

Electoral Services Update

Date: 26 September 2022

Report of: Head of Electoral Services

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 behaviour May 2022 – postal/polling station voting/turnout
 - Parliamentary Boundary Review 2023
- 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 inform on changes in voter behaviour in relation to the May 2022 elections, and to provide an update on the 2023 Parliamentary Boundary Review.
- 3 **Changes in voter behaviour – voting by post / voting in person / voter turnout**
- 3.1 As previously reported in September 2021, because of the requirement to hold elections under Covid-19 restrictions, the Electoral Registration Officer wrote to all electors who did not have a postal voting arrangement in place. This was approximately 500k electors.
- 3.2 The write-out resulted in an increase of postal voters in the City from 88k (15% of the electorate) in February, to 205k (35%) by the time of the elections on 6 May 2021, the largest number of postal votes in a single local authority in England.
- 3.3 At the time of the May 2022 elections, the number of postal voters in Leeds stood at 186,367 (31.87% of the electorate).
- 3.4 For information, the number of rejected postal votes at the elections in May 2022 compared to May 2021 was as follows:

Postal Votes	2021	2022
Total Issued	204779	186367
Total Rejected	4705	2569
Total PVs returned	146142	121912
% of PVs rejected from the overall number returned	3.22%	2.11%
% of PVs issued from the overall number issued	2.30%	1.38%
Average number of PVs rejected in a ward	143	78

- 3.5 A table showing the number of rejected postal votes by ward for the years 2019, 2021 and 2022 is attached at Appendix A.
- 3.6 Postal vote rejection rates have fallen following measures introduced by Electoral Services, namely:
 - (a) A review of the postal voting statement (PVS), included with each postal vote, which the elector is required to sign, include their date of birth, and return with their ballot paper. The review enabled us to identify problem areas and make the PVS clearer and more user friendly. The new version was used in 2021 and saw a drop in the overall rejection rate of 0.64%
 - (b) In an effort to reduce the number of postal votes being rejected, following the May 2021 elections we reviewed our processes for the rejection of postal votes at postal vote opening sessions.

Postal votes rejected by the matching software because of a mismatched date of birth or signature, or both, were sent for a manual check by a member of the Returning Officers staff in line with regulations and either accepted or rejected.

We introduced a second manual check before final rejection for the May 2022 elections, for instances where it was felt a second opinion was required. This is an additional

process which is not required by regulations. We found that the secondary checks enabled the Returning Officer to accept documents which may have been rejected under the standard system. This is something we will now undertake at all future postal vote opening sessions.

This new system saw rejected postal votes fall by 1.11% in 2022, with 2.11% of packs returned being rejected, compared with 3.22% in 2021.

- 3.7 The higher number of registered postal voters now means more electors vote by post in the Leeds City Council area than at a polling station, and this has been the case in 2022 and 2021. The table below shows how voter behaviour has changed in this respect over the past 5 years.

Year	Type	By post	In person
2018	LCC (all out)	33.44%	66.56%
2019	LCC & Parish	34.04%	65.96%
2020	No elections		
2021	LCC & Mayoral	63.75%	36.25%
2022	LCC	62.27%	37.73%

- 3.8 The overall turnout at the May 2022 elections was 33.7%, which fell by 3.5% compared to May 2021 elections which saw a turnout of 37.5%. This drop in turnout was replicated nationally and was largely attributed to voter apathy resulting from national issues.
- 3.9 As reported in 2021, it is anticipated that, for the time being, this high number of postal voters will remain as a legacy of the pandemic. Electors have found it to be a convenient and safe way of casting their vote.
- 3.10 This picture may change when the Elections Act comes into force, which will require all postal voters to submit a new application to vote by post every 3 years. This is different to the current system, which allows a postal vote arrangement to be in place indefinitely, with the requirement for the applicant to provide a fresh signature for the Returning Officers' records every 5 years.
- 3.11 More information on this change, and other changes being introduced by the Elections Act will be reported on when secondary legislation has been made, and a timetable has been confirmed.
- 3.12 The number of polling stations required, and the location of such, remains under review. For 2021 and 2022 the high number of postal voters allowed for the merging of some premises, and the relocation of others, with no adverse reaction from the electorate or candidates/election agents.

4 **Parliamentary Boundary Review 2023**

- 4.1 Following the passing of the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 2020 in December 2020, and the publication of the relevant Parliamentary electorate data in January 2021, the Boundary Commission for England (BCE) began a new review of all Parliamentary constituencies in England. This is referred to as the 2023 review, as the BCE are required to report their final recommendations by 1 July 2023.
- 4.2 The number of constituencies for the Yorkshire and Humber region will remain at 54.
- 4.3 Application of statutory rules to the published electorate means that all recommended constituencies must have no less than 69,724 Parliamentary electors and no more than

77,062. By law, these electorate figures relate to the electorates as they were on 2 March 2020.

- 4.4 Secondary consultation on the BCE's suggested new constituency boundaries closed on 4 April 2022. The BCE are now analysing all responses submitted during the first and secondary consultation stages.
- 4.5 The BCE will produce a report deciding whether the suggested constituency boundaries should change based on the feedback they have received. They will then hold a further four-week written consultation on their revised boundary proposals later in 2022.
- 4.6 Full details of the suggested boundaries can be found on the [Boundary Commission for England's Website](#).
- 4.7 A summary of what the current suggested boundaries mean for the wards of Leeds City Council can be found at Appendix B to this report.
- 4.8 Electoral Services will provide a further update when the final proposals have been published, expected 1 July 2023.

What impact will this proposal have?

Wards Affected:

Have ward members been consulted? Yes No

- 5 Various wards will be affected by the changes to Parliamentary Boundaries and consultation is being carried out by the BCE. There is no impact at present.

What consultation and engagement has taken place?

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

What are the resource implications?

- 7 There are no resource implications currently.

What are the legal implications?

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

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

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

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

Inclusive Growth Health and Wellbeing Climate Emergency

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

Options, timescales and measuring success

a) What other options were considered?

- 11 Not applicable.

b) How will success be measured?

12 Not applicable.

c) What is the timetable for implementation?

13 The new Parliamentary constituency boundaries are expected to be published on 1 July 2023 and would be implemented for any Parliamentary General Election which should take place following this publication.

Appendices

14 Appendix A – Postal Voting Statistics

15 Appendix B – Summary of Parliamentary constituency changes for Leeds

Background papers

16 None.