

Committee(s): Communications and Corporate Affairs Sub-Committee Policy and Resources Committee	Dated: 28 February 2024 18 March 2024
Subject: Election Engagement Campaign 2025	Public
Which outcomes in the City Corporation's Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 9 and 10
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	Yes
If so, how much?	£263,500
What is the source of Funding?	PIF/Committee Contingency
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department?	Yes
Report of: Executive Director of Corporate Communications and External Affairs	For Decision
Report author: Mark Gettleson, Head of Campaigns and Community Engagement	

Summary

The 2025 City of London elections represent both a challenge and opportunity for our organisation. Our key aims remain the same as in previous election cycles: (a) maximising the number of people registered to vote ahead of the 30 November 2024 deadline; (b) maximising the number of people who turn out to vote in the election in March 2025; and (c) increase the diversity of our elected Members to make them more reflective of the communities we serve.

The above links to key objectives listed in the new draft Corporate Plan's "Diverse Engaged Communities" outcome:

- *Increase the electorate registered to vote in City-wide elections pre and post 2025.*
- *Increase the number of candidates standing for election in the City-wide elections in 2025.*

Performance measures for the above in the new draft Corporate Plan's include:

- *Increase number of voters at 2025 and 2029 elections.*
- *Increase number of candidates at 2025 and 2029 elections.*
- *Increase number of contested wards at 2025 and 2029 elections.*

Ahead of the postponed 2021 Common Councillor elections, Policy & Resources Committee utilised £337,000 overall from its contingency funds to support electoral registration, candidate engagement and voter turnout efforts, details of which are below. This report:

- *Outlines the strengths and challenges we face in undertaking our election engagement work ahead of our 2025 elections.*

- Proposes a resourcing and activity plan to effectively deliver the objectives above.

Recommendations

Members of the Communications and Corporate Affairs Sub-Committee are asked to:

- Endorse the proposed campaign plan as set out in paragraphs 6 to 18 of this report in relation to meeting its engagement objectives;

Members of the Policy and Resources Committee are asked to approve one of the following funding Options:

- Agree a budget of up to £263,500 to be met from the 2024/25 Policy Initiatives Fund (PIF); or
- Agree a budget of up to £263,500 to be met from the Policy and Resources Committee's Contingency.

Noting that the current uncommitted balances within the 2024/25 PIF and Committee Contingency are £505,000 and £285,000 respectively and are subject to any items being approved at the February 2024 meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee.

Main Report

Background

1. Much of our complex election engagement work as an organisation is shaped by the nature of our franchise in the City. While residents register and participate in a similar way to other elections (though they must register separately for the Ward List and there is no rolling registration), the ability of workers to participate if registered by their workplace is wholly unique. The registration process is made more complex by: the formula which gives disproportionately more votes to smaller workplaces, a short registration period, and the lack of individual registration or requirement to register.
2. Many of the issues identified in response to our 2022 elections require changes in primary legislation to address, including potential reforms to our franchise and registration process. These are being outlined in a separate paper brought by the Remembrancer's and Comptroller & City Solicitor's Departments.
3. We should also remember that the City will see at least three elections between May 2024 and March 2025, adding pressure to our Electoral Services Team and making it crucial that engagement around our own elections is distinct and effectively resourced. In particular, the General Election will likely be held at the most intensive time for our own voter registration campaign.

