

Policy and Sustainability Committee

10.00, Tuesday, 24 October 2023

Preparation for the implementation of Photographic Voter ID at UK Parliamentary Elections

Executive/routine
Wards

Routine
All

1. Recommendations

- 1.1 To note the analysis undertaken by the Electoral Commission on the impact of the new Voter ID requirements.
- 1.2 To note the draft Communications Plan provided at Appendix 1 of this report which identifies action by this Council, the ERO and partner agencies to raise public awareness of the new requirements, aligning with the Electoral Commission's national campaign, and targeting those least likely already to hold acceptable forms of ID.

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Preparation for the implementation of Photographic Voter ID at UK Parliamentary Elections

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 This report is in response to a motion passed at the City of Edinburgh Council on 16 March 2023 requesting an analysis of the impact of the new voter ID requirements at UK elections, informed by the experience of the English council elections on 4 May 2023, with an account of actions to be taken by the Returning Officer, the Electoral Registration Officer and the Council to raise public awareness and to minimise the risk of disenfranchisement. Research indicates that that most people who wanted to vote on 4 May were able to do so, but that some groups struggled to meet the ID requirement. A Public Awareness campaign has been planned to target these groups in Edinburgh, aligning with planned national activity.

3. Background

- 3.1 The UK Elections Act 2022 introduced a new requirement for electors to present photographic identification (photo ID) at polling stations for voting at UK Parliamentary elections in Great Britain. On 4 May 2023 local council elections took place in many areas of England. These were the first elections where the new photo ID requirement was in place. The Electoral Commission has now reported in the impact of the new measures and other analyses have been produced.

4. Main report

- 4.1 This report responds to a motion passed by the City of Edinburgh Council on 16 March 2023 which instructed a report to Policy and Sustainability Committee, setting out the impact of “the Conservative’s Voter ID disenfranchisement legislation”, with information on its impact at the English local government elections on 4 May 2023. The report was to address the impact on turnout and participation and identify actions to be taken by the Council, the Returning Officer and the Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) to raise awareness of the new requirements and to minimise any risk of disenfranchisement of voters in Edinburgh.

- 4.2 The Elections Act 2022 introduced several changes to the conduct of UK elections. These include the requirement for voters to show photographic identification before being issued with a ballot paper at a polling station.
- 4.3 In Scotland the provisions of the Act apply only to UK Parliamentary by-elections, UK Parliamentary general elections (from 5 October 2023) and to UK Parliamentary recall petitions.
- 4.4 Voters can use passports, full and provisional driving licences, Proof of Age Standards Scheme (PASS) cards, “Blue badges”, and some concessionary travel cards. The ID used in a polling station must be original, but it does not matter if it is expired, if the photo is a good likeness. Voters may request their ID is inspected in private. Those without an existing acceptable form of voter ID can apply online or by post for a free Voter Authority Certificate (VAC). The VAC displays the name and a passport style photo of a voter.
- 4.5 Local elections in England on 4 May 2023 were the first in Great Britain to require voters to show any form of identification before being issued with a ballot paper. Photographic ID has been a requirement for polling station voters in Northern Ireland since 2003. The experience of these local elections in May 2023 has provided valuable experience and data to inform planning for the application of the new Voter ID rules at the next UK Parliamentary General Election in Edinburgh.
- 4.6 The Electoral Commission has a statutory duty to collect data and publish reports about elections that take place across the UK. Data was collected in polling stations on the number of people who were turned away. Polling station staff also recorded the number of people who later returned to vote successfully. The Commission also engaged with voters directly and with Returning Officer and Electoral Registration Officer Teams.
- 4.7 Interim findings were published by the Electoral Commission in June 2023, finding that awareness of the need to bring ID was high; that only 0.25% of voters did not vote because of the ID requirement; and that around 4% of non-voters said they did not vote because of the ID requirement. However there were concerns expressed about the completeness of the data being collected.
- 4.8 In its statutory report, published in September 2023, the Commission confirmed its interim findings that most people who wanted to vote were able to do so, but some found it harder than others to show accepted voter ID, including disabled people, younger voters, people from ethnic minority communities, and the unemployed. The Commission and others have recommended the list of allowable ID be reviewed and consideration be given to making the voter ID rules more accessible to these most affected groups.
- 4.9 With respect to the impact of voter ID on turnout at these elections, it was slightly lower than at recent comparable polls. Turnout was 32.0%, which was slightly lower than at the last comparable set of elections in 2019, when it was 32.5%. The

most common reasons given by people who told researchers that they did not vote were:

- a lack of time or being too busy at work (mentioned by 15% of non-voters)
- a lack of interest in, or being fed up with, politics (13%)
- medical reasons unrelated to Covid (8%)
- being away on polling day (8%)

