

CITY OF  
WOLVERHAMPTON  
C O U N C I L

**Scrutiny Review: Electoral registration and participation**

**April 2016**

## Foreword

I was honoured to chair a review assessing registration and participation rates in the City of Wolverhampton. Active public engagement in our democratic process has declined over a number of years at a national and local level, but this is one area that we need to do more to ensure that every resident has their views and interests represented.

This is even more important when you consider the West Midlands Combined Authority will be electing a mayor in 2017, the importance of greater local democracy and accountability and the imminent referendum on our EU membership.

The review group heard from a number of local organisations and residents about what the Council could do differently to improve awareness, understanding and engagement in the democratic process and our work. I would like to take this opportunity to extend my sincere thanks on behalf of the review group to all contributors. I would also like to thank all members of the review group for their contributions to improve the number of people who register and participate in elections.

The members of the review group and the Council now have a better understanding of some of the issues that prevent residents from registering to vote and/or vote, and intelligence to inform our on-going work. By implementing the review recommendations we hope that the process of engaging with the Council and/or voting is simpler, and encourages more local residents to exercise their democratic right to vote for their elected representatives and have a real say in how local services are managed and delivered.

Cllr Paul Singh, Chair  
Electoral Registration and Participation Scrutiny Review

## Summary of the report

### 1.0 Scope of the review

- 1.1. Scrutiny Board agreed on 30 June 2015 to undertake a review of electoral registration and participation. A review of registration rates and participation levels in the City of Wolverhampton was considered to be timely and appropriate, with low voter turnout, changes to the registration process and importance of greater local democracy and accountability.
- 1.2. The review focused on making recommendations to improve registration levels and address low participation rates in the City. It focused on issues that fall within the Council's remit: identifying the barriers to increasing voter registration and participation and building intelligence for our on-going democratic services work.
- 1.3. The review could not, therefore, consider the wide range of sometimes complex reasons why residents do not register to vote and/or vote. The review also did not consider issues related to understanding the influence of local or national politics and how this might impact on the motivation of residents to register and or vote.

### 1.4 Implementation

This report (and the recommendations) is due to be considered by Cabinet on 8 June 2016. Cabinet will be asked to consider and support any recommendation/s that aims to inform future work on improving registration and encouraging more residents to vote. Where recommendations are accepted, responsibility for effective implementation will sit with the relevant service area, with oversight from the Scrutiny Board.

### 1.5 The review group

#### Councillors

Review Group Chair: Cllr Paul Singh (Conservative)

#### Membership:

##### Labour:

Cllr Herman Banger  
Cllr Bishan Dass  
Cllr Keith Inston  
Cllr Linda Leach  
Cllr Daniel Warren  
Cllr Jacqueline  
Sweetman

##### Conservative

Cllr Wendy Thompson  
Cllr Jonathan Yardley

##### Liberal Democrat

Cllr Richard Whitehouse

## **Officer Support**

Strategic Director, Governance	Kevin O'Keefe
Lead Officer, Group Administration	Martyn Sargeant
Policy Officer	Aaron Toussaint

### **1.6 Contributors to the review**

To identify and understand the barriers preventing residents from registering to vote and/or voting, councillors wanted to hear from local organisations with knowledge of the subject. Councillors also wanted to hear from those with no direct experience of electoral issues but through the course of their work regularly communicate and engage with our target group - those that are traditionally under-represented. Witnesses were invited to suggest solutions to the barriers, and how the City of Wolverhampton Council could improve how it communicates and engages with residents.

### **1.7 Witnesses were asked to consider the following questions:**

- How best could the Council communicate with residents about who is eligible to register to vote?
- What work should/could the Council do with educational institutions and voluntary and community groups to increase knowledge about registering to vote and voting?
- What barriers, if any, do you think currently prevent eligible residents from registering to vote?
- What else could be done to maximise electoral registration?

### **1.8 The review group heard evidence from the following witnesses:**

- Ethnic Minority Council (EMC), Suffia Perveen, Project Manager
- Refugee and Migrant Centre (RMC), Olga Cenkute, Caseworker; Shawkat Lashkary, Senior Caseworker
- YMCA, Beverley Momenabadi, Participation Coordinator; Vicky Rogers, Participation and Support Worker
- Wolverhampton Homes Tenant Engagement Group, Clare Poskitt, Tenant Engagement Manager
- Youth Council member / Youth MP, Emma Curran, Youth MP; Emerson Morris, Member of the Youth Council
- Bite the Ballot, Jessica Davis, Engagement Officer
- Citizens' Advice Bureau (CAB), Wolverhampton, Helen Child, Chief Officer
- University of Wolverhampton, Yashiru Aboubakar, Student Union President

1.9 The review also considered evidence produced by national bodies, specifically the Electoral Commission, Cabinet Office, voluntary and community organisations and recent reviews carried out by other local authorities, including:

- Bassetlaw District Council, North Nottinghamshire
- Buckinghamshire County Council
- London Borough of Merton

1.10 Two online surveys were also carried out by the review group – one aimed at organisations and one aimed at individuals – to ensure a wide range of residents and organisations could contribute to the review. In total 198 individuals and organisations responded. Please see appendix B for the survey findings report.

### 1.11 **Overview of findings and recommendations**

Low registration rates and election turnout is a national issue, and is more prevalent among the following groups:

- private renters
- social renters
- young people
- students
- some Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) groups
- Those with a disability (evidence suggests that those with a disability are more likely to be on the Electoral Register, but under-represented in terms of voting)
- those not born in the UK.

### 1.12 **Voter registration**

In Wolverhampton there are 177,580<sup>1</sup> residents on the electoral register; the latest population statistics<sup>2</sup> state that the 16 and over population is currently 201,729, which represents an 88% registration completion rate.<sup>3</sup>

1.13 Although anecdotal, feedback presented to the review group outlined that some residents are disengaged or self-disenfranchise to avoid being identified by central or local government. Further, some residents merely have no intention of voting – for reasons unknown to the Council – and therefore fail to register. Conversely, it should be noted that voter registration and turnout figures show that many residents are registered yet do not vote.

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<sup>1</sup> As of 1 February 2016; the first full electoral register since the end of the transitional arrangements for IER and sees a reduction of 1854 residents

<sup>2</sup> Office of National Statistics annual mid-year population estimates, 2014

<sup>3</sup> Estimated as not all residents are eligible to register and vote, and some are unknown to the council so not included in any official figures

1.14 The motivations for registering to vote are varied, but there are additional benefits such as improving credit scores. Respondents to the survey indicated that their main motivation for registering to vote was due to the importance of having a say (78.6%), followed by 66% stating that it was important to exercise their democratic right. The survey respondents are not, however, representative of Wolverhampton as a whole and therefore the results cannot be considered representative.

