

DRAFT
WORK PLAN THEME PROJECT BRIEF

Review Title **Elections and Citizenship Review**

Project Sponsor **Assistant Director Policy and Public Relations**

The Project Team

To be confirmed following initial discussion at O&S.

This brief has been produced in anticipation of an initial discussion session at Social and Community O&S to decide what approach the council wishes to take regarding a review of elections and citizenship. Some main focal points for the review are detailed below, along with three ideas for events and projects that could be run to deliver on these aims.

Scope of the Review

Four main focal points were identified as part of the best value review of elections and citizenship.

Focal point 1 – Management of elections

The aim is to provide well-run elections which give all potential voters the opportunity to vote regardless of age, sex, ethnic background or disability. It also seeks to minimise costs without sacrificing service quality.

Focal point 2 – Inclusive citizenship

The aim is to ensure that under-represented groups, including young people and ethnic minority groups, appreciate the need to vote and to be involved in the community, including community decision-making.

Focal point 3 – Working with partners to improve active citizenship

The aim is to maximise involvement by community groups and political groups and parties in order to promote elections, voting and participation in the democratic process and informing, aiding and encouraging citizens to realise the choices available to them and to make decisions accordingly.

Focal point 4 – Registration of electors

The aim is to maximise the number of people registering by increasing the percentage of form As returned.

Members will need to determine which elements they want to pursue in identifying practical solutions for engaging with young people in local democracy.

Suggested activities

In order to fulfil some of the aims above, there are some activities that the council can become involved in. It is recommended that these form the basis for a discussion over what else can be done to deliver on the above aims.

Councillor web pages

Research has show that making Councillors more visible is an important contribution to democratic renewal at a local level. It improves the quality of communication between Councillor and the public - and it equips Councillors with important new skills.

According to a MORI survey in 2002:

- 67% of voters have never met their local Councillor
- 64% cannot name any of their current Councillors
- 80% of 18-24 year olds cannot name any of their current Councillors

Other research has shown that in the 2001 General Election only 40% of 18-24 year olds eligible to vote did so. It also shows that 18-24 year olds are three times more likely to be politically active through the internet and internet users are 22% more likely to engage in political discussion than those who do not use the internet.

The review could explore the opportunities for developing web pages for councillors and other communication channels and the willingness amongst councillors to pursue such initiatives

Local Democracy Week – 17-23 October 2005

The council is involved in running events every year as part of Local Democracy Week (LDW), and this year the theme is 'Ideas into actions'. We have run sessions for the last two years with sixth form students from Bournside and Cleeve Schools. The event has involved creating mock political parties, canvassing and discussing 'party issues' and then holding a mock vote. There is then a mock council meeting in the chamber, chaired by the Mayor.

These events have been successful and the schools have always stated how valuable the students have found them. Last year there was a budget setting task included, and councillors were invited to come in on the day and talk to the students. This was something that was felt to be of value to both students and councillors.

A sixth form event will be held again this year on Friday 21 October. The committee suite is booked out and local sixth form schools will be invited again. It would be good to have councillor involvement this year as well, though perhaps in a more structured way than last year. There is also scope to include more topical issues such as lowering the age of candidacy to 18 (as mentioned in the Queen's Speech) and lowering the voting age to 16. There is also potential to explore ways of increasing election turnout among young people, and this may link in with the councillor website/internet-based democracy.

University of Gloucestershire Fresher's Week

With students being an integral and democratically significant part of the borough, it is important that the council engages with them more. Holding an event during Fresher's week may be a good way of encouraging students to take an active interest in local democracy at an early stage.

Evidence suggests that many young people are more politically active and aware from the ages of 16-18 than they are from 18-21. This means that it is important to take advantage of this political awareness before it is lost.

The council could run a stall at the Fresher's Fair to inform students about local democratic issues that affect them, and also the encourage them to become involved in local democracy.

Regeneration at St Paul's

The council through CBH and other partners has started work on the St Paul's regeneration area. This is a ward with traditionally low turnout in elections and the review could explore how engagement with young people in the democratic process can be built in the regeneration programme.