

# FINAL REPORT

Referendum on UK membership of the European Union (Warrington Observation) 23rd June 2016



Dr John Ault

8<sup>th</sup> July 2016



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# **Referendum on UK's EU Membership – June 23<sup>rd</sup> 2016**

## **Report on Election Observation – Warrington (Council)**

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### **Objectives**

1. To objectively observe the electoral process across the Warrington Borough Council area (EU Referendum counting area) on 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2016.
2. To advise the local council (Warrington and national electoral bodies on the results of the observation for the improvement of electoral practice within the UK.
3. Support the local council and national election bodies with constructive feedback on areas of concern so that they may consider remedial action.

### **Methodology**

A team of 5 observers, registered with the UK's Electoral Commission, made 69 separate observations in 69 different polling stations across the Warrington Borough Council. This constituted approximately half of the polling stations in the council area.

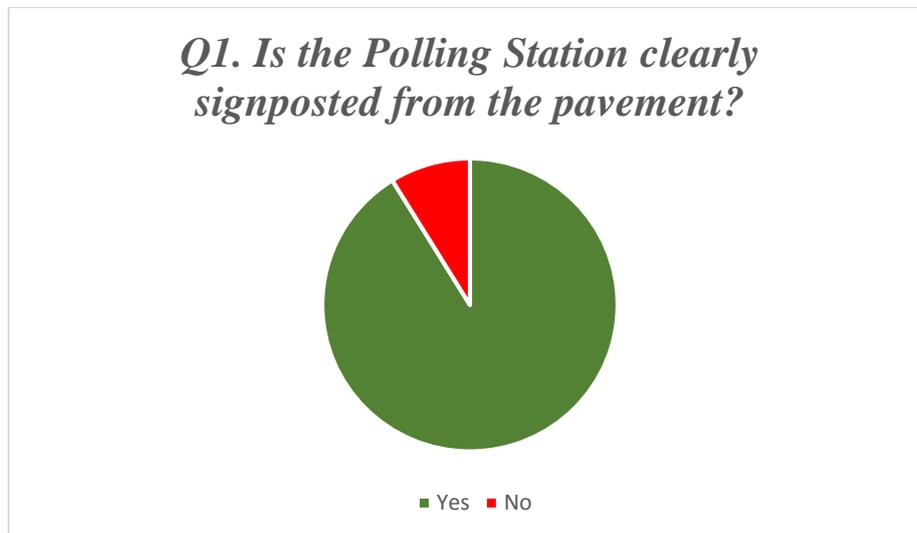
Each team was split into pairs to allow for objective observation and they then agreed their opinions of the electoral process before submitting data to the central team. The survey was conducted online so data was collected, and could be checked, live.

The observations generally took between twenty and thirty minutes per polling station as the observers were asked to ensure that they attempted to see the entire process, which included staff greeting electors on arrival at the polling station.

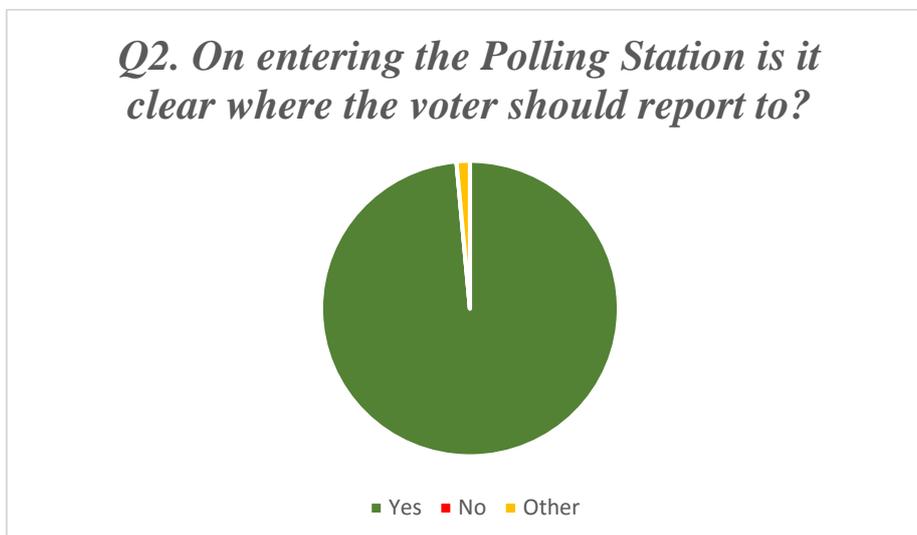
Each team of observers was contacted throughout the day by the central team to ensure that observation was as uniform as possible.

## Results of the Observation

The observers answered the following questions in order as they progressed with each observation at each polling station:

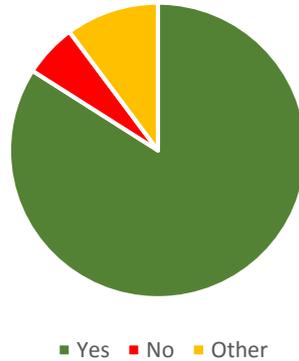


**QUESTION 1:** 9% of observations indicated that the polling station was not clearly identifiable from the main road, 91% identified that the polling station was highly visible. However, there were some issues over visibility that seemed to stem from lack of equipment to affix notices and also, due to weather conditions, some simply disappeared during the day.



