

## ELECTORAL SERVICES

### ACCESSIBILITY AND COMMUNICATION OF INFORMATION

#### Introduction

The Electoral Services Section attempts, not only when requested but also through other means, to supply information and documentation to electors in appropriate languages and formats.

We consider that all our forms and communications should aim to be clear, simple, helpful and user-friendly in an environment of complex legislation, where application and document requirements are often prescribed and difficult for the public to understand.

Even so, we have endeavoured to identify ways in which we can support not only electors but also candidates and agents throughout the electoral process.

Together with other departments throughout the Council relevant research is scrutinised to try and understand the demographic profile of our community and then provide the necessary tools to address deficiencies in the system and also to enhance the existing service.

#### Language

We have compiled our own electoral equalities impact assessment with a designated member of staff collecting data on requests for interpretation and translation this supported by a formal arrangement with Woking Interpreting and Translation Service (WITS). They can be contacted on 01483 750548 where a resident can leave a message in their own language, stating what their query is. A translator will ring back and clarify the query. If it relates to a council service, they will then ring an officer at the Council and ask the question on the resident's behalf or explain the situation. This service is not only provided for Electoral services but for the entire Council. (Contact at Runnymede Denise Morley)

#### **Text provided:**

*If you or someone you know does not speak English, you may find the following information useful. The Council has an arrangement with Woking Interpreting and Translation Service. You can ring: 01483 750548 and leave a message in your own language, stating what your query is. A translator will ring you back and clarify your query. If it relates to a council service, they will then ring an officer at the Council and ask the question on your behalf or explain the situation.*

**The Woking Interpretation and Translation Service - WITS** was set up in 1990 to provide trained Community Interpreters and Translators for use by members of the statutory and voluntary services in Surrey. Interpreters and Translators are trained to a nationally recognised standard in Community Interpreters' Skills and work in the strictest confidence.

[www.windowonwoking.org.uk/sites/wavs/ABOUTWAVS/wits](http://www.windowonwoking.org.uk/sites/wavs/ABOUTWAVS/wits)

In addition to the above there are direct links on the council's website in the following languages to explain the service provided by WITS

বাঙলা	<a href="#">Translation service information for Bengali</a>
italiano	<a href="#">Translation service information for Italian (Italiano)</a>
简体中文	<a href="#">Translation service information for Chinese (Mandarin)</a>
polški	<a href="#">Translation service information for Polish (Polski)</a>
español	<a href="#">Translations service information for Spanish (Espanol)</a>
اردو	<a href="#">Translation service information for Urdu</a>

## **Equalities**

Equality legislation makes it illegal to discriminate on the basis of gender, disability, race, nationality, religion, belief, sexual orientation or age.

Individuals and groups can experience a range of barriers that prevent them enjoying the same quality of life as their peers. The Council's aim is to ensure that its services are equally accessible by all people who need them, irrespective of gender, race, disability or age. This has been the Council's stated aim since adoption of the Equal Opportunities policy in 1995 and is integrated into normal working practices.

However public bodies also have a statutory duty to promote equality.

The attached Equality policy sets out how the Council aims to eliminate any discrimination based on gender, disability, race, age, sexual orientation, religion or belief by ensuring measures are in place to monitor whether its policies or practices discriminate against any particular group and then identify what can be done to ensure everyone is able to access its services.

The duty to promote equality between people of different racial groups is part of the Race Relations Amendment Act (2000), which requires that the Council has a Race Equality Scheme. The Disability Discrimination Act 2005 requires the authority to promote equality for disabled people and to publish a Disability Equality Scheme. The Equality Act (2006) required the authority to publish a gender equality scheme.

These schemes are all incorporated in our Councils equality plan and Electoral Service has its own equality impact assessment.

