EC suspected that properties whose residents did not change within the past year may believe (mistakenly) that there is no need for them to return the HEF, since their property has undergone no change.

We therefore analyse the likelihood that properties return the HEF and report no change. At the end of the canvassing period, we find that the Call to Action and Hassle messages have significantly higher rates of properties returning the HEF with no change. However, none of the differences observed are much larger than about 1 percentage point.

Figure 11: Proportion of properties that return HEF with no change, by end of canvass (Pooled)



## Cost-effectiveness

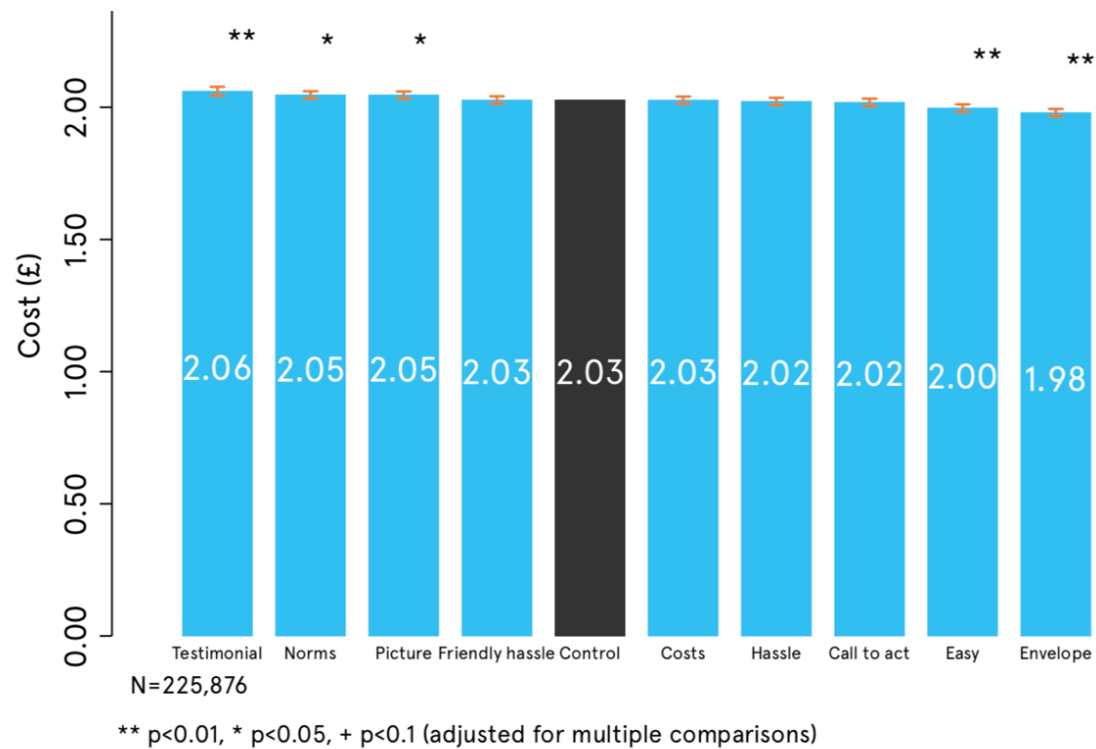
We conduct a cost-effectiveness analysis of our interventions. Full details on costs can be found in the appendix, but generally speaking, we assign the following costs to the annual canvass:

- Printing and postage of letters (£0.40 – £0.50 per letter)
- Wages of door-to-door canvassers (£1.10 – £1.30 per property)
- Return postage (£0.34 – £0.47 per postal return)
- Cost of staff time spent processing paper HEFs (£0.72 per postal return)

We present the results of this cost-effectiveness analysis in terms of the cost per property. We find that the Envelope intervention is the most effective intervention across both local authorities.

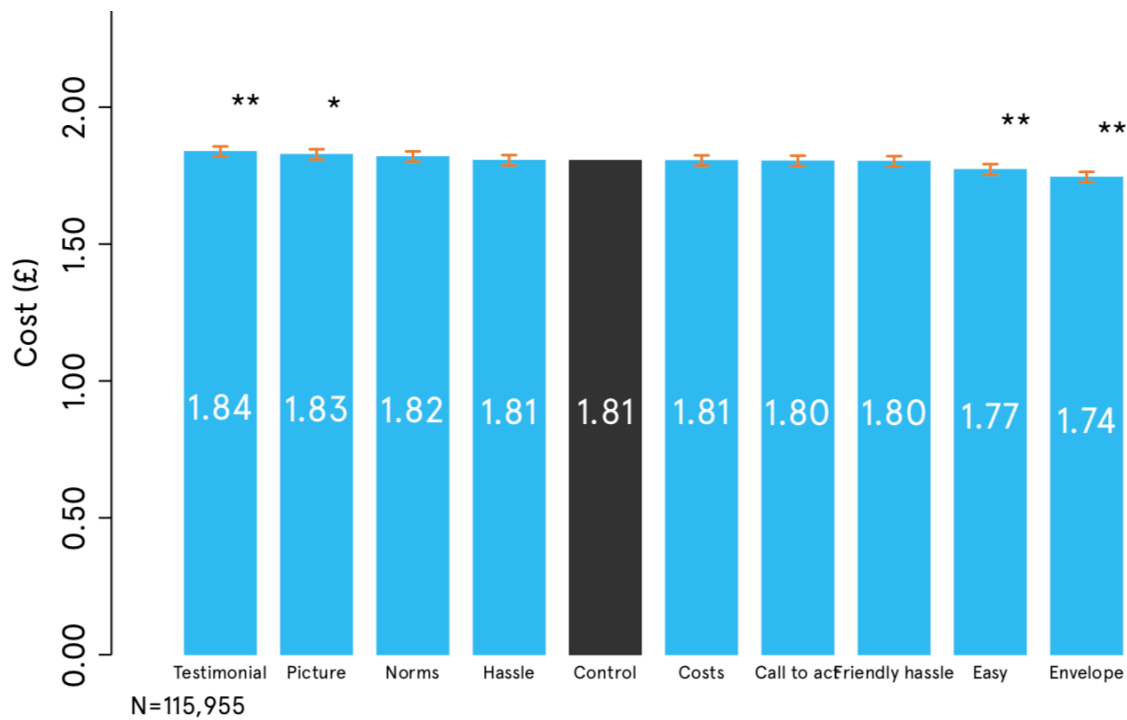
In our pooled analysis, the total canvassing spending per property was about 2.5% less for properties that received the Envelope. This would equate to savings of £5,000 per 100,000 properties per year.

Figure 12: Cost of annual canvass per property (Pooled)



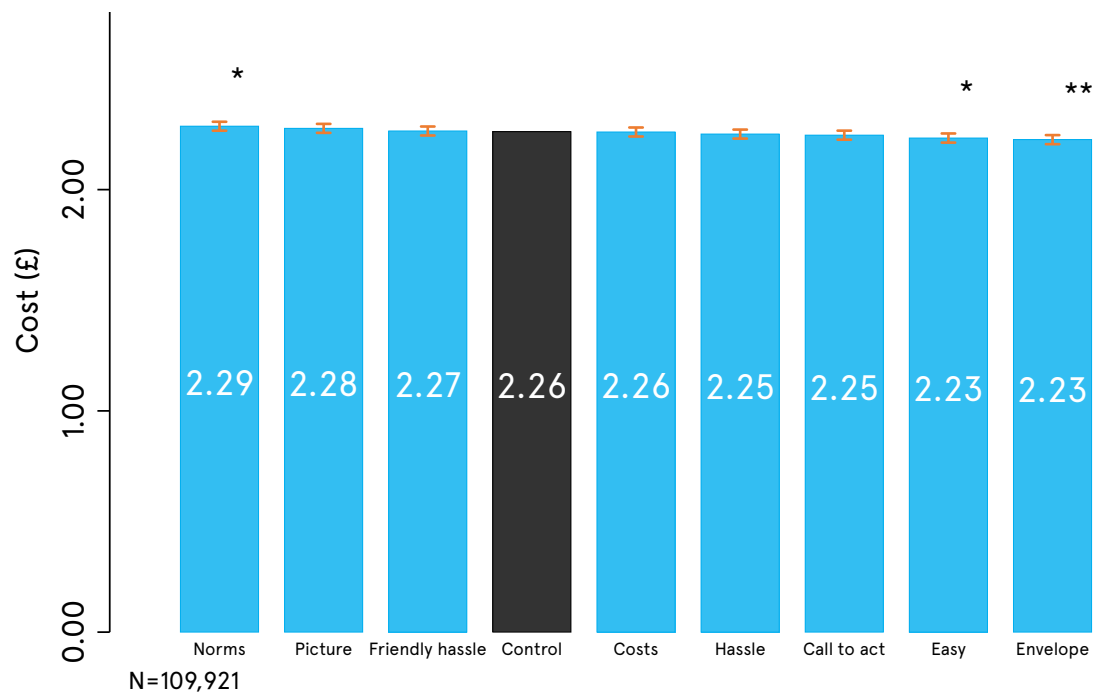
Similar to the results on initial returns, we find that our letters produce more cost savings in Hull than in Hackney. This is primarily driven by the increase in initial returns.