1.15 Concern that some residents have never registered individually but have always voted was raised. Although one of the aims of Individual Elector Registration (IER) is to make the Electoral Register more accurate, it is likely that some residents are unaware of the change of process and are now no longer eligible to vote.

#### 1.16 **Electoral participation (voting)**

There has been a decline in voter turnout at both local and national elections over the last decade (the period in which this review considered). In Wolverhampton, voter turnout has been particularly low at local elections, and tends to be lower than the national average. For parliamentary elections, voter turnout in Wolverhampton North East and South East are consistently below the national average. Wolverhampton South West, however, offers a contrasting view as voter turnout since 1997 has consistently been above the national average.<sup>4</sup>

1.17 At local elections voter turnout in nine out of the 20 wards that make up Wolverhampton are consistently below the city average. Turnout at other electoral events, such as the 2011 referendum (38.3%) and the 2012 Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) elections (10.2%) were lower than the national average. Turnout in these elections are, however, comparable to other Black Country local authorities.

#### 1.18 **Recommendations**

The issues identified during the review broadly fall into three themes:

- Engagement
- Information
- Communication.

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<sup>4</sup> Voter turnout rates do not take into account the number of residents eligible to vote but not registered to do so. It is therefore not possible to give a completely accurate picture of the number of non-voters in Wolverhampton.

- 1.19 Recommendations from the review correspond to these categories with some cutting across all three broad themes. Please see table 1 for a full list of recommendations.
- 1.20 Engagement  
A consistent theme from witnesses relates to how the council and councillors engage with residents. Witnesses commented on the need to diversify the platforms and methods used to engage with residents, and the need for tailored approaches to target specific groups. For example, the voluntary and community organisations that presented evidence to the review welcomed the opportunity to work with the Council to facilitate registration among their clients.
- 1.21 Information  
Witnesses provided detail about the lack of information available on certain issues. The issues raised range from lack of information about politics and the council and little understanding of the UK political system, to those new to voting, such as 18 year olds. Recommendations relating to information aim to address very specific issues identified.
- 1.22 With regard to registration, witnesses and responses to the survey indicate that there is a lack of understanding of IER. IER changed the process of registering to vote: moving from household registration to a system where every individual of voting age (and 16 and 17 year olds) is required to register. The need to make information available in different formats, such as infographics, was also raised.
- 1.23 With regard to voting, 41% of responses to the survey stated that receiving a leaflet/information about a candidate/party would possibly persuade them to vote at future elections.<sup>5</sup>
- 1.24 Communication  
Witnesses commented that there was a lack of understanding among residents around issues such as the eligibility to register and vote, what terms in manifestos (and other documents) mean and what the council and councillors actually do.
- 1.25 As an example, approximately half of the clients The Refugee and Migrant Centre (RMC) see are from the EU; some are therefore entitled to vote, but many fail to understand communication from the council and require the RMC to explain the content of documents. Conversely, Bite the Ballot, who have a very different target audience – young people - outlined the need to diversify how we communicate with residents, and make use of the different platforms

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<sup>5</sup> This refers to elections generally and is not specific about voting intentions at either a local or national level

available, such as social media. How we communicate with each group will need to be tailored to their needs.

**1.26 Progress to date**

Throughout the course of the review, the Elections team have taken the opportunity to engage with witnesses and implement potential recommendations that would improve the mechanics of how the council engages with residents. For example, work with the University of Wolverhampton began in 2015 to encourage students to work at the ballot count (recommendation 4), as has work with the team responsible for Looked After Children (LAC) to identify how we could enable and encourage them to take part in the count of ballots cast or in polling stations at the 2016 elections (recommendation 2 and 4).

1.27 Further, as noted in the Executive Response, all accepted recommendations are due to be implemented no later than January 2017. This will allow for the recruitment of an Electoral Services Manager, who will be responsible for implementing some of the recommendations, and for changes to be embedded well in advance of the local elections scheduled for May 2017.

Table 1: Scrutiny review recommendations

No.	Recommendation	Target implementation	Responsible person
<b>Engagement</b>			
1	All electors be sent a personalised letter about voting upon reaching the age of 18	January 2017	Electoral Services Manager
2	Elections / Council should review how we engage with different groups to undertake statutory and non-statutory functions to identify opportunities to promote registration, particularly among those currently under-represented	January 2017	Electoral Services Manager
3	Work with organisations to encourage clients to register to vote while in triage and/or waiting for a meeting with an adviser	January 2017	Electoral Services Manager
4	Engage younger people with elections – different job opportunities (e.g. at the ballot count or in polling stations)	Currently underway	Group Manager – Corporate Administration
5	Undertake scoping work to determine the feasibility of requiring organisations bidding for council contracts to aid work to increase registration in Wolverhampton as part of the Social Value <sup>6</sup> test, in a way that is not burdensome for organisations	Consulting with Procurement to consider how this could be implemented	Group Manager – Corporate Administration
6	Work with local organisations to develop an engagement programme targeting different demographic groups and communities	January 2017	Electoral Services Manager
7	Develop a programme of engagement with schools, colleges and universities	Currently underway	Group Manager – Corporate Administration
<b>Information</b>			
8	Provide information about the importance of registering to vote, and how to vote at the citizenship ceremony	Pilot registration exercise at	Group Manager – Corporate

<sup>6</sup> Social Value relates to how the council could improve the economic, social or environmental well-being for residents and/or the City through contracts awarded to organisations.

		citizenship ceremony had limited success - investigating provision of leaflet to registrants	Administration
9	Make it clear who is eligible to register and vote at particular elections	Complete – <a href="http://www.aboutmyvote.co.uk">www.aboutmyvote.co.uk</a>	
10	Provide information (signpost) to where residents can find out more about the UK political system	Complete – <a href="http://www.aboutmyvote.co.uk">www.aboutmyvote.co.uk</a>	
11	Make all information as accessible as possible, such as visually(e.g. infographics) for those that struggle to read/write	Ongoing	Electoral Services Manager
12	Erect posters providing basic information – how to vote, who to contact for more information etc.	In time for 2017 Mayoral election	Electoral Services Manager
<b>Communication</b>			
13	Actively encourage those producing documents to make the language used (such as manifestos) easy to understand and available in different languages	Limited scope but will offer suggestions through regular candidates' and agents' meetings	Electoral Services Manager
14	The council should review the range of communication methods currently used with a view to produce documents for those unable to read/write (such as videos detailing how to vote)	October 2016 (target action date)	Electoral Services Manager

