

Information Briefing

Report from:

Robert Connelly
Returning Officer

Date:

13 November 2020

Introduction of Voter ID at Polling Stations

1. Purpose of the report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to start raising awareness with Elected Members on the Governments manifesto to introduce voter ID at poling stations before an elector can cast their vote.
- 1.2 Following evaluations of the various models, the government has opted for the photographic only model.
- 1.3 In addition, over the coming months, it would be helpful to work with Members (and any other interested stakeholders) to identify potential issues and how best these can be addressed so no voter is disenfranchised

2. Background

- 2.1 The Governments manifesto in 2017 committed to introducing identification in polling stations, following the publication of the Pickles review in 2017.
- 2.2 As part of this pilot schemes were undertaken in both 2018 and 2019 to consider various models and what this would potentially look like.
- 2.3 As part of the pilots, the Government ran three models:
 - Mixed – photographic and non-photographic
 - The use of elector poll cards

- Photographic ID only
- 2.4 Both Woking and Pendle piloted the photo ID model in 2019 (Woking also piloted it in 2018). As a reference the electorate for Woking and Pendle was 72,299 and 65,908 respectively¹.
- 2.5 Under the photo ID model, acceptable ID included:
- Passport – UK and Crown Dependency, EU and Commonwealth
 - Photo Driving Licence - UK and Crown Dependency, EU
 - EEA Photographic Identity
 - Card Concessionary Pass funded by HM Government (e.g. Disabled People’s Bus Pass)
 - PASS card
 - MOD ID Card
 - Blue Badge Holder Photocard
 - Northern Ireland Electoral Identity Card
 - Local Elector Card
- 2.5 From the 2019 pilot it was found that the most popular forms of ID presented were driving licences (and based on the average over the two areas) at 62%, followed by passports at 25%, and then bus passes at 11%.
- 2.6 In addition in Pendle 63 electors presented a local elector ID card (out of 70 issued) and in Woking 37 electors presented such a card (out of 27 issued in 2019 and 64 issued in 2018)².
- 2.8 It is however recognised that due to the demographics of both Woking and Pendle that the potential impact on larger areas (such as Birmingham with a very different demographic) is still relatively unknown.
- 2.9 To help with the implementation a working group has been set up to work with the Government on looking at potential issues and what can be done to address them. The working group includes representatives from:

Birmingham	Shropshire	Manchester
Sunderland	Liverpool	Woking
Kirklees	Cabinet Office	

¹ Based on the 2018 register of Local Government electors

² Local elector cards are covered in more detail in section 5 below

- 2.10 As time progresses other organisations, such as the Electoral Commission and the Association of Electoral Administrators will be invited to participate as will other stakeholders.

3. Timetable

- 3.1 Whilst the Government has yet to set out its timetable for the introduction of voter ID, it has previously stated that it would aim to do this before the next scheduled Parliamentary General Election (PGE) in 2024.
- 3.2 Therefore, and working backwards, it is possible to predict a likely timetable for its introduction. I doubt whether the Government would want to implement it for the first time at the PGE in 2024 because of the associated risks. Therefore, and to allow for the approval of legislation, I would envisage that the earliest it could be introduced is for the scheduled local elections in 2023.
- 3.3 As Birmingham has no local elections in 2023, we may wish to consider using 2022 to start raising awareness and to consider running a voluntary pilot regarding the use of ID in polling stations.
- 3.4 To achieve that timetable I would anticipate legislation being introduced during the course of 2021 with all the parliamentary approval by mid 2022.

4. Photographic ID

- 4.1 I have already set out at paragraph 2.5 above the types of ID that would currently be acceptable. However, this is not an exhaustive list as other forms of ID may be acceptable as consultation continues.
- 4.2 Any ID would need to be sufficiently robust to ensure that the identity of the person has been properly verified. At the moment forms of ID not acceptable include Student cards and work place ID cards.

5. Local Elector ID Card

- 5.1 Where electors did not have one form of the specified ID, an elector would be able to obtain a Local Elector ID Card from the Returning Officer (at no charge) which the elector would then use at the polling station.
- 5.2 To obtain a local elector ID card, electors complete an application form and provided a witnessed photograph with copies of supporting documents. There is potential for this to all be done online.

- 5.3 Where an elector did not have any supporting documents separate provisions will need to be in place to ensure no elector is disadvantaged.
- 5.4 Currently documentation would be required to prove an individual's name and address include:
- UK paper driving licence
 - Non EU photo driving licence
 - Birth and/or marriage certificate
 - Student identity card
 - National insurance card
 - Mortgage statement
 - Bank/credit card statement
 - Poll card
 - Utility bill
- 5.5 There are some concerns about practical issues and the impact it could have locally. For example, even if only 1% of the electorate needed a LEC, in Birmingham that could mean up to 7,500 people. That has serious resource implications especially during the short period leading up to polling day.
- 5.6 Currently the thinking is that LEC should be made available up until 5.00pm on polling day (which follows other polling day deadlines such as obtaining a replacement postal vote). Again there are practical issues about how electors can be issued with these without causing pressure points elsewhere.
- 5.7 Still to be determine are issues around how long such cards would be valid for and whether a card issued by an adjoining authority would be acceptable.

6. What next

- 6.1 In addition to ensure those without ID can still vote there are other categories that will require further detailed work and that includes:
- Awareness/education of electors
 - Ensuring that voter ID is administered in polling stations in a consistent way.
- 6.2 The Government is continuing to consult with stakeholders (especially from those groups that could be adversely affected by the introduction of voter ID) at a national level.
- 6.3 As part of the awareness/education of the electorate (and to properly understand the issues) that dialogue will need to continue at a local level. Members will play an important part in this

as they are best placed to identify concerns within their communities and working with the Returning Officer and his staff to ensure no electors are disadvantaged or disenfranchised.

Contact Officer:

Robert Connelly – Returning Officer

Telephone:

0121 303 2443

E-Mail:

Robert_connelly@birmingham.gov.uk