

**FULL COUNCIL**

23 May 2007

## Report of the Scrutiny Management Commission

## **Outcomes of the Scrutiny Management Commission's review of Electoral Registration**

### **RECOMMENDATION**

1. To accept the recommendations of the Scrutiny Management Commission for increasing the level of electoral registration in Derby.

### **SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

- 2.1 At its meeting on 11 July 2006 the Scrutiny Management Commission (SMC) agreed to conduct a review of Electoral Registration in Derby. The aim of the review was to see how more Derby people could be encouraged to register.
- 2.2 From its earlier work the Commission was aware that there were very significant differences in the levels of registration in different wards in the City. The Commission was also aware that forthcoming legislation would impose a duty on local authorities to increase the level of registration within their areas.
- 2.3 The Executive Summary and the Recommendations arising from the Scrutiny Management Commission's review of electoral registration in Derby are included in Appendix 2.
- 2.4 Electoral registration is a non-executive function so the outcomes of the review have been reported to full Council as the body that is responsible for electoral registration processes in Derby. The Scrutiny Management Commission considers that implementing the recommendations it has put forward would increase the level of electoral registration in Derby.

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<b>Background papers:</b>	Appendix 1 – Implications
<b>List of appendices:</b>	Appendix 2 - Executive Summary and Recommendations arising from the Commission's review of Electoral Registration in Derby

<b>IMPLICATIONS</b>
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**Financial**

1. None arising directly from this report.

**Legal**

2. Electoral Administration Act 2006 places a duty on Electoral Registration Officers to maximise registration. This would involve targeting specific groups and would be a year round activity.

**Personnel**

3. The Commission were provided with the following comparison of electorate/electoral team members:
  - Derby - 77,500 electors/ member of staff
  - Nottingham – 48,500 electors/member of staff
  - Portsmouth – 23,000 electors/member of staff

Members were told that Portsmouth's staffing levels were enough for them to operate Elections and Registrations teams. However despite having more staff, Nottingham's registration levels were lower than Derby's.

**Equalities impact**

4. Increased levels of electoral registration will be of benefit to all Derby people.

**Corporate Objectives, Values and Priorities**

5. Increasing the level of electoral registration will potentially link to all the Council's Corporate Priorities.

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## **Scrutiny Management Commission**

### **A review of Electoral Registration in Derby**

#### **1. Executive Summary**

1. The objectives of the Scrutiny Management Commission's review of Electoral Registration in Derby were set out in the scoping report for the review and were:

1. To achieve an understanding of the electoral registration process and of the barriers to registration
2. To examine any examples of electoral registration best practice by UK local authorities and assess the outcomes of that best practice
3. To consider the actions taken by the Council to encourage electoral registration in Derby.
4. Through discussion with selected stakeholder groups, to assess the outcomes of the Council's initiatives to encourage electoral registration and see whether there is the potential to achieve further significant increases in the level of electoral registration in Derby
5. If it is considered that there is the potential to significantly increase the level of electoral registration in Derby, to formulate recommendations, supported by reasons, for achieving the increases, and to give an indication of the level of financial and personnel resources that would be required to achieve the potential increases that have been identified.

2. In the course of its review the Commission considered information contained in reports of the Electoral Commission and took evidence from a range of witnesses who included a representative of the Electoral Commission, local authority officers and members of the public.

3. The evidence presented to the Commission showed that the officers of the Council's Electoral Services team were already aware of the majority of the initiatives that are known to increase electoral registration and had implemented most that were practicable in terms of finances and resources.

4. The Commission has therefore proposed a structured series of recommendations that are intended to take forward and build upon the initiatives already considered and in some cases commenced by the Electoral Services team. The Commission recognises that implementation of the recommendations will be conditional upon the necessary finance being available but members hope that this can be found from the funds that central government are providing to enable local authorities to undertake the duties set out in the Electoral Administration Act 2006.

## 2. Recommendations

Recommendation		Reasons
<b>General Recommendations</b>		
G1	<p>That the Council web pages relating to registration:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Are always interesting, attractive and informative</li> <li>b) Include an on-line form that can be downloaded and used for registration</li> <li>c) Incorporate a more obvious link from the Home page</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) The current web pages, although factual, do not appear particularly attractive. The information that they contain, although factually correct could be presented in a way that makes it more understandable</li> <li>b) At the time of writing this report the web pages do not include a registration form</li> <li>c) It is considered that registration will be encouraged if potential registrants do not have to search for information on registration</li> </ul>
G2	<p>The Electoral Services team should investigate all the opportunities that exist for using other front line Council services and advertising media to provide information on electoral registration and should work with the relevant departments to promote those opportunities that appear to have potential. These could include, but are not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Council Tax section</li> <li>▪ Houses in Multiple Occupation</li> <li>▪ Benefits section on home visits</li> <li>▪ Housing Options</li> <li>▪ Derby Homes</li> </ul>	<p>Leeds City Council has successfully used other Council departments to provide information on electoral registration to the public. The Commission considers that this approach should be thoroughly explored for Derby.</p>

