

Committee(s): Policy & Resources	Date(s): 20 February 2020
Subject: Common Council Elections in March 2021	Public
Report of: Town Clerk	For Decision
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Summary

On 17th and 18th March 2021, all-out elections will take place to elect Common Councillors for a 4-year period. In advance of these elections, it is necessary to ensure the Ward Lists are as accurate as possible so that everyone who wishes to vote and is entitled to do so, can participate.

Ahead of the March 2017 elections, your Committee approved a budget of up to £90,000 for initiatives to improve voter registration. This money was used partly to fund a programme of communications including the creation of a “CityVote17” website, the distribution of flyers and business cards relating to the election, the production of a YouTube video, email signatures for Corporation staff to use, social media posts and a City Corporation Roadshow. Funds were also set aside to employ additional canvassers to visit businesses to actively encourage them to register to vote.

Prior to the March 2021 elections, it will again be important to ensure that as many business and residential voters are encouraged to register on the 2021/22 Ward Lists. A programme of promotional activities during 2020 is therefore planned to support this. Given the Members Diversity Working Party’s and the Committee’s efforts to promote and enhance the diversity of the Court of Common Council, the intention is to also raise awareness of those from a diverse range of backgrounds that is reflective of the City’s communities. This report therefore:-

- provides you with details of the proposed promotional plans to encourage businesses and residents to register in the lead up to 2021;
- asks you to consider a promotional campaign to encourage a diverse range of candidates to stand for the 2021 City elections;
- welcomes any further suggestions which you feel might assist in the lead up to the all-out elections.

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to agree:-

- the proposed promotional activities as set out in paragraph 8 of this report in relation to increasing registration numbers;
- a budget of up to £72,000 be met from the Committee’s contingency for 2020/21 and charged to City Fund to undertake these various activities.

- a further budget of up to £55,000 be met from the Committee's contingency for 2020/21 and charged to City's Cash to fund an advertising campaign to encourage as diverse a range of candidates as possible to stand for elections (up to £45,000) and host an early evening reception during Inclusion Week (28th September – 4th October 2020) (up to £10,000).
- subject to approval, a progress report on the activities outlined in this report be submitted to the Committee's meeting in November 2020.

Main Report

Background

1. From September to December each year, the Town Clerk is required to conduct a canvass to update the City of London Ward Lists. This involves sending voter registration forms to every eligible business in the City of London and every residential address.
2. In 2016, ahead of the all-out Common Councillor elections in March 2017 additional activities were undertaken to promote voter registration, the work of the City Corporation and to raise awareness of the forthcoming elections. Amongst other things, this included a dedicated web page and adverts in the local newspaper. Similar steps were taken in advance of the 2013 and 2009 all out elections.
3. The activities in 2016 also included holding two briefing meetings with potential candidates in order to provide them with an overview of the election process, give interested parties the opportunity to ask questions and to hear more about the City Corporation. In addition, given the Committee's desire to enhance the diversity of the Court of Common Council, and following the views of the then informal Member-level Diversity Group, an early evening reception was held to brief and engage employee networks operating in businesses across the City, to promote the City Corporation's work and the benefits of undertaking civic duties.
4. In advance of the all-out March 2021 elections, it is proposed that a similar series of promotional activities should be undertaken to once again encourage wider voter registration and interest in standing for election. This will help to ensure the Ward Lists are as accurate as possible, that eligible voters are well informed of the elections and encourage people to think about standing for election.

Current Position

5. The Ward List for 2020/21 was published on 14 February 2020. This is the Ward List that will be in force until February 2021, when it will be succeeded by the Ward List which is to be used for the all-out elections. The current number of voters is 19,200. This is made up of 6,484 residential voters and 12,716 business voters. The Ward List has grown steadily over the past two years. In 2018/19 there were 18,631 voters and in 2019/20 there were 18,829 voters. At the all-out elections in March 2017, there were 18,983 voters. It is important to ensure that as many voters

remain on the Ward Lists for the March 2021 elections, as well as identifying other eligible voters and encouraging them to register.