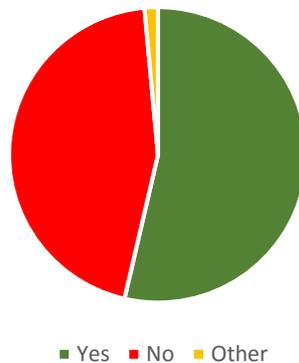
**QUESTION 2:** The main problems with reporting at polling stations centred around clarity in polling stations which had more than one ballot box covering separate polling districts. However, they were well signposted. The only problems were caused by queueing which made it unclear for some voters to access the polling station.

***Q3. Was it clear how disabled voters would access the Polling Station?***



**QUESTION 3:** 84% of observations indicated that access to the polling station was clear, whilst 6% indicated that access was not. These problems focused on step-free access which was not always available. Some polling stations' disabled access polling booths were situated in such a way that made it difficult for disabled voters to access.

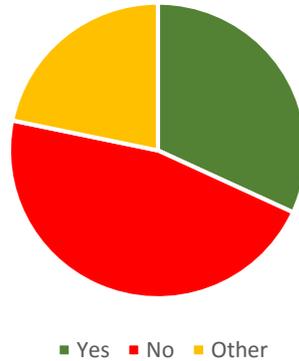
***Q4. Did the polling staff ask to see your ID on arrival?***



**QUESTION 4:** Although staff had clearly been informed that an observation team would be operating across the constituency, the formal procedure for identifying and then recording that observers had visited the polling station was not followed in many cases.

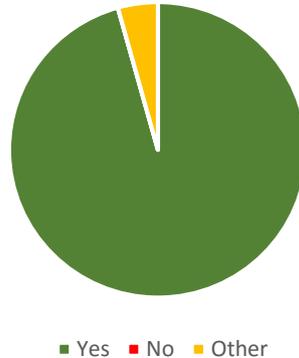
45% of observers did not have their credentials checked on arrival at the polling station.

*Q5. Did the staff record your ID number on a form?*



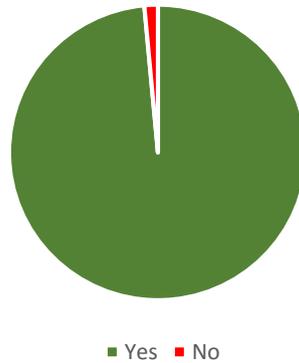
**QUESTION 5:** Similarly, we asked observers to note if the polling staff took a note of the ID that the observer was wearing. In each case this was an Electoral Commission badge which was numbered. 32% recorded the observer ID, 46% did not 21% took one ID or name but not the full set of credentials.

*Q6. Are there two staff on duty in the polling station as you arrive?*



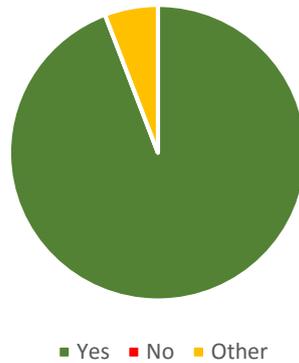
**QUESTION 6:** 4% of polling stations did not have two members of polling staff on duty when observers arrived at the polling station. In some cases, this was because they were briefly occupied elsewhere, sometimes on the telephone.

***Q7. Is the Ballot Box clearly sealed with cable ties?***



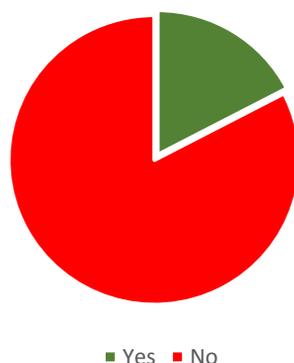
**QUESTION 7:** An important aspect of the electoral process is that the ballot should be secret and maintained as such allowing no one access to the ballot papers. The process for closing and sealing a ballot box, from the opening of the polls at 7am and closing at 10pm should be extremely clear but on one occasion this was not the case – it was not sealed at all. (The ballot boxes in Warrington are of modern design which allows them to be transported with shoulder straps conveniently. They are sealed with a plastic plug at the rear to prevent re-opening of the zip fastener. In one polling station this was not sealed at all.)

***Q8. Is each polling booth equipped with an explanatory poster and a pen/pencil?***



**QUESTION 8:** In some cases, posters were not displayed in all the booths in a polling station.

*Q9. Was there evidence of 'family voting' in the polling station?*



**QUESTION 9:** In 17% of cases, our observer team identified so-called ‘family voting’. OSCE/ODIHR, which monitors elections within the UK, describes ‘family voting’ as an ‘unacceptable practice’.<sup>1</sup> It occurs where husband and wife voting together is normalised and women, especially, are unable to choose for themselves who they wish to cast their votes for and/or this is actually done by another individual entirely. In several cases this was more than just husband and wife and included younger female family members. In all cases there was little attempt to hide this practice and only on a handful of occasions did polling staff intercede to prevent it. Only a few were successful in preventing it.

**OTHER COMMENTS:** We normally report on the activities of Tellers too but none were active at the polling stations that we attended.

### **FINAL CONCLUSIONS**

The organisation of polling stations was well run across the council area, voters could clearly see how to access voting and staff were trained to manage the process.

However, the large number of observations of so-called ‘family voting’, which is considered an ‘unacceptable practice’ in elections should be considered a matter of statistical significance as this constitutes over 1 in 6 polling stations across the constituency.

This was mainly family members colluding over their voting choices, elderly voters being ‘assisted’ with their voting intentions and family members overlooking another’s polling booth to observe how they cast their vote.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.osce.org/>