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| Committee(s): Policy and Resources Committee | Dated: 4 October 2022 |
| Subject: 2022 City of London Elections | 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? | N/A |
| Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department? | N/A |
| Report of: Deputy Town Clerk | For Discussion |
| Report author: Mark Gettleson, Head of Campaigns and Community Engagement Saira McKechnie, Head of Electoral Services and City Occupiers Database | |

Summary

1. The postponed Common Councillor elections were held on 22 March 2022. These elections, and the registration efforts leading up to them, were held in a context of ongoing disruption to the City as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.
2. Members of the committee asked officers to come back with a report on these elections that included ideas for them to consider improving participation in future City of London elections.
3. This report provides a summary of the overall trends in these elections, as well as outlining potential changes, including those requiring legislation, for further discussion and future recommendations.

Recommendations

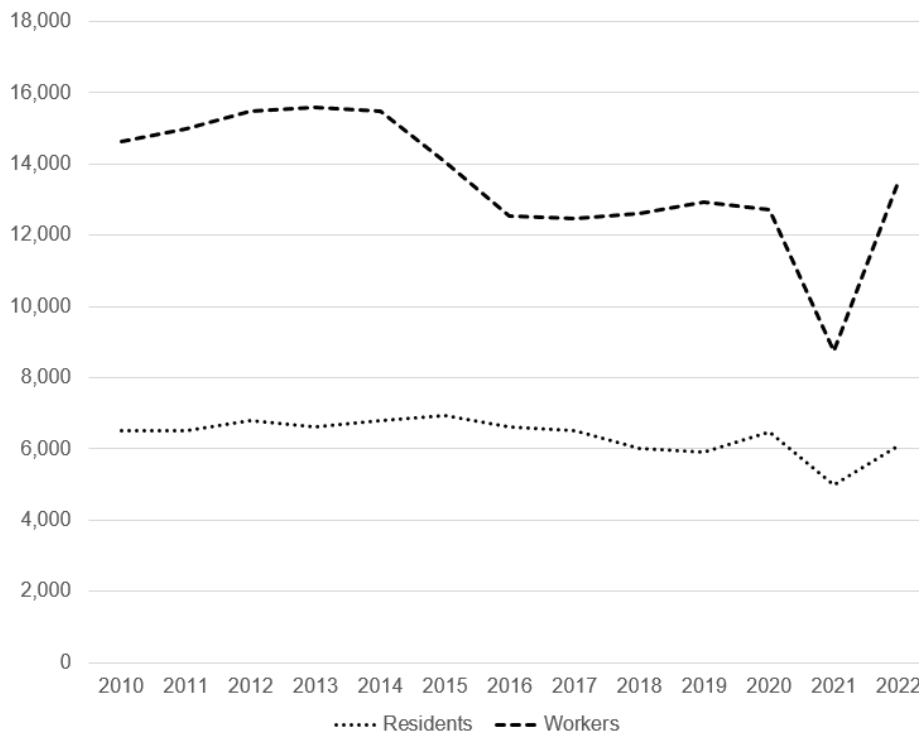
4. Members are asked to:
 - Note the report.

Main Report

Current Position

5. The Covid-19 pandemic meant that the 2022 City of London elections were held at an unprecedented time for the country and the City. The inability to run a meaningful canvass in 2020 reduced the size of the Ward List from 19,200 in 2020-21 to 13,748 in 2021-22. The 2022-23 Ward List was compiled while much of the City was still working remotely, with advice to work from home (“Plan B”) issued a week prior to the registration deadline – and only lifted eight weeks prior to polling day. Moreover, with the postponed election coming almost exactly two years after the first lockdown, the relationship between the working City and the Square Mile was difficult with many workers not having been to the workplace or taken part in in City life in that period.
6. Despite these significant challenges, the 2022 elections proved a success across a number of key metrics. The 2022-23 Ward List stood at 19,595 – a 43% increase and the highest figure for seven years (prior to which legacy names on the Ward List were retained for more than a year). Percentage turnout was down only slightly on 2017, from 33% to 32%, but was higher than in 2013 (25%). The number of votes cast, 5,483, was the largest in the past decade. The number of candidates was down slightly on 2017: 145 to 135.

