

STAY IN TOUCH AND UP TO DATE



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DAGENHAM & RAINHAM VOLUNTEER NETWORK REPORT 2016

By Andrew Achilleos

1 THE VOLUNTEER NETWORK

Back in 2013 the volunteer network was in its infancy. Born out of the philosophy of the 'Good Society' it was a way to build a sense of community with the ultimate goal of 'a volunteer on every street', providing an early warning system that can help bring local issues to the attention of politicians, local authorities and voluntary groups.

Community organising is where the Labour Party's roots are and the volunteer network is firmly at the heart of this idea. We need to be having discussions, and working with local communities – not dictating policy at them. Community organising doesn't mean turning up at a charity or a children's centre three weeks before polling day. And it isn't ringing round members that you haven't spoken to in five years when the short campaign kicks in. It is a long haul project.

The volunteer network allows the Labour Party to play an active role in peoples' lives – but our emphasis isn't party political. Every month from 2012 to 2014 we used focus surveys asking if there are any issues to report which were drafted, printed, stuffed and delivered by volunteers. The issues were then picked up and campaigns are formed, empowering residents, giving them the platform to solve their problems. In doing this people attributed the positive change in their lives to the local Labour Party.

We now have over 5,000 residents on email, which are plugged into the community. Over 400 of this number have indicated that they would like to help in some shape or form. During the Local and General Election we had over 300 people involved across the campaigns.

In Dagenham and Rainham people don't necessarily volunteer to support Labour to begin with – people come out to support the councillors that have worked tirelessly to improve the area, and the MP that gives them a voice on issues important to them. A large portion of these volunteers have become Labour members; because of the sustained engagement and because they have seen what a difference an active party can make to their everyday lives.

If you are in any doubt of the impact community organising can have, look at our election results in Dagenham & Rainham. In 2014 all of the council candidates that stood received some of the highest turnout figures outside of a General Election year, with 87.9% of our promises coming out to vote (and voting for us). The Local Election was the pilot of the volunteer model, and although not adopted in all of the wards – the UKIP candidate in Village Ward was quoted as saying he was "up against an army".

Then in the General Election we increased the Labour majority from 2,630 to 4,980 – the turnout was slightly lower but the vote share went up. The ground war is where we succeed but we can only do it if we have the numbers. The volunteer network, coupled with our growing membership is the future of campaigning in Dagenham & Rainham.

6 WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

Since Jon Cruddas MP piloted the volunteer project in 2012 it has met with local scepticism. However the proof is in the results and it is clear from the numbers that this politics of community has a functioning role in Dagenham and Rainham.

Only one ward really adopted the volunteer model in 2014 and that was Village Ward, where they had over 100 people out on polling day to fight against UKIP. This is now reflected in the membership. Moving forward this is something that we should be looking to emulate across the constituency.

Recently with the national picture growing ever more bleak and the Labour Party becoming increasingly insular - it is important that our local politics continues to be outward facing. The volunteer network is something that strives to involve local residents at every level of the political process, that is why in Dagenham and Rainham our vote turns out at election time, because we ensure that they are included in, and not disenfranchised by our local politics.

It is vitally important that a constant engagement is upheld with the volunteers. To do this effectively it will mean regular newsletters and focus surveys being distributed across the constituency. This in turn will benefit the local CLP as it will help maintain a visual presence in the community.

In the meantime as part of the next steps the office is calling through our volunteers that have yet to be followed up, and keeping a constant flow of activity by producing focus surveys for volunteers as and when they sign up to give them something to do right away.

As documented on the final graph in the centre of this booklet there is also a large scale latent Labour Party membership. Many of who haven't been contacted in quite some time - mainly in the Havering wards. The office is also making headway with this group of people.

