

FINAL REPORT

Woking – Surrey County Council Elections
4th May 2017



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9th May 2017



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Final Report on Election Observation – Woking

Objectives

1. To objectively observe the electoral process across the Woking Council area of Surrey County Council.
2. To advise the local council and national electoral bodies on the results of the observation for the improvement of electoral practice within the UK.
3. Support local councils and national election bodies with constructive feedback on areas of concern so that they may consider remedial action.

Methodology

A team of 3 observers, registered with the UK's Electoral Commission, made 44 separate observations in 31 different polling stations across Woking.

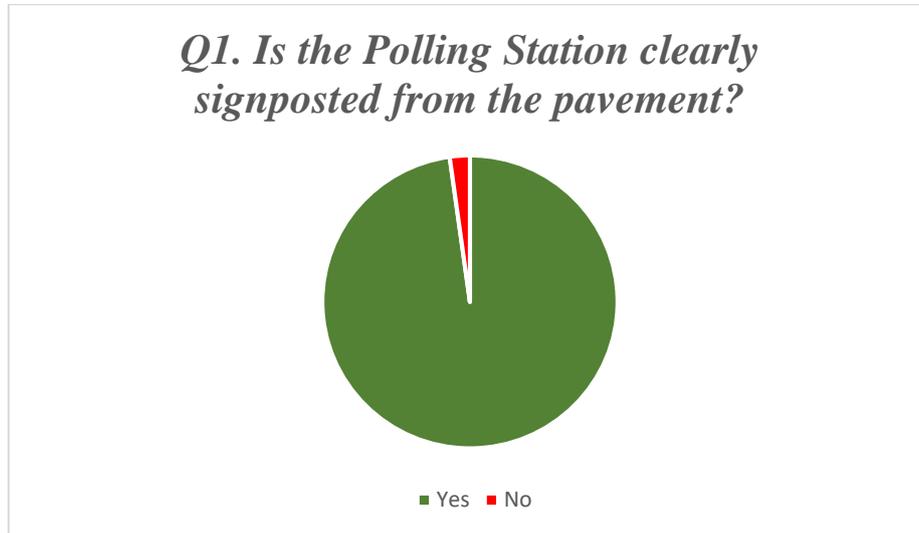
Each observation team was split into pairs to allow for objective observation and they then agreed their opinions of the electoral process before submitting data to the central team. The survey was conducted online so data was collected, and could be checked, live.

The observations generally took between fifteen 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.

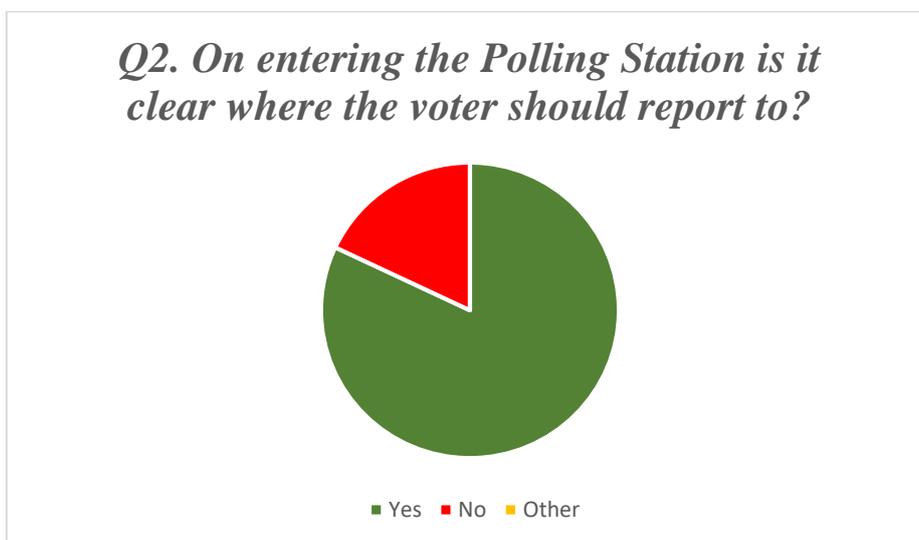
Each team of observers was contacted throughout the day by the central team to ensure that observation was as uniform as possible.

Results of the Observation

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

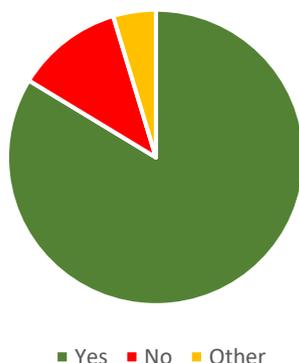


QUESTION 1: All but one polling station was visible from the road.



