

**Select Committee for Electoral
Participation**

**Friday 31 May 2019, at 3pm
in Committee Room 1
at Sandwell Council House, Freeth Street, Oldbury**

Agenda

1. Chairman's opening remarks and introductions.
2. Apologies for absence.
3. Members to declare an interest in any matters to be discussed at the meeting.
4. To confirm the minutes of the meeting held on 14 December 2018.
5. Progress Briefing and Update from Electoral Services Manager.
6. Minutes of the previous meetings of the Select Committee for Electoral Participation (for information).

**Jan Britton
Chief Executive**

Sandwell Council House
Freeth Street
Oldbury
West Midlands

Distribution:

Councillor Melia (Chair);
Councillors Cherrington, E A Giles, Hadley, P
Hughes, .

Rt. Hon. Adrian Bailey.

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Please note that this meeting may be filmed by members of the public and press, and may be filmed by the Council for live or subsequent broadcast on the Council's website.

Apologies

To receive any apologies from members

Declarations of Interest

Members to declare any interests in matters to be discussed at the meeting.

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

**14th December at 3.00pm.
at the Sandwell Council House, Oldbury**

Present: Councillor Melia (Chair);
Councillors L Horton, and P Hughes.

Rt. Hon. John Spellar MP

Apologies: Councillors Allcock and Webb.

7/18 Guest Speakers – School Representatives

In attendance - Ambassadors from the following Schools:-

- George Salter Academy;
- Wodensborough Academy;
- Q3 Langley Academy;
- Holly Lodge.

The Select Committee for Electoral Participation was informed about the workshops that the Participation Officer was undertaking with students in respect of Elections Leadership and Participation.

Q3 Langley was a new school and the opportunity to work with students and establish a Student Council had been undertaken since the school was created. Students had experienced voting and had received a presentation on Vision 2030.

Members asked if the schools had connected to SHAPE, the Shadow Cabinet, and the Youth Parliament.

Members were informed of cultural barriers that prevented some female students being unable to engage due to the meetings and conferences being held in the evening.

Three students at Wodensborough were currently running for election.

Select Committee on Electoral Participation – 14th December 2018

Q3 Langley had been involved in a SHAPE conference which occur on a monthly basis, however it was felt that this could be held more frequently.

An Established programme had been rolled out fulfilling statutory obligations provided a tool kit to young people to assist in undertaking elections and provide good awareness of democracy.

Another barrier to engagement was transportation issues.

Members suggested the following activities for young people:-

- visit to the Mayors Parlour;
- observing Cabinet meetings;
- shadowing Councillors;
- shadowing MP
- TUC project going into schools.

Young people felt that the education and awareness of democracy was crucial to enable young people to make their own mind up on their political views. They felt that a lot of their peers had a lack of understanding and needed to be educated on democracy.

Ofsted stated that PHSE lessons should be used for a personal development programmes and these would include leadership, resilience and resource lesson plans for democracy.

Members asked if the young people felt that they should be allowed to vote at 16, the consensus was that young people need to be educated prior to being allowed to vote. They should be educated about democracy and explain why they should be participating.

It was considered that young people should be encouraged to apply for citizenship cards and schools should be encouraged to get young people registered when they are old enough.

The Ofsted request about the personal development programme for students in PHSE lessons meant that Schools would be more involved if a model was created in respect of working with schools.

The Chair thanked the Ambassadors for attending and participating in the meeting.

Select Committee on Electoral Participation – 14th December 2018

8/18 Minutes

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 19th October 2018 be confirmed as a correct record.

9/18 Progress Briefing from Officers

Officers had investigated the Members proposal that a fine be imposed for not returning the Household Enquiry form.

Members were informed that any costs associated with the enforcement of the Civil penalty would be paid by the local authority and any money collected as a result of this would be returned to Cabinet Office to be paid into the consolidated fund.

Any form of prosecution would result in a significant workload for the local authority and no financial gain.

