

# THE BEACON SCHEME 2006 APPLICATION FORM

PART 1 - AUTHORITY INFORMATION	
Authority Name	<b>London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham</b>
Beacon Theme	<b>Electoral Services</b>
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This application can be made available on the IDeA web site once Beacon awards have been made	<b>Yes</b>
Application Number	<b>2261</b>
Application Status	<b>Submitted</b>

### 2.1 Please summarise the excellent practice for which you are seeking Beacon Status.

Electoral Services in Hammersmith and Fulham is widely regarded (by the Electoral Commission, administrators and other stakeholders) as a centre of excellence both in London and nationally. Registration levels are consistently high, given the borough's position as an inner London authority, and the service is at the forefront in introducing new practices within existing electoral law.

In H&F, our Electoral Services score very highly on the two key measures of registration and electoral turnout. Since 1998, the borough has increased its ranking for return of registration forms from 4<sup>th</sup> to 1<sup>st</sup> in inner London (out of fourteen authorities) and from 19th to 4th for all London boroughs (thirty-three authorities). It also has the best improvement rate of high-performing councils since a shorter annual canvass period was introduced in 2001. This long record of continuous improvement is something of which H&F is rightly proud.

To support this improvement, innovations such as phone and internet registration have been introduced in recent years in order to allow better fit with residents' preferences. The participation of local residents in elections is actively encouraged; they are invited each election through local advertising to join the electoral team as part of an "active citizenship" programme.

These new methods are among several innovations that Hammersmith and Fulham has pioneered in recent years. Others include:

- 1997 telephone helpline on poll cards
- 1998 maps on poll cards
- 1999 training for polling station staff
- 2000 confirmation of registration to all households
- 2000 pictorial information guide for postal voters
- 2001 Plain English postal voting packs
- 2001 faxback/attachment to email of all application forms
- 2001 all application forms available online
- 2001 online recruitment of election staff
- 2001 phone registration for "no change" households
- 2002 voter guide to all households
- 2003 electronic (email/fax) registration of overseas and service electors
- 2003 online recruitment of canvassers
- 2003 phone registration in 9 non-English languages
- 2003 internet registration for "no change" households
- 2004 postal voting guide to all postal voters
- 2005 polling station finder and registration checking online
- 2006 introduction of CINEMA data sharing software
- 2006 proxy voting guide to all appointed proxies
- 2006 "one piece mailer" postal voting packs
- 2006 automated calculation of ward results at count
- 2006 Language Line translation service available in polling stations

In summary, Hammersmith and Fulham Council is applying for Beacon status for Electoral Services because we have

a long-standing record of innovation which is reflected in consistent high performance in both voter registration and turnout. H&F possesses a strong track record in areas chosen by government for service reform; we are "tried and trusted" and successful in how and what we deliver.

This application is a clear sign of H&F's corporate and individual commitment to learning and improving. If successful in this bid, Electoral Services would use Beacon Council status not only to disseminate the good practice and innovative approach for which it is widely regarded but also to facilitate a further drive for improvement through the knowledge and learning that we can capture from others.

## 2.2 Leadership, Vision and Strategy.

Electoral Services has a number of distinct features that set it apart from other council functions. One of these is the pivotal position occupied by the service between the democratic and the bureaucratic faces of the council. For this reason Electoral Services has to show leadership and itself be led across both the political and administrative contexts.

H&F Electoral Services clearly demonstrates such leadership in the political paradigm through consensus-building with all the major political parties locally. This is best shown by reference to the organising and leading role taken by the service in the Elections Forum, which is important for providing clear lines of communication and feedback for the service over and above any political preferences or party priorities. Through this, H&F provides a platform for debate on electoral and election issues and ensures that the views of all parties are incorporated into local electoral and election practice.

In terms of service management and development, Hammersmith and Fulham clearly articulates its direction of travel for Electoral Services through an interlinked series of strategies and plans.

The long-term vision of life in the borough is outlined in Hammersmith and Fulham's Community Strategy. This was refreshed in 2004/05 and at the same time commitment was renewed to the three main borough priorities; a "fair chance", "convenient services" and "safe, clean and green". The provision of Electoral Services fits neatly under the "fair chance" and "convenient services" priorities.

With this in mind, the medium-term vision for the service was set out as part of the Best Value Review of Electoral Services. A wide range of issues was considered as part of this review, including the organisation of the annual voter registration canvass, the take-up of rolling registration, engagement of community groups and young voters, the nature of complaints received at elections and findings from customer satisfaction surveys. This review was conducted over three years and the final report and Improvement Plan was published in April 2004. This Plan set out actions, over a three-year period, which were designed to enhance the continued rate of improvement in registration and turnout that has been in evidence since the late 1990s.

