

SUBJECT:	EUROPEAN CITIZENS' ELECTORAL TURNOUTS
REPORT BY:	DIRECTOR OF RESOURCES
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1. Purpose of Report

1.1 As part of a broader investigation into turnout rates in local elections, members requested details regarding the relative proportion of European Union citizens taking part in elections set against the rates for British and other non-European electors. This report is intended to provide evidence as to whether a disparity in voter turnout exists and to provide an opportunity to discuss whether there are any appropriate actions which may be taken by the Council.

2. Background to European Union citizen voting

2.1 Citizens of countries in the European Union have the right to take part in local elections either as candidates or voters when resident in another European Union country, unless they are barred owing to their personal characteristics, e.g. if underage or serving a prison sentence.

2.2 Anecdotally, the proportion of European Union citizens in Lincoln has increased significantly since the accession of a large number of new member states since 2004. This increase poses a question as to whether these citizens are fully aware of their right to participate in elections and the means by which they can do so.

2.3 At the previous meeting of the Ethics and Engagement Committee, members considered the broader matter of electoral engagement and the specific priorities to be addressed in order to improve voter turnout rates. Members particularly noted the high proportion of European Union citizens in some wards and questioned whether and how turnout rates in particular electoral districts or wards might be affected by this. In order to address these matters, officers have undertaken a limited study of Lincoln's recent election, the results of which are detailed below.

2.4 In addition to considering the outcome in itself, having identified any trends it may be necessary to consider whether it would be advisable for the Council to undertake any further action to facilitate voting within particular groups who appear to face particular challenges in casting their votes.

3. Local turnout rates

3.1 At every election a list of electors who have voted, either in person or by post, is kept. This list also demarcates European Union citizens, as these voters are not eligible to take part in all elections. Using this information, which is already

provided on request to a number of persons including candidates and political parties, it is possible to work out relative turnout rates for European Union electors set against other voters. This information purely identifies whether a person has received a ballot paper or returned a postal vote. Guidance was sought and received from the Electoral Commission prior to undertaking this exercise.

3.2 Districts with relatively high numbers of registered European Union voters (ranging from 69 to 105 electors per district) were chosen in order to provide the widest possible statistical base for the individual results; these districts have been drawn from separate wards in order to provide an indication as to whether relative turnout for these groups varies significantly across the city. It should be stressed that this study is limited in geographical scale and only reflects the outcome of one election. As such, caution should be exercised in seeking to draw broad conclusions from these data.

3.3 District: AA

Overall turnout (total number of voters): 16.6% (205 votes)

British/Non-European Union voter turnout (total number of voters): 17.63% (201 votes)

European Union voter turnout (total number of voters): 4.21% (4 votes)

3.4 District: CJ

Overall turnout (total number of voters): 16.84% (148 votes)

British/Non-European Union voter turnout (total number of voters): 18.35% (142 votes)

European Union voter turnout (total number of voters): 5.71% (6 votes)

3.5 District: DH

Overall turnout (total number of voters): 20.85% (236 votes)

British/Non-European Union voter turnout (total number of voters): 21.96% (229 votes)

European Union voter turnout (total number of voters): 7.78% (7 votes)

3.6 District: EG

Overall turnout (total number of voters): 14.20% (99 votes)

British/Non-European Union voter turnout (total number of voters): 15.76% (99 votes)

European Union voter turnout (total number of voters): 0% (0 votes)

3.7 In each of the districts sampled, the turnout rate for European Union voters was significantly lower than for other voters when considered as a group. From the information available there also appears to be a correlation between respective turnout rates within the individual districts. In each of the districts (excluding EG in which no votes were cast) the turnout rate is approximately 3-4 times higher among British and non-European Union voters.

3.8 It is impossible to conclude from the information above the reasons for the disparity in turnout rates between European Union voters and other electors. Some possible conclusions which can be surmised from anecdotal evidence are put forward below for members' consideration and possible further investigation:

- European Union voters may be more likely to be young and geographically

mobile. Turnout rates among young people tend to be lower than among older people, while particularly geographically mobile voters are more likely to have moved home between the time of the annual canvass and the time of the actual election.

- European Union voters may not be fully aware of the process for casting their votes.
- European Union voters' understanding of the policy and ideological differences between political parties and candidates may be more limited than for British citizens.
- European Union voters may feel less strongly attached to a local area and therefore less likely to vote in local elections.

3.9 The possible reasons put forward above are not evidence-based and are purely intended as possible areas for investigation and discussion. Any actions recommended by the Committee should either seek to establish an evidential base for a more detailed examination or make use of existing information which would allow for sufficiently well-targeted action.

4. Funding opportunities

4.1 In a recent letter to all local authorities (attached as **Appendix A**), two funding streams were announced by the Cabinet Office which are open to bids from councils. These streams are being provided in advance of the forthcoming switch to individual electoral registration; this will significantly change the current electoral registration system whereby a householder returns a canvass form detailing all eligible persons resident at a property.

4.2 As detailed in Appendix A, the schemes will focus upon either carrying out additional canvassing aimed at individual groups, or through establishing more creative new schemes to encourage electoral registration during two defined periods. The deadline for the first round of funding has been set for 1 August 2013, while two further rounds of funding are available for applications until 1 December 2013. The Council is likely to lodge an application for targeted canvassing in the second round of funding for canvassing to take place between February and June 2014.

4.3 Section 3 of the report gives details of turnout rates among European Union voters which appear to be particularly low. While it is important not to directly link electoral registration and turnout, it is very possible that a group of voters with low levels of electoral engagement may also be less likely to register to vote.

4.4 A funding application is likely to focus upon improving the reliability of electoral registration data regarding students and empty homes. It may also be possible to incorporate proposals to improve electoral registration among European Union citizens. This could possibly take place through improving information provided in community meeting places or through targeting leaflets at European Union citizens already registered to vote who might be able to encourage others to register while also informing electors about the process of casting their vote.

4.5 However, members will note the broader problems with electoral engagement across the city beyond individual groups of European electors. The particular focus of the Cabinet Office funding does not appear to be European Union citizens;

rather the focus in the documentation provided to date has been placed upon 'young people, private and social renters, and students'. While some of these groups will incorporate European Union citizens, the Committee should consider the manner in which any funding can achieve the greatest possible impact, so as not to focus overly on one particular group while ignoring others.

- 4.6 The Committee may also wish to note that, in cooperation with the Cabinet Office and the National Union of Students, the Council will be one of 10 pilot areas for testing new ways to improve electoral registration rates among student residents. The details of the proposals have yet to be confirmed but will be reported to members in due course.

5. Organisational Impacts

5.1 Finance

As outlined in section 4, funding is available from the Cabinet Office to promote electoral registration. Any funding could be used solely for additional activities meeting the prescribed purposes and would be subject to any funding bids being successful. No further financial impact is anticipated.

5.2 Legal Implications

The Council has a duty to maintain an electoral register. Any decision to encourage particular groups to register to vote must be proportionate and reasonable. In particular, members should ensure that any potential further work has due regard to potential restrictions on accessing electoral data.

6. Recommendation

- 6.1 That members consider the data provided regarding electoral turnout rates among voters exercising their rights as European Union citizens.
- 6.2 That members consider whether any appropriate actions could be undertaken to improve turnout rates or commission further work including the gathering of further information as appropriate.