

ELECTORAL REGISTRATION PROCESS REVIEW WORKING PARTY

**Minutes of the meeting held on 17 October 2016 at 2.00 pm in the Council Chamber,
Council Offices, Cecil Street, Margate, Kent.**

Present: Councillor K. Gregory (Chairman); Councillors Campbell, Connor, Dawson, Grove, Jaye-Jones and Rusiecki

68. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Falcon, substituted by Councillor Rusiecki.

69. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interests made at the meeting.

70. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

Amendments to minute item 66:

Councillor Campbell proposed, Councillor Connor seconded and Members agreed the minutes of the previous Electoral Registration Process Review Task & Finish Group to be a correct record of the meeting that was held on 11 April 2016.

Councillor K. Gregory proposed, Campbell seconded and subject to the above amendments, Members agreed the minutes of the previous meeting held on 07 July 2016, to be a correct record.

71. CURRENT VOTER REGISTRATION PROCESS UPDATE 2016/17

Claire Hawken, Electoral Services Manager introduced the item for discussion by presenting updates for the voter registration and current approaches for getting residents onto the register.

Council was in the third phase of the annual canvass for this year. The first reminders of voter registration had been hand delivered to individual properties in the district. Door knocking (personal call) stage is still underway. However some residents were not particularly keen on the personal call stage. The response rate to canvassing was 70.3% as at 20 September 2016 and this was an increase on the previous year for the same period. Data available as at 17 October was 78.43%.

Claire Hawken said that this was a slow process by nature but the situation was improving. She suggested that there may be an opportunity for another round of door knocking. The Electoral Services Team has managed to carry out data matching in some areas so far with information from other services like council tax and benefit claims and this has helped towards getting residents to register. Claire Hawken reported that the team had faced some challenges particularly considering that they had to make data entry changes to 9200 properties to date.

Ms Hawken advised Members that the Council was in the process of making improved changes to the Council's website, which will also see improvements to the web pages for information regarding voter registration. The referendum was seen as the time when the register would be most up to date, but the number of changes required so far proves this not to be the case.

Council was now receiving citizenship ceremonies from Kent County Council, which could be used to update the register. The team receives service feedback from residents

through Feedback and Twitter, which is used to improve the service. The team intends to use email correspondence to send out reminders to residents, where such information exists.

One Member requested for a comparison of voter registration success between Thanet District Council and similar local authorities. In response Ms Hawken advised that such an approach had been tried. Unfortunately, it had proven difficult to get the cooperation from other local councils. She hoped to have better luck if she were to try again. One Member asked for details of which authorities did not respond so an FOI request could be submitted. As an update to this, Medway's figures were reported in the April meeting minutes.

Members also suggested that TDC could try and employ different canvassing approaches for different wards, as some residents in some areas were less likely to register to vote; particularly in deprived areas. They also suggested that Council could combine the offer of services to residents to maximum uptake of voter registration. This would include setting up desks at the Gateway so that when residents walk in for help with say council tax, benefits claims, and debt support, the Elections Team could canvass at that point.

Ms Hawken said that she would consider any appropriate suggestions. She advised Members that she was now getting a clearer picture of the challenges affecting the district in terms of improving voter registration. There may be a need at the right time to approach the Cabinet Office for increased funding to overcome those challenges.

Post Meeting Notes:

After the Chairman had adjourned the meeting after concluding the business, Members agreed that future meetings would continue to be held during the day time (preferably @ 2.00 pm).

Meeting concluded: 2.30 pm