

July 08

Jan Souness
Head of Service
Chief Executive's Unit

Responsible for Performance, Policy, Communications,
Emergency Planning and Neighbourhoods

Peer Reviews and CPA inspections

- 34 years Local Government and Elections
- Co-ordinate Independent Review

Background

- Traditional Structure – located in Chief Execs
- Electoral Registration –
part of Democratic Services/Admin Support
Team
- All three Teams worked closely/supportive

2005 – 2008 Key Changes

- Year on year efficiency savings
- Lean service became leaner
- Modernisation
- Postal voting
- New requirements placed on Service
- Restructure – moved into Corporate Services
- Introduction of Business Support Centre
- New management of election process

May 2008 Elections – Parish, Borough, All Out

Critical Factors

- Polling Place Review – December 2007
- Reduced Democratic/Elections Team
- One venue for count
- Members involvement in arrangements
- Limited technology
- Contractual arrangement with external providers
- Project Planning
- Organisational commitment

Polling Place Review

- Limited consultation
- Little local / geographical knowledge
- Maintained the status quo – e.g. 14 mobile units
- April 2008 – Disquiet at polling stations – last minute changes

Reduced Democratic/Elections Team

- Re-structuring within the Council/Directorate did not take account of capacity resources needed for successful election
- Election seen as a once a year function!
- Loss of key expertise and core and expanded team
- Ad hoc decisions taken - cutting corners and standards

One Count Venue

- Implemented as a cost saving
- Implication of handling borough / all out parish elections at count not fully considered
- Reduced overall staff numbers

Members Involvement

- Too close to operational arrangements – the ‘we have always done it this way’
- Same night count
- Mobile polling stations

Limited Technology/Expertise

- System old
- No quality assurance for data transfer
- Use of the system limited to few staff
- Lack of equipment

Contractual Arrangements

- Loose
- Not written down
- No accountability

Project Planning

- Ad hoc plans in isolation
- Work streams not linked up
- Didn't use skills we had
- Lack of clarity of roles

Organisational Commitment

- Silo working – defensive – no support
- The resources/skills and knowledge within the Council not used
- Seen as an elections team issue
- Implications of past decisions not recognised
- Support from wider management and teams optional

May 2008

As a Result

- Polling cards not delivered or late
- Ballot papers late
- Training for elections team rushed – not adequate
- Count long with mistakes made

Review – Terms of Reference

The purpose

- Examine election practice and processes in Warrington
- Identify strengths and weaknesses of the 2008 elections
- Identify any development and capacity issues for the Council
- Identify future requirements and assess the current election service provision against them
- To recommend actions and changes to procedures to achieve an effective election service fit for the future

Review - Outcomes

- Effective future election process and practice
- Project plan (including critical path) for future elections
- Robust risk management processes and comprehensive business continuity plans
- Appropriately resourced and skilled staff

Involved

- Desk Top Assessment of documentation and evidence
- One to one interviews with members/staff/candidates/MP's/members of the public
- Briefing – reassuring staff directly and indirectly involved
- Trust and Honesty
- Commitment to learn and change backed up by resources

Open About Recommendations

- Report to full Council
- Acknowledged
 - Not a single issue
 - Organisational culture – attitude of some members/staff
 - Lack of protocols and standards
 - Need for appropriate resources
 - Corporate commitment
 - Dedication of a few

June 2009 European Elections – What had changed ?

Robust Polling Place Review

- Extensive consultation
- Used local knowledge
- From 14 – 4 mobiles
- Worked jointly with Warrington Disability Partnership

Brought in Expertise

- AEA – Interim Management
- Electoral Commission – standards and advice
- Training – AEA support from colleagues locally
- Consultancy

Fit for Purpose Structure

- Manager and new post and career structures
- Brought under Assistant Chief Executive
- Business Continuity Risk Management Plans

Programme & Project Planning

- Communications
- Postal Votes
- Polling Stations
- Count Premises/Plan
- Contractual arrangements
- ICT
- Staffing, Training, etc.
- Business Continuity

Other Key Success Factors

- Clearly identified roles and boundaries
- Joined Merseyside consortium – access to wider expertise
- New contractual arrangements firmed up
- Comprehensive training programme
- ICT improved and resourced

Other Key Success Factors

- Appropriate Member involvement
- All Council Departments involved
 - Transportation
 - Leisure
 - Building Control
 - Corporate/Financial Services
- Count venue plan – logistics manager
- Count programme kept members, candidates and public informed throughout night!

Sir Howard Bernstein – RRO

"We have received timely and full responses to any information or feedback requested by the RRO and have been impressed by the professionalism and level of engagement with the RRO demonstrated by staff from the early planning stages through to the final results".

Key Messages

- Without elections we have no Council – don't take them for granted
- Don't let the small things creep up and become big things
- Know when to stand firm!
- Don't lose touch with the front line