

CITY OF
WOLVERHAMPTON
COUNCIL

Governance and Ethics Committee

20 October 2022

Report title	Preparations for Elections Act Introduction	
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor Paula Brookfield Cabinet Member for Governance and Equalities	
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Report has been considered by	Election Board	30 September 2022

Recommendations for noting:

The Governance and Ethics Committee is asked to note:

1. The timeline and key areas of the Elections Act.

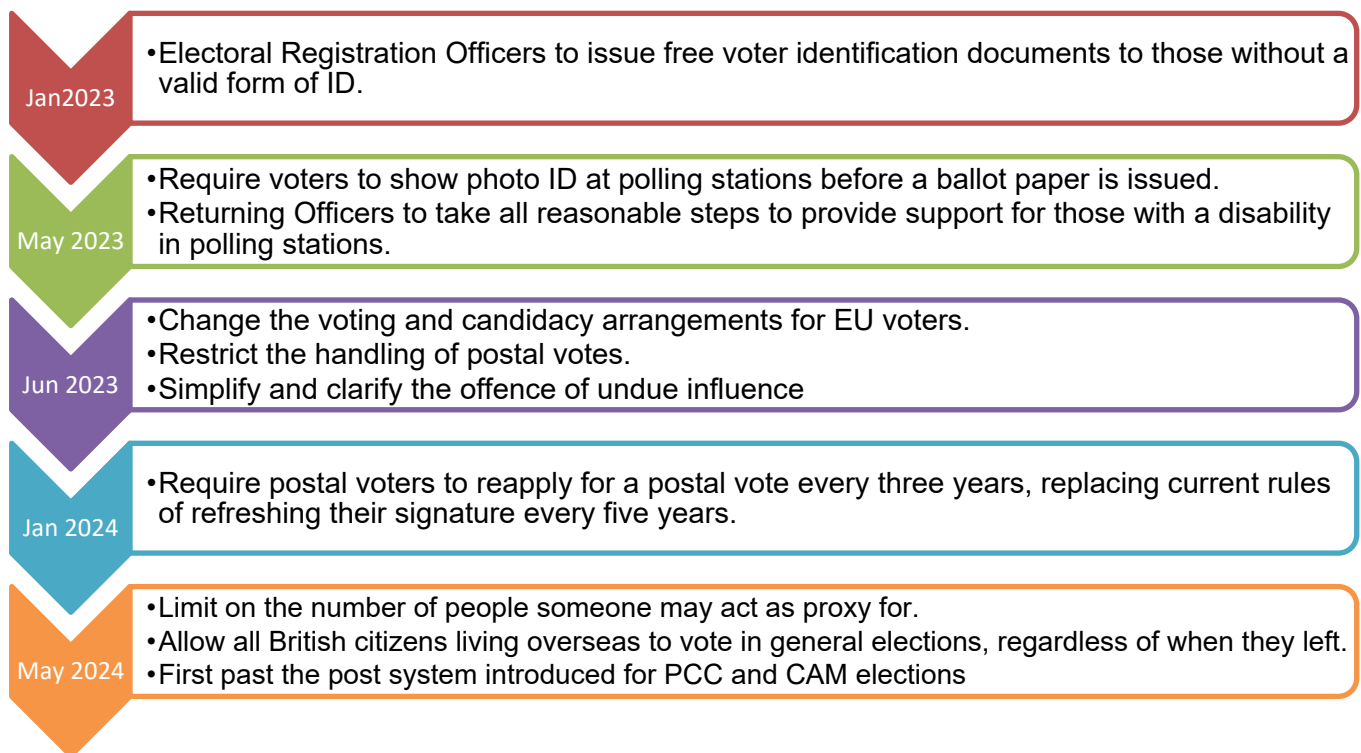
1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 To provide an overview of the Elections Act and to outline initial preparations for implementing the Voter ID and Accessibility arrangements in May 2023.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 The Elections Act received Royal Assent in April 2022. This Act has significant implications on the running of elections. The changes will be implemented over an 18-month period.
- 2.2 Electoral Services delivered a briefing session to all Councillors on the Elections Act on 10 October.