- 4.10 Although it was not one of the most common reasons given, 3% of non-voters said they did not vote because they did not have ID, and 1% said it was because they did not agree with the requirement to show ID to vote at a polling station.
- 4.11 The Electoral Management Board for Scotland (EMB) organised an observation programme for Returning Officer staff from across Scotland to observe the conduct of polling in England on 4 May 2023, including pre-election liaison with English teams to discuss planning, virtual attendance at their polling staff training, observation on polling day and a debrief on lessons learned following the election. Election staff from Edinburgh observed polling on the Wirral and in Newcastle. The experiences of all observers have been collated and are being used to inform planning across Scotland.
- 4.12 A public awareness campaign was launched in England by the Electoral Commission in January 2023, running through to the May 2023 elections. This informed voters of the need to bring photo ID to polling stations and the availability of the free voter ID for those without any other photo ID. Awareness of the need to bring voter ID increased from 23% in December 2022 to 92% in May 2023 following the elections. The Electoral Commission are planning to repeat that campaign in Scotland ahead of any UK Parliamentary election.
- 4.13 While the experience of the 4 May elections is informative and has provided lessons for planning for the next UK Parliamentary General Election in Edinburgh, there are limits to its application. Electoral Commission research indicates that the voter ID requirement is likely to have a larger impact at higher turnout elections such as a UK general election, where people who do not always vote at local elections may want to take part.
- 4.14 The Election Team of the City of Edinburgh Council meet regularly with the ERO staff to plan and prepare for future electoral events. Recent meetings have included focused work to prepare for the introduction of Voter ID. VACs are already available from the ERO and have been issued to voters in Edinburgh. The ERO has prepared capacity to issue volumes of VACs ahead of a future UK poll and is also aware that there may be an increase in applications for postal votes due to the new polling station measures.
- 4.15 Communications officers are a key part of the Election Team in Edinburgh and a marketing plan has been drafted to ensure that public awareness of the new requirements is raised. This is provided at Appendix 1. There is a particular focus

on those groups less likely to hold acceptable ID. The plan will align with the national Electoral Commission campaign and utilise the same images and materials. The plan includes work with other partner agencies to ensure as broad a reach as possible.

5. Next Steps

- 5.1 There is no scheduled date for the next UK Parliamentary General Election. The 2019 Parliament must be dissolved, at the latest, by 17 December 2024, and the next general election must take place no later than 28 January 2025 however, the Dissolution and Calling of Parliament Act 2022 allows the prime minister to request the monarch to dissolve Parliament and call an early election with 25 working days' notice.
- 5.2 With no fixed date the Election Team will continue to work with the ERO and other partners to implement the actions identified in the Communications Plan in Appendix 1. The Team continues to engage with local, national and UK networks to ensure that there is full and appropriate preparation for the poll with a particular focus on those groups most likely to be impacted by the photo ID requirements. The plan in Appendix 1 will continue to be revised in the light of this work.
- 5.3 The UK Parliamentary by-election in Rutherglen and Hamilton West on 5 October was the first poll in Scotland at which Voter ID was required. The Returning Officer will be sharing experience with colleagues across Scotland to inform planning. . At this point the statistics with respect to Voter ID from that by-election are still being analysed. Turnout at the by-election was low at 37.2% but initial reports are that the local public awareness campaign was effective with voters generally prepared with ID when attending polling stations.

6. Financial impact

- 6.1 The costs of delivering UK Parliamentary elections are covered by UK Government, with a maximum recoverable amount set per constituency. This includes an allowance for public awareness. The assumption within the funding model is that the local authority will put all council resources at the disposal of the Returning Officer for the delivery of the election.
- 6.2 Since the introduction of voter ID will place an additional burden all local authorities in various ways, including, for example, additional equipment that may be required for some offices or polling stations, or additional poll clerks that may need to be hired for polling day, the UK government have provided local authorities with funding for this additional burden where the cost would normally fall on the local authority. These resources are not ringfenced, have already been received by the City of Edinburgh Council and will help to finance additional public awareness activity by both the Council and the ERO.

7. Equality and Poverty Impact

- 7.1 The reason for this report is to inform Committee of the impact on turnout of new Voter ID requirements and to outline related future public awareness activity. The issues addressed in this report therefore have direct equality and poverty impacts.
- 7.2 Targeted public awareness work around the new Voter ID requirements is associated with our overall concern to provide electoral events that give all eligible electors an equal opportunity to participate on the same basis, voting independently and in secret. Consideration of equal access issues forms an integral part of election planning which covers all electoral processes where practicably possible.
- 7.3 The Elections Act 2022 also introduced new Accessibility responsibilities for the Returning Officer and these will see a range of new measures introduced at our next UK Parliamentary election to support voters with disabilities.
- 7.4 The Returning Officer has a duty to encourage participation, to ensure that it is straightforward for people to participate in elections, whether campaigning or voting; and to give people confidence that their vote counts.
- 7.5 Voting in elections is the easiest way for people to be directly involved in the democratic process. Evidence suggests that young people and minority groups are under-represented in being registered to vote and/or voting. People with disabilities can also encounter barriers in trying to engage in the democratic process by casting their votes. In addition, one of the key sections of the community identified as being under-represented by the Electoral Commission are individuals with learning disabilities. Turnout is lowest among the DE social grades and among social and private renters.
- 7.6 While there are limited actions that the Returning Officer can take in respect of those issues, some groups do face barriers to participating in democracy that the general population do not, and it is in these areas that the Returning Officer can take steps to remove or minimise those barriers.
- 7.7 These groups are also those identified in the Electoral Commission research as most likely to be affected by the new Voter ID requirements and will be the targets of much of the activity identified in Appendix 1.