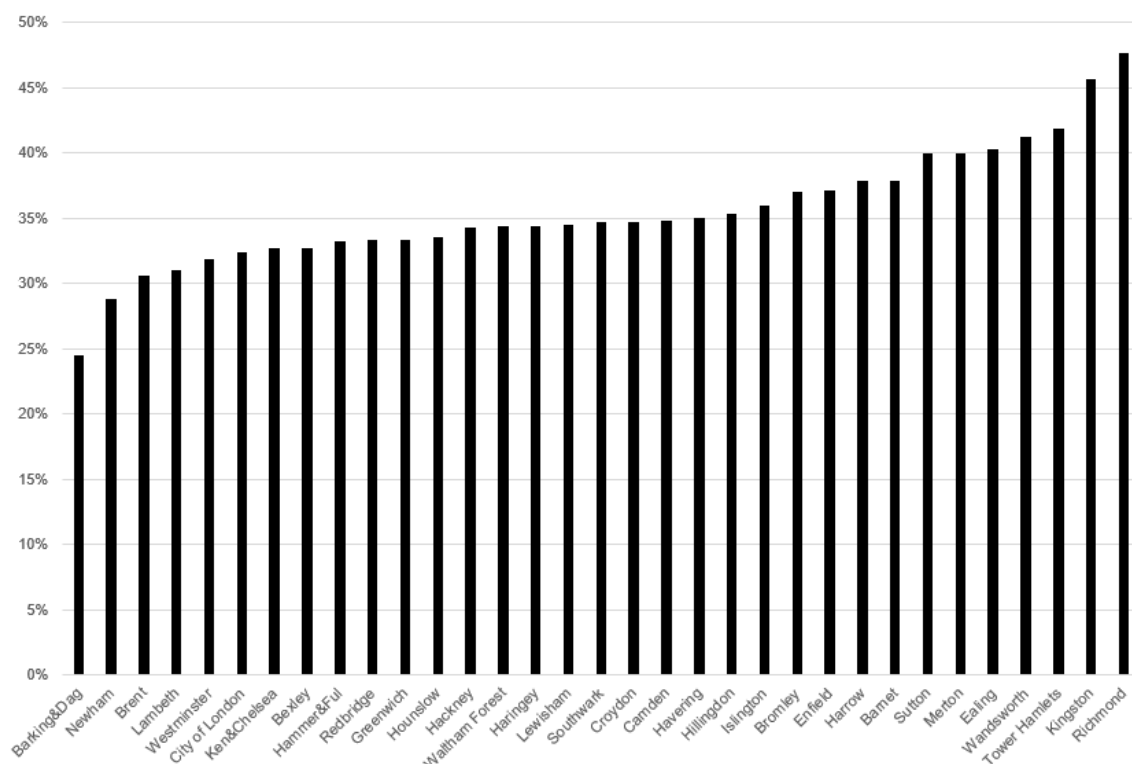
Figure 1: Ward List trends, 2010-22*



* Please note that prior to 2015, two year non-responders were retained on the Ward List.

7. We believe the election engagement campaign and improvements in the administration of the elections by the Electoral Services team were key factors behind the success of these elections – which, given the extremely difficult background against which they were conducted, may have otherwise been damaging for the democratic mandate and reputation of the City Corporation.

Figure 2: Turnout across London local authorities



8. The concerted campaign to encourage voters to switch to a postal vote paid some dividends, with the number of postal votes cast rising by 600 since 2017. Postal voters were more likely to return their ballot: with a 58% return rate compared to 19% turnout for in-person voters. While 34% of the electorate were on a postal vote, they made up 63% of those casting a vote, up from 59% in 2017. Much as this is heavily influenced by the pandemic and the fact the most engaged voters are more likely to take the time to apply for a postal vote, ensuring that the convenience of postal voting – and the need to apply individually – impressed on every voter is likely to benefit turnout in the future.