Figure 13: Cost of annual canvass per property (Hull)



\*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05, + p<0.1 (adjusted for multiple comparisons)

Figure 14: Cost of annual canvass per property (Hackney)



\*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05, + p<0.1 (adjusted for multiple comparisons)

### III. Conclusion

Our trial tested low-cost (or no-cost) interventions aimed at improving the efficiency of the annual electoral canvass. We find strong evidence that different interventions can significantly increase response rates.

Modified envelopes are particularly effective at increasing initial response rates and generating cost savings. One interpretation of this is that it is the envelope in the first instance that acts as a barrier to compliance, perhaps because the majority of people who have just picked up their mail may have a tendency to flick through and prioritise mail that looks important. We recommend that local authorities adopt the most effective modified envelope, which was tested in Hull. Future work could explore further modifications to envelopes with the aim of further increasing initial HEF responses.

A number of letters also show promise in terms of increasing initial response rates (Costs, Hassle) and shifting HEF responses from postal returns to electronic returns, which are easier to process (Easy, Call to Action). Depending on their priorities, local authorities may wish to adopt one of these letter templates for future canvasses. Providing local authorities with two to three choices of HEF cover letters, and information related to the benefits of the letters, may increase their likelihood of selecting one for their canvass.

We did not examine the additive effects of our interventions – in other words, we did not test the extent to which our interventions, when used together, increased HEF response rates. To our knowledge, this was the first randomised controlled trial that tested whether modified communications could increase HEF response rates. Given our lack of knowledge about what works in this area, we decided to test many different types of interventions separately, rather than combining a smaller number of interventions together in various combinations. Since our current research has identified several behavioural levers that seem to impact HEF response rates, these ‘kitchen sink’ style interventions may be an interesting avenue to explore for future trials.

Broadly speaking, our results suggest that messages focussed on compliance—and the negative consequences of noncompliance—are more effective in encouraging timely HEF response than messages that more closely resemble marketing and appeal to recipients’ attitudes (e.g. pictures and testimonials).

Promisingly, we find some evidence that certain interventions (e.g. the Envelope) are particularly effective for harder-to-reach groups. In Hull, the Envelope increased response rates from 25.9% to 32.8% for households that did not respond to the initial HEF in the previous year. In relative terms, this represents an increase of more than 25% in initial response rates.

We were limited in our ability to conduct further subgroup analysis, given our fairly limited data. However, future research could investigate whether certain interventions

are particularly effective for the groups that are disproportionately underrepresented on the register. For example, data sources like the Index of Multiple Deprivation may help identify households that are likelier to be economically deprived, and council tax data may be able to identify households with younger residents.

Our interventions did not increase response rates overall by the end of the canvass, nor did they result in additional registrations. These results are in line with previous work conducted by BIT in Southwark, which tested the effect of lotteries on voter registrations and found that these interventions bring forward registrations and responses, but do not raise the overall level of responses and registrations.<sup>14</sup> In order to encourage registration, we believe that different approaches are needed. These could perhaps be tied to the Invitation to Register rather than the HEF.

Still, the most effective interventions result in significant cost savings to local authorities. Assuming other local authorities spend about as much on canvassing (per property) as Hackney and Hull, we estimate that these local authorities could expect to save about 2.5% on their canvassing costs if they use the Envelope intervention. For a local authority with 100,000 properties, this is a savings of about £5,000 per year.

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<sup>14</sup> Behavioural Insights Team (2018) *Supporting councils to improve revenue collection with behavioural insights*. Local Government Association. Available at: [https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/11%2090%20Supporting%20councils%20to%20improve%20revenue%20collection%20with%20behavioural%20insights\\_LGA\\_March%202018.pdf](https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/11%2090%20Supporting%20councils%20to%20improve%20revenue%20collection%20with%20behavioural%20insights_LGA_March%202018.pdf)

## IV. Behavioural literature review

Based on our work and the wider academic literature, BIT has found that if you wish to encourage a behaviour, make it Easy, Attractive, Social and Timely (EAST)<sup>15</sup>:

- ◆ **EASY:** make a behaviour easier by making it the default, reducing the hassle factor of taking the action, and by simplifying messages.
- ◆ **ATTRACTIVE:** attract attention to the message or behaviour through use of images, colour, personalisation and salient messages; and design rewards and sanctions for maximum effect.
- ◆ **SOCIAL:** show that the majority perform the desired behaviour and tap into people's social networks and social commitments.
- ◆ **TIMELY:** prompt people when they are most likely to be receptive, consider immediate costs and benefits, and help people plan their response to barriers to the behaviour.

This literature review sought to identify particular aspects of these principles which could be applied to the design of letters and envelopes in the context of increasing HEF responses. We identified four key principles to take forward through this project:

1. Emphasise salient reasons for completing the form;
2. Personalise communications;
3. Use design to draw attention to key elements; and
4. Reduce friction in navigating the form.

More detail on each of these principles is presented below.

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<sup>15</sup> Service et al. (2014). *EAST: Four Simple Ways to Apply Behavioural Insights*. The Behavioural Insights Team. Available at: [http://www.behaviouralinsights.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/BIT-Publication-EAST\\_FA\\_WEB.pdf](http://www.behaviouralinsights.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/BIT-Publication-EAST_FA_WEB.pdf)



## Emphasise salient reasons for completing the form

Make sure the first thing people notice when encountering the form promotes reasons why they should fill it out, such as:

- ◆ Identity/self-image;
- ◆ Communicating positive social norms;
- ◆ Providing key information; or
- ◆ Highlighting consequences of not completing form.

Many people who don't complete their HEFs likely recognise that it's something they should do; the problem is that *should* is often not enough on its own to prompt a behaviour. This is known as the value-action gap<sup>16</sup>, and it means that the first thing someone sees when encountering the form is crucial to raising the priority of the action.

The literature provides a number of suggestive directions on messages that may be effective, and the below quotes are indicative of what these could look like in practice.

◆ **"You are required to complete this form"**

Is there a piece of information that could be provided upfront (such as the fact that the form is a legal requirement, which some people may not be aware of) that would increase attention?

◆ **"Not completing this form could cost you £80"**

The same outcome can be framed as a gain or as a loss. A seminal behavioural economics study, for example, contrasted a gain-framed response to a hypothetical disease threatening the lives of 600 people – "If Program A is adopted, 200 people will survive" – with a functionally identical loss-framed response – "If Program A is adopted, 400 people will die".<sup>17</sup> People tend to find a loss roughly twice as painful as they enjoy an equivalent gain, and will work twice as hard to avoid it as a result.

◆ **"Are you a voter?"**

A US study showed that more people voted if they were asked "How important is it to you to be a voter in the upcoming election?" as opposed to "How important is it to you to vote in the upcoming election?" The success of the first message

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<sup>16</sup> Homer, P.; L. Kahle (1998). "A Structural Equation Test of the Value-Attitude-Behavior Hierarchy". *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 54 (4): 638–646.

<sup>17</sup> Kahneman, D. (2011). *Thinking, Fast and Slow*. London: Macmillan.

came through relating the action to a person's essential qualities and self-image.<sup>18</sup>

- ◆ **"Nine in ten people in Tower Hamlets are on the electoral roll" or "Nine in ten people in your ward have completed their enrolment"**

BIT has employed this idea to increase tax compliance in the UK.<sup>19</sup> Conducting a field experiment we tested variants of reminder letters sent to around 200,000 UK tax payers. The most effective intervention arm combined a "local norm" and a "debt norm", in the form of, "The majority of people in [local area] with [debt level] pay their tax on time."

- ◆ **"Every year, it costs Tower Hamlets £X to follow up with people who have not returned their registration forms. This is funding that we can't use for local services like road improvements and parks."**

A BIT tax trial found that a loss-framed message about public services was effective in increasing tax repayments, particularly among those who owed large debts.<sup>20</sup>

However, messages that are likely to be effective are deeply context-dependent, and what may or may not be effective or appropriate in a particular context is often difficult to gauge. Sometimes loss-framed or enforcement messages can have boomerang effects and reduce the desired action. Likewise, if the social norm indicates that the majority of people do not engage in the desired behaviour, using it as a behavioural lever could have the effect of discouraging the desired action.