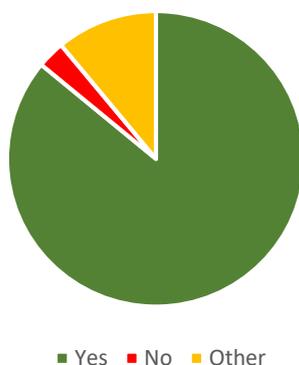
QUESTION 2: Observers identified issues in terms of where voters should report in the polling stations.

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 11% indicated that access was not. Another 5% suggested that some aspects of the polling station (such as heavy doors) was inadequate. These problems focused on step-free access which was not always available.

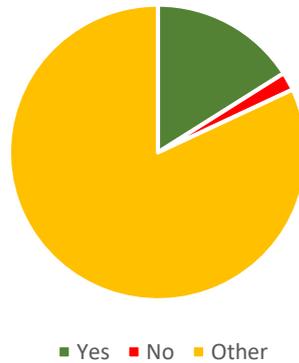
Q4. Did the polling staff ask to see your ID on arrival?



QUESTION 4: Although polling staff were unaware that an observation team might be operating across the council area, the formal procedure for identifying, and then recording, that observers had visited the polling station was followed in the vast majority of cases.

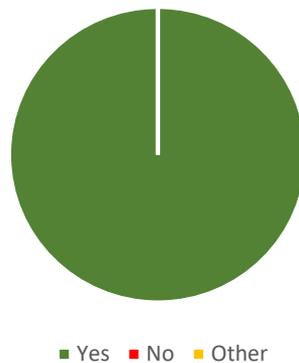
86% of observers had their credentials checked on arrival at the polling station. However, only 2% did not check the ID of observers on arrival at the desk in the polling station. The remaining 11% of 'others' show that ID was only checked for one of the observers.

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



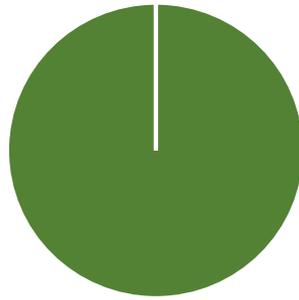
QUESTION 5: Similarly, we asked observers to note if the polling staff took a note of the ID that the observer was wearing. In each case this was an Electoral Commission badge which was numbered. Only 16% of polling stations recorded the ID details of the observers. Only 2% of polling stations did not record attendance at all. However, 82% of polling stations only took down the names of the observers, not the number on the badge. On some occasions, observers were asked to write their own names down, in others, the information was either not noted in the official polling station logbook or was recorded in the wrong section.

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



QUESTION 6: All the polling station had two members of polling staff on duty when observers arrived at the polling station.

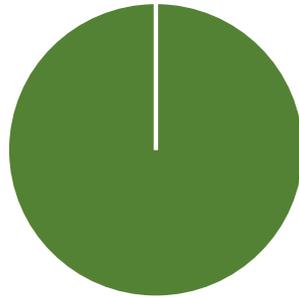
Q7. Is the Ballot Box clearly sealed with cable ties?



■ Yes ■ No ■ Other

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. All the ballot boxes observed were sealed.

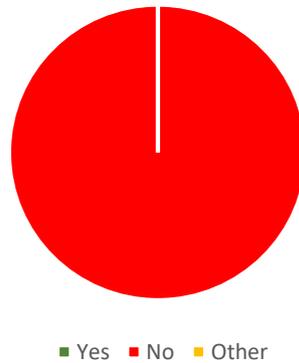
Q8. Is each polling booth equipped with an explanatory poster and a pen/pencil?



■ Yes ■ No ■ Other

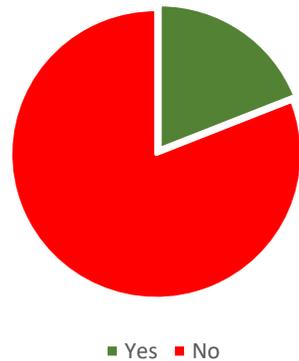
QUESTION 8: All polling stations were properly equipped with the requisite pencil and poster.

Q9. Are there any political leaflets in sight within the Polling Station?



QUESTION 9: This question was asked primarily to illicit whether improper political activity was taking place within the polling station.¹

Q10. Was there evidence of 'family voting' in the polling station?



QUESTION 10: In 19% 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'.² 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.

