

Electoral Services Update

Date: 27 March 2023

Report of: Director of Communities, Housing and Environment

Report to: Strategy and Resources Scrutiny Board

Will the decision be open for call in? Yes No

Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? Yes No

What is this report about?

Including how it contributes to the City's and council's ambitions

- To update and inform the Strategy and Resources Scrutiny Board on:
 - Voter identification implementation.
- The information in this report is for information only, no proposals are being made.

Recommendations

- a) Members of Scrutiny Board should note the content of the report

Why is the proposal being put forward?

- 1 This report is for information only. No proposals are being put forward at this time.
- 2 A request was made for a report to update on the progress and preparation relating to the introduction of photographic identification in polling stations from 4 May 2023.

3 Background

- 3.1 The [Elections Act 2022](#) introduced a requirement to for electors to show photographic identification when voting in person at polling stations. The [Voter Identification Regulations 2022](#) and [Voter Identification \(Principal Area, Parish and Greater London Authority Elections\) \(Amendment\) Rules 2022](#) set out the specific regulations for this requirement.
- 3.2 Voters will be required to show photographic identification in polling stations from 4 May 2023. In Leeds, this will be for the local and parish/town council elections.
- 3.3 It will also be a requirement at Parliamentary elections from October 2023, however, should a Parliamentary by-election occur before that date, voter ID will be required.
- 3.4 This requirement will not apply to postal voters. In Leeds 30% of the electorate are registered for a postal vote.
- 3.5 It is expected that an identity check for all existing and new postal voters will be introduced before the elections in May 2024. The detail and timing of this is not yet confirmed.
- 3.6 Research carried out by the Government, Electoral Commission and others, estimates between 2% - 8% of registered of electors will not have an [accepted form of ID](#). Anyone who doesn't have their own ID can apply for a free [Voter Authority Certificate](#) (VAC).
- 3.7 The deadline to apply for a VAC to use in a polling station on 4 May is 25 April at 5pm.
- 3.8 Electors registered anonymously are only able to show a form of ID supplied by the Electoral Registration Officer. This is called an Anonymous Electors Document (AED). The document will contain a photo of the elector and their elector number only, therefore not disclosing any details about the elector which may be on their own forms of ID.
- 3.9 Anonymous electors will also still need to take their poll card to the polling station.
- 3.10 Electors who miss the VAC deadline will have the opportunity to appoint a proxy under a new emergency proxy category of having no ID. This arrangement can be put into place up to 5pm on polling day.
- 3.11 In Leeds our in-person electorate is approximately 400,000, however only around 80,000 of these voted at the elections in May 2022.
- 3.12 Based on the entire in person electorate applying, we could expect between 8,000 and 32,000 applications for a VAC. However, based on the number of electors who voted, a more realistic number is between 2,000 and 7,000 applications. It is anticipated this would increase significantly in the event of a Parliamentary election.
- 3.13 As of 1 March, the Electoral Registration Officer in Leeds has received just under 600 applications for a VAC.
- 3.14 At the time of writing, there had been no significant increase in postal vote applications that could be attributed to electors choosing that method of voting to bypass the identification requirement.