8. Climate and Nature Emergency Implications

- 8.1 There are no direct climate and nature emergency implications as a result of this report. The reason for this report is to report to Committee on the impact on turnout of new Voter ID requirements and to outline related future public awareness activity.
- 8.2 The conduct of elections is governed by prescriptive legal conduct orders which specify much of how the events are to be delivered. However in our provision of polling facilities effort is made to ensure that polling stations are within easy walking distance of all voters in a polling district to minimise the impact of travelling to vote.

9. Risk, policy, compliance, governance and community impact

- 9.1 The delivery of elections is a major corporate project for the Council and remains on the Corporate Risk Register. The Electoral Commission has noted in their September report that significant changes to the process of voting added a new layer of complexity and risk to an already stretched process and that the capacity and resilience of election teams across the UK remain a significant concern.
- 9.2 A documented project management approach is applied to each election with a tailored project plan, regular highlight reports, a risk register and contingency planning.
- 9.3 The Electoral Commission provide Performance Standards for Returning Officers which are outcome focussed and assist in the planning of each election.

10. Background reading/external references

- 10.1 Motion by Councillor Dobbin - [Conservatives Voter ID Disenfranchisement Legislation](#). Item 8.7 The City of Edinburgh Council, Thursday 16 March 2023
- 10.2 Electoral Commission Report June 2023: [Voter ID at the May 2023 local elections in England: interim analysis](#)
- 10.3 Electoral Commission [Final Report on the May 2023 local elections in England](#) published 13 September 2023
- 10.4 House of Commons Library [Voter ID Research Briefing](#) Published Thursday, 14 September 2023
- 10.5 [Evaluation of Electoral Integrity Programme: public opinion research](#) from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Published 13 September 2023
- 10.6 Association of Electoral Administrators Report on the delivery of the 4 May 2023 local elections – including voter ID: [Under pressure: increased demand on the UK electoral system](#)
- 10.7 The UK [Elections Act 2022](#)
- 10.8 [The Voter Identification Regulations 2022](#) – secondary legislation making changes to polling station conduct rules for certain elections and to petition signing place rules for recall petitions under the Recall of MPs Act 2015 to implement the requirement to show photographic identification.
- 10.9 [Accepted forms of photo ID](#)

11. Appendices

Appendix 1 Voter ID Public Awareness Communications Plan

Policy and Sustainability Committee – 24 October 2023

Appendix 1 – Voter ID Public Awareness Communications Plan

Phase	Phase 1: Early awareness of voter ID	Phase 2: Post Christmas – March	Phase 3: Register to vote	Phase 4: Remember to vote and voter ID
Date range NB assuming May 2024 election – adjust phasing if called later in 2024	Autumn – Christmas 2023	Mid-January to March 2024	March – Mid-April 2024	Mid-April – May 2024
Council activity	Issue regular messaging using campaign style from Electoral Commission on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council social media channels including Facebook, Twitter/X, LinkedIn, nextdoor.co.uk • Website content • Tenant news • Email signature • Internal communication: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ News beat ○ colleague news 	Local paid and unpaid campaign, maximising exposure generated by Electoral Commission campaigning including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • targeted lamp post wraps • paid/unpaid social media advertising. • community channels • website banner • email signatures • internal communication 	Local mid-weight campaign including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • media activity • targeted lamp post wraps • paid/unpaid social media advertising. • community channels • website banner • outdoor ads • IVR message • email signatures • internal communication 	Local mid-weight campaign including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • media activity • targeted lamp post wraps • paid/unpaid social media advertising. • community channels • website banner • outdoor ads • IVR message • email signatures • internal communication

Phase	Phase 1: Early awareness of voter ID	Phase 2: Post Christmas – March	Phase 3: Register to vote	Phase 4: Remember to vote and voter ID
Electoral Registration Officer activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vote ID info insert in canvass communications (to all Route 2 properties). • Email communication to be issued through gov.uk/notify (to all electors at Route 1 properties with valid emails – numbers tbc). • Messaging included on interactive voter response (IVR) portal. • Website content currently available. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Closer to any potential election website banners and more prominent messaging will be made available on the website. • Powtoon explainer video to be created for use on website and social media channels. • LVJB Podcast episode to be recorded. • Use of Electoral Commission messaging resources on social media, email signatures and internal communications. 		
Key stakeholders/partner activity	<p>Councillor, community council and partner toolkit:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provide messaging and graphics for use on their news/information channels 		LVJB public awareness activity	LVJB public awareness activity
Electoral Commission activity		National voter ID campaign (dates TBC)	National register to vote campaign (dates TBC)	National remember to vote + voter ID campaign (dates TBC)
Other	Explore possibility of including information in other Council communications (without incurring costs) e.g. blue badges, CPZ	Outreach/community activity: pop up stalls in libraries, community centres, etc.	Outreach/community activity: pop up stalls in libraries, community centres, etc.	