Figure 3: Turnout trends, 2013-2022 (contested wards only)

| | % turnout | Electorate | Votes cast | Postal cast | In person cast |
|------|-----------|------------|------------|-------------|----------------|
| 2013 | 24.9% | 20,369 | 5077 | 2897 | 2180 |
| 2017 | 33.4% | 14,305 | 4779 | 2803 | 1976 |
| 2022 | 32.4% | 16,939 | 5483 | 3440 | 2043 |

Election Engagement Campaign

9. The Election Engagement campaign was carried out in two phases: a registration campaign during the canvass, running from 1st September to 16th December 2021 and a turnout campaign running to polling day. The details of the registration campaign is outlined in the January 2022 Election Engagement Campaign report to this committee (see Appendix). In particular, it was felt that significant paid digital outreach (especially on LinkedIn), the recruitment of temporary campaign assistants and cross-organisation working were all key to that phase of the campaign.

10. The priority for the turnout phase was to provide voters with the maximum amount of information about candidates and how to participate in the election in a way that was legally compliant and fair to all candidates. In particular, we:
 - a) **Developed an easy-to-use polling station/wardmote locator and candidates guide.** This enabled each voter to enter the address at which they were registered and see the candidates standing for election in their ward, where to meet them and how to vote. Each candidate was asked to submit 200 words to promote their candidacy for each voter to inspect. We received positive feedback from voters and candidates for this resource, especially given the difficulty of meeting worker voters face-to-face, which was exacerbated by the pandemic.

 - b) **Distributed a physical postcard to all voters**, split between those on a postal vote and not, giving them key information about the election and encouraging them to inspect the candidates guide and polling station/wardmote location online. This ensured that voters for whom we lack email addresses still had the opportunity to know about this information.

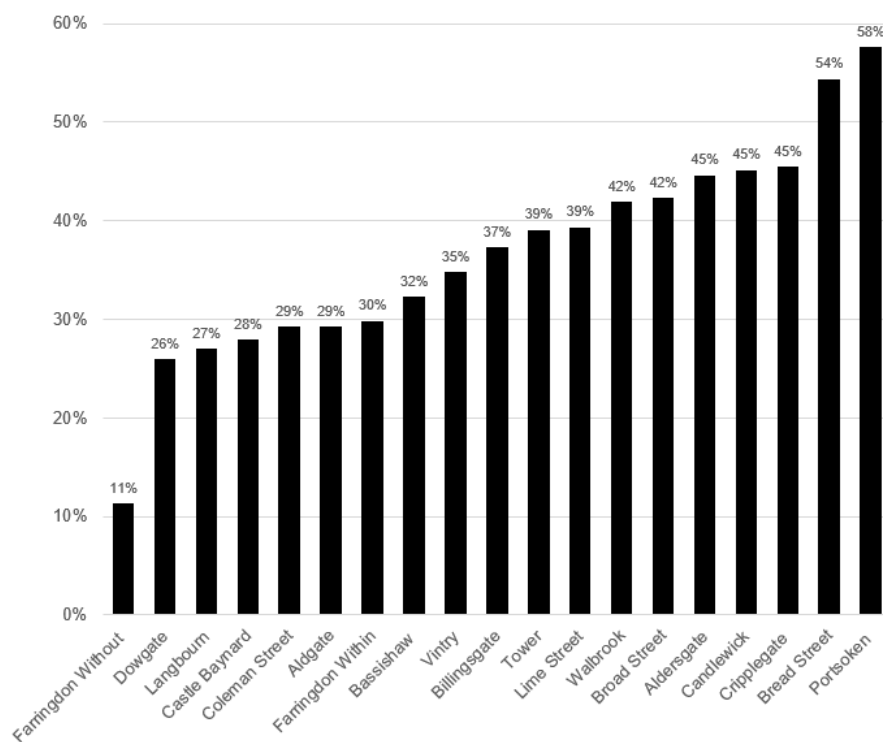
 - c) **Digital tools for postal voters**, enabling them to begin their postal vote application online. National legislation dictates that postal vote applications must be physically printed and signed before being returned. However, we gave voters the opportunity of generating an individualised PDF online that made this process more straight-forward.

d) **Sent multiple emails to voters**, reminding them of key dates in the election (such as for postal vote deadlines and wardmotes). Collecting more email addresses should be a goal of future registration campaigns.

