

VOTER IDENTIFICATION PILOT SCHEMES

Audit and Governance Committee

10 December 2018



BACKGROUND

Voters in five English council areas: Bromley, Gosport, Swindon, Watford and Woking, were asked to produce a form of identification before voting at last May's Local Elections.

The move represented part of the government's response to a series of recent recommendations for measures to safeguard the electoral process from fraud.

The proposals attracted criticism, amidst concerns that some voters would be disenfranchised and that certain groups would be disproportionately affected.

2018 VOTER ID PILOT DESIGN

The five participating areas each imposed particular identification requirements on 3 May 2018:

Bromley: one form of identification ID or two forms of non-photographic identification (one of which needed to include the full registered address of the elector).

Gosport – one form of identification ID or two forms of non-photographic identification (one of which needed to include the full registered address of the elector or an electoral identity letter).

Swindon – produce poll card. The poll card contained a QR code which was scanned in the polling station. If a voter did not bring their poll card they could show photo ID (from a specified list) or have their identity attested by another elector (with ID) registered at the same polling station

Watford - produce poll card. The poll card contained a QR code which was scanned in the polling station. If a voter did not bring their poll card they could show photo ID (from a specified list) or a valid debit/credit card.

Woking - one form of identification ID or a Local Elector Card

2018 FINDINGS

Across the five local councils, a maximum of 350 registered electors (0.2% of the total number of electors who went to the polling station to vote) did not return after arriving without the correct identification.

The government and the Electoral Commission deemed this a success, as the overwhelming majority of voters had the right documents. They said this proved that the scheme was a "reasonable and proportionate measure" to combat voter fraud at polling stations where an individual pretends to be someone else (known as "personation").

Looking at the results of the pilot scheme, reports (confirmed by the Electoral Commission) suggested that turnout *increased* in Swindon and Watford, when compared to the 2014 local elections when the seats were last contested. However, turnout *decreased* in Bromley, Gosport and Woking.

Factors that affect voter turnout are complex. However, it will be useful to briefly consider some of the most significant and immediate factors that may have accounted for the fluctuations in voter turnout between 2018 and 2014:

- voter turnout has traditionally been poor in local elections in the UK in comparison to general elections and referendums, a decrease in turnout in areas with stringent identification requirements might naturally be expected.
- local elections in May 2014 were held simultaneously with the European Parliament elections, in contrast to May 2018 which only covered local elections, so a higher voter turnout in 2014 might again be expected.
- there are growing concerns that “voter fatigue” may have led to a decrease in voter turnout. Bromley, Gosport, Swindon, Watford, and Woking have been regularly polled, on a yearly basis in some areas, in various local, county, and mayoral elections; the 2014 European Parliament elections since 2014; the 2015 and 2017 General Elections; the 2016 Police and Crime Commissioner elections; and the 2016 EU Referendum.

The publicity drive to raise awareness about the identification requirements in the five areas was significant. According to the Electoral Commission, 86% of people who voted in polling stations were aware of the need to bring identification. As such, the enhanced efforts to inform voters about the need to bring identification, and therefore of the election itself, may account for a small increase in voter turnout in the 2018 local elections.

The Electoral Commission has expressed that the pilot schemes have provided useful and important initial evidence about how a voter identification requirement in the UK might work in practice. They have also highlighted areas where further work is needed, because there is not yet enough evidence to fully address concerns and answer questions about the impact of identification requirements on voters.

Their primary recommendation is that the government should ensure that a wider range of local councils run pilot schemes in the 2019 local elections, due to the lack of diversity in the five areas that participated in the 2018 pilots. In that regard, it is imperative that the next round of pilots includes areas in Northern England and the Midlands; areas with a greater proportion of ethnic minorities; university towns and cities; and areas with high unemployment rates.

The Electoral Commission and the Association of Electoral Administrators are the same in the thinking that balance is needed – on one hand having a secure system and on the other having a system that the public can use.

NEXT ROUND OF VOTER ID PILOTS IN 2019

Eleven local authorities across England will be taking part in Voter ID pilots for the 2019 local elections:

Pendle	Ribble Valley	North Kesteven	Watford
East Staffordshire	Broxtowe	Braintree	North West Leicestershire
Woking	Derby	Mid Sussex	

In addition, Peterborough and Pendle will run separate postal vote pilot, looking at the security of postal votes and providing additional guidance in postal vote packs.

