

<b>Committee:</b> Public Relations/Economic Development Sub	<b>Date(s)</b> 19 February 2015
<b>Subject:</b> City of London Ward Elections	<b>Public</b>
<b>Report of:</b> Director of Public Relations/Electoral Services Manager	<b>For Information</b>
<b><u>Summary</u></b>	
<p>This report aims to give an overview of the City of London’s ward elections and, in particular, the registration processes associated with them. The report gives consideration to the background and history, the 2014 worker voter registration process, the voter carry-over, online registration, the diversity of the electorate, residential registration and turnout in City elections.</p>	
<b><u>Recommendation</u></b>	
<p>Members are asked to note the contents of the report and discuss issues that may arise from it.</p>	

## **Background and History**

1. The present voting franchise in the City is set out in the City of London (Ward Elections) Act 2002. Previously only sole traders and unlimited liability partnerships had been able to appoint voters. The Act extended this to include a wide range of qualifying bodies and therefore made the electorate more representative of the modern City. Each incorporated body or organisation, whose premises are within the City of London may appoint a number of voters based on the number of workers it employs. Limited liability partnerships also fall into this category.
2. The Act sets a qualifying date of 1<sup>st</sup> September. In order to be eligible to appoint voters a qualifying body must have been based in the City for 12 months prior to the qualifying date. The number of employees at premises on the qualifying date determines the number of voters that they may nominate. Bodies employing fewer than ten workers may appoint one voter, those employing ten to fifty workers may appoint one voter for every five; those employing more than fifty workers may appoint ten voters and one additional voter for every fifty workers beyond the first fifty.

3. Eligible voters must be at least 18 years old and a citizen of the United Kingdom, a European Union country, or a Commonwealth country. (N.B. Non-UK EU citizens are ineligible to vote in Aldermanic elections.) In addition, only certain individuals may be appointed as voters. Under section 5 of the Act, the following are eligible to be appointed as voters
  - Those who have worked for the body for the past year at premises in the City
  - Those who have served on the body's board of directors for the past year at premises in the City
  - Those who have worked in the City for the body for an aggregate total of five years
  - Those who have worked mainly in the City for a total of ten years and still do so or have done within the last 5 years.

In addition, residents who work in the City are only allowed to vote once in City elections.

4. The annual worker voter registration process takes place in the 14 week period between the qualifying date of 1<sup>st</sup> September and the registration deadline of 16<sup>th</sup> December. The ward list is then published in February and cannot be amended until the following year.

### **2014 Worker Vote Registration Process**

5. The annual worker voter registration work employs a number of tactics and devices to assist the process:
  - i. The City Occupiers Database (COD) team start the annual ward survey in January. During the ward survey they visit and analyse every building in the City to determine the organisations located in the building and the number of people that they employ. The success of the worker voter registration process is a function of the quality of the COD data and at present the COD team only have the resource to examine each premise once per year.
  - ii. All eligible qualifying bodies receive three mailings during the registration period, the first of which is sent prior to the qualifying date. The mailing contains a letter from the Town Clerk, the registration form and literature that explains the process.
  - iii. The City Occupiers Database and Electoral Services teams follow up the mailings and encourage businesses to return the forms