Current position

4. Our election engagement work ahead of 2024/25 possesses many advantages compared to three years ago:

- a. **Registration is approximately 50% higher than prior to 2021.** While the final Ward List statistics for 2024/25 are still being finalised, they will be very close to those seen in 2022/23 and 2023/24 – and significantly higher than in 2021/22, where registration was severely curtailed by the pandemic. This means there is a reduced number of businesses needing to produce a wholly new list of voters, and our points of contact will be more recent.
 - b. **We have a developed Speak for the City brand and website** (www.speakforthecity.com) that has proven its effectiveness as a scalable and reusable tool in multiple elections and voter registration periods. While we will want to develop additional functionalities to reflect feedback and priorities, the core product and its features – allowing voters and registrants to find out about our elections, request a vote, see their candidates and where to vote – remain highly effective and unique.
 - c. **Institutional knowledge** surrounding election engagement developed as a result of stable teams, only three years between all-out elections and multiple by-elections and aldermanic elections. Techniques that have proven effective, such as digital advertising, using LinkedIn to find new registration contacts and using temporary staff to support registration, can be developed further.
 - d. **The post-pandemic return to the City** contrasts strongly with a 2021/22 campaign, much of which required engaging City businesses whose staff had not worked in the Square Mile for almost two years. Not only should this make firms easier to reach than previously, but City-related issues and therefore the elections should be of more interest to voters and their workplaces.
 - e. **The City Belonging Project** has begun to access and convene HR and Diversity and Inclusion leaders in the Square Mile, many of which come from unregistered businesses. While still in its infancy, the initiative will likely prove helpful in encouraging voter registration and candidates from under-represented backgrounds. We are also considering ways to convene a network of the Heads of Internal Communications of City businesses to expand our reach across the Square Mile.
5. However, challenges for effective election engagement that relate to our own processes and structures remain. Key among these are:
- a. **No central CRM tracking all business relationships.** Large numbers of relationships are held by various departments, but this information is not currently held in a single place or layered onto electoral registration information to immediately identify unregistered businesses. The Director of Digital & IT is currently delivering a “lighthouse project” to deliver this across departments, the success of which will be crucial to our election engagement efforts.

Moreover, the way in which information on City occupiers is communicated to Electoral Services remains disjointed – especially when it comes to new businesses in the City. The reduction in size of the City Occupiers Database team from eight to two members of staff over the past decade has reduced their scope for outreach work, meaning the team has to rely more heavily on information from other departments. While information collected by Electoral Services can only be used for that purpose, other City Corporation data can be used to support electoral registration work.

- b. **Lack of comprehensive business engagement function – covering all workplaces.** As noted in previous reports, this work is distributed across a variety of teams. This includes engaging our largest financial and professional services firms around policy issues of interest to their sector (Innovation & Growth), engaging the facilities managers of the largest 200 City workplaces and Business Improvement Districts (Environment), SME engagement (SBREC/Heart of the City) and teams working to contact businesses across a range of workstreams, from Destination City to climate action and transportation.

There is no central co-ordination to this work or means of ensuring that all of our business community of over 6,000 workplaces, or even the approximately 700 with more than 100 staff, are hearing from us throughout the year – and that duplication isn't happening. In particular, our lack of comprehensive engagement with smaller workplaces (under 250 staff), who make up the vast majority of our unregistered businesses, remains a challenge. Many of these businesses are not SMEs, but the London office of a larger firm based elsewhere. While the development of the City Belonging Project has helped us access a wider range of businesses, across a range of size and sector, the initiative remains at its early stages.

Building relationships with businesses is both skilled and time-consuming and lies outside of the purview of the Electoral Services Team, whose remit is to administer the election. While developing such relationships between now and December will be difficult, target lists of unregistered businesses with 100 or more staff will be drawn up and circulated to the main teams undertaking business engagement (IG, Environment, etc.) to see where there could be scope to engage with those workplaces over the course of the year.

The Stakeholder Review, commissioned by the Corporate Communications & External Affairs Directorate, looking at all the relationships held by our organisation, will prove crucial in addressing these issues in the future – but its timeline for implementation sits beyond the period covered by this report.

Proposal: 2025 Election Engagement Campaign

6. Ahead of the postponed 2021 Common Councillor elections, this Committee utilised £337,000 overall from its Contingency funds to support electoral

registration, candidate engagement and voter turnout efforts – in particular, £150,000 was allocated towards the recruitment of an Electoral Registration Campaign Manager (10/12/20), £127,000 towards the creation of the Speak for the City website and brand, promotional materials, candidate engagement, digital advertising and additional temporary staff (20/02/20 revised 08/04/21) and £60,000 to extend this work from the registration deadline through to election day (14/10/21). The overall underspend in these budgets were carried through to support engagement around large number of by-elections and Aldermanic elections since March 2022, as well as the voter registration periods in 2022 and 2023.

