

**Minutes of the Select Committee
for Electoral Participation**

**19th October at 3.00p.m.
at the Sandwell Council House, Oldbury**

Present: Councillor Melia (Chair);
Councillors Allcock, L Horton, P Hughes and
Webb.
Rt. Hon. John Spellar MP

5/18 Minutes

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 13th July 2018 be confirmed as a correct record.

6/18 Progress Briefing and Update from Officers

Members received a report in respect of the actions that had been agreed at the first meeting of the Electoral Participation Select Committee to assist and drive the review of Electoral Registration activity and support the work of the Committee.

Members felt that a special effort should be made to engage with particular groups within the community and progress on this was recorded in the report as follows:

- current initiatives were in place for individuals undertaking citizenship and data was supplied to produce invitations to register;
- Council Tax mailings were already utilised and included leaflets to encourage registration;
- access to data sets that were available in respect of young people leaving care and adults with learning disabilities was being explored and a detailed analysis would be provided at the conclusion of the canvass;

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- levels of Service Voter Registration had been examined and currently there were 52 electors registered as service voters. A contact had been identified through the British Legion and discussion was ongoing regarding literature that could be distributed to those currently in the armed forces to promote registration;
- the elections team was currently producing a Customer Engagement Matrix which demonstrated customer contact with the Council and the variations in the way they contacted the Council. This would identify reference to electoral registration.

It had been agreed with neighbourhoods that the elections team would be provided a list of all new tenants on a monthly basis. Officers would be co-ordinating a meeting with all Town Leads to ensure a consistent approach and review the requirements for each Town area so strategies could be targeted appropriately. The Electoral Services Manager was currently working on a Data Sharing agreement across all council departments. Other initiatives that had been identified included:

- training outreach officers that were visiting properties to promote registration;
- Neighbourhood officers promoting registration at the Safer Six community events;
- all town leads to be responsible for ensuring that, where there was any customer contact, Electoral Registration was promoted – this was especially important during the canvass period with regard to the Household Enquiry Form (HEF).

Members had been provided with a table that illustrated the decrease in the electorate in March 2018 and the new registrations received between March and September 2018.

During the canvass, households were issued with the Household Enquiry Form (HEF), any household that did not respond was then targeted by a personal visit from a canvasser, a follow up letter would then be sent and the household given fourteen days to respond, followed by a further letter notifying removal from the register.

The table demonstrated a 52% increase in the number of new registrations compared to the number of electors that had dropped off following the canvass in 2017. Full increases in the electorate figures would be presented to the next Committee.

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It was reported that there had been a lot of engagement in Smethwick, however some had chosen not to respond to letters and had been removed. Some individuals were not aware that they are eligible to vote and officers intend to meet with community leaders to address this.

Members were notified that it was an offence not to return the Household Enquiry Form but not an offence to decline to register.

Members proposed that a fine be imposed for not returning the Household Enquiry Form and asked that the possibility of a penalty being incurred for refusing to register could be imposed. Officers would confirm if and how this could be undertaken with the Council's legal officers.

The canvass at the beginning of August delivered 134,200 initial Household Enquiry Forms and the response rate was currently at 82% compared with 69% at this point last year. So far 8000 Invitations to Register had been issued and these potential electors would be followed up to ensure that they registered.

Members were advised that there had been a successful response to telephone canvassing and this was a cost effective method of engagement.

Engagement via radio advertisements on Raj radio had been positive. This method was intended to reach low responding areas where language barriers may have been an issue.

Social Media platforms showed videos on how to respond to forms.

The communications team had considered how to promote the message to the right people. The Electoral Participation Officer had been invited to speak at a National event.

It was noted that despite efforts there had been lack of response from people with Gambian and Sudanese background. The Right Honourable John Spellar MP would be visiting the Gambian Centre in the near future and would discuss this matter with the Gambian community leaders.

Issues in respect of Houses of Multiple Occupancy meant that an accurate data set was difficult to capture, and people moved on a regular basis. Private Landlords should have a duty to see that HEF's were returned.

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Single occupancy forms would be investigated to ensure that 16 and 17 year olds listed at the properties would be followed up.

It was suggested that registration forms could be distributed at schools and colleges.

Town Champions/ambassadors was a suggestion at the last Committee meeting and officers were making arrangements.

An analysis of those in receipt of Housing benefit and the level of registration along with a snapshot of private housing would be developed.

The Electoral Services Manager would investigate if the travelling community with a permanent base had been included within the Canvass.

The Committee thanked Elections team for all their commitment and the work undertaken so far.

(The meeting ended at 4.05p.m.)

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