



Electoral Registration & Elections

Public Awareness and Access Strategy

1. Introduction

The Electoral Team works under the direction of the Electoral Registration Officer and Returning Officer and aims to meet its legal duties under the Electoral Administration Act 2006, to promote and raise public awareness of the electoral process for registering and voting by all reasonable means and methods tailored to the needs of our electorate.

We have a joint aim with the Electoral Commission i.e. We want to ensure that everyone who is entitled to vote can do so.

2. Age and Ethnicity breakdown of the District

The population of the District is 106,500 as per the 2008 Mid-Year population estimates. 85,249 of these were electors on the published register as at 1st December 2008. Of these electors 11,940 (14% of our electorate) were recorded as Over 70 and 1,100 (1.2%) as Attainers (i.e. aged 17 going on 18 – voting age).

District Profile within Staffordshire

Below shows our profile as it is important to know our target audience and therefore consider the appropriate medium for raising awareness.

Since 2003, the most growth has been in Lichfield with an increase of 4.2% in population, while South Staffordshire has seen the lowest level of population growth at just 0.4% over the same period. Staffordshire's population is increasing primarily as a result of migration into the County. Migration accounts for approximately two-thirds of the population growth with the remaining third a result of more births than deaths in the County. Although Staffordshire has experienced a population loss through international migration it has gained population from surrounding areas principally the West Midlands Conurbation and Stoke-on-Trent.

Older persons

Within Staffordshire 21.1% of the population has reached retirement age, this equates to 175,000 people. During the last five years the retired population has increased by 20,500 people. There are now significantly more retired people living in the County compared with the number of children.

The 2008 Mid Year Population Estimate shows that there are 17,500 people aged over 85 living in the County compared with 13,700 people in the age group in 2003. This equates to 27.4% increase in the number of people aged over 85 living in Staffordshire in the last five years. South Staffordshire along with Staffordshire Moorlands has the highest proportion of retired people in their populations (23.4%). We have some 24 registered residential/nursing homes recorded on the electoral register, one of which has over 200 residents. These establishments are personally written to and our canvassers visit them every autumn to collect the registration forms.

Young Persons

There are 170,900 children (aged 0-17) living in the County, this is 6,700 fewer than five years ago. Within this age group, the number of primary school children (aged 4-10) has fallen by 8% between 2003 and 2008 and currently stands at 62,800 and the number of high school children (aged 11-15) has also declined by 7.2% over the same period and now stands at 50,600. Within the County, South Staffordshire (-12.9%) and Cannock Chase (-10.8%) have seen the largest decline in primary school age children during the last five years and Tamworth (-11.3%) and Newcastle-under-Lyme (-10.7%) have seen the largest decline in the number of high school age children. In contrast, the number of pre-school children in Staffordshire has increased by 5.2% over the last five years and there are currently 35,500 children aged between 0 and 3 living in the County. Stafford (14.3%) and Lichfield (10%) have experienced significant growth in the number of pre-school children between 2003 and 2008, whereas Staffordshire Moorlands (1%) and South Staffordshire (1.4%) have experienced very modest increases in this age group.

Working Age

There are currently 483,100 people in the working age population (18-retired) of Staffordshire. This is 1,200 more people than in 2003, however, the structure of the working age population is changing with fewer younger people and more people in the older age groups. Since 2003 the number of people aged between 18 and 34 has fallen by -2.2% in the County and now stands at 158,500 people. The working age population aged between 35 and 49 has increased in the County between 2003 and 2008 by 2.6% and now stands at 185,200 people. Cannock Chase (6.6%) has seen the largest increase in the working age population (aged 35-49) in the County over the last five years. In contrast, the only district to experience a decline in the age group over this period was South Staffordshire (-2.3%). The older working age population (50-retired) has remained unaltered over this period at 139,400 people. However, the older working age population

has increased most notably in East Staffordshire (4.4%) and Tamworth (4%) over the last five years, whereas Lichfield (-4.1%) has experienced the largest decline in this age group during this period.

Ethnicity

From the 2001 Census 98% of the District is recorded as white, of which 97% of these are White British/Irish. There are no geographical areas of the District where there is a significant community of non-white ethnic groups.

Ethnic Group	Population	Percentage
All People	105,896	100%
White	103,825	98%
Mixed race	629	0.42%
Asian or Asian British	956	0.90%
Black or Black British	313	0.29%
Chinese or other ethnic group	173	<0.1%

Source: Office of National Statistics.

