

LONDON BOROUGH OF HAMMERSMITH & FULHAM

Report to: Policy and Oversight Board

Date: 23/01/2024

Subject: Update on Voter ID Requirements

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SUMMARY

This report provides an update to the previous report to the Policy and Oversight Board on 20 June 2023 on the implementation of voter ID.

It sets out the key findings from reports published by the Electoral Commission and the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities, and provides further details of activities being undertaken to support residents to vote.

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

1. The previous report to the Board explained the new voter ID requirements that the Elections Act 2022 brought into force for all elections including parliamentary by-elections, mayoral and local referendums in England.

2. The first set of local council elections under the new rules were held on 4 May 2023 at local council elections in England, and the 20 June report set out the findings from initial findings arising from those elections.
3. The Electoral Commission published a full report on the May 2023 Local Elections in England on 13 September 2023. The Department for Housing, Levelling Up and Communities also issued a report evaluating the Electoral Integrity Programme on 30 November 2023. Links to both reports are provided at the end of this report.
4. Both reports provided confirmation about the groups of people who were likely to be adversely affected by the voter ID requirements and gave some slightly more detail.

Electoral Commission report on May 2023 Local Elections in England – Summary

5. The key findings in the Electoral Commission's report with regards to voter ID from the interim report were set out as follows:

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- *around 4% of all people who said they did not vote at the elections on 4 May listed the ID requirement as the reason – 3% said they did not have the necessary ID, and 1% said they disagreed with the new requirement.*
- *at least 0.25% of people who tried to vote at a polling station in May 2023 were not able to because of the voter ID requirement – this was equivalent to approximately 14,000 people who were not issued with a ballot paper.*
- *awareness of the need to bring ID to vote at a polling station was high – 92% of people were aware of the need to bring ID to vote at a polling station, although awareness was significantly lower among people who said they did not have an accepted form of ID (74%)*
- *awareness and take-up of the Voter Authority Certificate was low – awareness of the availability of the free Voter Authority Certificate stood at 57% in May 2023, and only 25,000 certificates were actually used as a form of ID on polling day. ”*

6. The Electoral Commission's research showed that some groups were less likely to have one of the forms of accepted photo ID, “particularly those renting from a social landlord, the unemployed, lower social grades, and disabled people”. The Electoral Commission's final report also stated that their “evidence indicated that at least some of these groups were more likely to have a problem voting in person on 4 May”.
7. The Electoral Commission's survey reported that, although 3% of all non-voters said they didn't vote because they did not have the required ID, this was higher for unemployed non-voters (8%) and for disabled non-voters who reported being “limited a lot” by their disability or health condition (9%).

8. Other groups of electors who may be more highly impacted by voter ID and to be less aware of the requirements are those who do not tend to vote at local elections.
9. The Electoral Commission's survey found that only 84% of this group were aware of the requirement compared to those who more frequently vote at local elections, of which 94% were aware, and people who never vote in local elections were less likely to possess accepted ID (7%) compared to those who always vote in local elections (2%)

Voter Authority Certificates information from Electoral Commission

10. The Electoral Commission reported that approximately 89,500 people applied for a Voter Authority Certificate (VAC), the number was substantially fewer than the approximately 250,000 to 300,000 (30-36%) of the people estimated to need one to vote nationally.
11. Approximately 25,000 certificates of those issued were used as ID for voting on 4 May. The Electoral Commission's post poll survey suggests that some may have decided to vote by post instead of attending a polling station but states that the reasons are still uncertain as to why so many other voters did not use their VACs on polling day.

Department for Housing, Levelling Up and Communities (DHLUC) - Evaluation of the Electoral Integrity Programme

12. DHLUC's report provided further insight into the groups of people less likely to be aware of the voter ID requirements.
13. The report states that 84% of voting age adults living in areas holding local elections were aware of the voter identification requirements. However, this report also found that "awareness was not consistent across the electorate. Those most likely to have heard nothing at all about the requirement were people who rarely or never vote at local elections (18%), ethnic minorities (12%) and younger adults (11% of those aged 18-34)".