11. One of the key areas of focus throughout the campaign has been scalability and replicability, so that tools and systems created for this election can be easily deployed in the future. Each of the above were also used in the turnout campaign for the Aldermanic elections held in 2022.

Turnout trends between wards

Figure 4: Turnout by ward, March 2022



12. While overall turnout in the City was 32%, there was a significant range within this: from 11% in Farringdon Without to 58% in Portsoken. Several factors appeared to influence individual Ward turnout:

a) **Electoral competition**, defined not only by number of candidates, but whether those candidates engaged in significant campaigning. The seven wards with turnout over 40% all saw individual or groups of candidates run spirited campaigns that drove voters to the polls. In Castle Baynard and Farringdon Without, changes in the levels of candidate campaigning likely saw turnout rise by 7.4% in the former and fall by 9.7% in the latter.

- b) **Residential composition.** Three of the five highest turnout wards were residential wards. This is likely rooted in the fact that we face no relevance challenge among residents: for most, we are their sole local authority and have a clear relationship with them based on service delivery. Their council tax is paid to us, we collect their rubbish, we are often their landlord. Continued patterns of home working over the election period will have likely made it easier than usual for residents to vote on Polling Day, and harder for workers living outside the City. Our residential wards produce some of the highest turnouts in Inner London, with Portsoken only bettered by Dulwich Village.
- c) **Barrister's chambers.** While most City firms can only select a small proportion of their workforce as voters, and often select the most interested and engaged in City life, the vast majority of barristers are able to register, with many registered by their chambers on mass. This can lead to a larger and less engaged electorate in wards with large numbers of barristers such as Farringdon Without (approximately 72% barristers) and Castle Baynard (approximately 29%).
- d) **Large engaged businesses.** Where a ward has a business or group of businesses that are especially engaged in registration and the election, this can boost turnout overall – the presence of the London Stock Exchange in Bread Street and Lloyd's and other major insurance firms in Lime Street likely positively impact turnout figures in those wards. The former even held an online hustings for candidates. Some businesses decision to select voters to register at random – rather than asking for those interested – likely had the effect of lowering turnout