To provide the political buy-in critical to the success of the review, the Service Review Team included representatives from each of the three major political parties (including a Cabinet Member and the Leader of the Opposition). They were integral to all decisions taken by the review team, which was vital for providing clear and objective direction for the development of the service over and above any political preferences or party priorities, and for ensuring that plans for ongoing improvements were "future-proofed" wherever possible.

The actions contained within the three-year Improvement Plan are reviewed and refreshed through the annual service planning process undertaken by Electoral Services in common with all other council functions. This process provides the short-term framework for service management and development. Targets and actions from the Electoral Services plan are incorporated upwards into the annual Best Value Performance Plan and are translated down into staff workplans. This ensures that a "golden thread" of direction and performance is maintained right through the council and the service to the individual officer.

In order to ensure the smooth and prompt delivery of the scheduled improvements resulting from the Best Value review, the Electoral Services team was restructured and expanded in 2005/06. This provided extra staffing resources specifically for the development of community engagement and customer service; areas highlighted in the review as being in need of further development.

Alongside this enhancement, another new service offering has led to a step-change in the service offered to electors. The implementation of the council's new Customer Contact Centre as part of its Customer First Strategy means that first-line Electoral Services enquiries can be dealt with by a fully-trained team of customer services officers. This service is available six days a week (twelve hours a day on weekdays) at times that are more convenient for electors. It can deal with the majority of enquiries, leaving the Electoral Services team free to concentrate on service development and management.

## 2.3 Community and customer engagement.

Electoral Services has the largest customer base in the council - indeed polling day is the one occasion when the greatest number of customers comes into personal contact with a council service. However, the very nature of registration and an election mean that a customer's engagement with the service is limited to a small number of distinct transactions. This makes it very important to deliver faster, reliable and innovative services, which utilise new technology to the full.

Electoral Services in Hammersmith and Fulham therefore offers "multi channel" methods of voter registration and voting, to take advantage of the available technologies so that citizens can use the service when and how it suits them best. Telephone, internet and postal methods of registration are supplemented with extensive personal canvassing to capture as many potential electors as possible.

Personal canvassing has always been retained in H&F as it is considered to be the most effective method of capturing outstanding returns. The intensive approach employed by H&F means that properties are visited up to twenty times in some cases, on different days and at different times. Language issues can be dealt with on the spot as canvassers now have the Language Line translation service at their disposal. In short this means that anyone who wants to and is entitled to appear on the electoral register has ample opportunity to do so.

The benefits of this proactive approach are clearly reflected in the high registration levels and turnout shown in H&F. On the key measurement of response to the annual canvass, the borough has been highest in Inner London, and 4<sup>th</sup> in London as a whole, for both 2004 and 2005. Although the positions have been maintained, it should be noted that the rankings in 1998 were 4<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> respectively.

By telephone and email the Customer Contact Centre is the first point of call for electors. All contact centre staff are trained to send out confirmation of registration letters, voter registration, postal and proxy vote application forms, as well as to answer general Electoral Services enquiries. Complex enquiries are escalated to the Electoral Services team where necessary.

For information on-demand, Electoral Services has a well-developed and clearly signposted section on the council website. Local residents can download forms and factsheets as they need them. Electors are also able to request a details check through the site.

To those electors who choose to vote by post, a Postal Voting guide is sent that explains exactly how the system works and what electors need to do in order to vote this way. For electors that choose to vote in person, maps are printed on the poll cards and all but one polling station has step-free access. For voters whose first language is not English, there are nine phone registration lines, each in one of the major community languages, and for all sites Language Line (the telephone interpreting service) was on hand in all polling stations for the first time in the 2006 council elections.

Full training is provided for canvassers, presiding officers and poll clerks, which addresses the requirements of each role and its place within the efficient and effective provision of electoral services in the run up to and on election day. This enables all who take part to address at hand the needs of electors, residents and other stakeholders.

On election day itself, logbooks are kept by polling station staff, which enables Electoral Services to monitor comments, complaints and suggestions from electors and staff. This information is used to inform planning for future rounds of registration and elections. Hammersmith and Fulham further refines its offering to both electors and staff in the light of staff surveys undertaken after each election. These surveys, which covered count staff, poll clerks and presiding officers, were most recently carried out after the 2005 General Election and the 2006 council

election.