6. The number of businesses appointing voters was 3,120 (out of a possible 7,615). This compares with 3,304 businesses appointing voters (out of a possible 7,441) for the 2019/20 Ward List.
7. With regard to potential candidates, the Elections Office maintains a list of people who have expressed interest in standing for election in future who are notified of all forthcoming elections including the all-out election. 119 people are currently on the list.
8. In terms of encouraging greater diversity, the Committee has acknowledged that more needs to be done to improve the current situation and since 2016 the informal Member-level Diversity Group has been placed on a more formal footing by replacing it with a dedicated working party to focus on this area of work. Together with its help, the work of the staff networks and that of the Diversity and Engagement Lead officer efforts continue to be made to promote greater diversity and inclusion at Member Level. As part of this, the Committee is being asked to consider the merits of undertaking a more high-profile campaign to encourage as diverse a range of candidates as possible to stand for the 2021 City elections. Further details are referred to below.

Options and Proposals

9. The Electoral Services and Communications teams are proposing a number of activities throughout 2020 to increase awareness and promote voter registration and participation.

Digital Communications

- The creation of a webpage called “CityVote21” which will contain all information relating to the elections including key deadlines, lists of candidates and polling stations and other relevant information
- Production of a YouTube video promoting the City, voter registration and the elections
- Creation of an electronic campaign logo for use on email signatures by officers and Members
- A social media campaign, which can be used to disseminate the YouTube video and other key messages
- A feature on the home page of the City Corporation’s website
- Email communications to business contacts before and during the registration period

- Emails to residential voters to say “Look out for your registration form” during the canvass
- Promotion at the Guildhall reception areas

Whilst most of these activities will be met from current budgets. It is estimated that the total cost of the additional digital communications will be around £2,500.

Paper Communications

- Production of leaflets, posters, flyers and business cards with the “CityVote21” messaging for use in business and residential voter registration forms, business surveys from the City Occupiers Database team and distribution outside key train stations
- Production of posters, leaflets, email templates that contacts within businesses can use to promote the City and voter registration within their business. These will also include a statement which encourage businesses to nominate voters that reflect the make-up of their organisation – from the Chief Executive to regular contractors - as we currently do.
- An advertising campaign in CityAM and City Matters and Corporation publications (City Resident, CityView, ward newsletters and Livery Briefing) – this will involve at least three campaigns in each of these fora throughout 2020.
- Creation of a pocket card with fixtures for the Euro 2020 football tournament to be given out in key City locations with “CityVote21” branding
- A letter from the Town Clerk and Chief Executive to business contacts prior to the voter registration process to raise awareness of the registration period
- A letter from the Town Clerk to new voters (both business and residential voters) appointed during the registration period to inform them that they will be a voter in February and will be able to vote at the elections in March, and to encourage them to look out for further information as the elections approach
- A letter from the Lord Mayor to companies that have not responded towards the end of the canvass explaining the importance of appointing voters and participating in the City’s democratic process

It is estimated that the total cost of paper communications will be: £16,000.

Informative Events

- Two briefing meetings to be held in the autumn for potential candidates. The aim of this will be to provide candidates with details of the election process, give them the opportunity to ask questions and to hear more about the City Corporation and its work.

