

## Report of the Interim Strategic Director

**VOTER ID PILOTS 2019**1. Purpose of report

To confirm support to the Council's participation in the 2019 voter ID pilots.

2. Background

Voter ID is an integral part of the government's agenda to deliver a clear and secure democracy. Pilots were carried out in 5 local authorities at the local elections in May 2018 requiring voters to produce ID before they could be issued with a ballot paper. Three types of ID were piloted:

- photographic
- non-photographic e.g.: Council Tax bill, utility bill
- poll cards

Despite negative publicity in the media about the pilots, the Returning Officers who took part have indicated that the pilots were a successful test of the implementation of voter ID with the experience being overwhelmingly positive. In Swindon voter turnout increased by 6% from the previous local elections. Gosport also saw an increased turnout. Of the 234,000 electors across the five authorities taking part, 340 electors failed to return with the correct ID. The majority of those who turned up to vote without ID later returned with ID without issue. Of the 62,191 who visited a polling station in Swindon, only 25 chose not to return with the relevant ID, ie: 0.04%; in Gosport only 44 voters did not take the necessary ID with them. A copy of the evaluation reports produced by the Electoral Commission and Cabinet Office are circulated separately with the agenda.

Cabinet Office has announced that further pilots will be held in 2019 which will enable the models trialled this year to be refined, implemented with different partners and provide additional evidence for national roll out. Further testing will also help in understanding how to deliver a policy which best suits voters, local authorities and the Cabinet Office's commitment to introduce measures to improve the integrity of democracy in the United Kingdom. The Electoral Commission in its report evaluation agreed that it would be useful to collect more evidence from further pilots in 2019, with a wider range of councils running pilot schemes.

Further details of the pilot schemes and the rationale in support of an application to become a pilot are set out in the appendix.

3. Financial implications

Funding for the net additional costs of participating in a 2019 voter ID pilot will be provided by the Cabinet Office.

**Recommendation**

**The Committee is asked to RESOLVE that the application to take part in the 2019 voter ID pilots be approved.**

Background papers: Nil

Advantages of taking part in the pilots

- The pilots are a good opportunity to introduce voters to the idea of having to produce ID before it becomes compulsory from the next parliamentary election in 2022.
- It would give Electoral Services an opportunity to experience running elections where voter ID is required before it becomes compulsory. Full support would be available from Cabinet Office, not only for Electoral Services, but also for the Communications team.
- A pilot would give polling staff the opportunity to experience voter ID before the next parliamentary election.
- The cost of the pilots is met by Cabinet Office, including polling staff training.
- It is uncertain whether pilots will be continued after 2019.

Pilot process

The Returning Officer has submitted a formal application to Cabinet Office to take part in the pilots on the basis of voters being required to provide poll cards before they can vote, subject to confirmation by this Committee. All applications will be agreed by the Cabinet Office Electoral Integrity Project Board which comprises representatives of the Electoral Commission and the Association of Electoral Administrators. The decision to approve the pilots rests with the Minister for the Constitution who will need to be satisfied that the authority applying meets the criteria set out in the Electoral Integrity Pilots Prospectus.

Prospective pilot areas will be notified of the decision by 17 September 2019. If the Council is successful, discussions will begin with Cabinet Office in October. A programme of communications will also be drawn up so that electors are kept fully informed of the pilot and the fact that they will be required to take ID with them to vote at a polling station next year.