

**THE PERFORMANCE OF  
FAR-RIGHT POLITICAL PARTIES  
IN THE MAY 2006 LOCAL COUNCIL ELECTIONS**

**Race Equality West Midlands  
RED May 2006 Birmingham**

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## **Introduction**

The report looks at the performance in the local council elections held on May 4<sup>th</sup> 2006 of those political parties whose policies derive from an extreme nationalist, racist and authoritarian belief system. They are more commonly known as 'far right' political parties. The main party of the far right to contest seats in the May 2006 local council elections was the British National Party (BNP).

The report looks at the issues and accompanying media attention that may have contributed to the performance of the far-right political parties in the May elections, the areas where the elections took place, the candidates fielded by far right political parties, the national results, and a more detailed examination of what happened in the West Midlands (the region of the UK that Race Equality West Midlands serves).

## Summary

### **BNP success in the May 2006 local authority elections**

The BNP had its best ever results in the local authority elections in May 2006. It increased the number of its councillors from 20 to 48 and this figure rose shortly afterwards to 49, with the defection of a councillor to it from a mainstream political party. The BNP now has councillors on 16 major local authorities.

In the elections, the BNP received on average just over 18% of the votes cast in those electoral wards it contested. In total, it received some 235,000 votes. The best result was in the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham where it had 12 councillors elected, making it the main opposition group in the Labour-controlled authority.

The BNP only contests a minority of local authority elections. In May 2006, it contested around 8% of the seats coming up for election in just over 40% of the local authorities that held elections.

The BNP is more successful in local authority elections than the nationalist right United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) and other far-right political groupings. The BNP has more councillors than UKIP. Where the BNP and UKIP were standing against each other in the May elections, the BNP consistently polled more votes than UKIP and sometimes won council seats. The only other far right party to win seats in the May elections was the England First Party in Blackburn. It won 2 seats.

In the West Midlands, there was an increase in the number of BNP and far right party candidates standing in the May 2006 elections compared with the equivalent previous local authority elections in 2004. The BNP contested around 28% of the seats that were subject to election. For the first time, the BNP contested all 40 electoral wards in Birmingham.

In the West Midlands, the BNP's best results were in Sandwell and Stoke. In Sandwell, the number of BNP councillors rose to 4 (previously it only had one councillor) and in Stoke, the number of BNP councillors increased from 2 to 5. For the first time in the West Midlands, one BNP councillor was elected in Solihull and another in Redditch.

The election results in the West Midlands in Birmingham, Walsall, and Dudley, indicate that the BNP's vote may have reached a plateau. Whilst it has a substantial minority vote in these areas and, in isolated wards, is relatively close to winning them, its performance in the 2006 elections saw no significant improvement on its performance in the 2004 elections.

The elections results in Birmingham, in particular, indicate that the BNP does less well in multi-racial wards and in wards with substantial minority ethnic populations. The white population in these areas is less likely to vote for the BNP. The BNP does best in lower middle/working class wards with almost wholly-white populations.

## Chapter One

### **The run up to the May 2006 elections.**

In the General Election in May 2005, the BNP contested 119 constituencies and received almost 193,000 votes. Whilst the BNP's average number of votes in the constituencies it contested increased compared to the previous 2001 general election, it did not come close to winning any constituency. With the exception of one constituency (Barking in east London) the BNP always received a smaller number of votes than the three mainstream political parties. Overall, the results were a disappointment for the BNP and in no constituency was it left in a position where it could claim that it was well placed to win the constituency in a future general election.

On the same day in May 2005, elections were held for some local authorities. These mainly took place in county councils in semi-urban/rural areas where the BNP's record of electoral success (with a few exceptions) was poor. The BNP fielded very few candidates in these elections. On the same day, there was also an election for a new mayor of the unitary authority in Stoke on Trent. It is a city where the BNP already had two councillors and enjoyed a level of electoral support. The BNP candidate in the mayoral elections received nearly 16,000 votes, or 19% of the total votes cast. It was double the number of votes that the BNP received on the same day in Stoke in the general election and showed that in local council elections it was capable of attracting significantly more votes.

In late June 2005, the BNP lost its only council seat in London in the borough of Barking and Dagenham. The BNP had won this seat in a council by-election in September 2004 from the Labour Party. The 2005 by-election was caused by the resignation of the BNP councillor who was reported as saying 'he found council business going over his head and it was a waste of time him being there'. Labour comfortably regained the seat in the 2005 by-election. Labour received help in the by-election campaign from third party groups opposed to the BNP.

In early July 2005, four bombs exploded on the transport network in London, causing fatalities and casualties. It was quickly established that the planters of all the bombs killed themselves in doing so, and were Muslims. The BNP, with its hardening Islamophobic stance, sought to exploit the situation in a further council by-election in Barking and Dagenham shortly afterwards. It was unsuccessful, with the Labour Party comfortably winning the election and the BNP receiving just 19% of the vote.

For the remainder of 2005, the BNP largely disappeared from media attention. There were no issues around race that it could exploit and it contested only a minority of the council by-elections, taking place. When it did contest these elections, it did not come close to winning any seat and often received a smaller number of votes than the mainstream political parties.

In January 2006, the trial began in Leeds crown court of the BNP party leader, Nick Griffin, and party activist, Mark Collett. They were charged with incitement to racial

hatred. The charges arose from the BBC documentary, *Secret Policeman*, broadcast in July 2004. It attracted some five million viewers. This undercover report showed that the BNP was riddled with violence and racism.

The trial attracted media coverage and the BNP argued that broadcast quotes from the two men such as 'Islam being a vicious wicked faith' and describing asylum seekers as 'cockroaches' were within the bounds of free speech. On 2<sup>nd</sup> February, the two men were acquitted by the jury of half of the charges but the jury was deadlocked over the remaining charges. As a result, a retrial on these charges is expected to take place. Nick Griffin and the BNP claimed the verdict was a victory for free speech and for speaking the truth. The outcomes received widespread television and newspaper coverage. On the same day as these verdicts were publicised, a council by-election took place in the East Midlands borough council of Amber Valley. Although the Labour party retained the seat, the BNP came second with 30% of the vote. It was its best performance in a council by-election for many months.

