



Equalities Impact Assessment

Electoral Services

Index

- 1. Objective**
- 2. Introduction**
- 3. Questions**
- 4. Review**
- 5. Key areas for consideration**
- 6. Conclusion**

1. Objective

Electoral Services is a statutory service mindful of the issues associated with equality of opportunity, good race relations and social cohesion.

The purpose of Electoral Services is to provide a professional and customer-focused service

- Compiling the electoral register for Local, Parliamentary, European elections and Referenda;
- Managing all local elections held in the Borough;
- Managing all Parliamentary, European elections and Referenda

Working in partnership with the Ministry of Justice (MOJ), the Association of Electoral Administrators (AEA) and the Electoral Commission (EC), the service ensures that the democratic process is fair and open for an electorate numbering just under 60,000.

2. Introduction

Increasingly, local authorities work through partnership arrangements to deliver a range of services and initiatives. Through these partnership arrangements Electoral Services aims to promote an equality standard and where partnerships are involved in the contracting out of work, operate within regulations to ensure that contracts meet equal opportunity criteria and are effectively monitored.

Consequently, Electoral Services is constantly reviewing the service provision, in association with other organisations, with regard to the potential impact on the promotion of equalities.

Within this document each area of service has been broken down and assessed. These areas have then been given an 'impact rating' of high, medium or low priority and this will be used to identify those areas that will need assessing in the very near future or over a long period of time.

This impact assessment also looks at how the service promotes, monitors and consults within the Borough area to ensure that equalities are promoted.

Completion of this impact assessment will enable the service to determine the extent to which it will meet the requirements of the Equality Standard for Local Government.

The relevant legislation relating to Impact Assessments are

- The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000.
- The Disability Discrimination Act 1995
- The Sex Discrimination Act 1975
- The Human Rights Act 1998
- Employment Equality Regulations (Gender Reassignment, Sexual Orientation, Religion or Belief).

Whilst it is accepted that ideally the service will attempt to adhere to the above it is recognised that the individual nature and specific characteristics of the service can make total adherence very difficult and that some degree of lateral thought/interpretation may be required.

3. Questions

(To ascertain where the service needs to address equality issues a series of questions have been asked with the answers either listed in a table or comments)

3.1 Do you believe that the current working practices within Electoral Services have a negative or adverse impact on the following equality categories?

- Recognising diverse needs
- meeting the needs of equality groups
- Overlooks or excludes equality groups

It is important to bear in mind that there may be legitimate and justifiable reasons for the service to target certain groups only at a given point in time e.g. residential homes or Overseas Electors.

Equality categories	Yes	To some extent	No	What changes can be made in order to remove or substantially reduce the negative impact?	What evidence is there to demonstrate that the service does not discriminate against equality categories?
Racial (Black and Minority Ethnic communities)		Yes		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foreign Nationals that are not eligible to register and cannot get credit can be identified and informed of their rights • Communication established with the travellers liaison officer. • Registering Homeless people is difficult so will need to communicate with the Homeless Officer/Housing Officer or CAB • Local Connection applications to homeless 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We can provide most forms and information in different types of languages, Braille & audio tapes. (EC) • We currently register electors from Commonwealth and European Union Countries and can identify different nationalities and areas of clustering • Certain forms are prescribed in the legislation to only be made available in English so are not subject to equality of provision namely nominations and ballot papers etc
Religion or belief			No		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All our forms ask for Forename or First Name and not Christian name.
Gender (inc. male/female; transvestite and transsexual)			No		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is no requirement in legislation for us to record gender but there is a facility for us to record if a specific request if made.
Sexuality (e.g. homosexuality, lesbianism and bisexuality)			No	N/A	N/A

Disability (physical and/or mental impairment)	Yes			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Polling Stations constantly reviewed. • Guidance on dealing with Blind or sight impaired voters and assistance. • Guidance on dealing with disabled voters at elections. 	<p>Each Polling Station is reviewed before and after every election to make sure that there is disabled access and facilities provided.</p> <p>There is a statutory requirement for all polling places to be reviewed by the local authority – the next review is in 2011</p> <p>A large print of the Ballot Paper is now produced at each Polling Station and a hand held large print ballot paper made available at all times.</p> <p>A 'Blind Selector' device is available at each Polling Station subject to the size of the ballot paper</p> <p>Clear instructions are provided along with training of Presiding Officers to enable a blind person to receive help when casting their vote either from a companion or Presiding Officer.</p> <p>The annual canvass form can be provided in large print for electors who have impaired sight.</p> <p>Forms can also be produced in Braille via the EC website.</p>
Income (low income)	Yes				<p>Electors may have literacy problems and may not register because of that.</p> <p>As part of the annual canvass we are now required to carry out a door to door canvass where returns have not been received.</p> <p>This can highlight areas of deprivation around the borough and electors can be assisted to complete their forms personally by canvassers.</p> <p>However, there is no evidence that low income within the Borough is having a negative effect on electoral participation with ward turnouts consistent year after year.</p>