Summary

Staffordshire has an ageing population with significant increases in the retired population over recent years, particularly those aged over 85. This is likely to continue for the foreseeable future. There has also been a slight increase in the number of people in the working age population, and although there has been a decline in the number of children in the County there has been a notable increase in the number of pre-school children in the last couple of years.

- There are no Universities or other further educational establishments within the District.
- There is no military base within the District; however, there is close proximity to RAF Cosford air base on our border with Shropshire.
- There are two penal institutions.
- There are just under 8,000 permanent postal voters representing approximately 10% of our electorate. Take up of this facility is encouraged by targeted advertising in appropriate media e.g. Age Concern and Staffordshire Retired magazines.

Population by Selected Age Groups, 2008

0-3	4-10	11-15	16-17	18-34	35-49	50-retired	Retired-84	85+	TOTAL
3,900	7,600	6,600	3,000	17,800	23,800	19,000	22,400	2,400	106,500

Source: Office for National Statistics, Registrar General's Mid Year Population Estimates 2008

Note - Retirement age for the purposes of this table is 65 for males and 60 for females

Figures may not always sum due to rounding.

3. South Staffordshire Approach

Below details our approach to reaching our target audiences with different media and with any success measures cited.

Due to not having any specific areas of low registration or turnout that can be easily identified e.g. halls of residence, areas of concentrated ethnic groups, etc., the ERO takes an all encompassing approach to maximising registration levels and increased voter turnout.

3.1 Registration

Annual Canvass

Prior to every canvass the Elections Manager (Electoral and Concessionary Services Manager) meets with the Council's Communication Officer to discuss publicity to raise awareness of the annual canvass and to hopefully maximise participation and increase the response rate. This includes various targeted News Releases to local media i.e. press at the start of the process and for the key stages of the canvass; an article in the Autumn edition of the South Staffordshire Review (free news sheet to all households 4 times per year); notification to local Councillors of the commencement of the process and the results when the new register is published. Posters are issued to all Parishes, Libraries and to Parish Clerk offices about the canvass process and again once the canvass has concluded.

A large pop up banner is located at our main reception desk highlighting the annual canvass; along with the public information video screen in our public reception area.

Full use is made of the Council's website publicising the canvass.

We work in partnership with the ERS for using its telephone registration service which also comprises internet and SMS text voting.

We have used telephone registration for several years and have improved the choice available to the public by offering internet and text registering for no change properties which comprises 70% of our District.

A good response with very favourable comments is received to this facility with some 60% of those who can use the service so doing. We aim to increase this number each year though it remains fairly static at this percentage. This service was chosen to provide greater choice for electors to register and in particular target the housebound either through disability or age related infirmity. The system will not record the age of the registrant or any disabilities so we can only go on direct feedback from our surveys and specific comments and compliments received.

Rolling Registration

Numerous marketing and publicity/promotional ideas have been used to highlight the need to register and re-register if they move, for example:

- Beer mats in licensed premises – joint venture with emergency planning for awareness raising. **Audience** – 18 plus age range.
- Book marks via libraries and public offices. **Audience** – future voters and older persons.
- Plasma screen adverts at our Leisure Centres. **Audience** -
- Pencils with “make your mark” message. **Audience** – school children via LDW etc.
- Adverts in Environmental and Council Tax free calendars. **Audience** – home owners.
- Advert on refuse vehicles – **Audience** – all householders. New from Jan 2010.
- Advert in GP surgeries/Medical Clinics. **Audience** – all householders (particularly older persons promoting postal voting). New from Jan 2010.

Do-Politics

Consideration is given to the work of the public awareness arm of the Electoral Commission i.e. the Do Politics website. There is a link on our website to this site and all schools within the District have been notified of this valuable resource site, particularly the High Schools who all have a copy of the Local Democracy Cookbook.

Link - www.dopolitics@electoralcommission.org.uk

Local Democracy Week

Over the last 5 years we have put much effort in to promoting the electoral process during the Local Democracy Week. The Elections Manager visits a number of the High Schools in the area to raise awareness and assist with the preparations to the voting process that takes place during LDW. Feedback from the teachers and pupils is always very encouraging to this process and is an event that we put much effort in working with other service areas and in collaboration with the Schools Education Partnership.