3.0 Areas of Act and Timeline



4.0 Statutory Instruments

- 4.1 The detail for each area of the Act will be set out in secondary legislation. The Statutory Instrument for Voter ID is scheduled for early November, and the Statutory Instrument for Accessibility is scheduled for December.
- 4.2 The Electoral Commission will produce their guidance to electoral administrators and candidates and agents once the secondary legislation has been passed.
- 4.3 Electoral Services will hold another councillor briefing session when the secondary legislation is produced.

5.0 Election Act Impact in Wolverhampton

5.1 National research has indicated that around 98% of the public have some form of suitable ID. Therefore, in Wolverhampton, it is expected that approximately 3,700 electors would not have suitable ID and would need to apply for voter ID.

5.2 As at 1 August 2022, Wolverhampton had 12,764 EU nationals registered to vote – nearly 7% of the electorate. Two groups of EU citizens will retain their voting and candidacy rights and remain registered:

- Qualifying EU citizens – a list of countries with which the UK has bilateral voting and candidacy right treaties. Currently there are four countries, and the number of electors are as follows: Poland (2,364), Spain (380), Portugal (1,015) and Luxembourg (2).
- EU citizens with retained rights – those persons who were already resident in the UK at the end of the Implementation Period following our exit from the EU (31/12/20). Such persons are also required to have maintained lawful immigration status. All EU citizens will therefore need to have their eligibility to be registered reviewed when legislation comes in.

6.0 Voter ID

6.1 There will be a range of photo ID that electors can use such as:

- Passport (UK, EU or Commonwealth)
- Driving License
- Immigration Document
- PASS card.

6.2 The ID must be original, it cannot be a photocopy. Expired photo ID will also be accepted as long as the photo remains a good enough likeness to be able to identify the elector.

6.3 Work/student passes will not be an acceptable form of ID.

6.4 For electors who do not have an acceptable form of Photo ID, they can apply for a voter authority certificate. Applications can be made from January 2023 on the 'Get ready to vote in person' service on the government website. Applications will be downloaded by Electoral Services from a national Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) portal. Photos will be individually approved or rejected (making follow up enquiries where necessary), and then they will be released to a national printer for posting.

6.5 For electors who are not able to access the internet to make their application or upload a photo, they will be supported by Electoral Services in the Civic Centre to do this.

6.6 The deadline to apply for a voter authority certified will be 6 days before poll.

- 6.7 Electoral Services will be able to produce temporary voter certificates where an application has been made in time but not received. These will be available to collect from the Civic Centre up to 5pm on polling day.
- 6.8 The voter authority certificate will have a 10-year validity and electors will be advised to change it when it is no longer a true likeness.
- 6.9 The poll card will be changing to an A4 enveloped letter which will list all of the Valid ID that electors can bring and information on how to apply for a voter certificate.
- 6.10 Only the presiding officer and poll clerk can inspect ID unless permitted by elector. There will be comprehensive training given to polling staff and support available on day from Polling Station Inspector and Electoral Services.
- 6.11 The Presiding Officer must refuse an elector a ballot paper if they have reasonable doubt the ID does not look like the elector or suspect the documents are forged.
- 6.12 Privacy screens will need to be provided to all polling stations where there is not a separate space for checking ID for removal of face coverings etc. More queues can be expected at polling stations as a result of the additional step to check ID.

7.0 Accessibility

- 7.1 Returning Officers will have a general responsibility to take all reasonable steps to support voters with disabilities. The Electoral Commission's guidance will recommend a range of support that should be made available to voters with disabilities, and this will be developed in conjunction with organisations representing disabled voters and those from the electoral sector. The draft guidance makes clear that the RO has a legal obligation to provide:
 - A notice inside and outside the polling station providing instructions on how to vote at the election
 - A notice in each polling booth providing information on how to mark the ballot paper at the election
 - At least one large sample copy of the ballot paper must be displayed inside the polling station
 - An enlarged hand-held copy of the ballot paper
- 7.2 It also states that the following equipment should, as a minimum, be provided to all polling stations:
 - Chair/seating – this provides a place to rest for voters who cannot stand for long periods and a seat for voters who would like to take some time to think before entering the polling booth.
 - Magnifiers – these increase the size of the text on a document providing support for voters who are visually impaired to vote independently.
 - Tactile voting device –this provides support for voters who are visually impaired to mark their vote on the ballot paper in the correct place.

