

<b>Committee(s)</b>	<b>Dated:</b>
Policy & Resources	21 January 2016
<b>Subject:</b> Voter Registration	<b>Public</b>
<b>Report of:</b> Town Clerk	<b>For Decision</b>

### Summary

This report updates Members on the 2016/17 Ward List registration, especially in light of the anticipated reduction in numbers registering as a result of ceasing to retain electors on the Ward Lists through the 'carry-over' arrangement. The reasons why the carry-over can no longer be maintained are explained in more detail in the main report.

Registration on the 2016/17 Ward Lists closed on 16 December 2015 and the registration figures are currently provisional and will not be verified until February 2016. The provisional figures show that a total of 3,058 firms registered to vote in the recent 2016/17 Ward List (out of a total possible 7,009) compared with 3,612 in 2015/16. The percentage of eligible firms registering for 2016/17 was 44% compared with 51% for 2015/16 and the total number of business votes registered in 2016/17 was 12,514, compared with 13,855 in 2015/16. This indicates a reduction in the number of business votes registered for 2016/17 of approximately 10% compared with 2015/16. The number of residents registering for the 2016/17 Ward Lists is not yet available and more information on this should be ready during February.

The report also addresses plans for registration activities during 2016 to ensure that as many people as possible, both residents and business voters, are encouraged to register on the 2017/18 Ward Lists for the 2017 Ward Elections. Work has already started on this, with City businesses receiving literature about the 2017 elections and why it is important to become a voter in the City. Other activities including the option of online registration for businesses, a programme of communication and advertising, use of social media, a City Corporation Roadshow, stands at events and increasing temporarily the number of staff to canvass businesses. This later proposal is considered to have the greatest impact on increased registration.

Any encouragement that Members can give to businesses in their Wards to re-register could be invaluable in retaining them on the Ward Lists next year.

An initial estimate of cost of these activities is in the order of £90,000 and a breakdown is provided in the main report. Members' views are sought on the various activities.

## **Recommendations**

### **It is recommended that:**

1) the latest provisional results for registration on the 2016/17 Ward Lists be noted; and

2) Members consider and decide on the various registration activities proposed during 2016 to ensure that as many people and businesses as possible are encouraged to register on the 2017/18 Ward Lists for the 2017 Ward elections. If all the proposals are agreed, a budget of up to £90,000 should be approved to be met from your Committee's contingency for 2016/17 and charged to City Fund.

## **Main Report**

### **Background**

1. The registration period for the 2016/17 Ward List commenced on 1 September and closed on 16 December 2015. In the lead-up to and during the registration period for the Ward List, staff within the Town Clerk's City Occupiers Database Team actively canvassed unregistered businesses and encouraged businesses previously on the ward list to re-register. A household canvass of residential addresses was also undertaken between August and December, including personal visits to non-responding properties.
2. Individual Electoral Registration (IER) has been introduced nationally to reduce the potential for electoral fraud and increase the accuracy of the Electoral Register. While IER does not apply to the Ward Lists, the City still needs to be mindful of these national changes and, therefore, the practice of retaining electors on the Ward Lists for a year when a registration form has not been received from a business or residential address, sometimes known as the 'carry-over', was stopped. This has resulted in a drop in the number of voters which is referred to in more detail below.
3. While the carry-over was intended to make sure that more electors are retained on the Ward Lists, the information is effectively 18 months out of date before the Ward Lists are even published. As a result there are likely to be electors on the Ward Lists who have individually moved on or, in some cases where whole businesses have moved, creating the potential for fraud and distorting turnout in elections.
4. Any voters appointed by businesses or residents who are removed from this year's Ward Lists because they have not registered will still have the opportunity to be registered again in 2016 in time for the Common Council elections in March 2017

### **Voter Registration**

5. The business registration figures for 2016/17 are currently provisional and will not be verified until February 2016. The provisional figures show that whilst there was

a small increase in the number of firms registering compared with 2015/16, stopping of the carry-over arrangement meant there was an overall reduction in the numbers on the Ward Lists. The provisional figures show that a total of 3,058 firms registered in the recent 2016/17 Ward List (out of a total possible 7,009) compared with 3,612 (out of a possible 7,107) in 2015/16. The percentage of eligible firms registering for 2016/17 (provisional) was 44% compared with 51% in 2015/16.

6. The total number of business voters registered in 2016/17 (provisional) was 12,514 (out of a possible 26,570), compared with 13,855 (out of a possible 27,246) in 2015/16. This indicates a reduction in the number of business voters registered in 2016/17 of approximately 10% compared with 2015/16.
7. To add a little more context, 165 firms with 250 or more employees registered for 2016/17 out of a possible 243 eligible firms. 71% of firms with 500 or more employees registered as did 65% of firms with 250-499 employees. The lowest level of registration, at 36.5%, was firms having 1-9 employees.
8. The number of residents registering for 2016/17 is not available at the time of writing this report and the figures are unlikely to be ready until February 2016.