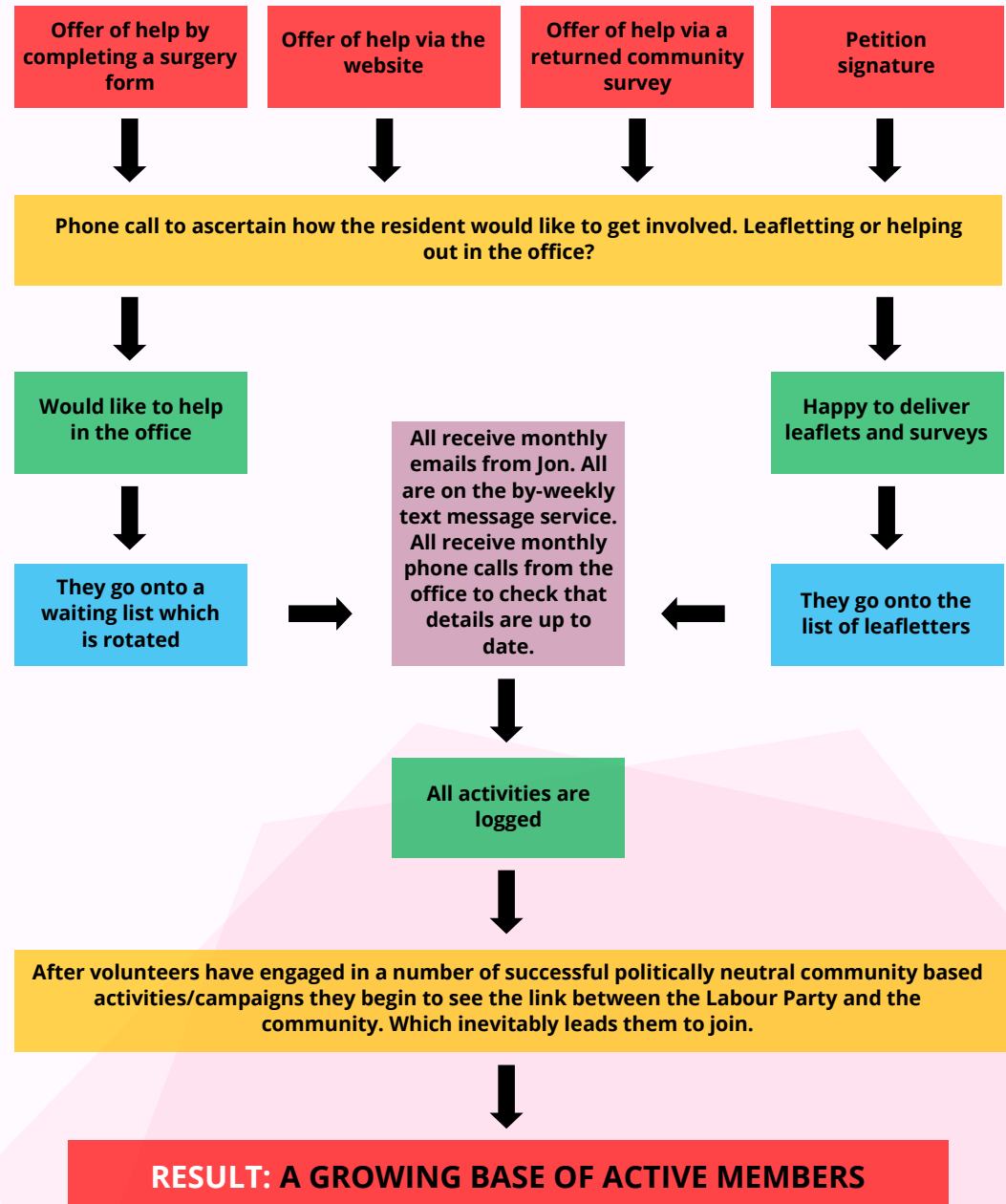
The figures in this report are constantly increasing and it is anticipated that by the time you read this we will have a core base of 400+ leaflet deliverers. Again, this will be mainly comprised of community volunteers which have come through to Jon's office via the steps outlined in the flow chart at the start of this report.

So to surmise - the volunteer network project has really made an impact on the way we communicate with local residents. It has taken the CLP back to a grassroots style of politics based on consultation and community. It has increased our membership, and most importantly it has increased the campaigning capacity of Jon Cruddas and the CLP.

In short the volunteer network has proved invaluable and is ultimately the future of campaigning in Dagenham and Rainham.

FROM VOLUNTEER TO LABOUR PARTY MEMBER

From the initial contact the process is about keeping a rolling engagement with volunteers. So far this process has been very successful and helps recruit genuinely active grassroots members that are interested in the local community. The outline below briefly highlights what is involved.



IMPACT ON CAMPAIGNING CAPACITY

Over the past few years the volunteer network has quietly become the backbone of our campaigning capacity in Dagenham and Rainham. The volunteers generally shy away from the idea of canvassing directly but will do the more onerous tasks that can often bog down key activists during elections.

Whilst there are some that have become more involved, the community volunteers that have yet to join the party are more inclined to leafleting and envelope stuffing. Lets take a look at the benefits of this in real terms.

Each of the nine wards have roughly between 20 and 30 road groups with each walk including approx. 250 properties on average. 250 leaflets can be delivered in around an hour at a regular pace. We now have 20 to 30 active volunteers in each ward which theoretically means we could deliver an entire ward of 5,000 leaflets in one hour.

Of course these are volunteers and as such we normally give leaflet delivery a two week turn around, but this could be shortened in the event of an election. Recently utilising our volunteers (with councillors picking up the odd round) we delivered 20,000 surveys from Jon Cruddas on the EU in three weeks. It is also worth mentioning that volunteers folded all 20,000 in under a week and bundled them into the walk groups ready for delivery.

Before that we sent out a letter to local women regarding the change in pension age. Volunteers stuffed 7,000 envelopes in two days.

Imagine the possibilities.

