

VotingMatters

YOUR OFFICIAL **OPT2VOTE** NEWSLETTER

OPT2VOTE
choices to suit you

ISSUE 04 / DEC 2007

IN THIS ISSUE:

**ADVISORY GROUP / SHREWSBURY BEACON AWARD
BY ELECTIONS / TRAINING UPDATE
FUTURE EVENTS**



OXFAM CHRISTMAS CARD DONATION

As an alternative to spending money on the usual Christmas cards this festive season **OPT2VOTE** has decided to make a donation to Oxfam with the money saved on cards and postage.

The donation has bought a bull which can significantly improve the future for an under privileged community. Further details of **OPT2VOTE's** donation can be found at: http://www.oxfamireland_unwrapped.com/cgi-bin/card.cgi?1196183995 **OPT2VOTE** hopes you will all agree that this is a very worthwhile alternative!

LONDON EVENTS AT EALING AND CROYDON

OPT2VOTE held two events in London during October to showcase the product portfolio for the London Councils in the run up to the GLA Elections. The events at Ealing and Croydon had an excellent turnout and **OPT2VOTE** would like to thank both Ealing Council and Croydon Council for their help in securing the venues.

OPT2VOTE recently delivered a By-Election to Ealing Council on which Ross Jackson, Head of Election Services commented,

*"I would like to thank **OPT2VOTE** for the excellent and professional service given by their team to Ealing Council at our recent Parliamentary By-Election. We had three weeks to organise the election from start to finish and it was vital that the **OPT2VOTE** software worked satisfactorily in processing postal vote statements and PI captures which it did very well. We look forward to using your systems again for the GLA elections next May."*

PRINT UPDATE

OPT2VOTE has been working alongside both print partners and the Advisory Group to improve the print portfolio for May 2008. The outcome is very positive with a refined, standardised print product set which will ensure improved products of a superior quality.

OPT2VOTE is delighted to announce that it will be holding a number of 'Open Days' in conjunction with its print partners in January. This will give Local Authorities the chance to visit print sites, gain a better understanding of the print process and obtain expert advice on any outstanding questions surrounding print issues. Further details including dates and venues will be available in the near future. To register your interest in the 'Open Days' please email Carmel (cquigg@opt2vote.com).

Welcome to VotingMatters

Welcome to the fourth edition of Voting Matters, **OPT2VOTE's** increasingly popular customer newsletter is now one year old!

In this edition, Voting Matters reports on the recent By-Elections, with a special focus on **OPT2VOTE's** Advisory Group. We also include a feature on Shrewsbury and Atcham Borough Council's Beacon Award achievement.

We hope that you enjoy our newsletter and that after one year of circulation it has achieved its initial goal of improving communication with our customers. We hope you benefit from learning more about **OPT2VOTE** and gain a better understanding of how the company can help you with the delivery of your elections. If there is anything you would like to see featured in forthcoming issues please email Claire at votingmatters@opt2vote.com – All feedback and ideas are welcome!

Finally, **OPT2VOTE** would like to take this opportunity to wish you all a Happy Christmas and a peaceful and prosperous New Year!

OPT2VOTE MEETS BERTIE AHERN!



As main sponsors of our Chamber of Commerce Autumn Gala Lunch on 2nd November, Ann-Marie Slavina (Managing Director, **OPT2VOTE**) had the opportunity to meet with An Taoiseach Bertie Ahern who was VIP Guest and Keynote Speaker at the event.

PERSONAL IDENTIFIER MATCHING SOLUTION (PIMS) PRODUCT ROAD SHOW

During the first week of November **OPT2VOTE**, alongside Northgate Information Systems, presented a product road show focusing on PIMS. Five road shows took place across the country targeting Local Authorities to participate in a PIMS Refresher Session. The principle objective was to provide information on the new product features, Best Practice and Frequently Asked Questions.

The new product, which has been released to the PIMS and PVMS customer bases, includes 15 new features plus additional reporting functionality to enable users to get the most information from the system.

The enhancements include:

- The ability to export data on a partial basis by providing the user with the options to

'Export All Records' or 'Export New Records not previously exported'

- The ability to scan forms in portrait or landscape format, thereby decreasing scanning time
- The ability to remove old Postal Vote Statements from the system prior to any new election
- The ability to reject an entire batch which reduces issues management and saves time
- Improved issues management – Postal Vote Statements requiring only verification of signature are put straight into adjudication and NOT flagged as issues in Issue Manager
- Improved documentation

The enhancements have been developed in response to customer feedback following the May 2007 elections and have been widely welcomed by users.

SEPTEMBER BY-ELECTIONS

September proved to be a busy month for OPT2VOTE with a number of By-Elections being held throughout the country in Birmingham City Council, Dover District Council, Darlington Borough Council and London Borough of Lewisham.

London Borough of Lewisham kicked off the month of hectic activity on 13th September with a Local By-Election for which OPT2VOTE supplied print. This was followed by another Local By-Election in Birmingham City Council on 20th September for one ward with OPT2VOTE providing print and PVMS.