It is estimated that the total cost of the two briefing events will be: £5,000

Promotional Events

- An early evening reception to be held during Inclusion Week (28th September – 4th October 2020) at a cost of up to £10,000). The purpose of the reception will be to brief and engage a diverse range of networks operating in businesses across the City as well as raise awareness through established contacts in organisations such as the 100% Club and those involved in International Women's Day, the Women in Finance Charter or the Pride flag raising event to promote the City Corporation's work and the benefits of undertaking civic duties. At the 2016 event, emphasis was placed on the City Corporation welcoming candidates from diverse backgrounds. It was hosted by a female Member and attendees also had the opportunity to hear from a Member from a BAME background who shared their experience. It is proposed that something similar to this is repeated.
- As part of efforts to encourage as diverse a range of candidates as possible for the 2021 City elections, costs have been investigated for a more high-profile campaign across appropriate print channels and in London Underground sites within the City. For example, this would include large format display adverts in City AM and City Matters newspapers (once a month for four months) (approx. £15,000 including design) and could also include advertising on London Underground escalator panels in stations across the City (whilst confirmation of the cost of this is still awaited from London Underground an illustrative figure of £30,000 has been used to cover this).

It is proposed that a sum of up to £55,000 is set aside for these events.

Additional Temporary Staffing

- In 2016, additional temporary staff were employed to actively encourage businesses to register, identify the correct contact for the business, complete follow-up work and provide administrative assistance during the all-out election period. This was considered a very effective part of the campaign.
- There are currently two full-time employees who concentrate on the maintenance of accurate records in relation to businesses in the City. During the registration period, they complete follow-up work by targeting businesses that have yet to register.
- The employment of two additional members of staff over the canvass and election period (August 2020 to March 2021) would enable extra follow-up work to be undertaken, help to ensure the accuracy of the Ward Lists and ensure there are sufficient resources to administer the elections effectively and efficiently.

It is estimated that the total cost of employing two additional members of staff for the canvass and election period will be: £48,000.

10. Following feedback from the roadshows that took place in 2016, it is not proposed to repeat this activity. There was no evidence to suggest that they had any impact on the number of people that registered to vote or on those who subsequently stood for election as a result of the roadshows.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

11. A thriving democracy within the City is central to the success of the Corporation. The unique opportunity workers in the City and residents possess to have their say on how services are delivered, and ultimately how the Corporation achieves its aims in the Corporation Plan, is central to this.

Financial Implications

12. It is requested that up to £72,000 be authorised to undertake the additional activities mentioned in this report in relation to increasing voter registration. It is proposed that the funding is met from the Policy Committee's contingency for 2020/21 and charged to City's Cash. No financial provision is specifically earmarked for this activity and use of the Committee's contingency is therefore necessary, as it was in 2016/17. The Committee is also asked to consider approving a further budget of up to £55,000 from its contingency to fund a high-profile advertising campaign to raise awareness of the election, encourage people from a diverse range of backgrounds to consider standing for election and to host an early evening reception during 2020's Inclusion Week.
13. The current uncommitted 2020/21 Committee Contingency Fund balance is £300,000. Supporting the activities contained in this report, including the cost of the high-profile campaign and proposed reception, would reduce the balance to £173,000.

Public Sector Equality Duty

14. In accordance with the Equality Act 2010, public authorities are required to comply with the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) when exercising their functions. Therefore, City Corporation is required to consciously consider whether it needs to take action to reduce inequalities in all areas of its activities. This includes encouraging people with protected characteristics to participate in public life and other activities. The Policy Committee, through its Members Diversity Working Party is committed to enhancing the diversity of the Court of Common Council and has been working to address this and has instigated a series of activities to assist in raising awareness and demonstrating commitment. The initiatives proposed in this report will help to further support the Committee's aspirations for the organisation to reflect the communities it serves.

Conclusion

15. There are reputational and political risks if democracy in the City is not effective. Therefore, ahead of the all-out Common Council elections in March 2021, there is a need to actively promote voter registration to help ensure that Ward Lists are

accurate and that workers and residents in the City participate in the democratic process. It is also important for the City Corporation to advocate that candidates standing for election are welcomed from all backgrounds and that it is committed to becoming more diverse and reflective of the communities that it is responsible for. The above plan will help to ensure that we reach our target audiences and that we utilise the contacts that we have within organisations to appoint voters. Electoral Services will work very closely with the Communications team to deliver the proposed communication activities.

Example of the communication material used in the lead up to the 2017 elections



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