



Kirklees Democracy Commission Cross Party Working Group – Wednesday 18 July 2018

Improving Electoral Registration

1. Background and Context

As part of its work the Commission undertook detailed work looking at voting, elections and registration. By way of a reminder Council have agreed the following outcomes in the context of the work covered by this paper:

- **Registering to vote should be easy, accessible and convenient especially for our young citizens;**
- **Citizens are able to access accurate, timely, trustworthy and relevant information about elections and candidates standing;**

The Commission looked at elections from the perspective of our citizens, in order to better understand the barriers and motivations to democratic engagement and voting. The Commission developed a more detailed understanding of some of the issues that citizens feel are important. These include the need for trustworthy, timely, accessible and valuable information about what is being done by local politicians and what their plans are.

Citizens would like a fairer voting and campaigning system, to help get the best people into the council. They feel that voting-related information should be available through a wide variety of channels, and that people should be given the opportunity to vote in as many ways as possible, including online. The Commission has explored these issues, along with others, and looked at how we can improve the voter experience as a whole.

Registering to vote is an important step on the journey to voting. It is not just about processes and systems. It needs to involve engaging, educating and raising awareness about the value of participation. The Commission therefore looked at electoral registration in the wider context of local democracy. In particular, this means there is a need to look at ways in which we can improve current arrangements in order to maximise take up. This involves continuing to reach out to those who feel socially excluded and to empower citizens to have their say,

removing any barriers (perceived or real) and working with both our young citizens as well as those who are already of a voting age.

The Commission heard about other initiatives that could be developed locally to maximise registration. Given our large student population there are real opportunities to work collaboratively with colleges and the University of Huddersfield to integrate electoral registration with the student registration process. The Commission recommended that we develop this kind of approach in Kirklees, building on the successful work that has already taken place in Sheffield.

Given that registration is the first step on the journey to voting, the Commission felt that it is important that Kirklees Council and central government do as much as possible to support our citizens in making that step as early as possible.

In light of the above the Commission made the following recommendations:

- Kirklees Council should work collaboratively with schools to develop an optional local approach to registering young people at the age of 16;
- Kirklees Council should work with the University of Huddersfield and local colleges to integrate electoral registration as part of the existing student registration process.

For full context this mandate should be read in conjunction with the “Elections” chapter in the final report.

The Theme Lead for this project is Sharon Salvanos.

2. Information

Since the recommendations were agreed by Council officers have undertaken work to begin to consider how to progress the above mentioned recommendations. In so doing officers propose that the project should seek to create products and approaches which will achieve the following objectives:

- To pilot a local approach to registering young people at the age of 16;
- To work with the University of Huddersfield and local colleges to integrate electoral registration as part of the existing student registration process.

Suggested Approach:

The approach will need to be adapted to align with school, college and university academic year and administrative protocols and/or delivery of education.

The initial approach will be to identify opportunities and also limitations of integrating automatic registration into the relevant organisations. Our approach needs to be mindful that there is no legal requirement for young people aged 16 and 17 to register to vote. Nor is there a legal requirement for university students to be

registered at their term time address. It is therefore essential that our approach is a partnership approach which supports the organisation to integrate automatic registration without creating additional and unnecessary workload. Our approach will be one that is inclusive, encouraging and supportive.

Stage 1:

Schools/colleges

June to July 2018 & September to December 2018

Attendance at relevant meetings with secondary school head teachers, college principals and University Registrars and Students accommodation providers - to discuss the benefits of registration to the young person in terms of life skills (there are a number of benefits of being on the electoral register), the school in terms of their responsibility for encouraging democracy (Citizenship Education), as to how automated registration can be realised.

Our approach will need to be adapted in each school/college to align with their internal procedures and resources available. There are over thirty schools in the Kirklees area and three 6th form colleges.

Initial meetings or contact will be to set out the aim of our project and identify and agree:

- A lead officer in each school/college;
- The approach required to integrate automatic registration;
- Timescales and resourcing/support requirements;
- Monitoring and evaluation.

Huddersfield University and associated stakeholders

June to September 2018

The final acceptance and registration of students at Huddersfield University takes place in August, the likelihood is that details of accommodation (required for registration) will not be confirmed until mid to late September. HUDLET are responsible for overseeing student accommodation (Halls of Residence and those landlords registered with HUDLET).

It will be important to understand the administrative processes described above in order to identify the most appropriate stage and how best to incorporate electoral registration. If a similar model to the approach used in Sheffield is used, the student would apply through the University course registration portal, the registration application is sited at the end of the course application process at this stage the data then becomes the property of the Electoral Registration Officer, in terms of GDPR compliance, consent is integrated into this part of the student application process. Data provided by the University would be used to submit electoral registration application data onto the system.

The law requires organisations responsible for Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) to share information with the Electoral Registration Officer (ERO). Consultation with student accommodation providers will need to take place to discuss provision of information which complies with GDPR. Inter-Agency Data Sharing Protocols will need to be developed to support the provision of information from all accommodation providers in the absence of applications via the University registration portal and to support applications, where necessary. Information provided by student accommodation providers is essential so that precise address details can be verified (historically the provision of accurate and/or incomplete student addresses has been identified as a major barrier in processing electoral registration applications).

Stage 2:

September 2018 to June 2019

Evaluation of the above will inform how automatic registration can be integrated into the relevant organisations administration and/or delivery of citizenship education. Outcomes will be reported to the Cross Party Working Group.

NOTE: All work relating to the project objectives must have regard to the following:

- Design and delivery of the project may be constrained by the opportunities to meaningfully engage with schools, colleges and the University (availability within and outside of the academic timetables).
- The Electoral Registration Officer is independent of the local authority. All work relating to electoral registration must have regard to the relevant legislation, Electoral Commission guidance and the responsibility of the Electoral Registration Officer to be impartial. The Register of electors is the property of the Electoral Registration Officer, and not the council.

The following will inform the design and delivery of the project:

Local knowledge (outreach officer, other internal services; partners and ward councillors);
 Legislation;
 Existing contacts;
 Partnership working;
 Learning service data;
 Data sharing agreements;
 GDPR.

Electoral Services will also continue (through its electoral outreach programme) to work with under-registered groups and organisations to increase awareness, provide necessary support and guidance to promote and maximise electoral registration, for example:

Residential care home and sheltered housing providers
Social housing providers
Houses of Multiple Occupation (non-student)
Kirklees Neighbourhood Housing
Local estate agents
RNIB, Mencap and other groups supporting individuals with disabilities and/or their carers
Partners supporting apprenticeship programmes
C & K Careers

3. Recommendation

The Cross Party Working Group is asked to:

- Consider (and sign off?) the objectives and proposed approach for undertaking this project as set out at section 2 of this paper.

Report produced by:

Sharon Salvanos in consultation with the wider Programme Team.