4 Communications

- 4.1 As the lead organisation for the campaign, the Electoral Commission began a promotional campaign at a national level from Monday 9 January 2022.
- 4.2 The campaign, entitled 'Note to self,' features advertising and messages around a reminder post-it note to advise people of the need to have ID if they wish to vote in person at this year's local elections. Their campaign utilises a range of advertising and messaging channels and platforms including the following:
- Television advert on ITV, Channel 4, and Sky channels
 - Video on demand – ITVX, 4, and YouTube
 - Regional radio including Greatest Hits Radio and Capital Yorkshire
 - Spotify adverts (including on podcasts)
 - Billboards, bus stop posters and on buses
 - Regional newspaper print adverts
 - Digital display website banners
 - Electoral Commission press release issued to all national and regional media
 - Social media messaging – Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter
 - Mobile gaming
 - Google search
- 4.3 All local authorities were asked by the Electoral Commission to help support and enhance the campaign, by sharing the national messaging and use available resources and assets to help raise awareness at a local community level.
- 4.4 A range of activities have been undertaken in Leeds and will continue to be active until the final deadline for voter ID applications on Tuesday 25 April. This began with sharing the national Electoral Commission messaging across the council social media platforms during January.
- 4.5 On 2 February, the local aspect of the Leeds campaign began. This included details of the support available across the city, with residents able to receive help in applying for a VAC, including having their photo taken for free at community hubs and libraries across the city. A [press release](#) was issued by the council's communications team that day to all local and regional media.
- 4.6 Social media messaging reinforcing the national campaign, and sharing the details of local support available, have been carried out on the Councils' Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and next-door accounts, as well as on council assets at local and community forum levels.
- 4.7 Further social media messages are planned across all the platforms listed over the coming weeks. In addition to this, targeted advertising has been undertaken on Facebook and Instagram across locations in Leeds (inner areas and outer areas) as well as by age (18 to 50 and those over 50) across the city.
- 4.8 The local voter ID information can be seen as a featured item on the [homepage](#) of the council's website as well as on the intranet for all council officers to see on Insite.
- 4.9 An advert for voter ID is included in the annual council tax bills letter being issued to every household in the city (approximately 340,000 households) in the coming weeks, to help raise awareness.
- 4.10 Voter ID information can currently be seen running as a footer message on all internal and external emails sent from council accounts.

- 4.11 Information about voter ID was emailed directly to over 250,000 residents for whom the Electoral Registration Officer has an email address, on 25 January. This was sent by the Electoral Services Team.
- 4.12 Further messaging was also emailed to over 100,000 subscribers on the Council's main contact list of residents and stakeholders by the Communications and Marketing Team on Friday 10 February.
- 4.13 A back page advert on voter ID and supporting article in Northside magazine is in the February edition. This is delivered free of charge to over 29,000 homes and businesses in the north Leeds area and is also viewed online by more than 170,000 people each month.
- 4.14 2,000 voter ID posters have been circulated in more than 1,100 community locations across the city, including community hubs and centres, doctors, dentists, cafes, leisure centres, libraries, supermarkets, religious and faith buildings, gyms, pubs and clubs, nursing homes, and parish councils.
- 4.15 A message about voter ID and the local support available was issued by the Leader of the Council, Councillor James Lewis, to all Leeds MPs partners and stakeholders on Friday 3 February.
- 4.16 Tom Riordan, who is the Returning Officer and Electoral Registration Officer for Leeds, included references to voter ID in his weekly all staff messages on 27 January and again on 3 February. The latter included information on the help available at community hubs and libraries across the city.
- 4.17 Voter ID will also be one of the topics being discussed by Tom Riordan on his next Vlog for all staff.
- 4.18 Tom Riordan was interviewed about voter ID live on BBC Radio Leeds breakfast show on Monday 6 February. It can be heard at [Rima Ahmed - 06/02/2023 - BBC Sounds](#) and begins at 1:34:40 in the recording.
- 4.19 Local adverts on voter ID are running on Greatest Hits Radio Yorkshire and Capital Yorkshire, including a DAX digital radio campaign connecting with local audiences across Leeds on their favourite radio, music, and podcasts.
- 4.20 The national voter ID television advert is showing on the big screen on Millennium square and will continue to be shown up to the application deadline of 25 April and Election Day of 4 May.
- 4.21 Versions of the national television advert are also showing on screens in all community hubs and libraries in the city which have screens.
- 4.22 Clear text information on voter ID requirements has been included on the envelope to be issued with polling cards to all 400,000 voters in Leeds who are currently registered as wishing to vote in person. In accordance with national electoral legislation the poll cards will be posted to residents from 27 March.
- 4.23 Static and digital backlit six-sheet screens and printed four-sheet posters are on display in key locations across the city, aimed at high footfall inner city areas, the city centre, and arterial routes.
- 4.24 In the coming weeks we will be focusing on getting the message out to hard-to-reach groups and communities.
- 4.25 Assets have now been received from the Electoral Commission with the voter ID national information translated into Urdu, Punjabi, Romanian and Polish, as well as specific resources for hard-to-reach groups including people experiencing

homelessness, Gypsy Roma and travellers, older people, trans and non-binary, blind and partially sighted, British Sign Language, easy-to-read text and those registered to vote anonymously.