### **Proposals to enhance Business Voter Registration**

9. Generally, the City Corporation works to retain as high a number of voters as possible on the Ward Lists. However, as with the ward elections held in 2009 and 2013, there is a greater imperative to see as many residents and businesses registered for the 2017. In the lead-up to previous elections, steps were taken to increase awareness and promote greater registration and participation and a similar strategy is proposed in advance of 2017. Work has already started with City businesses receiving information about the elections as part of the current canvass.
10. The principal activities are summarised below. They include the likely expenditure in each case and Members' views are sought on whether all or some of these proposals should be implemented:

#### **Online Registration - £5,000 (to be met from existing funds)**

In 2015 businesses that were already registered to vote had the option to re-register online and over 500 businesses opted to use this channel to do so. In 2016 the option of online registration will also be made available to unregistered businesses. This will make the process for them much easier and should improve the response rate. There will be a cost associated with the purchase of new software in the order of £5,000 which will be met from existing funds.

#### **Communication - £30k**

A programme of communication using existing publications such as CityView and additional material such as flyers/advertisements/articles etc, is planned. This was a successful part of the campaign for the 2013 elections and should

contribute significantly to people's awareness of the forthcoming round. For 2016, this would include the production of a YouTube style case study video, and the cost overall is estimated to be £30,000 which includes a significant sum for advertising in Tube Stations in the sum of £24,000, including design. Advertising in the Tube was a feature in the lead-up to the 2013 elections but there is no evidence to suggest that it had a material impact on voter registration. It is, however, a very tangible demonstration of the steps being taken to promote the City Corporation's franchise at a critical time.

### **Social Media - Nil**

Use of social media and an enhanced City Corporation website page about the elections and registration. There would also be a link to the relatively new page on how to become a member of Common Council. There is no cost attached to this work but it will be important for a social media strategy to be developed and for the web pages to be reviewed.

### **Members - Nil**

Any encouragement that Members can give to businesses in their Wards to re-register could be invaluable in retaining them on the Ward Lists next year. This will incur no additional expenditure.

### **Corporate Contacts - Nil**

Utilising contacts with City businesses by all relevant departments eg EDO/Licensing/Mansion House to ensure a corporate approach to promoting voter registration. This would mean departments across the organisation, in their routine contact with businesses, consciously advancing the message about registering and voting. This will incur no additional expenditure.

### **Roadshow – up to £20k**

Taking a City Corporation 'Roadshow' to City businesses on topics of interest to their employees eg safety/cycling/open space/public health/air quality etc, with a clear message of 'have your say' at the 2017 elections. This initiative needs to be developed further but would involve our taking to larger firms information in the form of a roadshow about matters of concern for people working in the City so that they can see the breadth of our work, ask questions and understand that they can influence this through exercising a vote. The cost is estimated to be £20,000 which includes the design for a backdrop and branded hand-outs. However, this includes an allowance for hiring venue space of £10,000 should the firms targeted not be able to accommodate the roadshow. Hopefully, this will not need to be spent.

### **Stands at Public Events – Nil**

Stands at public events in the City such as street fairs. This would be similar to the roadshow but in a more concentrated form and accessible to everyone.

Bearing in mind that the material produced for the Roadshow will be used, there is unlikely to be any extra cost.

### **Temporary Staff - £40,000**

This involves increasing temporarily the number of staff available to canvass businesses. This is a key element of the campaign. There are currently two full-time employees who concentrate on populating the database for the purposes of voter registration. Their job is to actively encourage businesses to register, identifying the correct contact in the firm for this purpose and following-up. This is probably the most effective part of the campaign and the aim is to bolster the numbers of staff on a temporary basis. Two temporary staff are already employed to support this work with the costs being met from existing resources. However, to make a real impact (including helping to run the roadshow and the stands) at least two further temporary staff are recommended for a period of eight months. The cost of two extra staff is approximately £40,000 including on-costs etc.

### **Corporate & Strategic Implications**

11. There are reputational and political risks if the City's unique franchise is seen to be ineffective. The greater the number of people able to have their say in how the City is run through participation in the democratic process, the better. Encouraging and enhancing voter registration is, therefore, important, particularly in the lead-up to the 2017 elections.

12. It is proposed that the required funding of £90,000 be met from your Committee's contingency in 2016/17 and charged to City Fund. The current uncommitted balance of the contingency in 2016/17 is £250,000, prior to any allowance being made for any other proposals on today's agenda. Generally, the City Corporation works to retain as high a number of voters as possible on the Ward Lists, however, an extra effort is made to increase numbers and raise awareness in the period leading-up to an election. Bearing in mind these take place every four years, no financial provision is specifically earmarked for this activity and use of the Committee's contingency is, therefore, necessary.

### **Conclusion**

13. As anticipated, the number of number of business votes registered in 2016/17 has reduced by approximately 10% compared with 2015/16. This is the result of stopping the carry-over arrangement that applied in previous years. Work has already commenced to encourage businesses to register for the 2017/18 Ward List to ensure that we maximise the numbers eligible to vote in the 2017 ward elections and a programme to enhance participation in those elections on the part of both businesses and residents is proposed.

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