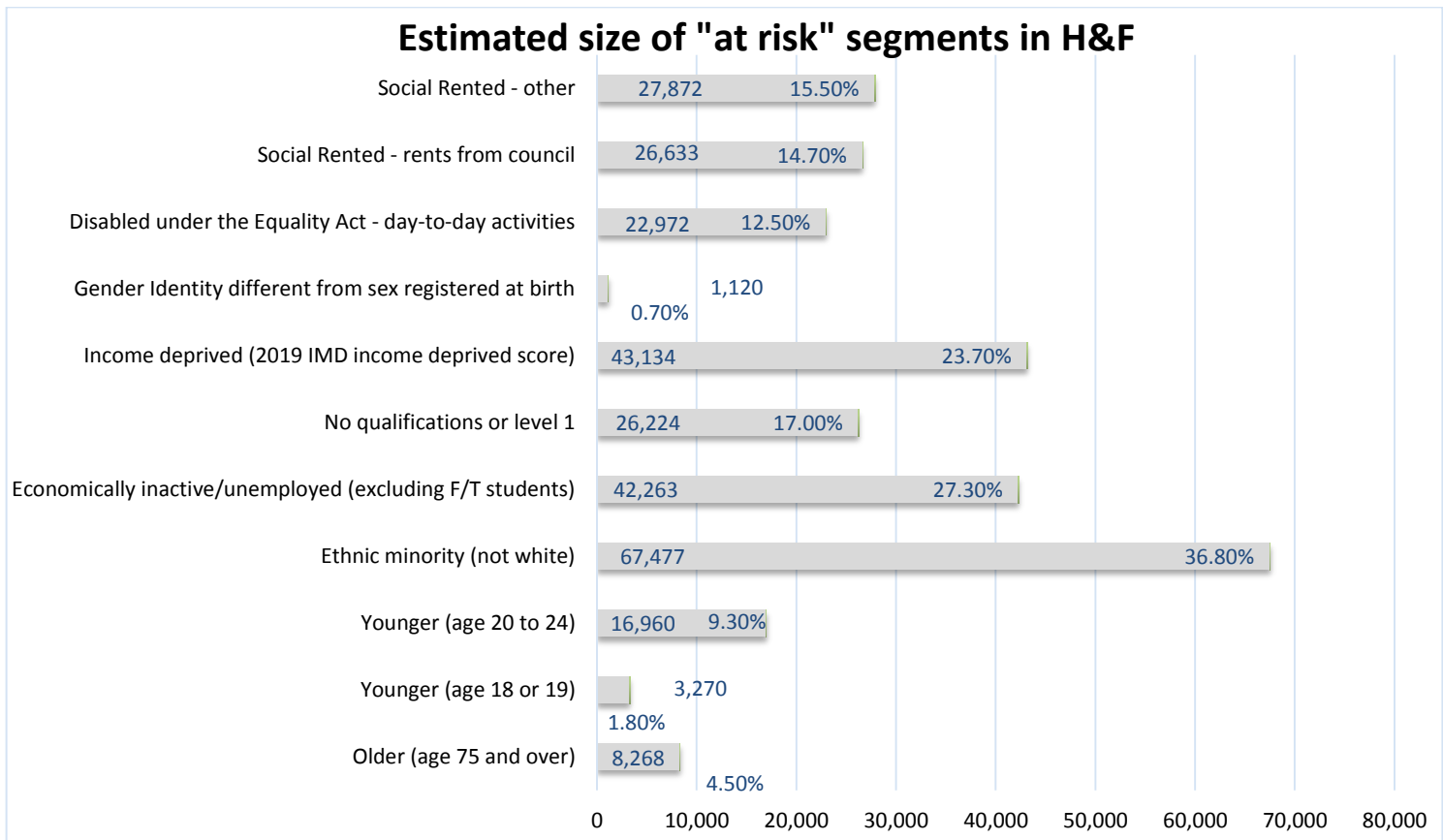
Voter Authority Certificates information from DHLUC

14. The DHLUC report states that 70,017 applications were made for VACs in the run-up to the May elections in areas that had them. Most applications were made online, and half of all applications were made in the month prior to the deadline of 25 April.
15. Overall, 92% of applications resulted in a VAC being issued. The most common reason for rejecting an application was a non-compliant photograph, which accounted for 33% of rejections.

EVIDENCE FOR TARGETED COMMUNICATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT – THE KEY "RISK FACTORS" IN H&F

16. Further work has been undertaken to establish what groups of electors in H&F fall into the groups identified by the Electoral Commission and DHLUC's reports and is summarised in the table below.