## Personalise communications

Summary of ways to personalise registration:

- ◆ Address people by first name and use a personal tone in letters;
- ◆ Tailor messages by demography, geography or past behaviour;
- ◆ Increase the visibility of the person preparing and sending the form (for example, by including hand-written elements); and
- ◆ Make the envelope as personal as possible to maximise open-rates.

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<sup>18</sup> Bryan, C. J., Walton, G. M., Rogers, T., & Dweck, C. S. (2011). Motivating voter turnout by invoking the self. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 108(31), 12653-12656.

<sup>19</sup> Hallsworth, M., List, J. A., Metcalfe, R. D. & Vlaev, I. (2014). The Behaviouralist as tax collector: Using natural field experiments to enhance tax compliance. NBER Working Paper, No. 20007.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid

Research into communications strategies consistently shows that the more personal a communication feels the more effective it is.

Personalisation of the communication to the respondent increases response rates. We worked with the UK Courts and Tribunals Service to demonstrate the effect of a personalised text message aimed at collecting delinquent payments, and increased payment rates by 41% versus an impersonal generic text message.<sup>21</sup> Another study we conducted tested variants of text messages inviting Jobseekers Allowance claimants to a recruitment event and found the inclusion of a first name increased attendance by four percentage points (on a baseline of 10.5%).<sup>22</sup>

This is more difficult with letters as people are accustomed to being addressed by name. However, further personalisation is possible and effective: for example, addressing people by their first name rather than title and surname. In a BIT trial, including an image of the person's car increased infringement notice repayments by seven percentage points (from a baseline of 42%). Letters could be personalised to:

- ♦ To the ward, council or suburb of the respondent (e.g.: "9 in 10 people in Whitechapel have returned their forms. Your household is one of the few that haven't.")
- ♦ The age of the respondent, either through an age-group social norm, or by focusing on messages that tend on average to resonate with the cohort.
- ♦ Past behaviour; for example, where people responded to the canvass on time one year, activate desire for consistency with: "Last year, you completed your paperwork on time; please help us again this year by returning this form promptly."

Likewise, increasing the visibility of the person at the other end of the form has been consistently shown to increase response rates to postal communications. Signing the accompanying letter by hand increases the odds of response to a questionnaire by more than a tenth.<sup>23</sup> Including a handwritten post-it note request with an SME survey by the Irish Revenue increased response rates after 15 working days from 19.2% to 36.0%.<sup>24</sup> A BIT trial found that hand-writing "[First name] you really need to read this" on the

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<sup>21</sup> Haynes, L. C., Green, D. P., Gallagher, R., John, P. & Torgerson, D. J. (2013). Collection of delinquent fines: An adaptive randomized trial to assess the effectiveness of alternative text messages. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 32(4): 718-730.

<sup>22</sup> Sanders, M. & Kirkman, E. (2014) I've booked you a place. Good luck: A field experiment applying behavioural science to improve attendance at high-impact recruitment events. Working Paper, No. 14/334. *Centre for Market and Public Organisation*.

<sup>23</sup> Edwards P., Roberts I., Clarke M. et al. (2007). Methods to increase response rates to postal questionnaires. *Cochrane Database Systematic Review*, 2.

<sup>24</sup> Irish Revenue (2013). *Survey of Small and Medium Sized Business Customers*. Available at: <http://www.revenue.ie/en/about/publications/business-survey-2013.pdf>

outside of a white envelope increased response rates to a letter about overdue tax by 4.2 percentage points (compared to 21.8% responding to a brown envelope). The time saved by avoiding follow-up contacts more than compensated the staff cost involved in writing the notes. There is no current evidence that handwriting-style fonts or e-signatures are equally effective.

Finally, a key challenge with postal communication is ensuring the letter gets opened in the first place. Some studies have shown coloured (i.e. brown) envelopes have become a mental short-cut for direct mail campaigns, i.e. impersonal communications. As such, using a plain white envelope may increase the likelihood of the recipient opening the envelope.<sup>25</sup> However, in the context of electoral communications, the EC found evidence that brown envelopes were particularly effective at attracting attention and conveying the importance of an envelope.<sup>26</sup>

Another signal of impersonal communication is franking stamps (i.e. 'postage paid'). An individual, actual stamp has been shown to increase open-rates.<sup>27</sup>

### Use design to draw attention to key elements

Reduce the cognitive bandwidth required to navigate the form through:

- ◆ Increasing the amount of white-space;
- ◆ Using "weight" – colour, contrast and movement (e.g. arrows) – to focus on actions and help respondents flow through the form;
- ◆ Put the most important information along the left-hand side of the form; and
- ◆ Use envelope features to increase interest.

Attracting attention is a critical part of successful communication, particularly through the post. Most of us receive large volumes of letters, many of which are not even opened, or scarcely glanced at.

A number of studies have been conducted into how to attract attention in various forms of postal communications. A trial evaluated the effect of using coloured ink, compared with black or blue, on questionnaire response rates. The odds of response were

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<sup>25</sup> Feld, S., Frenzen, H., Krafft, M., Peters, K., & Verhoef, P. C. (2013). The effects of mailing design characteristics on direct mail campaign performance. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 30(2): 143-159.

<sup>26</sup> [http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0005/167153/IER-Letter-testing-Qualitative-research-Report.pdf](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0005/167153/IER-Letter-testing-Qualitative-research-Report.pdf)

<sup>27</sup> Feld, S., Frenzen, H., Krafft, M., Peters, K., & Verhoef, P. C. (2013). The effects of mailing design characteristics on direct mail campaign performance. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 30(2): 143-159.

increased by two-fifths using coloured ink.<sup>28</sup> Coloured paper, however, does not appear to increase response rates compared to surveys printed on white paper.<sup>29</sup>

A number of studies have been conducted into what elements are most visually salient in webpages. These suggest that attention generally follows an F-shape, tracking along the top of the page, then along the left-hand side, following some lines of text across the page before returning to track the left-hand side. Visual elements given “weight” – for example, by colour, contrast, or being surrounded by white space – draw the attention away from this F-shape.<sup>30</sup> Pictorial elements are consistently most effective in drawing attention, regardless of size.<sup>31</sup> For example, a BIT trial found that redesigning an infringement notice to make the action clearer via a graphical “Pay Now” stamp increased on-time payments by 3.1 percentage points (compared to 14.7% in the control group).<sup>32</sup>



Examples of F-shaped gaze pattern on websites.

Source: [www.useit.com](http://www.useit.com)

Arrows are one effective way to guide people through a form. The gaze is instinctively drawn to follow the direction of the arrow and helps the viewer filter extraneous information out. Arrows and other visual cues are more likely to be understood than written directions alone and make fewer demands of working memory.<sup>33</sup>

Reducing the quantity of text on a page enables respondents to engage more with it both visually, because important elements stand out more, and in terms of content. There is also opportunity to use the design of the envelopes to increase attention. The use of a teaser with a questioning technique on the outside of envelopes has been shown to increase opening rates for direct mail. This could be something like ‘This envelope contains your right to be heard. Why not open up and find out how to make a difference?’<sup>34</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Edwards P., Roberts I., Clarke M. et al. (2007). Methods to increase response rates to postal questionnaires. *Cochrane Database Systematic Review*, 2.

<sup>29</sup> Phipps, P A., Robertson, K W., and Keel, K G. (1991). Does Questionnaire Color Affect Survey Response Rates?. *Proceedings of the Survey Research Methods Section, American Statistical Association*, 484-488.

<sup>30</sup> Nielsen, J. (2006). *F-Shaped Pattern For Reading Web Content*. Nielsen Norman Group. Available at: <https://www.nngroup.com/articles/f-shaped-pattern-reading-web-content/>

<sup>31</sup> Pieters, R., & Wedel, M. (2004). Attention capture and transfer in advertising: Brand, pictorial, and text-size effects. *Journal of Marketing*, 68(2), 36-50.

<sup>32</sup> Service et al. (2014). *EAST: Four Simple Ways to Apply Behavioural Insights*. The Behavioural Insights Team. Available at: [http://www.behaviouralinsights.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/BIT-Publication-EAST\\_FA\\_WEB.pdf](http://www.behaviouralinsights.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/BIT-Publication-EAST_FA_WEB.pdf)

<sup>33</sup> Malamed, C. (2011). *Visual language for designers: principles for creating graphics that people understand*. Rockport Pub.

<sup>34</sup> Vriens, M., van der Scheer, H. R., Hoekstra, J. C., & Bult, J. R. (1998). Conjoint experiments for direct mail response optimization. *European Journal of Marketing*, 32(3): 323-339

## Reduce friction in completing the form

Reduce the cognitive bandwidth required to navigate the form through:

- ◆ Providing information as it's needed to those who need it;
- ◆ Not asking for information or action that isn't necessary to completing the process; and
- ◆ Minimising the number of steps required to go from the form to online registration.