- 4.26 The Communications and Marketing Team is working with Electoral Services and localities colleagues on the most effective ways of sharing the information with these communities and residents in the city.

5 Electoral Services Core Team

- 5.1 It is a concern nationally, and has been reported in the media, that electoral administrators will struggle to cope with the additional workload of voter ID implementation in the short time scale provided.
- 5.2 Despite the late provision of guidance and legislation in relation to the introduction of voter identification, Electoral Services have been able to recruit an experienced Electoral Administrator from a neighbouring local authority, and 4 casual electoral registration assistants who will focus on the processing of voter authority certificate applications.
- 5.3 Spikes in the number of applications for voter authority certificates are expected and have been planned for. Working with colleagues from HR, a contingency pool of staff is being identified and those who can assist will be trained to carry out the processing of applications if called upon.

6 Election preparation

- 6.1 Preparations for the local and parish/town council elections are well underway and have not been delayed by the additional workload from Voter ID implementation.
- 6.2 Over 330 polling stations have been booked, with the data for poll cards being sent to printers on 11 March.
- 6.3 Staffing for polling stations, postal vote opening, and the count is complete, with only 2 vacancies at present from 1810 positions.
- 6.4 Over 100 additional poll clerks have been added to busy polling stations, and to those stations where it has been identified electors are less likely to have an accepted form of ID, or are more likely to require use of the privacy booth. The recommended ratio of poll clerks per electors has been amended by the Electoral Commission to ensure adequate staffing is available to support the new processes, and staffing in every polling station was evaluated and adjusted accordingly.
- 6.5 Maximum polling station electorate ratios suggested by the Electoral Commission have been reduced to 2,250, to reduce footfall on polling day and allow more time for Voter ID procedures. All our polling stations have been reviewed, and amendments made where necessary, to comply with the new recommendation.
- 6.6 Wherever possible, there will be a female member of staff in each polling station to undertake checking of Voter ID, with electors who need to remove a face covering in a private area and would not feel comfortable with a male member of staff carrying out this process.
- 6.7 All stations currently have a female member of staff appointed, however late staffing cancellations and availability of reserves may mean some stations do not have a female staff member. In these cases, a female Polling Station Inspector will attend the station if required. If a late cancellation occurs in an area where it has been identified that ID checks in private are likely, we will move a female member of staff from a nearby polling station.

- 6.8 All polling station staff are given training prior to polling day. This has been updated to provide comprehensive training on the Voter ID requirements.
- 6.9 In addition to this, Presiding Officers and Polling Station Inspectors will also be required to attend an online briefing from the Head of Electoral Services during the week of the election, which will focus specifically on Voter ID.

