

## TERMS OF REFERENCE

### **“Securing the Vote”: A review of Election Practices and procedures in Bath and North East Somerset**

#### **Resources Overview and Scrutiny Panel – Task and Finish Group Review**

#### **Background**

No reports on the methods for voter registration or engagement, or the Elections/Electoral Registration service have been considered previously by the panel. In addition to this, recent Electoral Commission proposals (“Securing the Vote”) have highlighted potential changes to the election processes and election services from May 2006.

The Head of Democratic Services recently commissioned a review of the service from the Corporate Performance Unit. This review looked at a range of management and service delivery issues. The report has been issued and an implementation plan is being devised. This report will have a bearing on this current review.

#### **Purpose**

*To examine Electoral Commission proposals (and Government response) for Election services and procedures (“Securing the Vote”) in order to consider potential service changes in terms of local implementation and potential resource requirements.*

#### **Objectives**

- Examine B&NES systems and procedures, to identify current work practices, work load and capacity
- Establish what the Council currently does to encourage voter registration and participation
- Explore new proposals and potential methods of implementation, including identification of good practice
- Identify obstacles to participation
- Examine ways in which voter registration levels and participation at elections can be improved within current legislation and local discretion
- examine the resource level for the service, including succession planning (addressed in part by the CPU review report mentioned above), particularly in the light of new proposals/changes to the service
- investigate awareness raising for the public

## Outcomes

- improve voter registration levels
- remove obstacles to voter participation
- identify the level of resource required by the Elections Service that is consistent with the Council's current and future expectations of that service (for ongoing service requirements and during election periods)
- promote local democracy among potential voters

## Scope

The scope has been established to look at 2 broad areas:

- Registration of voters (the Electoral Roll)
- Conduct of elections (voter participation and engagement).

Registration of Voters will include consideration of:

- information on the electoral registration process
- the current processes and means of registering to vote
- access issues for local people in the registration process and voting process
- Registration for "non-standard" households (students, residents in HMOs), etc
- Voter/registration incentive schemes
- Registration of households in new build properties
- Electoral Roll and other Council household documentation (Council Tax lists, etc)
- Capacity of present resources to cope with changes in registration administration imposed by Government

Conduct of elections will include consideration of:

- the current processes and means of voting permitted within the law
- current means of voting, and the trends in voter participation locally and nationally
- pre-polling/election day information for voters
- location and size of polling stations
- accessibility and suitability of polling stations
- information and access issues for local people in voting processes
- role/actions of polling station staff
- role and location of tellers at polling stations
- opening hours of polling stations

Both areas will include consideration of:

- All electoral processes– National, European, Council and Parish elections.
- Advertising/marketing and communications
- what the Council does / can develop in partnership, to promote democracy within schools and colleges (students),
- how technology might help achieve the above outcomes

This review will not consider

- alternative voting arrangements that have been piloted nationally but are not yet permitted within current legislation

- service management arrangements
- awareness raising and support to potential candidates (to be considered in the Member Services T&FG review)

## **Approach**

### An assessment of the current service:-

- receive information/briefings on the current means of registration and voting, and the trends in voter registration and participation locally and nationally as set out in the Scope
- examine the resource base for the service
- examine those conclusions of the CPU report commissioned by the Head of Democratic Services which have relevance to this review
- be advised by the Returning Officer/Electoral Registration Officer on matters of election and electoral registration law and practice
- examine whether the Council can use its various other data sources (within Data Protection provisions) to compare household information and enhance the Electoral Roll.

This will be carried out by an Officers briefing/Q&A with the Task and Finish Group.

### Explore alternative methods and good practice elsewhere

- key documents from Electoral Commission and Government (“Securing the vote”, Government response, “Understanding Electoral Registration”)
- Seek comparative information from similar councils
- investigate how technology might help achieve the outcomes set out above

This will be carried out by desktop study of key documents/websites and a potential visit to a nearby local authority that uses alternative/good practice methods

### Seek evidence from current and potential service users about

- perceptions/preconceptions of elections and electoral processes
- barriers to participation
- possible improvements/removal of barriers

This will be carried out by a half day contributors’ session, inviting

- Young voters and potential voters: (DAFBY, Youth and Community Service Youth Club)
- Young/new voters: Colleges and students (contact via Student Liaison Advisory Committee)
- Coalition of Disabled People
- Representative of the elderly
- Representative of the disadvantaged
- Racial Equalities Council

## Outputs of this Review

- Notes and papers from public Resources O&S Panel meetings
- Recommendations to the Executive Member for Resources (including draft criteria for good practice in provision of polling stations).

## Constraints

- The review must be managed within the budget and resources available to the Panel.
- The review must be completed in sufficient time to feed into budget setting processes for 2006/07 budget, in light of potential new legislative requirements from May 2006.

## Draft Outline Project Plan

<b>Date</b>	<b>Stage / Activity</b>	<b>Meeting Type</b>
29 <sup>th</sup> September 2005	Draft Terms of Reference (TOR) discussed at Resources Panel meeting.	Public
12 <sup>th</sup> October	Task and Finish Group to meet to agree full scope of the review, and Terms of Reference for approval by the Resources OS Panel on	Informal
27 <sup>th</sup> October	Confirm draft TOR and whether T&FG to go ahead, and timescales	Public
First week Nov	Circulation of information/desktop study	Informal
Before 15 <sup>th</sup> Nov	Officer briefing	Informal
Dec 8 <sup>th</sup>	Comparison information	Visit
Dec 13 <sup>th</sup>	Contributors Session	Public
Dec 19 <sup>th</sup>	Conclusions and Recommendations drafting	Informal
26 <sup>th</sup> January	Recommendations presented to Panel	Public
Approx 6 weeks	Executive Member response at Panel meeting	Public

## Project Team

<b>Task and Finish Group</b>	Cllr David Bellotti Cllr Shaun McGall Cllr Brian Webber
<b>Directors:</b>	Jean Hinks, Resources Director
<b>Service Officers:</b>	Vernon Hitchman, Returning Officer and Electoral Registration Officer Graham Russell, Head of Democratic Services Tom Dunne, Democratic Services Manager (Council and Member Services) Carol Nicholds, Elections Services Manager
<b>O&amp;S Project Officer:</b>	Anna Burgess
<b>Panel Administrator,</b>	Michael Owen