- through a continuing and extensive series of emails, phone calls and face to face meetings.
- iv. For the first time this year there was a member of the electoral registration team that worked exclusively on worker voter registration during the registration period.
  - v. A dedicated team concentrate on personal visits to small shops, bars and restaurants
  - vi. Letters returned to sender from these mailings are used to update the COD data and ensure that further mailings are not sent to non-existent companies.
  - vii. Advertisements through City AM, e shots and other media are used to raise awareness and encourage businesses to register.
  - viii. There is a section of the City of London's website dedicated to City Elections including voter registration.
  - ix. Members also assist in the registration process, especially through providing updated information on the movement in and out of their wards of individual firms.
6. At the end of the 2014 registration process the total provisional number of registered voters appointed by City firms is 13,855 from 3,612 firms (this includes the "carry-forward" of those who registered in 2013, but did not submit a registration this year). 269 more firms and 558 more voters were actually registered this year compared to the numbers actually registered in the previous year. However, there was an overall decline in the number of voters and firms due to the decline in the number of "carried forward" voters. The total theoretical business electorate is 27,346 from 7,107 organisations, though the real figures will be less than this due to reasons of ineligibility and firms no longer actually existing despite still being on the COD database.
7. A number of issues associated with worker voter registration have been identified:
- i. The high levels of satisfaction with the way in which the City Corporation performs its functions means that firms often do not see the need to register.
  - ii. The extremely fluid nature of the City workforce means that it is often not easy to retain contacts.
  - iii. The current structure of registration is rather restrictive and a rolling register would greatly improve the accuracy of the Ward lists. It would also be more efficient as the City Occupiers Database team could carry out the ward surveys and registration at

the same time. However, this change would require primary Parliamentary legislation.

- iv. It is more difficult to register voters in the 'fallow' years in which there is a not complete election for all 100 Common Council seats.
- v. There is a concern that the pressure to take up their full entitlement may deter firms from participating. The electoral services and COD teams feel that this may be true in isolated cases but isn't a widespread problem.
- vi. In the past, the lack of contested elections had caused some frustration amongst the contacts who carry out the registration process in the firms but this is much less of an issue than it had been.

### **Voter Carry-Over**

- 8. In previous years the firms that did not register in a particular year but had registered in the previous year were re-registered in a carry-over process. In 2014 2,114 voters were carried over in this manner which represents 15% of total registrations. This compares with 4,026 voters and 26% of total registrations in 2013. The carry over process is being discontinued in 2015, which will have a positive effect on the accuracy of the register.

### **Online Registration**

- 9. A trial of online registration took place during the 2014 registration canvass. Businesses that were included in the trial were still sent a registration form. On the form, and covering letter they were directed to a website where they could update the information for their business. Each business was given a unique ID and passcode which they had to enter when they registered online. The online form, like the paper form, was prepopulated with the businesses' existing voter information. Alternatively, businesses could still complete and return the paper form in the traditional way.
- 10. The businesses that were chosen for the trial were predominantly those that did not respond during the canvass in 2013. Additionally, some of the larger businesses with multiple premises, and those that in the past have requested forms to be emailed to them were also included in the trial. The businesses were a mix of qualifying bodies, sole traders and partnerships. They were spread across all 25 wards and their voter entitlement ranged from 1 to over 50.

11. In total 974 businesses were included in the trial, although of these 118 were identified during the canvass as having moved. Of the remaining 856 businesses, 97 registered online (11.3%). Another 66 registered by post (7.7%).
12. While the numbers and percentage of businesses using the online registration service may seem low, the fact that the majority of those included in the trial were businesses that did not register in 2013 indicates that there were already difficulties in engaging them in the registration process. However, that this number of such businesses decided to use the online system rather than returning a paper form is an encouraging trend. The evidence from other local authorities that have used telephone and internet registration for residents is that year on year the numbers and percentages using the system increase as people get used to using the new service. Should online registration be rolled out to all businesses, it is not unreasonable to expect an improved take-up, particularly when businesses that are more engaged in the registration process are also able to register in this way. In addition, there is scope for significantly increased information regarding the online service to be included in the leaflet and other information sent to businesses.

### **Diversity of Worker Vote Electorate**

13. Analysis of the ward lists suggests that 29% of the worker voters are female which compares to the latest ONS estimate of 38% for the overall City workforce. Analysis of the job titles for over 2500 workers in larger firms suggests that approximately 55% of voters are senior level (at least board level or partner), 25% are middle management and 20% are junior staff. Efforts are made during the registration process to encourage firms to have electorates that are representative of the overall workforce where it is reasonably practicable.