In February, considerable media attention was given to protests from Muslim communities in a number of countries, including the UK, about the publication in leading European journals of anti-Muslim cartoons which had originally featured in an obscure Danish magazine. In the UK, it included the media showing a group of young Muslims on a protest march/meeting in London dressed up as suicide bombers. It was a situation that the BNP used in the run up to the elections in May to present itself as the defender of freedom of speech and the British 'way of life', which was under threat from the Muslim faith.

In late February, a Bradford BNP councillor, Angela Clarke, resigned. It was reported that verbal abuse from a fellow BNP councillor had contributed to her decision. Angela Clarke had topped the poll in the Keighley West ward in the 2004 local council elections. Keighley was the town where the BNP had sought for some time to exploit public concern about the exploitation of young white girls by men for sex and drugs, known as 'grooming'. The BNP falsely claimed that the perpetrators were solely Muslim men. In the ensuing by-election in late March, the Labour party comfortably regained the seat from the BNP. The victorious Labour candidate's daughter had been a victim of the 'grooming'.

The BNP's manifesto for the local council elections entitled 'Standing for local freedom, security, identity and democracy', consisted of pledges in a twelve-point action plan. Some of the pledges, such as opposition to the selling of public assets, opposition to waste disposal charges and saving green-belt land, could have appeared in more mainstream political party manifestoes. The BNP's core racism however, was still on show. One of its pledges was entitled 'asylum clampdown', where it boldly stated that 'BNP councillors will do everything in their power to prevent asylum seekers being dumped in our areas'. In another pledge entitled 'equal treatment', the BNP stated 'different ethnic groups within the population will have money spent on them according to the percentage of the taxpaying population they make up'. For the BNP, ethnicity, not need, ought to determine how the council spends its money. Under the same equal treatment pledge, the BNP also stated 'we will examine closely the licensing policies of the council in relation to taxi and mini-cab businesses to ensure that the ownership of such firms bears the closest possible relationship to the average make-up of the local population'. This reflected the BNP's opposition to the

numbers of Asian (Muslim) taxi drivers and firms, and its wish to reduce them simply because of the ethnicity of the owners and employees.

On 16<sup>th</sup> April, the *Sunday Telegraph* newspaper carried an article which quoted the Government Minister and MP for Barking, Margaret Hodge, as saying that, when canvassing in her constituency for the Labour party in the local council elections, she had 'found as many as eight out of ten white families admitting they were tempted to vote for the BNP' and 'that's something we've never seen before in all my years. Even when people voted BNP they used to be ashamed to vote BNP'. She also said 'The Labour Party hasn't talked to these people...part of the reason they switch to the BNP is they feel no one else is listening to them'. In the absence of other leading news stories on a public bank holiday weekend, Margaret Hodge's comments attracted widespread media coverage and comment.

A You Gov opinion poll published in the *Daily Telegraph* a few days later on how people would vote in a General Election found that 7% of voters would vote for the BNP (previously this polling organisation had found no identifiable support for the BNP). Also, the same poll found that 24% of voters had considered voting for the BNP in the past or were now thinking of doing so. A similar finding from separate research carried out for the Rowntree Charitable Trust was also extensively quoted in the media. The BNP party leader, Nick Griffin, was interviewed by a range of media organisations and, shortly before polling day, the main BBC news programmes were carrying a story from Barking and Dagenham containing interviews from people openly admitting their intention to vote for the BNP.

The intention behind Margaret Hodge's comments was no doubt designed to alert the public to the dangers presented by the BNP and to encourage people to vote against it. From the BNP's viewpoint, how the story developed in the media gave it public attention and showed in places like Barking and Dagenham that it was an acceptable and legitimate political party to vote for. The BNP was to receive a further boost from another major news story before polling day.

On 26<sup>th</sup> April, the story broke that foreign nationals who had served terms of imprisonment in the UK for criminal offences and been recommended for deportation when they finished their prison sentences, had been allowed to go free. Several of them had re-offended on their release from prison. The story gave succour to the BNP's long-standing claim that immigration into the UK was uncontrolled and that the government had failed to deport immigrants (foreigners) who committed crimes in this country.

## Chapter Two

### What happened across the UK

In May 2006, elections took place in 176 local authorities in England. In the 32 London boroughs, because of boundary changes, all seats came up for election. Generally, in each London borough, three councillors are elected for each electoral ward and serve for a term of four years. Outside of London, elections were held in local authorities covering the metropolitan (urban) areas of the West Midlands, Merseyside, Greater Manchester, South Yorkshire, West Yorkshire and Tyne and Wear. One third of council seats were subject to election and generally this meant that one seat in the three-member electoral wards was contested. The successful candidate was elected for a four-year term. Outside of the metropolitan areas, elections took place in some unitary authorities and in a minority of district authorities in two-tier county areas. Again, one third of council seats was subject to election.

Far Right political parties fielded some 385 candidates. They contested just 9% of the seats holding elections. They stood for elections in 76 (43%) of the 176 local authorities holding elections. The BNP fielded an estimated 360 candidates and other far-right political parties, 25. Of the other far right political parties, the largest group of candidates came from Third Way. It had 14 candidates in the London borough of Havering. The National Front had just 4 candidates.

Direct comparisons with the number of candidates that the BNP had in previous council elections cannot easily be made as the number of local authorities having elections and the number of council seats subject to elections varies from one year to the next. What is known is:

- In the last major council elections in urban areas in England and Wales in 2004, the BNP fielded 309 candidates for seats in 59 local authorities. In the May 2006 elections outside of London, the BNP fielded some 326 candidates for seats in 64 different English local authorities. It was a similar number to 2003. There was a significant increase in the number of BNP candidates in the West Midlands (an increase of 27 candidates) and fewer BNP candidates in the North East (down 14). In other regions, the number of BNP candidates was not significantly different from 2004.
- In Greater London, the BNP fielded 36 candidates for seats in 16 different local authorities. In the previous elections in 2002 in Greater London, the BNP fielded 22 candidates for seats in 8 different local authorities. None was successful and there were no BNP candidates in Barking and Dagenham where the BNP was to enjoy significant success in the 2006 elections. There was clearly an increase in the BNP's capacity to fight local council elections in 2006 in London compared with 2002.

