

To: Communities and Partnership Scrutiny Committee

Date: 4th April 2013

Report of: Head of Law and Governance

Title of Report: Enfranchisement and Empowerment Panel - Update

Summary and Recommendations

Purpose of report: To update the Communities and Partnership Scrutiny Committee on the work carried out to date by the Scrutiny Panel that is investigating this topic.

Scrutiny Lead Members: Councillors Darke, Jones and O'Hara

Executive Lead Member: Councillor Bob Price, Board Member for Corporate Governance and Strategic Partnerships.

Recommendations:

- 1. To note and comment on the work of the Panel to date;**
- 2. To recommend continuation of the work of the Panel into the next programme.**

Introduction

- 1 The last meeting of the Communities and Partnerships Scrutiny Committee agreed that the Enfranchisement and Empowerment panel could continue its work into the next Council Year.
- 2 It also agreed the following next steps:-

As a next step, the Panel would like to speak with diverse groups within the community, whether or not they are eligible to go on the electoral register, to find out where they are and what they want from the City Council.

The Panel would also like to ascertain their country of origin, why they chose to come to the UK and in particular Oxford, whether they knew what services were offered and by whom, how to access those services, and for those eligible to vote to ask why they did or did not vote.

The Panel would also analyse when available the latest census results on nationality (the electoral register did not show this) as this could have an impact on low voter registration and turnout.

Progress to date

- 3 Following a useful meeting with Martin Tudge (Team Leader, Communities and Neighbourhoods) , it has been decided to speak with the following communities:-

Somali – to meet separately with adult men and women, and young people. The Council has established some relationships with this community, and it is expected that this community will grow over the next 5 to 10 years;

Pakistani – to meet separately with adult men and women, and young people. This is one of the longest established communities in Oxford, with which the Council already has well established relationships;

Polish – to meet with people of all ages. More Eastern Europeans are settling here, and although many register to vote, many assume they cannot vote (on the basis that non-Polish nationals are not able to vote in Poland.)

- 4 This is potentially a huge piece of work, but the Panel felt that three groups was sufficient to provide an initial “snapshot” of what is happening regarding empowerment and enfranchisement in Oxford.
- 5 Martin Tudge has very kindly offered to set up some focus groups with the above communities at which the Panel can talk over the issues it identified with participants. It is hoped that the first one will meet towards the middle of April.
- 6 The Panel is very grateful to Martin for his enthusiasm and help with this project. Further updates will be given as the issue progresses.

Recommendations:

1. To note and comment on the work of the Panel to date;
2. To recommend continuation of the work of the Panel into the next programme

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(On behalf of the Scrutiny Panel.)

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