



NORWICH City Council

Committee name: Cabinet

Committee date: 13/09/2023

Report title: Scrutiny Committee Recommendations

Portfolio: Councillor Kendrick, cabinet member for resources

Report from: Head of legal and procurement

Wards: All wards

OPEN PUBLIC ITEM

Purpose

To consider the recommendations made by scrutiny committee with respect to the impact of the Elections Act 2022 and on welcoming asylum seekers and refugees to Norwich.

Recommendation:

To consider whether to adopt all or some of the recommendations from the scrutiny committee.

Policy framework

The council has five corporate priorities, which are:

- People live independently and well in a diverse and safe city.
- Norwich is a sustainable and healthy city.
- Norwich has the infrastructure and housing it needs to be a successful city.
- The city has an inclusive economy in which residents have equal opportunity to flourish.
- Norwich City Council is in good shape to serve the city.

This report meets the city has an inclusive economy in which residents have equal opportunity to flourish and the people live independently and well in a diverse and safe city corporate priorities.

Report details

Elections Act 2022

1. Members agreed to consider a review of the impact of the Elections Act 2022, particularly that relating to Voter ID on Norwich City Council Elections in 2023 at their meeting on [20 July 2023](#).
2. Members received a report and presentation from the council's democratic and elections manager and elections team leader.
3. Members discussed the requirement to provide voter identification at polling stations at what impact this had on the election in 2023 in Norwich. Members considered how the council responded to the new legislation and heard about mitigation measures put in place by the team.
4. Members considered that the team had responded well but were concerned about the potential for residents to be disenfranchised by the legislation and considered any pertinent recommendations to make to cabinet which were as follows:

Recommendation	Rationale	Implications/ resource requirements
As part of a future council consultation process, investigate sources of funding to trial and potentially Commission demographically balanced participatory democracy methods including citizens assemblies based on the model of theories of change to ensure widescale representation is achieved;	To ensure widescale representation is achieved, to target disenfranchised and underrepresented electors.	Officer time to investigate sources of funding, question of how to fund if no funding streams available. Officer resource to run project to get assembly up and running and officer resource to maintain.
Research those in Norwich who may be disenfranchised as a result of the introduction of voter ID and assess how the Council can promote uptake amongst those disenfranchised;	To identify those that could be disenfranchised and enable them to vote.	Officer time to research those that could be disenfranchised and to design and implement a strategy to target this group.
Ensure that communications planning for future elections includes:	To ensure Norwich electorate aware of acceptable forms of Voter ID.	Communication planning is part of the election preparation process. Officer time to

<p>Promoting the Voter Authority Certificate and Proof of Age passes as an avenue for securing voter ID and engage with local communities to raise awareness;</p> <p>Promoting that acceptable Voter ID includes expired ID and, where relevant, EU passports and identity cards;</p> <p>Promoting the concept of Voter ID to younger groups, including those able to vote for the first time, and the different communication methodologies that may be more relevant for younger groups such as alternative social media channels;</p>		<p>ensure key points addressed.</p>
<p>Ask the Electoral Registration Officer to re-run the postal vote registration programme as previously undertaken in 2020 to raise awareness amongst non-postal voters, requesting funding if available to do so;</p>	<p>To increase the percentage of postal voters.</p>	<p>Officer time to manage project, to deal with responses and to input into system. Costs of stationery and postage. At the scrutiny meeting, officers highlighted that re-running this process has been estimated to cost £55k and there is not sufficient funding within the elections budget to support this</p>
<p>Thank the Returning Officer and her team for the work undertaken to support the implementation of Voter ID and the successful undertaking of the May 2023 election in Norwich;</p>	<p>Recognition of the success of the May 2023 election.</p>	<p>None</p>

To write to all party leaders to request that if called on to form a government, they should prioritise the abolition of the Election Act 2022, and if not, to include the poll card as an acceptable form of ID.	To remove or reduce the impact of the Election Act 2022.	Limited requires correspondence to be written.
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The recommendations have been shared with Councillor Kendrick, cabinet member for resources as the portfolio holder for elections. Councillor Kendrick noted in reference to the recommendation to conduct research on disenfranchised voters in Norwich that research was being done nationally by the Electoral Commission. He highlighted that the pool of disenfranchised voters in Norwich was too small to provide statistically robust data especially in relation to categories such as ethnicity.

Welcoming immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers to Norwich

5. The work on this topic began in the last civic year and cabinet will recall that they received an update on the committee's work at the [June 2023](#) cabinet meeting.
6. Members have been seeking to understand the lived experience of these groups and to identify any actions which could be taken to enable their smooth integration into Norwich.
7. As part of this work members undertook a visit to a community project working with refugees and asylum seekers and feedback from this visit and results of a survey of organisations supporting the cohort were considered at the committee meeting held on [16 March 2023](#).
8. Members held an extraordinary committee meeting on [25 July 2023](#) and heard from organisations within the city that directly supported refugees and asylum seekers.
9. Having considered all of this evidence members proposed the following recommendations to cabinet.