#### *The Election Results*

Across England, the Conservative Party share of the vote in the elections was 40%, the Liberal Democrat 27%, and Labour 26%. The share of the vote for other political parties was 7%, with both the Green Party and the BNP increasing their number of

councillors. There was a net gain of 300 seats for the Conservatives and an equivalent loss for Labour. There was almost no change in the number of seats held by the Liberal Democrats. In terms of political control of councils, there was a relatively small increase (18 in total) in the number of councils either run by the Conservatives, or with no political party in control. The election results reflected some dissatisfaction with the Labour Government and a renewed enthusiasm amongst Conservative voters to go out and vote, following the election of the new party leader. There was a trend in some local authorities of all mainstream political parties losing control of councils where they were unpopular as a result of local decisions or were perceived to be losing touch with the electorate. It was a situation that, in some areas, the BNP was able to exploit to its advantage.

The BNP across England received around 235,000 votes. In the wards where it fielded candidates, its average share of the vote was just over 18%. The number of BNP councillors on major councils in the UK increased from 20 to 48. Most of the BNP's gains in council seats were from the Labour Party. In total, the BNP has political representation on 10 unitary authorities (responsible for all council services) and 5 district authorities (responsible for some council services). The councils where the BNP now has councillors are:

**London**

Barking & Dagenham 12# (12 gains)  
 Havering 1\* (1 gain)  
 Redbridge 1\* (1 gain)

**Eastern**

Broxborne District 1  
 Epping Forest District 6 (3 gains)

**West Midlands**

Birmingham + 1 (1 gain)  
 Redditch District 1\*(1 gain)  
 Sandwell 4 (3 gains)  
 Solihull 1\* (1 gain)  
 Stoke 5 (3 gains)

**North West**

Burnley District 7 (net gain 1)  
 Pendle District 1\* (gain 1)

**Yorkshire**

Bradford 2 (net loss 1)  
 Calderdale 2 (loss 1)  
 Kirklees 3 (gain 2)  
 Leeds 1\*(gain 1)

\* First time BNP candidate elected to local council

# Currently BNP has 11 councillors. However, one result subject to legal petition to the courts as wrong result declared. A seat was given to Labour when apparently won by the BNP.

+ This result subject to legal petition to the courts as wrong result declared. A seat was given to the BNP when apparently won by Labour.

The increase in the number of BNP councillors was the largest experienced by the party since it first started to win seats on local authorities in local council elections in 2002. The BNP's average share of the vote in the electoral wards where it stood was slightly up on the last time that local elections to councils took place in similar urban areas in 2004. In 2004, the BNP average share of the vote where it fielded candidates was 16%.

The BNP's best result was in the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham where it won 11, and potentially 12, council seats. It achieved this even though the electoral threat from the BNP was well known in advance to the mainstream political parties,

and intense campaigning was carried out by independent third- party groups opposed to the BNP. The BNP is the main opposition party in the borough to the controlling Labour group. It is the only council in the UK where the BNP is the main opposition group. The BNP fielded 13 candidates although all 51 council seats were subject to election. It also only contested seats in 7 of the 17 wards in the borough. In the seats it contested, 11 (potentially 12) of the 13 BNP candidates were elected. In these wards, there was a good voter turnout for local elections (between 37% and 41%). In 5 of the wards where the BNP was elected, its candidates topped the poll. It is possible that if the BNP had fielded a full slate of candidates in these wards, it would have won all the seats and thus enhanced its representation on the council. Nearly all the BNP gains were made at the expense of Labour. Nearly all the wards where the BNP won seats were predominantly (over 90%) white with small minority ethnic populations.

Following the elections, there was the defection to the BNP of a Conservative councillor, Robert West, in South Holland District Council, Lincolnshire. . The Conservative councillor, an ordained elder in an evangelical Christian church, was already subject to an inquiry by the Conservative Party for addressing a BNP meeting. Cllr West's reported reasons for joining the BNP included opposition to the Conservative party's priority list of general election candidates as it 'excluded white males in favour of women, non whites, homosexuals and lesbians'. It brings the number of BNP councillors in major authorities to 49.

Of the other far-right political parties that stood in the May council elections, the only party to achieve success was the England First Party (EFP) in Blackburn. The party fielded a total of two candidates in two wards (Fernhurst and Meadowhead) in Blackburn and both were elected. The seats were gained from the Conservative and Labour parties respectively. The minority ethnic population in Blackburn is 22% but, in the two wards where the EFP saw their candidates elected, the minority ethnic population was negligible (98% of the population being white). One of the EFP councillors is the party chairman, Mark Cotterill, who was formerly associated with the BNP. He and a number of others left the BNP some four years ago to form the White Nationalist Party. This has now become defunct and replaced by a number of smaller far-right groups, of which the EFP is one. The manifesto of the EFP makes it clear that it believes that 'the multi-racial experiment is a disaster for the stability and well being of our country' and, at a more local level, that 'the EFP pledge to house local English people first before immigrants'.

The last major elections to councils in urban areas (June 2004) took place on the same day as elections for UK members to the European Parliament. The BNP obtained just over 800,000 votes (4.9% of the vote) but failed to win any seats in the European Parliament elections. The BNP blamed (with some justification) the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) for splitting the nationalist vote and depriving it of winning seats. UKIP did much better than the BNP in these European Parliament elections, winning some 16% of the vote and a number of seats in the European Parliament. Research conducted for the Rowntree Trust<sup>1</sup> on these elections also showed a link in voters' minds between the BNP and UKIP, with the parties being seen, to a certain extent, as interchangeable. This suggested that if UKIP and the BNP

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<sup>1</sup> The Far Right in London a Challenge for Local Democracy Oct 2005

contested the same seats in the local council elections in 2006, two things could happen:

- If there was only one seat in a ward that was up for election and there were BNP and UKIP candidates, then the nationalist (right) vote would be split to the advantage of the mainstream parties.
- If there were three seats up for election in a ward but, for example, only two BNP candidates standing and one UKIP candidate, then voters would vote in almost the same numbers for the BNP and UKIP candidates.

The May 2006 elections results showed that in the wards where the BNP was in competition with UKIP for council seats the BNP always polled more votes than UKIP and, in many cases, considerably more. Also, the results from Barking and Dagenham, where the BNP and UKIP were in competition in a number of wards, showed that UKIP did not sufficiently split the right nationalist vote to prevent the BNP from winning. What is more, electors who voted for the BNP in these wards did not automatically transfer their remaining votes to UKIP when the BNP did not have a full slate of 3 candidates in a ward. UKIP failed to win any seats where the BNP was successful. Instead, it was Labour who had the remaining councillors elected in wards where the BNP was winning seats with one or two candidates.

