

LONDON BOROUGH OF HAMMERSMITH & FULHAM

Report to: Policy and Oversight Board

Date: 20 June 2023

Subject: Introduction of Voter ID requirements.

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SUMMARY

The Elections Act 2022 introduced a requirement for voters to provide photo identification in polling stations.

To accommodate this change, Electoral Services are reviewing facilities in all polling stations, providing information and training for polling station staff, and providing additional information and publicity for voters on the new requirements ahead of the next scheduled polls.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. For the Board to note and comment on the report.

Wards Affected: ALL

Our Values	Summary of how this report aligns to the H&F Values
Being ruthlessly financially efficient	Our publicity, staff briefings will be by electronic methods where possible, and our review of facilities in polling stations to incorporate the legislation will ensure that additional spend is incurred only where necessary for the efficient implementation of the requirements.

BACKGROUND AND SUMMARY OF NEW RULES

1. The Elections Act 2022 requires voters to show photo ID before being issued a ballot paper in polling stations at local elections including parliamentary by-elections, mayoral and local referendums in England.

2. This first set of local council elections under the new rules were held on 4 May at local council elections, and the rules will also apply to Parliamentary General Elections from October 2023.
3. The Electoral Commission is expected to produce an interim report on the impact of voter ID on the May elections in June 2023, with a full report later in the autumn. Early reports suggests that there were people who had intended to vote who were not able to do so due to the new Voter ID provisions.

Forms of acceptable ID

4. Voters can use passports, full and provisional driving licences, Proof of Age Standards Scheme (PASS) cards, Blue badges, and some concessionary travel cards. The full list is given in Appendix 1.
5. The ID used in a polling station must be original.
6. The ID can be expired. If the photo on the expired ID is still a good likeness then it will be acceptable.

Provision of free ID

7. Voters who do not have their own acceptable form of voter ID can apply online or by post for a free Voter Authority Certificate (VAC). A VAC shows the name and photo of a voter.

Privacy requirements

8. Any voter may request that their ID is inspected in private and do not have to provide any reason for their request, so all polling stations must have sufficient space for allowing this.

ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGES FOR H&F COUNCIL AND OUR RESIDENTS

9. Broadly speaking there are three challenges in meeting the new requirements:
 - i. Ensuring polling stations are suitable and properly outfitted to enable the process to take place
 - ii. Ensuring sufficient, trained, and well-informed staff to provide the service in polling stations
 - iii. Informing and reminding residents about the new requirements and supporting them to access free ID (called Voter Authority Certificates) if needed.

Polling Stations – suitability and outfitting

10. The new rules allow voters to ask for their ID to be checked privately. Voters do not have to explain why they want to do this.

11. There are two ways of accommodating this – either a polling station has a separate room available, or some kinds of screens can be provided (in some stations it may be possible to screen an area with a polling booth)
12. Informal feedback from electoral services colleagues in other authorities is that privacy screens/private areas are very seldom requested, and other authorities have used existing station provision with a small number of screens purchased for individual polling stations where required.
13. Utilising quiet areas of the polling room itself have generally been favoured over private rooms because this ensures safeguarding. Screens (which may simply be a polling booth angled for this purpose) ensure that although faces cannot be seen, the overall interaction can be, providing security for both voters and witnesses.
14. As a result we intend to advise polling staff to utilise space in the polling station rather than closed off rooms where possible.

Electoral Services visits to polling stations

15. Electoral Services have visited all bar three of our polling stations this year to ascertain venues have sufficient space to accommodate a private area for checking voter ID. We expect to conclude the visits by the end of June, but at the time of writing we are confident that our current venues are of sufficient capacity/configuration to support the new processes.
16. There are three stations (Parsons Green Club, All Saints Church Hall and the Childerley Centre) that we have been informed will not be available for various reasons, and we are looking for replacements.

Outfitting of stations

17. The new process means that we will need to provide all polling stations with hand-mirrors (so that voters can ensure that, for example, face coverings are put back in place correctly), and in some cases privacy screens may be necessary.
18. Although we are planning to utilise polling booths for this purpose in most stations, we expect to purchase a small number of screens for contingency purposes if our regular stations cannot be used and we need to use other, potentially less suitably sized or configured options.
19. The costs for both screens and hand-mirrors will be met by DHLUC, either through grant funding or through a Justification Led Bid process.

