

Committee(s): Policy and Resources	Dated: 14 October 2021
Subject: Election Engagement Campaign	Public
Which outcomes in the City Corporation's Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?	3, 4, 5, 9 and 10
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	Yes
If so, how much?	£72,000
What is the source of Funding?	Policy and Resources Committee Contingency
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department?	Yes
Report of: Deputy Town Clerk	For Decision
Report author: Charlotte Gordon, Electoral Services Manager and Mark Gettleson, Election Engagement Manager	

Summary

1. Following the postponement of the all-out elections for Common Councillors and Aldermen until 2022, the Policy and Resources Committee chose to take this opportunity to improve engagement in those elections.
2. This report provides a joint update of Electoral Services and Election Engagement activity now that the voter registration period is underway. It also recommends resourcing and activity to see this project through to Election Day in March 2022. As in previous reports, it highlights the Whole Corporation approach being taken to this project and the digital-first nature of this activity, both in providing online registration and strong online engagement tools.

Recommendations

3. Members are asked to:
 - Note the report.
 - Approve an additional £12,000 in funding for Electoral Services to support the Business Improvement District ballots, increasing the capacity of the team during the Ward Elections. This is proposed to be funded from the Policy and Resources 2021/22 Committee Contingency.
 - Approve an additional £60,000 towards additional Election Engagement activities, including turnout-raising activities in January to March 2022. This is proposed to be funded from the Policy and Resources 2021/22 Committee Contingency.

Main Report

Electoral Services Update

Current position

4. The timetable for the preparation and publication of the Ward Lists is fixed as set out in Section 7 of the City of London (Various Powers) Act 1957. The qualification date for inclusion on the Ward List is 1 September each year.
5. The Town Clerk is required to make house to house or other sufficient inquiries as to persons entitled to vote in Ward elections. This involves sending voter registration forms to every eligible business and every residential address in the City of London.
6. The compilation of the Ward lists published in February 2021 was greatly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result the number of voters on the Ward Lists was significantly reduced in comparison to the February 2020 publication of the Ward Lists. The current number of voters is 13,748. This is made up of 4,993 residential voters and 8,755 business voters. For comparison, in the Ward Lists published in February 2020 there were 19,200 voters consisting of 6,484 residential voters and 12,716 business voters.
7. A survey is carried out by the City Occupiers database team in the Spring and early Summer each year. Between February 2021 and September 2021 the number of business records in the City Occupiers Database system has decreased by 918 businesses, from 7397 to 6479, showing the number of businesses that either no longer exist, have suspended operations or have moved outside of the City.

Canvass progress

8. Under Section 7 of the City of London (Various Powers) Act 1957 residents and businesses must be contacted by the end of August. Two reminders are then sent to non-responding properties. Initial residential forms were sent on 16 August 2021, and the initial business forms were sent on 27 August 2021.
9. The Ward List registration forms were fully redesigned – with a simplified layout and clear calls to action, directing registrants online to complete their return. An attractive insert, advising contacts on the registration process, was also provided.

10. The first reminders for residential properties were sent on 17 September, and on 27 September for businesses. A further reminder will be sent to businesses in October. A physical canvass of retail properties will also be carried out from early October. The last date for response is 16 December. Canvassers will be sent to residential properties from 18 October to conduct a physical canvass of non-responding properties.
11. As of 22 September 2021, 3,003 residential properties had responded out of 7398 properties. This is a 40.6% response rate. 1,087 businesses had responded out of 6,479 total businesses, which is a 16.8% response rate. The number of voters appointed is not available at this stage of the canvass, as processing the details of individual voters takes additional time.
12. An update of the latest available statistics will be available at the meeting.

Online registration

13. Prior to this canvass, online registration has not been available for residents. The Electoral Services team has worked closely with our Electoral Management System software company since the publication of the 2021 Ward Lists to develop and provide an online registration solution for residents. A bespoke system is now in place allowing residents to respond to both the Electoral Register and the Ward List forms. At the time of writing the report 1,986 residential properties had responded online (66% of responses received).
14. The reduction in Ward List residential voters between the 2020 and 2021 publications of the Ward Lists was in part due to the absence of residents in the City. As part of our contact with residential properties, emails have been sent to residential voters for whom we hold an email address with the online link and security codes. This enables voters who are not physically in the City at present to respond to the canvass, whereas previously they needed to respond on the forms posted to their City of London address.