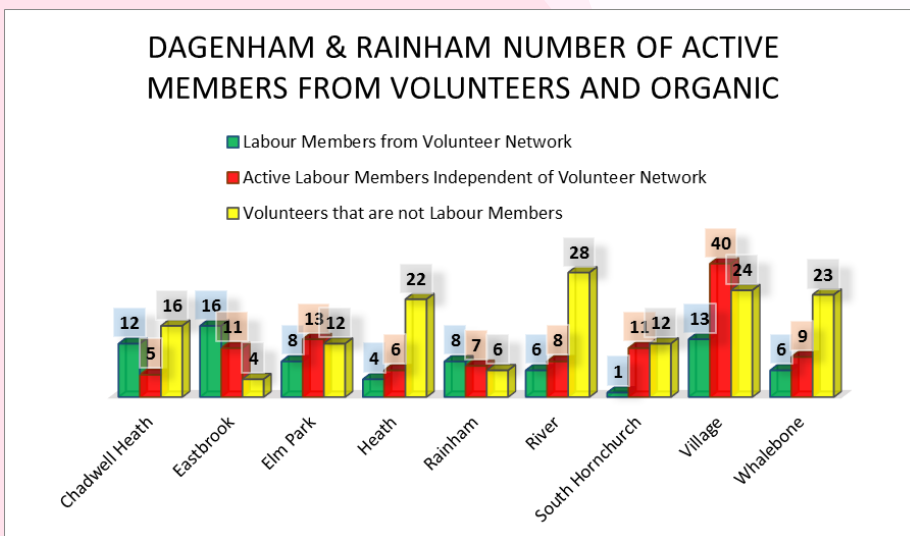
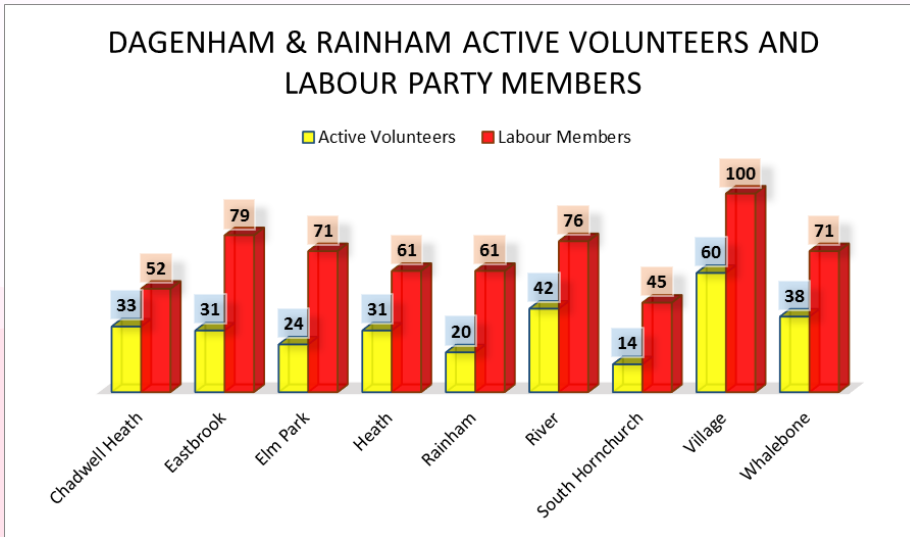
An army of envelope stuffers, and leaflet deliverers would free up our key activists, councillors, and more confident volunteers to spend more time on the doors at election time. Off the back of the volunteers with turnouts as seen below on a daily basis we can turn Dagenham and Rainham into a safe Labour seat.



VOLUNTEERS VS LABOUR MEMBERS

Since May 2015 (General Election) - 74 of the volunteers have joined the Labour Party. This conversion is organic, with volunteers progressing to membership without suggestion.

We are presently in a situation where we have 345 volunteers that will now deliver party political leaflets for Jon Cruddas and the CLP (there is a misc amount that live outside the CLP but will deliver). This number is constantly growing and at present we still have 78 residents that have shown initial interest to follow up.



WHAT DOES THIS DATA MEAN?

The first graph is a simple ward by ward tally of volunteers vs Labour Party members, highlighting a huge potential for membership growth and also hinting at increased campaigning capacity.

The second graph breaks the volunteers and members into three categories (with a remainder that is outlined below); active Labour Members that pre date the volunteer network, Labour Members that have joined following their activity as a community volunteer, and volunteers that are still community rather than politically based.

This breakdown highlights one simple fact, that our campaigning capacity is initially reliant on the volunteer network. The foundation of the volunteer network are leafletters which in campaigning terms frees up members and key activists to focus on canvassing.

If you look at the second chart on the opposite page you can see a breakdown of our members and volunteers. What the chart highlights is that our historic Labour members are relatively inactive tallying in at 110 across the constituency which translates to roughly 20 per cent of the total membership in relation to 221 activists that have stemmed from the volunteer base (including conversion members). There are also a total of 14 volunteers that have moved out of the area but still help regularly.

In the majority of wards the most active elements are the community volunteers, coupled with members that started out as community volunteers. However, we cannot discount the historic members either. The graph below outlines our campaigning capacity vs inactive members (potential campaigners).

