

DEMOCRATIC PROCESSES WORKING GROUP

16 DECEMBER 2015

Commenced: 1.00pm

Terminated: 2.00pm

Present: Councillors Taylor (In the Chair), K. Quinn, Ward and Warrington

Apology for Councillor Buckley, Cooney, Fairfoull, J Fitzpatrick
Absence:

1. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

AGREED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 26 October 2015 be accepted as a correct record.

2. INDIVIDUAL ELECTORAL REGISTRATION

Consideration was given to a report of the Executive Director (Governance and Resources), which updated Members on the outcome of the annual canvass and the publication of the first electoral register based on Individual Electoral Registration.

Members were reminded that on 31 January 2013, the Electoral Registration and Administration Act, received Royal Assent, paving the way for the introduction of individual electoral registration, whereby each person was responsible for registering to vote individually. The Act also enabled people to register to vote online.

It was explained that the transition to IER had ended on 1 December 2015 with the publication of the new register of electors. The publication of the new register meant that any entries for electors who were not registered individually, that is, those who had not either been confirmed or successfully made individual applications to register to vote were removed from the register.

During the transition to IER there had been speculation about the impact of IER, in particular the number of people who may be removed from the register as a result of not registering individually. In Tameside 4717 unconfirmed electors were eventually removed from the electoral register. This was despite numerous communications and visits to properties as well as a large amount of publicity. Overall the size of the electorate in Tameside had fallen by 1.5% when compared to the register published following the previous canvass, a breakdown of the electorate for each polling district was appended to the report. The appendix showed that the local government electorate had fallen from 169,257 on 1 December 2014 to 166,643 on 1 December 2015, a fall of 2,614 or 1.54% across the borough. With regard to the parliamentary electorate this had fallen from 166,315 to 163,976, a fall of 2,339 or 1.57% across the Borough. It was stated that anybody who was on the electoral but were removed on 1 December could apply at any time to be put back on the register individually.

It was explained that comprehensive household activity had taken place since 1 July 2015. Household Enquiry Forms had been sent to all 100,000 Tameside properties on 14 July 2015. An initial reminder was sent out on 16 September, the reminder was sent to 55,000 properties. Final reminders to the outstanding c43,000 properties were sent out on 6 November 2015.

In addition to the standard required actions outlined above and house to house visits, other steps that have been taken to maintain the accuracy of the register include the following:

- Data matching and analysis to identify low registration levels and target unconfirmed electors; Every non-responding property was checked against Council Tax;

- Personal letters to all unconfirmed electors;
- During the canvass regular press releases were issued;
- Extensive use of social media, large number of posts on Council Facebook and twitter and by partner organisations such as colleges;
- Encouragement to register at all budget consultation events;
- Encouragement to register on Leader's blog;
- Use of the Citizen;
- Internal communications encouraging staff to register to vote;
- Use of publicity material such as poster and banners which will be used across the borough until the end of the canvass;
- Use of bookmarks and business cards at various events;
- Working with Registered Social Landlords, CVAT, Fire Service and Bin Swap staff to target particular areas and groups;
- All callers to customer services were reminded to register and assisted in doing so where possible.

The final response rate for the annual canvass was 90.3%, this represents a high response rate relative to other canvasses. A significant proportion of the response rate was as a result of intense data matching undertaken by Democratic Services, Executive Support and Council Tax staff in the final few weeks of the canvass. This work enabled a significant number of non-responders to remain on the electoral register.

On 1 December 2015, 4,717 unconfirmed local government electors were removed from the electoral register as they had not been confirmed through data matching or registered individually. It was likely that a significant proportion of these could not be confirmed as they no longer lived at the registered address and a number had been replaced by new electors.

The final number of unconfirmed electors was 20,000+ less than the original number of unconfirmed electors in 2014, and the reduction is down to a lot of work undertaken over that period to identify and either confirm or replace the electors. A final breakdown of unconfirmed electors by ward and parliamentary constituency was included in the report as follows:

Ward	No of unconfirmed electors
Droylsden East	268
Droylsden West	221
Hurst	220
St Michaels	363
Waterloo	215
St Peters	542
ASHTON-UNDER-LYNE	1829
Audenshaw	156
Denton North East	197
Denton South	202
Denton West	159
Dukinfield	254
DENTON AND REDDISH	968
Dukinfield Stalybridge	200
Godley	301
Newton	264
Werneth	271
Longdendale	165

Mossley	252
Stalybridge North	283
Stalybridge South	184
STALYBRIDGE AND HYDE	1920
TAMESIDE	4717

AGREED:

That the update be noted and staff involved in conducting the annual canvass and other work on the transition to Individual Electoral Registration be thanked for huge amount of additional work that had been undertaken to minimise the number of people who were removed from the register.