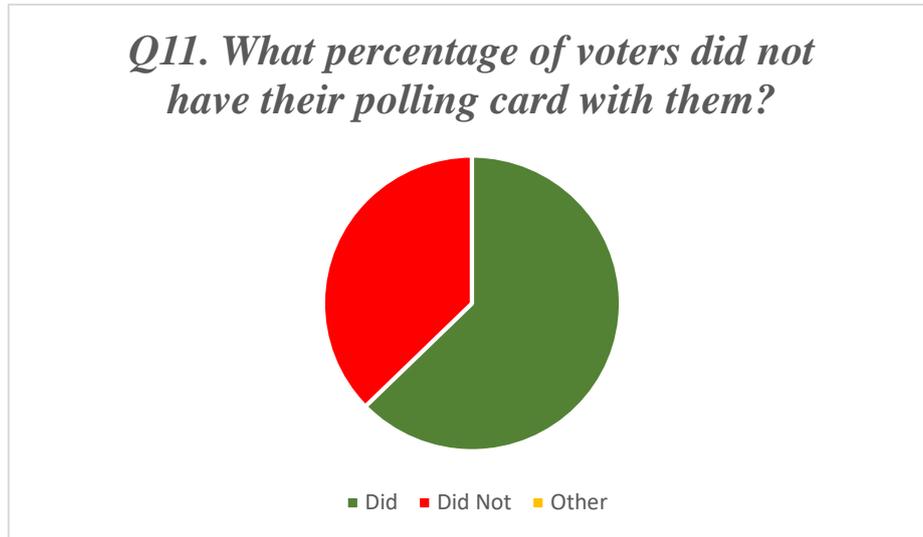
Having identified a number of cases of family voting, mostly involving two individuals, one incident stood out as more significant than the others: Three women, two voting, one of whom was not voting in that station but stayed to make sure they voted for the "correct" candidate. The women who were voting make sure they checked with the third woman who they should

¹ This question did not just relate to literature specific to this election but observers were also asked to identify if other literature, such as MP or councillors' surgeries were on public display – advertising the names of candidates and/or parties.

² <http://www.osce.org/>

be voting for. After one of the women voted for the "wrong" candidate, she tore up her ballot paper and attempted to hand the pieces back. The correct procedure was followed and she was issued with a new ballot paper. She then checked again with the third woman before marking her ballot and casting it.

In none of the cases reported by our observers did the polling station staff intervene to stop this practice.



QUESTION 11:

In 2017, with the planned pilot projects for the ‘Pickles Report’ likely to take place in 2018, we are evaluating the numbers of voters who attend the polling stations with, or without, their polling card. Although not a formal form of ID the card is also not a requirement to vote but is clearly evidence that the voter can provide to the polling staff that they are the registered voter and that they are eligible to vote.

In Woking, 56% of the electorate attended with their polling card and 44% did not.

OTHER REMARKS:

There was evidence of political activity in and around polling stations in Woking. These took the form of tellers taking numbers from voters as they left the polling stations. The majority of these tellers were representatives of the Conservative Party but, tellers from the Labour Party, the Liberal Democrats and the Green Party were observed. In all instances, voters were allowed unimpeded access to the polling station and all tellers were identifiable by party colours.

One issue that seemed to arise from the small size of most of the polling stations was that very often these tellers were within earshot or sight of the polling booths or ballot boxes.

Confusion seemed to arise in one case where, because of ward boundary changes, there were two ballot boxes of the same number but one of them post fixed with the letter ‘A’. These were

clearly meant to be two distinct ballot boxes however on at least one occasion these two boxes were placed side by side, causing confusion to voters.

An incident of note involved a group of six young males entering a polling station and proceeding to, one by one, attempt to vote at this place. However, none of their names were on the register at this particular polling station and were all directed to their correct places to vote by the Presiding Officer. One of the group proceeded to argue vehemently with the latter. When two other members of the group spotted our team of observers, they were overheard saying "let's leave we won't do it here." They promptly left the premises.

CONCLUSIONS

Despite some isolated incidents, the process seemed to be well run with most integral parts to the process functioning (ballot boxes sealed, pen and explanatory notes present).

In the instances of family voting observed by our observers, staff seemed unwilling or unaware of how to deal with this phenomenon, marked more obviously in the non-intervention in the case mentioned specifically previously. However, polling station staff seemed to be able to deal with incidents that may be seen as potential acts of intimidation as marked in the example of the group that entered the polling station where they were ineligible to vote at.

However, an awareness of the nature of observation, and even the existence of observers, seemed entirely new and the process by which they should deal with observers seemed unclear, mostly demonstrated by the fact that in the majority of cases the identification recorded was that of the observers' names and not badge ID number.