## **Introduction - Electoral registration**

- 2.1 Residents that are 18 or over from the UK, EU or Commonwealth countries are eligible to register and vote in UK local elections. British Citizens living abroad and registered as an overseas elector cannot vote in local government elections.
- 2.2 To register and vote for parliamentary elections, residents must be 18 or over, a British citizen or from a qualifying Commonwealth country and not subject to any legal incapacity to vote. 16 and 17 year olds can register to vote if they are due to turn 18 within the lifetime of that electoral register.
- 2.3 The UK's registration rate compares well internationally, but evidence suggests that a significant number of people are missing from the electoral register.<sup>7</sup> The old electoral registration system where the head of a household would submit an application on behalf of a household/address was inaccurate and open to abuse. Although the number of cases of reported fraud is actually very low, the weaknesses identified in the old system had the potential to undermine confidence in the whole system.
- 2.4 In Wolverhampton, as of 1 February 2016, there are 177,580<sup>8</sup> residents on the electoral register; the latest population statistics<sup>9</sup> state that the 16 and over population is currently 201,729, which represents an 88% registration completion rate.<sup>10</sup>

### **Individual Electoral Registration**

- 2.5 The Electoral Registration and Administration Act (ERA) 2013 made provision for Individual Electoral Registration (IER), and moved from household registration to a system where every individual of voting age (and 16 and 17 year olds) is required to register in order to vote.
- 2.6 To register under IER, each elector in every household is required to provide their name, National Insurance Number, nationality and proof of date of birth. Where possible, details were then matched against Department for Work and Pensions) (DWP's) database prior to the individual being confirmed or added to the Electoral Register. Once registered, individuals are required to confirm annually that their details are correct.

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<sup>7</sup> Mark Harper MP, Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office, Written statement on IER, HC Deb 30 June 2011 c59WS

<sup>8</sup> As of 1 February 2016; this is the first full electoral register since the end of the transitional arrangements for IER and sees a reduction of 1854 residents

<sup>9</sup> Office of National Statistics annual mid-year population estimates, 2014

<sup>10</sup> Estimated as not all residents are eligible to register and vote, and some are unknown to the council so not included in any official figures

## 2.7 Issue

Citizens' Advice Wolverhampton and Bite the Ballot told the review group that there were still a number of people unaware that the registration process has changed. The survey supported this view, finding 50.3% (82) of respondents were unaware of this change, and 59.1% (97) were unsure how to register to vote under the new system.

## 2.8 Solution

Building on evidence heard from witnesses, the council could run targeted campaigns in the lead-up to elections to remind residents of the need to register under IER and/or confirm details if they have not done so already.

### **Recommendations**

- Work with organisations to encourage clients to register to vote while in triage and/or waiting for a meeting with an adviser.
- Work with local organisations to develop an engagement programme targeting different demographic groups and communities
- Make it clear who is eligible to register and vote at particular elections

### **Groups with low registration and participation**

2.9 During the transition to IER, the Cabinet Office carried out some work to isolate the characteristics associated with lower registration rates to enable the Government to undertake a number of campaigns to increase voter registration. Analysis by the Cabinet Office and the Electoral Commission has identified that, on a national level, the five key groups that are under-registered are:

- private renters
- social renters
- young people
- students
- those not born in the UK.

2.10 In addition, there is evidence that identifies that those with disabilities are also under-registered. The Political and Constitutional Reform committee heard evidence from disability groups highlighting the issue, in particular the accessibility of registration and voting.<sup>11</sup>

2.11 Many of the issues identified during the review broadly fall into three themes:

- Engagement
- Information
- Communication.

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<sup>11</sup> Political and Constitutional Reform, Voter engagement in the UK, 2014

## 2.12 Engagement

Witnesses highlighted the way the council engages with residents as an area that could be improved. Witnesses commented on the need to diversify the platforms and methods used to engage with residents, and the need for tailored approaches to target specific groups.

2.13 The YMCA highlighted the need to engage with young people and students early by engaging with schools, colleges and universities. There is a greater chance of continued engagement by contacting young people and students early, and explaining what the council and councillors do. This was supported by other witnesses, such as Emma Curran, Youth MP, who suggested that the council, councillors and MPs go into schools to talk about democracy and the work of the council.

2.14 Mr Aboubakar, Wolverhampton Students' Union President, spoke of students' disconnection with the political process. The council does work with the University to engage with students, but it would improve engagement if the council/councillors could visit the university to give talks to explain what the council does, and incentivise people to register.

2.15 Detailing opportunities for young people and students to get involved in elections and the council would also help improve engagement with this group. In that, specifically opportunities to volunteer and/or undertake paid roles, such as at the ballot count or in polling stations.

2.16 The Ethnic Minority Council (EMC) mentioned the need to engage in locations where local people frequent, and to work with local organisations and communities to help improve registration and participation rates. The Refugee and Migrant Council (RMC) had a similar message - that there is insufficient engagement with marginalised groups. By working with local organisations to target particular groups and tailoring how the council engages could be part of the solution.

2.17 Citizens' Advice also noted that they could work with the council, and encourage clients to register to vote while in triage and/or waiting for a meeting. This could also be done at other organisations and places, such as doctors' surgeries.

2.18 Wolverhampton Homes Engagement Group held two group sessions with residents to discuss electoral registration and participation. The groups were relatively well engaged - most attendees were registered to vote; middle aged; some had children aged 18-24 and consequently gave feedback based on their children's thoughts. A common theme was that their children are not engaged,

largely because of national politics and the impact policies have on them, specifically housing benefit and the tuition fee rise. These do, however, fall outside of the remit of the council/councillors.

### **Recommendations**

- Elections / Council should review how we engage with different groups to undertake statutory and non-statutory functions to identify opportunities to promote registration, particularly among those currently under-represented
- Work with organisations to encourage clients to register to vote while in triage and/or waiting for a meeting with an adviser.
- Undertake scoping work to determine the feasibility of requiring organisations bidding for council contracts to aid work to increase registration in Wolverhampton as part of the Social Value test, in a way that is not burdensome for organisations.
- Engage younger people with elections – different job opportunities (e.g. at the ballot count or in polling stations)
- Work with local organisations to develop an engagement programme targeting different demographic groups and communities
- Develop a programme of engagement with schools, colleges and universities

#### **2.19 Information**

Witnesses provided detail about the lack of information available on certain issues. The issues raised range from lack of information about politics and the council and little understanding of the UK political system, to those new to voting, such as 18 year olds.

2.20 Witnesses stressed that there is a lack of understanding about the council/councillors and politics. The EMC told councillors that, in some communities, there is a lack of knowledge about the importance of voting, and that more could be done to inform residents of the benefits of voting.

2.21 Emma Curran highlighted the need to provide information about the technicalities of voting – how to vote, first past the post, proportional representation etc. Providing this information as part of an on-going engagement should improve knowledge of democracy and the confidence to participate.

2.22 The RMC detailed the lack of awareness with regard to who is eligible to vote at certain elections. Many of their clients are from the EU, with many unaware that they can vote in some elections. There is also a lack of knowledge about the UK political system, and political parties, and providing more information would help address this. It should be noted that many residents may not be aware of the need to register, as eligibility to vote in some countries requires proof of citizenship only. This information is available online, amongst other places, however it was felt the council could signpost to externally held information - such as the Electoral Commission – for those that visit the council website.

