

**Report by: Democratic Services Manager**

## **VOTER TURNOUT AND DEMOCRATIC ENGAGEMENT**

### **Purpose**

1. Members have suggested that one of the existing 'medium' priorities for review – 'Voter Turnout and Democratic Engagement', should be reclassified as a high priority.
2. This report sets out to provide some background information and identify some particular issues that the Panel may like to suggest are addressed during any review.

### **Recommendations**

- (1) That the Policy and Review (Oversight) Panel be asked to re-classify as a 'high priority' a review of voter turnout and democratic engagement**
- (2) That the Oversight Panel be asked to refer the proposed review and arrangements for its scoping to an ad hoc panel to undertake at an early date, with a recommendation that -**
  - (a) in respect of voter turn out, as part of its work the panel examines recent local voting trends; considers various initiatives that have been proposed nationally to increase the vote at elections, and brings forward for consideration by the City Council recommendations on ways and means of seeking increased voter turnout;**
  - (b) in respect of democratic engagement, as part of its work the panel focuses on some of those areas that are not currently the subject of examination elsewhere and that the detail of this part of the review be settled by the ad hoc panel.**

### **Background Generally**

3. At the meeting of the Performance Panel held on 28 July 2004 members noted that the topic of voter turnout and democratic engagement had been included as a medium term priority in the policy and review work programme for 2004-05. As some members felt that this review should be given higher priority they requested that a short information report on the matter be produced for this meeting to enable the Panel to consider an appropriate way forward. In-depth pieces of policy review work of this nature would usually be conducted by an ad

hoc Policy and Review Panel at the request of the Policy and Review (Oversight) Panel.

### **Statistical Information**

4. To assist members in appreciating aspects relating to electoral turnout, the following statistical information covering the period from 2001-2004 is attached as an appendix –
  - Published Electorate, based on the 15 October qualifying date
  - Electoral Register annual preparation – Response from households – ‘the canvass return’ (Number of Houses Responded and % of Houses Responded)
  - Election Turnout (Number of Votes Cast)
  - Postal Votes Issued
  - Postal Votes Returned (Used)
5. Figures for 2001 show the pre-boundary changes that increased from 13 to 14 the number of electoral wards. From 2002, Baffins Ward was created and the names of Central Southsea and Eastney & Craneswater were introduced for the previous wards of Havelock and Highland respectively. As part of the changes most ward boundaries throughout the City were altered. The electorate figures are those for the published register of electors based on the annual qualifying date of the preceding 15 October. The figures do not take account of rolling registration, whereby electors can be added to and removed from the register as they move address (which by itself does not alter significantly the published number).
6. The election statistics shown are for the following elections –
  - 2001 General
  - 2002 Local
  - 2003 Local
  - 2004 Combined European & Local.

### **Electoral Turnout**

7. Election turnout can be influenced by a range of issues, and these can generally be summarised (in no particular order) as –
  - General level of public interest in local and national affairs
  - A current local topic of public interest that has been featured in the media
  - Publicity (both editorial and advertising) in the media about elections generally
  - Calibre and personality of the candidates
  - Political parties canvassing and quality of election literature and manifestos

- Location of polling stations
  - Weather on the day
  - postal voting arrangements
8. The turnout at the 2004 combined elections was an average of 34%; up from 23% in 2003. Within the Council's Corporate Plan increasing the percentage turnout in local elections is one of the targets.
9. The Electoral Commission has recently published a report on the outcome of the 'all postal ballots' arrangements during the European Elections. The Commission has recommended that 'all postal pilot schemes' at elections should not continue, and that a new model of voting reform needs to be developed to enhance the degree of choice available to voters.
10. If members wish to examine and take evidence upon electoral turnout, they may wish to invite evidence from, for example -
- Local election agents
  - councillors
  - The public, including community groups
  - The media

In addition, there should also be informed research undertaken, consulting as necessary with other local authorities, on experiences related to an examination of additional forms of voting. This could include, for example, voting using electronic means, giving a choice to voters of where and when they can vote.

### **Democratic Engagement**

11. Democratic engagement is a fairly wide term. Members need to be clear as to whether they wish this to relate solely to the election process or, as I believe should be the case, in the more wider context.
12. Democratic engagement and community involvement can therefore extend through a whole range of functions and opportunities, including (in no particular order and certainly not an exhaustive list) –
- The role of councillors and how they engage with the public
  - Public participation and consultative arrangements
  - The opportunity for public involvement at Council meetings, the Executive, policy and review panels, and committees
  - E-government initiatives, encouraging people to talk to each other and to the Council about local issues that matter
  - Neighbourhood Forums
  - Southsea Town Council
  - Publicity produced by the Council, including Flagship
  - Public surveys and MORI polls

13. Community involvement is one of the priorities within the Community Strategy. In this respect the Strategy identifies that there is a need to –
- increase grass-roots participation by making sure that there are a range of formal and informal ways for people to make their own contribution to debates on local issues. This will include the continued development of the neighbourhood forums.
  - ensure people know how to make their voices heard. The Portsmouth Council of Community Service will be commissioning research about local engagement with democratic structures.
  - encourage children and young people to have their own say in the community's affairs by developing a range of appropriate forum across the City.
14. Increased participation in civic issues is one of the targets that has been identified for incorporation into the initial submission to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for the 2<sup>nd</sup> generation local public service agreement (LPSA2G). Possible measures include the percentage turnout at local elections; attendance at neighbourhood forums and community board meetings, and active involvement in community organisations. This is also one of the targets in the Council's Corporate Plan.
15. Before embarking upon a review there will be a need to consider whether to examine this subject in as wide a context as possible or to take a more narrow view, concentrating perhaps on some specific key areas. I suggest that this aspect could be considered by an ad hoc panel as part of the scoping process for a review. It would also be for that panel to decide who should be invited to give evidence.

