

Scrutiny Board

17 January 2017

Report title	Electoral registration scrutiny review update	
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor Andrew Johnson Governance	
Wards affected	All	
Accountable director	Kevin O'Keefe, Governance	
Originating service	Democratic Services	
Accountable employee(s)	Martyn Sargeant	Head of Democratic Services
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Report to be/has been considered by	n/a	

Recommendation(s) for action or decision:

The Scrutiny Board is recommended to:

1. Review the progress made in respect of the actions and recommendations arising from the scrutiny review in 2016.

1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 To provide an update to the Scrutiny Board in relation to the recommendations and actions arising from the electoral registration and participation scrutiny review, conducted in 2015/16.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 With the introduction of individual electoral registration (IER) in 2014), Councillors identified registration and participation as pertinent issues for consideration as part of the 2015/16 scrutiny programme. The review was accordingly carried out, with several recommendations arising from it. The outcomes from the review were considered by the Cabinet at its meeting on 8 June 2016 and copies of the report and associated paperwork are available at:

<http://wolverhampton.moderngov.co.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CIId=130&MIId=5986&Ver=4>

3.0 Progress against the action plan

- 3.1 A progress commentary against each recommendation from the review is provided at appendix one.
- 3.2 The Council has endeavoured three times in the past 12 months to appoint an Electoral Services Manager. All three attempts were unsuccessful. This means that the post has been vacant for over a year and, with the additional pressure of the EU Referendum in June 2016, not as much progress has been made against some of the objectives as was hoped. Where this applies, an amended target implementation date is shown.

4.0 Financial implications

- 4.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report as Scrutiny Board is requested to review progress in respect of the electoral registration and participation action plan. It is anticipated that any costs incurred in pursuit of the plan objectives can be contained within the existing £360,000 electoral registration revenue expenditure budget.

[GE/16122016/V]

5.0 Legal implications

- 5.1 There are no legal direct implications arising from the report. The Council has a statutory duty to facilitate the efforts of the Electoral Registration Officer to maximise registration in its area and encourage participation in the democratic process.

[RB/19122016/B]

6.0 Equalities implications

6.1 There are no equalities implications arising from this report. New initiatives and policies are subject to an equalities assessment.

7.0 Environmental implications

7.1 There are no environmental implications arising from this report.

8.0 Human resources implications

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

9.0 Corporate landlord implications

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

10.0 Schedule of background papers

Electoral registration and participation review, report to Cabinet, 8 June 2016

This report is PUBLIC
[NOT PROTECTIVELY MARKED]

No	Recommendation	Target implementation	Update	Revised implementation
Engagement				
1	All electors be sent a personalised letter about voting upon reaching the age of 18	January 2017	The Council has been working with Bite the Ballot, to target young people in schools. This has included a pilot with Heath Park Academy to deliver lessons with young people. The letters to 18 year olds has been deferred to the 2017 canvass, pending appointment of a service manager.	October 2017
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	As part of the 2016 canvass exercise a number of new initiatives were piloted, including <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A text message campaign (mirroring a similar campaign for Universal Credit). • Increased social media presence. • Contact with local faith and community groups. • Support for Bite the Ballot and its work with young people. 	n/a
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	This is an initiative that has not been furthered in the absence of a service manager. It has therefore been deferred pending an appointment.	August 2017
4	Engage younger people with elections – different job opportunities (e.g. at the ballot count or in polling stations)	Currently underway	A small number of care leavers were engaged for roles in polling stations in 2016, to support the Council's corporate parenting role and provide work experience. Also, the Council worked with one	n/a

No	Recommendation	Target implementation	Update	Revised implementation
			secondary school, which provided a group of teachers and students to act as a count team for the EU Referendum. This was very successful and has resulted in follow-up work with Bite the Ballot around both participation and registration. And sixth form students from St Peter's played a key role at both May and June polls in managing the ballot box receipt process.	
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 ¹ test, in a way that is not burdensome for organisations	Currently underway	Following a feasibility assessment with Procurement, it was agreed that this could not be included as a requirement in tenders but could be considered on an adhoc basis dependent on the nature of particular contracts.	n/a
6	Work with local organisations to develop an engagement programme targeting different demographic groups and communities	January 2017	A range of contacts was made with local community and faith organisations as part of the 2016 canvass exercise. The response was very disappointing, despite offers to meet with, visit or provide training and briefing materials to groups. A review of this initiative will form part of the Council's feedback to the Electoral Commission and help shape the public engagement strategy	n/a

¹ 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.

No	Recommendation	Target implementation	Update	Revised implementation
			for 2017.	
7	Develop a programme of engagement with schools, colleges and universities	Currently underway	<p>See (4) above. A pilot has been delivered, which has included the Council providing a session on local democracy as part of the Citizenship GCSE, the school providing a group to take part in the EU Referendum count, and follow-up sessions conducted by Bite the Ballot. This will be evaluated further once a service manager is in post but the outcomes from the pilot have been very positive.</p> <p>Also, the Council has worked with the university, which hosted two polling stations at polls in 2016. There has also been a presence on campus at various events to register students, although overall levels of engagement from this community remain poor.</p>	n/a
Information				
8	Provide information about the importance of registering to vote, and how to vote at the citizenship ceremony	Currently underway	A pilot was conducted at citizenship ceremonies mid-2016. The take-up was very low with most attendees having already registered as part of their efforts to secure British passports.	n/a
9	Make it clear who is eligible to register and vote at particular elections		Complete – www.aboutmyvote.co.uk	
10	Provide information (signpost) to where residents can find out more		Complete – www.aboutmyvote.co.uk	

No	Recommendation	Target implementation	Update	Revised implementation
	about the UK political system			
11	Make all information as accessible as possible, such as visually (e.g. infographics) for those that struggle to read/write	Ongoing	Much election material is set by statute but, where it is possible, the information will be reviewed in preparation for the 2017 Mayoral election. Electoral registration material was reviewed in preparation for the 2016 canvass and, where possible (again, much of the literature is stipulated by the government), amended to make it more accessible. The website was also reviewed.	n/a
12	Erect posters providing basic information – how to vote, who to contact for more information etc.	In time for 2017 Mayoral election	To be addressed as part of preparations for the May 2017 elections.	n/a
Communication				
13	Actively encourage those producing documents to make the language used (such as manifestos) easy to understand and available in different languages	In time for 2017 Mayoral election	Although the Council is not responsible for liaison with Mayoral candidates, this message is being disseminated through regional working. It will also form part of the candidates' and agents' information for 2018.	n/a
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)	May 2017	To be addressed as part of preparations for the May 2017 elections.	n/a