## Chapter Three

### What happened in the West Midlands

In May 2006, elections took place in 17 local authorities in the West Midlands, covering the seven boroughs of the former West Midlands Metropolitan county council, the unitary authority of Stoke on Trent and some district authorities in the county areas. Generally, elections were held for one third of council seats or just over 300 in number, with the successful candidates serving for a four-year term.

Prior to these elections, the only far right political party with local authority councillors was the BNP. It had a total of three councillors (two in Stoke and one in Sandwell). None of the BNP councillors was required in the May elections to seek re-election. The BNP fielded 86 candidates, and the National Front 3 candidates, in 12 of the 17 local authorities holding elections. This was an increase of some 28 candidates compared with the last equivalent major local authority elections across the West Midlands in 2004. The far-right parties contested around 28% of the seats subject to elections.

Across the West Midlands, the BNP received some 64,300 votes, and the National Front, 800. Eight BNP candidates were elected to give the BNP a total of 11 councillors in four different local authorities. Historically, this is the highest number of far right political party councillors to be elected to local authorities in the West Midlands. The election performance of the BNP is set out in the following table.

<b>Council</b>	<b>Seats up for election</b>	<b>BNP candidates</b>	<b>Total votes received</b>	<b>BNP candidates elected</b>
Birmingham	41	40	29,045	1+
Cannock Chase	13	1	550	0
Coventry	18	7	3,400	0
Dudley	24	5	5,116	0
Redditch	10	1	890	1
Sandwell	24	9	9,268	3
Solihull	17	3	2,139	1
Stoke	20	8	6,994	3
Walsall	20	7	4,911	0
Wolverhampton	20	1	1,016	0
Worcester	12	2	751	0

+ This result subject to legal petition in the courts as wrong result declared. A seat was given to the BNP when apparently won by Labour.

### ***Birmingham***

In the May 2006 elections, the BNP, for the first time, contested all 40 wards in the local authority. None of its candidates was elected on the vote (but see below for details of incorrect declaration of the BNP candidate as the winner in Kingstanding). Its share of the vote across the local authority was estimated to be 15%. Very few council seats changed from one political party to another and the council remained with no political party in overall control. The BNP received 20% or more of the vote in four electoral wards (Oscott, Shard End, Sheldon, and Tyburn. Its best results were in:

- Oscott, where it received 24.7% of the votes cast (1,652 votes) and was in a good third place behind the winning Labour candidate and the Conservatives in second place. The BNP candidate was 470 votes behind the winning Labour candidate.
- Shard End, where it received 25.9% of the votes cast (1,320 votes) and was in second place behind the winning Labour candidate. Labour's majority over the BNP was 696 votes.

Across the 40 electoral wards, the average vote obtained by the BNP was 726 votes per ward. This was less than in the previous elections for the local authority in 2004 when the BNP contested 24 of the 40 electoral wards and received an average of 912 votes per ward. The main reason for the fall in the BNP's average vote per ward was that in 2006 the BNP was contesting all electoral wards and thus areas of the local authority where it had less electoral support. If the BNP's average vote per ward in 2006 is confined to the 24 wards that it contested in 2004, it received on average 948 votes per ward. This is the same or slightly higher than the average vote it received in these wards in 2004, suggesting that while the BNP has a significant minority vote in these wards, it has reached a plateau.

In the 2001 census, the ethnic make up of the population of Birmingham was 70.4% white and 29.6% minority ethnic (primarily Asian and black Caribbean) . When a comparison is made between the ethnic make-up of the population in electoral wards and the votes received by the BNP, it is found that:

- In the 21 electoral wards where the population is largely white (over 85%), the BNP's share of the vote was over 10% in most (18) of the electoral wards.
- In the 10 electoral wards where the population was relatively multi racial (white population between 50% and 85%, and minority ethnic population between 50% and 15%), the BNP's share of the vote was less than 10% in 6 wards and between 14/16% in 4 wards.
- In the 9 electoral wards where the ethnic minority population formed the majority (50% or more) of the electorate, the BNP's share of the vote was always less than 10%, and in nearly all wards (8) less than 5%.

The BNP clearly does less well in areas which are multi racial or with significant minority ethnic populations. It does best in areas which have largely white populations. There is also some indication that the BNP does best in white-populated electoral wards where the white population is largely working or lower- middle class. The four wards where the BNP obtained 20% or more of the votes cast were wards where the make-up of population was in this category.

In one electoral ward (Kingstanding) where there were two vacancies for councillors, a mistake appears to have been made in the counting of the votes and the formal declaration of the result. It led to a Labour Party candidate and the BNP candidate being declared as elected when the correct result was that the two Labour Party candidates were the clear winners. The mistake was apparently only discovered shortly after the official declaration of the result. As a result, a petition to the courts is being made for the correctly-elected councillor to take the seats in the local authority. The mistake led to considerable media coverage in the local media, particularly for the BNP candidate. The BNP and its candidate claimed that the correct result was meaningless as the recounting of votes took place behind closed doors with election staff and with no political party candidates being present. What is clear is that the mistake in the counting of the votes presented the BNP with an opportunity for publicity, which it would not otherwise have enjoyed, to spread the impression that, during the counting, votes had been tampered with to prevent the BNP from winning (see appendix below).

### *Coventry*

In the May 2006 elections, the BNP contested 7 out of the 17 electoral wards in the local authority. This was a significant increase on the number of wards that it had contested in the previous election for the local authority in 2004. In 2004, the BNP had contested just one ward (Woodlands) when it received 894 votes and was in third place behind two of the mainstream political parties.

The BNP has, in more recent general elections, contested one of the three parliamentary constituencies in the city. In the 2005 general election, it was the Coventry North West constituency. It received 3.6% of the votes cast which, for the BNP in the West Midlands, was one of its more modest performances.

In the May 2006 elections, the BNP did not come close to winning any council seats. In all wards, it was either in third or fourth place. It received a total of 3,400 votes in the seven wards it contested. Its overall share of the votes cast in these wards was around 13%. Its highest share of the vote in a ward was 18.2% and the lowest 4.0% (a ward with a significant minority ethnic population). The only comparison that can be made is with previous elections in the Woodlands ward. In May 2006, it received a total of 653 votes and was in fourth place. In 2004, it received 894 votes.