Feedback from political parties is solicited through the regular Elections Forum. Introduced in 2000, this provides a mechanism for capturing first-hand the views of mainstream and locally active political parties and groups. Two members from each of the three main political parties along with local agents and organisers are briefed on new legislation and initiatives from Electoral Services and are able to contribute fully to changes and developments within the Service.

As an example, following requests from political parties through the Forum, absent voting lists are now provided in a format that highlights new /amended/deleted absent voters, rather than providing a full list on every occasion. This enables parties and their agents to target their campaigns more effectively and also improves the efficiency with which election and campaign materials are distributed.

Electoral Services has also worked with Hammersmith and Fulham Action on Disability (HAFAD), a local community group, with the aim of setting up a disabled voters' forum. H&F has also used HAFAD's network of contacts to promote the services available to disabled voters. H&F also works with other community groups, such as West London Citizens, to provide advice and support on voter registration drives. This included the provision of materials as well as officer time at meetings and during the registration campaign. Publicity materials are regularly sent to over 800 community groups and contacts.

## 2.4 Actions.

In common with all service functions across the council, Electoral Services engages in an annual round of service planning, designed to identify performance, financial, training and development, procurement and risk plans and priorities for the year ahead and to update those from the previous period. This planning is supported by published guidance from the corporate centre, ensuring consistency in standards and the overall cohesion of the service planning process.

Electoral Services' plans and priorities slot into the departmental service plan which itself forms an integral part of the council's published Best Value Performance Plan, available from the end of every June.

In such a high-profile service area H&F is both active and prudent in its use of scrutiny to monitor and call to account service management and delivery. To this end the Leadership Scrutiny Panel requested and received a full progress update on the Best Value review Improvement Plan in February 2006 and the departmental service plan for 2006/07 in March 2006.

In 2005, as in other years, H&F hosted organised visits from young people from the borough's schools during Local Democracy Week in order to familiarise them with the presence and work of local government. This gives them the chance to question officers and members first hand about their work and is valuable in raising awareness amongst the next generation of local electors.

H&F is an active local partner in any third party voting campaigns and initiatives and promotes voter registration outside the annual canvass, most recently in February 2006 in conjunction with Hillingdon and Kensington and Chelsea when joint advertising was commissioned.

Once a voter's details are captured on the electoral register, H&F makes every effort to keep them there and up to date. Confirmation of registration letters are sent out to every household each New Year. They reconfirm the details to residents about who is registered to vote at their address, whether they are registered postal voters, and whether or not they are opted out of the edited register. Postal vote application forms and voter registration forms are included with these. In 2006, this generated approximately 3,000 new voter registrations, and 1,700 postal vote applications.

All households are sent a Voters Guide, which details what happens in a polling station, how postal voting works (with an application form), the location of polling stations, information on proxy voting etc. The guide also explains how votes are counted and how this translates into seats on the council, the Greater London Assembly and Parliament.

Additionally, the H&F voter registration form has included a "tick box" to enable residents to request information / application forms for postal voting since 1994, an innovation that has now become part of the prescribed form.

For overseas voters, H&F provides a factsheet on registering to vote as an overseas elector. This is sent with an application form to any eligible elector who appears to be moving overseas. H&F consistently holds one of the highest numbers of overseas electors as a result.

Postal voters are sent a postal voting guide prior to ballot papers being sent out. The guide is sent to each postal voter's "qualifying" address and to their away address, if there is one. The guide explains how postal voting works, and gives voters the chance to amend or cancel the arrangement they have in place. It also explains the procedures for obtaining a replacement postal vote should the original be spoilt, lost or undelivered.

H&F was one of the first councils to separate the registration of 16/17 year olds on to their own section of the annual canvass voter registration form. This is now part of the prescribed form and is also used on rolling registration application forms.

All canvassing staff are required to ask about any 16/17 year olds living at an address when they are carrying out house-to-house visits, and to register a nil response where there are none. This increased emphasis on emerging voters raised the number of 16/17 year olds registered from 891 in 2001 to 2,034 in 2006.

Staff in polling stations are given access to Language Line - and this facility is publicised at the polling station, so that voters can communicate with staff in their own language if this is more convenient for them.

For rolling registration, Electoral Services make use of CINEMA software that allows information about changes to household details to be shared across council departments. This currently includes Council Tax, Social Services and Housing. This enables individualised voter registration forms to be sent to voters moving into, out of or within the borough. It is expected that LEA records will also be included in future, which will enable Electoral Services to send voter registration and other electoral information directly to 16/17 year-olds resident and attending schools in the borough.

