

THEME 2



ELECTORAL SERVICES

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The efficiency and effectiveness of electoral services is fundamental to a healthy democracy. Many of our electoral practices and procedures have been rooted in history and tradition. In recent years we have seen a number of changes designed to modernise the services provided, increase registration, make voting more convenient and encourage participation by all sections of the community, while at the same time ensuring that confidence in the integrity of the electoral process is maintained.

I am delighted that Electoral Services has been selected as one of the themes for Round 8 of the Beacon Scheme as this fits in very well with our own plans to improve service provision through legislation and performance measures and we are sure that the scheme will support service improvements by allowing providers to follow the example of excellent service providers.

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Harriet Harman

Minister of State for Constitutional Affairs

ELECTORAL SERVICES continued

Britain is described as the Mother of Democracies and the framework for delivering electoral services is held up as a model for other countries to copy. Nevertheless there is plenty of room for improvement.

The most recent major legislative impetus for modernisation has been the Electoral Administration Bill, which was introduced in the House of Commons on 11th October 2005. A raft of new regulations largely dealing with the security issues arising out of postal voting will also be a product of this modernising agenda.

Electoral Services encompasses all the procedures involved in compiling and publishing the Register of Electors, dealing with absent vote applications and in the administration of all elections. The overall aim of these services is to manage the electoral registration and elections process in a transparent, accountable and innovative manner thus ensuring that we are all able to engage in the electoral process and influence decisions that affect all our lives.

Although the Electoral Administration Bill will play a significant role in modernising electoral services, we are aware of the potentially significant impact that Beacon authorities can have both in terms of developing policy and in guiding their peer authorities towards the levels of excellence they have already reached.

Beacon authorities will ensure that there is a locally driven agenda of change, which will impact on three key tenets of the service: improving registration levels, encouraging participation and ensuring that processes are secure.

Recent research has shown that certain groups are least likely to be registered. These groups include African, Caribbean's, those renting from private landlords or letting agents, and students.

Turnout at elections has declined steadily. Although the turnout at the 2005 General Election rose to 61% as compared to the 59% in 2001, the 59% figure was the lowest since 1918 and 12% lower than in 1997. At the General Election in 2001 the number of people voting by post was 1.8 million. The number of postal voters at the 2005 General Election rose to 6.5 million. This rise in numbers of postal voters coupled with the publicity arising out of some high profile electoral fraud cases has highlighted the need to ensure that processes are secure.

The introduction of the ability to conduct pilot schemes some five years ago has led to a number of innovative and imaginative schemes undertaken by authorities for local government elections. It should be possible to build on the experiences of those pilots in launching the Electoral Services Beacon theme.

In identifying three key tenets of the service which will be transformed by the innovation and peer support offered by Beacon authorities it is recognised that these key tenets are not mutually exclusive and that other key areas are open to service delivery improvement.

Beacon authorities will need to demonstrate that they are already delivering or are about to embark on innovations which will tackle complex electoral services issues and which will ultimately result in more responsive and inclusive service provision.

ELECTORAL SERVICES THEME ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

Leadership: Vision and Strategy

- Evidence of a clear vision and a strategy of corporate commitment to positively promote and support service improvement in all key aspects of electoral services
- Evidence that resources and expertise have been mapped and deployed to implement the service delivery improvement.

Community and Customer Engagement

- Evidence that services are designed and delivered around the needs of citizens
- Evidence that attention is paid to the needs and expectations of various sections of the community and other stakeholders
- Evidence that strategies and policies are developed through active engagement and consultation with communities and key stakeholders in order to understand actual and perceived problems and to consider how these are best addressed.

Actions

- Evidence of the development, active promotion and delivery of a package of methods, including innovative and less formal approaches, with clear objectives, targets and indicators

- Evidence of clear coordinated service planning and a review process with effective involvement of stakeholders
- Evidence of the use of schemes such as local democracy week or Electoral Commission registration campaigns to assist in delivering improvements and raising awareness
- Evidence of raising awareness in specific areas of service provision. For example how to apply for a postal vote and the availability of the rolling registration facility
- Evidence that the authority is developing and has in place systems designed to improve the service provided to other stakeholders, such as political parties, Government Departments and the Electoral Commission. For example the administration of the supply of the Register of Electors and the marked Register of Electors to political parties; the administration of the return of election accounts to the Elections Claims Unit and the administration of any responses to information requested by The Electoral Commission.

Partnerships

- Evidence that the authority has defined each relevant partnership and its role in delivering this theme
- It has described what each partnership achieved
- It has identified the key lessons that were learnt.

Equality and Diversity

- Evidence that there is a corporate commitment to tackle equality and diversity issues in the provision of electoral services
- There is a corporate commitment to identify the needs of specific groups and that electoral services are responsive to their needs.

Outcomes

- Evidence that the authority is making a discernible difference to the quality, diversity and scope of the electoral services that they deliver to their community
- Delivering a more effective, efficient and accessible service

- Developing and has in place systems which will encourage sections of the community which have previously not been engaged, such as the young, BME groups and other harder to reach groups, to engage in the democratic process at and between elections. These systems will encourage members of these groups to register to vote and once registered will encourage them to vote and also to play an active part in democratic life between elections through engagement with opportunities made available to them locally
- Developing and has in place well-directed and responsive public engagement opportunities which address local needs and concerns
- Developing and has in place systems which will facilitate the compilation of a more accurate and comprehensive Register of Electors
- Improving voter confidence and satisfaction levels by taking steps to ensure that electoral fraud is mitigated against.