Age (young or old people)	Yes		<p>Problem trying to include 16/17 year olds onto the register so communication with Schools, Colleges, Universities, Youth Services & Youth Council is very important</p>	<p>Advertising and running a campaign to increase the number of 16/17 years old on to the register.</p> <p>This has been taken over by the Electoral Commission who are currently running a student participation program across the country.</p> <p>We have taken part in setting up polling booths and a recent BBC program at Stroud college in Egham.</p> <p>We record all attainers on our canvass forms and also rolling registration applications (Those attaining voting age during the life of the most recent published register)</p>
Geographical location (rural and isolated areas)	Yes		<p>Registering anyone that has moved into the area – communicate with Estate Agents, Solicitors, Council Tax, Housing Associations.</p> <p>Increasing the number of Polling Stations at elections (£)</p>	<p>Advertising and running a campaign to increase the number of people moving to the area.</p> <p>Predominantly, this process has been taken over by the Electoral Commission via a program called home movers. We record via a form 1A and 2A when these forms are submitted to us.</p> <p>Interestingly the majority of residents captured this way are already registered with us having been identified through our own usual registration processes.</p> <p>Provide postal and proxy voting at all elections.</p> <p>Every form has a Helpline number on in case of problems or requiring information.</p> <p>Every new Council Tax payer receives an application form from the office enclosed with their first bill so that they can register. This has proved extremely successful.</p>

3.2 Does the service include measures designed to promote equality? Consider positive measures designed to address disadvantage and increase access to different communities or groups

In general the service provides a service that is designed to include all but there have not been any specific programmes to identify and engage specific areas of the community other than those already mentioned. That said, there has not been any specific information or research undertaken to identify areas where equality of opportunity is inadequate and it has to be accepted that until this is undertaken a categorical answer that equal opportunities are available to all is difficult to justify. That said the acid test is an election and we have yet to have any evidence of areas of electorate who have claimed inequality of approach by the authority.

3.3 Does your service/policy have any equality data collection systems in place?

As previously mentioned the service can categorise the many identified sections of the electorate and these are recorded throughout the year with some specifically targeted. These include cross referencing systems via the internet and telephone.

3.4 What steps are taken to install or improve the arrangement for monitoring the impact of your policy/service on equality categories?

- We hold monthly meetings, these increasing as we get closer to elections or the electoral register compilation
- Briefings held before and after each election with all political party agents, independent candidates and political parties
- Customer Satisfaction Surveys could be introduced – **As mentioned above this has not been completed but the acid test of any election is the reaction to the availability of an individual's rights and the feedback obtained from candidates and agents at de-briefs e.g. re a particular area of the community not engaged. To date no adverse comments have been received.**
- We have recently sent out 2800 letters to known European Union citizens re their right to vote in this country at the European Parliamentary election. To date 50% of these have requested that they exercise their right to vote in this area.
- Compliments and complaints review (see above)
- Presiding Officers and Inspectors carry out a survey of access and other issues at all polling stations for each election
- Elections are in general the "acid test" for the accuracy and engagement of electors

3.5 Are the aims of the service consistent with wider Council policies on Equality and Diversity i.e. Comprehensive Equality Policy and Race Equality scheme?

Yes

3.6 Does the service work in partnership or contract out services?

The service works very closely with

- The Ministry of Justice (**MOJ**)
- The Association of Electoral Administrators (**AEA**)
- The Electoral Commission (**EC**)
- Political Parties & their respective agents
- The Electoral Reform Society (**ERS**)
- Royal Mail
- Halarose of Oxford (**IT**)
- Hensall print

- Financial Data Management Ltd (**FDML**)

3.7 In the past three years, have you consulted with any equality categories regarding the delivery of and access to your service/policy?

- RNIB
- SCOPE
- The Runnymede Access Group
- AEA
- EC
- SALDR
- Polling Station reviews.
- Engaging 16/17 years old
- Getting people who move into the area on the register – EC Home movers
- Identifying specific groups and adapting the system to increase registration

3.9 Within Electoral Services, what do you regard as being the main issues relating to Age / Disability / Gender / Race / Religion / Sexual Orientation or other factors where people may face disadvantage or discrimination?

