



## ELECTORAL SERVICES OUR PUBLIC AWARENESS STRATEGY

### Introduction

The Electoral Administration Act 2006 (Section 69) placed new duties on the Electoral Registration Officer and the Returning Officer “to take such steps as he thinks appropriate to encourage the participation by electors in the electoral process in the area for which he acts”. This section also gave the Electoral Commission powers to provide guidance on this matter, and empowered the Secretary of State to reimburse electoral officers in respect of any expenditure incurred under this section.

We endeavour to strengthen the electoral process in our community by:

- Raising awareness of electoral registration, elections and electoral reviews of boundaries and electoral arrangements;
- Encouraging people to vote and to stand as candidates for elections;
- Minimising the numbers of rejected postal votes at our election;
- Introducing our young people to the voting habit and democracy;
- Engaging hard to reach groups to register and to vote.

### The “Target Audience” for our strategy

Residents of the Borough encouraging them to register and to vote at elections

Older people – many of our postal voters are elderly, and our efforts seek to ensure that the numbers of rejected postal votes at elections are kept to a minimum

Young people – introducing them to voting and encouraging them to register and continue to do so

Home movers and new residents in the Borough – some 15% move home every year, and we endeavour to ensure that they do not lose their right to vote

Candidates at elections and elected members of the borough and County Council;

The local press and media – to help them more effectively report on registration and election matters

(Those boxes below marked in red are areas that we will need to review in 2010)



| Our objectives and how we deliver them  | The resources that we use  | How we measure our success  |
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| <b>We encourage people to register and to vote at elections</b>   |  |   |
| We provide good general information about electoral registration and elections; this includes guidance on special category electors' registration and access to necessary forms, information about current elections, historic results, guidance on candidacy and access to necessary forms | Electoral Services has it's own web portal accessible at:<br><a href="http://www.runnymede.gov.uk/portal/site/elections/">http://www.runnymede.gov.uk/portal/site/elections/</a><br>Posters are produced, both from the EC and personal to Runnymede at various stages of registration and prior to elections are sent to publicly accessible sites along with small marketing stands e.g. libraries, civic centre, colleges etc | The website remains up to date and relevant in its content<br>Our canvass feedback includes specific questions about the website  |
| We provide a general guide about the registration process with the voter registration form that is issued to every household in the borough   | We have a Frequently Asked Questions section in our canvass documentation  | We have always considered that the election is the acid test of the accuracy of the register  |
| We provide specific information about a current election  | Our Website has an up-front, current elections page which is updated as the election proceeds (See above)  | The website is updated  |
| We endeavour to ensure that all statutory notices are published and effectively placed in the localities  | The notice of election, statement of persons nominated and notice of poll are published  | The timely publication and distribution of the notices throughout the 30 notices boards within the borough. This list is maintained by the service with a designated member of staff responsible for the distribution of all notices. |
| We aim to give a timely issue of poll cards that are informative and helpful  | Our poll cards are issued at the earliest opportunity in the election timetable; they do not include polling station maps because it is considered that there is too much information on them already (this is an area that needs a radical re-think)  | The timely issue of the poll cards  |
| We do not issue press releases to promote the return of registration forms but do so to build up the awareness of elections   | <b>Needs reviewing</b>   |   |

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| We appreciate that different elections require different public awareness strategies; we prepare strategies that are appropriate to the different types of election   | This is usually incorporated within our project plan for elections   | Our team meetings and meetings with our communications manager evaluate the effectiveness of these approaches                       |
| <b>We endeavour to maximise our return of postal votes and to reduce errors in postal voting</b>  |  |   |
| We attempt to ensure that our postal voting pack is as helpful and informative as we can make it  | This is carried out together with our printers ERS – meeting has already been held to discuss the methods to be adopted for the 2010 elections | Public comment and accurate % return. We also ask members of staff within the Civic Centre for their comments on the packs received |
| <b>Young people - proposals (We currently do not get involved in any specific projects and this will be set as a priority next year and suggestions made below will form the basis of our approach together with the tools available from the do-politics site)</b>   |  |   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Write to our Youth Clubs and include copies of posters from the Electoral Commission’s do-politics website</li> <li>• Write to Colleges, Schools that have sixth forms and the University at canvass time to urge registration, including copies of posters from the Electoral Commission’s do-politics website</li> <li>• Liaise with our leisure services who have requested we assist them in Local Democracy week (Natalie Clarke – assistant leisure development officer)</li> <li>• Provide a democratic engagement toolkit to all secondary schools in the area; the toolkit contains information, exercises, lesson ideas and discussion topics promoting democracy and engagement</li> <li>• To set up a “Run your own school election” to every school in the borough, with suggested templates and documents to support the process</li> <li>• Arrange a school visit by year 6 pupils to Civic Offices to meet Chief Executive, Cabinet member and Mayor, to meet decision makers, understanding what the Council does and how local democracy works.</li> <li>• Send a letter to all young people who are rising 18 at the time of their birthday, providing information on their voting rights and guidance on voting</li> <li>• Provide registration information on the front page of our website specifically aimed at Young people with a link to the appropriate stakeholders</li> </ul> <p>All year round poster campaign to promote awareness.</p> |  |   |