Birmingham City Council's, Cheryl Mulvihill commented,

"We are pleased with the progress made so far to improve the package being designed by OPT2VOTE to meet the needs of Authorities for the 2008 elections. The issue and management of postal votes for the Brandwood Ward By-Election in September 2007, was smooth and efficient."

1375 were issued, with 875 postal votes proceeding through to the count. I am looking forward to continuing this relationship over the next few years."

On 27th September By-Elections were successfully delivered by OPT2VOTE in Dover District Council and Darlington Borough Council. Dover District Council held two Local By-Elections and one County By-Election on the same day with OPT2VOTE providing Postal Packs and PVMS. Darlington Borough Council's By-Election was a Mayoral Referendum carried out by postal ballot Linda Todd, Corporate Services Department – Darlington commented,

"The arrangements for the Mayoral Referendum followed a similar pattern to the May election, with the OPT2VOTE staff and equipment arriving the week before the election. The process this time seemed much smoother and the transition of data went without any hitches. The support from OPT2VOTE was invaluable, and we received total assistance from the staff on site and it was a pleasure to see the process working so smoothly."

SHREWSBURY & ATCHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL - A SHINING EXAMPLE!



Pictured from left to right: Penny Chamberlain - Democratic Services Manager, Julie Haines-Adams - Elections Officer and Karen Smith - Elections Officer receiving the award from the Minister.

Earlier this year Shrewsbury & Atcham Borough Council, a long term partner of OPT2VOTE, was awarded the prestigious Beacon Award for Electoral Services.

The Beacon Scheme identifies and highlights innovation and excellent practise within Local Authorities. In 2006 the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) offered Electoral Services as a Beacon theme and Shrewsbury was one of only three councils to be awarded this accolade. This award recognises the work done in the Borough to improve the democratic process and a number of pilot schemes were run - including early voting, on-line voting and using shops as polling stations.

Gareth Owens, Assistant Chief Executive of Shrewsbury and Atcham Borough Council, commented,

"OPT2VOTE has been involved in every aspect of the pilots and part of the Council's success is due to OPT2VOTE's innovation. SABC and OPT2VOTE have worked together on every election pilot that has been carried out in the Borough since 2003. Using OPT2VOTE's knowledge and expertise SABC has been able to press ahead with innovative ways of increasing voter registration through telephone and internet registration, as well as more traditional ways. As a result of the work by SABC and OPT2VOTE, the Electoral Register is 99% accurate. A large part of our Beacon Status is due to their help and the relationship we have with them."

TRAINING UPDATE

Following on from the launch of the new training courses in the September Edition of the newsletter, Voting Matters talks to OPT2VOTE's Trainer, Joanne Campbell...



PROFILE ON JOANNE CAMPBELL

Joined OPT2VOTE: September 2007

Position: Trainer

Background: Extensive experience in IT training at 3rd Level Colleges.

Roles & Responsibilities: Delivery of Internal and External Training across complete product range.

PVMS Training Course Dates

| Date (Week Commencing) | Region / Location |
|---------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 07/01/08 | South West / Bristol |
| 14/01/08 | South East / Kent |
| 18/02/08 | Midlands / Birmingham |
| 25/02/08 | Yorkshire & Humber / Bradford |
| 10/03/08 | North East / Darlington |
| 31/03/08 | Yorkshire & Humber / Sheffield |

Northgate Training Course Dates

| Date (Week Commencing) | Region / Location |
|---------------------------|------------------------|
| 21/01/08 | North West / Wakefield |
| 28/01/08 | Midlands / Nottingham |
| 03/02/08 | South West / Bristol |
| 11/02/08 | South East / Bracknell |

* All dates and locations are provisional and may be subject to change

To book please phone sales on 028 7137 1111 or email sales@opt2vote.com

Course Details: OPT2VOTE offer a dedicated training service designed to meet the demanding requirements of electoral staff. Whatever your role, OPT2VOTE has developed comprehensive training materials to cater for your requirements. With a flexible approach to content selection, the training is expertly delivered in instructor led classes to:

- Offer practical exercises to maximise the learning experience
- Enable busy staff to benefit from concise training sessions
- Increase skill levels for all staff
- Increase quality management in elections
- Increase speed and confidence in product use
- Decrease risk on projects

Earning a specific training credential provides an objective measure of your ability to successfully perform critical functions. To secure your place or for further details please email sales@opt2vote.com or phone sales on 028 7137 1111.

»» OPT2VOTE ADVISORY GROUP UPDATE

OPT2VOTE's Advisory Group has been in place for almost six months and has proved both popular and beneficial for improving understanding of customers' needs and promoting feedback to develop and strengthen products. To date OPT2VOTE, alongside Group members, has made significant progress in developing and enhancing Print products, Postal Vote Management Solution (PVMS) and Personal Identifier Matching Solution (PIMS). In this edition of Voting Matters OPT2VOTE has asked some Local Authorities to give their views on the Advisory Group...