17. The figures given are at population level – not all residents in these groups will be eligible to vote – but nevertheless this gives a good indication as to the relative scales of each group within the electorate.



18. These figures have informed our plans for engagement and communications so that we are ensuring residents are given appropriate information and assistance.

Ethnicity and languages spoken

19. ONS data shows that H&F's population is diverse with some wards with more diversity than others.

20. On ID ownership, the Electoral Commission's report on the May 2024 polls show that voters from minority ethnic backgrounds may find it harder to meet voter ID requirements.

21. 3.1% of Hammersmith residents cannot speak English well or at all. Areas with the highest concentrations are around College Park & Old Oak (5.4%) and White City wards (5.2%)

All polling stations have access to a telephone translation service, and the council's website has appropriate links to forms and information in other languages where available.

Disabled Voters

22. An average of just under 13% of voters in H&F report that they have a disability that limits them a lot (6%) or a little (7%).
23. If applied to the local government electorate (at election time) of approximately 130,000 then it would equate to 16,900 voters, although as with the ethnic minority figures, it has to be noted that not all disabled voters will be eligible to vote, as some will not meet eligibility criteria around age or citizenship.
24. All polling station have been visited and all will meet the Electoral Commission's recommendations, such as low-level polling booths, tactile voting devices, seating for voters, and so on.

As the Electoral Commission's report highlights, there is a lack of awareness of the support available to Disabled Voters amongst Disabled Voters. In H&F we have co-produced advertising materials and messages with local Disabled Voters, and we will be updating and re-using those materials for the upcoming polls.

25. Electoral services have started discussions with the Co-production team to consider what additional materials and engagement would be useful for Disabled Voters.
26. The electoral services team are working with the Digital Accessibility lead to ensure that all our publicity materials are accessible.

Faith groups

27. Members of some faith groups, such as Muslim women, are likely to have concerns about voter ID checks taking place in public.
28. ONS figures tell us that Muslims are represented in all wards of the borough, ranging from 4.9% of residents in Munster ward to just under 24.7% in White City ward.
29. We will be ensuring that a privacy area and/or privacy screens are available at all polling stations and that all stations will have at least one female member of staff to assist. A mirror will also be provided to ensure the face covering can be replaced with ease.

Unemployed/Economically inactive

Unemployed and economically inactive residents at 24%+ of the population in H&F are a significant sized minority that the Electoral Commission's report suggests are more likely to find the voter ID requirements difficult, making this

group an important one to target as part of our communications and engagement activities.

HOW WE ARE SUPPORTING RESIDENTS TO MEET THE NEW REQUIREMENTS

30. Communications and engagement are continuing and will increase in frequency and volume over the next three to four months ahead of the London Mayor and Assembly elections in May.

Activities that have already taken place include

31. A flyer was sent to every household with the annual canvassing form and letters alerting residents that voter ID would be required at elections. This didn't raise the numbers of applications for VACs, but as per the DHLUC report, it is likely that most who need a VAC will apply when an election is imminent.
(Cost:£2647)
32. A page was included in the winter booklet reminding residents of the voter ID requirements and to register to vote for the GLA elections. The booklet was distributed to c.95000 households (Cost: £2000)
33. We engaged 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. Local Democracy Week activities were promoted via social media, using the GLA's resources and our own messaging.

Activities to begin or intensify over the next three months:

A. General audience

34. Facebook and Instagram advertising targeting borough residents, with an increase in frequency as the election approaches. This will cost £2000 (at £500/month)
35. Internal communications and newsletters will include sections to raise awareness and encourage onward distribution of advertising materials.
36. There will be a one-page advert in the Annual Report booklet. (Cost £2000).
37. E-newsletters will include information re photo ID and elections to be sent to all subscribers.

B. Voters renting from Social Landlords / voters with lower income

38. Digital Boards - Using high street boards and boards in H&F social housing lifts to raise awareness around Photo ID and election dates. (Design costs tbc)

39. “Warm Welcome” hubs and Cost of Living “pop ups” to be provided with distributable information/posters. (Costs tbc – estimated £500)

C. Young voters and future voters

40. Electoral Services and members of the Youth Council are co-producing messaging for Young People in the borough – this is still in development and is expected to include short videos and reels about the voting process, voter registration and FAQs for publication on social media and distribution to schools.