2.23 Providing information could also have a positive impact on residents voting, as 41% of responses to the survey stated that receiving a leaflet/information about a candidate/party would possibly persuade them to vote at future elections.<sup>12</sup>

#### **Recommendations**

- All electors be sent a personalised letter about voting upon reaching the age of 18.
- Provide information about the importance of registering to vote, and how to vote at the citizenship ceremony
- Provide information (signpost) to where residents can find out more about the UK political system
- Make it clear who is eligible to register and vote at particular elections
- Make all information as accessible as possible, such as visually (e.g. infographics) for those that struggle to read/write
- Erect posters providing basic information – how to vote, who to contact for more information etc.

#### **2.24 Communication**

Participants at Wolverhampton Homes Engagement Group's session commented that there was also a lack of explanation about why things are happening in the City, which resulted in some people feeling disgruntled. Responsibility for explaining events and issues should rest with all councillors and not merely the Cabinet Portfolio holder. Councillors discussed the need for elected members to look for other opportunities to communicate with residents.

2.25 The YMCA spoke about the need to tailor the communication to particular groups, including visual / infographics for those that are unable to read or write.

2.26 The RMC informed the group that some of their clients need help completing voter registration forms. Many only complete the form to avoid a penalty for failing to do so. The RMC suggested working with local organisations as a platform to communicate with different groups to better engage with residents.

2.27 The consistent theme from all witnesses was the need to diversify how the council/councillors communicate with residents. Emerson Morris discussed the need for information to be posted on platforms such as Facebook.

#### **Recommendations**

- The council should review the range of communication methods currently used with a view to produce documents for those unable to read/write (such as videos detailing how to vote).
- Actively encourage those producing documents to make the language used

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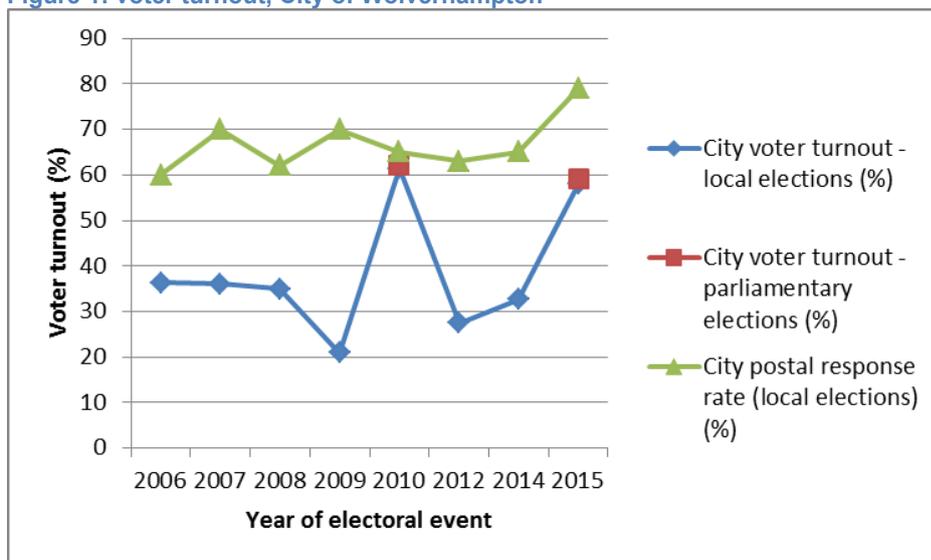
<sup>12</sup> This refers to elections generally and is not specific about voting intentions at either a local or national level

(such as manifestos) easy to understand and available in different languages

## Introduction - Electoral participation

- 3.1 For the purpose of this review, electoral participation refers specifically to voting. There has been a decline in voter turnout at both local and national elections over the last decade (the period in which this review considered). In Wolverhampton, voter turnout has been particularly low at local elections, and tends to be lower than the national average. For parliamentary elections, voter turnout in Wolverhampton North East and South East are consistently below the national average. Wolverhampton South West differs as voter turnout since 1997 has consistently been above the national average.<sup>13</sup>
- 3.2 At local elections voter turnout in nine out of the 20 wards that make up Wolverhampton are consistently below the city average. Turnout at other electoral events, such as the 2011 referendum (38.3%) and the 2012 Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) elections (10.2%) were lower than the national average. Turnout in these elections are, however, comparable to other Black Country local authorities.

Figure 1: voter turnout, City of Wolverhampton



\*Postal vote response rate relates only to those registered to cast their vote by post.

### Parliamentary elections

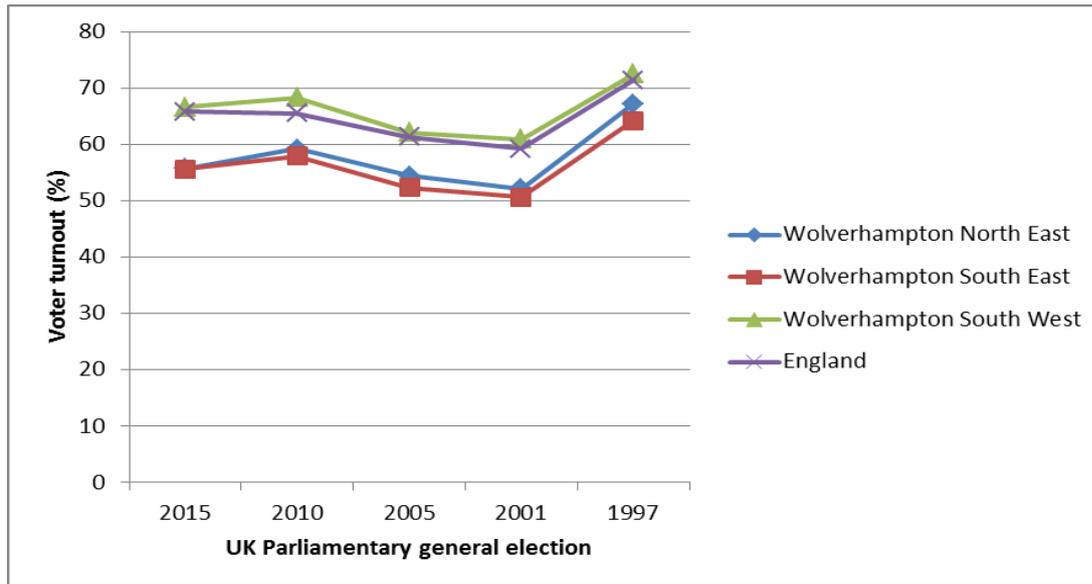
- 3.3 At the 2015 UK Parliamentary general election, Wolverhampton North East (55.7%) and Wolverhampton South East (55.6) received lower turnout than the

<sup>13</sup> Voter turnout rates do not take into account the number of residents eligible to vote but not registered to do so. It is therefore not possible to give a completely accurate picture of the number of non-voters in Wolverhampton.

average in England, 65.8%. In contrast, Wolverhampton South West saw turnout of 66.6%.