One of the most consistent behavioural findings is that minor frictions in a process can significantly affect the likelihood that people complete it. This includes friction around the length of the form, other information required to complete it, understanding what is required, and being given information before it is needed.

A good example of this is providing instructions for how to correct household information before the respondent has established whether it is necessary that they do so. This makes it more difficult to understand what is required, because the respondent has nothing concrete to pin the information to. It also increases the cognitive intensity of completing the form, because it means the information has to be remembered until it is needed, or that the respondent has to circle back and find the information when they establish it is needed.

An additional direction where simplification could be beneficial is in directing people towards online completion. For example, a BIT trial increased tax filing rates by three percentage points just by including a link in the letter that took readers directly to the form they needed to complete, rather than to a website which contained a link to the form. Removing this one small extra step in the process significantly reduced the effort required to complete the action.<sup>35</sup>

Some local authorities/EROs already do a number of things to reduce friction, including pre-filling the HEF (Occupants Known) and ITR forms. It is worth stressing the beneficial impact this can have, especially in the context of the two-stage registration process.

## Extension to the literature review: social norms and network effects

One of the key recommendations of the literature review was to emphasise salient reasons for completing the registration form, with one approach being the use of social norms. Social norms are informal or implied rules which outline how an individual should act. They can include injunctive norms, which suggest whether a behaviour is

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<sup>35</sup> Service et al. (2014). *EAST: Four Simple Ways to Apply Behavioural Insights*. The Behavioural Insights Team. Available at: [http://www.behaviouralinsights.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/BIT-Publication-EAST\\_FA\\_WEB.pdf](http://www.behaviouralinsights.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/BIT-Publication-EAST_FA_WEB.pdf)

widely considered acceptable or not, and descriptive norms, which describe what is normally done.

The effectiveness of social norms in increasing pro-social behaviour has been shown in a variety of public spaces, including increasing the proportion of people paying their tax on time,<sup>36</sup> speeding up collection of delinquent court fines,<sup>37</sup> encouraging people to pay to charity,<sup>38</sup> and reducing over-prescription of antibiotics by GPs.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Hallsworth, M. (2014). The use of field experiments to increase tax compliance. *Oxford Review of Economics Policy*, 30(4): 658–679.

<sup>37</sup> Haynes, L., Service, S., Goldacre, B., & Torgerson, D. (2012). Test, Learn, Adapt: Developing Public Policy with Randomised Controlled Trials. *Cabinet Office*.

<sup>38</sup> Sanders, M., & Smith, S. (2016). Can simple prompts increase bequest giving? Field evidence from a legal call centre. *Journal of Economic Behavior and Organisation*, 125(1): 179–191.

<sup>39</sup> Hallsworth, M., Chadborn, T., Sallis, A., Sanders, M., Berry, D., Greaves, F., Clements, L., & Davies, S.C. (2016). Provision of social norm feedback to high prescribers of antibiotics in general practice: a pragmatic national randomised controlled trial. *The Lancet*, Published online February 18, 2016 [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(16\)00215-4](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(16)00215-4)



## V. Appendix

### Demographic profile and initial HEF response rates of Hackney and Hull boroughs

	Hackney	Hull
	Demographic information	
Population	263,150 (est 2016)	258,995 (est 2015)
Younger vs. older population (ONS Mid-Year Population Estimates 2014)	Under 20: 25% 21-29: 21% Over 55: 18%	Under 20: 24% 21-29: 17.5% Over 55: 44%
Index of Multiple Deprivation rank, extent measure (England, 2015)	11th	8th
Housing tenure (ONS Census 2011)	Private renter: 29% Social renter: 44% Owner occupier/shared ownership: 26%	Private renter: 20% Social renter: 28% Owner occupier/shared ownership: 50%
Ethnic diversity (ONS Census 2011)	White British: 36.2% Black/African/Caribbean/Black British/Other Black: 23.1% Other White: 16.2% Asian/Asian British: 10.5% Mixed/multiple groups: 6.4%	White British: 89.7% Other White: 4.4% Asian/Asian British: 2.5% Black/Black British: 1.2% Mixed/multiple: 1.3% Arab and other: 0.8%
Main language is English (ONS Census 2011)	75.9%	93%
Other	6th most racially diverse borough in London; 3rd most densely populated borough in London	
	Previous HEF response rate	
2016 initial HEF response rate	24.2%	49.5%
2015 response rate	n/a (incomplete return submitted)	33.7%
Total number of HEFs sent (2016)	113,427	118,350
% special properties <sup>40</sup>	1.5%	3%

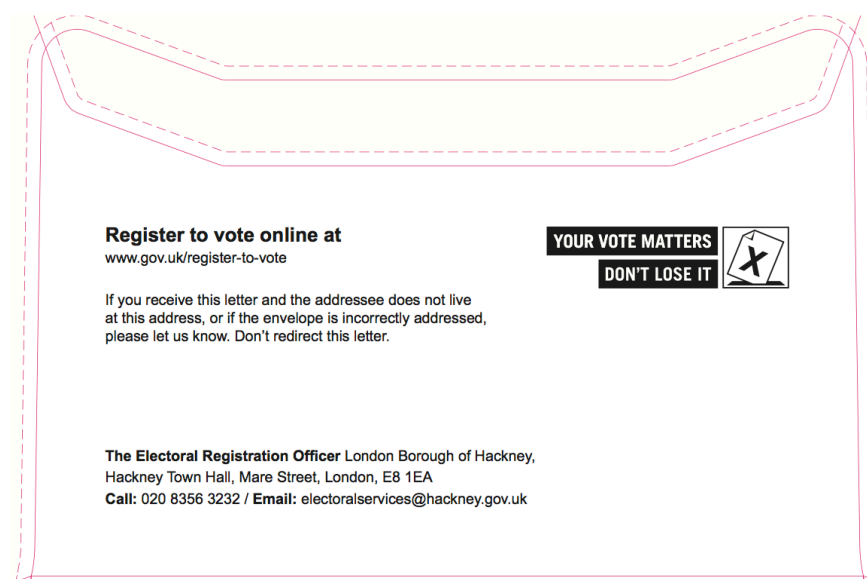
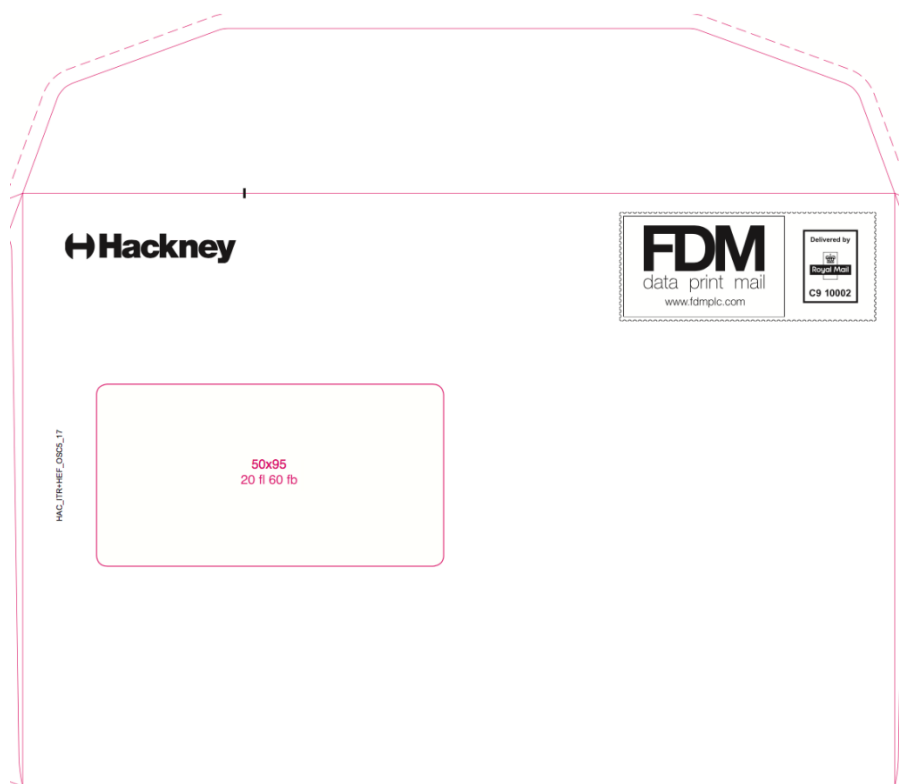
<sup>40</sup> "Special properties" (e.g. nursing homes, student halls, etc.) will be excluded from our trial due to IT constraints





## Intervention materials

Below, we include copies of the Control (business as usual) letters and envelopes from both Hackney and Hull. We also include copies of modified Envelopes for both Hackney and Hull, given their differences. But for all of the other interventions tested, given their similarities, we include only those used in Hull.

