

Committee(s): Policy and Resources	Date: 8 July 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?	N
If so, how much?	N/A
What is the source of Funding?	Committee Contingency
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department?	N/A
Report of: Director of Communications	For Information
Report author: Mark Gettleson, Election Engagement Manager	

Summary

Following the postponement of the all-out elections for Common Councillors and Aldermen until March 2022, the Policy and Resources Committee chose to take this opportunity to improve engagement in those elections: a new Campaign Manager arrived in post in March and a funded campaign plan was approved at the Committee's April meeting.

This report provides a brief update on the progress made in election engagement since that meeting and next steps to be taken over the summer. Many of the items outlined in the report represent improvements to existing areas of work, many of which are long-establish or laid down in statute. Additional programmes of work, outlined in the previous report, are being developed and will be deployed later in the year.

Recommendations

Members are asked to note the report.

Main Report

Background

1. At its April meeting, Policy & Resources Committee approved an election engagement plan for the City Corporation's March 2022 elections.
2. The process to compile the ward list for 2022 has begun, with the 'survey period' due to be completed by the end of July and the 'canvass period', during which registrations must be completed, running from August to December. Much

of the emphasis of election engagement work in recent months has been in ensuring these processes are as effective as possible, within time constraints, using improved communications and marketing strategies to boost their effectiveness.

City Workplace Register

3. The City Occupiers Survey is one of the ways in which we determine if an organisation is eligible to register voters, estimate the number of voters to which they are entitled and identify a named contact at the organisation. It provides much of the groundwork for the canvass period, beginning in August, when voter registration can begin. Approximately 15% of eligible occupiers reply to the City Occupiers Survey in a normal year – and an update will be provided for the next meeting with this year's figures.
4. Some significant changes have been made to the survey ahead of its distribution this year, both in light of ongoing restrictions and the need to improve performance. It has been renamed the City Workplace Register, which is both easier to understand and less likely to be seen as an optional marketing survey. A digital-first approach is being taken, whereby existing contacts are emailed and invited to complete the form online. While there was not sufficient time to create an automated process for this year, whereby filling in the form online populates the City Occupiers Database without manual intervention, the process is smoother for the recipient and this change can be prioritised for next year.
5. Those who have not submitted the form by 30th June are then to be posted a paper copy of the form, which will in turn encourage them to fill it out online. This has been redesigned visually to give it a more professional and official feel. We have set up a City Elections MailChimp account to email these contacts, enabling us to track open and click rates of each communication. Through this system, we are able to identify contacts who are simply not engaging and find alternative, where one exists. Our initial emails are getting an open rate of approximately 35%, a relatively healthy rate for an unsolicited message. We have received advice from City Solicitors that information that is in the public domain, including – for example – using LinkedIn to find the name of senior staff at an organisation is permissible to use for this purpose, as long as we inform recipients where we sourced their information. An additional benefit of the City Workplace Register process is that it allows us to test and improve the effectiveness of our email lists ahead of the registration period.
6. Crucially, we have also received advice that completing the City Workplace Register is a legal obligation on the part of eligible occupiers – and have included this within all correspondence with them for the first time. While positive messages will be put front and centre, the added element of compulsion is hoped to yield dividends.¹

¹ An earlier version of this report incorrectly stated that voter registration itself was obligatory, in addition to the City Workplace Register. This is not the case and Paragraph 6 has been edited to reflect this.

Voter Registration Process

7. In addition to the activities above, the voter registration documentation is currently under review. While the electoral registration forms sent to residents are set out in national legislation, we have a much greater degree of control over ward list documentation, especially surrounding worker voters.
8. As mentioned in the April report, online registration for both residents and businesses will be possible for the first time. We have also been working closely with the Electoral Management Software company to create an online response system for residents that satisfies both Electoral Registration and Ward List legislative requirements. This means that residents will be able to respond online to the registration forms that will be sent to them in the Autumn. These responses will be automatically loaded into the Electoral Management Software system which will provide significant time savings and efficiencies for the Electoral Services team. Businesses will also be able to respond using this online system which will also allow for more real time reporting on registration figures as we will not be dependent on the processing of paper forms. We are currently evaluating whether we can use MailChimp to send the link to business registration, which will allow for continuous tracking of engagement.
9. Rather than using temps or redeployed officers (as has been done previously), short-term dedicated Campaign Assistants will contact potential voters directly during the registration period. Much of their work will concentrate on finding new contacts, online and offline, where an organisation has yet to submit their registration. They will also, for the first time, contact organisations who 'under-register' (giving fewer names than their entitlement) to ask them for names of additional voters. Campaign Assistants will also have the advantage of being easier to deploy at evenings and weekends, if necessary, in order to visit unregistered residences when potential voters are more likely to be in.
10. We are working with IT to ensure that during the canvass period (August to December), we will have a live dashboard of registrations, seeing which organisations have and have not completed their registration – and will make this information available to stakeholders.

