

# Participation in Voter ID Pilot scheme

**Council**

**Date: 9<sup>th</sup> November 2017**

---

Author:	Leader of the Council Returning Officer/Director of Law and Democratic Services
Wards:	All Wards that have scheduled elections in 2018 (see Appendix A)
Parishes Affected:	All parishes that have scheduled elections and are contested in 2018 (See Appendix B)

---

## **1. Purpose and Reasons**

- 1.1 To consider a request from the Cabinet Office for Swindon Borough Council to take part in a proposed Voter ID Pilot in relation to the scheduled Borough & Parish elections in Swindon on Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2018.
- 1.2 The outcomes sought from the Voter ID pilot would be to:
  - 1.2.1 establish a suitable and secure platform for providing voter ID in polling stations prior to legislative changes;
  - 1.2.2 provide an opportunity for Swindon to assist shape the future of voting in polling stations;
  - 1.2.3 provide the Government with voting statistics from Swindon that will establish the already recognised poll card as a suitable form of ID; and
  - 1.2.4 provide a readily available and accurately marked register for political parties.
- 1.3 The item is urgent as a response is required to meet the Government's deadlines.

## **2. Recommendations**

Council is recommended to:

- 2.1 Consider whether to accept the invitation from the Cabinet Office for Swindon Borough Council to take part in a proposed Voter ID Pilot in relation to the scheduled Borough & Parish elections in Swindon on Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2018, and, if so,
- 2.2 Authorise the Returning Officer/ Director of Law and Democratic Services to participate in the Voter ID election pilot in 2018.

# Participation in Voter ID Pilot scheme

**Council**

**Date: 9<sup>th</sup> November 2017**

---

## **3. Detail**

### Background

- 3.1 The current test for a voter's identification precedes the introduction of the secret ballot in the Nineteenth Century (s.10 Ballot Act 1872, 35 & 36 Vict. C. 33,), in which the presiding officer can ask the elector to confirm their name as stated on the register and that they have not already voted at the current election. The only significant change since then is that there is no legal requirement to administer an oath to any person who failed to answer the two questions satisfactorily.
- 3.2 The system was designed to work with smaller electorates and more homogenous communities in which the identity of electors could be established more easily. In 1885, there were 464 geographical seats in England with 2338809 registered electors (approximately 5040 voters per parliamentary constituency), which is fewer voters than the Wroughton and Wichelstowe ward in 2016). To illustrate the difference further, the electorates for North Swindon and South Swindon were 80168 and 72372 respectively – at least 14 times larger.
- 3.3 Former Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, Sir Eric Pickles MP, was asked by the government in 2016 to consider what further changes were needed to make the electoral system more secure. This was particularly in light of the 2015 Tower Hamlets election court judgment that saw the disqualification of the elected mayor for a number of corrupt and illegal practices.
- 3.4 The subsequent report '*Securing the Ballot*', made a series of recommendations on what further changes were needed to make the electoral system more secure. The 50 recommendations, 48 of which were accepted by the Government, included piloting some form of identification at polling stations.
- 3.5 The Government agreed with the Report's view that voters should be required to present identification before voting as currently there are no checks on anyone's identity prior to being given a ballot paper. Full security checks via the Individual Electoral Registration process (IER) are now made ensuring a person is entitled to register to vote, however, there are no measures in place to ensure any security for the vote itself.
- 3.6 The pilots are a precursor to legislation that will require some form of identification to be presented before voting. Pilots will help to identify and shape how and when it would be best to introduce this new requirement more widely to ensure that our election process is secure.
- 3.7 The Government is keen to pilot various initiatives across a limited number of Local Authorities to accurately determine the best way to combat fraud and improve electoral integrity in the voting process in the UK. The pilot scheme has

---

Further information on the subject of this report can be obtained from Stephen P Taylor, Direct Dial 01793 463012, [staylor@swindon.gov.uk](mailto:staylor@swindon.gov.uk).

# Participation in Voter ID Pilot scheme

Council

Date: 9<sup>th</sup> November 2017

---

been limited to ensure the Cabinet Office can work closely with each Local Authority in a truly collaborative manner to ensure the pilots are successful and that they work for voters.