7. Bearing this in mind, and drawing heavily on lessons from our previous elections, it is proposed to ask the Committee to approve £263,500 in funding from either the 2024/25 Policy Initiatives Fund or Policy and Resources Committee Contingency to support the resources and activities below, each of which is then explained in detail:

Campaign staffing	Campaign Manager (12 month FTC)	£95,000
	2 x Campaign Assistants (7 months)	£60,000
Digital tools	Website development and maintenance	£23,000
	Digital advertising and design	£50,000
Mail and printed material		£6,000
Candidate engagement	Promotional materials	£2,000
	3 x candidate events	£15,000
Ward engagement events		£12,500
TOTAL		£263,500

Campaign staffing

8. The recruitment of a dedicated Campaign Manager, solely focused on overseeing the registration, turnout and candidate engagement campaign was felt to be an effective means of delivering the desired outcomes in 2021/22. It is proposed that while the Head of Campaigns and Community Engagement will still be responsible for the oversight of this campaign, its day-to-day management should be again given to a Campaign Manager, whose sole responsibility will be the effectiveness of this campaign. Part of their responsibilities will include working across the organisation to ensure that all departments with a business engagement function are effectively contributing to the success of the campaign. While it will not be necessary to recruit at a Grade H level of experience, as previously, we must recognise the competitive market for such roles on a short-term basis, especially in a general election year. As such, it is proposed to recruit a Campaign Manager at Grade G, subject to job evaluation.

Proposed Campaign Manager, 12 month fixed term contract: **£95,000 (including on costs)**

9. During the 2021 registration period, six temporary campaign assistants were engaged to contact unregistered or under-registered organisations and identify new contacts. Two assistants were also hired late in the 2022 and 2023 registration periods. As in 2016, this was felt to be a highly effective means of approaching businesses directly, with assistants given a sense of ownership over particular organisations. However, it is felt that starting this process far earlier in the year, allowing firms to be identified and relationships built over several months, will be far more fruitful than a last-minute end of year rush. It also removes the need for training up new staff during the busy registration period itself. It is therefore proposed to engage two temporary Campaign Assistants at Grade D for a period of seven months, from May to December (or as soon as the new Campaign Manager is embedded), to assist with this key work – this will either be through the use of agency staff or as a fixed term contract.

Proposed two campaign assistants for 7 months ahead of the registration deadline: **£60,000 (including on costs)**

Digital tools

10. The “digital first” campaign undertaken in 2021/22 was seen to be a key element of its success, reflecting the ability to reach City workers in a targeted way whether at home or in the office.
11. Previous investment in the Speak for the City website means we start this campaign with an excellent digital platform to allow for engagement with the electorate. However, new functionality to better showcase the registration process and to promote candidature should be developed during the Spring and early Summer (£14,000) – and ongoing maintenance costs of the website covering us to the end of the election campaign in March 2025 should also be paid (£9,000).

Proposed further website development and maintenance total: **£23,000**

12. LinkedIn adverts also proved an effective means of reaching City workers in 2021/22, allowing for the targeting of unregistered businesses at scale – and creating upward pressure on businesses, whose staff were now asking to participate. More than 640,000 adverts were served to City workers over LinkedIn, including 47,000 direct sponsored messages from the Lord Mayor. During the 2021 registration period, more than 1,400 individuals at 600 organisations requested a vote through the Speak for the City website, with many serving as a point of contact to kickstart registration at previously unregistered businesses. Overall, approximately £45,000 was spent on digital advertising and it is proposed to repeat this, along with a further £5,000 towards the design of such advertising.

Proposed digital advertising and design: **£50,000**

Direct mail and printed material

13. While we severely limited the amount of direct mail we distributed ahead of the 2022 election, each voter was sent a postcard ahead of polling day with a link to the candidates’ guide and polling station finder, at a cost of just over £10,000. The

same process has been followed in subsequent elections. As this information links to online material, it is proposed going forward to only send such information through the post where we lack an email address. This not only reduces the overall cost, but allows voters to receive the information in a more timely manner than, for instance, if it needs to work its way through a corporate mailroom.

14. It is also proposed to reprint the business card with registration information that members were able to distribute to business contacts in their ward, as well as specific A5 flyers for both retail units and residents. It is not proposed to repeat the more generic flyers for pavement campaigning and visibility, as these were not felt to produce an effective conversion rate.

