

CABINET ITEM COVERING SHEET PROFORMA

AGENDA ITEM

REPORT TO CABINET

19 JANUARY 2017

**REPORT OF SENIOR
MANAGEMENT TEAM**

CABINET DECISION

Leader of the Council – Councillor Cook

ELECTORAL REGISTRATION UPDATE

1. Summary

To provide an update on electoral registration following publication of the Revised Register on 1 December 201 and the impact of the 2016 polls and on-going registration and engagement activity. The report also highlights future requirements.

2. Recommendation

That the report be noted.

3. Reasons for the Recommendations

To update Cabinet.

4. Members' Interests

Members (including co-opted Members) should consider whether they have a personal interest in any item, as defined in **paragraphs 9 and 11** of the Council's code of conduct and, if so, declare the existence and nature of that interest in accordance with and/or taking account of **paragraphs 12 - 17** of the code.

Where a Member regards him/herself as having a personal interest, as described in **paragraph 16** of the code, in any business of the Council he/she must then, **in accordance with paragraph 18** of the code, consider whether that interest is one which a member of the public, with knowledge of the relevant facts, would reasonably regard as so significant that it is likely to prejudice the Member's judgement of the public interest and the business:-

- affects the members financial position or the financial position of a person or body described in **paragraph 17** of the code, or
- relates to the determining of any approval, consent, licence, permission or registration in relation to the member or any person or body described in **paragraph 17** of the code.

A Member with a personal interest, as described in **paragraph 18** of the code, may attend the meeting but must not take part in the consideration and voting upon the relevant item of business. However, a member with such an interest may make representations, answer questions or give evidence relating to that business before the business is considered or voted on, provided the public are also allowed to attend the meeting for the same purpose whether under a statutory right or otherwise (**paragraph 19** of the code)

Members may participate in any discussion and vote on a matter in which they have an interest, as described in **paragraph 18** of the code, where that interest relates to functions of the Council detailed in **paragraph 20** of the code.

Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

It is a criminal offence for a member to participate in any discussion or vote on a matter in which he/she has a disclosable pecuniary interest (and where an appropriate dispensation has not been granted) **paragraph 21** of the code.

Members are required to comply with any procedural rule adopted by the Council which requires a member to leave the meeting room whilst the meeting is discussing a matter in which that member has a disclosable pecuniary interest (**paragraph 22** of the code)

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RECOMMENDATION

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DETAIL

BACKGROUND

1. The Electoral Registration System has undergone significant changes over the past three years with the move to Individual Electoral Registration (IER) from the household system of registration. This was the biggest change to electoral registration in the last 100 years and the transition programme has resulted in a complete overhaul of all aspects of registration activity.
2. This change to registration has had to be delivered in parallel with the increasingly complex programme of elections and referenda.

TRANSITION TO INDIVIDUAL ELECTORAL REGISTRATION

3. The final transitional IER canvass was carried out in 2015 culminating in the publication of the revised register on 1 December 2015. Efforts were focused on ensuring that any electors who had not successfully been transferred to the IER electoral register did so before the legislation required their deletion in December 2015. Legislation required the Electoral Registration officer to promote registration and proactive data mining, house to house enquiries, requirements to register and a comprehensive programme targeting under-represented groups has paid dividends.
4. Leading up to the end of the transition to IER and mindful of the reduction in transitional funding, activities we were focused on identifying and developing new internal and external partners to help maximise voter registration using outreach to target groups of people that are statistically the least likely to register or vote (e.g. young people, students, BME, social housing tenants, home movers).
5. The register published on the 1 December 2014 had 138,132 electors. On publication of the revised register on 1 December 2015 (following transition to IER) there were 138,809 electors on the register which represented 92% of the adult population and maintained the percentage of the adult population registered to vote pre IER despite the many challenges of transition and bucking regional and national trends. Attainer registration on publication of the Revised Register was however disappointing with only 20% of attainers registered to vote. As a result

there has been focused targeted work to increase registration of this group who are under registered nationally

6. To coincide with National Voter Registration day on 5 February 2016 and as part of our work to maximise voter registration and engagement, Household Notification Letters were sent to all properties to ensure that our register was as complete and accurate as possible prior to the PCC Election in May and EU Referendum in June. A household notification letter was sent advising who in the household was registered and how to update the registration details if required.
7. The table below sets out improvement in registration levels between January and August 2016:

| Register Month 2016 | Dates of 1st input and deadline | Register Published | Electorate | Pending Electors | Attainers | Postals | Overseas | Service |
|---------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------|------------|------------------|-----------|---------|----------|---------|
| January | 21/11/2015-11/12/2016 | 04/01/2016 | 138,894 | 8,794 | 921 | 32,226 | 191 | 100 |
| August | 10/06/2016-08/07/2016 | 01/08/2016 | 143,120 | 7,320 | 1,919 | 33,443 | 556 | 109 |

8. The EU Referendum had a positive impact on registration levels and the percentage of the adult population registered peaked on 1 July at 93% (18+); the percentage of attainers registered also significantly increased from 20% to 41%.

