

RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL REPORT TO POLICY & FINANCE COMMITTEE

Agenda Item No.

meeting date: TUESDAY, 23 MARCH 2010
title: POLICIES AND STRATEGIES FOR ELECTORAL REGISTRATION
submitted by: DEBBIE NUTTALL, SOLICITOR
principal author: DEBBIE NUTTALL, SOLICITOR

1 PURPOSE

1.1 Committee are asked to consider three draft plans/strategies on Electoral Registration.

1.2 Relevance to the Council's ambitions and priorities:

- Council Ambitions – The role of the Electoral Registration Officer (“ERO”) is, technically, an office in itself, discrete from that of the Council. In practice, however, the Council and the ERO work closely together with overlapping staff and resources.
- Community Objectives – Please see above.
- Corporate Priorities - Please see above.
- Other Considerations – The Council is being encouraged, by central government, to encourage and promote democracy. The work of the ERO is an important aspect of this with ample opportunities for closer, mutually beneficial, “partnership working” between the ERO and the Council.

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 The Electoral Commission has a legal power to direct Electoral Registration Officers (“EROs”) to provide a report on their performance against published performance standards.

2.2 A self-assessment process for EROs ensures that the standards are reflective of the work, knowledge and experience of the ERO. The basis of self-assessment is derived from four key questions within the performance standards framework. The first of these is: “Do EROs have the appropriate plans and processes in place to satisfy the definition of the standards?” The others relate to these same plans and processes.

2.3 The performance standards themselves are grouped into four subject areas representing the most important that EROs should focus on to keep and maintain a complete and accurate electoral register. These are: (i) completeness and accuracy of electoral registration records; (ii) integrity of the registration process; (iii) encouraging participation in the registration process; and (iv) planning and organisation.

2.4 There are ten performance standards as follows:

1. Using information sources to verify entries on the register of elector and identify potential new electors.

2. Maintaining the property database.
3. House to house enquiries.
4. Maintaining the integrity of registration and absent vote applications.
5. Supply and security of the register and absent voter lists.
6. Public awareness strategy.
7. Working with partners.
8. Accessibility and communication of information.
9. Planning for rolling registration and the annual canvas.
10. Training.

2.5 The Council's ERO and Electoral Registration Unit have always aimed to do all that is required of them. Evidence suggests that electoral registration is high in the borough. However, in some areas the team is unable to attain the highest performance standard level, largely due to a lack of documentation demonstrating compliance. As a small team in a small authority, "planning" was, for example, carried out by the ERO and her assistant via discussions and a shared understanding (both officers have been in post for some time and are therefore familiar with the processes). A written plan has never, therefore, been formulated. The performance standards require a written plan and risk assessment.

3. ISSUES

3.1 In order to better meet the performance standards and to improve performance generally, the current plans, processes and strategies of the Council's Electoral Unit had to be documented.

3.2 The Electoral Commission has published extensive guidance for electoral officers to assist them with particular points of practice and procedure in relation to electoral registration. It has also published "template" plans and strategies.

3.3 The Council's Solicitor has reviewed the guidance documents and templates, and, following consultation with the ERO about actual practices and procedures in the Ribble Valley, has used these to create three draft documents which are appended to this report:

- A canvass and rolling registration plan;
- An integrity plan; and
- A public awareness strategy.

3.4 The Council's Solicitor has also updated other documents, used to support electoral registration (such as guidance to staff and forms which must be completed before copies of the register are released). It was not considered necessary to take these documents to Committee but Committee members are welcome to see and comment upon these, should they wish to do so.

3.5 Committee are asked to consider the draft documents appended to this report.

4 RISK ASSESSMENT

4.1 The approval of this report may have the following implications:

- Resources – The plans and processes are based on current procedures and plans.

- Technical, Environmental and Legal – The applicable Regulations have been considered in drafting the reports.
- Political – The electoral registration procedures and plans encourage registration and voter-turn out.
- Reputation – An improved performance standard score for the ERO and her team will help to maintain the Council's reputation.

5 **RECOMMENDED THAT COMMITTEE**

5.1 Review and approve the following plans and strategies:

- Ribble Valley Borough Council's (draft) canvass and rolling registration plan;
- Ribble Valley Borough Council's (draft) integrity plan; and
- Ribble Valley Borough Council's (draft) public awareness strategy.

DEBBIE NUTTALL
SOLICITOR

BACKGROUND PAPERS

1. Electoral Commission guidance and templates, available from:

<http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/guidance/resources-for-electoral-administrators/electoral-registration/managing-electoral-registration-services>.

2. ERO's file of pro forma documents.

For further information please ask for Debbie Nuttall, extension 4403.