The Conservatives took control of the council from no political party gaining overall control by two seats. Even though the BNP fielded a significantly greater number of candidates in May 2006, the elections showed that it had a relatively small level of electoral support in Coventry. This is a continuation of a pattern from previous elections.

## *Dudley*

In the May 2006 elections, the BNP contested 5 electoral wards out of 24 in the local authority. The wards it contested were centred on the Dudley North parliamentary constituency where it obtained some 4,000 votes in the 2005 general election and a 9.7% share of the votes cast (it was one of the BNP's best result in the UK). In the previous elections for the local authority in 2004 (when all seats were subject to election), the BNP contested 4 wards and fielded 6 candidates. In the 2006 elections, the BNP contested the same 4 wards plus one other ward (St. James).

The Conservatives retained control of the local authority with a majority of 8 seats over all the other parties. Only one seat changed from one political party to another (Labour gaining a seat from the Liberal Democrats). The BNP received 5,116 votes but did not win a council seat.

The BNP, on average, received around 25% of the votes cast in the wards it contested. Its average vote per ward was 1,023. This compares with an average vote of 1,125 in the 4 wards it contested in the 2004 elections. The BNP came second in two wards and was a strong third in the remaining three wards it contested. The BNP's best result was in the Coseley East ward where it was just 36 votes behind the winning Labour candidate. The voter turnout in the wards contested by the BNP ranged from 36.5% to 43.9%, which is a good turnout for local council elections. Of the five wards contested by the BNP, the Labour party won three (it included the St. James seat which it gained from the Liberal Democrats) and the Conservatives, two.

In the 2003 local authority elections, the BNP gained the Castle and Priory ward seat from Labour with 43% of the votes cast to have its first councillor elected in Dudley. It narrowly lost the seat in the all-out elections the following year by 36 votes. In the May 2006 elections, the BNP was 556 votes behind the winning Labour candidate with 24.3% of the votes cast.

In the 2001 census, the ethnic make-up of the population in Dudley was 92.5% white and 7.5% from minority ethnic groups. The minority ethnic population in Dudley is one of the smallest in the West Midlands. In the 2006 elections, 4 of the electoral wards contested by the BNP had overwhelmingly white populations (over 95%). The exception was St James, where 19% of the population consists of minority ethnic groups. For Dudley, it is a multi-racial ward. In St James, the BNP received a respectable 21% of the votes cast and was in third place behind the Labour and Liberal Democrat candidates. It was only 101 votes away from winning the seat.

The May election results suggest that the BNP has a significant vote in parts of Dudley but, when compared with the previous elections in 2004, there was no overall improvement. The BNP vote appears to have flattened out. However, this cannot mask the fact that the BNP came extremely close to winning the Coseley East ward, although it fell back in the one ward it had previously won (Castle and Priory). Also, the BNP polled well in the multi-racial St. James ward, which is a pattern that was not repeated elsewhere in the West Midlands.

### ***Redditch***

Redditch is a district council in Worcestershire and, prior to the May elections, the controlling group on the council had been Labour. Labour lost two seats in the elections, with the result that no political party now controls the council. Of the two seats that Labour lost, one was to the BNP in the Winyates ward.

In the May 2006 elections, the BNP contested one seat in one electoral ward in the local authority, namely, Winyates. It had not contested seats in previous and more recent elections in Redditch. The BNP won the won seat it contested from a long-serving councillor by 12 votes. The turnout of voters in Winyates was high for local authority elections at 44%.

Winyates is a mainly residential area in Redditch. It has a predominantly white population of 98%. The successful BNP candidate was reported in the local press as saying he had only joined the party less than a year previously. The outcome in Winyates may have been an isolated and one-off success for the BNP. However, it could also provide the opportunity for it to gain a political base in Redditch.

### ***Sandwell***

There is a history of far-right political parties contesting local authority and general elections in Sandwell. In the 2003 local authority elections, the BNP succeeded for the first time in having two councillors elected in the Princes End and Great Bridge wards. In the local authority elections in 2004, when all council seats were subject to election due to changes in electoral ward boundaries, far-right political parties (the BNP and the Freedom Party) contested 5 electoral wards with 12 candidates. The BNP succeeded in having one councillor elected in the Princes End ward. In the subsequent general election in 2005, the BNP contested three out of the four parliamentary constituencies in Sandwell. Its best result was in the West Bromwich West constituency where it received 3,456 votes, or a 9.9% share of the votes cast. The BNP has targeted wards in the West Bromwich West constituency in local authority elections.

In the May 2006 elections, the BNP fielded 9 candidates in 9 different electoral wards out of a total of 24 wards where elections were taking place.. Unlike previous local authority elections, no other far-right party contested any seats. Sandwell has historically been controlled by the Labour party and, following the May 2006 local elections, Labour still had 50 out of the 72 seats on the council. Labour did, however, lose three seats to the BNP which were the only seats to see a change in political composition.

The BNP won three seats and it now has a group of four councillors. It received on average around one third of the votes cast in the 9 wards which it contested. Its average vote per ward was 1,030. This compares with an average vote per ward of 884 in the previous 2004 elections. The three wards which the BNP won were:

- Great Bridge: The BNP received 45.4% of the votes cast and had a majority of 186 over the second-placed Labour candidate. The seat was also contested by

the Liberal Democrats. The turnout of voters was 33% (average for local authority elections). It was one of the best results for the BNP in the UK.

- Princes End: The BNP received 43.5% of the votes cast and had a majority of 78 votes over the Labour candidate. The seat was also contested by the Conservative party. The turnout of voters was 29% (relatively low). Two of the three councillors representing this ward are BNP.
- Tividale: The BNP received 37% of the votes cast and had a majority of just 33 votes over the Labour candidate. The seat was also contested by the Conservative and Liberal Democrat parties. The turn-out of voters was 36% (relatively good).

The wards which the BNP won had all been previously contested by it in local elections. The BNP came a close second in a further ward, Tipton Green, where it received a 33.6% share of the vote and was just 73 votes behind the winning Labour candidate. The Conservative Party also contested the ward and was in a strong third position. Tipton Green is a ward which had previously been contested by the far-right Freedom Party which had received a significant number of votes and had come second behind the Labour Party. In the remaining five electoral wards contested by the BNP, it came second, although there was a considerable margin between it and the winning mainstream party candidate.

