

## APPENDIX 1

### EASTBOURNE BOROUGH COUNCIL ELECTORAL SURVEY 2002

A survey has been conducted with all Eastbourne residents. The objectives of the survey were:-

- To gauge the public level of awareness and motivation in respect of democratic/electoral matters.
- To seek views on the primary reasons why many people do not bother to vote.
- To consult on preferences for alternative future voting methods.

This information was obtained via survey questionnaires which have been made available on the Council's web site and sent out to every residential property in the town (a total of 45,000) with the electoral canvass forms. Also, person to person research was conducted in the town centre by Democratic Services staff during Local Democracy Week (14-18 October 2002).

The results of this survey and initial comments are set out below.

## OVERALL RESPONSE

<b>Total Forms Issued</b>	-	<b>45,000</b>
<b>Total Forms Returned</b>	-	<b>9,007</b>
<b>Percentage Return</b>	-	<b>20%</b>
<b>Age Profile of Respondents</b>		
	<b>18-30</b>	- <b>11%</b>
	<b>31-50</b>	- <b>22%</b>
	<b>51-65</b>	- <b>29%</b>
	<b>66 +</b>	- <b>38%</b>

**COMMENT:** The level of response to this survey has exceeded all expectations and generated a great deal of interest. As such, its impact on our future electoral initiatives should not be underestimated. It is slightly disappointing that the percentage of younger respondents is not higher. However, the overall age profile spread is encouraging.

**AWARENESS** – It is important to gauge the level of awareness among local residents in respect of their electoral representation and Council services. Awareness is the first stage towards participation.

#### 1. We asked people if they knew which ward they lived in:-

<b>Those who know their ward</b>	-	<b>71%</b>
<b>Those who do not know their ward</b>	-	<b>29%</b>

**COMMENT:** Considering that Eastbourne recently went through a Boundary Review where all the old wards were changed, it is encouraging that so many people answered this question correctly. This seems in part to prove the merit of the extensive consultation and awareness work that was undertaken as part of the Boundary Review.

**2. We asked people if they could name their ward Councillors:-**

Those who correctly named all 3 - 11%

Those who correctly named 1 or 2 - 19%

Those who do not know any - 70%

**COMMENT:** Having regard to the fact that a large majority of people were able to correctly identify their wards in question 1 above, these figures are extremely disappointing.

**3. We asked people if they knew the name of the Leader of the Council:-**

Those who know - 60%

Those who do not know - 40%

**COMMENT:** Again, this result is considerably better than the figures relating to ward councillors. One of the key aims of Local Government modernised structures is to increase the accountability of lead members in the eyes of the public. There would appear to be some progress being made here although comparable data from the traditional structure days is not available.

**4. We listed four major service areas, namely, Housing, Social Services, Tourism and Education, and asked people if they knew which of these were EBC services and which were ESCC services:-**

Those fully correct - 54%

Those partially correct - 32%

Those who do not know - 14%

**COMMENT:** These results show a surprisingly high level of awareness as to which key services are provided at Borough and County level respectively.

**SUMMARY:** Overall, the above research results are quite encouraging with the obvious exception in respect of awareness of ward councillors. This is particularly important as local ward councillors are, in many cases, intended to be the first point of contact for community representation and a familiarity with the activities of ward councillors probably has the most significant impact on whether or not people bother to vote. It may be that this is in part due to modernised local government lowering the profile of non-executive councillors.

**MOTIVATION** – Whilst awareness is vital it will not necessarily translate into improved voter turnout unless people are motivated to vote.

**1. We asked people who responded to the survey if they vote at local elections:-**

Those that do vote - 80%

Those that do not vote - 20%

**COMMENT:** These figures show that we are still struggling to receive sufficient levels of feedback from those people who do not vote.

**2. We asked for views as to why people do not vote giving a list of suggested possible reasons. The results in order of most popular answers are as follows:-**

General disinterest - 24%

<b>Local Government lacks power</b>	-	<b>23%</b>
<b>Lack of local political activity</b>	-	<b>20%</b>
<b>Lack of information on election candidates</b>	-	<b>15%</b>
<b>Too much politicising of local issues</b>	-	<b>12%</b>
<b>Inconvenient polling stations</b>	-	<b>3%</b>
<b>Unaware of elections</b>	-	<b>3%</b>

**COMMENT:** Clearly the top reason is a matter of concern. However, taken together, the figures in respect of lack of local political activity and lack of candidate information are also very high. This could be one of the main reasons for the high general disinterest figure. The figure relating to politicised local issues is interesting because this was not included on the prompt list of suggested reasons. Many people chose to put this in as an additional reason and there does seem to be a widespread perceived resentment that consideration of real local issues is being sacrificed for the benefit of political argument much of the time. The research also confirms that, in the eyes of the electorate as a whole, polling stations are a relatively minor issue compared with the others referred to above.

**THE FUTURE** – A great deal of time and energy is being spent at both National and Local level about alternative voting initiatives. However, there is only one fundamental reason to change current voting practices and that is to increase voter turnout by making the voting process more convenient.

**We asked people for their views on potential preferred voting methods for the future. The results in order of most popular answers are as follows:-**

<b>Postal Voting</b>	-	<b>51%</b>
<b>Internet Voting</b>	-	<b>15%</b>
<b>Telephone Voting</b>	-	<b>14%</b>
<b>E-Voting at Polling Stations</b>	-	<b>12%</b>
<b>Text (Mobile) Voting</b>	-	<b>5%</b>
<b>Digital TV Voting</b>	-	<b>3%</b>

**COMMENT:** This is an extremely conclusive endorsement of the preference for postal voting over all other methods put together. This is not entirely unexpected as it generally reflects the fact that most turnouts have improved where postal vote pilot schemes have taken place. There would seem to be a strong argument for focusing on perfecting arrangements for postal voting rather than spending more time and resources piloting other options which are unlikely to be well received.

## **Peter Finnis**

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