

From: Ben Watts, General Counsel
To: Selection & Member Services Committee – 14 March 2024
Subject: **Preparations for the 2025 Election**
Classification: Unrestricted

Summary:

The purpose of this report is to set out the preparations for the 2025 KCC election.

Pre-election arrangements are currently focused on the promotion of the councillor role. These will build on the success of the work undertaken for the 2021 election to encourage people to consider being a councillor, and aid the Returning Officer in the discharging of their responsibilities around the provision of information to potential candidates.

Post-election arrangements, including the design of a training and induction programme, are currently focused on the support in place for new members, which will be handled by the Member Development Sub-Committee.

Recommendation(s):

The Committee is asked to:

- a) NOTE the reflections on the 2020 prospective councillor event and the proposals for the 2024 events; and
- b) ENDORSE the Returning Officer plans to progress pre-election preparations with support from KCC Officers;
- c) AGREE that the Member Development Sub-Committee will lead on the post-election preparations.

1. Introduction

1.1 Preparations for the 2025 KCC election are now beginning. This paper has been put together to provide an update on these early conversations to the Committee.

1.2 These preparations are currently focused around prospective councillor events to be held this year, and the development of the Member induction programme.

2. Prospective Councillor Event

- 2.1 In December 2020 a virtual prospective councillor event was held. The aim of the event was for people interested in standing in the 2021 election to find out more about being a councillor and how to become a one. The event was well attended, with 96 registered attendees, of which 57 went on to stand in the election.
- 2.2 Following the event, a feedback survey was circulated to all attendees, which combined with the election project team's own reflections, highlighted some key learnings to take forward into the 2025 election. The first of which was that most political group selection events had already taken place by December, which limited the options available for those interested in standing in the election.
- 2.3 Officers have been in contact with the political group leaders and whips to establish the timeframes for selection events this year, and are intending to hold the event in advance of these where possible.
- 2.4 The feedback indicated 33% of people experienced difficulty joining the event, but overall people rated the virtual delivery of the event very highly with an average rating of 4.1 stars out of 5. In order to increase the accessibility of the event moving forward, it is proposed that two events will be held, one virtual and one in person.
- 2.5 The feedback also highlighted that the contributions of current Members regarding their role were particularly valuable to those in attendance. It is therefore proposed that the experiences and expertise of current KCC Members will be at the heart of the event and the communications, and Officers from Governance, Law and Democracy will be engaging with group leaders to facilitate this.
- 2.6 As well as lessons learned from the 2020 event, the preparations for the 2024 event are also taking into account the work undertaken by the LGA and The Young Foundation to explore how the LGA's 'Be a Councillor' Campaign could encourage more people from underrepresented groups to stand in elections.
- 2.7 The Young Foundation (2022) found that a high level of awareness of the role of councillors and a positive perception of the role across all groups in society is crucial to people taking the steps towards standing in an election.
- 2.8 Taking on board the findings of The Young Foundation, the aims for the 2024 Prospective Councillor Event are:
 - a) To raise awareness of the role of the councillor and the positive impact councillors can have on their local communities and those of the entire authority area;
 - b) for people interested in standing in the 2025 election to find out how to become a councillor; and
 - c) to encourage people from underrepresented groups to stand in the election.

- 2.9 To support these aims, colleagues in Marketing and Resident Experience (MRX) have put together an initial communications plan to engage and encourage a wide and diverse cross section of the Kent community to explore becoming a KCC councillor by signing up to one of the prospective councillor events.
- 2.10 Within this plan are a series of features which include videos of cross-party councillors talking to camera and working to demystify the role of the councillor, explaining the difference that can be made, the importance of local government, and the professional and personal benefits of being a councillor.
- 2.11 The Returning Officer is responsible, as per guidance from the Electoral Commission in 2022, for the administration of the nominations process, including providing information to potential candidates to support them in standing for election, it is intended that the prospective councillor event will aid the discharging of this responsibility. The Committee is asked to endorse the Returning Officer plans to progress pre-election preparations with support from KCC Officers.

3. Post-election Preparations

- 3.1 Consideration also needs to be given for arrangements that will need to be in place immediately after the 2025 election.
- 3.2 As the operating environment in KCC and local government more generally is now much changed to that which the current cohort of Members were elected into, it would be beneficial for a new induction programme to be developed for all new and returning Members.
- 3.3 The Committee is asked to agree that the Member Development Sub-Committee, as part of delivering on a crucial aspect of their terms of reference and purpose within the Council's governance, will lead on post-election preparations, including the creation of an induction programme for Members elected in 2025. This approach, with its Member requirement focus makes best use of Member knowledge and expertise by allowing the sub-committee to oversee the design and preparation of a programme tailored to support and prepare new and returning Members for the particular experience of being a Kent County Councillor.

4. Recommendation(s)

The Committee is asked to:

- a) NOTE the reflections on the 2020 prospective councillor event and the proposals for the 2024 events; and
- b) ENDORSE the Returning Officer plans to progress pre-election preparations with support from KCC Officers;

c) AGREE that the Member Development Sub-Committee will lead on the post-election preparations.

5. Background Documents

The Electoral Commission, (2022) 'Guidance for Returning Officers administering Local Elections in England'. Available at: <https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/guidance-returning-officers-administering-local-government-elections-england/nominations> (Accessed: 22/02/24).

The Young Foundation, (2022) 'Greater diversity among councillors matters. Here's why'. Available at: <https://www.youngfoundation.org/greater-diversity-among-councillors-matters-heres-why/> (Accessed 22/02/24)

6. Contact Details

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