



Report for: ACTION/INFORMATION
Item Number: 5

Contains Confidential or Exempt Information	NO
Title	Progress on Action Plan for Increasing Local Democracy
Responsible Officer(s)	Andrew Elkington, Head of Policy and Performance
Contact officer, job title and phone number	Andrew Green, Community Partnerships Officer 01628 682940
Member reporting	Cllr. Christine Bateson
For Consideration By	Big Society – Action plan for Increasing Democracy on Parish Councils
Date to be Considered	4 th February 2014
Implementation Date if Not Called In	
Affected Wards	All wards with a town or parish council
Keywords/Index	Big Society, Town and Parish Councils, Elections

<p>Report Summary</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. This report updates the Big Society Sub Group with progress on the Action Plan for Increasing Local Democracy. 2. It recommends that members should: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i) Note progress against the Action Plan for Increasing Local Democracy (attached as Appendix A) and issues relating to its implementation. ii) Secure agreement with parishes on the best way of publicising local vacancies. iii) Recognise the critical importance of encouraging candidates to come forward for election and prioritise actions to encourage this. iv) Agree the level of support that will be offered to parishes to encourage contested elections. 3. The recommendations are being made to support the Council's commitment to the Big Society and to encouraging democracy. 4. If adopted, the key financial implications for the Council will be depend on the extent to which the Council agrees to support the cost of parish
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elections.

If recommendations are adopted, how will residents benefit?	
Benefits to residents and reasons why they will benefit	Dates by which they can expect to notice a difference
Effective local democracy will benefit residents by making sure that, wherever possible, decisions about things that matter to people are made as close as possible to the people that they affect.	May 2015 – next full scale parish elections

1. Details of Recommendations

It is recommended that:

1. Members should note progress against the Action Plan for Increasing Local Democracy (attached as Appendix A) and issues relating to its implementation.
2. That there should be further consultation with parishes through DALC on the best way of publicising local vacancies.
3. That Members should recognise the critical importance of encouraging candidates to come forward for election and prioritise actions to encourage this.
4. That Members agree to support town and parish councils with up to 50% of the cost of contested parish elections.

2. Reason for Decision and Options Considered

Options	Comments
The Council does not take any action to encourage town and parish level democracy and leaves arrangements for initiating and promoting local elections to town and parish councils.	Parish Councils are a basic building block of local democracy. If they are not working effectively and engaging with local residents the Council's aim of promoting the Big Society will be undermined. The 17 th September report presented evidence that there has been a low incidence of contested elections to town and parish councils. It is appropriate for the Council to consider measures it can take to promote elections at a local level.
The Council continues with actions to trigger local elections but fails to focus on measures for encouraging new candidates to come	Contested elections will only take place if sufficient candidates can be encouraged to come forward.

forward.	Triggering an election where there are no candidates can create a situation where posts have not been filled but are not available for co-option.
The Council implements the action plan for encouraging local democracy with a particular focus on encouraging new candidates to come forward.	Encouraging sufficient candidates to come forward is critical to encouraging contested elections.

2.1 There has been limited progress to date in taking forward the Action Plan for Increasing Local Democracy.

2.2 There has been some success in triggering elections by securing the necessary ten signatures that has been achieved through the active intervention and encouragement of borough councillors but this has failed to initiate contested elections because, in each case where it occurred, there has been a failure to secure candidates willing to stand for election.

2.3 One vacancy was filled through an uncontested election but in the other two instances a 'stalemate' situation has arisen where there are no candidates willing to stand for election but the seats are not available for co-option. In this situation a new date has to be set for an election within 35 days of the previous date; a process that will continue until there is a successful outcome.

2.4 However, there can only be a successful outcome if sufficient candidates can be encouraged to come forward. This is the critical element in the whole process but the most difficult part to achieve.

2.5 In relation to the current vacancies it is proposed that the parishes should be given maximum support to publicise their vacancies and encourage new candidates to come forward. This would include: Council support for publicising the vacancies and encouraging candidates to come forward (e.g. leaflets distributed at the Council's expense, press releases, letters to local companies and organisations).

2.6 It is currently unclear who will lead on various aspects of this process and who should be consulted at what point. It is important that these issues should be resolved and a clear protocol agreed that is acceptable to all parties.

2.7 It is particularly difficult to secure candidates within the tight timescales that come into effect once a vacancy has occurred. The register of potential candidates was

intended to address this problem by having a list of people eligible and willing to stand who could be contacted in the event of a vacancy.

2.8 It should not be necessary to secure the ten signatures needed to trigger an election if there are willing candidates because they should be able to secure the necessary backing for themselves. So getting the candidates is the critical part.

2.9 Discussion has focused on who should 'hold' the list but this isn't strictly relevant. The vital issues are:

- how should people be recruited to it?
- who will take responsibility for alerting potential candidates that there is a vacancy?