2016 CANVASS

9. The 2016 canvass is now complete. The canvass includes a requirement under IER to send a "Household Enquiry Form (HEF)" to every household to elicit information about who lives in the property, however, this is not a registration form. Following receipt of a Household Enquiry Form, any new resident who has moved into a particular property or anyone turning 16 is sent an individual invitation to register and this can be completed on the Invitation to Register form provided, online, or over the telephone (provided that national insurance number and date of birth are provided).
10. Key dates in the 2016 Canvass were:
 - Stage1 - 1 August – all properties receive a HEF form by post
 - Stage 2 - 8 September – personal visits to all non-responding households commences
 - 19 October – end of personal visits
 - Stage 3 - 28 October – final HEF reminders are posted
 - Data mining/ matching
 - 1 December – publish Revised Register
11. Invitations to register individually were sent out to anyone added to the HEF form throughout all stages of the canvass.
12. In order to ensure accuracy and completeness of the Register, Electoral Registration Officers have a duty to plan a range of activities to raise awareness of the canvass across the Borough. Alongside write outs and door knocking, activities included press releases, social media messages on Twitter and Facebook, Stockton News, KYIT, advertising on SBC car park tickets, and information sent out via partners in our Democratic Information Network.
13. The response rate to the first stage of the canvass was 63% which represents an increase of 9% on previous years and there has also been a significant increase in the use of on line and

automated responses. At the end of the canvass the response rate was a pleasing 94%. Of the canvass forms returned, 16% had changes to the elector details. Where names are added to the HEF form, these become pending electors (i.e. individuals added to the canvass form or identified through data mining who need to provide national insurance number and date of birth to complete their registration). On publication there were 7,500 pending electors and these electors will need to be invited to register at least twice and receive at least one personal visit where an application is not made. Where names are crossed off a canvass form, a separate process is commenced to remove them by checking other data sets.

14. On publication of the revised register on 1 December 2016, there were 140,964 electors. This comprised 139,557 18 plus electors representing 92% of the adult population maintaining registration levels at 2015. On publication of the Revised Register on 1 December 2016 there were 1407 attainers (16 and 17 year olds) representing 30% of the 16/17 year old population and an increase of 10% compared to the 2015 Register.

MODERN ELECTORAL REGISTRATION PROGRAMME (MERP) AND CANVASS PILOTS

15. The Minister for Constitutional Reform has a vision for change to improve user satisfaction and drive down costs associated with electoral registration in order to increase public trust and confidence in the electoral registration system, as well as the levels of completeness and accuracy of the electoral register. Delivering this change is the focus of MERP.
16. The success of the new Programme will be dependent on the collection of robust evidence of 'what works' and, as a result, on the delivery of appropriate and timely policy changes.
17. As a result of the Programme, The Electoral Registration Pilots Scheme (England) Order 2016 enabled three pilot schemes to be held in the areas of Birmingham, Ryedale and South Lakeland. Application for pilots for 2017 have now closed and will trial three schemes involving changes to the usual canvass approach around the use of Household Notification Letters, Channel Shift and Data Matching.
18. A recent presentation was made to electoral administrators at the AEA Branch Meeting on the Ryedale pilot. Ryedale (a predominantly rural area with low churn) piloted the issuing of Household Notification Letters rather than canvass forms putting the onus on household to only advise of changes. There were significant financial savings and no discernible impact on registration levels. Further reports will be submitted once the pilots have concluded on the analysis of their impact and proposed policy changes, if any.

NEXT STEPS

January 2017 – Postal Vote Identifier refresh
February 2017 – Local Democracy Week and Household Notification Letter sent
January – May 2017 – Registration activity in the run up to the Tees Valley Combined Authority Mayoral Elections
Summer 2017 – Annual Canvass
Polling District and Places Review – Commencing 1 October 2018

FINANCIAL AND LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

19. Duty to comply with the relevant legislation.

RISK ASSESSMENT

20. Business continuity plans continue to mitigate against any perceived risks.

COUNCIL PLAN

21. Stronger Communities

Assistant Director Administration, Democratic and Electoral Services

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Background Papers:

Ward(s) and Ward Councillors:

Property Implications: