

# FINAL REPORT

English Local Elections  
3rd May 2017



Dr John Ault

8<sup>th</sup> May 2018



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## Final Report on English Local Election Observation

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### Objectives

1. To objectively observe the electoral process across a series of councils in England.
2. To advise the local councils 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.

### Training and Pre-deployment

All observers were trained and briefed on the process of observation in the days before polling day. The briefing for the Northern Councils was held in Manchester on Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> April and the briefing for the Voter ID pilots took place in London on the morning of Wednesday 2<sup>nd</sup> May before teams were sent to their various areas of observation.

A final debriefing took place on the morning of Friday 4<sup>th</sup> May in London.

### Methodology in Voter ID Pilot Areas

Democracy Volunteers deployed teams across the five councils conducting Voter ID Pilots on May 3<sup>rd</sup>. Teams of observers were deployed as follows:

Bromley	2 Teams of four observers
Gosport	1 Team of four observers
Swindon	2 Teams of four observers
Watford	1 Team of four observers
Woking	2 Teams of two observers

The number of polling stations to visit differed dramatically between the council areas and this explains the differences in deployed team size. As such the number of polling stations observed across the five councils was:

Bromley	63 Polling stations out of a possible 185	(34%)
Gosport	27 Polling stations out of a possible 44	(61%)
Swindon	72 Polling stations out of a possible 102	(70%)
Watford	47 Polling stations out of a possible 58	(81%)
Woking	34 Polling stations out of a possible 43	(79%)

This meant the 29 observers visited 243 (56%) of the polling stations across the five council areas.

As well as observers from the United Kingdom (15), teams that covered these councils included election experts and experienced observers from Republic of Ireland (3), Russia (3), Germany (2), Canada (1), France (1), Hungary (1), Lithuania (1), Italy (1) and Poland (1). All observers were accredited by the Electoral Commission to observe the elections.

Observers attended polling stations in teams of two. This started with the opening of polls at 7am and ended at 10pm. Observations lasted no less than 30 minutes and no more than 45 minutes per polling station. On exiting the polling station, the two observers completed an online form with their immediate report of their observations at that polling station.

## **Methodology in Other Councils**

Democracy Volunteers deployed teams across several other councils conducting local elections on May 3<sup>rd</sup>. Teams of observers were deployed as follows:

Kirklees	1 Teams of four observers
Calderdale	1 Team of four observers
Oldham	1 Teams of two observers
Bradford	1 Team of four observers
Tower Hamlets	2 Teams of two observers

In total 78 polling stations were observed across Bradford, Calderdale, Kirklees and Oldham. These were councils identified as being areas concerned by the so-called Pickles Report.

We observed 39 polling stations in Tower Hamlets and a report on these will be issued in the coming weeks. We have been in contact with Tower Hamlets Council for several weeks and attended some of their training events, postal vote opening and other aspects of the voting process to give us clearer knowledge of the electoral process.

In total, as well as observers from the United Kingdom (34), teams that covered all the councils, being observed in England, included election experts and experienced observers from Russia (4), Republic of Ireland (3), Germany (2), Canada (1), France (1), Hungary (1), Lithuania (1), Italy (1) and Poland (1). All observers were accredited by the Electoral Commission to observe the elections.

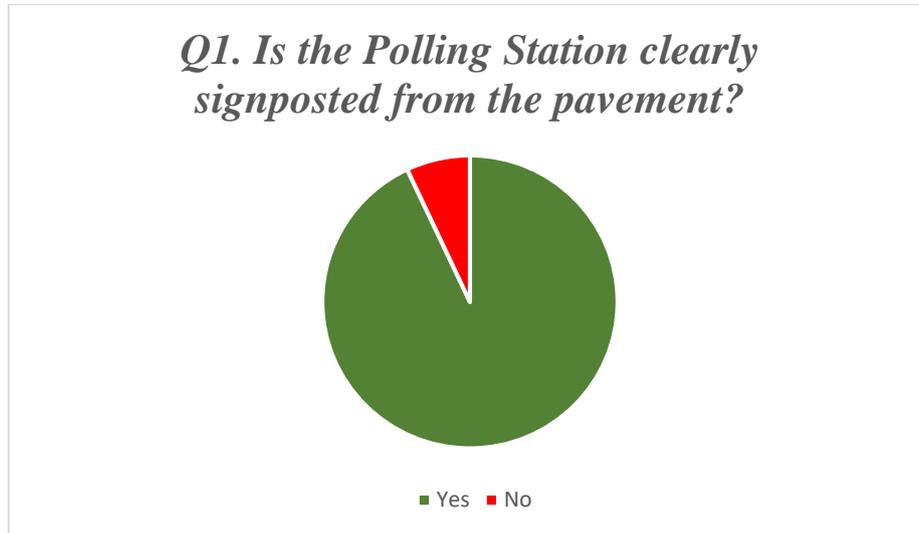
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‘Family Voting’ persists in being a problem in the UK electoral process. This is one that should be dealt with by electoral authorities.

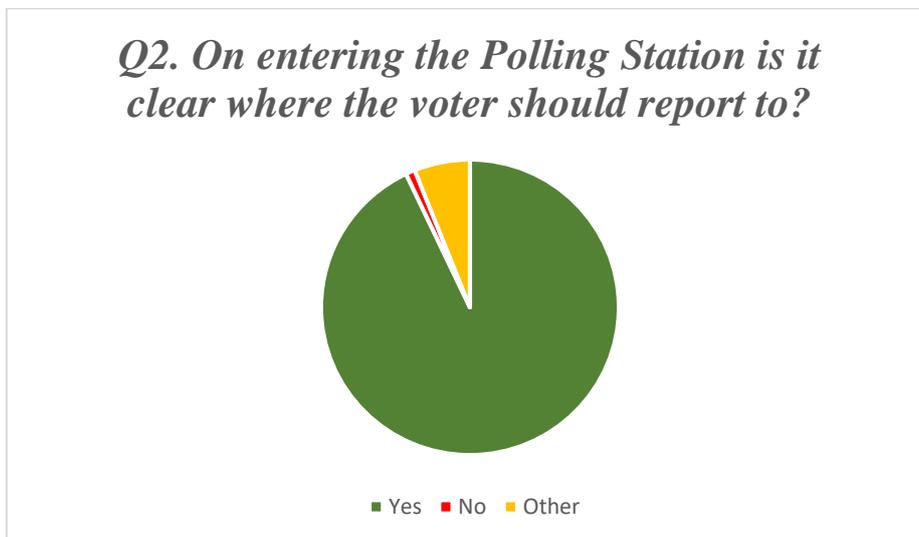
We also observed postal vote opening in Camden Borough Council.

## Results of the Observation

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

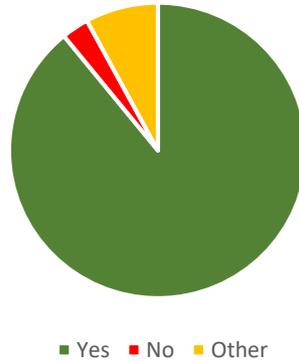


**QUESTION 1:** In 93% of cases polling stations were properly signposted from the pavement.



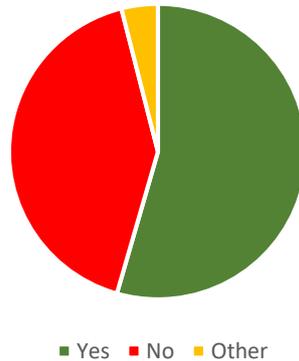
**QUESTION 2:** In 93% of cases, observers did not identify problems with where voters should report. Problems were often identified where multiple polling stations functioned in the same polling place.

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



**QUESTION 3:** 90% of observations indicated that access to the polling station was clear. Generally access was reduced because they were not step free.

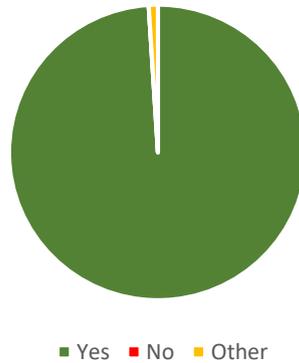
*Q4. Did the polling staff ask to see your ID on arrival?*



**QUESTION 4:** Polling staff are increasingly aware that observation teams might be operating across the areas. The formal procedure for identifying, and then recording, that observers had visited the polling station is still not followed.

In the areas conducting Voter ID trials staff were clearly more prepared than other councils, as there were so many institutional observers touring the polling stations. All the same checking and recording could be more formally done – especially as ID was a requirement in the five council areas conducting the ID trials.

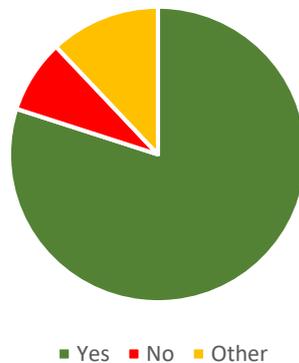
***Q5. Are there two staff on duty in the polling station as you arrive?***



**QUESTION 5:** 99% of polling stations had two members of polling staff on duty when observers arrived at the polling station.

In fact, in the council areas where the pilots were being conducted there were often four or more staff in attendance at the polling stations. PLEASE SEE RECOMMENDATIONS.

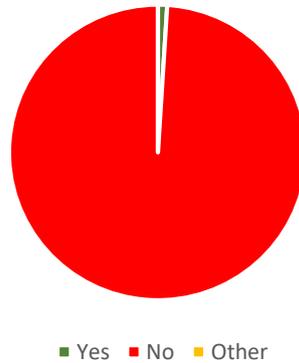
***Q6. Is the Ballot Box clearly sealed with cable ties (or tabs)?***



**QUESTION 6:** An important aspect of the electoral process is that the ballot should be secret and maintained such as 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. Only 80% the ballot boxes were visibly sealed. 12% of ballot boxes were sealed but with fewer than the require number of cable ties/tabs and 8% of ballot boxes were not sealed properly.

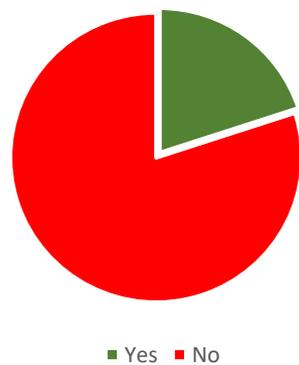
We believe this figure is of concern. Although there is no suggestion, or belief, that the incorrectly sealed/unsealed ballot boxes were done so intentionally we saw a number of ballot boxes that could not be shut properly and which, in some cases, were not properly sealed with the regulation seals. More care should be taken over making sure that this is done properly. This was more notable in the council areas with voter ID pilots than the five northern councils.

***Q7. Are there any political leaflets in sight within the Polling Station?***



**QUESTION 7:** This question was asked primarily to illicit whether improper political activity was taking place within the polling station.<sup>1</sup> We saw this in just 2 polling stations that were observed.

***Q8. Was there evidence of 'family voting' in the polling station?***



**QUESTION 8:** In 20% 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>2</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.

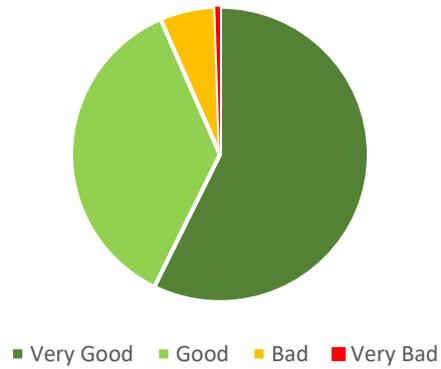
In the Northern Councils observed this was at a very high 29% of polling stations and at 18% in the Voter ID Councils. Staff do sometimes attempt to intervene but still family members discussing their vote and/or sharing a polling booth is not acted upon regularly by staff.

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.osce.org/>

*Q9. Overall how do you rate the quality of this polling station*



**QUESTION 9:** Observers were asked for an overall rating of the polling station they had attended. 57% of polling stations were reported to be 'Very Good', 36% 'Good', 6% 'Bad', and 0.5% 'Very Bad'.

## **Voter ID Pilots - Meetings in advance of the Election**

As well as our normal polling station observations we also met with several interlocutors to discuss the proposals before polling day to assess the various reasons that the Government was conducting the pilots and from organisations who were concerned about the proposals. These meetings were with the Electoral Commission, The Association of Electoral Administrators, The Electoral Reform Society, The Labour Party and the Liberal Democrats (a list of those specific interlocutors we met are listed in Appendix A).

We also requested meetings with the Minister for the Constitution (Conservative Party), The Cabinet Office and the Green Party.<sup>3</sup> Neither the Conservative Party nor the Cabinet Office responded to our requests for a meeting to discuss the pilot projects. The Green Party did respond but no suitable time to meet was arranged before polling day.

In our meetings with our interlocutors we were especially interested to discover answers to a series of questions, some of which were based on media concerns and those from civil society whilst also appreciating that concerns had been raised in the report by Sir Eric Pickles – ‘Securing the Ballot’.<sup>4</sup>

The use of ID to vote in the UK is not new. Northern Ireland has used ID for several years and this experience has encouraged authorities, including the Electoral Commission, to recommend this as being a possible way forward to securing the ballot, whilst its recommendations tried to ensure that ID was available, for free, to those who do not have photographic ID. The use of ID to vote is common place around the world, most of western Europe uses it whilst other ways of proving identity that are less formal than a passport or driving licence, are also widely used. It is, in fact, generally considered an international standard for elections, but invariably this is because there is some form of compulsory national ID system, which the UK does not have.

We were especially interested to assess, from the Electoral Commission, what their assessment for success would be for the trials, these included:

- If the experience for the voters is made worse or improved
- The impact on polling station procedures and consistent implementation of the process
- The capacity to secure private areas for some aspects of checking ID

We also discussed how fundamentally difficult it might be for the local councils and the Electoral Commission to evaluate the process and feedback this information to the Cabinet Office. One of the possible problems with evaluating the impact on certain demographic groups is that the pilots took place in areas with limited socio-economic diversity, racial diversity as well as areas which do not have high numbers of those in Higher Education.

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<sup>3</sup> Caroline Lucas MP.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/securing-the-ballot-review-into-electoral-fraud>

However, we were informed that Returning Officers and Local Authorities were doing their best to make the process work as smoothly as possible. The choice of councils comes from expressions of interest from local authorities, not an imposition from central government, which possibly explains the reason why few of the pilot councils are ‘Pickles councils’. We understand that further pilots are planned for 2019 in other councils. The Cabinet Office and the Electoral Commission are conducting independent evaluations, but we understand that the success for returning officers is that there is no discernible disruption of the voter flow. It was not clear to us that councils were directly concerned about the impact this might have on those being discouraged from voting because of the new requirements to present ID.