Outside of election periods the three mainstream political parties are engaged through the Elections Forum, the operation of which has been outlined elsewhere. During election periods, this is replaced by a Forum for Election Agents and Candidates. Agents and candidates are routinely offered appointments for an informal check of nomination papers. The Electoral Services Office offers an "open door" policy for candidates and agents seeking advice.

Electoral Services in H&F enjoys a productive working relationship with the Electoral Commission. The Electoral Services Manager was seconded to the Electoral Commission in 2002 to conduct a review of electoral forms. H&F granted full and free access to high-level representatives of the Commission to visit all aspects of the electoral service at elections in 2001, 2005 and 2006.

Electoral Services reminds local political parties to obtain up-to-date copies of the electoral register as a matter of course if they have not already done so. Councillors are sent the monthly amendments to their ward register via email. The data is sent to them in spreadsheet format, with an easy-to-use embedded function that allows colour coding to highlight where amendments have been made. All members are given advice about the legal use of the data.

## 2.5 Partnerships.

The Elections Forum has enabled the authority to form a strong and ongoing cross-political partnership leading to stability in the future direction of the service. To support this direction of travel key partnerships have been developed, where advantageous to do so, with internal and external providers.

The partial production of postal voting packs has been outsourced, greatly reducing clerical resources at the time of issue. This is very important as 11% (13,000) of electors now have a permanent postal vote, and the packs have to be prepared in a matter of days.

Electronic registration (phone and online) has been continued in partnership with Electoral Reform Services Ltd. This

service is used by 1 in 7 (15%) electors and means a significant reduction in the number of paper forms that have to be processed.

In August 2004, electoral services were the first major service to transfer incoming public telephone calls and emails to the Customer First contact centre. The centre now handles 60% of all calls, these being almost all public enquiries. This enables the main office to concentrate on calls from temporary electoral staff, outside bodies, and more complex enquiries. There has been a dramatic improvement in the number of calls answered quickly (especially at election time), with over 95% resolved at the first point of contact. Across the two offices 97% of calls are answered within the target 10 rings. The impact of the centre is best illustrated by the 2005 annual registration canvass, when 69% of household registrations were processed within 2 days (97% within 10 days). At the General Election a new "am I registered?" online enquiry service was introduced with no impact on the main office, as these were all answered by the contact centre.

We also value our partnership with the Electoral Commission and the DCA; this enables us to offer our practical solutions to legislative changes, as well as giving us insights into the development of national policy, and its application at the local level. The Electoral Services Manager was seconded to the Electoral Commission in 2002 to lead on a review of forms. H&F has also welcomed visits from Commissioners, staff and overseas observers at elections in 2001, 2005 and 2006. The Manager has also shared our experience on a number of DCA and Commission working groups, and is regularly consulted on one-off matters (topics include individual registration, anonymous registration, funding electoral services, design of registration forms, electoral fraud).

Our Best Value Review placed a high importance on providing equal access to the electoral process for all groups. Having laid firm foundations with improvements to core services, we are now developing some key initiatives which will develop through partnerships with key groups of residents. These include the following:

#### Young voters

- toolkit to be developed to assist citizenship education as part of the curriculum
- materials support for school council and other elections
- "question time" events in schools, involving local members/celebrities
- talks to schools by officers/sixth formers
- "take your parent to vote" at election time
- setting up advisory panel of teachers/youth officers
- setting up panel of young electors

#### Disabled electors

- survey work with disabled electors/voters to assess their needs
- briefing advisory groups of key electoral events
- working with other council services to identify vulnerable electors

#### Community groups

- piloting the use of translated forms for registering European Union citizens
- working with Registrars to encourage voter registration through citizenship ceremonies
- supplying publicity to community groups for newsletters, word of mouth, etc
- encouraging community groups to apply to the Electoral Commission's New Initiatives Fund for local educational work
- employing more members of community groups as registration canvassers
- offering balloting services to local groups
- meeting with community groups to tailor electoral services to their needs
- promoting registration for homeless people, remand prisoners and voluntary mental health patients

## 2.6 Equalities and Diversity.

Hammersmith and Fulham Council has a long-standing record of promoting equality of access and opportunity across the board. The Council has had a generic Equalities Scheme in place since 2005 that covers issues pertaining to race, disability, gender, age, faith and sexuality.