In respect to the analysis of those in receipt of Housing Benefit and the level of registration, a data matching and investigation exercise was ongoing and a further update would be provided at a future meeting.

Members received an update on the Canvass.

The response rate for the Housing Enquiry form was 93% compared to 82% last year. The number of non-responding properties this year was 8,600 and it had been established that 3,100 of those had been confirmed as void/empty. This meant that 4% of properties had not responded as opposed to 19% last year.

Comments from members were as follows;

- consider empty properties and Council tax charges for vacant properties;
- retirement homes – how often are they contacted due to the high turnover of residents;
- spoilt votes – most records – West Bromwich.

(The meeting ended at 4.45pm.)

Contact Officer: Shane Parkes
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Minutes of the Select Committee for Electoral Participation

**13th July at 3.00p.m.
at the Sandwell Council House, Oldbury**

Present: Councillor Melia (Chair);
Councillors Hughes and Webb.

Apologies: Councillors Allcock, L Horton and
Rt. Hon. John Spellar.

1/18 Introduction

The Chair welcomed everyone to the first meeting of the Select Committee for Electoral Participation and asked that an agreement be reached in respect of key objectives and outcomes sought from the Committee.

2/18 Terms of Reference of the Select Committee

The terms of reference of the Select Committee were received.

3/18 Neighbourhood Engagement with residents in respect of Registration

The Committee received a presentation regarding Neighbourhoods engagement with tenants in respect of Registration.

New tenants were supported with the process of completing on line registration form by a neighbourhood officer and the officer also explained the implications of not completing the registration. Tenants were automatically removed from the register when they vacated a property.

Resolved that Neighbourhoods supply a list of new tenants to elections in order to check that they have registered.

4/18 **Electoral Participation:-**

Members considered key objectives and outcomes sought from the Committee.

Members were informed that it was not compulsory to be on the register.

Sandwell had developed a unique and innovative programme and activities to engage with local communities especially those that were furthest away from being engaged from the democratic engagement process.

A Youth Democracy Programme would offer young people opportunity to participate and learn about how democracy affects them. All schools and young people organisations could be targeted.

Members felt that a special effort should be made to engage with the following groups.

- young people leaving care;
- adults with learning disabilities;
- people coming to the council for services;
- armed forces;
- those applying and gaining citizen ship;
- those in private sector housing;

Resolved

1. that a quarterly report be submitted of the numbers registered to restore confidence in system;
2. capture the reason for not registering and feedback to Committee.

Members stated that there had been a decrease of those registered which had been noted at the last election. Individuals had turned up to vote and were told that they had not been register. Members were informed that this would be addressed during the canvass.

Resolved

1. that an analysis of fall off for each ward to include ethnicity breakdown be brought to a future meeting;
2. that the whole engagement strategy would be considered to ensure more comprehensive engagement;

Select Committee on Electoral Participation – 13th July 2018

3. consider the possibility of a canvass video in different languages;
4. that a schedule of activity for each town be brought to a future meeting of the Committee.
5. the Chair would engage with ward members prior to group meeting to discuss Electoral Participation;
6. that an Electoral ambassador for each town be established to engage with communities in respect to registration;
7. that developers building in the area be approached to consider putting a leaflet in respect of registration in their packs.
8. Youth engagement be undertaken via the young people's champion Councillor Millard;
9. that a full list of champions and ambassadors be assembled;
10. all activities to be launched in September 2018.

(The meeting ended at 4.15 p.m.)

Contact Officer: Shane Parkes Democratic Services Unit 0121 569 3190
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**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;

Select Committee on Electoral Participation – 19th October 2018

- 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.

Select Committee on Electoral Participation – 19th October 2018

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.

Member 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.

Select Committee on Electoral Participation – 19th October 2018

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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.)

Contact Officer: Shane Parkes Democratic Services Unit 0121 569 3190
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