In the 2001 census, the ethnic make-up of the population in Sandwell was 79.7% white and 21.3% from minority ethnic groups. The three electoral wards won by the BNP had largely white populations of between 90% and 94%. In the Tipton Green ward, where BNP came a strong second, the ethnic make-up of the population in the 2001 census was 76.5% white and 23.5% from minority ethnic groups (close to the average across Sandwell). The largest minority ethnic group is Asian. It is also where the families live of the three young Muslim men held for some years at Guantanamo Bay by the United States government.

The BNP's performance in the May elections was significantly better than in the previous 2004 elections. It won seats which it had targeted for a number of years and wherever it stood in Sandwell it received a significant number of votes. It now has a group of members on the local authority. The BNP has now established a political base in this borough.

### ***Solihull***

In the May 2006 elections, the BNP contested 3 of the 17 electoral wards. In the previous elections to the Council in 2004, when all 51 seats were subject to election, the BNP had fielded just 2 candidates in two wards. Its best result was in Chelmsley Wood, where it received 679 votes and came in second behind the winning Labour Party. In the 2005 general election, the BNP contested one of the two parliamentary constituencies in Solihull, namely, the Solihull constituency. It received a modest 3.4% of the votes cast.

In the May elections the BNP received a total of 2,139 votes in the three wards it contested. It won one ward (Chelmsley Wood) and was third in the other two wards

with vote shares of 16% and 21% respectively. In Chelmsley Wood, the BNP received 707 votes and gained the seat from Labour with a majority of 19 votes. Both the Conservative and Liberal Democrat parties contested the ward. The turn-out of electors was 23.5%, which is low. The ward has a large social housing estate. The BNP only required a small number of extra votes, compared to those that it received in the 2004 election, to win the ward.

The successful BNP candidate had previously contested the seat in the 2004 elections. After the election result was declared, he was quoted in the local press as saying 'immigration is part of it (the success) but our campaign was more based on social issues like rubbish and mini bikes all over the place'.

In the 2001 census, the ethnic make-up of Sandwell was 94.5% white and 5.5% minority ethnic. The minority ethnic population is widely distributed across most wards in Solihull. In Chelmsley Wood, the minority ethnic population comprises 6% of the population and is primarily black Caribbean or of mixed racial origin.

The Conservatives retained control of the local authority with a majority of one seat over all other parties. The BNP's success in Chelmsley Wood may be an isolated event or provide the opportunity for it to form a political base in Solihull.

### ***Stoke on Trent***

The BNP has targeted Stoke in local authority and general elections in recent years. Its potential electoral support first became apparent in 2002 when it received over 8,000 votes (or 18.7% of the votes cast) in the first elections in Stoke for a new executive mayor. In elections to the local authority in 2003 and 2004, the BNP won the Longton North Ward. It has an almost exclusively white population and is a lower-middle and working class ward with a large social housing estate. In the 2005 general election, the BNP contested all three parliamentary constituencies in the city. It received 7,615 votes, or 7.9% of the votes cast. It was one of the BNP's best electoral performances in the UK. Elections were held for the election of a new executive mayor on the same day. (The Labour Party won the election and replaced the previous mayor who was an Independent). The BNP received 15,776 votes, or 19% of the votes cast.

In the May 2006 elections, the BNP contested 8 of the 20 wards. It was the same number of wards as in the 2004 elections. Six of the wards that the BNP contested in 2004 it contested again in 2006. In the May elections, the political composition changed in a small number of electoral wards. It resulted in the Labour Party losing control of the authority, with no political party having a majority of council seats. Labour has 30 seats and a range of other parties also has 30 seats (Independents 13, Conservatives 6, Liberal Democrats 5, BNP 5 and Socialists 1). The BNP gained 3 seats in the May local elections.

The BNP's gain of 3 seats in the May elections means there is now a group of 5 BNP councillors. The BNP had not previously won seats in any of the three wards it won. The BNP received around 30% of the votes cast and a total of 6,994 votes in the 8 wards it contested. Its average vote per ward was 874. In the previous 2004 elections,

the BNP received around 25% of the votes cast in the wards it contested and an average of 760 votes per ward. The three wards which the BNP won were:

- **Abbey Green:** The BNP received 744 votes (24.9% of the votes cast) and had a majority of 131 votes over the second placed Labour candidate. The BNP were helped in winning the seat with a very low proportion of the total votes cast due to the number of candidates standing. Apart from Labour, the seat was contested by four other candidates including a Socialist Party candidate who came third with just over 500 votes. The turnout of electors was 33.7% (average for local authority elections). In the 2004 elections in the ward the BNP received 653 votes or 24.8% of the votes cast and was in second place.
- **Bentilee and Townsend:** The BNP received 735 votes (33.3% of the votes cast) and had a majority of 58 votes over the second-placed Labour candidate. The seat was also contested by Conservative and Independent candidates. The turnout of electors was 24.3% which is low. The BNP had not contested this seat in the 2004 local elections.
- **Weston and Meir North:** The BNP received 945 votes (32.9% of the votes cast) and had a majority of 130 votes over the second-placed Labour candidate. The seat was also contested by Conservative and Independent candidates. The turnout of electors was 30.7% (average turnout). In the 2004 elections in the ward, the BNP received 815 votes or 29.9% of the votes cast and was in third place.

In the Longton North ward, which it had won in the two previous elections, the BNP came second, 82 votes behind the winning Labour candidate. The BNP received 1,350 votes (39.2% of the votes cast). This was a better performance than when it won the seat in 2004 (then it polled 956 votes, or 35.2% of the votes cast). In the remaining 4 wards contested by the BNP, it was in second place in 3 wards and third in the remaining ward.

In the 2001 census, the ethnic make-up of the population in Stoke was 94.8% white and 5.2% minority ethnic. The four wards where the BNP has councillors are almost exclusively white (98% plus of the population). The wards where the BNP is winning seats include areas which are relatively deprived as well as areas that are not.

The BNP performance in the May 2006 elections was an improvement on the 2004 elections and probably its best ever performance in Stoke. It also has a potentially viable group of councillors on the local authority. A minority and growing proportion of the electorate in Stoke is consistently voting for the BNP in elections.

