

ITEM 4

Commenced: 6.00pm

Concluded: 7.31pm

Corporate Scrutiny and Governance Board 13 October 2014

Present Councillor Lisa Eldret (Chair)
Councillors Carr, Davis, Dhindsa, Pegg, Stanton & Whitby

15/14 **Apologies for Absence**
There were no apologies received

16/14 **Late items introduced by the Chair**
There were no late items.

17/14 **Declarations of Interest**
There were no declarations of interest.

18/14 **Minutes of the meeting held on 18 August 2014**
The minutes of the Corporate Scrutiny and Governance Board meeting held on 18 August 2014 were agreed to be an accurate record.

19/14 **Review of Voter Turnout - Scoping Report**

The Board received a scoping report of the Returning Officer, with suggestions as to how the Board's decision, to include a review of voter turnout in its work programme, could be delivered. The report included statistical information and a proposed methodology and timescale for the review.

The Director of Legal and Democratic Services also gave a presentation to the Board, to outline her roles as Returning Officer and Electoral Registration Officer and to provide an update on the progress of the new initiative, Individual Electoral Registration (IER).

IER transfers responsibility for registering from the previous 'head of household' on a single form, to every individual of voting age. In this first year transfers from the old to new register have been achieved, in the majority of cases, through data matching processes – first with DWP databases and then by local data matching, using other records accessible to, or maintained by the council. Derby's figures are amongst the best in the country, as an initial transfer from the live run against DWP records matched almost 80%. Further local matching had increased that to 89.04% as the report was published, with further progress likely as the publication date of the register, on 1 December, draws nearer.

Measures to maximise the percentage of those registered include write outs, using Electoral Commission prescribed wording, and a personal canvas of properties and individuals, where letter prompts still fail to get a response. We have made extra efforts to engage with students, working with the

University of Derby and Derby College and are developing a scheme to visit residential care homes to ensure that those who live there are included in the new register.

The Director was able to reassure Members that there remains an option to be removed from the register available for sale and in extreme cases, such as an individual avoiding a threat of violence, anonymous registration is still possible.

The Director reminded Members that Derby has been identified by the Electoral Commission as one of the top 16 local authorities most at risk of electoral fraud – following successful prosecutions resulting from the local elections of 2012. Our performance is closely monitored and a review of processes for the most recent European and local elections, in May 2014, identified Derby as demonstrating 'best practice' for the working relationship developed between the council and local police.

Discussion then moved to the review of turnout and the Board considered a range of statistics presented within the report, detailing turnout by ward, highlighting how it is much lower for local elections, in isolation, than when they are combined with a Parliamentary General Election.

The Head of Democratic Services answered questions relating to the statistics and committed to expanding on them to produce graphs to demonstrate trends, in the period since the current wards were established in 2002. Where possible these figures would be matched with comparator authorities, as this could highlight if Derby's election by thirds model has an impact on turnout.

Members were keen to learn if there is evidence available, from published research, on voting patterns within demographic groups, by age, gender, ethnicity etc and if this could be matched with the demography of wards in Derby. Any published research with findings on the reasons stated by people to explain why they do not vote should be included in the findings of the review.

Members then discussed the specifics of the consultation and engagement methods available, to identify and connect with those citizens who do not routinely vote in local elections.

Resolved to:

- 1. Note the report and approve a methodology for the conduct of the review.**
- 2. Devise and distribute a survey to a randomly generated selection of names and addresses, increasing the numbers of forms suggested in the report from 70 to 100 in the four wards with the lowest turnout.**
- The survey to establish if the recipient voted at the local elections in May 2014 and to include open questions to establish a reason if the response is 'no'.**

- **The survey to ask if the recipient would be likely to vote in the event of a future 'in/out' referendum on membership of the European Union.***
- 3. Invite Neighbourhood Boards to consider boosting the numbers in the survey by funding additional coverage.**
- 4. Engage with local media to encourage the public to complete the survey, by publishing it on the council's website.**
- 5. Liaise with the council's Communications Team, to encourage completion of the survey through its promotion on social media channels.**
- 6. Engage with the council's Diversity Forums, through the attendance of Members of the Board at their forthcoming meetings, the list of dates to be circulated.**
- 7. Ask for details of the Speaker's Commission on Digital Democracy to be circulated to Board Members, to assess its potential relevance to the review.**
- 8. Ask for information from the Strategic Director of Children's Services detailing the number of schools in Derby, which are using an election process to select school council members to familiarise pupils with the process.**
- 9. Complete the review by the end of the calendar year, to differentiate it from the local and Parliamentary elections on 7 May 2015 and to allow time for any proposals to increase turnout to be implemented.**

* This recommendation seeks only to explore potential participation of the respondent, not their voting intention.

MINUTES END