3.4 Wolverhampton does, however, achieve a similar turnout figure to the neighbouring authorities, Dudley (North and South) and Walsall (North and South). See appendix A for comparative data with neighbouring authorities at both national and local elections.

Figure 2: Voter turnout at parliamentary elections



### Local elections

3.5 Electoral turnout at local elections has consistently been lower than parliamentary elections. There is a 25 percentage point<sup>14</sup> difference between turnout where local elections were combined with parliamentary elections (59.5%) compared to when held as a standalone election or combined with other elections (34%).

3.6 There is, however, a sizeable difference in turnout between wards. Penn consistently achieves higher voter turnout than the city average, seeing 70% of registered voters vote in 2015 compared to 58% across the city. In contrast, Bushbury South and Low Hill received the lowest turnout in both 2014 and 2015 with 23% and 44% respectively.

3.7 As figure 1 shows, response rate for postal ballots are consistently higher than the total turnout percentage of those casting a ballot. At the 2015 local elections there were, however, under 1,000 residents registered to vote by post in 13 of the 20 wards that make up the City of Wolverhampton.

<sup>14</sup> Figure taken when comparing all elections since 2006

3.8 Table 2 and 3 detail the highest and lowest three wards for voter turnout in person and postal ballot response rate; please see appendix A (table 7 and 8) for the rank of every ward in Wolverhampton.

**Table 2: Highest and lowest three wards for voter turnout in 2014 and 2015 local elections**

	Rank	2015	Rank	2014
<b>Highest voter turnout</b>	1	Penn	1	Penn
	2	Tettenhall Regis & Tettenhall Wightwick	2	Tettenhall Wightwick
	3	Merry Hill	3	Tettenhall Regis
<b>Lowest voter turnout</b>	1	Bushbury South & Low Hill	1	Bushbury South & Low Hill
	2	Heath Town	2	Heath Town
	3	East Park	3	St.Peter's

**Table 3: Highest and lowest three wards for postal vote response rate in 2014 and 2015 local elections**

	Rank	2015	Rank	2014
<b>Highest response rate</b>	1	Tettenhall Regis	1	Spring Vale
	2	Tettenhall Wightwick	2	Tettenhall Regis
	3	Bushbury North	3	Tettenhall Wightwick, Wednesfield North, Bushbury North
<b>Lowest response rate</b>	1	St Peters	1	Bushbury South & Low Hill
	2	Ettingshall	2	Bilston East
	3	(Wards listed below)	3	East Park

*Wards with the third lowest response rate: Bilston East, Blakenhall, Bushbury South & Low Hill, East Park, Heath town.*

## Appendix A: Voter registration eligibility and voter turnout

### Electoral registration / eligible voters

The UK's registration rate compares well internationally, but evidence suggests that a significant number of people are missing from the register.<sup>15</sup> The old electoral registration system where the head of a household would submit an application on behalf of address was inaccurate and open to abuse. Although the number of cases of reported fraud is actually very low, the weaknesses identified in the old system had the potential for undermine confidence in the whole system.

Eligible voters refers to residents that are 18 or over from the UK, EU or Commonwealth countries and can register and vote in UK local elections. British Citizens living abroad and registered as an overseas elector cannot vote in local government elections.

To register and vote for parliamentary elections, residents must be 18 or over, a British citizen or from a qualifying Commonwealth country and not subject to any legal incapacity to vote. 16 and 17 year olds can register to vote if they are due to turn 18 within the lifetime of that electoral register.

### Voter turnout

Table 4: Voter turnout at European elections, the 2011 referendum and 2012 Police and Crime Commission elections

	Turnout (%)					
	Year	Electorate	Wolves	UK	Dudley	Walsall
European elections	2014	174,325	33.06	34.19	35.02	33.69
PCC (England & Wales only)	2012	176,275	10.19	15.1	11.4	10.72
Referendum	2011	170,751	38.30	41	36.1	37.79
European elections	2009	170,507	33.2	34.5	33.9	30.5

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<sup>15</sup> Mark Harper MP, Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office, Written statement on IER, HC Deb 30 June 2011 c59WS

**Table 5: Voter turnout at local elections**

					Turnout (%)		
	Year	Electorate	Wolves	England	Dudley	Sandwell	Walsall
<b>Local election &amp; parliamentary</b>	2015	180,104	58.32	65.2	63.1	56.4	60.9
<b>Local election &amp; European</b>	2014	178,273	32.67	36	35.7	31.7	34.5
<b>Local election</b>	2012	176,922	27.42	31.5	29.7	25.4	29
<b>Local election &amp; referendum</b>	2011	164,938	38.65	42.7	39.2	36.3	38.7
<b>Local election &amp; parliamentary</b>	2010	170,857	61.42	63.1	65.8	59.1	61.8
<b>Local election</b>	2008	177,619	35.29	35.4	35.6	31.8	29.3
<b>Local election</b>	2007	178,096	35.97	38.3	36.7	36.1	33.8
<b>Local election</b>	2006	178,366	36.47	36	36.2	36.7	34.9

\*Turnout data for Dudley, Sandwell, and Walsall are sourced from the Electoral Commission and relate to all votes cast, including rejected ballot papers.

**Table 6: Voter turnout at parliamentary elections**

					Turnout (%)	
	Year	Electorate	Wolves	England	Dudley*	Walsall*
<b>Parliamentary &amp; local elections</b>	2015	183,989	59	66.1	63	58.4
<b>Parliamentary &amp; local elections</b>	2010	177,660	62	66	63	60
<b>Parliamentary &amp; local elections</b>	2005	181,738	56	61	60	56

Turnout data for Dudley (Dudley North and Dudley South), and Walsall (Walsall North and Walsall South) are sourced from the Electoral Commission and relate to all votes cast, including rejected ballot papers.

### **Voter turnout by ward**

Table 7 outlines the rank by ward for voter turnout at the 2014 and 2015 local elections. Penn saw the highest turnout in 2015 with 70% turnout, compared to Bushbury South and Low Hill, which saw 44% of eligible cast a ballot. Table 8 ranks wards based on postal ballot response rate for the same electoral event, with Tettenhall Regis achieving an 87% response rate compared to St. Peters which achieved a 74% response rate.