### ***Walsall***

In the May 2006 elections, the BNP contested 7 of the 20 electoral wards. In the previous elections for the local authority in 2004 when all 60 seats (three seats per ward) were subject to election due to changes in electoral ward boundaries, the BNP also contested 7 wards but only stood one candidate in each ward. In the 2006 elections the BNP contested 5 of the 7 wards it had contested in 2004. The BNP did not win any seats in the 2004 elections but clearly established that a minority of the

electorate was prepared to vote for them. This was reinforced in the 2005 general election when the BNP contested all three parliamentary seats in Walsall and overall received 5% of the votes cast. It was one of the BNP's better performances in the West Midlands.

In the May elections, the Conservatives retained control of the council with a majority of 8 seats over the other political parties. The political composition of just two seats changed (Labour gaining two seats from the Conservatives). The BNP received a total of 4,911 votes in the 7 electoral wards it contested but did not win any seat.

In the 7 wards that the BNP contested, it was second in 4 wards and third in the remaining 3 wards. The BNP did not come close to winning any ward. The BNP received around one fifth of the votes in the wards it contested and an average of 702 votes per ward. In the 2004 elections, the BNP's average vote per ward was 697 votes. This suggests that the BNP vote in Walsall may have flattened out. It is a substantial minority vote but is not enough for it to win council seats.

In the 2001 census the ethnic make-up of the population in Walsall was 86.4% white and 13.6% minority ethnic. The wards contested by the BNP in the May 2006 elections had largely white populations. It was over 93% in all wards. The wards that the BNP contested were also the more Conservative Party-inclined wards in Walsall, with 6 of the 7 wards the BNP contested won by the Conservatives. This suggests that the BNP may have more support in middle-class areas in Walsall than is the case generally across the West Midlands.

### ***Wolverhampton***

In May 2006 elections, the BNP contested only 1 of the city's 20 wards. This was in Wednesfield North on the north-east boundary with Walsall. The Conservative candidate won the seat from Labour with 1,225 votes, Labour came in second with 1157, and the BNP was third with 1,016. This represented, respectively, 30.9%, 29.2% and 25.6% of the votes cast. Representatives of the mainstream parties were shocked that a BNP candidate had gained more than a quarter of the vote in a ward in Wolverhampton.

The ward is characterised by what for Wolverhampton is a comparatively small minority ethnic population, its traditional and relatively stable white working class electorate, and the self-contained nature of its estates on the border of the city.

## Appendix

### The strange case of the Kingstanding election result and the BNP candidate

Kingstanding was the only one of the 40 electoral wards in Birmingham, where two seats were being contested in the councils elections on the 4 May 2006. Two candidates were declared the winners of the seats, Zoe Hopkins, one of the Labour contestants, and Sharon Ebanks of the BNP. The major political parties walked out of the count to shouts of 'racist scum' and altercation took place between Labour supporters and BNP activists. Less than an hour after she had made her victory speech, Sharon Ebanks was told she had finished third and not first. Denouncing the verdict, she said 'we know we've won: they counted the votes not once but twice and declared me the winner'.

Because she had been declared the winner, she was entitled to be sworn in at the Council House on the following Monday. The council's chief executive and returning officer later released figures showing the votes as announced and after a recount, and signalled that the council would back a petition to the High Court to have the decision overturned.

The announced and corrected results (published in the *Birmingham Post*, 8.5.06) were as follows:

	Announced	Corrected
Anne Bennett (Ind)	328	171
Hubert Duffy (Lib Dem)	597	446
Sharon Ebanks (BNP)	2,310	1,329
Catherine Grundy (Lab)	1,973	1,823
Mark Haddon (Lib Dem)	719	514
Mick Hawker (Cons)	1,349	1,134
Robert Higginson (Cons)	1,043	966
Zoe Hopkins (Lab)	2,088	1,894
Mohammed Malik (Ind)	109	58
Richard Pitt (Green)	606	315
Terry Williams (NF)	1,207	615

As the story of the counting blunder unfolded, the local press carried interviews on Sharon Ebank and her views. She said that she was not a racist and that her membership of the BNP was 'not a colour thing'. 'I have black neighbours and genuinely believe that we can live together in harmony'. But while she didn't believe in segregation, she drew the line at intermarriage: 'I don't think it works and causes problems for all of society' (*Sunday Mercury*, 07.05.06).

Membership of the BNP is open to those of 'British or kindred European decent', although it offers associate membership to persons who cannot comply with its whites-only criterion. Sharon Ebanks made it clear that ethnic minorities could not join the BNP because members had to be from the indigenous population that is, those who have been living here 'for at least a few hundred years'.

By the 11 June, the *Sunday Mercury* was carrying a story on its front page that Sharon Ebanks was mixed race: her mother was white and her father was black and born in Jamaica. Her step mother had come forward to accuse her of betraying the memory of her father who had died two years previously: 'I don't know how she has the nerve to be a member of the BNP and hold those views when her father was black...After she was elected, Sharon said that she had been adopted as a child, and had spent time in 24 care homes because of her abusive black adoptive father. Although she was in care, she was never adopted and she never had a black step-father. It was her natural father who was black and he was the kindest and gentlest of men' (*Sunday Mercury*, 11.06.06). When contacted by the *Sunday Mercury* Sharon Ebanks denied that her father was Rodwell Ebanks.

At the time of going to press, a recount of the Kingstanding ballot papers has been ordered.

## Acknowledgments

Race Equality Digest 19, *The performance of Far-Right Political Parties in the May 2006 Local Government Elections*, was researched and written by Eric Seward, Associate Executive of Race Equality West Midlands (REWM) and a former Director of the Commission for Race Equality for the north of England. He has a long experience of involvement in election campaigns, including campaigns involving opposition to the British National Party. He has served as a local councillor.