D. Disabled Voters

41. The existing Disabled Voters campaign, co-created with local disabled residents, will be reprinted and redistributed to include messaging about Voter ID. (Cost £500)
42. The council’s website and information provided with poll cards (see below) will also give more information about what facilities and assistance will be available in polling stations.

E. Voters with privacy requirements

43. A leaflet explaining what privacy arrangements will be offered in all stations will be distributed via the Faith advisory group and associated Facebook and networks.

F. Poll cards

44. Poll cards for May’s elections will be on A4 paper, enclosed into envelopes. This will also allow us to include a flyer about voter ID with the poll cards, which is now being designed.
45. The flyers are estimated to cost up to £5000, dependent on size/colour/folding etc.

LONDON EXPERIENCE OF ELECTIONS HELD UNDER NEW RULES

46. Several London Boroughs have now held polls under the new voter ID rules. These included Hackney, with a borough-wide election for Mayor, while others, including Hounslow and Haringey have held council by-elections.
47. A workshop was held by the Association of Electoral Administrators to share learning from these elections. The discussion was wide ranging and extensive, but some key points are discussed below, although to avoid repetition, all the councils carried out social media communications, provided leaflets and posters and internal communications as we have, or are planning to do, in H&F.

Hackney

48. Hackney had a borough wide election of a Mayor. The election had a very low turnout (22%), and the Elections Manager was not confident that the experience would be replicated at a higher turnout type of election.

- Their experience for the Mayoral election was much in line with the reports from authorities who held elections in May. An estimated 300 voters initially attended stations without ID, and of those around two thirds returned to vote later with acceptable ID. Precise figures were unavailable at the time of this report.
- Hackney utilised the “mayoral booklet” in which candidates provide and electoral address to voters.
- One of Hackney’s biggest assets in spreading information about voter ID were political campaigners who were provided with information via agents enabling them to subsequently inform voters about the new rules.
- Polling stations all had a “placemat” on their issuing tables showing samples of acceptable ID, which polling staff found very helpful, both to confirm that ID was of the right kind, but also to show voters who had arrived without ID what they needed to bring.

Haringey

49. Haringey have had four by-elections since the new rules have come into force.

- Generally polling days have run smoothly – but there is lower turnout for by-elections than for borough wide polls and experience may consequently differ significantly.
- Provided information for polling staff to inform voters about which department in government can be contacted if they have feedback to offer about the new rules, following discussion with voters at initial by-election.
- They are investigating how to support voters to apply for VACs in libraries for future elections.
- Communications and engagement obviously targeted to wards with by-elections, but research into what “risk factors” affecting those wards was used to tailor their communications plans.

Hounslow

50. Hounslow also had a by-election, but they have also conducted some borough-wide communications and engagement activities:

- Hounslow use faith community networks and internal networks to promote and distribute information.
- Libraries were used to display information about polls and voter ID.
- Area forums (hosted by councillors) were also provided with information leaflets and materials.

- Voters sometimes attended polling stations with copies of ID, rather than originals, so voter ID information was/is being updated to ensure that “originals not copies” messaging is clear.
- Use of digital boards was helpful, but one message at a time was better than messaging conveying several pieces of information.

FUNDING FOR ACTIVITIES TO PROMOTE AWARENESS AND DELIVER THE NEW REQUIREMENTS

51. Since the last report to the council, at which we noted that a further grant was due, we have received a further £37,690. The grant is not ring-fenced, but the funding was intended to cover changes to the Overseas and absent voting rules at £17,943 and £19,747 for voter id communications costs. This will allow us to conduct all the activities listed above.

52. We are expecting a final grant in April for the remaining provisions in the Act, and the grant determination letter is expected in January 2024.

HELPFUL INFORMATION

Further reports which may contain helpful Information for Officers and Members can be found here:

Electoral Commission’s report on the May 2024 elections in England:

[Report on the May 2023 local elections in England | Electoral Commission](#)

DHLUC’s Evaluation of the Electoral Integrity Programme:

[Electoral Integrity Programme evaluation: Year 1 - executive summary - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

All Party Parliamentary Group on Democracy and the Constitution:

[VID+Inquiry+Report+FINAL.pdf \(squarespace.com\)](#)

Local Government Information Unit, The Impact of Voter ID, the Views of Administrators : [The-impact-of-voter-ID-the-views-of-administrators.pdf \(lgiu.org\)](#)