G3	A generic 'Registration poster' should be prepared. The poster should be available in English and the major minority ethnic languages. The poster should be useable for all applications and should include details of how to obtain more information on electoral registration	<p><b>The Commission considers that the fundamental need is for clear easily accessible information on electoral registration.</b></p> <p>It is thought that a poster and an information pack that explains the need to register and the benefits of doing so and includes the relevant forms would help promote understanding of the process and so encourage registration and voting.</p> <p>It is intended that the poster and the pack would be usable for all applications</p> <p>To ensure that effort is directed towards those areas where there is the highest potential to improve electoral registration</p> <p>It is considered that professional advice may enable a more productive and cost effective campaign.</p> <p>Derby has a very small Electoral Services team compared to other similar sized local authorities and it will be difficult to deliver the proposed recommendations unless more staff are available</p>
G4	A generic 'Registration Information pack' should be compiled. The information pack should be usable for all applications where information on registration is required. The pack should be available in English and the major minority ethnic languages.	
G5	The Electoral Services team should identify specific areas and communities where there is a lower than average level of electoral registration and efforts to encourage registration should be targeted at those areas	
G6	Consideration should be given to engaging a publicity company to advise on the promotion of electoral registration	
G7	Consideration should be given to increasing the size of the Electoral Services team	
<b>To encourage the registration of Attainers (16/17 year olds)</b>		
A1	Young people at schools and colleges offering 16 to 18 provision should be provided with information on electoral registration when they reach their 16 <sup>th</sup> birthday.	<p>The Commission was told that young people are currently given very little information about electoral registration and do not know how registration and voting might affect them.</p> <p>The Commission considers that it is important to redress this deficiency and has suggested some specific actions with this</p>
A2	Head teachers should be asked to prominently display the generic registration poster (G3) in all Derby secondary schools	

A3	The Citizenship Co-ordinators news letter should be used to publicise the fact that 16-18 year olds are eligible to register even though they cannot vote until they are 18.	<p>aim.</p> <p>The Proof of Age card scheme that Trading Standards have put in place at Derby secondary schools will show when pupils attain their 16<sup>th</sup> birthday. They could then be sent information such as a personalised birthday card and the generic information pack (G4).</p> <p>The Commission considers that as well as young people being given information about electoral registration it is important that they are actively encouraged to register.</p>
A4	The Council should lobby the DfES to include electoral registration as part of the National Curriculum	
A5	The Electoral Services team should offer electoral registration advice to Derby sixth form pupils	
A6	As an incentive to register the Council could enter all young people between 16 and 18 who are registered in a prize draw.	
<b>To encourage the registration of Students</b>		
S1	The Electoral Services team should establish contacts and work with the Students' Unions of Derby University and Derby College to provide information and promote electoral registration.	<p>The Commission was told that little information on registration and voting was currently provided to students.</p> <p>The Commission considers that it is important to redress this deficiency and has suggested some specific actions with this aim.</p> <p>The Commission considers that the approach should be to provide some general information on electoral registration and to explain where more detailed information can be obtained.</p>
S2	The Students' Unions and the University/College authorities should be asked to prominently display the generic registration poster (G3) in all University and College buildings.	
S3	The Electoral Services team should encourage the display of the generic registration poster (G3) in places such as shops, hot food shops, bars and clubs, and on transport, that is used by students.	
S4	The Electoral Services team should ensure that sufficient copies of the generic information pack (G4) are provided to the Students' Unions and the University/College authorities.	

S5	The Electoral Services team should make information on registration available at appropriate 'freshers' week' functions at both Derby University and Derby College.	
S6	The University accommodation officer should be contacted to find out if there is a database of students in private rented accommodation and if so whether this can be used to send information on registration to those students.	
<b>To encourage registration by members of Derby's ethnic minority communities</b>		
E1	The Electoral Services team should seek to establish contacts in community and religious centres and work with them to make information on electoral registration available to the communities that they represent. The generic information pack G4 will provide a starting point for this.	<p>The Commission was told that some women were isolated from the electoral process and did not get the information or understand that they needed to register in order to be able to vote. Members were also told that to overcome barriers it was necessary to communicate with key people in the new communities and religious communities.</p> <p>The Commission considers that the approach should be to provide some general information on electoral registration and to explain where more detailed information can be obtained.</p>
E2	Information and advice provided to the ethnic minority communities on registration should where necessary be offered in the appropriate language.	
E3	The Electoral Services team should encourage the display of the generic registration poster (G3) in places such as shops, community and religious centres and on transport, that are used by members of Derby's ethnic minority communities.	

<b>To encourage registration by people who are moving house</b>		
M1	The Electoral Services team should work with Estate Agents, Building Societies, Housing Associations, the Housing Options Centre and Derby Homes to ensure that people who move house are reminded of the need to register and are provided with the information and the forms that they need to do this. The poster G3 and information pack G4 can be used for this purpose.	<p>The Commission was told that people who had moved in the past six months and those who were in private rented accommodation were among the groups with the highest levels of non-registration.</p> <p>The Commission considers it important that these groups are reminded of the need to register and are provided with information on how to do this.</p>
M2	The Electoral Services Team should seek to establish contacts with letting agencies representing private landlords and should attempt to work with them to make information on electoral registration available to their clients	
<b>To encourage the registration of people in the 18-30 age range</b>		
Y1	The Electoral Services team should encourage the display of the generic registration poster (G3) in places such as shops, bars, clubs and sports centres, that are used by this sector of Derby's population	<p>Information from the Electoral Commission's report suggest there is a significant likelihood that single people under the age of 30 will not be registered.</p> <p>The Commission considers that the provision of publicity and information in places likely to be frequented by people in this age group may help to redress this imbalance.</p>