- Language barrier – Where English as a second language given the complexities of electoral process and legal requirements relating to franchise
- Potential lower voter turnout in ethnic-minority wards
- Suspected lower percentage of registration in areas where there may be BME groups
- No facilities to research the intricacies of voter turnout
- Disabled access – blind, wheelchairs etc
- Low registration levels and voting levels among young people.

3.10 What issues have been identified by stakeholders / peers?

- Postal voting documentation is complicated
- People who are illiterate could not vote by post, would be disenfranchised unless they go to the polling station
- Lighting in polling booths
- Provision for General Disabilities
- People who go to the polling stations will vote – people with postal votes do not always complete them. (84%)
- Use of staff with ethnic language skills at polling stations in ethnic-minority wards would help but is not a recognised issue within this Borough.
- Instructions on postal votes in the different languages. **(The legal requirement is to offer instructions in Braille, different languages etc through our web site or the EC. Actual provision would be impossible given the multitude of nationalities so tends to be reactive)**

- Leaflets at polling stations on how to vote in different languages. **(Polling cards have the information detailed how to receive various language literature)**
- Ramps at all polling stations where there are steps to negotiate. Finance is a serious issue for what is effectively a one off event. **(All of our polling places are reviewed as required by the legislation and this is slowly being achieved)**
- Large print ballot papers used at polling stations **(Available)**
- Large print annual electoral canvass forms where there are known visually-impaired electors **(Available)**
- Tactile voting device for the blind **(Available)**
- Magnifiers for visually –impaired voters **(Available)**
- Provision for voter with disabilities to have a companion to vote on their behalf, or PO to do this. This is provided in the regulations and will be extended in the new act. **(Available)**
- Working with local schools – St Paul’s School and Fullbrook.
- Provision of polling booths to accommodate wheelchair users at all polling stations. Borough facilities can be funded by us but we are reliant on other facilities that may not have the funding. We are under an obligation to review all polling places and we check every place before elections and have taken photographs of all access and egress points.
- Assistance from Presiding Officer to overcome literacy issues.
- Polling booth notices in 4 main minority languages in significantly populated ethnic minority wards could be provided but is it an issue here?
- Automatic telephone and internet registration during electoral canvass is provided in English and main minority languages are currently available. **(Completed but it must be accepted that all languages are not available and additional costs are incurred each and every time)**

3.11 What evidence (positive or negative) is available to support the above views?

- Percentage turnout for the various wards e.g. Royal Holloway fluctuates quite drastically despite efforts to increase participation
- Census figures and EC research show low levels of registration among young people
- No means of measuring voter registration but an election is the acid test where franchise is challenged. The electoral canvass results in 100% of all properties within the Borough either sending back a form or receiving a personal visit if no response received.

Evidence of research, of which Runnymede has been a part, is available from the DCA, EC and the AEA namely:

- Consultation exercises
- Statistical analysis
- Research
- Other authorities data
- Surveys
- Focus groups
- Complaints
- User feedback

- Reports
- Questionnaires
- Records, archives etc.

3.12 Do you have evidence to ensure there is no adverse impact or discrimination based on Age / Disability / Gender / Race / Religion / Sexuality or other factors?

There have been comments raised by Cllrs re the provision of ramping systems for our mobile polling places and we have had to provide finance (£500) for Egham Town Band Hall to address an access issue at the front of the hall.

There have also been concerns from electors with visual impairment that the correspondence sent out is difficult to read and complete.

This is being addressed by consultation with the Surrey Adult Physical Register to compile our own list within the Borough and we are slowly identifying premises so that they can receive different forms and receive a different approach from the elections team.

3.13 From the above responses, what unmet needs / requirements can now be identified that affect specific groups?

- Ethnic minorities **may** be disadvantaged by language barriers and our cultural norms but this is speculative given that no research has been undertaken to identify where this may be an issue within the Borough.
- Young people – there certainly is a degree of apathy to register or to vote with the Universities with % returns very low indeed. Indeed this is increasing in areas such as Englefield Green where student accommodation is increasing. We currently register all campus students and there is an argument that this practice should stop (EC & DCA). However, this would result in a political imbalance within the Ward that would certainly be targeted by the Boundary Commission.
- Housebound people living alone obviously find it difficult to attend the polling station and those with postal votes often have difficulties completing these as well. This can be a problem in general with our receiving many calls after the postal vote literature is sent out and we tend to contact the political party that the person wants to support so that they can assist the individual to complete the correspondence. Unfortunately, with a new code of conduct produced and signed up to by all political parties the handling of postal votes is very sensitive indeed and this is stressed in all briefing sessions.
- Visually impaired/disabled (see above)

3.14 What robust information gathering and data collection systems are in place to monitor the usage, and effectiveness of the service?