When we recently observed the local elections in The Netherlands we identified that local presiding officers are supplied with a visual compendium of acceptable IDs from across the countries that the UK’s present election law allows for local elections, like those rules in The Netherlands, namely those EU citizens who live locally. We understood that the use of EU IDs was a fundamental part of the training for polling staff but in the polling station, the presiding officers still had the final say because members of staff have to be satisfied it is genuine.

Those interlocutors we met seemed satisfied that the councils running the pilots were prepared for the process and had made necessary arrangements for the process to function well. Indeed, we were informed that Bromley would be having three members of staff in polling stations compared the usual two – we did question whether this would be replicated in normal circumstances.

Concerns were raised by opposition parties and civil society that the use of ID could restrict the rights of some groups which were enunciated in a letter, coordinated by the Electoral Reform Society.<sup>5</sup> The specific groups that considered that this might be a limitation on their access, if ID were to be used, included:

- Young people/Students
- Older people
- Disabled people
- Transgender and gender non-conforming people
- BAME communities
- The homeless

This led some to suggest that, like some other countries, this might be considered a form of voter suppression – where some groups, including those mentioned above might be directly, or indirectly, disadvantaged from voting because of the use of ID. We were concerned that this might be difficult to evaluate through election observation, especially because many of the areas being piloted did not necessarily have significant numbers of these minority groups to

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.electoral-reform.org.uk/latest-news-and-research/media-centre/press-releases/unprecedented-coalition-of-charities-and-civil-society-demand-rethink-on-dangerous-voter-id-trials/>

assess whether it was a limiting factor on their capacity to vote. We also believe that fluctuations in turnout might be easily attributed to other causes rather than the use of ID.

## The Different Pilots

The five councils did not run the same pilot and we will give these differences different data sets later in the report. However, understanding the different ID thresholds is important.

	Preferred ID	Alternate ID
<b>Bromley</b>	One of the following: a UK, Commonwealth or EU Passport; a UK, Crown Dependency or EU Driver's Licence (inc. Provisional); an NI electoral ID card; a biometric immigration document issued by the UK (ARC card); EEA ID Card; Oyster 60+ London Pass; Freedom Pass (London); a PASS scheme card	Two of the following: a valid debit or credit card; poll card for the poll; non-photocard driver's licence; birth certificate; marriage or civil partnership certificate; adoption certificate; firearms certificate; the record of a decision on bail made in respect of the voter; a bank or building society cheque book; a mortgage statement, bank or building society statement, a credit card statement or a utility bill dated within 3 months of the date of the poll; a council tax demand letter or statement or a Form P45 or Form P60 dated within 12 months of the date of the poll
<b>Gosport</b>	One of the following: a UK, Commonwealth or EU Passport; a UK, Crown Dependency or EU Driver's License (inc. Provisional); an NI electoral ID card; a biometric immigration document issued by the UK (ARC card); EEA ID Card; DBS certificate with registered address; MoD photographic ID card; MoD Defence Privilege Card; photo bus/travel pass from a Hants. Council.	Two of the following: (one must show address) non-photocard driver's licence; birth, adoption or marriage/civil partnership certificate, bank or building society debit/credit card; bank/mortgage statement, council tax demand or statement letter, utility bill, P2, P6, P9, P45, P60 or statement or entitlement to benefits dated within 12 months of the poll
<b>Swindon</b>	Barcoded poll card	Only one of the following: UK, EU, Commonwealth Passport (expired or valid); UK, Crown Dependency or EU photocard Driver's Licence (inc. Provisional); NI electoral ID Card; Biometric Immigration Document; EEA ID Card
<b>Watford</b>	Barcoded poll card	Only one of the following: UK, EU, Commonwealth Passport; UK, Crown Dependency or EU photocard Driver's Licence (inc. Provisional); NI electoral ID Card; Biometric Immigration Document; EEA ID Card; valid credit or debit card
<b>Woking</b>	One of the following (expired or valid): a UK, Commonwealth or EU Passport; a UK or EU Driver's Licence (inc Provisional); an NI electoral ID card; a biometric immigration document issued by the UK (ARC card); EEA ID Card; Surrey Senior Bus Pass; Surrey Student Fare Card; 16-25 Railcard; Rail Season Ticket Photocard	Local Elector Card (Applied for in advance).

Because the pilots were testing different potential approaches to assessing the feasibility of ID as a requirement to vote, we were aware that it was possible to assess different aspects of this process before the trials formally took place. For the past eighteen months we have asked our observers to count both the number of voters attending a polling station but also the number of voters who failed to bring their polling card, bearing in mind this is not a requirement to receive a ballot paper until the ID trials. They have been in the ID trials in both Swindon and Watford.

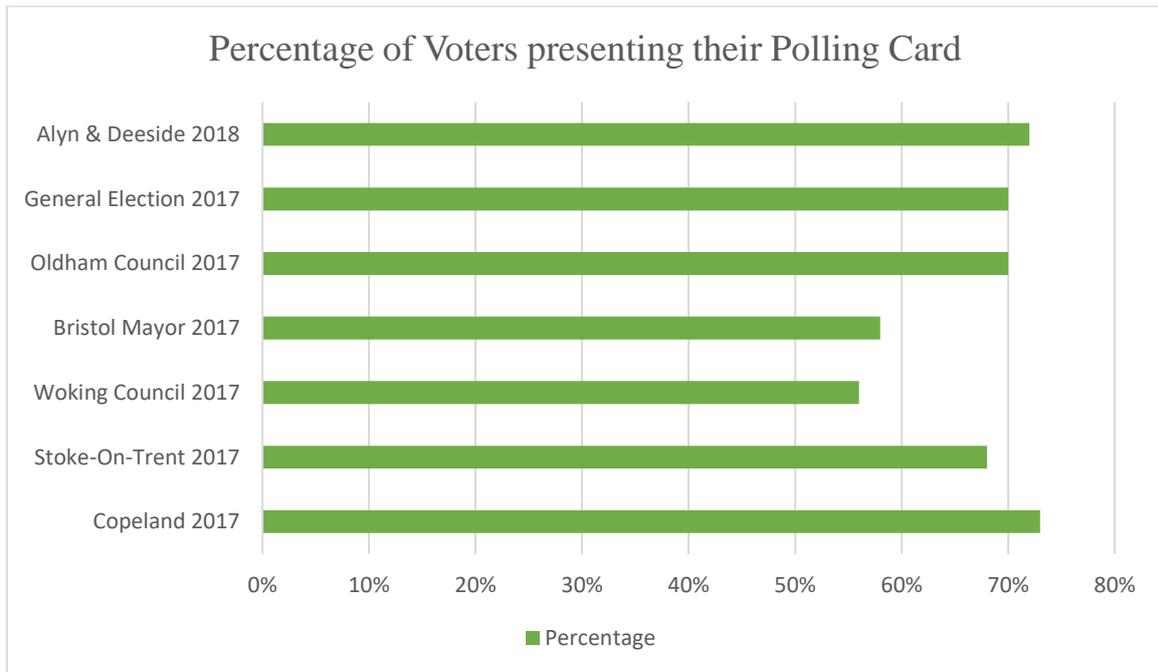


Figure 1 - Data from 2017 and 2018 observations for those attending with their polling cards

Our data suggests that those attending the polling stations with their polling cards is certainly not universal. Indeed, at the UK General Election in June 2017 those attending with their polling card was almost exactly 70% of those who attended the 642 polling stations we observed across 66 UK constituencies (sample size 3119 voters). Only the Alyn and Deeside Welsh Assembly by-election showed that 72% attended with their polling card and the Stoke-on-Trent Parliamentary by-election was 68% whilst the Copeland by-election was 73%.

However, notably those attending in local elections in 2017 in Bristol and Woking saw those attending with their card lower at 58% and 56% respectively. However, Oldham Council elections in 2017 had 70% of voters presenting with their polling cards. This may suggest that voters may be less prepared to vote in local elections and possibly the impact of party turnout operations may be more effective in local elections, whereas national elections are much better advertised, and voters are more prepared for their election day plans. Turnout in some areas is significantly different and this may also affect the percentage of voters who attend with their polling card – those more habitual in their attendance at the polls.<sup>6</sup>

Further data will follow concerning the percentage of voters who attended at polling stations with their polling card on May 3<sup>rd</sup>, including Swindon and Watford where it was mandatory.

<sup>6</sup> In 2018, we have revisited both Woking and Oldham Council elections as part of our observations.

## Public Awareness Campaigns

For us to be satisfied that our observations of the voter ID pilots were to be fair to those undertaking them, at council level and those who were required to conform to the new regulations we felt it was important to ask our interlocutors, and to find out from our own investigations, that the pilots had received.



Figure 2 Woking Council Advertising

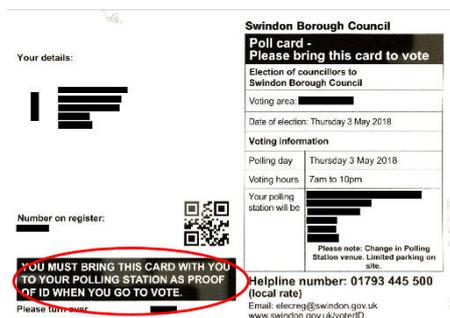


Figure 3 Polling Card – Swindon (Front)

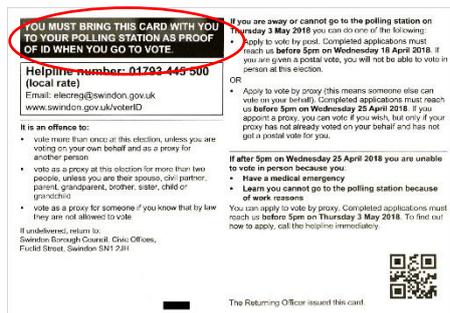


Figure 4 Polling Card - Swindon (Reverse)

Both the Electoral Commission and the Association of Electoral Administrators believed that the local information campaigns, supported and augmented by the press team at the Cabinet Office, had been of sufficiently high profile to ensure that local voters were fully conscious of the necessity to have the relevant ID, or information, to ensure that they did not have issues whilst attempting to vote.

This was clearly made obvious on polling cards in Swindon and Watford as well as through public information programmes, in the local press and at high footfall areas across the other three pilot areas. We also believe that local political parties, presumably in attempt to maximise their capacity for turnout, and to help voters through their own literature, also advertised the necessity to take the relevant ID for the council areas concerned.

We were, therefore, satisfied that the pilots were due to take place in areas that had received sufficient information to ensure that any of our observations were in a context which would reasonably assess the viability of the various options that were being piloted.

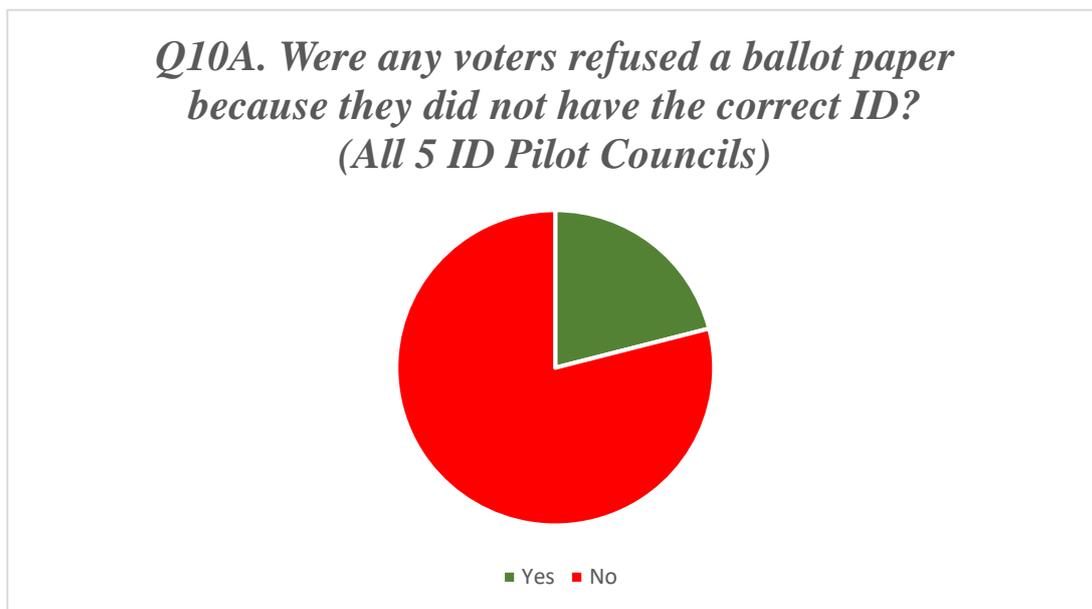
We were also conscious that the pilots took place in the context of significant local publicity, and to a lesser extent national publicity, over the trials, but we also believe that the significantly lower turnout seen at local elections compared to a Westminster election or national referendum probably suggests that those more engaged with local politics would be those most likely to have seen the local publicity.

On polling day, we observed that those voters attending the polling stations were generally aware of the new rules regarding the requirement for ID to vote and seemed engaged with the process.

## Results of the Observation in Voter ID Areas

As usual the observers asked a series of questions which will be reported in a separate report later. This report deals specifically with those issues associated with ‘Securing the Ballot’ and the voter ID trials in the five councils.

As with other observations Democracy Volunteers assessed a series of simple tests for polling stations such as the sealing of the ballot boxes and the accessibility issues of polling stations. These will be reported on at a later date.



**QUESTION 10A:** Observers were asked to identify those voters who were refused a ballot paper because they did not have the correct ID. Across the five councils voters were refused a ballot paper in 21% of polling stations. This data broke down as Bromley 23% to 77%, Gosport 24% to 76%, Swindon 23% to 77%, Watford 19% to 81% and Woking 15% to 85%.

In terms of the actual percentage of voters that were turned away from voting this constituted (a sample size of 3229) 54 voters, 1.67% of all voters across the five pilot areas were unable to vote because they did not have the required ID to vote. Of the 1.67% of voters who were excluded we cannot assert the number that later returned, if at all.

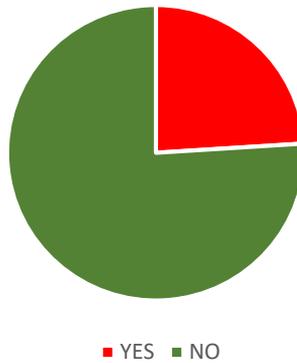
Although the numbers are quite small, in terms of how these figures break down, we also asked observers to count the male/female ratio of those without an acceptable ID and also those from BAME communities. Of those turned away 61% were women and 52% were from BAME communities. Both figures are significantly higher than the general population. However, we should make clear that the sample size is quite small at 54 out of 3229 voters.

