

<b>Review Title: Review of Electoral Services</b>
<b>Overview &amp; Scrutiny Panel: Resources (Task &amp; Finish Group)</b>
<b>Panel Chairman: Cllr. David Bellotti</b>
<b>Overview &amp; Scrutiny Project Officer: Anna Burgess</b>
<b>Supporting Service Officer(s): Vernon Hitchman, Solicitor to the Council / Graham Russell, Head of Democratic Services / Tom Dunne, Democratic Services Manager (Council and Member Services)</b>

### **Process for Tracking O&S Recommendations - Guidance note for Executive Members**

The enclosed table lists all the recommendations arising from the above Overview & Scrutiny Review. Individual recommendations are referred to the relevant named Executive Members (or whole Executive in the case of a whole Executive referral) as listed in the '**Exec Member**' column of the table. In order to provide the O&S Panel with an Executive response on each recommendation, the named Executive member (or whole Executive) is asked to complete the last 3 columns of the table as follows:

#### **Decision Response**

The Executive has the following options:

- **Accept** the Panel's recommendation
- **Reject** the Panel's recommendation
- **Defer** a decision on the recommendation because a response cannot be given at this time. This could be because the recommendation needs to be considered in light of a future Executive decision, imminent legislation, relevant strategy development or budget considerations, etc.

#### **Implementation Date**

- For 'Accept' decision responses, give the date that the recommendation will be implemented.
- For 'Defer' decision responses, give the date that the recommendation will be reconsidered.
- For 'Reject' decisions this is not applicable so write n/a

#### **Rationale**

Use this space to explain the rationale for your decision response and implementation date. For accepted recommendations, please give details of how they will be implemented.

## Electoral Services Review: Recommendations

Recommendation	Exec Member	Decision Response	Implementation Date	Rationale
<b><i>General Recommendation</i></b>				
<p><b>1. The Task &amp; Finish Group recognise that the Council must take on board all potential requirements as outlined in the bill going through parliament. Despite the major ensuing resource implications this should be seen as an opportunity to progress the service rather than a detrimental cost to the Council. The Task &amp; Finish group recommends that the council is proactive in making improvements and pursuing new innovative practices in response to the changes in the law.</b></p>	<p>Cllr. Malcolm Hanney</p>	<p>Reject</p>	<p>n/a</p>	<p>The Electoral Administration Bill currently before Parliament contains far-reaching proposals to modernise the British elections system. If sufficient time is made available in the parliamentary timetable the Bill will become law later in 2006. The Local Government Association in identifying key issues in the Bill has stated that “the Bill’s measures to strengthen electoral administration will create new burdens for local councils that will need to be properly funded by government in order to maintain current high standards.”</p> <p>Preliminary work done by the Electoral Registration Officers of the unitary authorities in this area, since the Panel completed its review, suggests that there could be extra costs for this authority in the region of £25k per year for the canvass (beginning in 2006/07) and £40k in an election year (the next one in 2007/08). This represents a considerable extra demand on resources at a time when the Council is already facing significant budget</p>

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				<p>pressures.</p> <p>I consider therefore that the implementation of any new electoral arrangements must be related only to the legislative requirements. Given the existing resource pressures facing this Council I do not consider that we should engage in any pilot or experimental work which might be wasted when the Bill goes through Parliament in its final form and at that stage imposes new obligations on Councils.</p>
<b><i>Recommendations to improve the registration process</i></b>				
<p><b>2. Mindful of the fact that Students in Halls of Residence are already block registered and that the Solicitor to the Council has advised that there is no legal objection, the Task &amp; Finish Group recommend that the Council should liaise with the Universities to ensure that <u>all</u> students are block registered, not just those in Halls of Residence.</b></p>	<p>Cllr. Malcolm Hanney</p>	<p>Defer</p>	<p>Depending on the response of the Higher and Further Education Institutions.</p> <p>Review in 6 months</p>	<p>This proposal needs to be considered at a strategic management level between the Council and representatives of the Universities and Colleges. There could be resourcing implications for the institutions and also legal aspects to be examined by them such as data protection to safeguard the rights of the individual students. Further action depends on these investigations and the institutions` response. I will ask the Chief Executive to raise with the senior management of the Higher and Further Education Institutions. I hold the view that any action on the</p>

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				Council's part that might be needed to make this happen would have to be affordable within existing budgets.
<p><b>2.1. The group are aware of discussions taking place between the Council's Revenues and Benefits department and the Universities regarding Council tax data. This discussion should be extended to include the sharing of information for block registering purposes.</b></p>	Cllr. Malcolm Hanney	Defer subject to further consideration	<p>Dependent on consideration by Support Services Director and possible discussion with Higher Education institutions.</p> <p>Review in 6 months.</p>	<p>I will ask the Support Services Director to progress discussions with the institutions only if she is satisfied that there is a realistic prospect of them being able to supply reliable information in a format that can be used for this purpose. I have reservations about the institutions being in a position to provide reliable information on the current addresses of students living off-campus and about what steps might be needed to obtain the consent of individual students to allow this information to be released. Again I hold the view that any action on the Council's part that might be needed to make this happen would have to be affordable within existing budgets.</p>