- Polling booth at wheelchair level –helps to ensure that voters who use a wheelchair are able access a lower writing surface to ensure they can cast their vote in secret in a booth that is accessible.
- Staff name badges – these help voters more easily identify that a person is a member of staff in the polling station and is someone they can approach for assistance.
- Pencil grip – these can help voters with dexterity impairments to more easily hold and use a pencil independently.
- Ramps (for buildings with steps) – these support access to a polling station for voters who use a wheelchair or have difficulty using steps.
- Temporary alerters or doorbells for any doors that are required to remain shut during the day (for example, fire doors) – these provide a way for voters to let polling station staff know that they need assistance to open the door so they can access the polling station.
- Appropriate lighting – some polling station venues have good lighting but others may need additional lighting at the desk; to ensure that voters can clearly see the faces of staff, and in the polling booths; to support voters with visual impairments to be able to read and complete the ballot paper.
- Reserved parking spaces reserved for voters with disabilities (where parking is available at the venue) – this ensures that disabled voters can park as close as possible to the polling station

7.3 The draft guidance also states that Returning Officers should provide accessibility awareness training for all staff who interact with voters, including staff who support electoral services, to help improve their understanding of the needs of those with disabilities and the importance of clear communication. It is also vital that training for polling station staff addresses the importance of being aware of accessibility needs of voters at the polling station and what steps they should take to support them.

7.4 An accessibility working group has been set up to discuss the improvements that can be made in Wolverhampton. The membership of this group includes Electoral Services, Equalities, Adult Social Care. Local disability organisations have been invited to join.

8.0 Funding

8.1 The Electoral Commission is to produce guidance for electoral administrators and candidates and agents once the secondary legislation has been passed. The Government has indicated that additional new burdens funding will be provided to support the implementation of the Elections Act, though the level of funding is yet to be confirmed.

9.0 Communications

9.1 All local communication channels will be utilised including council website, Facebook, twitter and the resident's newsletter.

9.2 The following key messages will be covered:

- There will be a private area in polling stations to check ID
- You may have to remove veil/face coverings if asked
- The deadline to apply for voter cert is 5pm 6 days before poll
- Ensure you are registered to vote first before you apply for voter cert
- You can apply for a voter cert online, or contact electoral services if you need assistance
- You only need to apply for a voter ID card if don't have acceptable ID
- The poll card has changed. It will now be an A4 envelope letter. It will list all of the Valid ID
- Your polling station may have changed due to boundary changes. You can check where your polling station will be online. It will also be on your poll card
- There will be an FAQ page on the Council website for all other queries.

9.3 All candidates will be encouraged to share the council and Electoral Commissions posts about Voter ID.

9.4 Candidates and agents will also be encouraged to include voter ID reminders in campaign literature and on elector's doorsteps.

10.0 Financial implications

10.1 The Government has indicated that additional new burdens funding will be provided to support the implementation of the Elections Act, though the level of funding is yet to be confirmed. A full assessment of financial implications will be undertaken when this information has been provided and details of costs and funding incorporated in future reports. [GE/11102022/F]

11.0 Legal Implications

11.1 All preparations outlined in this report are in line with the Elections Act. The next stage in our planning rests on the statutory instruments being made. [DP/12102022/A]

12.0 Equalities implications

12.1 Local authorities have a duty to review the accessibility of all polling places to disabled voters and ensure that every polling place, and prospective polling place, for which it is responsible is accessible to disabled voters 'so far as is reasonable and practicable'. All polling stations are accessible for disabled voters or provisions will be made to make them accessible for disabled voters on polling day.

12.2 The accessibility working group has been set up to ensure compliance with the new requirements relating to accessibility.

13.0 All other Implications

13.1 There are no other implications arising from the report at the current time.

14.0 Schedule of background papers

14.1 Democratic Engagement Update, Governance and Ethics Committee, 1 September 2022