According to the government, the pilots will provide further insight into how best ensure the security of the voting process and reduce the risk of voter fraud.

HOW TO INCREASE VOTER TURNOUT

Voting is the very basis of a democracy. A high voter turnout is the best guarantee of a decision that reflects a nation's - or, indeed any other group's - real desires. Yet countries across the world (including the US and UK) suffer from lackluster voter turnouts. The United Kingdom spoke of

'bumper' turnout for the 2017 election – and indeed, it was the highest in 20 years – but 69% (or two-third of the people who were allowed to vote) isn't fantastic in the grand scheme of things. The United States have similar problems, with only 58% of eligible voters turning out for one of the most controversial elections in the nation's history two years ago.

There is no silver bullet for increasing turnout—a mix of strategies would need to be pursued, each (on their own) with incremental effects:

- making voter registration easier
- encouraging citizens to engage with democracy
- more nuanced understanding of why different groups are motivated (or not) to vote (three key factors influencing voting behavior: impact, convenience, or community)
- better online provision of information about elections
- better use of internet and technology to engage with citizens
- transitioning to a multi-party system with an electoral process that allocates representatives proportionally—the system in Nordic countries and others with high voter turnout rates

PLYMOUTH CITY: ELECTORAL REGISTER HEALTH CHECK

At the point of implementation of IER 80.95% of PCC residents on the old (2014) register were automatically transferred to the new IER register without having to do anything. 3.25% were confirmed via DWP records. Those that did not transfer automatically were invited to register, reminders were sent and each person received a home visit to encourage them to apply.

Number of registered electors in Plymouth City	Month and Year
185,529	December 2014 (pre-IER)
204,682	December 2015
184,577	December 2016
187,687	December 2017
191,990	April 2018
191,018	September 2018
187,517	1 December 2018*

*It needs to be noted that the ERO is statutorily required to review and delete electors that have moved and/or are no longer resident in Plymouth. During the canvass, the ERO reviewed and deleted 6,434 registered electors.

*It also needs to be noted that there are still 10,337 pending electors as at 1 December 2018 and 16,591 student data pending data matching

Canvass Update

2018 canvass	2017 canvass
89.14% total response 4 Dec 2018: 43.97% Postal response 36.93% Digital response (9.3% Telephone, 20.13% Internet, 7.5% SMS) 19.1% Data match rate**	83% total response - 4 Dec 2017: 70.16% Postal response 29.35% Digital response (4.8% Telephone, 16.40% Internet, 8.15% SMS) 0.5% Data match rate**
**Matched 20,440 addresses using Xpress ALDM (19.1%) against NFI/CTAX data	**Matched 700 addresses using Xpress ALDM (0.5%) against NFI/CTAX data

The success of 2018 canvass due to:

- change of canvass form design and wording
- digital canvass – sending e-mails (67,000) before HEFI was delivered by Royal Mail, sending reminder e-mails, text messages as well as telephone canvass
- intelligent canvass - data matching and mining working collaboratively with other council officers using available council data sets
- comprehensive engagement plan with identified communities (Homeless, Military, HMOs, Nursing Homes, Students, etc.)
- timely and targeted communications plan

The ERO Team will continue to register as many local residents as possible ahead of the 12 April 2019 deadline. This will include sending a pre-election confirmation letter in February/March 2019 to every household to identify anyone who is missing from the register and inviting them to register. In addition, a comprehensive local engagement and communications plan has been drafted to target any under-registered communities and new home movers are given information about the importance of registration to enable them to vote in May 2019.

Figures for different local authorities will change every year as people move from one area to another and as EROs check and remove people who should not have been on the register in the first place.

The publication of the electoral registers gives an indication of the registered electorate for each local authority, but they are not the final registers that will be used for 2019 local elections. The register for the local elections will be published on 19 April 2019.

It is tempting to use the December registers as a benchmark for the number of registered electors as they represent the first formal milestone in the public domain. In reality they will only provide a snapshot of the total electorate and will not include the number electors that are not registered yet. As a result they will not provide a true or full picture and they should not be used as the measure of success.

The Electoral Commission will be conducting a detailed analysis of the figures nationally and will publish its assessment of the state of the registers as at 1 December in February 2019. This will include a review of the work of EROs and their staff to get people correctly added onto the register.