The Councils equalities documentation can be found on the following web page

<http://www.runnymede.gov.uk/portal/site/runnymede/menuitem.053f3359a8f21168c4a81c10af8ca028/>

The electoral services equalities impact assessment can be found at:

[http://www.runnymede.gov.uk/portal/binary/com.epicentric.contentmanagement.servlet.ContentDeliveryServlet/RBC%2520Portal/LGCL%2520Categories/Council%2520government%2520%2526%2520democracy/Councils/Council%2520policies%2520%2526%2520plans/Electoral\\_services\\_EA.pdf](http://www.runnymede.gov.uk/portal/binary/com.epicentric.contentmanagement.servlet.ContentDeliveryServlet/RBC%2520Portal/LGCL%2520Categories/Council%2520government%2520%2526%2520democracy/Councils/Council%2520policies%2520%2526%2520plans/Electoral_services_EA.pdf)

## **Making a Difference, Runnymede Borough Council's Sustainable Community Strategy and Corporate Plan**

The Council's focus has always been on achieving outcomes and seeking to make a difference for those who live, visit and work in Runnymede. 'Making a Difference', published in 2009, is a statement of Runnymede Borough Council's long-term ambitions for the borough, and sets out in one place the priorities the Council and its partners will focus on to achieve these ambitions over the next ten to fifteen years.

It was developed in consultation with residents, community groups, businesses, and public services, and combines and builds upon core aspects of the Council's previous Community Strategy (2002), Strategic Plan (2005-10), and other long-standing policy aims.

The Council's principal aim is to enhance the quality of life for residents and provide an attractive environment for businesses and visitors. To achieve this aim, the Council and its partners will focus on shaping a Runnymede of healthier, safer and more prosperous communities.

Underlying these long-term priorities, Runnymede Borough Council is committed to ensuring it continues to be well-run, provides value for money and pursues opportunities for partnership working. The Council will seek to maintain the quality of and satisfaction with our services, and ensure that services are accessible by and responsive to all who need them.

## Outside organisations

We also have several organisations that the council liaise with regularly e.g.

- **AbilityNet** helps disabled adults and children use computers and the internet by adapting and adjusting their ICT. In 2005 AbilityNet supported 490,000 people of all ages. Whatever the disability or problem, everyone stays in touch. [www.abilitynet.org.uk](http://www.abilitynet.org.uk)
- **Chinese Association of Woking.** The Chinese Association of Woking was formed in 1987 as a non-profit making voluntary organisation. It is the cultural, educational and social heart of the Chinese community. Members and their families are based in and around the Woking area. Most of them come from Mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaysia. Some are from Britain and other nations.
- **Woking Pakistan Muslim Welfare Association.** To work for the benefit of, and help to promote the interests of Muslim's living in Woking and adjacent areas, without any discrimination on the basis of creed or colour, sect, sex, political affiliations or opinions of the members. To help the community in the field of Education, Health, welfare Culture Sports by arranging lectures Seminars Discussions and debates producing leaflets and printed material. The Maybury Centre, 27 Board School Road, Central Maybury, Woking, Surrey, GU21 5HD 01483 770600
- **Shifa - Asian Women's Support Group.** This group is specifically for Asian Women with mental health problems, and aims to provide a safe and secure setting where members can socialise without feeling stigmatised or isolated. Group members are encouraged to develop life-long learning skills which may help them to increase their self-confidence and self-esteem. The group also concentrates on the complex cultural and spiritual needs of its Asian women members, an area where in the past help has not been readily available. [www.shifa-woking.org.uk](http://www.shifa-woking.org.uk)
- **Deaf PLUS South** promotes social inclusion and independent living for the 1 in 7 adults with any level of deafness. Our Mobile Advisory Service provides advice and information and the opportunity to try out specialised equipment to make daily life easier. Our Home Benefits Service helps hard-of-hearing/D/deafened people with claims for welfare benefits including DLA, AA & Pension Credit. Deaf awareness Training is also offered. **Deaf PLUS South** has 2 offices in the South East, in Farnborough and Aldershot covering Hampshire and Surrey. In Somerset, our 2 discrete services run out of our base in Taunton. <http://www.deafplus.org/> Address: 67 Albert Road, Farnborough, Hants, GU14 6SL 01252 510051 (telephone) 01252 524642 (fax) 01252 510051 (text/phone)
- **Surrey Adult Physical Disability Register.** <https://www.saldr.org.uk/saldr/saldr.nsf?opendatabase>
- **Surrey Association for Visual Impairment.** Rentwood, Fetcham, Surrey KT22 9JX 01372 377701 <http://www.surreywebsight.org.uk/>
- **Action for Blind People** is a dynamic national charity founded in 1857. We are one of the largest charities in the UK working with blind and partially sighted people to enable them to transform their lives. Our mission is to inspire change and create opportunities to enable blind and partially sighted people to have equal voice and equal choice. Every year we provide direct support for more than 22,000 people. <http://www.actionforblindpeople.org.uk/>
- **The Benefits Agency.** <http://www.dwp.gov.uk>
- **The Big Print.** The Big Print story. Big Print is the only British weekly newspaper published in bold text - sometimes double the size of standard print in major daily newspapers. Big Print was launched in the UK in 1992 to help people who struggle to read the print of conventional newspapers and who do not wish to use taped 'talking' newspapers. Big Print comprises of weekly national and international news coverage provided by the country's leading news agencies (including PA and Reuters') which is then edited into pages by our own editorial team. Big Print newspaper has a UK readership of around 14,500 and is produced by RNIB.
- **Diabetes UK.** [http://www.diabetes.org.uk/In\\_Your\\_Area/South\\_East/](http://www.diabetes.org.uk/In_Your_Area/South_East/)