- Database of residential properties
- Percentage turnouts are recorded in all areas and hourly turnouts in polling stations
- Census data
- Politicians/parties
- Annual canvass
 - Three forms sent out
 - Internet registration
 - Telephone registration
 - SMS registration
 - Personal visits to non responders
 - Property databases changed with consultation between internal departments and Royal mail
 - European e-mail distribution network after canvass

- Overseas electors
- Service Voters
- Form K (EC)
- Data collection after every election by the electoral commission and Plymouth University (Brian Cheal)

It is important to have information gathering and data collection systems in place to continuously monitor the effect of the service. Such systems should identify service users according to equalities factors.

3.15 What can be done to improve access to / take up of services?

- Meetings with ethnic groups to encourage registration and explain the voting process **(if identified)**
- Advertise the facility to provide large-print canvass forms - **(Done)**
- Consult re registration process – times, how to encourage, process etc
- Train and support staff and devise ways of monitoring their performance **(Done)**
- Review polling places namely situation, accessibility etc **(Ongoing)**
- Inspect polling stations when in situ – we currently use polling station inspectors who are experienced officers who identify problem areas and get them rectified early on polling day
- Presiding Officers are encouraged to record all comments made to them at polling stations

3.16 Is there any evidence of the way relevant functions/policies/services impact differently on specific groups? (Race, gender disability, age)

Information	Service, Policy, Function	When/how collected	Source	Summary of analysis
Electoral Commission (EC) Evaluation Reports	✓	2002 - 2006	EC	Low registration 18-25 year olds
Scope Report	✓	2005	Scope	DDA compliance / non compliance Difficulties in registering and voting
Various Government & EC Reports	✓	2002 - 2006	EC	As per recommendation – setting up of national working groups / training strategies and new Electoral Administration Bill
Office & Internal Review	✓	Continuous	Internal staff	

There are numerous consultations that have been undertaken by the EC that we have been party to. There is also a number of case studies of voter participation from around the country where schemes have been undertaken some at great expense and some not with various degrees of success.

Are there any unmet needs/requirements that can be identified that affect specific groups?

Service/policy/function	Category	Unmet	Comments
-------------------------	----------	-------	----------

		Need/Gap	
Registering to Vote	Race	Y	Do not understand eligibility and process
	Gender	N	No
	Disability	Y	Difficulties in completing the documentation
	Age	Y	Lack of awareness, there is clear evidence of youth disengagement
Voting (in person or by post)	Race	Y	Do not understand process. Location of polling stations, complicated legislation.
	Gender	N	No
	Disability	Y	Mobility issues and visual impairment make both processes difficult
	Age	Y	Young people are mainly aware of process but not enthused to participate. Elderly can have difficulties with transport etc
Service Support	Race	Y	Need to apply appropriate resources £
	Gender	N	-
	Disability	Y	Need to expand and improve facilities
	Age	Y	Major campaign to increase participation required but nationally the Electoral Commission are driving this.

3.18 List those elements that may have a differential impact and/or an unmet need/requirement. Could the service be re-designed to reduce differential impact and meet needs?

	Service/policy/function	Category	Redesign		Comments
			Yes	No	
A	Registering to Vote	Race	✓		Review registration process. Government to revise statutory forms
		Gender		✓	
		Disability	✓		Online registration. Allow support groups to confirm information
		Age	✓		Engage with colleges and universities. Promote citizenship in schools
B	Voting (in person or by post)	Race	✓		Arrange campaigns and provide literature in multi language format.
		Gender		✓	
		Disability	✓		Review polling station facilities. Set up helpline / support group.
		Age	✓		Major issue for Politicians. Engage with colleges (Universities & youth organisations)
C	Service Support	Race	✓		Review resources and skills
		Gender		✓	
		Disability	✓		Review resources and skills.
		Age	✓		Review resources and skills.

3.19 List the basic statements of proposed changes and record the principal outcome expected from each change.

	Proposed Change/Action	Outcome
A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liaise with Government and Electoral Commission • Review local procedures • Conduct regular service Review 	<p>Propose changes to legislation to improve process</p> <p>Encourage registration thereby improving participation</p> <p>Identification of 'low registration areas' enabling concentration of additional resources</p>
B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review Polling Stations • Review Notices in Polling Stations • Set up elections hotline / support group • Promote citizenship 	<p>Ideally all venues DDA compliant</p> <p>Large print, different Languages & Braille to assist disabled.</p> <p>Advise in completion of postal votes</p> <p>Increased participation of 18-25 year olds</p>
C	<p>Review Service Resources</p> <p>Increase training of staff in specialised areas</p>	<p>Identify additional support for 'weak areas' shown above</p> <p>Develop / use existing language skills.</p> <p>Provide dedicated support to disadvantaged groups.</p>