2.10 There are a number of recommended measures for securing candidates outlined in the action plan.

These include:

- inviting personal recommendations from various individuals and organisations
- inviting individuals to act as 'ambassadors' for local parishes helping to contact and encourage individuals to stand
- advertising via national and local volunteering web sites
- launching local publicity campaigns
- undertaking actions identified in the DALC action plan.

2.11The intention is not to identify a set of candidates who meet particular criteria or support a particular viewpoint but to identify a raft of candidates from whom residents can make a choice at the ballot box. The implication of this is that candidates would not be interviewed but, subject to eligibility and having the nature of the role explained to them, would be encouraged to stand for election.

2.12 It is understood parishes may sometimes prefer to interview and co-opt candidates rather than go to an election as a way of recruiting candidates with complimentary skill sets to existing councillors. There is no reason they should not target candidates with desired skills but RBWM has a clear preference for election as against co-option and will do everything it can to promote this.

2.13 It was agreed at the last sub group meeting that parishes should hold the register in relation to their own parish. This is a sensible arrangement provided that parishes are committed to the principle of election as against co-option. The mechanism for informing prospective candidates of a vacancy and encouraging them to stand for election will need to be agreed in discussion with parishes.

2.14 The Council has offered to meet up to 50% of the cost of recent parish elections in Wraysbury and Sunningdale. A similar level of support has been suggested for forthcoming elections but has not been formally agreed.

3. Key Implications

Defined Outcomes	Unmet	Met	Exceeded	Significantly Exceeded	Date they should be deliver by
No. of electoral areas for which contested elections are held in the May 2015 Borough wide election.	Less than 8 out of 27 electoral areas are contested.	At least 8 electoral areas 8/27 are contested.	At least 10/27 electoral areas are contested.	At least 15/27 electoral areas are contested.	May 2015.
The number of potential candidates willing to be nominated (the Council retain a register).	Fewer than 60 potential candidates on register (4 per parish).	60 potential candidates on register.	65 potential candidates on register.	70 potential candidates on register	May 2015.

4. Financial Details

4.1 The Leader has proposed that the Council will meet 50% of the cost of parish elections for 'first elections'. Grant funding would be available for the cost of subsequent elections.

4.2 Drawing on information presented in the original report the financial implications of carrying through this decision would be:

- 50% of costs for a single contested election combined with another election would be £1,250.
- And 50% of costs for a single 'stand alone' contested election would be between £1,500 - £2,000.

4.3 There are approximately 10 casual vacancies per annum so the full year implication of meeting 50% of the cost for these 'stand alone' elections would potentially be £20,000.

4.4 There are 27 electoral areas in the borough at parish level, with some parishes split into wards; so meeting 50% of the cost of May 2015 elections (assuming that they are combined with borough elections) would be £33,250.

5 Legal Implications

Legal implications – to follow.

6. Value for Money

Proposals for encouraging local democracy will need to be balanced against the Council's commitment to delivering value for money.

7. Sustainability Impact Appraisal

This recommendation has no direct impact on sustainability issues.

8. Risk Management

Risk	Uncontrolled Risk	Controls	Controlled Risk
The Council may alienate town and parish councils by pressing ahead with measures that they do not agree with.	High	The Sub Committee will invite representatives of parishes to its meetings and seek to involve town and parish councils in implementing the action plan.	Medium
Lack of co-operation from parishes may impede measures to promote vacancies and encourage new candidates to come forward.	High	The Sub Committee will establish a Media protocol identifying how vacancies will be advertised and new candidates encouraged to come forward.	Medium

9. Links to Strategic Objectives

Improving local democracy contributes to the Council's Big Society objectives and to the working for safer and stronger communities objective.

10. Equalities, Human Rights and Community Cohesion

There are no equalities or human rights implications arising from these recommendations. Effective representative democracy can contribute to community cohesion.

11. Staffing/Workforce and Accommodation implications:

There are no Staffing/ Workforce or accommodation implications in relation to this report.

12. Property and Assets

None

13. Any other implications:

None

14. Consultation

14.1 The original report made clear that any changes to parish election arrangements would be discussed with parish representatives at the parish conference.

14.2 The report and action plan were discussed at the parish conference on 15th October 2013 and representatives of town and parish councils were invited to attend the Sub Group meeting on 5 December 2013 and will be invited to attend subsequent meetings as well.

14.3 The District Association of Local Councils has been invited to comment on the proposed media protocol.

15. Timetable for Implementation

The timetable for implementation is outlined in the Action Plan.

There has been slippage against the original timetable arising from the concerns expressed by parishes.