.....  
Democratic Services Manager

Background Papers:

*Portsmouth Local Strategic Partnership's Community Strategy 2004-09*

JH/me  
2 September 2004  
M drive: Election

## PUBLISHED ELECTORATE

Ward	2004	2003	2002	2001*
St Thomas	8286	10378	10219	13153
St Jude	7889	9691	9651	10807
Central Southsea*	9022	10990	11191	11135
Eastney & Craneswater*	8966	10269	10386	11250
Milton	8896	9570	10084	10703
Fratton	9227	10441	10672	10747
Charles Dickens	9255	10621	10517	9577
Baffins	9815	10363	10421	N/a
Nelson	9394	10405	10426	10969
Copnor	9482	10025	9982	11811
Hilsea	9402	10084	10169	12196
Paulsgrove	9222	10150	10139	10550
Cosham	9332	9883	9925	9094
Drayton & Farlington	9701	9876	10048	10214
TOTAL	127889	142746	143830	142206

**Note:** The published electorate is that based on the annual qualifying date of 15 October.

## ELECTORAL REGISTER PREPARATION – CANVASS RESPONSE

\*Number of houses responded (% responded)

Ward	2003	2002	2001*	2000*
St Thomas	4598 (68%)	4442 (67%)	4412 (67%)	5784 (67%)
St Jude	4307 (66%)	4178 (63%)	3880 (59%)	4321 (62%)
Central Southsea*	4542 (71%)	4317 (67%)	4493 (71%)	4522 (70%)
Eastney & Craneswater*	4667 (75%)	4373 (70%)	4206 (68%)	5330 (79%)
Milton	4654 (81%)	4556 (79%)	4587 (80%)	4762 (81%)
Fratton	4800 (75%)	4650 (73%)	4412 (70%)	4217 (66%)
Charles Dickens	5006 (71%)	5063 (73%)	4659 (66%)	4126 (65%)
Baffins	4933 (87%)	4775 (84%)	4832 (85%)	N/a
Nelson	4844 (77%)	4728 (76%)	4587 (74%)	5291 (82%)
Copnor	4563 (85%)	4470 (84%)	4548 (85%)	5450 (86%)
Hilsea	4662 (82%)	4473 (79%)	4686 (83%)	5091 (74%)
Paulsgrove	4560 (80%)	4481 (78%)	4586 (80%)	4800 (80%)
Cosham	4634 (86%)	4501 (83%)	4522 (84%)	4029 (82%)
Drayton & Farlington	4792 (92%)	4697 (90%)	4740 (91%)	4849 (91%)
TOTAL	65562 (78%)	63704 (76%)	63150 (75%)	62572 (75%)

**Note:**

The canvass response has been shown as the number of houses that responded and also as a percentage as this reflects the increase in the number of properties (eg Gunwharf development) .

## ELECTION TURNOUT

Ward	2004	2003	2002	2001*
St Thomas	3283	2936	3030	5829
St Jude	2808	2492	2510	4818
Central Southsea*	3560	3101	3707	5590
Eastney & Craneswater*	3573	2919	3206	6262
Milton	3250	3030	3332	6104
Fratton	2689	2113	2774	4900
Charles Dickens	2512	2442	2730	4018
Baffins	3590	3314	3889	N/a
Nelson	2609	2133	2494	5120
Copnor	3002	2360	3078	6876
Hilsea	3059	2862	3085	6225
Paulsgrove	2381	1994	2519	5023
Cosham	3416	2593	3133	5021
Drayton & Farlington	4597	3605	4179	6580
TOTAL	44329	37894	43666	76400

## POSTAL VOTES ISSUED

Ward	2004	2003	2002	2001
St Thomas	767	653	431	Portsmouth
St Jude	844	650	376	South
Central Southsea*	642	532	384	2449
Eastney & Craneswater*	775	639	364	
Milton	599	518	300	
Fratton	452	389	278	
Charles Dickens	595	540	274	
Baffins	597	504	390	
Nelson	558	468	396	Portsmouth
Copnor	413	320	275	North
Hilsea	693	571	433	2729
Paulsgrove	621	563	466	
Cosham	868	563	503	
Drayton & Farlington	714	459	337	
TOTAL	9138	7369	5207	5178

**Note:**

In the case of the 2001 General Election postal votes were issued on a constituency basis, and therefore no individual ward figures are available

## POSTAL VOTES

\*Figures show number of Postal Votes returned.

Ward	2004	2003	2002	2001*
St Thomas	514	439	285	Portsmouth
St Jude	552	412	221	South
Central Southsea*	424	358	275	1184
Eastney & Craneswater*	549	426	223	
Milton	419	368	212	
Fratton	281	219	177	
Charles Dickens	344	343	254	
Baffins	430	365	183	
Nelson	369	304	246	Portsmouth
Copnor	291	186	182	North
Hilsea	482	343	276	2150
Paulsgrove	402	373	324	
Cosham	601	385	345	
Drayton & Farlington	532	335	240	
TOTAL	6190	4856	3443	4034

**Note:**

In the case of the 2001 General Election postal votes were returned on a constituency basis, and therefore no individual ward figures are available