Table 7: Voter turnout rank by ward, local elections 2014 & 2015

Rank	2015	Rank	2014
1	Penn	1	Penn
=2	Tettenhall Regis	2	Tettenhall Wightwick
=2	Tettenhall Wightwick	3	Tettenhall Regis
4	Merry Hill	4	Spring Vale
5	Park	5	Park
=6	Bushbury North	6	Merry Hill
=6	Wednesfield South	7	Blakenhall
8	Wednesfield North	8	Graiseley
=9	Graiseley	9	Bushbury North
=9	Oxley	10	Wednesfield South
=9	Spring Vale	11	Wednesfield North
12	Bilston North	12	Fallings Park
13	Fallings Park	13	Bilston North
14	Ettingshall	14	Oxley
=15	Bilston East	15	Ettingshall
=15	Blakenhall	16	Bilston East
=15	St. Peters	17	East Park
18	East Park	18	St. Peters
19	Heath Town	19	Heath Town
20	Bushbury South and Low Hill	20	Bushbury South and Low Hill

Table 8: Postal ballot response rate rank by ward, local elections 2014 & 2015

Rank	2015	Rank	2014
1	Tettenhall Regis	=1	Spring Vale
2	Tettenhall Wightwick	=1	St. Peters
3	Bushbury North	=3	Bushbury North
=4	Park	=3	Wednesfield North
=4	Penn	=3	Tettenhall Wightwick
=4	Merry Hill	6	Penn
7	Wednesfield North	=7	Tettenhall Regis
=8	Fallings Park	=7	Bilston North
=8	Graiseley	=7	Blakenhall
=10	Oxley	=10	Merry Hill
=10	Wednesfield South	=10	Graiseley
=12	Spring Vale	=12	Oxley
=12	Bilston North	=12	Park
=14	Bilston East	=12	Wednesfield South
=14	Blakenhall	=12	Fallings Park
=14	Bushbury South and Low Hill	16	Ettingshall
=14	East Park	17	Heath Town
=14	Heath Town	18	East Park
19	Ettingshall	19	Bilston East
20	St. Peters	20	Bushbury South and Low Hill

# Appendix B: Scrutiny review: Electoral registration and participation

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**Survey findings report**

**December 2015**

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## 1. Introduction and key facts

### 1.1 Background

Wolverhampton Councillors are carrying out a review of electoral registration and participation rates in the City. The review aims to identify potential barriers that might prevent local residents from registering to vote and/or voting. Evidence indicates that the following groups are under-represented in terms of registration and voting: private renters, social renters, young people, students, those not born in the UK and those with a disability, but there is recognition that existing barriers could impact all groups in Wolverhampton.

Councillors wanted to hear the views of local residents and organisations, such as voluntary and community groups, about the barriers and possible solutions to improve registration and voting rates. As such, two surveys were carried out – one aimed at residents and one at organisations. The surveys ran from 16 November to 16 December 2015.

The surveys were broken down into two broad sections:

- Registration: the motivations to register, how easy they found the process, how to encourage residents to register etc.; and
- Participation (voting): Whether they voted at recent elections, the motivations for voting, how would encourage residents to vote in future elections etc.

### 1.2 Respondents and response rates

The survey aimed at residents was sent to Citizens' Panel members, advertised on the Council's consultation webpage, Facebook page and circulated by our Participation Officers to local contacts. In total there were 196 responses. The survey targeting local organisations was sent to over 700 contacts and received two responses.

39.7% (62) of respondents were female, 57.1% (89) were male, and 3.2% (5) people did not provide this information. Out of the 156 respondents to the question, 3.8% did not say whether their gender was the same as the gender assigned at birth. 4.5% of respondents that answered the question stated that they were from the LGBT community, with 9.1% that preferred not to say and 42 people skipping the question.

11.6% (18) of respondents stated that they have a disability that affects their day-to-day activities, with 9% (14) either unsure or preferred not to say. 41 people skipped the question. 82.7% of those that responded to the question about their ethnicity classed themselves as White British, followed by Asian with 4.5%. In addition, 64.5%

(100) of respondents considered themselves Christian, followed by 21.9% (34) that are not religious.

The largest number of respondents was from Penn (10.5%), followed by Tettenhall Regis (9%) and Bushbury North (9%), and the fewest from Ettingshall (0.8%) and Bilston North (1.5%).

Figure 3: Age of respondents

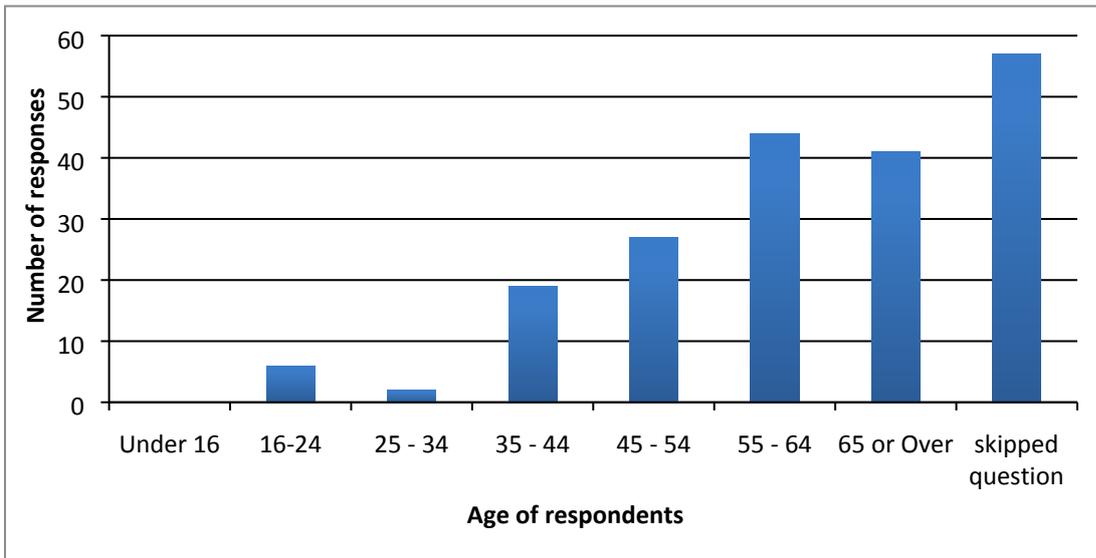
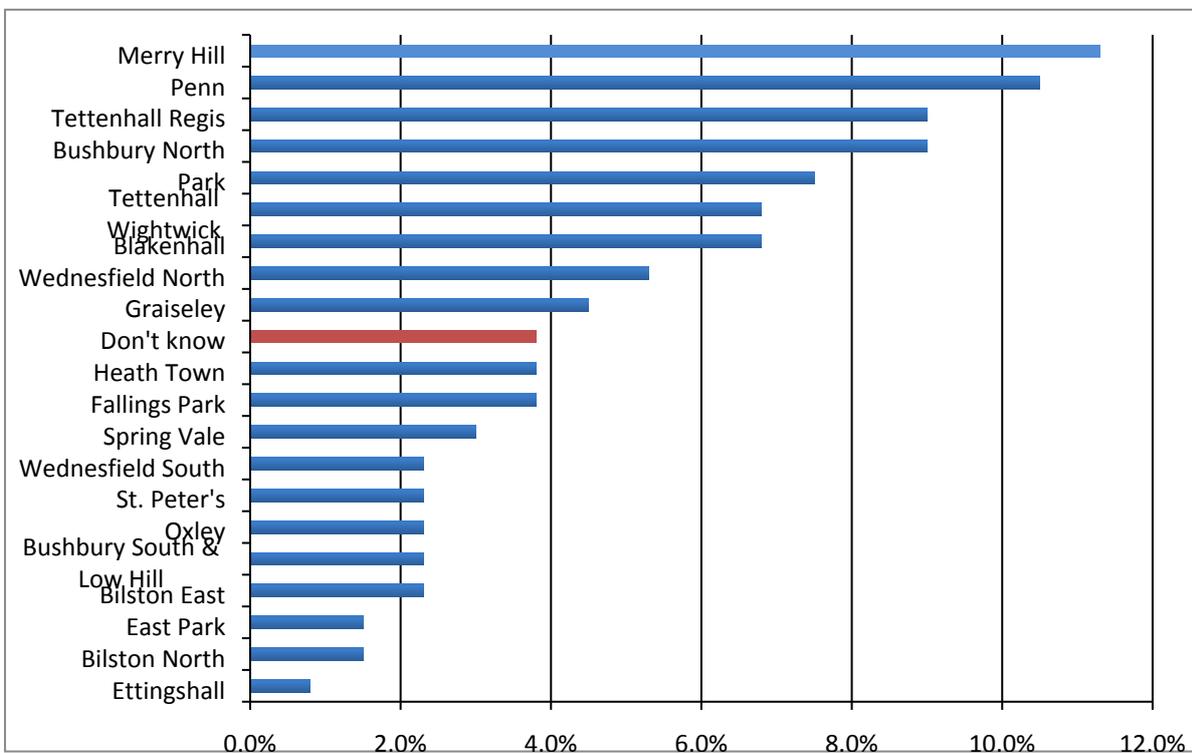


