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| SUBJECT: | INCREASING THE DIVERSITY OF ELECTORAL CANDIDATES |
| REPORT BY: | DIRECTOR OF RESOURCES |
| LEAD OFFICER: | CAROLYN WHEATER – ASSISTANT DIRECTOR (LEGAL AND CORPORATE SUPPORT SERVICES) |

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To provide members with options with regard to the Council taking a more proactive role in encouraging people from a diverse range of backgrounds to consider standing for election as councillors.

2. Background

- 2.1 The Ethics and Engagement Committee has responsibility, as part of its work programme and terms of reference, for developing innovative and effective proposals to improve democratic engagement. Part of this democratic engagement includes ensuring that Lincoln's voters are empowered to take a full part in the democratic process, covering both voting in and standing for election.
- 2.2 One measure of success for the Council's effectiveness in increasing democratic engagement is to examine whether the Council's composite members and the candidates from whom they are chosen represent as wide a range of Lincoln's population as possible, without particular groups being excluded from taking part through a lack of knowledge or opportunity. While stressing the ultimate power of the voter to decide upon the most suitable of the available candidates it is important that all those who might stand are given sufficient support from the Council to make the process of standing for election and becoming a councillor as clear and unintimidating as possible.
- 2.3 While the Council has always and will continue to perform its electoral functions to the full extent of the law, the mere provision of free and fair elections is only one part of a broader democratic picture. This report presents some key factual information surrounding the makeup of Lincoln's population, topics for discussion, and possible policy options for the Committee's consideration.

3. Reflecting Communities

- 3.1 The Council does not maintain a record of councillors' personal details for the purposes of equal opportunities monitoring. However, the Council's membership is sufficiently compact to allow members to gauge adequately the respective gender, age, and ethnic backgrounds of current councillors based on their own knowledge. Having considered this, members may wish to consider the extent to which councillors are an accurate reflection of the communities they represent by reviewing the statistics provided below for Lincoln's population as a whole.

3.2 Age

| Age | Number | Proportion of all 18+ residents |
|--------------|--------|---------------------------------|
| 18-29 | 23,369 | 30.9% |
| 30s | 11,887 | 15.7% |
| 40s | 12,016 | 15.9% |
| 50s | 10,161 | 13.4% |
| 60s | 8,665 | 11.4% |
| 70s | 5,471 | 7.2% |
| 80s+ | 4,127 | 5.5% |

3.3 Gender

| Gender | Number | Proportion of all 18+ residents by gender |
|---------------|--------|---|
| Male | 36,652 | 48.4% |
| Female | 39,044 | 51.6% |

3.4 Ethnicity (including under-18s)

| Ethnicity | Number | Proportion of <i>all</i> residents |
|---|--------|------------------------------------|
| White: English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British | 83,653 | 89.4% |
| White: Irish | 719 | 0.8% |
| White: Gypsy or Irish Traveller | 80 | 0.1% |
| White: Other White | 4,927 | 5.3% |
| Mixed/multiple ethnic group: White and Black Caribbean | 367 | 0.4% |
| Mixed/multiple ethnic group: White and Black African | 189 | 0.2% |
| Mixed/multiple ethnic group: White and Asian | 372 | 0.4% |
| Mixed/multiple ethnic group: Other Mixed | 302 | 0.3% |
| Asian/Asian British: Indian | 522 | 0.6% |
| Asian/Asian British: Pakistani | 139 | 0.1% |
| Asian/Asian British: Bangladeshi | 139 | 0.1% |
| Asian/Asian British: Chinese | 452 | 0.5% |
| Asian/Asian British: Other Asian | 542 | 0.6% |
| Black/African/Caribbean/Black British: African | 504 | 0.5% |
| Black/African/Caribbean/Black British: Caribbean | 165 | 0.2% |
| Black/African/Caribbean/Black British: Other Black | 109 | 0.1% |
| Other ethnic group: Arab | 175 | 0.2% |
| Other ethnic group: Any other ethnic group | 185 | 0.2% |

3.5 Disabilities

| Type | Number | Proportion of all residents |
|--|--------|-----------------------------|
| People who have their day to day activities limited a lot | 8,012 | 8.6% |
| People who have their day to day activities limited a little | 9,254 | 9.9% |
| Total | 17,266 | 18.5% |

