

DEMOCRATIC PROCESSES WORKING GROUP

3 JULY 2023

Commenced: 4.00pm

Terminated: 4.25pm

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

Apologies for Councillors Costello and Kitchen
Absence

1. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting of the Working Group held on 20 February 2023 be approved as a correct record.

2. MAY 2023 ELECTIONS

Members considered a report of the Chief Executive / Returning Officer, which outlined the administrative issues which arose during the 2023 Borough Council Elections. Members were reminded that there had been significant differences to standard Borough Council elections in that all 57 seats were elected following the boundary review. In addition the May 2023 elections were the first at which voter id was required to vote in polling stations.

Given that there were three vacancies in each ward there were a total of 118 nomination papers submitted. The number of assentors required on Borough Council nominations had been reduced to two on a permanent basis. As in previous elections, parties were encouraged to collect and return nomination packs for groups of candidates rather than collecting individually, most adopted this approach.

One of the implications of all-out elections had been that the three successful candidates in each ward were elected for varying terms office. What this meant in practice was that at the May 2023 Borough Council election the candidate receiving the most votes in a ward was elected until May 2027; the candidate receiving the second most votes was elected until May 2026 and, because 2025 had to be a fallow year the candidate receiving the third most votes was elected until May 2024.

At the May 2023 local elections it was necessary to show photographic id in order to vote at a polling station. If a voter turned up at a polling station with no accepted photo identification, they were not issued with a ballot paper and were asked to return with an accepted form of photo identification. There was no discretion in this matter and it was enforced at polling stations in accordance with the law. Additional poll clerks were used in each polling station in order to check on arrival at the polling station if the elector had voter ID. If on arrival at the polling station the elector did not have ID they were advised by the additional poll clerk to return with valid ID. Monitoring information was gathered at polling stations on behalf of the Electoral Commission to determine the numerical impact of the introduction of voter ID. The headline figures for Tameside were:

- 215 electors were not issued with a ballot paper on first visit;
- 162 of these returned with valid ID and were issued a ballot paper;
- 53 electors were not issued with a ballot paper as a result of not having valid voter ID;
- 142 electors used the Voter Authority Certificate as their form of ID;
- 5 electors asked that their voter ID was checked in a private area.

Members were informed that the Electoral Commission had published its analysis of the impact of the introduction of Voter ID requirement nationally. In summary the Electoral Commission research showed:

- **Awareness of the need to bring ID to vote at a polling station was high** - 87% of people in England (excluding London, where there were no elections) were aware that they needed to show photo ID to vote at a polling station. In the research carried out immediately following the poll, this was 92% of people in areas with elections. Awareness varied across the population and was lowest among younger age groups (82% for 18 to 24-year-olds), Black and minority ethnic communities (82%) and those who said they never vote in local elections (84%). Awareness was significantly lower among people who said they did not have an accepted form of ID (74%) compared with those who did have ID (94%).
- **Awareness and take-up of the Voter Authority Certificate was low** - approximately 89,500 people applied for a Voter Authority Certificate before the deadline on 25 April. Around 25,000 certificates were used as a form of ID on 4 May. In May 2023, awareness of the Voter Authority Certificate was 57% both among the overall population and those who said they did not already have photo ID. The overall number of Voter Authority Certificates applied for and used was low compared with estimates of the number of voters who might not have any other accepted ID.
- **Nationally, at least 0.25% of people who tried to vote at a polling station in May 2023 were not able to because of the ID requirement.** Data collected in polling stations showed that at least 0.25% of people who tried to vote at a polling station were not issued with a ballot paper because of the ID requirement, this equated to approximately 14,000 voters. At least 0.7% of people who tried to vote at a polling station were initially turned away but around two-thirds of those people (63%) returned later in the day and were able to vote.
- **Around 4% of all non-voters said they didn't vote because of the voter ID requirement.** Some people who would have wanted to vote at a polling station may have decided not to try, because they realised they did not have accepted ID before attempting to vote.

Members were informed that in Tameside the percentage of voters going to a polling station who were not issued a ballot paper as they did not produce valid voter ID was 0.24%, which was in line with the national average. Overall turnout in Tameside was similar to the turnout at the equivalent round of elections in 2019.

For the May 2023 Borough Council Elections there were a total of 40,332 postal votes issued, for the May 2022 elections there had been 35,038 postal. This was an increase of circa 5,000 or 15%, the bulk of this increase followed the letter sent to all properties advising of introduction of voter ID and offering alternative of a postal vote. Despite the significant increase in the number of postal votes the percentage of postal votes returned is the same as at the last election, 59%.

The report stated that following the Local Government Boundary Review Members agreed a number of changes to polling districts and polling stations at Council in December 2022. Members were asked for comments on the impact of the changes and areas or polling stations requiring further review

With regard to the Count, Members were reminded that as voters could vote for up to three candidates in each ward it was necessary to count votes using the 'grass skirt' method of counting. The approach taken included the use of block votes whereby if a party received all three votes they were counted separately, the majority of votes counted were block votes and adopting this approach saved a considerable amount of time in conducting the count.

Members also considered the count venue for future elections given that Unit 7 would no longer be available. Of particular concern was the count for the next Parliamentary Election. Given that the implementation of the Parliamentary Boundary Review was imminent and would be in place before

the next election the Tameside Returning Officer would be responsible for two constituencies rather than the current three it would be possible to conduct Parliamentary Counts in Dukinfield Town Hall.

RESOLVED:

- (i) That the update be noted;**
- (ii) That Members be asked for feedback on changes made to polling districts and polling stations;**
- (iii) That arrangements be made to hold the count for future Parliamentary Elections at Dukinfield Town Hall**

3. ELECTORAL COMMISSION BULLETINS

Consideration was given to a report of the Chief Executive 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