

## **DEMOCRATIC PROCESSES WORKING GROUP**

**26 September 2022**

**Commenced: 4.00pm**

**Terminated: 4.25pm**

**Present:** Councillors Cooney (In the Chair), Costello, Fairfoull, McNally, North, Ward and Warrington.

**Apologies** for Councillors Feeley, Kitchen and Ryan.  
**Absence**

### **1. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

#### **RESOLVED:**

**That the minutes of the meeting of the Working Group held on 21 February 2022 be approved as a correct record.**

### **2. LOCAL GOVERNMENT BOUNDARY REVIEW AND REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING STATIONS**

Members considered a report of the Chief Executive/Returning Officer, which advised Members that following the outcome of the Local Government Boundary Review revised boundaries would be used for the May 2023 Borough Council elections. The new Register of Electors, based on new boundaries, would be published on 1 December 2022. It was intended to bring forward the statutory review of Polling Districts and Polling stations from 2023 so that it could be completed prior to the publication of the new register on 1 December. The report outlined the timetable for implementing the boundary review and the polling district reviews.

It was explained that statistical information for the new wards had been collated about electorates, postal voters, turnout etc. to identify those polling districts/polling stations requiring attention simply based on the number of people in the polling district and the number of electors likely to vote at a particular polling station. The information relating to each ward was attached at **Appendix 1** and would be shared with Councillors for the Ward. Previous reviews had addressed the primary issues which were: too many polling stations with very small electorates and too many mobile polling stations. This had resulted in polling places in Tameside from 115 in 2010 to 100 at recent elections and a reduction from 20 mobile polling stations to 7 over the same period. The primary purpose of this review would be the implications for polling districts and polling stations of the changes to ward boundaries

It was intended to submit the final report on the outcome of the review to Council on 6 December 2022. In order to meet this deadline the following timetable will be followed:

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|-----------------|--|
| 4 October 2022  | Council to receive minutes of Democratic Processes Working Group informing Members of the start of review process.   |
| 5 October 2022  | Communication with all Members setting out the basis of the review and principles being followed, statistical information and maps showing polling districts and polling stations for their Ward. In addition Members will be informed of the Returning Officer's recommended changes. Each Member will be offered an opportunity to discuss their Ward in detail. |
| 5 November 2022 | Deadline for responses from Members. Between 5 October and 5 November all Members will have the opportunity to respond in a number of ways including an opportunity for all Ward members to discuss options directly with Head of Democratic Services.   |

November 2022 Democratic Processes Working Group to consider proposals  
(date to be following consultation with all Members and to determine  
confirmed) recommendations to Council.

6 December 2022 Council to consider proposals.

Taking into account the end of the Route 1 cycle and the returns from Route 2 we are at an overall 83% response with 17,696 properties left to issue reminders to. Compared with this time last year where the response rate was 81.42% and in 2019 prior to reform we were at 56.8% with around 45,000 reminders due to go out it highlights the need for Canvass reform and results seem positive so far.

**AGREED:**

**That the update be noted and endorsed.**

### **3. ELECTIONS ACT**

Members considered a report of the Chief Executive/Returning Officer, which updated Members on the Elections Act 2022. In particular the report set out how voter identification would work and the arrangements that would need to be put in place. It was explained that the Elections 2022 Act made new provisions and amended existing electoral law by introducing identification to vote at polling stations, measures relating to postal votes and measures to prevent any foreign interference in elections and to make it easier for British expats to vote in Parliamentary elections, and removing the 15-year limit on their voting rights.

The Act was in seven parts, Part 1 Introduced new measures concerning the integrity of the electoral process, including: a requirement for voters to show an approved form of photographic identification before collecting their ballot paper to vote at a polling station; provisions enabling online applications for absent votes, along with identification checks; new measures for postal and proxy voting; and an extension of the secrecy provisions which applied in the polling booth to postal and proxy voting. It also clarified and updated the law on the undue influence of electors, and on the accessibility of elections for voters with a disability. Part 1 further made changes to nomination rules for candidates at parliamentary elections, and changed the voting system for Police and Crime Commissioners elections in England and Wales, and certain mayoral elections in England to the Simple Majority voting system (also known as "First Past the Post").

