

FINAL REPORT

Pendle – Lancashire County Council Elections
4th May 2017



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9th May 2017



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Interim Report on Election Observation – Pendle

Objectives

1. To objectively observe the electoral process across the Pendle Council area of Lancashire County Council.
2. To advise the local council and national electoral bodies on the results of the observation for the improvement of electoral practice within the UK.
3. Support local councils and national election bodies with constructive feedback on areas of concern so that they may consider remedial action.

Methodology

A team of 4 observers, registered with the UK's Electoral Commission, made 33 separate observations in 29 different polling stations across Pendle.

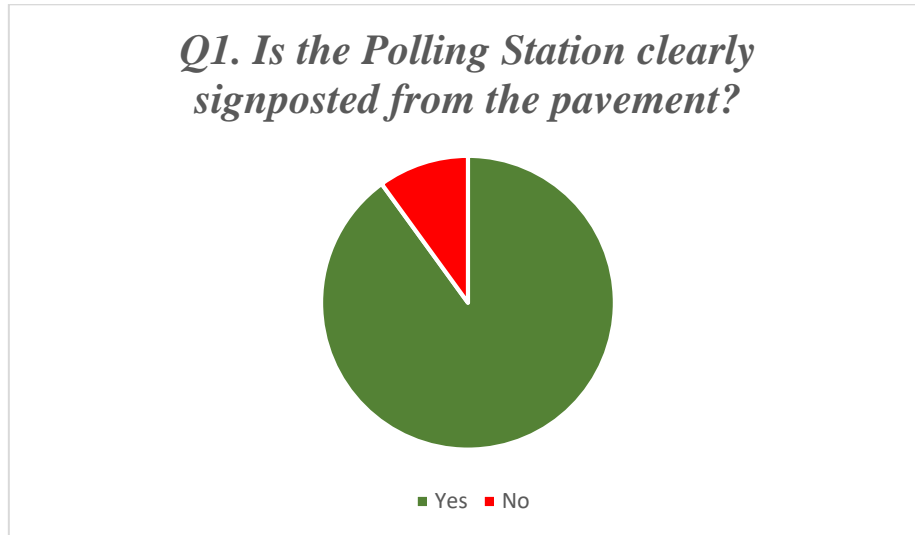
Each observation team was split into pairs to allow for objective observation and they then agreed their opinions of the electoral process before submitting data to the central team. The survey was conducted online so data was collected, and could be checked, live.

The observations generally took between fifteen and thirty minutes per polling station as the observers were asked to ensure that they attempted to see the entire process, which included staff greeting electors on arrival at the polling station.

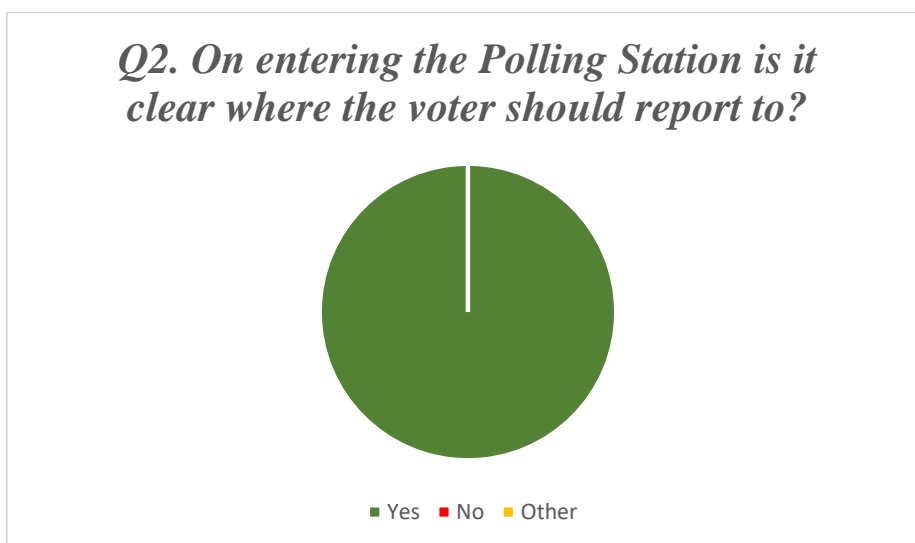
Each team of observers was contacted throughout the day by the central team to ensure that observation was as uniform as possible.

Results of the Observation

The observers answered the following questions in order as they progressed with each observation at each polling station:

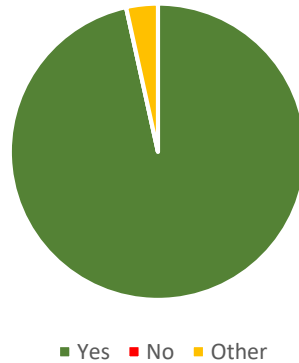


QUESTION 1: In 90% of cases polling stations were properly signposted from the pavement.