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<p><b>3. The registration objective of the Council is to ensure that as many people as possible are registered in time for Elections. The introduction of a rolling register means that the work load peaks should be distributed more evenly across the year. To these ends the Task &amp; Finish Group recommend</b></p> <p><b>3.1. That the first letter requesting registration details is sent out in early September rather than August when the likelihood of people being away is reduced.</b></p>	Cllr. Malcolm Hanney	Reject	n/a	<p>I am advised that the letter is currently sent out during the first week in September. It cannot be delayed otherwise there would not be enough time to process the responses as the Council is still obliged to consider the 15<sup>th</sup> October as the relevant date for inclusion in the next year's Electoral Register which has to be published by the 1<sup>st</sup> December each year. The rolling Register allows updates to be made throughout the year, but that has not removed the 1<sup>st</sup> December deadline for publication of the Register and the requirement for that to be as accurate and complete as possible.</p> <p>Depending on the new arrangements for compiling the Register that are introduced as a result of the Electoral Administration Bill, it is possible that it might be necessary to begin mailing even earlier in the year, so as to allow enough time for responses to be processed before the door-to-door canvass is started.</p>
<p><b>3.2. That the Council wait until January to send out the reminder letter to those who have not responded to the first letter. Although this is after the registration publication date, the</b></p>	Cllr. Malcolm Hanney	Reject	n/a	<p>The Electoral Register is required to be published on the 1<sup>st</sup> December each year and the Council has a duty to ensure that it is as accurate and complete as possible when it is published.</p>

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<p><b>Task &amp; Finish Group believes that more people will be captured at this time, especially in the lead up to an election and this will also alleviate some of the pressure on the team in September to November.</b></p>				<p>If no reminder was issued during the autumn a lower response rate would be the result so the Register when published would be much less complete. In 2005 the response rate after the initial letter was sent out was 69.32%; this rose to 87% after the reminder.</p> <p>Delaying the reminder until January instead of issuing it in the autumn would not alleviate pressure on staff to any significant degree as they would still have to compile the Register for publication on 1<sup>st</sup> December. There would however be an increase in pressure on staff in January/February at a time of year when this would not be helpful, because the Elections Service is already under pressure at that time to ensure that the rolling Register is kept updated for elections, the majority of which (other than by-elections) normally take place between April and July.</p> <p>Issuing the second reminder in January would result in an extra cost in the region of £4k because the temporary staff engaged to prepare the Register in the autumn would need to be re-engaged at a time they were not normally required.</p>

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<p><b>3.3. That every other year a canvass should take place of those properties that are not on the register or are about to come off, with the first canvas in early 2007. If there are serious cost pressures this should be piloted using three wards with the largest number of unregistered properties and properties about to come off the register.</b></p>	<p>Cllr. Malcolm Hanney</p>	<p>Reject</p>	<p>n/a</p>	<p>Because the Electoral Administration Bill in its current form includes proposals to require Councils to carry out a door-to-door canvass of non-responding properties, I consider that any action should await the implementation of that legislation.</p> <p>There is already an established system in place with the Council's Transportation, Access and Waste Management Service which is responsible for street naming and numbering, to ensure that Electoral Services are notified of all new properties. The only properties not shown on the Register are those where forms have not been returned by the householder.</p>
<p><b>3.4. That by using the emerging Electronic Document and Record Management System, the Council should use these canvasses for the information needs of other Council departments and not just for registration purposes.</b></p>	<p>Cllr. Malcolm Hanney</p>	<p>Reject</p>	<p>n/a</p>	<p>Because the Electoral Administration Bill in its current form includes proposals that will change the way registration information is collected and validated, I see no reason to pre-empt that. I have reservations about the use of canvass details for other Council services without the express consent of the individuals concerned.</p>
<p><b>4. The Council should send out the September registration forms to residents along with other information</b></p>	<p>Cllr. Malcolm Hanney</p>	<p>Reject</p>	<p>n/a</p>	<p>The Electoral Commission have issued good practice guidance to local authorities stating that electoral material should not be</p>

