

Briefing Note

Title: Voter registration and democratic engagement update

Prepared by: Laura Noonan, Project Manager – Electoral Services

Date: 6 September 2018

Intended audience: Internal Partner organisation Public Confidential

1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 To provide an update on voter registration and engagement initiatives undertaken since attending Scrutiny Board in [July 2017](#) where Electoral Services were asked to report back on progress following the 2016 [electoral registration and participation scrutiny review](#)
- 1.2 To introduce the plan for the year ahead.

2.0 Overview

- 2.1 Over the last year a significant amount of work has been undertaken to promote voter registration and democratic engagement amongst under-registered groups, as well as making an offer to all residents such as the be a councillor coffee morning and an invitation to take up a postal vote. The most notable achievement has been to embed voter registration into the university student registration process. A good platform for engagement has been established, and it will continue to be built on in the 2018-2019 plan – see **appendix 1**.

3.0 Background and context

- 3.1 Overall registration rates in the city are strong. The response to the 2017 annual canvass was 93.4%, but there are areas where response was lower (worst in St Peter's – 78.9% and Heath Town – 81.6%). However, the canvass household enquiry form is purely an information gathering tool to understand who has moved in or out of the property to establish who is eligible to be invited to register. There are certain groups that are particularly under registered and the Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) has identified students, attainees, BAME communities and private sector tenants as priority groups.

4.0 Voter registration initiatives – please see appendix 2 for pictures

- 4.1 **General voter registration drive** – Ahead of the 2018 local election, City of Wolverhampton Council launched the 'be vote ready' campaign to raise awareness of the local elections and the deadline for registering. This appeared on social media, digital signage in the reception area at the civic centre, corporate signature on all emails and also featured in the express and star.
- 4.2 **Postal vote campaign during annual canvass** – 113,000 leaflets have been sent out to every household as part of the annual canvass to encourage people to take up a postal vote as Wolverhampton is lower than the national average. To date, 4,000 people have indicated they would like to take up a postal vote and a third of those have completed their application and have a postal vote in place for all future elections. A rise of 2,000 postal voters will represent a 10% increase.

- 4.3 **Registration drive with partners** – Since 2017, Electoral Services has partnered with Citizens Advice Bureau and Refugee and Migrant Centre to run a two-week registration drive ahead of every election, which helps to reach the priority groups. The CAB pinned voter registration forms to clipboards for a week leading up to the deadline to register, offered assistance to help people register and promoted it on their social media accounts. The RMC printed it on the back of every ticket whilst clients were waiting to be seen by an advisor and a question on electoral registration is built into client registration all year round, so they can advise on eligibility to register and offer assistance to register online.
- 4.4 **Electoral registration is embedded into student registration** – From August 2018, every student is given the opportunity to register to vote when they register with the university. So far this has resulted in 3531 student registrations, which is almost half of the people who registered with the university. In Sheffield, this model resulted in 65% of eligible students registering, compared to 13% at a neighbouring university who did not have this process in place.
- 4.5 **Encouraging attainers to register** - Electoral Services has attended the college freshers' fayre for the last two years to raise awareness of registering at 16 and 17 to be ready to vote as soon as they are 18. This was done with the 'registering to vote is a piece of cake' initiative. This resulted in 60 registrations.
- 4.6 **Private renters leaflet** – The private sector housing team housing officers were given leaflets to give to tenants on their visits as part of their information packs. The feedback was that this was useful to have a conversation about voter registration, but didn't necessarily lead to a registration, so more work needs to be done in this area.
- 5.0 Democratic engagement initiatives**
- 5.1 **Be a councillor campaign** – For national democracy week, Electoral Services launched the Be a Councillor campaign to highlight the work of councillors and to encourage residents to consider becoming a councillor to continue to ensure leadership is reflective of the city. A website was set up which included video case studies from 7 councillors: <https://beacouncillor.co.uk/wolverhampton/>. Two information sessions were held which were attended by 30 people who rated the event as excellent and said it gave them a good insight in to being a councillor, and it has resulted in attendees joining political parties.
- 6.0 Initiatives scheduled for 2018 - 19**
- 5.2 **Vote 100** – To celebrate 100 years since women got the vote, Electoral Services is working with Councillor Momenabadi to plan a session with primary schools in the autumn to raise awareness of the importance of voting when they are old enough. This will initially be trialled in the Ettingshall ward and can be offered to schools across the city with support of Councillors.
- 5.3 **Meet the MP college event** – Electoral Services will be supporting a democratic engagement event at Wolverhampton College in November where students will have the opportunity to meet MPs and register to vote.
- 5.4 **Community democratic engagement events** – Electoral Services is working with West Midlands Combined Authority as part of the Leadership Commission to plan a community event that encourages residents to consider becoming a councillor, but more generally talks

about the importance of democracy and includes a workshop on how residents can engage with their local councillor to resolve issues. Bushbury South and Low Hill has been chosen to host the workshop as historically it is a low turnout in elections.

6.0 Proposal

- 6.1 To ask councillors to comment on the public engagement strategy and plan for 2018-19.
- 6.2 To invite councillors to work with Electoral Services to continue to promote voter registration and engagement initiatives across the city and in their wards.