Figure 4: Wards respondents are from



### 1.3 Key facts

#### Registration

- 98% of respondents are registered to vote
- 78.6% of respondents stated that the main reason they registered to vote was because of the importance of having a say, followed by 66% of respondents stating it was important to exercise their democratic right.
- 97.9% (183) of respondents found the registration process very easy (123) or easy (60)
- 50.3% (82) of respondents were unaware of the change to the registration process (to Individual Electoral Registration), and 59.1% (97) were unsure how to register to vote under the new system

#### Participation (voting)

- 72% of respondents that answered the question (7 people skipped it) vote in person and 27.5% vote by post.
- The primary reason respondents gave for not voting at a recent election was due to a lack of information / knowledge about who to vote for (43.3%), followed by those that believe their vote would not make a difference, and that what they believe was not represented by candidates and/or parties (both 14.1%)
- 41.4% (53) of responses did state, however, that receiving a leaflet about a candidate/party could persuade them to vote at future elections.

## 2. Registration

### 2.1 Introduction

This section was designed to identify the issues related to registration – such as the reasons for registering to vote, reasons for not registering and what could be done to encourage residents to register.

Residents that are 18 or over from the UK, EU or Commonwealth countries are eligible to register and vote in UK local elections. British Citizens living abroad and registered as an overseas elector cannot vote in local government elections.

To register and vote for parliamentary elections, residents must be 18 or over, a British citizen or from a qualifying Commonwealth country and not subject to any legal incapacity to vote. 16 and 17 year olds can register to vote if they are due to turn 18 within the lifetime of that electoral register.

### 2.2 Registration and registering to vote

98% (192) of respondents state that they are registered to vote. This implies that the respondents are largely those already engaged with the council, to a degree. Four

respondents are not registered to vote, with three stating that they are unaware how to register but two are yet to seek advice. None of the four unregistered residents outlined what would encourage them to register.

The two responses to the survey targeting local groups outlined the following barriers to residents registering to vote: lack of knowledge and desire, and a lack of understanding of their eligibility to register to vote, such as EU citizens.

### Individual Elector Registration (IER)

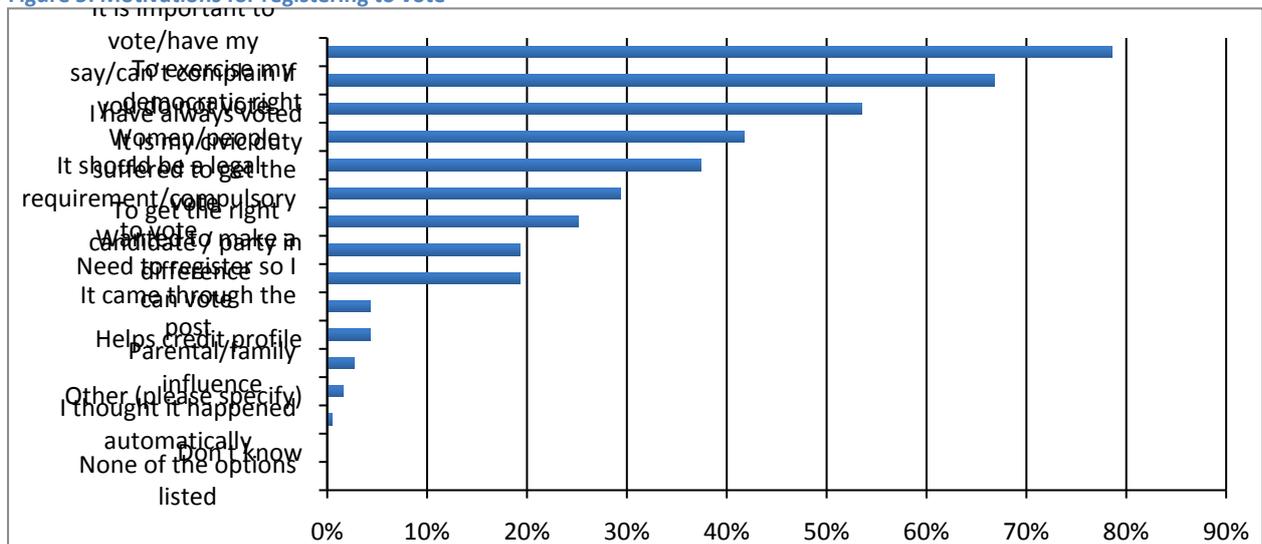
IER has been introduced and requires every individual of voting age (and 16 and 17 year olds) to register individually in order to vote. This replaces household registration and details needed to be confirmed under the new system by 30 November 2015 to ensure that they remained on the electoral register. 50.3% (82) of respondents were unaware of the change to the registration process, and 59.1% (97) were unsure how to register to vote under the new system.

