



ELECTORAL SERVICES TRAINING PLAN

Introduction

Runnymede Borough Council places considerable store on the training and development of all staff. Electoral Services is a service area where, because of the sensitivity, high profile, diversity and complexity of its work, particular emphasis has to be placed on appropriate training.

This training and development plan extends to the core team of one permanent and two part time staff and to the temporary staff who typically comprise 14 canvass assistants, 90 polling station staff, 120 counting assistants, 14 postal vote opening staff, 3 Deputy Returning Officers, 12 senior counters and six document retrieval staff.

The following has been identified as the aims and objectives of our training plan.

Aims and Objectives

Core Staff

- To ensure that core staff are fully aware of and understand the legal requirements of registration and the conduct of elections;
- To ensure that core staff are familiar with best practice;
- To ensure that core staff are enabled to get the best out of the software package that supports the service;
- To ensure that core staff are aware of and know how to use the resources available to them to support them in their work;

Temporary Staff

- To provide all temporary staff with guidance and instructions appropriate to their levels of responsibility and duties;
- To supply this guidance at an appropriate time in advance of the performance of duties;
- To provide all temporary staff with either pre-task training or a pre-task briefing that is appropriate to their levels of responsibility and duties.

Who do we deliver training to?

Core Staff

Corporate Training

The Council provides a wide variety of training from IT to management skills with the application and process detailed in Personnel's Training Policy available on the Councils intranet.

As far as particular courses are concerned the council is a partner in the Surrey Shared Training Scheme (STOG) a programme that is continuously updated and available on request from personnel. Information relating to STOG can be seen at <http://www.surreyimprovement.info/stog>

Section Training

Team Meetings	<p>Team meetings are an invaluable way to review both work in progress but also to evaluate existing working practices and tasks undertaken. Consequently, they are held frequently and all staff given the opportunity to contribute.</p> <p>Where necessary the issues arising from team meetings are formally recorded but invariably minutes are not taken but issues informally adopted.</p> <p>If necessary other officers are invited to team meetings particularly after major events.</p>
Specific Training	<p>These can comprise of in the office or off site training, covering a number of topics. Specific training can be linked to team meetings or merely a period of time set aside during the week to cover a certain subject e.g. a software program. It has not been unusual for us to set aside a couple of hours at a set time each week to identify and address specific issues that a member of staff would like to cover. Unfortunately, current budget constraints can restrict all staff attending formal training sessions from outside organisations e.g. AEA, Solace with reliance on other staff who have attended to de-brief on their return.</p>
AEA	<p>All three members of the Electoral Services Team are members of the Association, and the Council pays the appropriate membership fees. The Service Manager is an Accredited Trainer of the Association and has extensive experience of preparing and delivering training courses for the Association.</p> <p>The following opportunities are available for staff but are subject to available budgets:</p> <p>Quarterly Branch Meetings – through the South East Branch of the Association. (The ESM attends the Southern Branch meetings)</p> <p>Annual Seminar and Conference – a three-day event held in January/February each year.</p> <p>Autumn Conference – a one-day event held in September each year.</p> <p>Specific Training Courses – the Association provides a wide variety of training courses which can be viewed on its website at http://www.aea-elections.co.uk/educationtraining/educationtraining.jsp</p>

Surrey County Group	This was an initiative that originated from the South East European Parliamentary Working Group to exchange good practice and knowledge among Surrey's 11 neighbouring authorities. Meetings are held at different authority locations and formally minutes are taken.
Software Supplier	Our current software supplier is Halarose of Oxford but this is to change in January 2010 to Xpress Software Solutions. Half-yearly User Group Meetings are held over a period of two days and these meetings now comprise a significant training element with a workshop and user group meeting. Specific Training Courses – a wide range of training opportunities are also available on specific components of the system but these are proving cost prohibitive with fees exceeding £850 being quoted for a days training. It is accepted that certain training is less than this figure if shared with other authorities or internet training taken but with significant changes to the service the amounts are increasingly beyond that which is acceptable to the authority.