Proposed direct mail and printing budget: **£6,000**

Improving candidate diversity

15. The wish to diversify the membership of the Court has long been a priority for this committee. While it is the voters who decide who gets elected, and we must treat all candidates fairly and on an equal basis, work can be done to broaden the range of those who receive information and consider standing for election in the City. Low numbers of candidates (1.35 per vacancy compared to a London average of 3.4) lead to uncontested elections and limit voter choice – both a reputational risk and a barrier to effective engagement.
16. It is proposed that we create and expand informational materials relating to being a candidate and Common Councillor, including testimonials, descriptions of the role and legal requirements. These would then be showcased on the Speak for the City website and disseminated across businesses via the City Belonging Project and other channels. In particular, we would seek to work with diversity networks and initiatives such as InterLaw, ICAN (Insurance Cultural Awareness Network), Change The Ratio and We Are The City, as well as the Lord Mayor's Appeal and Heart of the City, to provide this information to their members. Moreover, the increasing diversity of the working City, any work to better promote candidature across businesses in the Square Mile is likely to result in our reaching more diverse audiences.
17. It was felt that, despite an ongoing pandemic, the informal informational sessions held for potential candidates in 2021 were helpful and effective, with a number of current members having taken the decision to stand as a result. It is proposed to hold at least three such in-person events, with a budget of £5,000 for each – as well as online drop-in sessions.

Proposed design and production of new materials to encourage diverse candidates: **£2,000**

Three proposed candidate informational events: **£15,000**

Ward engagement events for unregistered businesses

18. Unregistered businesses are often those with no or little previous engagement with our organisation or regular invitations to events. While we can prioritise

engagement with these businesses through the City Belonging Project and other channels, there is likely also merit to put on specific events for decision-makers at these businesses, where they can be introduced to our organisation, its activities and elections. These would ideally be done on a ward basis to allow for scale, with members assisting in finding potential organisations to host such events. It is proposed to allocate a budget of £500 per ward to support the creation and publicity for at least one engagement event per ward during the early autumn, with wards combining to create a bigger event where appropriate. This will be overseen by the Campaign Manager, in consultation with ward members. In residential wards, with few unregistered businesses, such an event can be used to promote ward engagement more broadly.

Proposed ward-based engagement events: **£12,500**

Corporate & Strategic Implications

19. Our engagement programme ahead of our 2025 elections will help realise the City Corporation's vision in terms of its existing 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.

It will also prove essential in realising key objectives listed in the new draft Corporate Plan's "Diverse Engaged Communities" outcome, specifically:

- *Increase the electorate registered to vote in City-wide elections pre and post 2025.*
- *Increase the number of candidates standing for election in the City-wide elections in 2025.*

Performance measures for the above in the new Corporate Plan's include:

- *Increase number of voters at 2025 and 2029 elections.*
- *Increase number of candidates at 2025 and 2029 elections.*
- *Increase number of contested wards at 2025 and 2029 elections.*

Financial implications

20. Financial implications – It is proposed that funding of £263,500 is drawn from either 2024/25 Policy Initiatives Fund or Policy and Resources Contingency and charged to City's Estate to support the activities outlined in this report. The current 2024/25 uncommitted balances of £505,000 and £285,000 respectively are subject to Committee's approval for any items where funding has been agreed at the February meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee.

Resource implications

21. Resources from across the City Corporation will be deployed to make our election engagement programme a success and various teams asked to undertake work to support this activity.

Legal implications

22. All engagement activity will continue to work closely with Electoral Services and City Solicitors to ensure that all activity is compliant, including with the GDPR.

Equalities implications

23. The aim of our Election Engagement work is to increase participation in the election and candidate diversity. The proposed spend on promoting registration and candidate will make the process more accessible to a wider and more diverse audience, including those with protected characteristics.

Climate implications

24. While promoting further digitisation of our campaigning methods, the proposals included in this paper do not carry any significant implications for the Climate Action programme.

Appendices

- **Appendix 1** – Contingency/Policy Initiatives Fund Application – Election Engagement Campaign 2025

This information is provided as required under the policy relating to applications to Committee Contingency.

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
- 15 September 2022 – 2022 City of London Elections

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