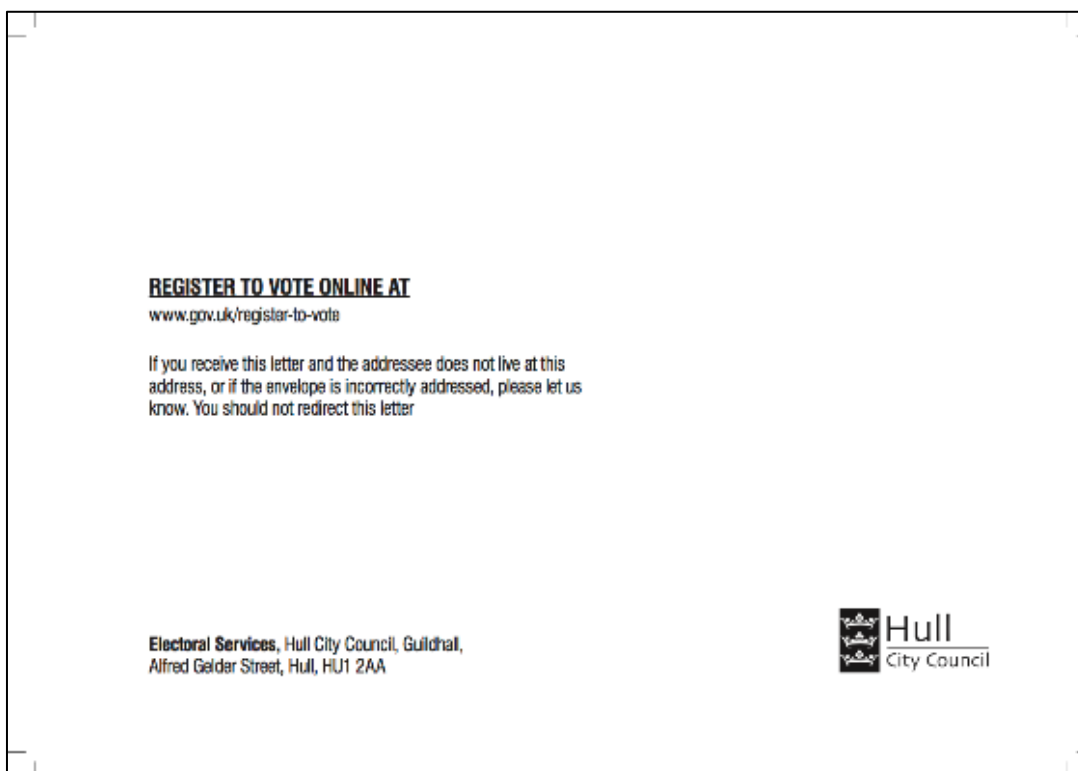
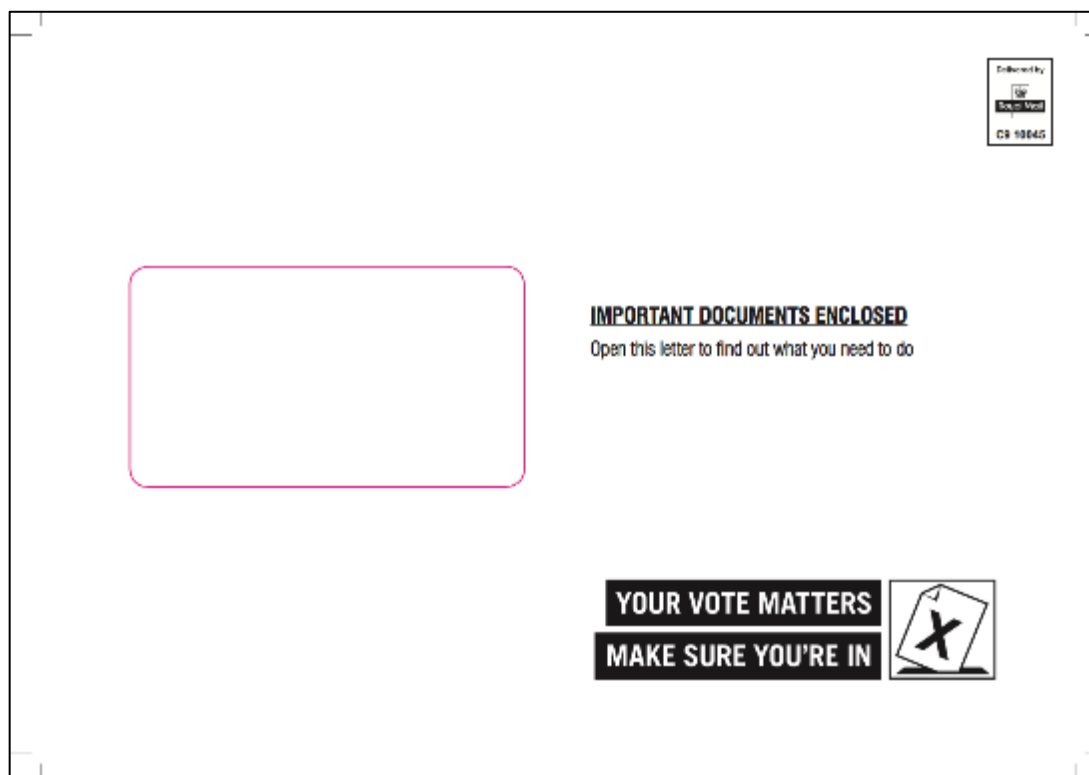
### Hackney – Standard envelope



## Hackney – Control letter

	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; display: inline-block;"><b>YOUR VOTE MATTERS</b></div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; display: inline-block;"><b>DON'T LOSE IT</b></div> 	
	<p>London Borough of Hackney Town Hall Mare Street London E8 1EA Call 020 8356 3232 Email <a href="mailto:electoralservices@hackney.gov.uk">electoralservices@hackney.gov.uk</a> Web <a href="http://www.hackney.gov.uk">www.hackney.gov.uk</a></p> <p>Date: July 2017</p>	
<p><b>Your vote matters. Don't Lose it.</b></p> <p><b>You must respond to this form, even if there are no changes.</b></p>		
<p>Dear Occupier</p> <p>We are updating our records to make sure everybody in your household who is eligible will be able to vote at future elections. Being on the electoral register could also improve your credit rating.</p> <p>Enclosed are details of who we currently have registered to vote at your property.</p> <p>To respond please choose <b>ONE</b> of the options below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Visit <a href="http://www.householdresponse.com/hackney">www.householdresponse.com/hackney</a> and enter part 1 and part 2 of your security code, or</li><li>• Call <b>0800 197 9871</b> and when prompted enter part 1 and part 2 of your security code, or</li><li>• Text us on <b>80212</b>, or</li><li>• <b>Complete</b> the form and then <b>post</b> it back to us in the envelope provided (postage is free).</li></ul>		
<p>Your security code is <b>Part 1:</b>                      <b>Part 2:</b></p>		
<p><b>Adding new names to this form will not register anyone to vote.</b> The information you provide will enable us to send an individual voter registration form to each person in your household who needs to register to vote.</p> <p><b>This correspondence must receive a response.</b> If no response is received you will continue to get reminders. The property may also receive a door to door visit from an electoral canvasser if no response is received. If you do not provide the information requested, you could also be fined £1,000.</p> <p>Yours faithfully</p> <p>Electoral Services On behalf of the Electoral Registration Officer</p>		

## Hull – Standard envelope



## Hull – Control letter



**Hull**  
City Council

YOUR VOTE MATTERS

DON'T LOSE IT



Electoral Services  
Hull City Council  
Guildhall  
Alfred Gelder Street  
Hull, HU1 2AA  
Call 01482 300 302  
Email [electoral.services@hullcc.gov.uk](mailto:electoral.services@hullcc.gov.uk)  
Web [www.hullcc.gov.uk](http://www.hullcc.gov.uk)  
Reference number: 1

24th July 2017

### Please respond now so that we can check who is eligible to register to vote

Dear Occupier

We need to know who lives at this address in order to check who is eligible to register to vote.

To respond please choose **ONE** of the options below:

- Visit [www.householdresponse.com/hull](http://www.householdresponse.com/hull) and enter part 1 and part 2 of your security code;  
or
- If the details overleaf are correct you can call **0800 197 9871** and enter your security code;

Your security code is	<b>Part 1:</b>	<b>Part 2:</b>
-----------------------	----------------	----------------

or

- **Complete** the form and then **post** it back to us in the envelope provided (postage is free).