Identified Training Opportunities – Temporary Staff

Canvassers	A Canvassers' Guidance Pack is provided to all those recruited to carry out house to house enquiries. Canvassers are also required to attend a training session for which an attendance fee is paid this covering lone working, legal requirement, process etc The training for canvassers is scheduled into the section's Canvass Project Plan and takes place in October after the returns for three forms have abated. Canvassers are required to visit house during the first three weeks of November to ensure returns are with the Electoral Services Team by publication date on the 1 December 2009.
Polling Station Staff	All polling station staff and inspectors are provided with the Electoral Commissions Manual for Presiding Officers and Poll Clerks this ordinarily issued with their formal appointment and prior to the training session so that they can familiarise themselves with the processes. Presiding Officers are required to attend a training session at the Civic Centre and it is hoped that the elections next year will involve a more informal approach with a more hands on element rather than a repetition of the same session each year. For local elections attendance at this training session is optional for Poll Clerks but for the Parliamentary will probably be <u>invited</u> to attend. Payment for training sessions is made as part of the overall fee.
Polling Station Inspectors	Polling Station Inspectors are invariably senior officers and a short briefing is provided re their tasks e.g. CEO, Head of Democratic Services, Director of Planning and the Senior Solicitor Inspectors will be provided with a checklist and since the introduction of postal voting on demand have to visit polling stations twice during the day and also attend the count far early than has traditionally been the case. They also have to be available for the entire day and not just office hours with contact maintained with mobile phones.

Counting Assistants	<p>All Counting Assistants are provided with instructions well in advance of the Count along with their formal appointment. It is the responsibility of the Team Leaders to brief their individual teams before the count begins and concentrates on the practicalities of the count.</p> <p>Instructions include guidance on the procedures that are followed in the verification and in the count and also include guidance on good and bad ballot papers.</p> <p>For local elections, the procedures for conducting three different types of count – single member vacancies, counting ‘block votes’ and counting multi-member vacancies are described and illustrated.</p>
Postal Vote Issuing Staff	<p>Postal votes are not issued in house, this service provided by ERS.</p> <p>However, our Risk Assessment has recognised that the fall back provision of issuing postal votes is considered and that appropriate draft instructions held on file.</p>
Postal Vote Opening Staff	<p>All Postal Vote Opening Staff are provided with instructions and a briefing provided just before the very first session begins. Once complete the same openers are used throughout the election including the sessions at the count. This enables familiarity of process with some staff used year after year.</p> <p>Two experienced Deputy Local Returning Officers will be appointed specifically to adjudicate the postal voters’ personal identifiers.</p> <p>EC21/2007</p> <p>http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/_data/assets/electoral_commission_pdf_file/0014/12605/EC212007-appendix1_25610-19035_ENSW.pdf</p>
Count Team Leaders	<p>All Count Team Leaders are provided with instructions in advance of the Count this part of their official appointment. A briefing is delivered by the Service Manager, and includes sample material, so that a practical and to-the-point demonstration can be given.</p> <p>The instructions include guidance on the procedures that are followed in the verification and in the count and also include guidance on good and bad ballot papers.</p> <p>For local elections, the procedures for conducting three different types of count – single member vacancies, counting ‘block votes’ and counting multi-member vacancies – are described if applicable to that particular election.</p> <p>It is proposed that a Senior Count Team Leader be appointed for the 2010 elections who will be responsible for the paperwork for each team this being distributed when the Team Leaders arrive at the Egham Leisure Centre enabling the Electoral Services Team to concentrate on other issues.</p>
Ballot Box Co-Ordinators	<p>It is a legal requirement that election documents are secured and retained, and during the Count they may be required by the Returning Officer for checking.</p> <p>Our ballot box team are issued with instructions well in advance of the Count and a briefing provided to the ESM/SC re process. Essentially, the breakdown of the packaging is very specific and this is strictly co-ordinated by one of the</p>

	Electoral Services Officers (SC) The movement of boxes and other equipment is carried out by a team who are essentially at the beck and call of the Elections team.
Front of House	Front of House staff are “on the coal face” and it is important that they are briefed re frequently asked questions. A pro forma is provided to assist them in this respect.

Conclusion

This training plan does not detail the specific training schedules of individuals these are listed in formal annual appraisals. However, it is clear that there are a multitude of officers who assist us in addition to the main players listed above, from IT support, to the courier, to the person who puts notices on the boards, to the depot who deliver and collect equipment and those who assist us in the office.

The most important training of all is to ensure there is no complacency and a mind set that the tasks at hand are not subject to any degree of flexibility but must be completed promptly, professionally and within the extremely strict timetables set.