

Electoral Services

Summary of key points of review of registration activity

Electoral Registration Officers (ERO) have a duty to promote participation in the electoral process within our area. This means we need to maximise the number of electors registered. This relies on an effective local public engagement strategy with robust processes sitting behind it that are continually reviewed and measurable.

The purpose of the Electoral Matters Committee was to undertake a review of the engagement and participation activities that are currently in place. The committee was tasked with identifying any areas of improvement as well as recommending certain practices to continue. Key areas and recommendations will be presented in the Chairman's report. Below I have given a summary of current activities and a new approach to consider.

Engagement with schools

Since the introduction of IER in 2014 there has been school engagement plan in place. There are 22 schools in the borough and a relationship has been built with 14 of these schools. Listed below are the activities that are currently in place. 40% of students are currently registered and whilst events that have been undertaken have built very good relationships with schools we need to start making a more targeted approach with the use of data sets from the education department.

- Student democracy programme
- Currently have 25 ambassadors in 8 schools
- Voter ID cards for 16 year olds.
- College Democracy events – surgeries to assist with registering to vote
- Some schools having their own “your vote your choice social media accounts”
- Interactive workshops which include mock elections, question time with elected members, school leadership elections.

The engagement with schools work has been very successful in terms of raising awareness of democracy and educating students about the importance of voting. The area that needs to be focused on is the actual registration numbers of students which will form part of the recommendations for this area in the Chair's report. The **key area** will be the interrogation and maximum use of Local Authority Education data

Community Engagement

The community engagement programme is required to build awareness of the importance of electoral participation. Key engagement activities that have been used are:

- Voter registration surgeries

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- Advertising, use of radio and newspapers, social media
- Promotion from within the council

Targeted Community Engagement

The borough of Sandwell has a large number of BME communities who are seen as one of the hardest to reach groups to engage with. In several areas English is not the first language, Relationships have been developed with partners and faith based organisations to run voter registration surgeries. Officers have been present at community events at critical points of the electoral calendar.

The use of Raj radio and new style radio to advertise the Annual Canvass proved very effective in highlighting the importance of the Household Enquiry form being returned. Other initiatives include:

- Voluntary Sector Council who place articles in their newsletters regarding the annual canvass.
- Social media tweets and the use of Facebook to raise awareness of the annual canvass.
- Mailshots in the main community languages
- YouTube videos to show people how to complete and return their Household forms
- Citizenship Ceremonies
- Posters and messages in key community places such as doctors, dentists and libraries.

In terms of community engagement one of the key recommendations will be the introduction of “all year round” canvassers who specially target outstanding Invitations to Register. This is a measurable way of targeting key wards and non-responding areas. **Key area** - The use of mobile tablet devices enable the forms to be displayed in all languages.

Whilst the surgeries that are held during the canvass period assist those that are already engaged the focus needs to be on people that are not engaged. We need to be able to identify and target individuals who are not currently engaged in the electoral process.

Data Matching and Data Mining

In investigating the services current engagement programme, it is clear that one area identified for further action is data matching. The key element to electoral participation is identifying electors who are eligible to be registered and invite them. Data sets from within the council provide rich data that can be cross referenced

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against the electoral register. This enables officers to then target specific electors. These data sets include:

- Council Tax movers list
- New tenants lists
- Education department – school leavers list
- Adult and social care data- blue badge holders list

Key area - The elections team will be utilising all the above data sets to ensure that we are identifying as many potential electors as possible.

Annual Canvass 2018.

The annual canvass 2018 was a huge success. A 93% response rate was achieved whilst reducing the costs of the canvass by £25,000. These results were achieved by the use of telephone and email canvassing of properties reducing the “door knocking” costs whilst increasing response rates. The activities at the canvass also increased the electorate from 219,000 to 226,000. This included specifically targeting empty/void properties and interrogating the council tax data base to data match. These initiatives must be utilised at the next canvass and developed further to maximise response rates.

Key area - Individual Electoral Registration requires a response from a household but each individual must then register – we need to maximise our resources and efforts to follow up any invitations to register that are issued. This should not be isolated to just the annual canvass.

Effective Public Engagement

Effective public engagement involves input from across the whole local authority working in partnership. New relationships were built with the town leads in each area for the 2018 annual canvass; we need to extend these relationships to outreach workers who are out amongst the community on a daily basis. This provides a perfect opportunity to engage with the electorate and promote voter registration. This will be a key area of focus for this year’s annual canvass. **Key area** – use of council “outreach” officers to promote registration.

Key areas of focus

- Targeted canvassing of outstanding invitations to register.
- Continue work within schools – meet quarterly with ambassadors
- Maximise the use of all Local Authority data sets – measurable results.

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- Use of mobile tablets to facilitate registrations and help with language barriers whilst canvassing.
- A whole council approach – use of the neighbourhood community outreach workers.

The Chairman will present a report to the July meeting of the Council detailing the review and make any necessary recommendations.