Recommendation	Rationale	Implications/ resource requirements
To engage with organisations that support asylum seekers and refugees, when making updates to the website to ensure that these changes are accessible;	To ensure accessibility for these groups.	Officer time taken to engage with organisations.
To explore becoming a Council of Sanctuary	To ensure that the council is a welcoming	Officer/ Member time to consider the

that will include a service user group of asylum seekers and refugees, to ensure that their voices and experiences are listened to on an ongoing basis;	organisation and takes account of the different needs of different groups.	implications of becoming a Council of Sanctuary and officer time to engage with service users and to consider and implement views.
Thank the organisations that have attended committee, and other organisations, and their work with asylum seekers and refugees;	Recognition of the excellent work of support organisations in the field.	None.
To condemn Home Office policies in relation to refugee and asylum seekers;	View of the committee.	None.
To include a strand within the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion policy review that relates to asylum seekers and refugees;	To ensure the needs of this cohort are considered.	Officer time to research and include within policy.
To engage with community centres to provide free activities to asylum seekers and refugees;	To recognise the limited financial means of the cohort and to promote wellbeing by engaging with activities.	Officer time to engage with organisations.
To engage with Places for Leisure to extend the provision of free gym services to asylum seekers	To recognise the limited financial means of the cohort and to promote wellbeing by engaging with activities	Officer time to negotiate with Places for Leisure.
To ask the leader of the council to write to the Norwich Business Improvement District to support refugees and asylum seekers to develop an outreach programme for asylum seekers and refugees	To recognise the limited financial means of the cohort and to promote wellbeing by engaging with activities	Leader's time to write to Norwich Business Improvement District.
To explore the potential for councillors to have training on using the INTRAN system	To ensure that councillors have means to communicate with all residents.	Officer time to deliver training.

To conduct user testing of the Norwich City Council website with service users	To ensure accessibility of website content.	Officer time to arrange and conduct user testing.
To conduct an audit of communications that the council produces, this would involve service users	To explore the effectiveness/ accessibility of council communications.	Officer time to design, implement and run project.
To explore the use of City Hall for organisations that support asylum seekers and refugees	To provide free or low cost space to organisations and to improve joint working.	Officer time to explore possibility.
To ask cabinet to explore the ability for asylum seekers, refugees and other residents that have limited English to book face-to-face appointments	To ensure that the council is communicating effectively in a way service users can understand.	Officer time to consider implications and then greater officer time to provide appointments.
To ask the leader of the council and Lord Mayor to invite refugees and asylum seekers to City Hall to be able to engage with them directly	To provide a welcome from the council to these groups and to hear from them directly.	Officer time to arrange, coordinate and deliver event.
To explore funding streams to be able to provide a similar provision that is provided Ukrainian refugees to other asylum seekers and refugees.	To provide a similar response to that provided to Ukrainian refugees.	Officer time to explore funding streams, provision of services. Would require a change in approach at a national level.
To request that cabinet treat these recommendations as a matter of urgency	Recognition that prompt action is required.	As above.

Consultation

10. There has been no specific consultation on these proposals.

Implications

Financial and resources

11. Any decision to reduce or increase resources or alternatively increase income must be made within the context of the council's stated priorities, as set out in its Corporate Plan 2022-26 and budget.
12. Any additional financial requirements where activities cannot be undertaken within existing resources will need to be subject to further consideration, and approval through a business case. This will need to include an appropriate funding source being identified and/ or being built into future years' budget processes.

Legal

13. These recommendations related to the Elections Act 2022 from Scrutiny are to be put to Cabinet for consideration. However, any decision to be made will need to take into account the relevant legal framework, including the role of the Electoral Registration and Returning Officer who has statutory responsibilities for administering electoral registration and elections.

Statutory considerations

Consideration	Details of any implications and proposed measures to address:
Equality and diversity	The measures impact beneficially by: Ensuring that council services and communications are accessible to all. Mitigating impacts of voter ID on disenfranchised groups.
Health, social and economic impact	The aim of the recommendations in terms of asylum seekers and refugees is to enable their smooth in integration into Norwich which should have a beneficial impact to their health, social and economic position. The aim of the Elections recommendations is to ensure that electors are not disenfranchised and can contribute decisions which affect this arena.
Crime and disorder	None at this stage.
Children and adults safeguarding	None at this stage.
Environmental impact	None at this stage.

Risk management

Risk	Consequence	Controls required
None at this stage.		

Other options considered

14. There have been no other options considered for this report, as it is a factual report based on the outcome of committee meetings that have already taken place.

Reasons for the decision/recommendation

15. This report will allow cabinet to make a decision on whether or not to take forward some or all of the recommendations.

Background papers: None

Appendices: None

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