We also believe that at busy times in buildings where multiple polling stations were housed, staff welcomed voters at the entrance and pre-checked whether they had their polling card or valid ID. If they had neither they were reminded of this and did not formally present themselves

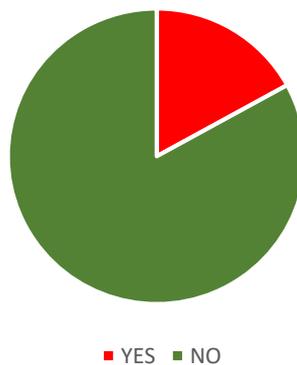
in the normal way. We also understand that a number of voters refused to produce appropriate ID (9 voters in total) and that several also refused to allow staff to record their details so that they could be recorded as having been refused their ballot paper. Thus, we believe it is possible that they may not have been recorded as having been turned away. In some cases, it was not clear how staff were recording those people that were turned away because they lacked the appropriate ID or polling card.

Observers commented that at times voters had been issued with two polling cards and they had brought both with them. At times the polling card scanners did not always work. The use of attestation as to identity by a third party was allowed in Swindon. At times this was done by political representatives.

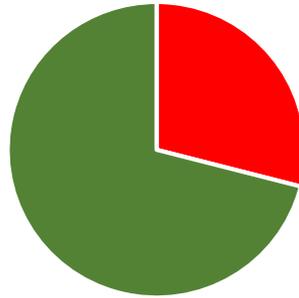
***Q11A. Did you identify queues forming at polling stations (Bromley)?***



***Q11B. Did you identify queues forming at polling stations (Gosport)?***

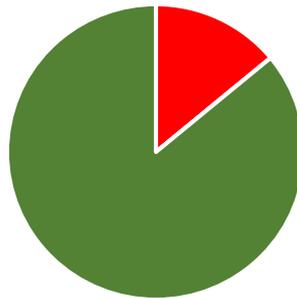


***Q11C. Did you identify queues forming at polling stations (Swindon)?***



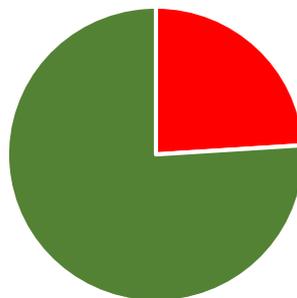
■ YES ■ NO

***Q11D. Did you identify queues forming at polling stations (Watford)?***



■ YES ■ NO

***Q11E. Did you identify queues forming at polling stations (Woking)?***



■ YES ■ NO

**QUESTION 11 A-E:** Our observations indicated that queues did form at a number of polling stations. Although these queues were never very long they did tend to form when either the equipment required for scanning polling cards or improper ID was offered at polling stations.

Clearly, queueing was modest partly because of the lower turnout at local elections – even with more than the usual number of staff available for conducting polling day operations.

However, if rolled out across a larger area, and subject to larger turnouts at parliamentary elections, this could be much more of a problem.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

What is clear to the observer group is that the elections were invariably very well run, and staff were well trained and conscious of the rules, especially in the Pilot Voter ID areas. Councils ensured sufficient staff were available to conduct the voter ID trials and to facilitate voters' access to the polls with public information campaigns and literature in polling stations to assist those without the correct ID. However, we believe that reflecting on our recommendations would be beneficial to an improvement in the electoral process.

### **VOTER ID TRIALS RECOMMENDATIONS**

**R1.** The pilots took place in largely suburban areas which many people, including polling staff and ourselves, did not think were representative of the general population. We would recommend that in the proposed 2019 pilot areas more of those areas identified in 'Securing the Ballot' take part in the trials.<sup>7</sup>

**R2.** The Pilots were given resources in terms of public information campaigns and also through extra staff in polling stations. We believe that if voter ID is to become an aspect of UK voting in the future it should be considered normal to have more than the present two members of staff in polling stations.

**R3.** Other forms of ID should be considered as part of the standardised ID types which are tested.<sup>8</sup>

**R4.** We believe that attestation as to identity, as a form of acceptable ID, was too readily available in areas where polling cards were the required form of ID.<sup>9</sup> We believe allowing party representatives, invariably tellers, to attest to the identity of a voter, at the polling station when the elector asserted that they had misplaced their polling card, is too open to question and possible misuse and it should be considered, in future, to be an unacceptable practice. (We will be issuing a series of Freedom of Information Requests to evaluate the number of attestations there were across the five council areas).

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/securing-the-ballot-review-into-electoral-fraud>

<sup>8</sup> One Police Officer was turned away from voting despite showing his police ID card. Another voter with their NHS card was declined their vote.

<sup>9</sup> In a number of polling stations voters were able to have their identity attested to by presiding officers and polling clerks who knew them – this was the case in Swindon. However, our observers also witnessed party tellers, who were at the door to take numbers for their party campaigns, being used as witnesses to allow some voters to vote.