Polling station staffing

20. It is critical that polling staff are confident about any new legislation and processes in the voting process. We rely on them to be able to support and

inform voters about the new rules and to ensure that they are implemented fairly and consistently across the borough.

21. Although it is outside the scope of this report, it needs to be acknowledged that the next scheduled elections will produce additional challenges for polling staff, other than the introduction of voter ID requirements, as other changes will also be implemented at the same time, particularly for voters handing in ballots. To address this we will hire some additional staff.
22. There is some concern that this increase in responsibility may make recruitment and retention of polling staff, particularly of Presiding Officers, more difficult.
23. Other authorities recruited additional “meet and greet” staff outside stations to ensure that electors were reminded to have ID ready before entering the polling station, so minimising delays and queues in the polling station proper, and as a result we are intending to implement the same in H&F in our busier stations.
24. We previously had “meet and greet” staff at the 2021 GLA elections to ensure COVID measures were complied with, and we will use the feedback from that election to determine which stations might benefit, as it was of limited assistance for some of our smallest venues.
25. Electoral Services contacted all 2022 polling station staff on 23 May to enquire about their availability to work on next year’s elections. About 450 staff members were contacted and 235 people have responded to our initial contact, and most responses have been positive.

Training and sharing information with our polling station teams

26. Electoral Services have already shared information with Presiding Officers (the officers in charge at polling stations) about the voter ID changes via “Sway” presentations/newsletter.
27. Electoral Services will also be providing voluntary briefing sessions for all polling staff over the summer and during the autumn as we move more fully into our recruitment phase.
28. We believe that providing additional information and briefing / question and answer session will both embed knowledge about the new requirements but also allay some fears staff may have about how the processes work and the additional burden it places on them when administering the new rules.
29. There will be mandatory training for all polling staff that in the early part of 2024, ahead of the Greater London Authority Mayor and Assembly elections in May 2024. (GLA Elections)
30. At the time of writing, it has not been decided whether the Greater London Returning Officer will be providing an online training package, but it is anticipated that there will be some London-wide materials and messaging to ensure that there is consistency in the delivery of the May 2024 GLA elections.

Voter awareness and support

31. The Electoral Commission's interim report on the May elections will provide evidenced detail when published in June.

Initial reports

32. This is expected to provide data about how many people may have attended a station but were denied a vote, and to provide some research about those who chose to stay away from the process entirely who may usually have expected to participate.
33. There has been some research on the impact of the changes, published in the aftermath of the elections. Reports from the BBC (20 May) show that over 160 council areas 26,165 voters were denied a vote at a polling station due to not having a valid ID. A survey of 202 of the 230 authorities in England that held elections this year by Reuters (26 May) found that 33,509 voters were turned away for not having ID. While many returned later with ID and were able to vote 13,085 did not.
34. The phenomenon is particularly acute in urban areas, which is a concern for Hammersmith & Fulham. In Walsall of the 48,713 people who voted at polling stations, 1,240 (2.6%) were initially turned away for not having ID. Of these 473 returned but 767 (1.6% of those voting at polling stations) did not. In Knowsley, of the 16,413 people voting at polling stations, 322 (2%) were turned away. Of these 158 returned with ID but 174 (1.1%) did not.
35. The GLA and the Electoral Commission will be providing advertising and engagement activities, and we will be utilising and promoting their messaging on social media as well as providing information directly ourselves.
36. Without anticipating learning or guidance that may come from the Electoral Commission, Electoral Services, in conjunction with the Communications team, have planned to deliver several sets of messaging for residents over the coming months, as we approach the GLA elections in May
37. We have already been posting on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and Nextdoor, reminding people that they will need ID for future elections, along with instructions on how to apply if they need ID, and we plan to continue this indefinitely, with increased frequency as polls approach next year. Examples of our messaging can be seen in Appendix 2.
38. The Council's website also explains the new Voter ID requirements and how to apply for a free Voter Authority Certificate.
39. Despite our campaign, and the national campaign by the Electoral Commission, take up of the free voter ID, the Voter Authority Certificate, has remained low at 101 applications. This is consistent with the rest of London and is likely due to the fact that voters have not needed to apply for ID given that there have not

been any elections in the borough since the certificates became available in January 2023.