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<p><b>that goes out from the Council at the same time, e.g. Council News, Council tax etc. This will save cost and also act to engage more people with the registration process.</b></p>				<p>combined with any other mailings. This Council adheres to that.</p> <p>There is a risk that if elections material is delivered alongside other promotional or publicity literature it will be disregarded as junk mail.</p> <p>The Council Tax bills are issued in March/April. This is a time of year that does not fit into the timetable for electoral registration mailings.</p>
<p><b>5. The Council should be actively liaising with and learning from similar local authorities who are implementing changes to their elections and registrations services in time for May 2006 elections.</b></p>	Cllr. Malcolm Hanney	Accept	Ongoing	<p>This is already happening. The Council subscribes to the Association of Electoral Administrators which is the national body representing the profession throughout the country. Electoral Services staff participate in regional meetings with other authorities in the south west and especially the four neighbouring unitary authorities.</p>
<p><b><i>Recommendations to improve the election turnout</i></b></p>				
<p><b>6. The Task &amp; Finish Group would urge the Executive to put forward Bath &amp; North East Somerset for a pilot scheme candidate in May 2007 should an appropriate opportunity arise.</b></p>	Cllr. Malcolm Hanney	Reject	n/a	<p>Given the existing resource pressures facing this Council I support the view previously voiced by Group Leaders that we should not engage in any pilot work. This would have extra resource implications and place considerable additional pressures on the Elections</p>



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				Service staff who are already stretched in preparing for the implementation of the changes being brought in nationally whilst continuing to run the existing service. The Council should not anticipate what we will be required by law to do nor pre-empt whatever decisions Parliament makes on the Electoral Administration Bill.
<p><b>7. In the wake of mandatory electronic registration systems the Council should pilot the operation of Super Polling Stations. This could be under the guise of a government pilot or independently. The Task &amp; Finish Group suggest the following locations for these Super Polling Station pilots:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>The Guildhall</b></li> <li>• <b>A supermarket somewhere in North East Somerset</b></li> <li>• <b>The Royal United Hospital</b></li> <li>• <b>The University of Bath</b></li> </ul>	Cllr. Malcolm Hanney	Defer	<p>Consider only if and when electronic registration is in place and there is experience of it working.</p> <p>This is several years ahead.</p>	Consideration of this should be put on hold until arrangements nationally for electronic registration are in place and there is experience of them working. To avoid the risk of electoral fraud, there would need to be a robust electronic registration system in place, capable of instantly transmitting any entry on the Register made when a person had voted at any polling station, to all the other polling stations in Bath and North East Somerset.
<p><b>8. The Council should look into the possibility of using outlets that have electronic information points to promote election participation. For example, informing the public of the election date, reminding people to vote on Election Day and giving simple</b></p>	Cllr. Malcolm Hanney	Defer to investigate further	<p>When investigated.</p> <p>Review in 6 months.</p>	I will ask the Customer Services Director to investigate the feasibility of displaying information to encourage people to register as electors by electronic messaging etc at Council service points such as libraries, leisure centres.

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<p><b>information about polling station hours. This could be done at minimal cost and be run on plasma screens at the Cinema, at banks, local post offices, local libraries and in the University library.</b></p>				<p>I will ask the Chief Executive to discuss with the senior management of the Higher and Further Education Institutions if they are willing to make available the facilities to run such promotions on their premises in locations such as the libraries, students unions, staff rooms etc.</p> <p>If this has resource implications I hold the view that it should only go ahead if it is affordable within existing budgets.</p>
<p><b>9. Two members of the Task &amp; Finish Group recommend that the Council should explore using a variety of incentives to get people out to vote. These could include</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>• Appropriate commercial sponsorship of raffle prizes or vouchers for voters.</b></li> <li><b>• The Council itself offering a raffle of winning free Council Tax for the year or offering a voucher towards a Council service, such as a leisure centre, for everyone who votes. This way people would see the connection between voting and the services the candidates will be responsible for.</b></li> </ul>	Cllr. Malcolm Hanney	Reject	n/a	<p>I would not support offering promotions at the public expense that seek to inveigle people into doing what is their civic duty. I am concerned about the legal implications and because it would be contrary to the Council's commitment to equal treatment of Bath and North East Somerset residents.</p>

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<b>10. An interactive CDROM should be produced for 16 year olds in Bath &amp; North East Somerset educating them from a local perspective about registration and voting.</b>	Cllr. Malcolm Hanney / Cllr Jonathan Gay	Reject	n/a	I have discussed this proposal with the Executive Member for Children`s Services as the budget for the Youth Democracy Project / Citizenship Programme in Schools is his responsibility. He has indicated that, whilst he is sympathetic in principle, he cannot allocate resources to this given the current pressures on the LEA Education/Youth Services Budgets and the savings required in those areas.
<b>11. All polling cards should include a map on the back showing routes of how to get to the polling stations in the ward; this information should also be available on the Electoral Services webpage.</b>	Cllr. Malcolm Hanney	Reject	n/a	Work is in progress to bring the Council`s GIS systems to a stage where this level of information could be provided. I may consider this suggestion at a future time when resources permit but that will not be before the 2007 Elections.
<b>12. The Council should adopt a more robust strategy to obtain the best polling station facilities for the voter in each area, where necessary requiring schools to make their premises available. If planned for far enough in advance the school calendar could be rearranged accordingly.</b>	Cllr. Malcolm Hanney	Accept	In preparing for each election	The selection of polling stations is the responsibility of the Solicitor to the Council as the Electoral Registration and Returning Officer. I urge him to use the powers available to him to ensure that suitable premises for polling stations are obtained.