

## **County Council - 16 December 2022**

### **Item 11(b) - Notice of Motion on Elections from Cllr Lord**

#### **Briefing Note**

The Elections Act 2022 provides for new requirements for elections, including compulsory voter photographic identification (PID) for voting at polling stations. Common forms of PID will be accepted, including passports and driving licences. People who do not possess a valid form of PID will be able to apply to their local election office to obtain a PID card. In West Sussex, this will be the local district or borough council. The May 2023 elections are the first scheduled elections to take place using PID at polling stations. In West Sussex, May 2023 elections or part elections are taking place in Arun, Chichester, Crawley, Horsham, Mid Sussex and Worthing district and borough areas.

The Government has stated that asking voters to provide evidence of their identity will safeguard against the potential voter fraud - someone casting a vote in the name of another person at the polling station.

Northern Ireland has used voter identification in its elections since 1985 and expanded this in 2003. In the first General Election after photographic identification was introduced in Northern Ireland (2005), turnout was higher than in each of England, Scotland and Wales. Many countries, including Canada and most European nations, require some form of identification to vote.

Research published by the Government indicates that 98% of UK electors own an eligible form of identification, which includes a broad range of documents and expired photographic identification. As part of the Government's implementation plans a free, local Voter Card will be available if any elector needs one.

The Electoral Commission, the independent body which oversees elections, states that the UK has very low levels of proven electoral fraud. It states that two thirds of people surveyed would feel more confident in the security of the voting system if there was a requirement to show ID. It adds that the implementation of voter identification should ensure that applying for a PID is easy and that PID requirements should be realistically deliverable for electoral services teams and introduced with 'manageable timescales and proper funding'.

The Association of Electoral Administrators, the professional body for elections officers, states that many staff are not confident Voter PID can be delivered as currently planned. The Association states that the statutory instrument setting out the detailed arrangements is expected to come into effect in mid-January 2023, less than four months before the elections. The Gould Principle recommends electoral legislation should not be introduced within the six months before a scheduled poll.

The Association has also expressed concern that Electoral Commission guidance cannot be finalised and issued until the statutory instrument comes into effect and that the level of detail they can provide has been affected by the lateness of the secondary legislation. This will have a knock-on effect for poll preparations

and on polling station staff training and risks inconsistency of approach as electoral services attempt to understand and implement the changes.

Work has been undertaken to develop and build the online Voter Authority Certificate application portal. Producing certificates centrally will reduce one burden on Electoral Registration Officers (EROs), which the Association welcomes. However, concern remains about the administrative burden on EROs to check each application manually to verify photographs.

The Association states that local authorities will support the planned national public communications campaign from the Electoral Commission but it criticises the decision not to provide local communications funding, particularly for areas with scheduled polls in 2023. With local knowledge of hard-to-reach groups, the Association would like additional funding for local targeting. The evaluation of the 2019 pilot schemes found the majority of electors cited official local sources as the main way they became aware of the need to bring ID to vote.

According to 2021 census data, the percentage of the adult population within West Sussex aged 18 to 25 is 7.5%, which is lower than the national average of 9.6% or regional average of 8.9%. Within West Sussex the district or borough with the highest percentage of 18 to 25-year-olds is Crawley, with 8.7%.

**Tony Kershaw**

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