

Review of Voter Turnout - Scoping Report

SUMMARY

- 1.1 At its meeting on 18 August 2014, the Board resolved to undertake a review of voter turnout at local elections, to investigate if and why it is relatively low and to seek ideas, to raise the percentage of those who exercise their right to vote in future.
- 1.2 Although low turnout is not unique and is exercising minds in many other authorities across the country, the Board hopes to identify the key local factors affecting turnout and to consider measures which could be taken, at a local level, to improve it and bring Derby at least in line with our neighbouring cities.
- 1.3 This report includes statistical information, at Appendix 2, to establish a benchmark, against which to measure the effectiveness of any recommendations arising from the review.
- 1.4 The report makes no assumptions about how to counter any causes discovered, as it will be for Members to make recommendations.
- 1.5 Engagement with those who do not vote will be difficult, as by their very nature they are not engaged with the council in relation to the democratic process, but by launching the review in Local Democracy Week, and engaging with local media, we may be able to raise the profile of the review and improve consultation.
- 1.6 Subject to Members' views the review could involve some or all of the following methodology:
 - Conducting a survey using a citywide random sample of 1000 names from the electoral register, to ask whether or not they voted at the 2014 local elections and give reasons for their decision.
 - Considering the views of young people, through the Youth Mayor and Voices in Action, about participating in the electoral process,
 - Considering the views of diverse communities, by consulting the council's diversity forums, including the newly formed Deaf People's Forum.
 - Comparing turnout between those using postal votes and those voting at polling stations
 - Identifying what actions authorities with higher turnouts than Derby are taking to achieve those improved figures.
 - Considering the potential impact of Individual Electoral Registration on the percentage of the electorate who are registered and the potential impact on

turnout.

- 1.7 If the review is launched during Local Democracy Week it can be complete by the end of the calendar year. This is important to ensure that it does not impinge on the integrity of the local and parliamentary elections, to take place on 7 May 2015.

RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 To consider and agree which elements of the methodology to implement.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

- 3.1 Turnout at local elections in Derby is lower than in our neighbouring authorities and very much lower than in Parliamentary elections. A detailed review could help identify the reasons for the low turnout and measures could be introduced to improve democratic accountability in the city.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 4.1 UK law requires people to register to vote but does not compel them to vote. This has resulted in lower turnout at elections in comparison with countries where the law compels people to vote. This review will look objectively at the key factors which could influence an individual whether to exercise their choice to vote.
- 4.2 Turnout in General Elections can be twice the rate for local elections, yet the process is the same. The electorate is clearly more engaged with national than local politics.
- 4.3 Turnout in the recent Scottish Independence Referendum was very high at 85%, again suggesting a high level of engagement.
- 4.4 Individual Elector Registration has been introduced this year and the stricter verification of individual's details could lead to a fall in numbers registered after 2015, when automatic carry forwards from the current register cease to be applied.
- 4.5 Derby has been identified by the Electoral Commission as in the top 16 authorities at risk of electoral fraud. This review must be demonstrably about increasing turnout across the city and across all demographic groups and not be seen to favour any one political group

OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 5.1 To not conduct the review, but that would likely lead to stagnation of turnout or further falls.

This report has been approved by the following officers:

Legal officer	Janie Berry – Director of Legal & Democratic Services
Financial officer	NA
Human Resources officer	NA
Estates/Property officer	NA
Service Director(s)	Janie Berry – Director of Legal & Democratic Services
Other(s)	Janie Berry – as Returning Officer

For more information contact:	Philip O'Brien – Head of Democratic Services 01332 643644
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Background papers: List of appendices:	phil.o'brien@derby.gov.uk None Appendix 1 – Implications Appendix 2 – Statistical and Research evidence to inform the review Appendix 3 – Potential methodologies for the review
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IMPLICATIONS

Financial and Value for Money

- 1.1 It is estimated that the cost of this review will be approximately £600 which can be contained within the Overview and Scrutiny project activities budget of £2305.

Legal

- 2.1 Article 6.3 of the Council Constitution enables overview and scrutiny boards to undertake policy development and review.

Personnel

- 3.1 None arising directly from this report.

IT

- 4.1 None arising directly from this report.

Equalities Impact

- 5.1 Effective scrutiny benefits all Derby people and the very nature of the Board ensures it looks in depth at equality in all its investigations.

Health and Safety

- 6.1 None arising directly from this report

Environmental Sustainability

- 7.1 None arising directly from this report

Property and Asset Management

- 8.1 In respect of the content of the report there are no issues from a Property and Asset Management perspective. However, if an agreed solution to improving voter turnout is the relocation /increase in polling stations there may be implications from a Property and Asset Management perspective which will need to be considered at that time.

Risk Management

- 9.1 Derby is among the 16 local authorities at highest risk of voter fraud based on Electoral Commission findings. This review is likely to raise the profile of the electoral process and may invite greater scrutiny from press and public.

Corporate objectives and priorities for change

- 10.1 Our aim is to work together so that Derby and its people will enjoy a thriving sustainable economy, good health and well-being and an active cultural life.