**R5.** Some of the ID requirements did lead to some, almost perverse, episodes. Clarity of the rules of attestation as a form of ID should be clearer.<sup>10</sup>

**R6.** Our observers saw a voter refused a vote because someone had apparently already voted in his name using an acceptable form of ID (a freedom pass). He had his polling card and passport with him ready to vote. The authorities should explain how this is possible when voter ID is designed, and intended, to stop this possibility. The voter was issued with a so-called ‘tendered ballot’ which has no status to be counted. We believe it is important to assess how many tendered ballots were issued across the five councils to help evaluate the extent to which the use of ID effectively prevented the possibility of personation. (We will be issuing a series of Freedom of Information Requests to evaluate the number of tendered ballots there were across the five council areas).

**R7.** Polling staff should be provided with a much more detailed handbook of acceptable ID. Although most voters presented passports or driving licences we did question whether staff would know the difference between a real ID from another EU country, who could vote in the election, and a fake one.<sup>11</sup>

**R8.** Staff should receive more training on how to annotate the forms of ID being used.<sup>12</sup>

## GENERAL

We have noted that observers are still not an accepted, let alone anticipated, part of the process. Swindon Council was very reluctant to admit observers as they were not on their prescribed list of attendees at the polling stations. This made access difficult at times as we assume the so-called list was actually a list of polling agents which accredited observers would not appear on. After some time, the council issued a list of all the observers in the UK to the polling stations. This was, of course, unnecessary as all accredited observers should be allowed reasonable access to the polling stations of their choice, without notice.

We also faced outright opposition to our attendance at a postal vote opening in one London Borough where a council officer suggested that our accredited observers could be ejected from a count if she deemed it appropriate. She seemed wholly unaware of the rights and responsibilities of observers and her attitude was rather surprising. Other councils were very welcoming and understood that the UK’s accreditation of observers is a fundamental aspect of strengthening public confidence in the electoral process by citizen observation.

**R9.** Returning Officers should train staff as to the existence of, and the possibility of the attendance of, observers at elections. They should also explain their duties, if possible their code of conduct and make them aware of the international agreements to which the UK is a signatory encouraging election observation.

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<sup>10</sup> This recommendation is based on an observation group meeting a presiding officer being forced to turn away a male voter whom he had known personally for 35 years.

<sup>11</sup> In our recent observation of the Netherlands all polling stations were equipped with a handbook of all acceptable IDs.

<sup>12</sup> One observer group noted that staff were recording bank statements (which is valid as an ID form with another valid form in some of the ID areas) as BS which is the correct coding for a Bail Sheet. The correct code for a bank statement should have been ST.

**R10.** We consistently see high levels of ‘family voting’ at UK polling stations. We consistently see breaches of the secret ballot where voters are observed, assisted or openly directed how to vote by family members. We believe that the election authorities are starting to understand the scale of this problem and some of the publicity from the Electoral Commission before the May elections did identify this. We recommend that the Cabinet Office should work with the Electoral Commission to produce signage and literature aimed at those most vulnerable to this problem in the next round of local elections. This could even form a pilot of its own.

**R11.** Ballot boxes are often improperly or not uniformly sealed, impossible to seal properly or not able to be proven to be sealed. We recommend that all ballot boxes should be standardised across all council areas.

**R12.** Because of R11 we also recommend that there should be the standardisation of the sealing of ballot boxes with numbered seals which are recorded at the sealing of the ballot box and these are placed in a public space for them to be checked easily.<sup>13</sup>

**R13.** Electoral Commission ID badges for observers should clearly state the name of the accredited organisation ‘Democracy Volunteers’ rather than simply ‘Organisation’ to avoid confusion in polling stations and counting venues.

**R14.** We are often asked how old children can be when accompanying their family into polling stations. When a small child attends with their parent we never record this as ‘family voting’ indeed we feel this is an integral part of the process of normalising the voting process to those who are not yet able to. Although, we feel this could be rather prescriptive we do feel that a ‘rule of thumb’ would be worth adopting by councils and presiding officers. In Norway, we have observed that children can enter the polling booth with their parent if they cannot see above the shelf. We feel this is a simple and efficient rule for UK councils to adopt.

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<sup>13</sup> Some Councils already do this, but we believe it should be regulated to all councils.

## **Appendix A (Interlocutors)<sup>14</sup>**

### **The Electoral Commission**

Tom Hawthorn (Head of Policy)  
Phil Thompson (Head of Research)  
Katy Knock

### **Association of Electoral Administrators**

Peter Stanyon (Chief Executive)

### **Electoral Reform Society**

Jess Garland (Director of Policy and Research)

### **The Labour Party (Office of Cat Smith MP - Shadow Minister (Cabinet Office) (Voter Engagement and Youth Affairs))**

Liam Budd (Political Advisor to Cat Smith MP)

### **The Liberal Democrats (Spokesperson for Communities and Local Government)**

Wera Hobhouse MP

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<sup>14</sup> We also met a number of these interlocutors on polling day, as well as others, as part of our observations.