Candidate engagement

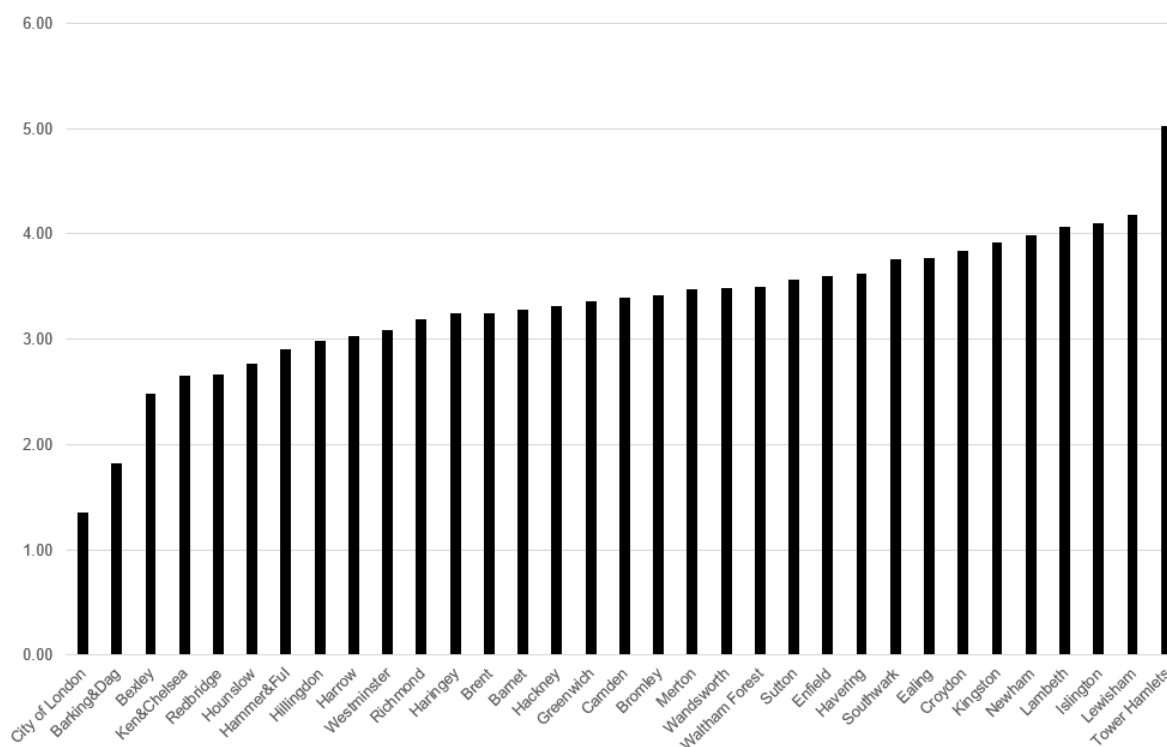
13. The committee made clear its wish to increase the number and diversity of candidates standing for election. The Covid-19 pandemic meant that regular in-person contact with potential candidates was extremely difficult, with the “pipeline” stalled for much of two years. However, two events were held with candidates prior to the election and they were regularly updated with fresh information by email or through direct inquiries. Many candidates, including several successfully-elected new members from non-traditional backgrounds later told us that they made the decision to stand as a result of the engagement events.
14. While significantly more information was provided to potential candidates than previously, it would likely be of benefit to work with new members to identify key questions that they would have found useful in making the decision to stand. Additionally, a multi-year approach to candidate engagement events should be undertaken to encourage talented and diverse individuals across the City to stand for election. This would include improved information on

candidate conduct, and while it would not be possible to force candidates to agree to a Code of Conduct beyond the existing statutory requirements, alternatives should be considered ahead of the next all-out elections.

15. Increasing numbers of candidates will be key to improving electoral participation in the future, as much of the work to engage voters with the election is done by candidates and people are more likely to vote they feel they have a choice of who to elect. While London boroughs have an average of 3.4 candidates per vacancy, with the major parties often standing full slates, our election saw just 1.35 candidates per vacancy.

16. While the London Borough with the lowest number of candidates per vacancy (Barking & Dagenham) also saw the lowest turnout, the borough with the highest number (Tower Hamlets) saw the highest turnout in Inner London. Indeed, while there were six uncontested wards in the City this year, there were none elsewhere in Greater London. We should welcome and encourage competition in wards, as a means of encouraging participation and electoral choice.

Figure 5: Candidates per vacancy across London local authorities, 2022



17. Lack of electoral competition in Common Councillor elections has been a feature over the past decade, however there does seem to be a long-term trend towards greater competition in Aldermanic elections.

Figure: Common Councillor contests (100 vacancies), 2009-22

| | Wards contested | Wards uncontested | Candidates |
|------|-----------------|-------------------|------------|
| 2009 | 13 | 12 | 128 |
| 2013 | 21 | 4 | 161 |
| 2017 | 15 | 6 | 145 |
| 2022 | 15 | 6 | 135 |

Figure: Aldermanic contests, 2010-22

| | Contests | Contested | Uncontested | Candidates | Per vacancy |
|------|----------|-----------|-------------|------------|-------------|
| 2010 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 1.5 |
| 2011 | 5 | 4 | 1 | 6 | 1.2 |
| 2012 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 5 | 1.0 |
| 2013 | 9 | 5 | 4 | 14 | 1.6 |
| 2014 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 6 | 2.0 |
| 2015 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 5 | 2.5 |
| 2016 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 1.5 |
| 2017 | 6 | 2 | 4 | 17 | 2.8 |
| 2018 | 6 | 3 | 3 | 16 | 2.7 |
| 2019 | 7 | 5 | 2 | 13 | 1.9 |
| 2022 | 7 | 7 | 0 | 20 | 2.9 |

Potential changes to electoral practices

18. Several changes to our electoral practices have been suggested by Members, officers and others in recent years and the Committee has asked for an overview of such proposals.