H&F is presently at Level 2 of the Equality Standard for Local Government and has made a corporate commitment to achieve Equality Standard Level 3 by March 2007, Level 4 by the end of 2007/2008 and Level 5 by 2009. As part of this process Electoral Services has undertaken a draft Equalities Impact Assessment which is currently in the process of assessment and validation. When complete, this assessment will directly inform the H&F Equalities Scheme Action Plan, which is monitored and reviewed every six months.

Electoral Services in H&F is responsive to the diverse needs of the community and takes action to meet them. High levels of voter registration and turnout bear testimony to this. All canvassers and polling station staff are trained in diversity and equalities awareness. Early action was taken to introduce large-print ballot papers (now statutory) and the Language Line interpretation service at polling stations.

Electoral Services has also worked with HAFAD to scope setting up a disabled voters' forum. H&F has also used HAFAD's network of contacts to promote the services available to disabled voters.

Electoral Services continues to encourage more attainers and young people to join the elections team. At the local elections in May 2006, borough schools were asked to publicise the availability of jobs on the count team. This resulted in 11 young people being employed on the night. Electoral Services intends to expand this engagement with young people into the canvass as well as to future election counts, and to the employment of young local residents in polling stations.

Because of the emphasis placed on household visits as part of the annual canvass, particular efforts are made with harder-to-reach electors. At the annual canvass, households that have not returned their form will be visited by a canvasser at least once and more as necessary. This means that if any particular group is less engaged with the service, the system will ensure that they receive particular attention as a matter of course.

The elections office is open during standard council office hours. In addition, the office is open for extended hours at times of elections. The customer contact centre is open 8am to 8pm Monday to Friday and 9am to 1pm Saturday, and during the hours of poll at an election.

The elections office reception area has step-free accessibility. Where polling stations do not have step-free accessibility, temporary ramps are provided for the duration of the poll. All but one of the polling stations currently used at elections have step-free accessibility. If an elector is unable to enter a polling station, the presiding officer has discretion to allow a vote to be cast outside of the building.

All forms and publications issued by the service carry information about the council's interpretation service in the major community languages of Russian, Polish, French, Spanish, Albanian, Amharic, Portuguese, Somali, Punjabi, Gujarati, Hindi, Urdu, Farsi and Arabic. Translations into these languages are carried out upon request. Some notices at polling stations carry key information in a selection of alternative languages. Telephone registration is available in 9 non-English languages.

## 2.7 Outcomes.

H&F views the registration of eligible electors as core to the service provided. Registration has increased steadily, from 82.93% of all households in 1993 to 96.13% of all households in 2006. This compares very favourably with the rest of London; H&F is ranked 1<sup>st</sup> of fourteen authorities in Inner London and 4<sup>th</sup> of thirty-three authorities in London as a whole. Turnout in all elections in H&F is markedly higher than comparable neighbouring boroughs.

An important contributor to this is H&F's canvass system, which is based on delivering multiple reminders and making repeated visits to households where no response is made to the initial voter registration form.

A household could receive four forms, as well as repeated personal visits before no response is concluded. Canvassers are not given a maximum number of visits to make meaning that some properties are tried up to 20 times, at different times of day, and on different days of the week.

Only 4% of properties do not respond by the time that the revised register is published in December. Some of these are empty or second homes.

Households not responding to the first two forms almost always fall into a "hard to reach" category. Personal canvassing increases the response to the annual canvass by approximately 23,000 households - around 28% of the total. Canvassers, in making face to face contact, are able to explain the legal requirement to register. They are given several aids with which to help residents to register, such as translation sheets and access to the Language Line interpreting service.

Rather than asking for details of eligible electors only, canvassers also request the details of 16 or 17 year olds living at every household visited. If there are none, this has to be recorded clearly on the form before residents sign the application. This has raised the number of registered attainers from 891 in 2001 to 2,034 in 2006.

Electoral Services is working with the council's Housing in Multiple Occupation (HMO) team to obtain information direct from landlords about their tenants, so that personalised forms can be sent to them directly or through the landlords.

Electors tend to see a poll card as a "ticket" to vote; they are now sent out in envelopes to help reinforce this perception. The number of complaints made to polling station staff about non poll card delivery has reduced from 353 at the local elections in 2002 to 112 at the 2006 election.

Electoral Services ensures the accuracy and coverage of the electoral register by assigning small canvass areas to each canvasser. Canvassers are fully trained and each is supported by a team leader.

