

## **ELECTORAL REGISTRATION PROCESS REVIEW TASK & FINISH GROUP**

**Minutes of the meeting held on 8 October 2015 at 7.00 pm in the Council Chamber,  
Council Offices, Cecil Street, Margate, Kent.**

**Present:** Councillor Ken Gregory (Chairman); Councillors Campbell,  
G Coleman-Cooke, Connor and Game

### **49. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Councillor Falcon.

### **50. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

There were no declarations of interest made at the meeting.

### **51. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

Councillor Campbell proposed, Councillor Glenn Coleman-Cooke seconded and Members agreed the minutes as a true record of the meeting that was held on 7 July 2015.

### **52. INCREASING PUBLIC AWARENESS OF REGISTRATION UNDER INDIVIDUAL ELECTORAL REGISTRATION (IER)**

Cliff Robinson, Electoral Services Project Manager introduced the item. An updated Annex 2 was circulated to Members in the meeting to replace the one that was attached to the report. This showed that the response rate to the household I canvass was currently running 67%; up from the 56% reported in the initial Annex 2 in the agenda pack.

However responses varied with each ward, with the lowest response being 30% and the highest at over 70 %. Electors could now text their responses to the canvass as well as the online, telephone service. Such arrangements were clearly cheaper and a more efficient way of registering. However most individuals preferred using the traditional method of filling in a paper copy and sending it back to the Council via post.

Strategies to increase the uptake of electronic registration were being developed and these strategies are highlighted in the Individual Electoral Registration (IER) Communications Strategy. Some Members suggested that Council could consider restricting access to some services like use of library services to residents who were registered electors and charging more for the use of cemeteries for those not on the register and suggested this be investigated .

Members requested that future updates of canvass responses should reflect all ward responses in order for Members to identify where there were poor responses and target such areas to increase voter registration numbers. Madeline Homer, CEx said that the Communication Strategy for IER will be up dated. Members also requested information the actual numbers of individuals in Thanet following the canvass process had registered be provided to a future meeting of the working party. The Election Project Manager said in response, that this information was only likely to be available much later in the canvass process

Officers suggested that Members could play a part in encouraging residents in their respective constituencies to register. In response Members said that they would need to have information regarding the various zones that made up their constituencies so that

they could best target areas that required more uptake to register. Madeline Homer said a report with information regarding the current numbers of electors who had individually registered including a map of electoral areas be included on the agenda for a future meeting of the Sub-Group.

Members agreed the following recommendations:

1. That the report and the proposed actions outlined in the Communication Strategy for IER, be received and noted;
2. That Members of the Group come forward with any ideas of their own that would help promote voter awareness of registration via their work in the community;
3. Given the uncertainties around the future of the annual canvass process that representations been made to the Cabinet Office, to ensure the Government continues to adequately fund the IER process and so ensure there is effective promotion.

### **53. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS**

In response to question from a Member regarding the exemption of the 'Review of printing and postal voting arrangements under Individual Electoral Registration;' Madeline Homer advised the meeting that the exempt report contained information that was commercially sensitive and therefore must be considered in a private session.

Councillor K. Gregory proposed, Councillor Campbell seconded and Members agreed that the public and press be excluded from the meeting on agenda item 6 as it contains exempt information as defined in Section 3 of Part V of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).

### **54. REVIEW OF PRINTING AND POSTAL VOTING ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE MAY 2015 ELECTIONS**

Cliff Robinson led the discussion by introducing the report. He said that the May Elections posed some significant election administration challenges due to the requirement to manage because unlike the usual elections, the Council had to manage three different elections on the same day. These were for the Parliamentary, District, Parish/Town Councils. This change had come on the back of major changes through the introduction of the new Individual Electoral Registration system.

As is always the case for every election, the Electoral Commission set performance standards against which all Returning Officers are measured. Thanet District Council met all the standards, although there were twenty nine Returning Officers that failed to meet the standards. Cliff Robinson acknowledged that lessons had been learnt in going forward for future elections and an action plan had been prepared highlighting key approaches to be developed.

Members observed that during this election, Thanet District Council had to deal with the international media attention due to a high profile Parliamentary candidate. They gave credit to the Electoral Services Team for a job well done in successfully managing the May Election considering the significant challenges that the department faced during this election.

Members agreed that the findings of the Audit Review exercise concerning postal voting arrangements together with steps set out in the Action Plan be noted.

Meeting concluded: 7.40 pm