16. Appendices

Appendix A – Action Plan for Increasing Local Democracy

17. Background Information

17.1 The Big Society Panel 17th September considered a report on Increasing Local Democracy.

17.2 The report outlined the legal requirements relating to parish elections, looked at barriers to parishes holding elections as opposed to co-opting new members and actions for promoting town and parish elections and encouraging local democracy. It recommended that members should endorse the 'action plan for increasing local democracy' at Appendix A which included proposals to: increase publicity and promotion around parish elections, support parishes with the cost of elections, encourage more candidates (particularly young people) to come forward for election and take the necessary measures to trigger local elections wherever appropriate.

17.3 The Panel resolved unanimously that a sub-committee comprising Councillors Burbage, Bathurst and Mrs Bateson should be set up to deliver the action plan for encouraging democracy on town and parish councils, in conjunction with the Head of Legal and Head of Policy and Performance and that the Sub Committee should consider the issues of funding parish council elections and encouraging new candidates to put themselves forward for election.

17.4 There are currently 5 vacancies on parish councils.

- A vacancy on Wraysbury Parish Council was recently filled through an uncontested election
- A notice of election was posted in relation to the second vacancy on Wraysbury Parish Council but the planned election did not take place because no candidates came forward for election.
- The same thing happened in relation to a vacancy on Sunningdale Parish Council planned for the same date.
- A further notice in relation to both vacancies has to be posted within 35 days. Because a request for an election was submitted - they can not now be filled by co-option.
- Elections for both vacancies are now planned for Thursday March 27th.
- The Notice of Election and timetable will be published on the Borough and Parish website and notice boards for 19th February with the close of nominations being Friday 28th February 2014.
- There are three vacancies on Cox Green Parish Council. Because the necessary signatures were not received these are only available to be filled by co-option.

18. Consultation (Mandatory)

Name of consultee	Post held and Department	Date sent	Date Received	See comments in paragraph:
Internal				
Cllr Burbage		24/01/14		
Cllr Bateson		22/01/14	23/01/14	
Andrew Elkington		22/01/14	22/01/14	
Maria Lucas		22/01/14		
Andrew Brooker		22/01/14		

Report History

Decision type:	Urgency item?
Non-key decision	No

Report no.	Full name of report author	Job title	Full contact no:
	Andrew Green	Community Partnerships Officer	01628 682940

Schedule for writing and reviewing report

Stages in the life of the report (not all will apply)	Date to complete
1. Officer writes report (in consultation with Lead Member)	
2. Report goes for review to head of service or DMT	
3. To specialist departments: eg, legal, finance, HR (in parallel)	
4. To lead member	
5. To SMT or CMT	
6. To the leader	
7. To overview or scrutiny, if a cabinet report	
8. To cabinet	

OBJECTIVE ONE : Encourage more candidates (particularly young people) to come forward for election					
ACTION	BY WHO	BY WHEN	RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS	OUTCOME	CURRENT PROGRESS
Develop a register of potentially interested candidates who could be contacted in the event of an election (whether full scale or casual).	Business and Community Partnership Team - working with Town and Parish Councils.	Presentation to next parish conference 15/10/2013 register established thereafter.	To be delivered within existing resources	A register of potentially interested candidates to have been established by November 2013.	It was agreed at the December Sub group meeting that parish clerks would establish a register and inform the borough that it exists. Further discussion is needed to agree how this will work.
Invite personal recommendations re potentially interested candidates from: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ward Councillors - Town and parish councils themselves - Local businesses (linked to CSR activity) - Youth Cabinet - Community Groups - Sports Groups – associated with parish pitches etc.) 	Business and Community Partnership Team - working with Town and Parish Councils.	Presentation to next parish conference 15/10/2013 register established thereafter.	To be delivered within existing resources	At least 60 new candidates (not currently active on parish councils) to be on the register by October 2014.	This action is intended to bring new names forward for the register once it has been established. On hold pending further consultation with parishes.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Faith communities - Resident & Tenants Associations - Young Farmers - Business Networks (particularly young people's networks) - Neighbourhood Action Groups 					
Identify parish ambassadors who would be willing to approach potential candidates and encourage them to come forward.	Business and Community Partnership Team	Approach potential ambassadors from October 2013	To be delivered within existing resources	All town and parish council to have an ambassador by October 2014 (six months ahead May 2015 elections)	On hold pending further consultation with parishes.
Advertise for potentially interested candidates on RBWM, WMVA, DO It and other appropriate websites.	Business and Community Partnership Team	October 2013 & on-going	To be delivered within existing resources	Advertise on relevant web sites by October 2013 with potentially interested candidates taken forward to the register.	On hold pending further consultation with parishes.
Develop a publicity and communications plan for attracting potential parish councillors (particularly younger people)	Communications Team	Timescale to be determined for maximum impact. Run up to May 2015 all out elections or earlier as and when opportunities arise.	Information for prospective candidates Leaflets/ posters promoting election – Potentially £2,000	Draft Marketing and Communications Plan (attached as Appendix C to be finalised by November 2013.)	A Marketing and Communications Plan is in place and has begun to be implemented.
Review and develop DALC action plan with particular	Business and Community	October/ November 2013	Variable	At least 5 new young people (under 30 and	This will be taken forward by