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## Race Equality West Midlands Publications

**Most Race Equality Digests and research reports are available in hard copy from the REWM office or on the REWM website at [www.rewm.org](http://www.rewm.org).**

### **Race Equality Digests (RED)**

- RED 1      *Community cohesion, Bradford, Burnley and Oldham: four significant reports* (January 2003) (superseded by RED 16).
- RED 2      *The draft statutory code of practice on the duty to promote race equality* (February 2002).
- RED 3      *Ethnicity and religious affiliation in the West Midlands region: information from the 2001 Census* (Spring 2003).
- RED 4      *The success of the British National Party and other extreme right-wing parties in the local elections on 1 May 2003* (May 2003). (superseded by RED 19). RED Supplement: *From BUF to BNP: a concise chronology of extreme right-wing activity in Britain and of the responses to it* (May 2003). ( Supplement superseded by book, *From BUF to BNP*).
- RED 5      *How should local race equality work be organised? Developing and positioning race equality organisation in the context of Neighbourhood Renewal and the statutory duty of public authorities to promote race equality* (October 2003).
- RED 6      *Race equality councils and partnerships: their strengths, needs and aspirations. The 2003 audit of resources of West Midlands race equality councils and partnerships* (February 2004) (superseded by RED 9).
- RED 7      *Gypsy and Traveller Communities in the West Midlands Region with information from the last five ODPM counts* (July 2004) (superseded by RED 15).
- RED 8      *Modelling the delivery of local equality services in rapidly changing circumstances. Exploring the feasibility of local equality and human rights facilities in a world of Race Equality Councils and other single equality strand agencies* (July 2004).
- RED 9      *The 2004 national audit of race equality councils and partnerships* (September 2004).
- RED 10     *Assessing the impact on local race equality work of the Commission for Racial Equality's policy for funding organisations under Section 44 of the Race Relations Act (Getting Results 2004-05)* (October 2004).

- RED 11 *Confronting the racist activities of political parties. A guide for voluntary and community organisations* (January 2005).
- RED 12 *Confronting the racist activities of political parties. A guide for local authorities* (February 2005) (Superseded by RED 18).
- RED 13 *What happened to far-right political parties in the West Midlands. An analysis of the 2005 General Election results* (June 2005).
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- RED 15 *Gypsies and Travellers: disadvantage and discrimination. How race equality councils and other voluntary bodies can help* (August 2005).
- RED 16 *How to make the Government's strategy on community cohesion SMARTER (specific, measurable, agreed, realistic, targeted ethnically and reciprocal).* (September 2005).
- RED 17 *British urban ethnic group conflict and violence. Instruments for conflict management and resolution: initial REWM scoping exercise. Working paper 1* (February 2006)
- RED 18 *Confronting the racist activities of political parties. A guide for local authorities and elected members* (fully revised edition, March 2006).
- RED 19 *The performance of far-right political parties in the May 2006 local council elections* (May 2006).

### **Books in the Race Equality Practitioner Series**

*From BUF to BNP, a chronology of racist extremism and of opposition to it,*  
by Frank Reeves and Eric Seward.

### **Research reports**

1. *Race equality: the significance of working with local communities. A strategic review of West Midland racial equality councils and partnerships* (August 2001, revised November 2001).
2. *West Midland Race Equality councils' development project. End-of-project report* (August 2002).
3. *Promoting race equality and community cohesion through local strategic partnerships. Report and recommendations based on research into local strategic partnerships in West Midland NRF and local management pilot areas* (Race Equality West Midlands in association with Government Office for the West Midlands and the Commission for Racial Equality, Birmingham office) (November 2002).

4. *Local authority race equality schemes 2002 and their preparation. How local authorities in the West Midlands have responded to their duties under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000* (Race Equality West Midlands in association with Government Office for the West Midlands, the Commission for Racial Equality, Birmingham office and West Midland Race Equality Councils and Partnerships) (December 2002).
5. *Community cohesion: concept, policy, implementation and theory. An introduction to recent community cohesion initiatives, with reference to West Midlands pathfinder programmes* (Race Equality West Midlands in association with Government Office for the West Midlands, the Commission for Racial Equality, Birmingham office and West Midland Race Equality Councils and Partnerships) (October 2003). (Partially superseded by RED 16).
6. *Impact assessment as a means of improving race equality schemes, eliminating institutional racism and promoting race equality. Scoping the tasks involved with a view to undertaking further analysis of method and providing guidance* (Race Equality West Midlands in association with Government Office for the West Midlands, the Commission for Racial Equality, Birmingham office and West Midland Race Equality Councils and Partnerships) (December 2003).
7. *A new approach to race equality in Warwickshire* (research report undertaken for Warwickshire County Council and other partners as a joint report by TMP Worldwide and Race Equality West Midlands) (May 2004).
8. *Walsall racial equality and diversity audit, review and plan* (research and development report undertaken for Walsall Borough Strategic Partnership) (August 2004).
9. *Jigsaw Mentoring Partnership. Project Review and Recommendations*, prepared for East Staffordshire Race Equality Council (May 2004, finalised September 2004). (See also follow-up evaluation, below.)
10. *Young people for race equality. A compendium of local youth projects promoting race equality and community cohesion in the West Midlands* (March 2005).
11. *Jigsaw Mentoring Partnership, Project Evaluation with Recommendations*, prepared for East Staffordshire Race Equality Council (February 2006).

#### **West Midlands Race Equality Forum responses to consultation**

1. Response to the West Midlands. Regional Assembly Strategic Review of Equality and Diversity (December 2005).
2. Response to the Equalities Review interim report for consultation (Spring 2006).

## **Conference reports**

*Combating racism through the ballot box: meeting the challenges of the racist far-right*, conference organised jointly by the Commission for Racial Equality, Trades Union Congress Midlands Region and Race Equality West Midlands, 15 March 2004, at the Bescott Stadium, Walsall.

*Defeating racial hatred, producing safe communities*, conference organised jointly by the Commission for Racial Equality, the Home Office, the Midlands Monitoring and Networking Group and Race Equality West Midlands, 14 March 2005, at Villa Park, Aston, Birmingham.

*Sexual orientation and religion or belief in the workplace and training - new regulations*, conference organised by Race Equality West Midlands, funded by the Department for Trade and Industry in partnership with the British Federation of Race Equality Councils, 23 March 2005, at the Lakeside conference centre, Aston University, Birmingham (conference training materials by the London Discrimination Unit and conference evaluation report available).

*Improving opportunity, strengthening society. The Government's strategy to increase race equality and community cohesion*. Report of the launch event organised by the Community Cohesion Team at the Government Office for the West Midlands, 14 July 2005, at Shimla Pinks restaurant, 214, Broad Street, Birmingham B15 1AY.

*The local race equality roadmap: the way ahead*, conference organised by Race Equality West Midlands, 22 October 2004, at the Hawthorns, West Bromwich, Birmingham.

## **Annual Report**

*Race Equality West Midlands Annual Report and Audited Accounts, 2004-05*, presented to the REWM board, 29 June 2005.