3. 2016 ELECTIONS

Consideration was given to a report of the Executive Director (Governance and Resources) which informed Members of the statutory timetable for the 2016 Local Elections and sought Members views on preparation and the timing of events at the 2016 Election. Members were informed that on 5 May 2016 there will be Borough Council elections only. The previously scheduled Police and Crime Commissioner Election will not now be held in Greater Manchester as the post will be subsumed by the GM Mayor from 2017 and it was intended that legislation would be passed to address this.

With regard to postal votes it was explained that the deadline for withdrawal of nominations would be 4pm on Thursday, 7 April 2016 and, in theory, postal votes could be issued any time after this. However, the printers normally required a week following confirmation of candidates to print and prepare packs for dispatch, therefore the earliest postal vote packs could be dispatched was Thursday 14 April 2016. Previously dispatch day had been Friday, in this case Friday 15 April 2016, and postal votes begin to arrive over the weekend. This would give electors almost three weeks to return postal votes.

Members were reminded that Tameside was part of the Greater Manchester contract for election printing, this contract was managed by the AGMA Elections Co-ordination team who had agreed with the printers, Electoral Reform Services that postal votes would be issued across Greater Manchester on Friday 22 April. The printers confirmed that if Tameside chose to send out postal votes on 15 April they would be able to do the necessary work.

Postal vote verification and opening would be conducted on a Parliamentary Constituency basis i.e. all wards within each constituency being done at the same time. It was intended that verification and opening of postal votes would be undertaken at Dukinfield Town Hall. Attached at **appendix 2** to the report was a draft timetable for Members' endorsement. At the postal vote opening sessions for the last elections access was by pass only and only to the appropriate constituency, not all, it was proposed that this approach should be retained.

Members had previously agreed an approach whereby a number of polling stations were made into double polling stations when there were combined elections and it had previously been agreed that where there was a single local election there would not be double polling stations. It was proposed that this continued to be the case and that there would be no double polling stations for the 2016 Local Elections. Attached at **appendix 3** to the report was a breakdown of the number of electors who could vote at each polling station, the table showed how many electors would vote if 20% of those who could vote at the polling station did so, the highest number would be 589 at Dukinfield Town Hall.

It was suggested that as there was only one election it will be possible to begin the verification and counting of local ballot papers immediately the on the close of poll at 10 pm. With regard to the

venue for the Count Members have previously expressed a preference for conducting the 2016 election count at Unit 7, Plantation Industrial Estate, which had been used to conduct the 2015 Parliamentary and Local Elections. At that time Members also asked that Dukinfield Town Hall should be booked as a contingency venue, this has been done.

AGREED:

- (i) That the timetable for the 2016 Election be noted;
- (ii) That Postal Votes be dispatched on Friday 15 April 2016 and opening sessions be held as follows:

Date	Ashton-under-Lyne	Denton and Reddish	Stalybridge and Hyde
Thursday 21 April	1.00pm	2.00pm	3.00pm
Wednesday 27 April	2.00pm	3.00pm	1.00pm
Friday 29 April	3.00pm	1.00pm	2.00pm
Thursday 5 May	1.00pm	2.00pm	3.00pm

- (iii) That it be agreed that all polling stations will be single polling stations;
- (iv) That the Count begin immediately after the close of poll on 5 May 2016;
- (v) That Unit 7, Plantation Industrial Estate be used as the count venue and Dukinfield Town Hall be the contingency venue.

4. ELECTORAL COMMISSION BULLETINS

Consideration was given to a report of the Executive Director (Governance and Resources) that provided Members with recent copies of the Electoral Commission news bulletin which set out current issues affecting the democratic framework for local government.

AGREED:

That the report be noted.

CHAIR