Election Engagement Update

Business registration

15. Our campaign continues to focus overwhelmingly on business registration. Based on those who have not yet registered this year, we have created the following priority segments:
 1. Not registered since 2019: 1,056 organisations regarded as the most likely to now register. This includes a large number of SMEs, whose engagement will be crucial to our registration efforts.

2. Not registered since 2018: 458 organisations with some recent experience of registration.
3. Larger organisations (with 10 votes or more) who have not registered in recent years: 294 organisations, where a direct approach from those with an existing relationship may prove worthwhile.
4. Retail: Those businesses who are easier to reach through traditional doorstep campaigning methods.

While some of our activity and advertising will reach beyond this list, prioritisation enables us to focus our energies on the recipients most likely to respond.

Personnel

16. Two temporary Campaign Assistants, with relevant experience, have been engaged for the duration of the registration campaign. Their focus has been on cleaning email lists (e.g. finding a replacement contact where one has left), setting up target lists of businesses for digital advertising and will cover areas such as providing administrative support to the Business Registration Delivery Group and the Retail Canvass. They will also be contacting organisations who have registered, but not used their full allocation, encouraging them to do so.

Voter contact

17. With many of our target businesses now engaged in hybrid working, and difficult to reach through physical campaigning even before the pandemic, we are delivering a digital-first campaign. The Speak for the City campaign site was launched on 7 September, with a clear interface to engage workers and residents with the election. This includes a guide to registration, FAQs and, for the first time, an automated way for workers to request a vote at their organisation, triggering an email to the relevant contact.
18. The central aim of our digital engagement strategy is to direct City workers to this site. The main platform we are using to do this is LinkedIn, as it provides rigorous ability to target specific organisations and roles within the City. After a period of testing, we launched a major advertising campaign on 26 September. We will also be advertising on Twitter and Facebook from mid-October, with the latter especially useful for outreach to residents. We are seeing strong click-through rates and cost-per-click on our initial creative, and will be refreshed continuously with new content.
19. Digital resources have been created for members and officers to facilitate their own engagement with the campaign and were distributed by the Town Clerk on 24 September. This kind of organic reach, through individuals' own digital presence, is both free and effective – and will be continued throughout the campaign.

20. We are also ensuring that email addresses are kept as accurate as possible, investigating any failed email delivery and using public sources like LinkedIn to check that an unresponsive contact is still at an organisation. Where a contact has moved on from an organisation, we are immediately identifying a potential replacement.
21. In addition to the statutory mailings being sent to businesses, we will be sending ad-hoc mailings, encouraging participation. These will largely be to senior figures at an organisation, who are not necessarily the registration contact. We will also be advertising in the print copies of CityAM in October and November, reminding potential voters about the election, registration deadline and directing them to the campaign site.
22. In order to make the retail canvass more effective, we will be offering a prize incentive to small workplaces who register and will dedicated literature for this purpose will be produced.

Candidate engagement

23. Candidate numbers and member diversity have been highlighted in previous reports – and funding given to an event to encourage interest in candidature, especially among those from underrepresented groups. A promotional reception, aimed at those who might not have previously considered standing, will be held later this year, hosted jointly between the Elections team and Diversity & Inclusion. Our diversity networks are being encouraged to use their City contacts to promote the event and D&I leaders at City firms will be contacted directly to spread the word in their organisation. The event will also be used to encourage voter registration, as eligible candidates will want to get on the Ward List prior to the deadline.
24. The Speak for the City website contains an eye-catching page on candidature, which will be expanded. Digital adverts will also be placed and shared among out networks to direct traffic to that page.
25. It is proposed to hold a further candidate event, with a focus on providing information to those intending to stand, early in the New Year.

Whole Corporation Approach

26. A whole Corporation approach is being taken to voter registration. A Business Registration Delivery Group has been formed, with one of the Campaign Assistants acting as Project Manager, to ensure we utilise all existing relationships where they exist. The Delivery Group has representation from

Innovation & Growth, Small Business Research + Enterprise Centre, City Revenues and the City Property Advisory Team.