### 2.3 Motivations for registering to vote

78.6% (147) of respondents stated that the main reason they registered to vote was because of the importance of having a say, followed by 66% (125) of respondents stating it was important to exercise their democratic right. Registering because people suffered to obtain the vote (37%) and the view that it should be a legal requirement/compulsory to vote also featured prominently among responses (29%).

The two responses to the survey targeting local groups felt that the main reasons for not registering to vote were due to the parties/candidates being perceived as the same, a lack of information and due to the difficulty of registering.

Figure 5: Motivations for registering to vote



## 3. Participation

### 3.1 Introduction

This section was designed to identify the issues related to voting at elections, such as the reasons for voting/not voting at recent elections, and what might encourage residents to vote at future elections.

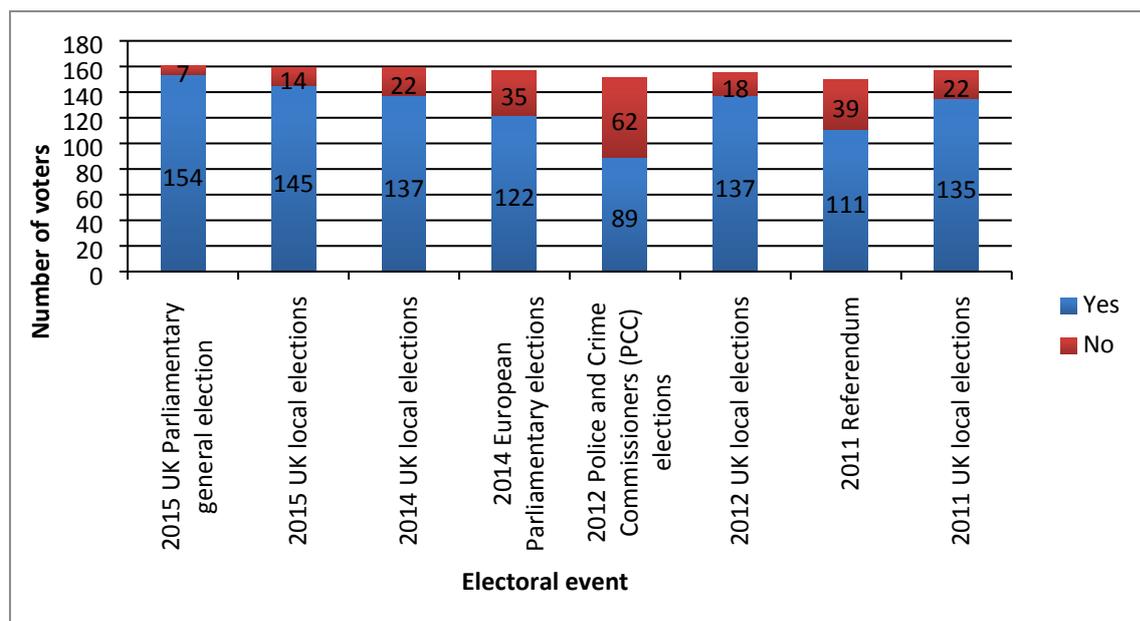
Voter turnout at both local and national elections has been in decline over the last decade. In Wolverhampton, voter turnout has been particularly low at local elections, and tends to be lower than the national average; nine out of the 20 wards that make up Wolverhampton are consistently below the city average. Turnout at other electoral events, such as the 2011 referendum and the 2012 Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) elections were lower than the national average.

### 3.2 Voting at recent elections

There were four questions related to participation (voting) at elections, covering the reasons for voting/not voting and what might persuade them to vote at future elections.

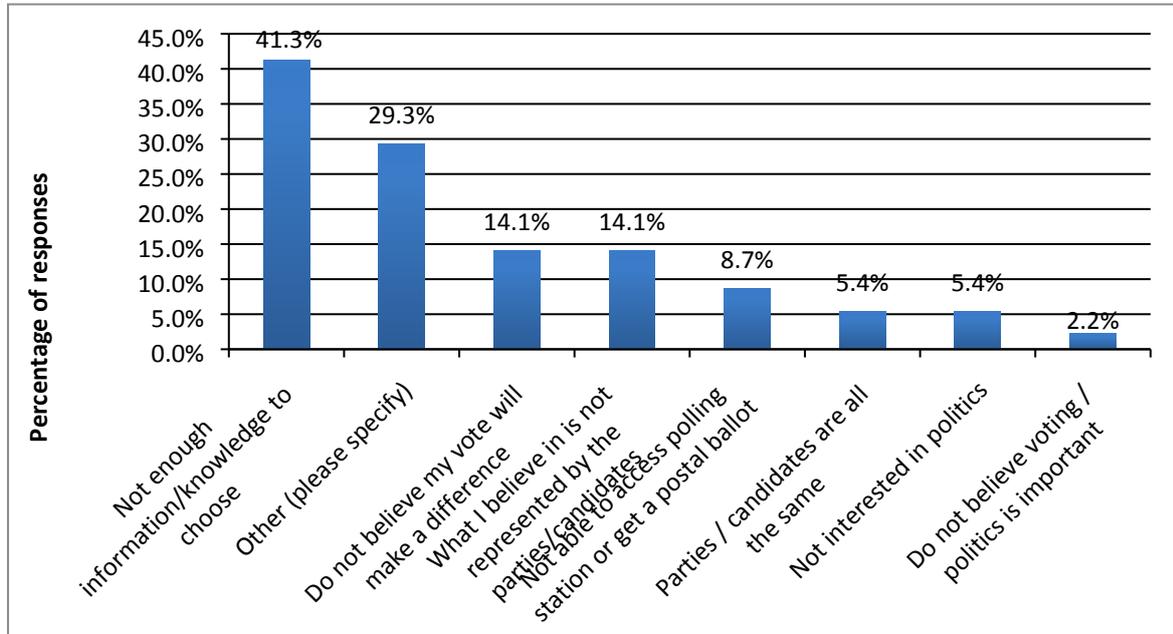
Excluding the seven that skipped the question, 72% (136) vote in person, 27.5% (52) vote by post and 0.5% (1) by proxy. 162 people detailed the recent elections that they voted at. As Figure 4 outlines, a high of 95.7% of respondents voted at the 2015 UK Parliamentary general election, compared to 58.9% that voted at the Police and Crime Commissioner elections.

Figure 6: Voting patterns at recent elections



41.3% of respondents stated that they did not vote due to a lack of information or knowledge, compared to 2.2% that did not believe in voting. 5.4% of respondents did not vote due to their perception that parties / candidates were all the same. The free-text explanations included a lack of belief in the elections (PCC) and those that were away from home at the time.

Figure 7: Reasons for not voting at recent elections



41.4% (53) of responses stated that receiving a leaflet about a candidate/party would possibly persuade them to vote at future elections, followed by 25.8% that selected other. The free-text explanations included more honesty from candidates, being able to vote online and the need for more direct democracy.

Figure 8: Actions that could persuade respondents to vote at future elections

