

Part A

Report to: Council
Date of meeting: 16 October 2018
Report of: Managing Director
Title: Voter ID Pilot

1.0 Summary

- 1.1 Once again Cabinet Office has offered local authorities in Great Britain with elections in May 2019 the opportunity to pilot voter identification (ID) in their local elections to enable the Cabinet Office to determine the best way to implement voter ID in polling stations nationally. In 2018 Watford together with Bromley, Gosport, Swindon and Woking undertook pilots to test different forms of voter ID in conjunction with the Cabinet Office.
- 1.2 Council has within its terms of reference the power to confirm whether the Council should participate in an electoral pilot.
- 1.3 Following consultation with the Mayor, it is recommended that the Council takes part in the pilot once again with the proviso that any and all additional cost to undertake the Pilot is covered by the Cabinet Office.
This report seeks formal confirmation from Council to proceed with the Pilot.
- 1.4 The report also provides Council with the evaluations undertaken by both the Cabinet Office and the Electoral Commissions review of the outcome of the voter identification pilots that the Council participated in this May.

2.0 Risks

2.1	Nature of Risk	Consequence	Suggested Control Measures	Response (Treat, tolerate, terminate, transfer)	Risk Rating (the combination of severity and likelihood)
	ID pilot will disenfranchise voters	Democratic process will be impaired	Extensive publicity will be undertaken to ensure all	Tolerate	4

		voters know the requirements. Watford's pilot is not restrictive as the poll card or any other approved ID is the only requirement.		
There may be a challenge to the pilot or election result	May generate legal process	Government will make the regulatory Order which legally authorises the pilot.	Tolerate	4

3.0 **Recommendations**

- 3.1 That Council agrees to participate in the Voter Identification Electoral Pilot for the May 2019 Borough Ward elections and any County Council by election.
- 3.2 Council notes the evaluations of last May's voter ID Pilots

4.0 Detailed proposal

4.1 Watford participated in a voter identification electoral pilot in May 2018 for both the Mayoral and Borough elections. The objective of the Watford pilot was to test the use of poll cards, which are sent to every eligible elector as a matter of course before an election informing them of their polling station, for the purposes of being a valid form of identification. In addition the pilot also tested new technology for scanning poll cards and electronically marking the register to indicate who had voted. Following the pilot both the Cabinet Office and the Electoral Commission have published their evaluations of the effectiveness not just of the pilot undertaken by Watford but also the other pilot authorities. These evaluations are available through the links below. Council is asked to note these.

- A. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/733128/Electoral Integrity Project - Local Elections 2018 - Evaluation.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/733128/Electoral_Integrity_Project_-_Local_Elections_2018_-_Evaluation.pdf) Link to Cabinet Office's Full 2018 Local Election Evaluation (Extract attached as Appendix 1).
- B. https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0006/244950/May-2018-voter-identification-pilots-evaluation-report.pdf Link to Electoral Commission's Full May 2018 voter identification pilot schemes Findings and recommendations (Extracts attached as Appendix 2)

Following on from last year's Pilots the Cabinet Office have again issued a prospectus seeking interest in undertaking a further ID Voter Pilot. The prospectus can be found in the link below.

- C. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/735413/Electoral Integrity Pilots Prospectus 2018.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/735413/Electoral_Integrity_Pilots_Prospectus_2018.pdf) Link to Cabinet Office's current Electoral Integrity Pilots Prospectus 2018 for May 2019 elections

4.2 The intention for the 2019 electoral pilots will once again be to address a number of risks to the integrity of the electoral system by testing methods of mitigating the risk of electoral fraud. In 2018 Watford Council put forward the idea that the level of ID requirement should be as unobtrusive as possible and that, rather than ask for formal documents such as a passport, requiring the poll card, in addition to the existing requirement for electors verbal confirmation of his/her name and address for voter eligibility in conjunction with technology would be sufficient. At the moment other than the verbal confirmation an elector is not required to provide any form of ID at all. The Council and the Cabinet Office's interest in testing this lower intervention approach in 2018 proved highly successful and there is expectation for this model to be more refined and trialled again at the 2019 local government elections. Pilot findings in 2019 in conjunction with the results from 2018 will determine the most effective way the government can introduce polling station voter ID checks for all elections across the UK.

The key to making the ID pilot work in Watford well is to have extensive publicity – most voters bring their poll card anyway – to remind voters to do so and our pilot is such that in the absence of bringing the poll card other forms of ID such as a passport, photo driving licence, current debit or credit card will be acceptable. As in 2018 a similar publicity plan will be agreed with the Cabinet office. A copy of the 2018 publicity plan is attached to the equality impact assessment (Appendix 3). The Cabinet will also be undertaking a pilot wide EIA.

- 4.3 Modern Democracy Ltd will again be providing the digital software to scan the poll cards at the polling station. The different scenarios that may arise have been anticipated with advice on how to deal with them set out in the Appendix to the Equality Impact Assessment. Lessons from the 2018 pilot have been incorporated. Appendix 4 sets out a simple flowchart.

A full evaluation of the pilot will be undertaken including assessing whether there has been any impact on voter patterns.

4.4 **How Watford Pilot solves possible disadvantages**

<i>Additional Voter ID checks will lengthen the election process, possibly requiring additional polling stations, staff and cost</i>	Simple instructions can be given to polling station staff. Some cost involved in setting up technology to record, but in the long-term could replace some stationary requirements. Any methodology of <i>ensuring</i> that the current electorate has some form of ID, especially photo ID is likely to be far more expensive to both introduce and maintain.
<i>Electors may get disenfranchised, on account of their inability to provide certain forms of Voter ID</i>	All eligible individuals currently listed on the electoral register will have access to their poll cards, which will all be personally addressed, barcoded, enveloped and hand delivered
<i>May reduce voter turnout through uncertainty of ID requirements, or more importantly due to queues</i>	The simple message of “Bring Your Poll Card” to be communicated to the electorate. Barcode being read may be a faster process than looking up details within register – dependent upon individuals bringing poll cards to polling station.

5.0 **Implications**

5.1 **Financial**

The costs of the Borough elections are provided for in the base budget. The additional costs of the pilot will be met by the Cabinet Office.

5.2 **Legal Issues** (Monitoring Officer)

Council will need to be satisfied that the criteria as set out in the Cabinet Office prospectus for participating in a further electoral pilot for 2019 has been demonstrated (see Appendix 5). Should the Council be selected to undertake another pilot a statutory instrument implementing the pilot will need to be passed by Parliament.

5.3 **Equalities and Human Rights**

A detailed equalities impact analysis (EIA) has been undertaken and is attached as appendix 3. Lessons learned from the 2018 pilot have been incorporated. The document will continue to be refreshed as the project progresses. The Cabinet Office will also be producing an EIA.

Appendices

1. Cabinet Office Evaluation – Extract
2. Electoral Commission Evaluations
3. Equality Impact Assessment requirements
4. Watford Intended Pilot flowchart
5. Confirmation of criteria for piloting authority