Joint work is undertaken with other Council services, such as the GIS team and the gazetteer team. In addition, Electoral Services uses CINEMA software, which allows information about changes to household details to be shared across council departments.

Information from polling station logbooks is used to cleanse the register. Confirmations of voter registration provide further prompts for electors to check details of their registration. Regular cleansing of duplicate names on the register is carried out.

Close links exist with registrars in both H&F and neighbouring boroughs. They provide, on an ongoing basis, the names and addresses of newly-naturalised British citizens. Data from the Registrar for Births, Deaths and Marriages is obtained on a weekly basis. Deceased electors are removed from the register promptly to prevent the misappropriation of their details.

All annual canvass forms are hand delivered by the canvass team, who take personal responsibility for their canvass area, and the correct delivery of forms to households within it. Any undelivered forms are returned to H&F with an explanation as to why they remain undelivered. Close monitoring of returned forms allows for quick action to be taken if it appears that forms have not been delivered correctly. Risk is minimised because areas are small.

For telephone or internet registration, all voter registration forms carry a two part 10-digit code which is unique to each household. Residents wishing to register using these methods can do so only if they have the code along with the postcode of the property. As the form is hand-delivered, these methods can only be used by someone with access to the property. Additions to or deletions from the register are not available through phone or internet registration.

Rolling registration forms are not accepted where no information is given about a previous address; instead, these are queried by Electoral Services. Any form that appears to be "dubious" is checked against other council records for corroborative evidence. Where necessary, electoral services staff use the ERO powers to request proof of identity, residence and nationality.

To mitigate against postal voting fraud, all postal voters are sent an acknowledgement of their application. When an election is imminent, all postal voters are sent a postal voters' guide to both their registered address and the "away" address, if there is one. Voters are offered the opportunity to cancel or change any arrangement they have in place,

and the signature on any application is checked against the original application. These measures allow voters the opportunity to alert electoral services to any irregularities that may occur.

Presiding Officers are also provided with a "log book" to note the names and addresses of anyone delivering more than 2 postal votes to a polling station. The logbook also contains a pro-forma for electors to complete if a postal vote has not arrived, or was delivered but not applied for.

All declarations are barcoded, so that if a request for a replacement ballot paper is made, a quick check is made to ensure that a voter has not already completed a postal vote form.

Poll cards are enveloped to provide greater security. Polling station staff, as part of their training, are reminded of the need to ask every voter to confirm their name and address, not to rely on the production of a poll card to determine the identity of the person applying for a ballot paper.

### 3 **Outline, with reference to a specific case (a geographical area, a particular section of the community, an individual or particular issue) how you have taken action to address an issue and the impact that this action has had.**

#### **Hammersmith & Fulham and registration reforms of 2000**

##### **Background**

The Representation of the People Act 2000 introduced a new system of voter registration, as well as postal voting on demand. It brought in rolling registration, and also provided for a shorter period for the annual voter registration canvass. The time to compile a new register was reduced from about 22 to 12 weeks, to enable revised registers to be published in December each year.

This presented a massive challenge to all electoral services offices across the country. Many councils dropped personal canvassing, because of the shorter time for canvass, and the availability of rolling registration to make good any missing returns. However, since 2001, registration levels have generally fallen across the country. This has been highlighted in the parliamentary debates during progress of the Electoral Administration Bill. Minimum standards for the canvass now appear on the face of the Bill, in order to improve general registration rates.

H&F took a different approach to the challenge presented by the 2000 Act. Rather than reduce activity to fit the shorter canvass period, a conscious decision was made to restructure the operation to maintain and improve registration levels. H&F takes the view that registration is a continuous activity, with the canvass seen as an integral part of rolling registration rather than a separate exercise.

##### **Action**

In early 2001, all households received a promotional leaflet explaining rolling registration, as well as a form for house-movers to complete. The new postal voting rules were explained, and a form was provided to everyone.

In each year, since 2001 rolling registration and postal voting has been actively promoted.