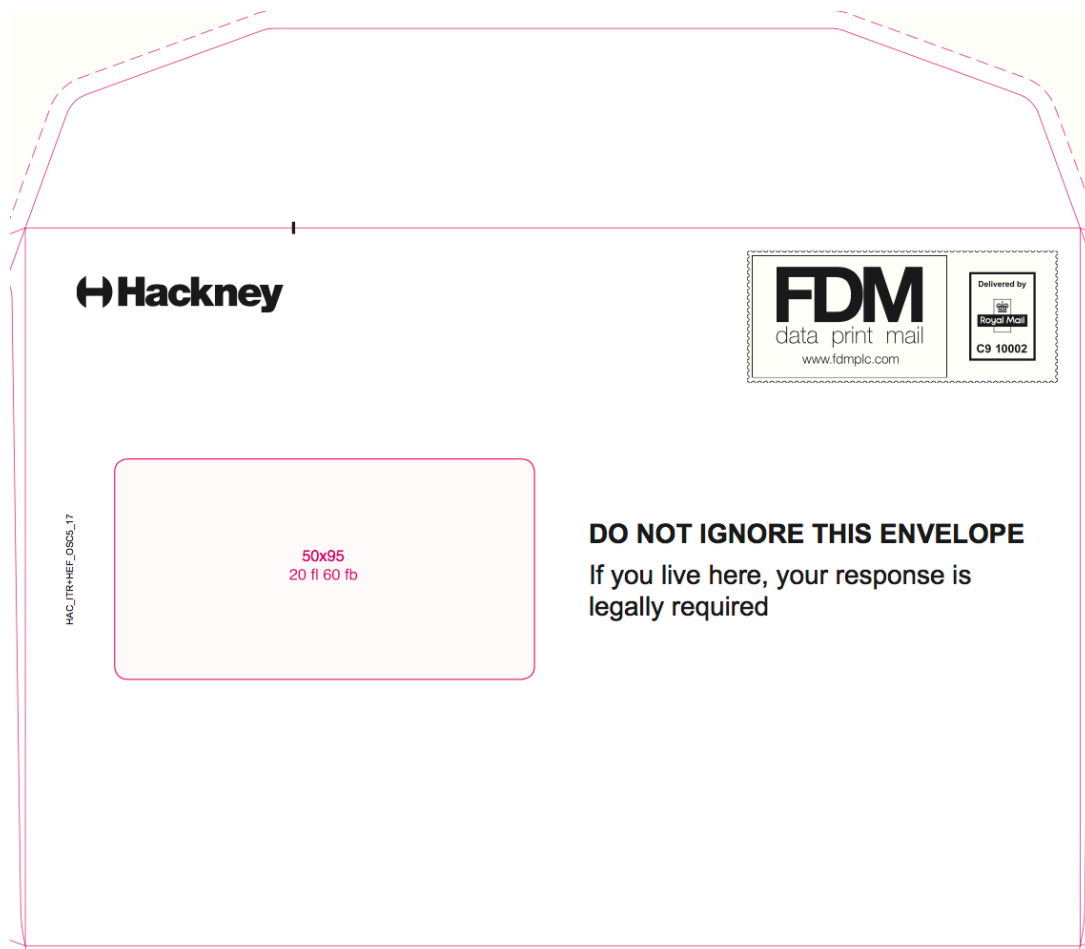
This form is **not** a registration form but you do need to complete it. The information you provide will enable us to send a separate registration form to all the people living at this address who are eligible and need to register. Any new residents who are eligible to vote can go online to register at [gov.uk/register-to-vote](http://gov.uk/register-to-vote) once you have responded to this form.

It is a legal requirement to provide the information requested; **if you don't you could be fined £1,000.**

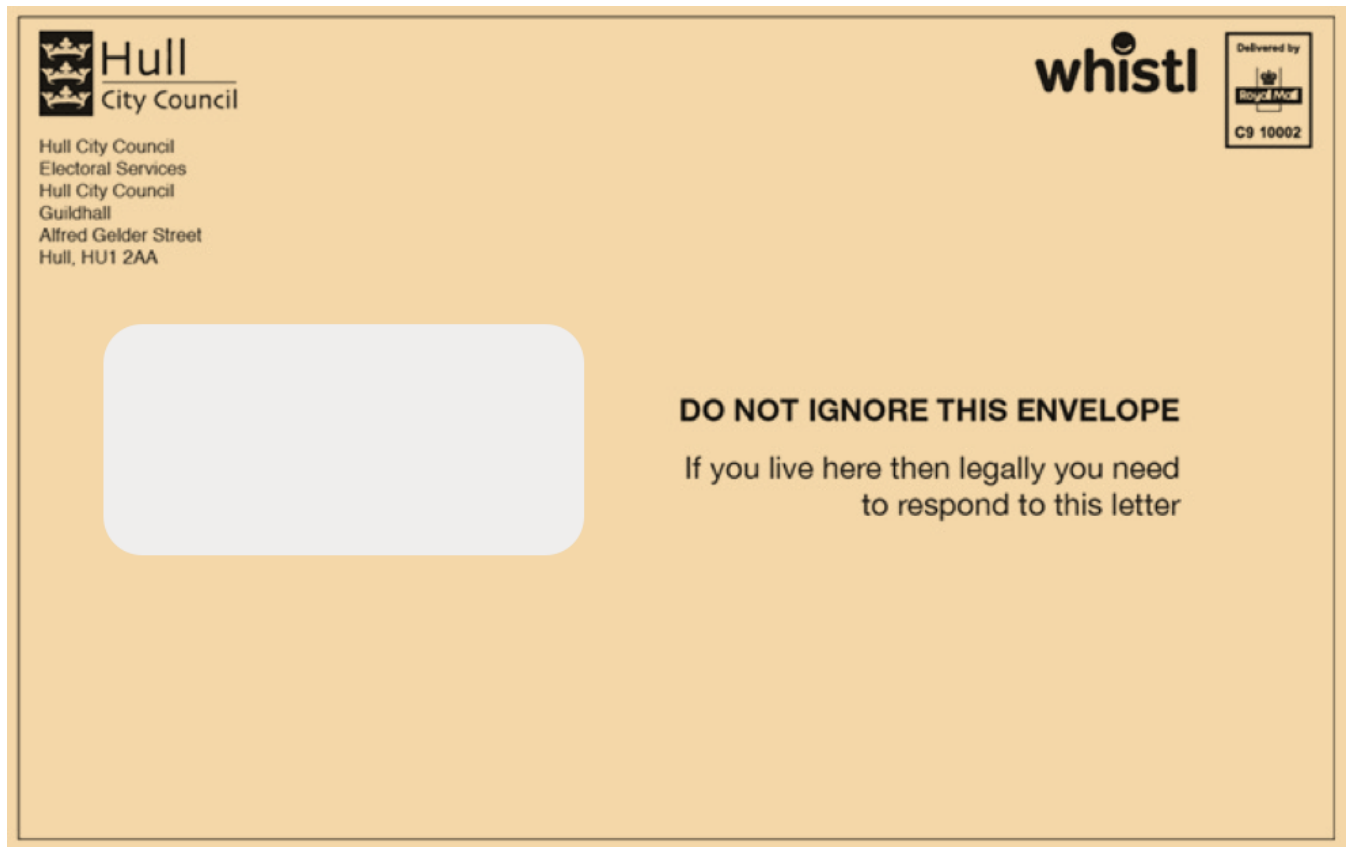
Yours sincerely

Ian Anderson  
Electoral Registration Officer

## Hackney – Envelope (modified)



## Hull – Envelope (modified)



## Hassle



YOUR VOTE MATTERS  
DON'T LOSE IT



Electoral Services  
Hull City Council  
Guildhall  
Alfred Gelder Street  
Hull, HU1 2AA  
Call 01482 300 302  
Email [electoral.services@hullcc.gov.uk](mailto:electoral.services@hullcc.gov.uk)  
Web [www.hullcc.gov.uk](http://www.hullcc.gov.uk)  
Reference number: 8645

24th July 2017

### Please respond now so that we can check who is eligible to register to vote

Dear Occupier

We need to know who lives at this address in order to check who is eligible to register to vote.

All local authorities are required by law to send reminder letters and pay visits to households that don't return this form. Last year this cost us **over £100,000**. The same amount of money could buy **7,000 hours of homecare for elderly, sick or disabled people in Hull**. Please return this form so we can spend our money on local services such as these instead.