4. Review

All of the items listed below are subject to constant review

Equalities Improvement Plan	By Whom	By When	Improvement Aim/ Impact/ Outcome
All forms to have the wording 'If you require this form in a different language, please ring Helpline 01932 425650	Electoral Registration Staff	(Completed but reviewed as processes change)	Everyone to have forms in a language that they want
Communication to be instigated with <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gypsy and traveller Officer, • Housing Officer • CAB 	Electoral Registration Staff	As determined	To increase voter registration
Review all Polling Stations	Electoral Registration Staff	Ongoing	Assess if the Polling Place is suitable to use for Elections
Guidance at elections for dealing with Blind, Sight Impaired or Disabled voters.	Electoral Registration Staff	Ongoing	Help the Presiding Officer and Poll Clerk at elections to give them guidance on how to deal with certain situations
Annual canvass to collect Household forms from	Canvassers	Every year	Help electors who wish to register who may

door to door canvass			have literacy problems
Communicate with Universities, Colleges, Youth Services and Youth Council	Electoral Registration	Ongoing	Help 16/17 years old registered and also include at Counts to see the process
Communicate with Council Tax, Estate Agents, Solicitors and Housing Associations etc	Electoral Registration	Ongoing	Help get more people who have moved to the area to register.

5. Key areas for consideration

Key Area	Provisions Currently In Place	Possible Areas For Improvement
Register of Electors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Annual canvass – canvass form sent to every property showing the elector information we have. This includes Nationality, Over 70's indicator and Postal voting indicators. Option to return form per paid post Telephone Registration available in other languages if required Internet registration also included We include a help line number & Guidance notes on completing the form Downloadable application forms Assistance given by office staff over the phone and at reception desk on completing forms. We receive a list of properties from Council Tax where ownership may have changed and we write to these properties 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote the availability of large print versions of form - EC Guidance leaflets on Registering to Vote in various languages Audio Tapes Braille Work with community groups to provide guidance and information on entitlements and how to register and vote How to encourage the 18-25's to register & vote
Poll cards – Statutory requirement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased to an A5 size card Includes information on how to apply for a postal vote & include the deadlines for applying Includes a Helpline Number 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to improve the clarity and font size Stopped including maps showing location of polling stations
Polling Stations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provision of polling stations – where possible in suitable locations to meet voter demands – Extremely expensive Polling stations reasonable disability access If a regular Polling station is not available attempt to locate another station in close proximity or if not possible use next nearest and write to electors in advance advising of changes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Polling Station policy is the responsibility of the RO Involve the Council's Access Officer & local disability groups in carrying out regular reviews/assessments of our polling stations
Polling Station Equipment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provisions of low level voting booths suitable for wheelchair users provided in every station Large print versions of ballot papers are 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Training of our Polling Station staff include disability awareness , use of Tactile devices, layout of the polling station, positioning notices and at suitable height, speaking clearly to

	<p>displayed in each station</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tactile voting devices are available in each station for the visually impaired • Magnifying glasses are supplied to each polling station • Electors with disabilities also allowed to have the assistance of a companion when voting • Presiding Officers are asked to complete a questionnaire highlighting access problems 	<p>people who have hearing or learning difficulties, make sure they know how to install any temporary ramps safely</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision of the Electoral Commission's leaflet 'Easy Guide to Voting' in English and other language in polling stations
Absent Voting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Postal Vote applications downloadable from website • Provide telephone advice and suitable letters when distributing • Inform the electorate of the availability of Absent voting on canvass forms, poll cards, advert during election period 	<p>Promote availability of vote by post leaflets in</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • English • Other languages • Audio Tape • Braille • Provide large print application forms • Work with Community groups to provide guidance and information on how to vote by post • tactile device
Standing for Election	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Candidates pack provided including guidance book on how to complete all forms • Meetings with Political Party Election Agents • Information on standing as a candidate on the website 	
Website	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Currently have a lot of information available 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working on improving and providing more information • Will soon have own control
Equal Access to Electoral procedures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good practice guidance – produced by the Electoral Commission 	

6. Conclusion

The main conclusion of the assessment is there are issues that need investigating and developing.

However, a significant amount of information provided and received is covered as we have been dealing with foreign nationals, ethnic minorities and communities for several years and have developed several areas of investigation and guidance information that appears to be working well given the feedback after specific elections. However, it is accepted that this is an ongoing process and we should never sit still and should, subject to appropriate resources being allocated, always look to move the service forward.