

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY CHIEF EXECUTIVE

TO:	CORPORATE, COMMUNITY AND EXTERNAL AFFAIRS		
DATE:	2 <sup>ND</sup> DECEMBER 2008	AGENDA ITEM:	10
TITLE:	NATIONAL IDENTITY CARDS		
SERVICE:	CHIEF EXECUTIVES	WARDS:	ALL
SCRUTINY CHAIR:	COUNCILLOR STEVENS	AREA:	CCEA
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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report will provide further information on the National Identity Scheme and the implications for the citizens of Reading. This report is a response to a resolution from Council on 14<sup>th</sup> October 2008 requesting the CCEA Scrutiny panel to investigate the matter further.
- 1.2 This report aims to provide a balanced overview of the implications of identity cards for the future provision of services and for the citizens of Reading.

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 That the Panel note the report and consider the issues raised;
- 2.2 That in the context of that discussion the Panel either:
  - i. take a view as to whether the Panel should consider the issue further or make any recommendations at this stage
  - ii. delegate to the Management Panel to take a decision as to whether the panel should consider the issue further or make any recommendations at this stage.

3. POLICY CONTEXT

- 3.1 Reading Borough Council does not currently have a position on identity cards.

- 3.2 The Home Office has stated that identity cards will provide an easy and secure way for legal UK residents to prove who they are when they apply for services with private businesses, or for government benefits.

#### **4. CURRENT POSITION**

- 4.1 The Home Secretary announced on 7<sup>th</sup> November 2008 that plans for a pilot scheme had changed. Initially, all airside airport staff were to be issued with identity cards, now this pilot will run with workers at two UK airports in 2009.
- 4.2 From 2010, students will be encouraged to apply for identity cards when opening bank accounts.
- 4.3 The government aims to rollout a National Identity Card scheme nationwide by 2012; this has been put back from the initial plans for a rollout in 2010.
- 4.4 Current plans are for identity cards to display a photo of the cardholder, name, date of birth, gender, nationality and immigration status. A microchip within the card will hold fingerprint details and a digital face image. Plans for iris scans to be held within the chip have been delayed.
- 4.5 It will be possible to opt-out from having an identity card. However, the details of all passport applicants will be added to the National Identity Register when the scheme is rolled out nationally.
- 4.6 The Identity and Passport Service have set up a network of 69 interview offices across the UK. The Reading interview office on Kings Road is for first-time adult passport customers who are attending their passport interview. Passport interviews are required by all customers aged 16 or over, who are applying for a passport for the first time. The interview confirms that the passport application belongs to the applicant and that they are the rightful owner of that identity.

#### **5. POTENTIAL IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE PROVISION OF PUBLIC SERVICES WITHIN READING.**

- 5.1 Applicants for local services and benefits would be able to prove their entitlement by confirming their identity with their ID card. However, because only 2.5% of benefit fraud is due to identity fraud, it would only have a small impact upon this.
- 5.2 Almost half of respondents to a Central Office of Information (COI) poll on the National Identity Scheme stated that they expected to use their identity card when they dealt with their local authority. This would indicate that there is a level of acceptance regarding the usage of the cards.
- 5.3 However, respondents from the same poll did not think that making public and private services more accessible was a particularly believable advantage of identity cards. This might suggest that the residents of Reading could be sceptical about how useful the cards would be for accessing public services.

5.4 The Home Office has recently announced that they are asking private companies to bid for the contract to collect biometric data that will be used on the cards. One suggestion has been that there will be booths available for collection of this data within supermarkets and Post Offices. The COI poll also stated that 34% of respondents would be happy having their biometric data recorded at their local council offices, which would have implications for RBC.

## **6. POTENTIAL POSITIVE IMPLICATIONS FOR THE CITIZENS OF READING.**

6.1 Due to the changeable nature of central government plans on identity cards, it is difficult to pinpoint the implications of the cards for Reading citizens.

6.2 There has been no information issued from central government detailing exactly how local authorities will be affected by identity cards, how they would be expected to support their usage or comply with the scheme.

6.3 Identity cards could lead to a boost in national security; national borders could become more secure.

6.4 The new face-to-face interview system for identity cards would make it harder for someone to fraudulently obtain someone else's identity.

6.5 Identity cards would provide a way for the young people of Reading to prove their age. This would mean that they could access services that they are legally entitled to and it could help those providing said services ensure that they were not breaking the law.

6.6 Identity cards would help cut down on illegal working by offering a simpler way to check a person's employment eligibility. This would help employers within Reading ensure that they did not mistakenly employ illegal workers and therefore avoid a penalty of £10,000.

6.7 Identity cards would also provide a secure way for residents of Reading to apply for financial services.

## **7. POTENTIAL NEGATIVE IMPLICATIONS FOR THE CITIZENS OF READING.**

7.1 The anti-identity card campaigning group No2ID have pointed out that the government has not offered detailed information on how identity cards would combat issues such as identity fraud and terrorism.

7.2 There are concerns over whether the information held upon the National Identity Register would be secure.

7.3 Current cost predictions indicate that citizens of Reading would have to pay £30 for an identity card, plus £29 to have their biometric (fingerprint) data collected. Plans are to combine the issuing of identity cards with passport applications. This would bring the combined cost to £131 for a passport and identity card.

7.4 Identity cards could potentially cause friction within Reading if some communities felt that they were being victimised by checks upon their identity. There is also a risk that identity cards could encourage some people to avoid contact with the police and hospitals.

7.5 No2ID claim that the types of biometric data that the government plan to store upon the identity cards will not be 100% accurate. Miss-matches could be costly for the government.

## **8. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS**

8.1 The possible negative implications of identity cards relate to the equality and social inclusion themes within the council.

8.2 Efficiency gains from the adoption of the identity card scheme would contribute towards the 'Improving the way we work' priority within the council.

8.3 The potential security risk of personal information stored upon identity cards relates to the council's 'Safer and Stronger Communities' theme.

## **9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

9.1 Legal implications will become clear if and when such a scheme is implemented.

## **10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

10.1 There will be a cost to taking part in any pilot scheme and from implementing the full scheme. We are not in a position to assess these costs at present.

## **11. BACKGROUND PAPERS.**

11.1 Central Office of Information, National Identity Tracking Research, Wave 3: February 2008. <http://www.ips.gov.uk/identity/press-2008-03-06.asp>

11.2 No2ID website: [www.no2id.net](http://www.no2id.net)

11.3 Several news articles from news.bbc.co.uk:

Analysis: The First ID Cards  
People 'can't wait for ID cards'  
ID card fingerprint errors fear  
Airport workers' ID card 'insult'  
Foreign national ID card unveiled  
ID card 'could threaten privacy'  
Q&A: ID cards

11.4 Identity and Passport Service Website: [www.ips.gov.uk](http://www.ips.gov.uk)