To respond please choose **ONE** of the options below:

- Visit [www.householdresponse.com/hull](http://www.householdresponse.com/hull) and enter part 1 and part 2 of your security code;  
or
- If the details overleaf are correct you can call **0800 197 9871** and enter your security code;

Your security code is **Part 1:** **Part 2:**

or

- **Complete** the form and then **post** it back to us in the envelope provided (postage is free).

This form is **not** a registration form but you do need to complete it. The information you provide will enable us to send a separate registration form to all the people living at this address who are eligible and need to register. Any new residents who are eligible to vote can go online to register at [gov.uk/register-to-vote](http://gov.uk/register-to-vote) once you have responded to this form.



It is a legal requirement to provide the information requested; **if you don't you could be fined £1,000**.

Yours sincerely

Ian Anderson  
Electoral Registration Officer

p1

## Friendly hassle

	<b>Hull</b> City Council	<b>YOUR VOTE MATTERS</b> <b>DON'T LOSE IT</b>				
<p>Electoral Services Hull City Council Guildhall Alfred Gelder Street Hull, HU1 2AA Call 01482 300 302 Email <a href="mailto:electoral.services@hullcc.gov.uk">electoral.services@hullcc.gov.uk</a> Web <a href="http://www.hullcc.gov.uk">www.hullcc.gov.uk</a> Reference number: 6725</p>						
<p>24th July 2017</p>						
<p><b>Please respond now so that we can check who is eligible to register to vote</b></p>						
<p>Dear Occupier</p>						
<p>We need to know who lives at this address in order to check who is eligible to register to vote.</p>						
<p>Hull City Council spends months finding out who is eligible to vote, sending multiple letters to non-respondents and even making door-to-door visits. <b>You can get this process over with by completing a single action today. Do it now to save both you and us the hassle!</b></p>						
<p>To respond please choose <b>ONE</b> of the options below:</p>						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Visit <b><a href="http://www.householdresponse.com/hull">www.householdresponse.com/hull</a></b> and enter part 1 and part 2 of your security code; or</li><li>• If the details overleaf are correct you can call <b>0800 197 9871</b> and enter your security code;</li></ul>						
<table border="1"><tr><td>Your security code is</td><td><b>Part 1:</b></td><td><b>Part 2:</b></td></tr></table>				Your security code is	<b>Part 1:</b>	<b>Part 2:</b>
Your security code is	<b>Part 1:</b>	<b>Part 2:</b>				
<p>or</p>						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Complete</b> the form and then <b>post</b> it back to us in the envelope provided (postage is free).</li></ul>						
<p>This form is <b>not</b> a registration form but you do need to complete it. The information you provide will enable us to send a separate registration form to all the people living at this address who are eligible and need to register. Any new residents who are eligible to vote can go online to register at <b><a href="http://gov.uk/register-to-vote">gov.uk/register-to-vote</a></b> once you have responded to this form.</p>						
<p>It is a legal requirement to provide the information requested; <b>if you don't you could be fined £1,000.</b></p>						
<p>Yours sincerely</p>						
<p>Ian Anderson Electoral Registration Officer</p>						
<p>p1</p>						





Hull  
City Council

YOUR VOTE MATTERS

DON'T LOSE IT



Electoral Services  
Hull City Council  
Guildhall  
Alfred Gelder Street  
Hull, HU1 2AA  
Call 01482 300 302  
Email [electoral.services@hullcc.gov.uk](mailto:electoral.services@hullcc.gov.uk)  
Web [www.hullcc.gov.uk](http://www.hullcc.gov.uk)  
Reference number: 5418

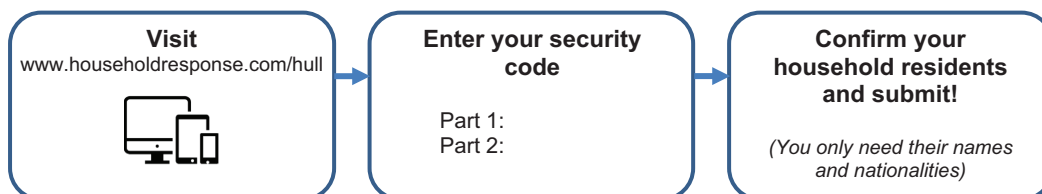
24th July 2017

## Please respond now so that we can check who is eligible to register to vote

Dear Occupier

We need to know who lives at this address in order to check who is eligible to register to vote.

The easiest way to complete the form is online. **It takes just 3 minutes:**





This form is **not** a registration form but you do need to complete it. The information you provide will enable us to send a separate registration form to all the people living at this address who are eligible and need to register. Any new residents who are eligible to vote can go online to register at [gov.uk/register-to-vote](http://gov.uk/register-to-vote) once you have responded to this form.

It is a legal requirement to provide the information requested; **if you don't you could be fined £1,000.**


Yours sincerely

Ian Anderson  
Electoral Registration Officer

## Call to action

 <b>Hull</b> City Council	<b>YOUR VOTE MATTERS</b> <b>DON'T LOSE IT</b> 			
<p>Electoral Services Hull City Council Guildhall Alfred Gelder Street Hull, HU1 2AA Call 01482 300 302 Email <a href="mailto:electoral.services@hullcc.gov.uk">electoral.services@hullcc.gov.uk</a> Web <a href="http://www.hullcc.gov.uk">www.hullcc.gov.uk</a> Reference number: 2</p>				
<p>24th July 2017</p> <p><b>Please respond now so that we can check who is eligible to register to vote</b></p> <p>Dear Occupier</p> <p>We need to know who lives at this address in order to check who is eligible to register to vote. Your response is therefore required. To make responding as easy as possible, we have pre-filled a form with the details of who is currently registered to vote at your property.</p> <p><b>If the form is correct...</b></p> <p>You can confirm this with us easily. Please choose <b>ONE</b> of the following options:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Online:</b> Visit <a href="http://www.householdresponse.com/hull">www.householdresponse.com/hull</a> and enter your security code</li><li>• <b>Text</b> NOCHANGE followed by your security code to <b>80212</b></li><li>• <b>Call 0800 197 9871</b> and enter your security code</li><li>• <b>Post:</b> Sign the form and then post it back to us in the envelope provided (postage is free)</li></ul> <table border="1"><tr><td>Your security code is</td><td><b>Part 1:</b></td><td><b>Part 2:</b></td></tr></table> <p><b>If you need to update your household details (or if this form is blank)...</b></p> <p>You can do this <b>online</b> at <a href="http://www.householdresponse.com/hull">www.householdresponse.com/hull</a> or by <b>post</b> (see the form for details).</p> <p>This form is <b>not</b> a registration form but you do need to complete it. The information you provide will enable us to send a separate registration form to all the people living at this address who are eligible and need to register. Any new residents who are eligible to vote can go online to register at <a href="http://gov.uk/register-to-vote">gov.uk/register-to-vote</a> once you have responded to this form.</p> <p>It is a legal requirement to provide the information requested; if you don't you could be fined £1,000.</p> <p>Yours sincerely</p> <p>Ian Anderson Electoral Registration Officer</p>		Your security code is	<b>Part 1:</b>	<b>Part 2:</b>
Your security code is	<b>Part 1:</b>	<b>Part 2:</b>		

## Costs




# Hull

City Council

YOUR VOTE MATTERS

DON'T LOSE IT



Electoral Services  
Hull City Council  
Guildhall  
Alfred Gelder Street  
Hull, HU1 2AA  
Call 01482 300 302  
Email [electoral.services@hullcc.gov.uk](mailto:electoral.services@hullcc.gov.uk)  
Web [www.hullcc.gov.uk](http://www.hullcc.gov.uk)  
Reference number: 8645

24th July 2017

**Please respond now so that  
we can check who is eligible to register to vote**

Dear Occupier

We need to know who lives at this address in order to check who is eligible to register to vote.

All local authorities are required by law to send reminder letters and pay visits to households that don't return this form. Last year this cost us **over £100,000**. The same amount of money could buy **7,000 hours of homecare for elderly, sick or disabled people in Hull**. Please return this form so we can spend our money on local services such as these instead.

To respond please choose **ONE** of the options below:

- Visit [www.householdresponse.com/hull](http://www.householdresponse.com/hull) and enter part 1 and part 2 of your security code;  
or
- If the details overleaf are correct you can call **0800 197 9871** and enter your security code;

Your security code is   **Part 1:**                      **Part 2:**

or

- **Complete** the form and then **post** it back to us in the envelope provided (postage is free).

This form is **not** a registration form but you do need to complete it. The information you provide will enable us to send a separate registration form to all the people living at this address who are eligible and need to register. Any new residents who are eligible to vote can go online to register at [gov.uk/register-to-vote](http://gov.uk/register-to-vote) once you have responded to this form.




