Bite the Ballot – written evidence (CCE0254)

Explaining the Data-sharing Process and Agreement

Last year, Bite The Ballot (BTB) facilitated positive conversations between the Electoral Commission (EC) and Experian about data sharing in order to gain insight into registration levels and the electorate. After many positive conversations, genuine interest and verbal agreements nothing has yet to materialise. This is largely in part because the current data protection laws and lack of a written agreement between the two parties, which we at BTB are striving to ensure is pushed through.

At this moment in time Experian is not working with the EC on anything explicitly in regards to the insights. Experian feel by helping to encourage all eligible members of society to register vote through BTB, they will be not only be supporting a great cause and help UK society become more politically aware, but also will benefit from being able to identify more UK consumers through the use of the Electoral Roll data. This, in turn, will improve automated identity verification services and credit applications by helping to fill a data gap that exists for people in society. However, if an agreement were possible then local authorities would be able access invaluable insights into the electorate.

Over the years, Experian has developed a system whereby using consistent attributes like name, address, date of birth as well as other less obvious attributes, they can look at the electoral data, data from lenders, some public data, and other data sets to form a view of a ‘consumer’ and assigns a particular identifier to link all the data together. By doing this Experian able capable for example to determine whether someone registered for the first time. Experian would use all data sets to match the electoral data to a particular identifier and then look to see whether that particular identifier has previous or historical electoral data link to it. If the answer is no, then the person is newly a registered person.

Notably, similar approaches can be applied to determine to a high degree of accuracy unregistered individuals, individuals registered incorrectly, and offer better insights into registered people i.e. age, ethnicity etc. The insight and data can be invaluable and assist the EC and to local authorities.

However, as mentioned earlier data protection laws are a barrier. The EC remains the data controller of electoral data and Experian can only process the data on behalf of the EC. Therefore, Experian is unable to share the data direct to BTB or local authorities. Experian and the EC are working on their relationship and there is hope that a solution can be found in the future, however, legislative assistance would be greatly appreciated. The benefits linked to this can be extended to:

- lower duplication of work i.e. applications;
- better targeted canvassing campaigns;
- and better value for money in maintaining of the electoral register.