- 3.8 The pilots will generate strong evidence and enable careful evaluation so that voting with ID can be successfully rolled out across the UK.
- 3.9 The voter ID pilots will take place in May 2018 and are being designed to test the impact of voter identification on all aspects of elections in Great Britain, including cost and turnout. ID is seen as a way of modernising and strengthening the electoral processes and enhancing public confidence in the rigour of our democratic processes.
- 3.10 There is not considered to be a trade-off to be made between security and accessibility (turnout). For example, in Northern Ireland where voter identification measures have been in place since 1985, there has been no evidence that voters have been disenfranchised by the measures introduced to increase security.
- 3.11 The pilots are designed only to test the impact of ID in polling stations and to ensure the Cabinet Office achieves their objectives to improve the security of the electoral system and boost public confidence in elections. The Cabinet Office feels that there is nothing political about securing our democracy for everyone by asking voters to confirm who they are.
- 3.12 As part of the Ministerial announcement on 16<sup>th</sup> September 2017, Claire Bassett, Chief Executive of the Electoral Commission, said: *"We welcome the Minister's announcement today as a positive first step towards implementing our 2014 recommendation that an accessible, proportionate voter identification scheme should be introduced in Great Britain. Voters in Northern Ireland have been required to show photographic proof of identity since 2003, and we have the opportunity to learn from that experience. The Electoral Commission is responsible for carrying out an independent, statutory evaluation of the pilot schemes and we will publish our findings following the May elections, in the summer of 2018."* (<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/voter-id-pilot-to-launch-in-local-elections>)

## Current Position

- 3.13 A number of authorities were contacted by the Government about taking part in pilots. Subsequently, Slough BC withdrew from the process. Swindon BC were then contacted by the Cabinet Officer on 20<sup>th</sup> October 2017 to see if Swindon BC would take part. The Minister of Constitutional Reform, Chris Skidmore MP has discussed this with Swindon's Members of Parliament who are supportive.
- 3.14 The Local Authorities that have already been confirmed to undertake Voter ID Pilots are Bromley, Gosport, Watford, Woking, and Tower Hamlets (postal pilot).

# Participation in Voter ID Pilot scheme

**Council**

**Date: 9<sup>th</sup> November 2017**

---

- 3.15 The Cabinet office is keen to ensure there is support from elected members and, accordingly, group leaders have been consulted.
- 3.16 The Leader of the Council is supportive providing all costs are fully reimbursed. The Labour group leader is not supportive commenting that *"I've looked further into this and under no circumstances can the Labour Group be a party to this pilot. My understanding is that none of the pilots in the other authorities have cross party support and would advise that Swindon Borough Council declines to take in this pilot which appears, on the face of it, to be party politically motivated. As stated previously this pilot appears to make it more difficult for the public to vote when we should be trying to make it easier given the levels of turn out in recent elections. As for voter fraud, my view is that the current laws are robust enough to deal with any transgressions."* The Liberal Democrats group leader is supportive.

## Detail of the pilot scheme

- 3.17 The pilot would be on the basis that all voters in contested Borough Wards will take part in the Voter ID Pilot. Anyone not providing the required ID will not be able to cast their vote.
- 3.18 The methodology for the proposed pilot would be that all electors will be required to present a secure poll card at the polling station. The poll card will contain a unique barcode that identifies both the elector, the correct election and links that person to the property on the register. Anyone not being able to present a valid poll card would have the opportunity to present a limited form of photo ID or have their ID attested. It may also be that the pilot authorises an additional security question to be asked.
- 3.19 The poll card is considered to be a well-recognised form of ID that will limit the requirement for electors to source other forms of identification to prove who they are. Production of the poll card at the polling station would continue, if not enhance, the political benefits provided to Tellers and Political campaigners.
- 3.20 The barcode would then be scanned and the elector recorded on the electronic version of the electoral register. Polling staff would thereby be informed whether or not that person can vote at the station and will identify if they have already voted.
- 3.21 An elector who has lost their poll card will have three choices; either to contact the Electoral Services Office and be sent, or collect a replacement poll card (the later will require ID); provide a form of photo ID (as prescribed); or to receive an attestation (as determined) in the polling station.
- 3.22 The software used would be required to record the type of ID used, together with the voters who arrive to vote but do not meet any of the new security measures in

## Participation in Voter ID Pilot scheme

**Council**

**Date: 9<sup>th</sup> November 2017**

---

place. We would also want the software to also record when voters that had been turned away subsequently came back to vote with ID.