SALMAN MATHER, BRADFORD COUNCIL

*"Bradford Council has worked with **OPT2VOTE** every year since 2004 utilising their PVMS solution and our experience together has encompassed Parish, District, European and General elections. What we have always found most satisfying about working with **OPT2VOTE** is that it is much more than a contractual relationship, we have developed a genuine partnership between our staff and colleagues in **OPT2VOTE** who have shown great personal commitment to helping us deliver successful elections often in adverse circumstances. Of course things don't always go to plan and in the May 2007 elections, like many other authorities, we certainly had our fair share of problems as a result of the introduction of personal identifiers.*

*Following the May elections we were invited to join the **OPT2VOTE** Advisory Group with the aim of learning from our shared experience and those of other customer authorities and to assist **OPT2VOTE** in developing improved products that would meet our future needs. I have attended two meetings of the advisory group and have been deeply impressed at just how focussed and useful they have been. In preparation for the first advisory group and subsequent meetings the **OPT2VOTE** team had clearly done a huge amount of preparatory work mapping out potential customer requirements and product improvements. We were thoroughly consulted on these and an action plan was produced assigning responsibilities for particular actions to named persons and with clear time scales. Advisory group members have been kept informed of developments by e-mail and our input has been sought at key stages. It is apparent that **OPT2VOTE** are determined to deliver on their promises and we have already seen some very useful changes to products which should be available at the next elections. For me the Advisory Group has had a number of benefits, it has been a great opportunity to network with colleagues, it has given us the opportunity to discuss our needs with **OPT2VOTE** and it has enabled us to plan with confidence for our next election."*

DEBORAH MERRY, SOLIHULL COUNCIL

"Like many other authorities, we found this year's new postal voting requirements quite a challenge. With hindsight it was always going to be difficult - implementing new regulations at such short notice and without proper training or even having tried and tested the computer systems fully before going live, we were never really sure it would be 'alright on the night'.

As a result the experience was far from comfortable, characterised more than anything by a feeling of loss of control over critical areas such as the preparation of ballot papers and the production and issue of postal voting packs as more reliance had to be placed on external suppliers.

*One thing we were clear about after the event - we never want to have an election like that again, next year has GOT to be better! **OPT2VOTE**, for their part, has been completely open about the things that did not go well at this year's elections and has demonstrated a strong commitment to improving the services offered to their customers in the future.*

*An Advisory Group was set up by **OPT2VOTE** soon after the elections and has met on a number of occasions to discuss the improvements that need to be made. The **OPT2VOTE** Team has taken away the suggestions and ideas from Advisory Group sessions and, in between meetings, has come back with revised documentation, proposals for product redesign and regular progress reports. Detailed plans have been worked up for communication between customer and supplier during the elections - one of the key areas where we felt most badly let down this year.*

*My experience of working with the **OPT2VOTE** Team through the Advisory Group has given me confidence that most of this year's problems will be resolved. Of course there's no guarantee that next year's elections will be easy but it's good to feel that **OPT2VOTE** are really listening to what their customers want."*

CHERYL MULVIHILL, BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL COMMENTED

*"**OPT2VOTE** are to be commended on their commitment to developing their product to meet all the needs of its customers. The introduction of the Advisory Group is of great benefit, enabling Authorities to play a full part in future developments, and advise on customer needs.*

***OPT2VOTE** are proving that they listen to all their customers' feedback, and are intent on learning from them, developing improvements to ensure that they are developing a very easy to use, safe product that will provide a reliable service for any future Elections."*

OPT2VOTE would like to take this opportunity to thank all participants of the Advisory Group for their commitment and support over recent months. Without your feedback and input the progress that has been made on **OPT2VOTE**'s product portfolio for 2008 would not have been possible. Should you wish to be involved in future **OPT2VOTE** Advisory Group events please email votingmatters@opt2vote.com and we will contact you.

Events

6th December 2007
OPT2VOTE Product Launch
Radisson SAS Hotel, Belfast

7th December 2007
**OPT2VOTE Advisory
Group Meeting**
Radisson SAS Hotel, Belfast

17th January 2008
**SOLACE National
Elections Conference**
Thistle Hotel, Marble Arch, London

24th to 27th February 2008
**AEA Annual Seminar
and Exhibition 2008**
Hilton Hotel, Blackpool

»» We welcome your feedback and suggestions. Please write to: votingmatters@opt2vote.com
OPT2VOTE LTD., 25D BISHOP STREET, DERRY, BT48 6PR T: +44 (0)28 7137 1111 W: www.opt2vote.com

Opinions expressed in Voting Matters are not necessarily the opinions of **OPT2VOTE** or the editor. While every effort is made to ensure the accuracy of the information contained in Voting Matters, no responsibility can be accepted for any errors or omissions. No part of this document can be used without the express permission of the editor. All photography is used with thanks to the respective owners. **OPT2VOTE** Ltd. All rights Reserved.