| <b>We encourage our home movers to register to vote</b>                                   |   |   |
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| Estate Agents   | Estate Agents who operate in the Borough have in the past purchased the electoral register but this has tailed off in recent years since the reduction in size of the edited register (53%)   | It is difficult to monitor where the new applicants come from because we have always tried to be consistent in our form design. That said we will have a look at this in the new year to see if there are any agents willing to hold our forms. |
| Home movers   | We provide a voter registration form with every home-mover pack that is issued by our colleagues in the Revenues and Benefits Section.  | This has proved extremely successful particularly highlighting the form by providing it on pink paper. Specific numbers are not recorded but we do receive a significant number back  |
| <b>We work to promote participation among the 'hard to reach' groups in our community</b> |   |   |
| Care/Residential homes  | We communicate directly and regularly with the Care/Residential Homes to ensure that their residents do not lose their right to be registered and a specific campaign is carried out at every canvass using specifically designed correspondence. A database is also maintained with contact details directly to the manager or office responsible. | All responses from care /residential homes and establishments are carefully monitored   |
| Churches/Faith groups   | We do not write to churches and faith groups in the borough to encourage the registration of BME and new Migrant Worker groups at canvass time.   |   |
| Homeless  | We do not communicate with Salvation Army or related projects, explaining how homeless persons can register supplying relevant registration forms   |   |
| Civil Registration  | We do not supply a copy of our rolling registration form to our Civil Registration Service so that it can be included in the new citizens pack that they issue to people being granted citizenship at   |   |

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|  | ceremonies in the Borough  |   |
| Service Voters                                 | We have endeavoured to communicate with the service contacts but without success. Runnymede does not have a specific service area and recent EC campaigns resulted in one additional service voter   | We monitor the number of our service registrations  |
| Adults with Learning Difficulties              | We have not contacted the Adults with Learning Difficulties team based at the County Council to advise them of Electoral Commission material to assist people with learning difficulties.  |   |
| Impaired sight/hearing                         | We have always relied on the materials available from the EC and do not hold a stock of materials this difficult given the lack of storage in the open plan office. That said we have a number of contact stakeholders who will be contacted again through the Councils equalities program in the New Year |   |
| BME groups                                     | We do not have a specific plan to engage BME groups  |   |
| Language.                                      | We provide a language translation service and promote this not only throughout the council but on our documentation sent to electors   | This is monitored by another department re the number of occasions this service is utilised |
| <b>Information about candidates and agents</b> |  |   |
| Candidates/Agents                              | We provide a candidates/agents information pack (recently used the EC version) and this is supported by a formal presentation that includes information about the count and postal vote opening.   |   |
| Specific candidature                           | We produce a candidate's profile at every election along with a photo and contact details including the registered party if applicable   |   |

**We provide press releases to our local press to help them more effectively report on registration and election matters**

Press releases

We do not produce as many press release as we should particularly at registration. We have in the past produced the figures but unfortunately the articles have been hidden away amongst the death notices and are not treated as high profile by the media despite our expressing our disappointment.

It is hoped that our communications strategy will go some way to improving this.

That said we inform all political parties and Cllrs of the statistics as they progress throughout the process.

**Public Awareness Budget**

The Electoral Services budget for 2009-10 **does not** include specific funds for a public awareness strategy.