

Audit and Governance Committee



Date of meeting:	26 September 2023
Title of Report:	Assessment of the Impact of Voter ID on Plymouth residents and elections team
Lead Strategic Director:	Giles Perritt (Assistant Chief Executive)
Author:	Glenda Favor-Ankersen
Contact Email:	Glenda.favor-ankersen@plymouth.gov.uk
Your Reference:	Voter ID 2023 I
Key Decision:	No
Confidentiality:	Part I - Official

Purpose of Report

This report responds to the request by Council at its meeting of 27 March 2023 that a report be brought to this committee assessing the impact of the Election Act 2022 on Plymouth residents and election officials following the May 2023 local elections.

Recommendations and Reasons

1. For Audit and Governance Committee to note the briefing and reports at Appendix B and Appendix C;
2. Members consider whether to endorse the findings and recommendations of the Electoral Commission and the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG):
 - Recognise that the current system of Voter ID has the potential to reduce the number of eligible voters who are able to vote at the next General Election.
 - Review the current list to broaden the range of accepted ID documents and identify any additional documents that could be included.
 - Focus on forms of ID that would support people who are least likely to have documents on the current list, including ethnic minority communities, disabled people and those who are unemployed.
 - Ensure that changes to the list of accepted forms of ID should be confirmed in legislation in time for details to be included in public awareness materials and activities, and in guidance for polling station staff ahead of polling day.
 - Ensure appropriate training for polling station officers to maximise the opportunity for those that are eligible to exercise their vote.
 - The APPG recommendation to allow voters who are refused a vote to make a statutory declaration and the similar recommendation of the Electoral Commission to allow voters with acceptable forms of ID to 'vouch' for voters who do not.
 - The Electoral Commission recommendation on improving access to Voter Authority Certificates.

Alternative options considered and rejected

With the exception of the recommendation regarding the training of polling station staff, the remainder of the recommendations by the EC and the APPG rely on central rather than local government action. It is within the Committee's discretion as to whether it chooses to endorse the APPG and EC recommendations.

Relevance to the Corporate Plan and/or the Plymouth Plan

The Corporate Plan commits the Council to engaging with and listening to our residents, businesses and communities. The Council's values include a commitment to Plymouth being a place where people can have their say about what is important to them, and where they are empowered to make change happen. The recommendations of this report seek to deliver these commitments in respect of a key element of the Council's democratic arrangements.

Implications for the Medium Term Financial Plan and Resource Implications:

Additional funding of £60k has been allocated by the Government to the City Council to support the further implementation of voter ID in 2024. The reports set out the considerable extra administrative burdens that the legislation places on electoral staff, and the implications of this for recruitment and retention.

Financial Risks

As set out in Implications above.

Carbon Footprint (Environmental) Implications:

None specific to the recommendations of this report

Other Implications: e.g. Health and Safety, Risk Management, Child Poverty:

** When considering these proposals members have a responsibility to ensure they give due regard to the Council's duty to promote equality of opportunity, eliminate unlawful discrimination and promote good relations between people who share protected characteristics under the Equalities Act and those who do not.*

Whilst there is no specific local evidence to support the claim that the implementation of voter ID had adverse implications in relation to protected groups in the context of the Equality Act 2010. The APPG report highlights the experiences of ethnic minority voters and the Electoral Commission argue that more can be done to raise awareness of the support on offer for disabled voters.

The Council will continue to ensure that guidance and best practice are fully utilised to ensure that equalities impacts on eligible voters' ability to exercise their right to vote are mitigated as far as possible.

Appendices

**Add rows as required to box below*

Ref.	Title of Appendix	Exemption Paragraph Number (if applicable) <i>If some/all of the information is confidential, you must indicate why it is not for publication by virtue of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 by ticking the relevant box.</i>						
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
A	Assessment of the Impact of Voter ID on Plymouth residents and elections team							
B	“Voter ID – what went wrong and how to fix it”							
C	Electoral Commission’s Report on the May 2023 local elections in England (Not included in Pack, need to click hyperlink to view)							

Background papers:

*Add rows as required to box below

Please list all unpublished, background papers relevant to the decision in the table below. Background papers are unpublished works, relied on to a material extent in preparing the report, which disclose facts or matters on which the report or an important part of the work is based.

Title of any background paper(s)	Exemption Paragraph Number (if applicable) <i>If some/all of the information is confidential, you must indicate why it is not for publication by virtue of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 by ticking the relevant box.</i>						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Sign off:

Fin	HLS1 8092 3	Leg	LS/00 0010 75/2/ AC/1 8/9/2 3	Mon Off	Click here to enter text.	HR	Click here to enter text.	Asset s	Click here to enter text.	Strat Proc	Click here to enter text.
Originating Senior Leadership Team member: Giles Perritt											
Please confirm the Strategic Director(s) has agreed the report? Yes											
Date agreed: 18/09/2023											