4. Options to Improve Accessibility

- 4.1 It would appear from the information provided above that the Council's current membership is weighted towards being disproportionately older and more male than the city's population as a whole. This is, of course, ultimately a matter for voters to determine and it should be clear that the Council has no role to play either in influencing the outcome of elections or in the candidate selections of political parties. It should also be recognised that within a sample size of 33 members it is inevitable that there will be variance from the population as a whole and that this variance is likely to be exacerbated by the first-past-the-post voting system. In addition, there is perhaps an institutional bias in terms of age towards retired persons who may have more time than those in younger age groups to dedicate towards both becoming and being a councillor.
- 4.2 However, as discussed above, there is a clear role for the Council to play in ensuring that as a wide a proportion of the city's residents and workers are aware of their rights to stand for election and the role of councillors. Equally, the Council should do all it can to identify and mitigate potential barriers in these areas. With a view to achieving these goals the following options are put forward for members' consideration.
- 4.3 Improving Awareness
The majority of candidates for election within Lincoln in recent years have represented national political parties. Through these parties candidates can benefit from a party's electoral experience, support, and guidance. Political parties also have their own methods for attracting and selecting new candidates for election. There is potential, however, for the Council to supplement these processes by ensuring that as many people as possible are aware of how and why they should stand to become councillors, including those who would prefer to stand as independent candidates or to establish their own local groups.
- 4.4 Currently the Council uses both its website and the *Your Lincoln* publication to promote the role of the councillor. This includes guides to the role of the councillor, the process of becoming a councillor, and a regular spotlight magazine article on an individual councillor. The *Lincolnshire Echo* also previously ran a regular series of columns by local councillors although this appears to have been discontinued. While there is perhaps scope for increased prominence within both *Your Lincoln* and the Council's website, members may also wish to consider whether there is value in other forms of publicity, such as poster campaigns and the general promotion of councillors' roles via other local media.

4.5 Information Provided to Prospective Candidates

Candidates for election currently receive information packs which focus primarily upon meeting the statutory obligations for candidates and their agents. Members will have experience of these packs from their time as candidates and so may have feedback which can be offered with regard to providing the most helpful and relevant introduction possible to the role of the councillor. This could include, for example, more information on the structure of the Council, the role of the councillor, and what is likely to be expected of candidates should they be successful in an election.

4.6 Outreach to Key Groups

The Council may also be able to take advantage of existing community and interest groups to spread knowledge and awareness of how to stand for election. While councillors already take a prominent role in the operation of a considerable number of local organisations, these tend often to be related to the provision of particular services in which the Council has a direct stake. By way of example of a wider interest group, there is the possibility of councillors delivering presentations on their role to the regular meetings held for voluntary sector organisations, which would provide a potentially valuable source of people who are already motivated to serve in their community and will often be drawn from groups which may be under-represented within the typical range of candidates.

4.7 Working with Employers

The median wage for a full-time worker in Lincoln is approximately 5 times higher than the basic allowance payable to councillors, which means that a significant number of people would require additional income streams to carry out the duties of a councillor while maintaining a basic standard of living. An inevitable outcome of this is that elected members are often reliant on the support of an existing employer in order to stand for election. This is a particular factor where employers are or would be unwilling to allow their employees time off or flexible working arrangements to fit around their Council duties. While noting the potential difficulty for an employee in confronting an unwilling employer, the Council should ensure it supports the rights of councillors to take reasonable lengths of time off work to carry out their duties as a councillor, as established in section 50 of the Employment Rights Act 1996.

4.8 While the Council does not have powers to compel the co-operation of business with employees who wish to become councillors and recognises the pressures that may be placed upon small business in particular, there is certainly scope for the Council to work with local employers to understand their concerns and to emphasise the part roles councillors play in their communities.

4.9 The Committee may be therefore be minded to request representations from local employers or to proactively provide information to Lincoln's key employers regarding this. Any attempt to create a dialogue in this regard is likely to be positive provided that the Council is able and willing to engage constructively with any points raised.

4.10 Support for Parents and Carers

The Council has provisions in place for a Childcare and Dependent Carer's Allowance, which allows for payments of up to £5 per hour upon provision of a

received receipt for care undertaken while a member carries out their duties as a councillor. Take-up for this allowance is low, with the majority of members having never claimed. The reason for this may be low awareness, a lack of willingness to submit claims, or that the allowance rate is set too low. With regard to awareness, future guidance to prospective candidates could highlight the possibility of claiming an allowance if required to allow members to carry out his or her Council duties.

- 4.11 There is also the possibility that members could recommend that Council change the rate of the allowance to match either the minimum or living wage in order to increase the possibility that members will be able to meet in the full any costs incurred while carrying out their duties. The budgetary impact of this is likely to be minimal in view of the low level of claims, while other options, such as providing in-house care, would be disproportionately expensive.
- 4.12 As is the case for those in employment, it is likely that the current timing of Council meetings is a benefit to some and a disadvantage to others. The majority of public meetings are held in the early evening between Monday and Thursday; members in receipt of a special responsibility allowance are also likely to have a greater number of meetings during the day with officers and external organisations. These timings are likely to benefit most those councillors who work during normal business hours, but will present particular challenges to those who work irregular hours or have caring duties for children or others. While these arrangements for meeting times are longstanding and may be regarded as appropriate in a compact urban area unaffected by long journey times to meetings, member may wish to consider whether the current arrangements are the most effective possible for the broadest possible benefit to officers, members, and the public.

5. Organisational Impacts

5.1 Finance

There are no direct financial implications to this report.

5.2 Legal Implications

There are no legal implications to this report.

6. Recommendation

- 6.1 That members note the contents of the report.
- 6.2 That members highlight which, if any, of the options put forward within the report should be adopted or investigated further, in addition to any other developments which members feel would be advantageous.