19. The following proposals would require changes to national legislation governing City of London ward elections, but would not affect elections elsewhere and we regard as worth further consideration by Members and officers:

- a) **Allow non-responders to remain on the Ward List.** While other authorities require evidence to remove voters from their electoral register, the City of London is unique in requiring voters to register for the Ward List each year and otherwise be removed. This is likely responsible for large numbers of people losing their registration. Moreover, a cycle is created for worker voters

by failing to register each year, as an organisation loses its list of existing names for the next and must start again from scratch. Amending legislation to allow the City Corporation to retain non-responding voters for a period longer than a year would provide immediate benefit to engagement in our elections.

- b) **Introduce rolling registration**, the ability to register to vote throughout the year. One of the unique elements of City of London elections is that we only have an annual canvass running from the qualification date of 1st September until 16th December – which then leads to a Ward List for one year from 16th February of the subsequent year. While in all other authorities, applications to vote can be made up to 12 working days before an election, the deadline to register in a City of London election (such as a by-election) in late January could have been more than 400 days previously. Similarly, a registered individual who departed the City on 2nd September 2021 would still be entitled to vote in our elections into 2023. Given the natural churn of the City workforce, exacerbated by the pandemic, this static model is has significant drawbacks. Several workplaces have contacted us in advance of this year's Aldermanic elections, requesting changes to their registration due to colleagues' departure, which legislation does not allow us to carry out. Rolling registration would also avoid a situation in election years, seen most notably this year, where a substantial portion of the electorate came on to the Ward List for the first time just a month prior to polling day.
- c) **Amend the nomination formula for worker voters**. The current formula for nominating workers at companies and other organisations gives one vote to every five workers, up to fifty staff, and one for every fifty thereafter. This has the intended effect of giving a disproportionately larger share of worker votes to those in small workplaces – and avoids any one company dominating the electorate in a given ward. Indeed, approximately seven in ten eligible worker voters is in a workplace of under 250 staff. In practice, however, this puts a ceiling (likely less than 10%) on the number of City workers who are able to become voters and allocates the majority of potential votes towards harder-to-contact workplaces, with whom we often have no relationship.
- d) **Extend the franchise to cover co-working spaces**. Currently, organisations or sole traders who own or rent all or part of a City workplace with a freehold or lease are eligible to register voters. However, since the legislation was written, co-working spaces have become common in the City, and are especially popular among the SME and startup community. Organisations and individuals normally occupy these premises with a licence rather than a lease. In order not to further disenfranchise this section of the City worker community, legislation could be amended to allow those occupying City premises with a long-term licence (such as three months or more) as their primary place of work to register.

20. The following proposals would require changes to primary legislation affecting all UK elections. These are therefore unlikely to be successfully introduced and officers are not recommending they be taken forward:

- a) **Online voting.** There is currently no provision for online voting in the UK and conversations with the Cabinet Office in 2020 showed no appetite for a trial. While practiced for local elections in some parts of Canada and elsewhere, online voting is comparatively rare internationally and has never been discussed seriously in a UK context. Indeed, once introduced, the requirement to produce ID at polling stations in the UK elections strengthens the presumption towards in-person voting.
- b) **All-postal election.** There is no existing provision for a local authority being allowed to conduct an all-postal ballot. Indeed, the rules around the length of time an individual can hold a postal vote without reapplying have been tightened by the recent Elections Act. Similarly, the individual registering worker voters at their organisation cannot apply for postal votes on their behalf – the law states these must be physically signed by each individual.

21. Other changes that might benefit the efficient operation of our elections, and could be introduced by Members through an Act of Common Council, could include:

- a) **Centralised count.** A single count at the Guildhall, as practiced by other local authorities, rather than individual ward counts would significantly reduce the number of external counting staff needing to be brought in and allowing the Head of Electoral Services more oversight over the conduct of each count. It would also be a focus point for interest in the election and ensure that candidates across the City and the media were up to speed on developing results.
- b) **Polling station and wardmote locations.** Allowing these to be located a short distance outside a ward boundary would enable venues to be co-located. This would have the effect of reducing staff burdens and cost, as well as removing the need for emergency premises such as Portakabins.