Part 2 removed the 15 year limit on the exercise of voting rights currently placed on British electors living overseas, and made amendments to the registration process, including how an applicant's identity and connection to a UK address will be verified. It also lays out the new rules for voting and candidacy eligibility of EU citizens voting and standing in local elections in Northern Ireland, England, and PCC elections in England and Wales, following the UK's departure from the European Union.

Part 3 amended provisions for the Parliamentary accountability of the Electoral Commission. Part 4 amended the law about political finance, including by clarifying the rules on notional spending,

Part 5 of the Act Introduced a new disqualification order, which a court must impose, unless the court considers it unjust to do so, if a person is convicted of an intimidatory criminal offence motivated by hostility towards a candidate, future candidate, campaigner, substitute or nominee (in Northern Ireland), or holder of a relevant elective office. The effect of a disqualification order is that the person will be disqualified from standing for, being elected to, and holding any relevant elective office for five years.

Part 6 of the Act introduced a new requirement for digital campaigning material to display a digital imprint, with the name and address of the promoter of the material or any person on behalf of whom the material is being published (and who is not the promoter). Part 7 included miscellaneous and

general provision.

The Elections Act 2022 introduce the requirement for electors to identify themselves by showing an accepted form of photographic identification document before being issued with a ballot paper. This will apply at:

- UK Parliamentary elections
- Recall petitions
- local elections in England
- local referendums in England
- Police and Crime Commissioner elections in England and Wales [
- UK-wide national referendums

Voter Identification was scheduled to be in place for the May 2023 Elections, meaning that to vote at a polling station would require the elector to produce a legally specified form of identity at the polling station in order to be issued with a ballot paper. Although regulations on how voter ID would work had yet to be issued acceptable forms of ID would include passports, driving licenses and older peoples bus passes if they included a photograph. Electors who did not have any form of photographic identity would be able to apply for a Voter Authority Certificate via a national portal up to six days before the election

It was explained that the staff working in polling stations would have no discretion about the circumstances in which they would be able to issue ballot papers and the forms of identity that would be acceptable.

The Electoral Commission would run a national public communications campaign to raise awareness of the requirement to show identification and remind the public to bring identification with them when they go to vote.

It was stated that it remained the Government's intention to introduce voter identification for the May 2023 elections, though formal confirmation had not been received and final arrangements and funding were yet to be confirmed. It was anticipated that by the end of September 2022 an initial letter would be received from DLUHC regarding 'new burdens' funding. Confirmation of initial funding allocations to districts and accompanying guidance were expected at the end of October, with this payable at the end of November. Whilst the Electoral Commission has responsibility for the national campaign regarding Voter ID, it was confirmed that there would be no localised funding available for communications.

It was anticipated that by early November 2022 relevant secondary legislation would be laid (this will contain all the detail regarding the Voter ID application process and polling station requirements). It was expected that this legislation would be made mid-January 2023 to be in place for May 2023 polls, with the application portal for voter id going live mid/late January 2023. The timeline meant that there would be a very short timeframe for introducing the administrative arrangements and communicate the new arrangements.

**RESOLVED:**

**That the update be noted.**

#### **4. NEIGHBOURHOOD FORUMS REVIEW**

Consideration was given to a report of the Chief Executive, which sought Members views on the approach to be taken to the review of Neighbourhood Forums. It was suggested that a Member Working Group should be established review the operation of the Forums and consider the best way forward. Members were asked to consider the membership and arrangements for operation of Working Group to consider future of Neighbourhood Forums and report back to this group to approve recommendations for Council.

**RESOLVED:**

- (i) That a Member Working Group be established to review the operation of Neighbourhood Forums with a view to making recommendations to Council, through the Democratic Processes Working Group for implementation for the 2023/24 Municipal Year.
- (ii) That the membership of the Working Group be confirmed at the next Council meeting, to include the four Neighbourhood Forum Chairs, the relevant Executive Member and a representative of the Opposition Group

**5. ELECTORAL COMMISSION BULLETINS**

Consideration was given to a report of the Director of Governance and Pensions that provided Members with recent copies of the Electoral Commission news bulletin, which set out current issues affecting the democratic framework for local government.

**RESOLVED:**

**That the report be noted.**

**CHAIR**