The shorter canvass required us to dramatically alter the way we compiled the voters list:

- H&F introduced smaller canvass areas, to make canvasser workloads more manageable.
- More canvassers were recruited, especially non-council staff from the local community.
- Canvass team leaders were introduced to help us monitor the process closely and ensure staff kept to the timetable.
- The canvasser training programme was radically altered to reflect the tighter timetable. Canvassers are introduced to 'real-life' situations with demonstrations from actors as well as theoretical knowledge and practical advice.
- H&F canvassers are paid on a performance-related basis.
- Certificates of Achievement, and financial bonuses, were introduced for high performing individuals, and the best-performing team
- Extra reminders are sent to non-responding households at more frequent intervals. This helps to keep non-responders aware of their requirement to register into the visit stage.
- In partnership with 3 other councils and Vote It Ltd, H&F developed the first use of telephone registration for "no-change" households to confirm their details. This was a major innovation, designed specifically to encourage quicker registrations, and to reduce clerical workloads in the office. This work was progressed with the successor-supplier (Electoral Reform Services) in 2002.
- H&F decided to expand e-registration in 2003 and were the first council in the UK to offer online internet registration, having developed our own software. A partnership with Electoral Reform Services enabled them to roll-out internet registration to other councils in 2004.
- Every household is written to in February to confirm the details supplied at the canvass. This enables Electoral Services to correct any errors and to pick up home movers.

- Electoral Services is always investigating new, more effective, ways to reach new residents to encourage rolling registration. Since 2001 H&F has included a form with new council tax bills, written by name to new taxpayers, as well as making forms available online. H&F is now one of the first councils to join-up data from a wider range of council services (council tax, housing, social services, benefits) to identify changes of address.
- New British citizens are now actively encouraged to register, through weekly data exchange with the Citizenship Office.

## **Outcomes**

The reforms introduced by H&F in 2001 have put the service in a strong position.

In the run-up to the 2001 General Election, nearly 5,000 rolling registration changes were made to the register - one of the highest take-ups in the UK at that time. H&F is now making around 12,500 rolling registration changes to the register each year (as well as over 50,000 during each canvass).

The percentage of electors with a postal vote was the 23<sup>rd</sup> highest out of 659 constituencies in 2001. At the 2005 General Election, 15% of electors had a postal vote - H&F ranked 128<sup>th</sup>, but a considerable number of higher placed constituencies have conducted all-postal ballots at intervening elections.

Voter registration has steadily increased since the reforms of 2000. H&F now has the highest registration in Inner London, and the fourth highest in London as a whole.

In autumn 2000 (the last 22-week canvass period) 20 of the 32 London boroughs had a response rate of 90% or more. Since then, 16 of these boroughs have seen a drop in their registration rates. Only 4 have increased, with Hammersmith & Fulham (up 1.13%) achieving the highest growth (the other three have increased by only 0.49%, 0.25% and 0.21%).

Hammersmith & Fulham now has a higher registration rate than many councils outside London.

H&F was at the forefront of introducing phone and internet registration - a service that is now offered to 65-70% of UK households.

High and accurate registration is a cornerstone of high turnout. H&F has consistently produced one of the highest turnout levels in Inner London, at all types of election.

## **Future development**

The Electoral Administration Bill places new duties on electoral officers to increase registration and participation.

Many councils now have to address how they will carry out voter registration effectively - something H&F did in 2000/1.

The challenge is now to build further on the firm base H&F has already put in place. Greater use of data sharing with council services; developing a new model for registering residents of Houses in Multiple Occupation; and preparing for individual registration will be key aims going forward for Electoral Services.

### 4.1 Factors that underpin your success.

The canon for our service is maximum and accurate registration. This provides as many electors as possible with the opportunity to participate at elections. An accurate register gives local parties their key campaigning tool. High and accurate registration drives higher turnout.

We seek to improve on firm foundations, ensuring the delivery of the core service is robust. New initiatives are only adopted if they are sustainable in the long-term and they provide value for money.

We ensure our approach is highly professional, impartial and knowledgeable. We actively engage with and listen to all political groups to ensure cross-party confidence and support.

In a time of rapid electoral reform, we have made a substantial investment in staff training and high-quality back-up materials, especially for presiding officers and poll clerks, counting staff, and canvassers.

We are committed to wide-ranging electronic service delivery, including phone and internet registration, online recruitment on temporary staff, web-based information and enquiry services, email registration of overseas electors and use of the council's Contact Centre.

Above all, we put residents first. We make registration easy through our multi-channelled approach to annual canvass; we inform electors through our range of voter guides; and we aim for the highest level of customer service in our polling stations.

### 4.2 Successful initiatives.

We have a proven track record of delivering innovative services within existing electoral legislation. In many cases we were the first council, or among the first, to introduce what are now standard services for many electoral services offices. Several of our initiatives have since become statutory requirements.

We were at the forefront in pioneering telephone (2001) and internet (2003) registration. This is now used by a quarter of the borough's no-change households, and significantly is now available to around 60-70% of UK households.