We intend to consult further on these and bring back firm recommendations in the future.

Potential changes to City Corporation practices

22. While some changes to improve engagement in our elections are legislative, perhaps more important are changes to our practices, many of which do not deal with elections directly, but aim to increase the relevance of and interest in

the City Corporation among our potential electorate, especially among workers. Almost all of such engagement work is the responsibility of the organisation as a whole and sits outside the purview of Electoral Services.

- a) **Long-term investment in elections infrastructure.** Due to the wholly unique nature of our elections, many tools and processes need to be developed by our Electoral Services team that cannot simply be deployed from elsewhere, from databases to registration campaign material. Many of the issues faced by the administration of our elections in the past have stemmed from a lack of long-term investment over decades.
- b) **Refocus stakeholder engagement on all workplaces.** The vast majority of potential City voters (approximately seven in ten) are in workplaces of under 250 staff. Many more are in workplaces that are neither financial or professional services. While many of these are SMEs, large numbers are City offices of larger companies headquartered elsewhere. As an organisation, we have a meaningful relationship with comparatively few of these organisations, a fact reflected in their low engagement with our activities and elections.
- c) **Develop new avenues of engagement with the working City.** While our relationships with the senior leadership of the top financial and professional services firms and the civic city are strong, we must reconsider our offer as a whole to the average member of our half a million-strong worker community. Our events and communications programmes should prioritise finding new ways to reach City workers and create activities that reflect their interests. Relationships should be formed with groups such as HR managers, who act as the gatekeepers of the City workforce but are too often overlooked.
- d) **Bring together diverse City leaders.** In order to increase our pool of active and engaged worker voters, who might be interested in becoming registration contacts and eventually candidates, we should work more deeply with diversity networks across the City. City firms of all sizes have Women's, BAME, LGBT and other networks, and we should use our convening power to bring them together. This is especially key given the wish to increase the diversity of the Court of Common Council and the requirement that an organisation's registrations to reflect the make-up of its workforce.
- e) **Track all relationships and improve email lists.** We are significantly limited by the contact details we hold across the working City and the lack of engagement with our central CRM. All externally facing officers should have access to the CRM and we will hold further discussions to achieve this. If we do not possess a complete picture of the relationships we hold, we cannot identify gaps and develop new ones. Similarly, we have not prioritised the collection of email addresses among both workers and residents – and ensuring that those we do collect are permissioned for a variety of engagement purposes. This will benefit our elections directly, as any contact

details held by the City Corporation can be used by the Electoral Services team for the purposes of registration.

- f) **Empower Members to engage their constituents.** Elected Members have a key role to play in engaging their constituents with the City Corporation and new means must be found to help them with that work – rather than simply send out a ward newsletter to the small proportion of the constituents on the Ward List.

Following this report and after feedback from Members and officers we will bring further measures to enhance community engagement forward.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

- 23. The work of Electoral Services and the Community Engagement 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

- 24. None

Resource implications

- 25. While there are no recommendations in this report, many of the ideas suggested will have resource implications when further developed in the future.

Legal implications

- 26. 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

27. The aim of our Election Engagement work is to increase participation in the election and candidate diversity, making them more accessible to a wider and more diverse audience, including those with protected characteristics. The Community Engagement ideas for discussion contained in this report further aim to make the City Corporation accessible and accountable to a diverse range of City workers and residents.

Climate implications

28. The proposals included in this paper do not carry any significant implications for the Climate Action programme.

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
- 14 October 2021 – Election Engagement Campaign
- 20 January 2022 – Election Engagement Campaign

Mark Gettleson

Head of Campaigns and Community Engagement

E: mark.gettleson@cityoflondon.gov.uk

T: 07596 888 230

Saira McKechnie

Head of Electoral Services and City Occupier Database

E: saira.mckechnie@cityoflondon.gov.uk

T: 020 4558 3967