It is a legal requirement to provide the information requested; **if you don't you could be fined £1,000.**

Yours sincerely

Ian Anderson  
Electoral Registration Officer

p1

Picture

 <div style="display: inline-block; vertical-align: middle;"><h1 style="margin: 0;">Hull</h1><p style="margin: 0;">City Council</p></div>	<div style="display: inline-block; text-align: center;"><div style="background-color: #004a99; color: white; padding: 2px 5px; font-weight: bold;">YOUR VOTE MATTERS</div><div style="background-color: #004a99; color: white; padding: 2px 5px; font-weight: bold;">DON'T LOSE IT</div></div> 
<p>Electoral Services Hull City Council Guildhall Alfred Gelder Street Hull, HU1 2AA Call 01482 300 302 Email <a href="mailto:electoral.services@hullcc.gov.uk">electoral.services@hullcc.gov.uk</a> Web <a href="http://www.hullcc.gov.uk">www.hullcc.gov.uk</a> Reference number: 9926</p>	
<p>24th July 2017</p> <p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold; font-size: 1.2em;">Please respond now so that we can check who is eligible to register to vote</p> <div style="text-align: center; margin: 10px 0;"></div> <p>Dear Occupier</p> <p>We need to know who lives at this address in order to check who is eligible to register to vote. To respond please choose <b>ONE</b> of the options below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Visit <a href="http://www.householdresponse.com/hull">www.householdresponse.com/hull</a> and enter part 1 and part 2 of your security code; or</li><li>• If the details overleaf are correct you can call <b>0800 197 9871</b> and enter your security code;</li></ul> <div style="border: 1px solid #00a69a; padding: 5px; margin: 10px 0;"><p>Your security code is   <b>Part 1:</b>                      <b>Part 2:</b></p></div> <p>or</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Complete</b> the form and then <b>post</b> it back to us in the envelope provided (postage is free).</li></ul> <p>This form is <b>not</b> a registration form but you do need to complete it. The information you provide will enable us to send a separate registration form to all the people living at this address who are eligible and need to register. Any new residents who are eligible to vote can go online to register at <a href="http://gov.uk/register-to-vote">gov.uk/register-to-vote</a> once you have responded to this form.</p> <p>It is a legal requirement to provide the information requested; <b>if you don't you could be fined £1,000.</b></p> <p>Yours sincerely</p> <p style="margin-top: 20px;">Ian Anderson Electoral Registration Officer</p>	

p1

Social norms



Hull  
City Council

YOUR VOTE MATTERS

DON'T LOSE IT



Electoral Services  
Hull City Council  
Guildhall  
Alfred Gelder Street  
Hull, HU1 2AA  
Call 01482 300 302  
Email [electoral.services@hullcc.gov.uk](mailto:electoral.services@hullcc.gov.uk)  
Web [www.hullcc.gov.uk](http://www.hullcc.gov.uk)  
Reference number: 1643

24th July 2017

**Please respond now so that  
we can check who is eligible to register to vote**

Dear Occupier

We need to know who lives at this address in order to check who is eligible to register to vote.

Local authorities send out forms every year, and last year **9 out of 10 households in England returned this form.**

To respond please choose **ONE** of the options below:

- Visit **[www.householdresponse.com/hull](http://www.householdresponse.com/hull)** and enter part 1 and part 2 of your security code;  
or
- If the details overleaf are correct you can call **0800 197 9871** and enter your security code;

Your security code is **Part 1:** **Part 2:**

or

- **Complete** the form and then **post** it back to us in the envelope provided (postage is free).

This form is **not** a registration form but you do need to complete it. The information you provide will enable us to send a separate registration form to all the people living at this address who are eligible and need to register. Any new residents who are eligible to vote can go online to register at **[gov.uk/register-to-vote](http://gov.uk/register-to-vote)** once you have responded to this form.

It is a legal requirement to provide the information requested; **if you don't you could be fined £1,000.**

Yours sincerely

Ian Anderson  
Electoral Registration Officer

Local testimonial



Hull  
City Council

YOUR VOTE MATTERS

DON'T LOSE IT



Electoral Services  
Hull City Council  
Guildhall  
Alfred Gelder Street  
Hull, HU1 2AA  
Call 01482 300 302  
Email [electoral.services@hullcc.gov.uk](mailto:electoral.services@hullcc.gov.uk)  
Web [www.hullcc.gov.uk](http://www.hullcc.gov.uk)  
Reference number: 2

24th July 2017

**Please respond now so that  
we can check who is eligible to register to vote**

Dear Occupier

We need to know who lives at this address in order to check who is eligible to register to vote.

**Jean Bishop, Hull's iconic and much-loved Bee Lady, had this to say about voting:**

*"I have lived in Hull all of my life and have voted in every election I could. I have always felt that it is important to have my say in elections as it's a chance for my voice to be heard. Every single vote can make a difference to the way our city and country is run."*

To respond please choose **ONE** of the options below:

- Visit **[www.householdresponse.com/hull](http://www.householdresponse.com/hull)** and enter part 1 and part 2 of your security code;  
or
- If the details overleaf are correct you can call **0800 197 9871** and enter your security code;

Your security code is **Part 1:** **Part 2:**

or

- **Complete** the form and then **post** it back to us in the envelope provided (postage is free).

This form is **not** a registration form but you do need to complete it. The information you provide will enable us to send a separate registration form to all the people living at this address who are eligible and need to register. Any new residents who are eligible to vote can go online to register at **[gov.uk/register-to-vote](http://gov.uk/register-to-vote)** once you have responded to this form.

It is a legal requirement to provide the information requested; **if you don't you could be fined £1,000.**

Yours sincerely

Ian Anderson  
Electoral Registration Officer

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### Significance thresholds adjusted for multiple comparisons

When presenting the significance of our primary outcome results, we adjusted for multiple comparisons using the Hochberg Step-Up procedure. We have 9 treatment arms that we compare to the Control – in other words, we adjust for making 9 comparisons.

The table below outlines our significance cut-offs adjusted for multiple comparisons.

Rank (1 being lowest p-value, 9 being highest)	p = 0.01	p = 0.05	p = 0.10
1	0.0011	0.0055	0.011
2	0.0022	0.011	0.022
...	...	...	...
n	$0.01 * (n/9)$	$0.05 * (n/9)$	$0.10 * (n/9)$
...	...	...	...
8	0.0088	0.044	0.088
9	0.01	0.05	0.10

## Cost-effectiveness analysis – more details

Cost	Description	How it's calculated	Hackney cost per property	Hull cost per property
Printing and postage costs of initial HEFs	Cost of paper, printing, postage, and printer fees.	Total cost of printing and postage during phase# of letters sent during phase	£0.496	£0.40
Printing and postage costs of 1st reminder HEFs		Printing costs vary by supplier.	£0.454	£0.0789
Printing and postage costs of 2nd reminder HEFs		Hull provided printing and postage costs broken down by phase, and we worked out the average cost per recipient in our trial. According to Hull, the costs provided include some printing and postage costs associated with the Invitation to Register, and the HEF costs cannot be disaggregated. However, given the relatively low costs of their printing and postage, we suspect these costs to be rather quite limited, and therefore use the total costs provided.  Hackney printed more HEFs than necessary initially (240k), and then over-printed content on them as necessary. Hackney worked out their costs for each phase pro-rata.	£0.476	£0.129
Return postage costs	For HEF forms returned by post, the LA is charged the return postage fee.	For the per unit costs, we use the info given to us directly from LAs. Hull's return postage rate was quoted as £0.335. Hackney's rate was £0.465 -- they used Royal Mail's 2nd class business return. We apply this cost to each "Scanned" return.  We are somewhat concerned about our ability to identify postal returns in Hull. The "Scanned" return method in that local authority includes both postal returns and canvasser returns.  However, using Hull data, it seems that applying return postage costs to each Scanned return is sensible. For example:  Hull had 80,189 postal returns and return postage costs of £25,240. $\text{£25,240} / 80,189 = \text{£0.315}$ , which is very close to the return postage rate quoted.  This may be an overestimate of the true	£0.335	£0.465



		costs.		
Costs of processing postal returns	LAs must manually input postal HEF returns. This task is done by permanent LA staff.	<p>Hackney calculated their costs using a report from an Electoral Commission pilot from 2015 in another London borough which estimated that HEFs took 2 minutes to process, and some extra time to review and scan.</p> <p>Given the lack of a response from Hull, we will assume similar costs to Hackney there.</p>	£0.72	£0.72
Door-to-door canvassing costs	LAs hire seasonal staff to go door-to-door to get HEF responses.	<p>Total canvass staff payments# of properties that did not respond initially</p> <p>We assume no additional time of permanent staff members. This is therefore an underestimate of the true cost.</p>	£1.095	£1.29