The new legislation in 2000 enabled electronic submission of application forms, and we have positively promoted the availability of fax-back and scan-and-email. This has been particularly useful for overseas electors. We have a very high response to annual reminders because we send these out by email, and receive most returns by fax. Responses come within a few hours or days.

Fears about postal voting fraud, and measures to reassure voters, are uppermost in current debate. We have always acknowledged every postal vote application, and this is now a statutory requirement. Since 2001, we have shown who has a postal vote on both voter registration forms and confirmations of registration. In 2004, we wrote to all existing postal voters, informing them they had a postal vote and where the ballot paper would be sent; a postal voting guide was also included. This exercise has now been done at three full elections. This is to become a statutory requirement as part of the Electoral Administration Bill.

### 4.3 Who are the key target audiences that would benefit from hearing your key messages?

We believe we have a lot of experience to share, not only about what can work, but also what does not work so well. The key target audiences that we believe would benefit most from a H&F Electoral Services Beacon are:

- Electoral administrators - to show that the delivery of electoral services does not have to be bureaucratic

and reactive. Proactive services can make a difference to local residents' engagement in the electoral process.

- Senior council staff and elected members - to inform those who are responsible for allocating local resources of the need to invest in quality electoral services.
- Electoral Commission and government departments - to show how legislation can be turned into practical solutions in local communities.
- Our own service - because we believe sharing experience and ideas will open up learning opportunities.

We also expect the Electoral Administration Bill to create a specific group of councils who will benefit from practical advice. The new duty to maximise registration will place demands on some authorities who have not used canvassers, nor made extensive use of other council records. We believe our canvass model can show an effective method to achieve high registration rates. Our current work on sharing data with other council services also gives useful solutions to target rolling registration activity. We also have proven examples of encouraging participation through voter guides for ordinary electors, as well as specific materials to inform postal voters and increase confidence in the security of the postal voting option.

#### **4.4 Beyond the national Learning Exchange conference and Open Day, how might you work with other Beacons within your theme to maximise the impact of your learning activities?**

We fully acknowledge that "one size does not fit all"; each council has its own priorities and different learning needs, especially as electorates and office teams vary so much in size. For this reason we would seek to use a wide range of channels to share our experiences.

We would suggest that Electoral Services Beacons pool their experiences and action lessons into a wide-ranging information pack, and to actively promote its availability.

H&F sees it as important to make a wide range of materials - forms, training notes, publicity materials, financial tools and service monitoring proformas - readily available for others wishing to avoid reinventing the wheel.

The Beacon councils, and the resources they can offer, should be promoted through the Association of Electoral Administrators/Electoral Commission/DCA network, including attendance at the Association's branch meetings and Annual Seminar. H&F would be happy to take a lead role in this.

We firmly believe that there should be opportunities for electoral staff to spend an extended period of time (more than one day) working in an Electoral Services Beacon office. In addition, staff in Beacon offices should be available to provide advice to colleagues elsewhere; this is standard H&F practice and over the years has led to several exchange visits between H&F and other authorities.

Lastly, the Beacons should be used as a regular sounding board by policy makers. This is especially important in the development of any system of performance standards for electoral services, and the eventual move to individual registration.

#### **4.5 What experience does your authority have with sharing lessons with others? Give examples of where your authority has supported others to improve.**

H&F has always been proactive in peer improvement. Most recently the authority has provided expertise to LB Waltham Forest through the ODPM Capacity Building Fund and seconded its Director of Policy and Administration to the Local Government Association. The Electoral Services Manager was seconded to the Electoral Commission in 2002.

In 2003 (a non-election year), H&F proposed and developed a scheme of one-day exchange visits between Electoral

Services offices in different London boroughs, which proved very popular and informative. H&F visited and hosted several neighbouring authorities. In recent years, we have hosted information-gathering visits from several councils, specifically to study our canvass model and the use of our customer contact centre. H&F has also hosted visits from Electoral Commissioners, staff and overseas observers at elections in 2001, 2005 and 2006.

Within London, Electoral Services staff have led workshops on organising the canvass, count administration, and effective polling station management. We have also shared our experience at AEA Annual Seminar workshops, and presented an overview of our canvass model at the 2005 Seminar.

The Electoral Services Manager has also shared our experience on several DCA and Commission working groups, and is regularly consulted on one-off matters (topics include individual registration, anonymous registration, funding electoral services, design of registration forms, electoral fraud).

All Electoral Services staff are always available to offer specific advice to colleagues in other authorities on a wide range of subjects.