### **Residential registration**

14. Electoral Services conduct a thorough canvass of all residential addresses to register the residents on the ward lists. A household registration form is sent to each address before the end of August. This is followed up with a reminder form to non-responding addresses before the end of September. A team of personal canvassers are then employed to visit those addresses that still have not responded during October and November. The canvassers are required to make at least 3 visits to each address, although they will often make more visits. Once they have made their final visit, if

they still have not obtained a completed form, then they deliver a final form.

15. Prior to the personal visits, information provided from council tax data is used to identify properties that are short-let. These addresses are not personally canvassed, so that canvassers can focus their time and effort on properties where potential electors reside.

### **Turnout in Common Council By-elections and Aldermanic Elections**

16. The Wardmote for an Aldermanic election has to take place within 42 working days of the Alderman's surrender of office at the Court of Aldermen. If this happens towards the end of the year, then it is a legal requirement to hold the election while the old ward list is still in force. Non-UK EU citizens are also ineligible to vote in Aldermanic elections.
17. Listed below are the turnout figures in Common Council by elections and Aldermanic elections since 2009 showing the month of the contest. In theory the register for elections in March should be most complete, and January the most incomplete and there does appear to be a loose correlation. It is also clear that elections in the wards with large electorates suffer from smaller turnouts, especially the very large wards in the west of the City.

<b>Ward</b>	<b>Contest</b>	<b>Month</b>	<b>Turnout %</b>
Aldersgate	Ald	Jun 11	31
Bassishaw	Ald	Apr 10	44
Bishopsgate	CC	May 11	21
Bishopsgate	CC	Nov 11	13
Bishopsgate	Ald	Dec 14	24
Bread Street	Ald	Mar 13	35
Broad Street	Ald	Jul 13	18
Castle Baynard	CC	Feb 14	11
Cheap	CC	Mar 14	33
Coleman Street	Ald	Nov 13	27
Dowgate	Ald	Dec 14	29
Farringdon Within	CC	Mar 11	19
Farringdon Within	CC	Jul 12	11
Farringdon Within	Ald	Oct 13	18
Farringdon Without	CC	May 11	11
Lime Street	CC	May 11	54
Portsoken	CC	Sep 11	32
Portsoken	CC	Mar 14	44
Walbrook	Ald	Sep 09	54

As a comparison below is a list of the turnouts in London Borough By-Elections since 2012. There is a broad similarity between the tables especially when the large ward outliers are discounted. The discontinuation of the carry over will improve the accuracy of the City's registers and therefore have a corresponding positive effect on the City's turnout figures.

<b>Borough</b>	<b>Ward</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Turnout</b>
Barking & Dagenham	Longbridge	9 May 2013	29.8
Brent	Barnhill	3 May 2012	38.0
Bromley	Bromley Town	3 May 2012	42.8
Camden	Gospel Oak	14 March 2013	27.2
Hackney	Hackney Central	3 May 2012	41.5
Hammersmith & Fulham	Wormholt	7 February 2013	24.8
Harrow	Harrow on the Hill	7 November 2013	29.0
Havering	Gooshays	21 March 2013	20.6
Islington	St George's	21 March 2013	25.9
Kingston upon Thames	Beverley	25 July 2013	42.2
Lambeth	Tulse Hill	25 July 2013	20.0
Lewisham	Evelyn	28 March 2013	16.2
Merton	Colliers Wood	8 August 2013	29.9
Richmond upon Thames	North Richmond	3 May 2012	52.4
Southwark	East Walworth	29 November 2012	25.4
Sutton	Stonecot	6 December 2012	24.0
Tower Hamlets	Weavers	3 May 2012	44.6
Waltham Forest	Larkswood	12 July 2012	24.4
City of Westminster	Marylebone High St	2 May 2013	23.1

## **Conclusion**

18. Members are asked to note the contents of the report and discuss issues that may arise from it.

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