<p>consideration for how more young people can be involved e.g.:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage parishes to establish youth councils – who will be consulted on local facilities etc. • Or youth representatives (16-18) who would be invited to council meetings as non voting participants • Establish regular contacts between Parish Conference and the Youth Council • Strengthen links between parishes and local secondary schools 	Partnerships			not currently active on parish councils) to stand for election at the May 2015 Parish Elections.	Business and Community Partnership Manager, Chair of DALC and Lead Member.
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OBJECTIVE TWO: Increase publicity and promotion around parish elections					
ACTION	BY WHO	BY WHEN	RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS	OUTCOME	CURRENT PROGRESS
Raise awareness re the role of parishes - current low level of contested elections.	Communications Team	December 2013	Within existing resources	At least 8 electoral areas contested at town/ parish level in May 2015 elections.	<p>A press release highlighting the low level of contested elections in parishes and encouraging residents to come forward as Parish Councillors was issued in September 2013.</p> <p>A further article, including an interview with a parish councillor was included in the Winter 2013 edition of Around the Royal Borough/</p>
<p>Develop and deliver a publicity and communication plan for the next full scale parish elections.</p> <p>Key components to include:</p>	Communications Team	May 2015 - next 'full scale' parish elections. (From date of election notice).	£1,000	A turn out of at least 20% in full scale parish election May 2015.	A Marketing and Communications Plan is in place and has begun to be implemented.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Web page - Front Page Around Royal Borough Feature - Press Releases - Posters/ leaflets 					
<p>Secure the necessary ten signatures to trigger an election whenever notice of a casual vacancy is posted</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Make sure the vacancy is effectively publicised - Advise & encourage potential candidates to secure 10 signatures 	<p>Electoral Services/ Business & Community Partnership (linked to register of potential candidates)/ Communications Team</p>	<p>From the date notice of a casual vacancy is announced (14 days).</p>	<p>Within existing resources</p>	<p>Ten signatures necessary to trigger an election secured for all casual vacancies.</p>	<p>The necessary 10 signatures have been secured in relation to recent by elections in Wraysbury (2) and Sunningdale but there have been no contested elections arising from these vacancies because there were insufficient candidates. (One vacancy was filled, at Wraysbury through an uncontested election.)</p>

OBJECTIVE THREE : Support parishes with the cost of elections					
ACTION	BY WHO	BY WHEN	RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS	OUTCOME	CURRENT PROGRESS
Proposal re supporting the cost of parish elections to be considered by Big Society Panel	Legal Services/ Finance	26 November 2013	Nil	As above	The Big Society Panel 26 November 2013 agreed in principle to supporting the cost of parish elections and the Leader has proposed meeting 50% of the cost of a first election but the level of support has not been formally agreed.
Implementation of the proposal	Maria Lucas – Legal Services/ Finance	Date to be determined	To be determined	As above	There have been no contested elections since the proposal was put forward.
Borough Council to publicise parish vacancies and parish elections.	Communications Team	May 2015 and as and when vacancies arise.	To be determined	Marketing and Communications Plan preceding May 2015 local elections Council Press release to be issued relating to each casual vacancy. Letter sent to each registered voter ahead of any by-election to fill a casual vacancy.	The Council is committed to helping parishes to publicise vacancies and elections but agreement has not yet been reached on the best way to do this. A protocol relating to how parish vacancies and elections should be

					<p>publicised was proposed at the last meeting but has not yet been agreed</p> <p>The Council is currently preparing leaflets related to the vacancies on Wraysbury and Sunningdale Parish Councils.</p>
Secure the necessary support to trigger an election whenever notice of a casual vacancy is posted. (as above)	Business and Community Partnerships/ Communications Team	As and when a casual vacancy is announced.	As above	At least 10 residents requesting an election whenever a casual vacancy is announced.	The necessary 10 signatures have been secured in relation to 2 vacancies at Wraysbury and Sunningdale – unfortunately there have been no contested elections due to insufficient candidates coming forward. One vacancy was filled at Wraysbury through an uncontested election. A further notice is being prepared re the remaining

					Wraysbury vacancy and the Sunningdale vacancy a new by election is scheduled for Thursday March 27 th .
Initiate a community governance review.	Legal/ Electoral Services Business and Community Partnerships	Where there has been no contested election in 10 years.	To be determined – likely to be significant	Newly constituted parish councils (with a potentially clearer mandate) triggering a full scale election.	