

The Highland Council

Community Safety, Public Engagement and Equalities Committee - 26 March 2014

Agenda Item	10
Report No	CPE 12/14

Highland Elections – Encouraging Participation / Increasing Turnout

Report by the Chief Executive

SUMMARY

This report provides members with an up-date of the actions to encourage participation in elections, particularly for young people.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This Report advises the Committee of the work undertaken by the Election Team and the development of a number of work streams for encouraging participation in elections.

2.0 MOCK REFERENDA

- 2.1 Since the last meeting of the Committee (in December 2013) a number of schools have or intend to hold mock referenda on the Scottish Independence question. Those schools (in addition to Nairn Academy) include Dornoch, Kinlochleven, Grantown, Kingussie, Culloden and Wick Academies. The schools have been delighted with the interest generated by the mock referendum and all are keen to maximise the enthusiasm generated to ensure as many students as possible are registered to vote. Apparently many of the students are not sure whether they were registered by their parents last October or not.
- 2.2 This has been discussed with the Electoral Registration Officer who has advised that he is investigating available options to address this issue. These include the possibility of writing directly to the 4,000+ young voters confirming that they have been registered. This would form part of a continuing process seeking to register all eligible young voters in advance of the referendum.

3.0 VOTES@16

- 3.1 The Council has also backed Highland Youth Voice's "Votes@16" campaign which calls for 16 and 17 year olds to get the vote. Ainya Taylor, Highland Youth Convener, who addressed the Council meeting on 13 March 2014, commented that the Highland Council recognised the importance of young people in local communities and actively encouraged 16 year olds to attend, vote and stand for community councils.

4.0 BY-ELECTIONS

4.1 Since the last Committee, two by-elections have been held. As part of the ongoing programme to encourage participation in elections by young people, Secondary Schools in Caithness and the Black Isle have been encouraged to appoint pupils as "Observers". Observer status afforded the pupils access to the postal vote opening process, polling stations in the Ward and the By-election Counts. With regard to the Caol & Mallaig by- election on 1 May, even though the date is in the middle of the exam schedule, pupils from Fort William will also be invited to be appointed as Observers.

5.0 IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Resource Implications

There are specific resource implications arising from this report, but any additional work involved will be met from the existing Election Team resources.

5.2 Financial and Legal Implications

There are no specific financial or legal implications contained in this Report.

5.3 Equality Implications.

The focus on young people is an attempt to address the issue of low participation among this age group in the electoral process.

5.4 Climate Change/ Carbon Clever Implications

There are no specific climate change implications arising from this report.

<h4>6.0. RECOMMENDATIONS</h4>
<p>6.1 Members are asked to note the ongoing work to encourage participation in elections in Highland.</p>

Designation: Chief Executive

Date: 19 March 2014

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