

**Agenda Item No:** 7 **Report No:** 121/14  
**Report Title:** Encouraging residents to vote and stand as candidates at local elections  
**Report To:** Scrutiny Committee **Date:** 4 September 2014  
**Ward(s) Affected:** All  
**Report By:** Catherine Knight, Assistant Director of Corporate Services  
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### **Purpose of Report:**

To consider the work being done by the Council to encourage more residents to vote, and stand as candidates at local elections, and suggestions for improvements.

### **Officers Recommendation(s):**

- 1 That the Report be noted and any further suggestions for improvements be made.
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### **Reason for Recommendation**

- 1 At a previous meeting, the Scrutiny Committee requested that a report on the Council's responsibilities for encouraging more residents to vote and to stand as candidates at local elections, and suggestions for improvements, be brought to the Committee.

### **Information**

- 2 Registration officers have a duty under the Representation of the People Act 1983 (Section 9A) to take all necessary steps to maintain the electoral register and to ensure, as far as is reasonably practicable, that all eligible persons are on the register and all non-eligible persons are removed.
- 3 Electoral officers have a duty under the Electoral Administration Act 2006 (Section 69 (1)) to take appropriate steps to encourage the participation of electors in their area in the electoral process.
- 4 The previous duty on Councils to promote democracy was repealed under the Localism Act 2011.

## **Encouraging registration - Individual Electoral Registration (IER)**

- 5** Individual Electoral Registration (IER) is the new system for registering to vote. It replaces the outdated household registration system and makes registration quicker and easier for the elector. People need to be registered in order to vote at elections and referendums.
- 6** The new system means:
  - For the first time, people can register online. They need to provide a few more details, including national insurance number and date of birth, which are verified against national databases. This helps to make the electoral register more secure.
  - People are responsible for registering themselves individually – in the past forms were sent to the ‘head of the household’ who would register those living at the address.
  - Most people who are already registered have been transferred automatically to the new register.
  - Some people need to take action to join the new register, even if they were registered in the past.
  - Those missing from the register are more likely to be from certain under-registered groups, including young people.
- 7** The key principles behind IER are to address concerns about potential fraud by verifying that everyone on the register is who they say they are, resulting in greater trust in the legitimacy and fairness of elections.
- 8** The Electoral Commission are raising awareness of IER nationally. Electoral Registration Officers and electoral services teams at each local authority are responsible for promoting IER locally.
- 9** Key challenges for Councils are to utilise all available data and other local knowledge to plan activities that address the most effective ways of maximising the completeness and accuracy of the register in their locality. Population mobility remains the demographic variable with the strongest impact on under-registration. Private renters, students and young people, care home residents, BME voters and those classified as semi-skilled, unskilled, manual and casual workers are less likely to be registered.
- 10** Under IER, Councils must take a proactive approach to electoral registration throughout the year, undertaking activities to identify people who are not registered individually and to encourage them to register.

## **Encouraging voting at elections**

- 11** The table appended to this Report details the activities being undertaken by the Council to encourage more residents to vote.

- 12** In general, average turnouts at all elections are shrinking. The wider context of lower levels of engagement and participation in traditional electoral politics needs to be acknowledged. This changing environment makes it increasingly challenging to keep the electoral registers complete. Technical policy changes can help improve both access to the electoral registration process and the security of registers but they will not change people's fundamental motivation to participate in democracy. Candidates, political parties and campaigners continue to play a vital role in encouraging participation.

### **Encouraging candidates to stand**

- 13** The table appended to this Report details the activities being undertaken by the Council to encourage more residents to stand as candidates at local elections, and includes some suggestions for improvements.

### **Financial Implications**

- 14** There are no financial implications arising from this Report. Elections and electoral registration activities are funded centrally or from existing budgets.

### **Legal Implications**

- 15** None over and above those set out in the body of this Report.

### **Sustainability Implications**

- 16** I have completed the Sustainability Implications questionnaire and have identified no impacts, either positive or negative, arising from this Report.

### **Risk Management Implications**

- 17** There are no risk management implications arising as a result of this Report. The Council fulfils its statutory duties by implementing electoral and electoral registration activities in accordance with the legislation.

### **Equality Screening**

- 18** I have completed the initial Equality Impact Assessment screening exercise and have identified no negative impacts arising from this Report. Therefore, a full Equality Impact Assessment is not required.

### **Background Papers**

- 19** None

### **Appendix**

- 20** Table showing work done by the Council to encourage more residents to vote and more people to stand as candidates at local elections, including suggestions for improvements.