

Scrutiny Board

4 July 2017

Report title	Public Engagement Strategy	
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor Andrew Johnson Resources	
Wards affected	All	
Accountable director	Kevin O'Keefe, Governance	
Originating service	Electoral Services	
Accountable employee(s)	Laura Noonan Tel Email	Project Manager 01902 555053 Laura.noonan@wolverhampton.gov.uk
Report to be/has been considered by	n/a	

Recommendation(s) for action or decision:

The Scrutiny Board is recommended to:

1. Comment on the electoral registration public engagement strategy for 2017/18.

1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to outline the proposal for electoral registration activity for 2017/18, and in particular the approach to working with key partners to target under-registered groups and areas in Wolverhampton.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 The public engagement strategy has been developed to ensure that City of Wolverhampton Council continues to strive to maintain an accurate and complete register. Data from the 2016 canvass, along with other sources including census data and Mosaic profiles have been analysed to build up a profile of voter registration rates in Wolverhampton. Please see **appendix 1** for the public engagement strategy.
- 2.2 Overall registration rates are quite strong at 90.3% after the 2016 canvass, and this has improved further in the run-up to the general election. There are a number of areas where response was lower (worst in Heath Town – 81.6% and St Peter’s -78.9%).
- 2.3 Priority areas and groups have been identified due to two main reasons; a low response rate (less than 88%) and/or a high percentage of priority groups in the area.
- 2.4 The Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) has identified students, BME communities (where levels of English as a first language are lower than usual) and private sector tenants as priority groups, as they are particularly under-registered.
- 2.5 The data analysis has revealed the following ten priority areas:

Ward	Response Rate	Priority Groups
Blakenhall	93.5%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High percentage of BAME and low levels of English as first language Above average social and private rented Above average number of students
Bushbury South and Low Hill	88.9%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Above average BAME
East Park	86.6%	
Ettingshall	89.9%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Above average BAME Above average transient renters
Fallings Park	88.8%	
Graiseley	93.4%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High percentage of BAME and low levels of English as first language High percentage of transient renters
Heath Town	81.6%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High percentage of students Above average BAME High percentage of transient renters
Park	94%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Above average BAME and low levels of

		<p>English as first language</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Above average number of students • High percentage of transient renters
Tettenhall Regis	87.3%	
St Peter's	78.9%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Above average BAME and low levels of English as first language • Above average number of students • High percentage of transient renters

2.6 Resourcing issues over the past two years, in the absence of an Electoral Services Manager, have made it difficult to effectively target key groups/areas. The Council has recently appointed a Project Manager to the Electoral Services team, and a key part of their role is to strengthen registration amongst under-registered groups.

3.0 Progress against the delivery of 2016/17 public engagement strategy

- 3.1 The primary innovation for 2016 was the introduction of a new approach to the canvass. Rather than using about 150 people taking paper forms to small areas of the city, the Council recruited a team of about 15 people to work full time, using tablet devices to collect and transmit information. This significantly reduced the volumes of paperwork and data was immediately transferred into the electoral registration system, rather than having to be manually entered.
- 3.2 In 2016/17 progress has been underway to increase registration rates and engagement amongst students, attainers and black and minority ethnic groups. The 2017/18 public engagement strategy will build on this to develop more partnerships to strengthen registration rates amongst these groups.
- 3.3 A strong partnership has been developed with the University to promote student registration. Electoral Services has supported registration at key points throughout the year, most recently at a pop-up registration desk at the University to encourage people to register to vote for the general election. Progress is underway to develop a data sharing agreement with the University to embed student voter registration in to the student registration process for September 2018. This is a good practice model that was developed by Sheffield Council and Sheffield University and it has significantly increased the percentage of eligible students registered. This will reduce the cost of canvassing student properties and halls of residence.
- 3.4 In March 2017, a letter was sent to all 16 and 17 year olds in the city to advise them that they can be added to the electoral register as an attainer, so that when they are 18, they will be able to vote in elections.
- 3.5 A video was developed to explain the supplementary voting process used in the Mayoral election in May 2017. The video was in English, Gujarati, Polish and Punjabi. It was trialled in Blakenhall as Blakenhall has the highest percentage of Black and Minority Ethnic residents in the city, and these are the most widely spoken languages in the ward.

This was developed in response to one of the recommendations from the Electoral Registration scrutiny review to develop video material that can be used by polling station staff to advise non-English speakers how to vote. A postcard was sent to every elector in Blakenhall to encourage them to view the video ahead of polling day, and Presiding Officers encouraged voters to view the video on tablet devices in polling stations on polling day. Presiding Officers felt the concept was a good idea, but only a handful of voters viewed it in polling stations. The video was viewed 155 times online. There were staff in the polling station who could speak Gujarati and Punjabi and this was much more beneficial. A generic video on the voting process in multiple languages has also been produced, and this will be shared on social media ahead of future elections.

- 3.6 A dedicated elections page has been established on the Wolverhampton Information Network website in addition to the elections page on the Councils website. This reaches a wider audience than the corporate website, and it has a translation feature. This will continue to be updated throughout the year to explain the canvass process, encouraging people to register to vote and to provide information on upcoming elections.

4.0 2017/18 public engagement – Students and attainers

- 4.1 Electoral Services will continue to work with the Dean of Students at the University of Wolverhampton and the President of the Students' Union to register students to vote at the point of university registration and to attend key events such as freshers' fayre to inform students that they are eligible to vote at their home and term time address.
- 4.2 A meeting is scheduled with Wolverhampton College and The Way in June to discuss how Electoral Services can work with them to improve registration rates amongst attainers and students. There may be scope to adopt the university voter registration model at the college. Engagement activities such as presentations, pop up registration stands and involving students in the elections process will also be explored.
- 4.3 Education now provides a quarterly report of students that have turned 16, so that Electoral Services can target attainers for registration.

5.0 2017/18 public engagement – next steps

- 5.1 Work is underway to develop partnerships with community groups to promote registration. Research has found that street marketing, such as pop up stands in the community can be highly effective for registering BME groups and transient renters. This could be even more effective by partnering with community groups who have the knowledge about how and where groups would like to be contacted.
- 5.2 Three roller banners will be produced for use at pop up registration events. One is generic and aimed at all voters. One is aimed at 18-24 year olds to communicate that 3 out of 10 18-24 year olds are not registered and it's important they get their voice heard. The other one is aimed at private renters, communicating that only 63% of private renters are registered to vote compared to 94% of homeowners.

5.3 Following the general election, meetings have been arranged in June with the following organisations to discuss ideas for working together to improve registration rates amongst priority groups and areas:

- Citizens Advice Bureau
- Refugee and Migrant Centre
- Wolverhampton College
- The Way Youth Zone
- Outreach for Wolverhampton
- Private Sector Housing team

5.4 A verbal update will be provided on the outcome of these meetings at Scrutiny Board.

6.0 Financial implications

6.1 The costs of delivering the public engagement strategy will be funded from the £367,000 net budget set aside for Electoral Registration in 2017-18.

[GE/20062017/Q]

7.0 Legal implications

7.1 The public engagement strategy and registration plan have been produced in accordance with the Representation of the People Act 1983. The Electoral Registration Officer has a statutory duty to maximise registration across the city.

[TS/16062017/Q]

8.0 Equalities implications

8.1 There are equality implications in ensuring that every elector has the opportunity to vote. This is a priority for both the Council and the Electoral Commission.

8.2 Particular steps will be taken to maximise accessibility to registering to vote, including:

- Working with community champions to educate groups on eligibility to vote and to promote voter registration.
- Working with community champions to set up pop up events in targeted areas to encourage people to register to vote.
- Video material has been produced in four different languages to explain the voting process to assist voters where English is not their first language.
- Information on elections and the canvass will also go on Wolverhampton Information Network to reach a wider audience and it includes a translation option.
- Establishing a partnership with Citizens Advice Bureau, who come in to regular contact with members of the public.

9.0 Environmental implications

9.1 There are no environmental implications arising from this report.

10.0 Human resources implications

10.1 There are no human resources implications arising from this report.

11.0 Corporate landlord implications

11.1 There are no corporate landlord implications arising from this report.

12.0 Schedule of background papers

2016/17 Public Engagement Strategy and 2016/17 Registration Plan