- 3.23 The digital registers and barcoded poll cards would enable quick and efficient processing of voters at the station as well as recording all the information required by the Cabinet Office for taking the legislation closer to implementation.
- 3.24 The software to be used will be developed and fully managed by Xpress Software Solutions. The company currently provides the election team with software that manages both the electoral register and the running of the elections. Xpress has considerable knowledge of both elections, election software and the running of successful pilot schemes across the UK. They have just completed extensive piloting working with the Cabinet Office for proposed changes to the canvass process. They have also been at the forefront of other pilots to assist with the enhancement of the election process.
- 3.25 All hardware will be procured by Xpress and the contract for both software and hardware will be between themselves and the Cabinet Office.
- 3.26 All IT support required on polling day relating directly to the pilot will be managed by Xpress and not Swindon Borough Council.
- 3.27 The remainder of the voting process using paper ballots will remain the same.

### Publicity

- 3.28 A full publicity campaign would take place across the Borough in the months prior to the elections including a household targeted campaign to ensure voters understand the change.
- 3.29 This campaign will include a Household Notification Letter sent out in March to ensure people are registered, and to clearly explain the process. A similar targeted campaign proved extremely successful prior to the Parliamentary election in 2015 after the introduction of Individual Electoral Registration.

### Comment

- 3.30 Whether or not to take part in the pilot is a decision for members. The Borough Council has taken part in many pilots over the years including electronic voting. Indeed, the Borough Council was accorded Beacon Status in 2007 for its Electoral Services.
- 3.31 It may be that some form of Voter ID is inevitable following implementation of Individual Electoral registration (IER). After all, it is difficult to see the point of IER if, for example, anyone can turn up at a polling station without any identification with them and say they are elector A B and be given A B's ballot paper. On that basis, it may be that members may wish to participate in the Voter ID pilot in order to trial a practical implementation route.

# Participation in Voter ID Pilot scheme

**Council**

**Date: 9<sup>th</sup> November 2017**

---

- 3.32 Although voter fraud is not considered a significant issue in Swindon, it is understood that the Cabinet Office have invited the Borough Council to take part in the pilot precisely because of that, and so that the practicality of implementing voter ID in an area where there is no perceived problem can be assessed and where the outcome can provide a balanced approach to voter ID in the future.
- 3.33 There are, however, undoubted risks to taking part in pilots as, by their nature, they are trying things out that have not been done before. Such risks could include voter inconvenience, the denial of a vote to a qualified voter who does not produce the necessary ID, the breakdown of the equipment provided, and the possibility of additional queues at polling stations. Participation in such a pilot, however, does give rise to an increased level of support and funding from the government which mitigates such risks albeit not removing it.

## **4. Alternative Options**

- 4.1 Not to undertake the Voter ID Pilots in 2018.

## **5. Implications, Diversity Impact Assessment and Risk Management**

### Financial and Procurement Implications

- 5.1 The Cabinet Office has confirmed that the pilot “... *would be fully funded, including of course additional staff cost and communications. [The Cabinet Office] will fund the cost of piloting voter ID net of the already identified business as usual cost of the election. A purpose of the pilots is to identify the true cost of implementing voter ID.*”

### Legal and Human Rights Implications

- 5.2 Legal and human rights implications have been taken into account in preparing this report. There are no direct Human Rights Act implications associated with the recommendations.

### All Other Implications (including Staff, Sustainability, Health, Rural, Crime and Disorder)

- 5.3 None have been identified.

### Diversity Impact Assessment

- 5.4 None have been identified as only qualified voters should be able to vote.

### Risk Management

- 5.5 Taking part in electoral pilots always contains an element of risk as, by their nature, they are doing something not done before in that way. Participation in such a pilot, however, does give rise to an increased level of support and funding from the government which mitigates such risks albeit not removing it. Such risks

# Participation in Voter ID Pilot scheme

**Council**

**Date: 9<sup>th</sup> November 2017**

---

could include voter inconvenience, the denial of a vote to a qualified voter who does not produce the necessary ID, the breakdown of the equipment provided, and the possibility of additional queues at polling stations.

## **6. Consultees**

- 6.1 The Director of Finance (Section 151 Officer) and Director of Law and Democratic Services (Monitoring Officer) are consulted in respect of all reports. The Chief Executive, and the Corporate Director of Resources and Growth have also been consulted.

## **7. Background Papers**

- 7.1 None

## **8. Appendices**

- 8.1 Appendix A Elections scheduled in Borough Wards on Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2018
- 8.2 Appendix B Elections scheduled in parishes on Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2018