As well as giving young voters of tomorrow a taste of voting with a mock election, the opportunity to express the importance of being on the electoral register and then using their vote as soon as they are old enough is emphasised.

Birthday Card to 18 Year Olds

All attainers are written to with a birthday on their 18th birthday to draw attention to the importance of being registered and voting and we offer a postal vote application for their use.

This initiative is aimed at encouraging youngsters to make sure they stay registered and use their vote.

Council Tax Liaison

Our Revenues Service sends out for us with all new bills two rolling registration forms to encourage registration by new home owners.

3.2 Voting

Website

There are several pages on the Council website with links to the Electoral Commission and the Do Politics pages. Copies of the electoral registration form and blank postal vote/proxy application forms can be downloaded and the links to the Electoral Commission site refer to all forms of registration e.g. services voters, overseas, anonymous etc.

Much use is made of the website for promoting electoral awareness and take-up of registration and voting. Surveys have shown there is a relatively high percentage of our population with a home computer and internet access.

There is a specific page for every year e.g. "Elections in 2009".

During every election campaign a banner appears on the home page and there is a permanent link to elections from the home page.

All communications e.g. letters, postal votes, poll cards etc promote our website www.sstaffs.gov.uk/elections

Council Free Newspaper

Regular articles appear in our free newspaper publication that gets delivered to every household in the District. This publication is also widely available via parish council offices, and other public venues such as libraries etc. Surveys have shown that there is a very high readership of this document so full use is made of this to publicise elections and the registration process e.g. annual canvass.

Engagement with local stakeholders

Liaison takes place with stakeholders prior to key events e.g. elections and the canvass. For example at the start of the canvass we email all our councillors to give them details of the process, deadlines etc and the same prior to an election.

We undertake a stakeholder survey after each election seeking feedback on their opinions on the documentation e.g. poll cards, postal voting packs etc for ease of use etc; the count; our website etc.

Stakeholders include all local politicians – County, District, Parish Clerks, and local Agents etc.

A review of the Year document is produced and is sent to all stakeholders informing them of themes, result of the canvass, feedback on elections, staffing, etc.

4. Risks

The risks associated with promoting awareness is kept under review and shown in the table below. See also comments under Section 5.

Risk	Likelihood (Max 4)	Impact (Max 3)	Rating	Mitigation	Officer	Review
1. Budget too low or not spent wisely /overspent	2	2	4	Monitored monthly. Vfm sought by joint or free initiatives.	ECSM	Annual
2. Publicity not aimed at target audience	3	3	9	Liaison with Policy team on population trends and local knowledge from stakeholders	ECSM	Annual e.g. Prior to canvass and main elections
3. Audience not known to ERO	2	3	6	As in 2 above.	ECSM	Annual

NOTES:

Likelihood – Max 4 means “certain”. Impact – High 3 to low 1.
Green shaded area equals low priority. Amber equals medium. Red equals High priority.

5. Resources

The ERO has limited financial resources for awareness raising with a £1,000 publicity budget. As with all budgets best value has to be obtained and maximum use of free publicity or shared ventures with other initiatives is sought. For example, maximum use is made of Media Releases and our own free newspaper for promoting awareness.

Book marks and beer mats have involved other service areas and hence shared budgets. Beer mats shared with emergency planning and book marks with customer services.

No direct feedback has been requested from the public though a future survey will ask for such.

6. Public Perception and Feedback

6.1 User Satisfaction Survey

Our User Satisfaction Surveys, as conducted by an Independent Research organisation (BMG) show are very high knowledge rate on the

question "how and where to register to vote" – 88%, in 2006; 84% in 2007 and this increased to 91% in 2008.

These results are from a postal questionnaire sent to 2,500 households and data weighted to be representative.

4.2 Surveys

As mentioned in 3.2 above all stakeholders get sent a survey form after an election. The results are analysed to improve our processes as necessary. Results are posted on our website.

A random 1,000 questions are sent out each canvass time with our personal canvassers to ask the public their views on the form, the process, customer services e.g. our standards. Results are analysed and posted on our website.

We survey our canvassers at the end of the canvass to seek their comments on the timetable and how the form could be improve for the public's benefit.

We take on board comments raised from the public during the canvass who either write, phone or email their comments. All comments are logged and any necessary action acted upon. A sample of feedback is recorded on our website – comments, complaints and compliments.

Electoral and Concessionary Services Manager

on behalf of

**Electoral Registration and Returning Officer
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