Further campaigns

40. We intend to include information on Voter ID with the annual voter registration documents that are sent to all households. Options are still being discussed with our print supplier, and is estimated to be around £5000.
41. This additional information will probably be in the form of a flyer enclosed with forms and letters (where hard copies are already sent to residents). Where households would normally receive emails, then the additional information will be included in those emails.
42. An August 2022 YouGov poll commissioned by the GLA reported that, in London, young people are less likely to have acceptable ID than older voters, with as many as 1 in 5 not responding that they did not possess any of the ID listed as acceptable in the regulations.
43. The same poll also showed that awareness of the requirement was also low, but particularly amongst Black and minority ethnic voters and young voters, although that may have improved in the intervening period given the national publicity that the requirements have received since then.
44. Advertising on electoral matters is more likely to be effective when it can be tied into a forthcoming election, so we will carry out Facebook and Instagram advertising in the new year, as well as advertising targeting borough residents, with an increase in frequency as the election approaches.
45. This will cost around £500 (minimum) per month, and we would expect to do at least three months' worth of campaigns.
46. We will have a one page advert in the Winter Update booklet and a page in the Annual Report booklet. These will cost £2000 per page.
47. There is still uncertainty about whether the costs for such advertising as described above can be recouped from DHLUC's grant due to competing calls on the pot.
48. We will actively engage with the GLA's Active Citizenship and Democratic Participation team to promote and distribute materials to our local community organisations, especially during Local Democracy Week.

Poll cards

49. We will have additional reminders about voter ID requirements on poll cards, and this will probably mean making them a larger size, and potentially enclosing them in envelopes at an additional cost
50. At the time of writing the matter of the form of poll cards for next year's GLA elections is still being considered by the Greater London Returning Officer

(GLRO), and a decision will be taken following her guidance/direction as appropriate when available.

51. Additional costs for changes to poll card size is expected to be met by DHLUC grant, either directly or via the GLRO as part of the reclaim of our election expenditure from them.

Funding for activities to promote awareness and deliver the new requirements

52. We have received a small grant of £6154 in 2022/23 for “expenditure lawfully incurred or to be incurred through implementation of the Elections Act 2022”. A further £3839 was received in 2023/2024 to cover administrative costs for processing Voter Authority Certificate applications.
53. We expect to receive a further, more substantial, grant from DHLUC ahead of the May 2024 polls, to cover the costs of staff training, additional staff in polling stations, changes to poll cards and general implementation costs. However, we do not know how much this is likely to be and we are awaiting figures from DHLUC.

Activities that may be possible with additional funding

54. All the activities listed above will need to be paid for through existing funding. However, the Council, Electoral Registration Officer and Returning Officer would recommend the following activities to promote the need for Voter ID:

Increasing the frequency of paid for promotions on Facebook and Instagram

55. We currently intend to do three or four paid for promotions, but a higher frequency or longer term campaign would be helpful in raising additional awareness and retention of our messaging.

Household Notification Letter (HNL)

56. Providing a “Household Notification Letter” (HNL) to all households in the early part of 2024, showing who is registered to vote, offering information about how to obtain a postal vote using the new online application service, and explaining the new Voter ID requirements may be very useful. This would be likely to cost between £30,000-£40,000.
57. Given there have been no elections this year, it is likely that some new residents have not yet registered who would normally be prompted to do so by an election. An HNL would give electors a further reminder to ensure they were registered, had their voting arrangements in place, and also provide an opportunity for us to explain the new rules around both voter ID and postal voting to all the households in the borough.

Nextdoor paid promotion

58. Providing a “paid for promotion” on Nextdoor is also recommended by the communications team if funds allow. The minimum cost would be £15,000 for three months. This approach was successfully used by H&F for the Clean Air Neighbourhoods campaign, where the reach was some 198,000 people.

Additional hard copy materials

59. Additional “standalone” double-sided A5 Flyers could be printed and distributed to every address in the borough for approximately £20,000.

LIST OF APPENDICES

- Appendix 1 – List of acceptable Voter Identity Documentation
Appendix 2 – Samples of Voter ID awareness publicity