## Political parties

All political parties and those involved in past elections are regularly contacted by the Electoral Services team. Invariably this is by e-mail or when Electoral Commission guidance is published.

Groups include

- All registered party agents
- All political parties
- All independents
- All Cllrs for Borough and County

It is recognised that early communication with these groups enables the process to be streamlined and keeps all those involved in the political process up to date with recent changes to legislation and practices.

## Forms reviewed each year

Information	Additional support for electors
Annual canvass form	Translation and large print documentation offered Allowing people to exercise choice in how they register: by post, internet, telephone or SMS
Rolling registration form	We use the Electoral Commissions web site to offer rolling registration forms in Cantonese, Polish, Punjabi, Urdu and Slovakian and detail the web site on all forms
European Union Citizens UC1 forms	These are not sent out each year but prior to a European Parliamentary election. That said, nationalities read recorded identifying different franchise requirements
Poll Cards	Maps are not provided on poll cards
Postal voting pack	We recognise that many of our senior citizens vote by post, and that the postal voting process, involving the collection of personal identifiers and the maintenance of the secrecy of the ballot, can be confusing for voters. We provide pictorial and script guidance to help the voter to complete their postal vote correctly.
Polling Station Signs and Notices	A recommended layout for polling stations is provided in the Electoral Commissions Polling Station Manuals this complemented by our presiding officer briefing sessions and polling station inspectors' briefing.

## How to contact us

We recognise that the electors need to contact us, conveniently and easily. We are committed to always providing contact details in any of our communications but it is accepted that in some communications, space to provide contact details can be constrained.

We endeavour to provide the following contact details on all documentation:

Annual canvass form	Postal address, e-mail address, website details, helpline numbers
Rolling registration form	Postal address, e-mail address, website details, helpline numbers
Absent vote application form	Postal address, helpline numbers
Poll card	Postal address and helpline number(s)
Postal voting pack	Postal address and helpline number(s)
Councils Web site	<a href="http://www.runnymede.gov.uk">http://www.runnymede.gov.uk</a>
Electoral Services Web Portal	<a href="http://www.runnymede.gov.uk/portal/site/elections/">http://www.runnymede.gov.uk/portal/site/elections/</a>