27. The group has been given segmented target lists of businesses based on their last registration date and their size. While the main focus will be on firms who have registered since 2018, IG will also be contacting major financial and professional services businesses, who may not have registered previously or where they are under-registered, encouraging them to do so. In addition, IG is engaging with trade associations and member organisations to see how they can encourage City based members to register to vote. We will also use campaigns like Destination City to raise the salience of the City Corporation and our elections among City businesses.
28. We are co-ordinating with partners, such as Heart of the City, to ensure their networks are encouraging registration – as well as with the BID team, ensuring the BID voter registration messaging and activity compliments Ward List registration. Specific literature for BID staff to distribute is under development.

Future resources

Electoral Services

29. The Policy and Resources Committee considered a report on 19 November 2020 outlining future costs for the administration of the City wide elections. It was agreed that £127,000 be approved to meet the cost of electoral and registration promotional activities. Of this, £48,000 was allocated for the employment of two temporary members of staff to assist Electoral Services in the administration of the canvass and the election.
30. A separate report is being considered at this meeting on a Business Improvement District ballot. Notwithstanding the funding already allocated for temporary members of staff, additional resources will be required by the Electoral Services Team to be able to provide support to the BID ballot due to the close proximity of the ballot to the elections. The following additional funding is therefore requested:
- £12,000 towards an additional full time member of staff will be required between December and February 2022 to enable the required support to be provided to the BID ballot.

Election Engagement

31. While significant resources have already been allocated to the registration phase of the campaign, additional funding is requested both to sustain that campaign into the turnout phase and to ensure we are able to renew our digital creative, without which our engagement levels will fall. An additional £60,000 is therefore requested, in addition to the funding already allocated:

- £20,000 towards additional content design and creation to generate interest and engagement in the election. This would be a combination of fresh digital adverts, short videos and print design and production. This will be used both for the registration and turnout stages.
- £15,000 to retain the services of temporary Campaign Assistants until Election Day (currently engaged for the registration campaign only), providing support for turnout-raising activities, candidate information and public engagement.
- £15,000 on digital advertising and direct mail to support turnout efforts prior to Election Day.
- £5,000 towards additional web development work to ensure the campaign site has the functionality and information required for the turnout stage (between the end of registration and Election Day). This would include completing work on the online candidates guide, polling station finder and additional information for those standing.
- £5,000 towards an additional candidates informational event to be held early in 2022.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

32. The work of Electoral Services and the Election Engagement campaign continues to assist the City Corporation's vision in terms of its Corporate Plan. It will help the organisation's contribution to a flourishing society, ensuring people have equal opportunities to enrich their lives through our democracy. The activities and engagement are helping to encourage residents and businesses to become more invested in engaging with democracy at a local level. It is helping to build more socially responsible businesses by engaging them in City democracy and encouraging them to promote diversity among voters and candidates. By reaching out to stakeholders and partners, we are making communities better-connected and encouraging collaboration across our organisation.

Financial implications

33. As there is no resource available within local budgets, it is proposed that the required funding of £72,000 is to be drawn from the Committee's 2021/22 Contingency Fund. The current uncommitted balance in the 2021/22 Contingency is £282,719 prior to any allowances being made for any other proposals on today's agenda.

Resource implications

34. In addition to the additional financial resources requested in this report, significant resources from across the City Corporation will continue to be deployed to make the election a success, especially those involved in the Business Registration Delivery Group, IT and City Solicitors.

Legal implications

35. Electoral Services and Election Engagement continue to work closely with City Solicitors to ensure that all activity is compliant, including with the GDPR.

Equalities implications

36. The aim of our Election Engagement work is to increase participation in the election and candidate diversity. Digitising both the electoral process and engagement campaigns has made it more accessible to a wider and more diverse audience and encouraged more City constituents to participate in the democratic process, including those with protected characteristics.

Climate implications

37. The proposals included in this paper do not carry any significant implications for the Climate Action programme. However, the digitisation of the electoral process and engagement has contributed to decreasing the City Corporation's carbon footprint. While some paper materials will continue to be required, this plan aims to reduce significantly the proportion of outreach this represents.

Background Papers

Reports to the Policy and Resources Committee:-

- 20 February 2020 – Common Council Elections in March 2021

- 7 May and 9 July 2020– COVID-19 Implications – possible postponement of the City-Wide elections in March 2021
- 10 September and 8 October 2020 - Common Council Elections Change of Date from March 2021 to March 2022 – Bill for an Act of Common Council
- 19 November 2020 – Electoral Registration Update
- 10 December 2020 – Electoral Registration Campaign Manager
- 8 April 2021 – Election Engagement Campaign
- 8 July 2021 – Election Engagement Campaign Update

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