7 **Polling day**

- 7.1 The Head of Electoral Services has been working closely with WY Police to ensure adequate Police presence and support is in place on polling day. This is in preparation to deal with any potential unrest in polling stations, because of electors being turned away if they do not have the correct photographic identification and are refused a ballot paper.
- 7.2 The number of Polling Station Inspectors available to assist polling station staff with issues on polling day has been increased. There will now be 2 Inspectors per ward, previously 1 per ward.
- 7.3 Every polling station will have a specially designed polling booth that can be reconfigured into a privacy booth as and when required.
- 7.4 The voting process will have an additional step, after the polling station staff have located the elector on the polling station register, they will then ask to see their identification.
- 7.5 If the polling station staff are satisfied the ID is acceptable, ballot paper(s) will then be issued in the usual way.
- 7.6 However, regulations state a Presiding Officer must refuse a ballot paper if an ID document raises reasonable doubt as to whether the voter is the elector they claim to be, or they reasonably suspect the document to be a forged document.
- 7.7 Presiding Officers in Leeds will be instructed to contact Electoral Services for advice before refusing a ballot paper for either of these reasons. It is likely that a Polling Station Inspector would attend the station to make a final decision. This process is still being developed.
- 7.8 To maintain a record of refusals, polling station staff will be required to complete a new form called a 'ballot paper refusal list' (BPRL). This is a form prescribed in legislation.
- 7.9 The form is to keep a record of ballot papers refused for:
- reasonably doubt the voter is who they say they are
 - reasonably suspect the ID is forged
 - failure to answer the prescribed questions
- 7.10 The Presiding Officer must record the name of the voter, their electoral number, and the reason a ballot paper has been refused. If a proxy was voting on an elector's behalf, they must also record the details of the proxy.
- 7.11 The elector or their proxy are still able to return to the polling station with valid ID. If they do return, the BPRL must be updated to reflect this.
- 7.12 The BPRL is not used to record instances where electors attend the polling station without ID. This will be recorded on a separate form called a voter identification evaluation form (VIDEF).
- 7.13 The purpose of the VIDEF, is to collect statistical information including the number of voters who:

- use a VAC
- use an AED
- request the use of a private area to have their ID checked
- are refused ballot papers based on ID presented (as per BPRL)
- are unable to vote as they have ID that is not on the prescribed list
- are unable to vote as they do not have ID with them
- return to the polling station and successfully vote after initially being declined

8 Cost

- 8.1 The Government has applied the [new burdens doctrine](#) to the implementation of Voter ID.
- 8.2 Under the new burdens doctrine, any policy or initiative which increases the cost of providing local authority services is classed a new burden and the government department introducing the policy, in this case the Department for Levelling Up Housing and Communities, must meet this cost.
- 8.3 The introduction of the [Voter Identification Regulations 2022](#) as part of the [Elections Act 2022](#), creates new burdens, as the policies add additional responsibilities to local authorities when delivering elections and electoral registration activities.
- 8.4 There are restrictions on what local authorities can claim, and Electoral Services are managing spend to ensure all cost can and will be reimbursed.
- 8.5 An initial grant funding payment was made to the authority in November 2022. A further payment will be made in April 2023. The new burdens claim process commences in June 2023.

What impact will this proposal have?

Wards Affected:

Have ward members been consulted? Yes No

- 9 All wards are affected. The Head of Electoral Services has provided a briefing on the implementation of voter identification to each of the Council's political Groups.

What consultation and engagement has taken place?

- 10 This report is for information only. No consultation has taken place.

What are the resource implications?

- 11 The resource implications are mentioned in section 5. above.

What are the legal implications?

- 12 The Returning Officer and Electoral Registration Officer are statutorily obliged to implement the new requirements.

What are the key risks and how are they being managed?

- 13 The key risks include insufficient capacity within the Electoral Services Team, and electors being unable to vote on polling day.
- 14 These risks are being managed as outline in 4. and 5. above, as well as being part of the wider elections risk register, reviewed regularly at meetings of the Elections and Elections Act Project Board, chaired by the Chief Officer, Elections and Regulatory.

Does this proposal support the council's 3 Key Pillars?

Inclusive Growth Health and Wellbeing Climate Emergency

- 15 Not applicable - no proposal is being made at this time.

Options, timescales and measuring success

a) What other options were considered?

- 16 Not applicable.

b) How will success be measured?

- 17 Evaluation of electors unable to vote due to lack of ID after the elections on 4 May, using the information collected on the VIDEF form.

c) What is the timetable for implementation?

- 18 Implementation commenced on 16 January and will come into effect on 4 May.

Background papers

- 19 None.