Small workplaces

11. An analysis has been conducted of both the 2019 and 2020 registrations. In 2019, only approximately 40% of eligible worker voters were registered, falling to 28% in 2020. 7 in 10 of these who don't register are in small workplaces (under 100 staff), with half in workplaces of less than 50. While many of these businesses are SMEs, many are in chain retail and hospitality – small branches of a much larger company. Small workplaces are therefore the most significant, and in many ways trickiest, piece of the puzzle. Many have a loose relationship with the City and the City Corporation and have been hit especially hard by the pandemic.

12. Different approaches will be required for different kinds of small workplaces. While financial and professional services SMEs can be reached through LinkedIn, those in retail and hospitality are unlikely to engage with our campaign online and will require heavy investment in field during the canvass period. We are also likely to introduce a prize draw for completed registrations, as is carried out in other local authorities.
13. We are also working with the Small Business Research + Enterprise team to ensure that questions that relate to the elections and the City Corporation are a whole are included in the focus groups they are running among SMEs. This work, being undertaken as part of the City Corporation's SME strategy, will help inform our messaging and approach to engaging them in elections.

Digital Engagement

14. We have successfully engaged Tectonica (www.tectonica.co) – one of the world's top digital agencies, specialising in campaigns and elections – to develop our new election campaign portal. This will provide a central point of information on the elections, both as a voter and potential candidate, with eye-catching messages and imagery, designed to drive engagement.
15. As in-person voter contact is likely to remain limited, especially with workers in offices, this website will replace paper communications as our main way to provide information in the campaign, and potential voters and candidates will be directed here.
16. Functionality is intended to include guides on electoral registration, checking the current registration status of an organisation, expressing interest in being a voter – and, later in the year, a polling station finder and online candidates' guide. The latter is seen as especially important in increasing voter knowledge and therefore turnout, but requires approval from City Solicitors. Additionally, a 'Be A Councillor' section is being developed, aimed at increasing interest in candidature.
17. The campaign as a whole will be titled 'Speak for the City' – and the domain www.speakforthecity.com and relevant social media handles have been registered. We aim to make basic site functionality live in July, ahead of the registration period, with more complex functions appearing in September onwards. We will purchase LinkedIn Sales Navigator to enable us to send large numbers of direct messages to potential voters and direct them towards the site – focusing, wherever possible, on those workplaces where we have not already received traction.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

18. The election engagement programme will continue 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

proposed will help encourage residents and businesses to become more invested in engaging with democracy at a local level. They will help build more socially responsible businesses by engaging them in City democracy and encouraging them to promote diversity among voters and candidates. The proposals to create an innovative digital-first election campaign will make our communities better-connected and encourage collaboration across our organisation and its partners.

Resource implications

19. Significant resources from across the City Corporation will continue to need to be deployed to make the election engagement campaign a success, specifically from all departments and partners with a community engagement function, as well as IT and City Solicitors – both of whom have already provided valuable assistance to the campaign.

Legal implications

20. While many activities relating to voter registration are public duties required by law, several of these proposals involve significant GDPR considerations – and will only be implemented subject to the agreement of the City Solicitor.

Equalities implications

21. The aim of this campaign plan is to increase participation in the election and candidate diversity. It also addresses the requirement for qualifying bodies to nominate a reflective representation of their workforce as voters. Digitising both the electoral process and engagement campaigns will make it more accessible to a wider and more diverse audience and encourage more City constituents to participate in the democratic process, including those with protected characteristics, for example, those with mobility issues.

Climate implications

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

Conclusion

23. While restrictions remain in place and time constraints are tight, the election engagement campaign is on track, both in terms of improving existing processes and creating new and innovative channels of engagement. We can be confident that the preparatory work undertaken over the past few

months will yield significant benefits once voter registration opens later in the summer.

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

Mark Gettleson

Election Engagement Manager

E: mark.gettleson@cityoflondon.gov.uk

T: 07596 888 230