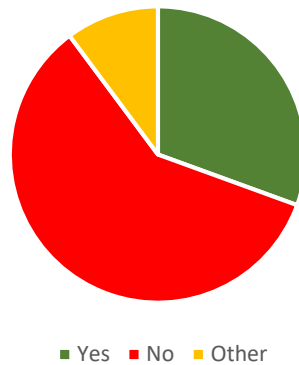
QUESTION 2: Observers identified no issues in terms of where voters should report in the polling stations.

Q3. Was it clear how disabled voters would access the Polling Station?



QUESTION 3: 96% of observations indicated that access to the polling station was clear. Another 5% suggested that the disabled access was available however this was not clearly signposted.

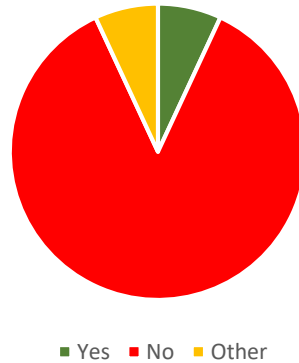
Q4. Did the polling staff ask to see your ID on arrival?



QUESTION 4: Polling staff were unaware that an observation team might be operating across the council area, the formal procedure for identifying, and then recording, that observers had visited the polling station was not followed in the vast majority of cases.

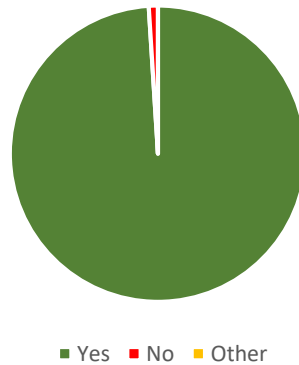
In only 34% of cases did observers have their credentials checked on arrival at the polling station. However, 64% did not check the ID of observers on arrival at the desk in the polling station. The remaining case was that observers did have their ID checked however this was not until they had been in the polling station for a while.

Q5. Did the staff record your ID number on a form?



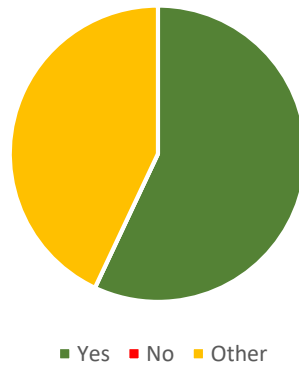
QUESTION 5: Similarly, we asked observers to note if the polling staff took a note of the ID that the observer was wearing. In each case this was an Electoral Commission badge which was numbered. Only 7% of polling stations recorded the ID details of the observers. Meanwhile, 86% of polling stations did not record attendance at all. However, in the remaining 7% of cases, polling station staff only took down the names of the observers, not the number on the badge.

Q6. Are there two staff on duty in the polling station as you arrive?



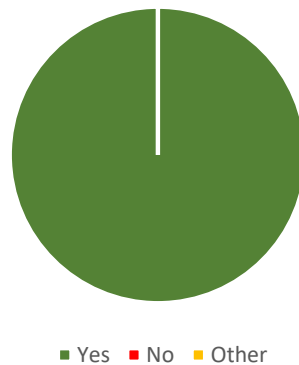
QUESTION 6: All but one of the polling stations had two members of polling staff on duty when observers arrived at the polling station.

Q7. Is the Ballot Box clearly sealed with cable ties?



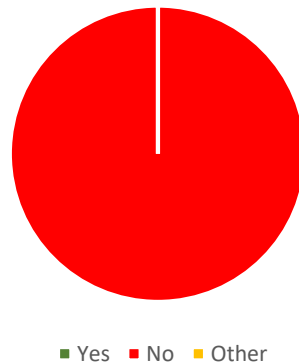
QUESTION 7: An important aspect of the electoral process is that the ballot should be secret and maintained as such allowing no one access to the ballot papers. The process for closing and sealing a ballot box, from the opening of the polls at 7am and closing at. Most of the ballot boxes were visibly sealed, however, the nature of the ballot boxes being used meant that in 43% of cases, observers could not clearly see that the box was properly sealed.

Q8. Is each polling booth equipped with an explanatory poster and a pen/pencil?



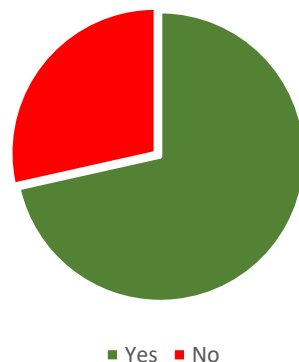
QUESTION 8: All polling stations were properly equipped with the requisite pencil and poster.

Q9. Are there any political leaflets in sight within the Polling Station?



QUESTION 9: This question was asked primarily to illicit whether improper political activity was taking place within the polling station.¹

Q10. Was there evidence of 'family voting' in the polling station?



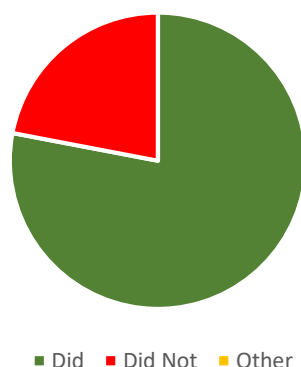
QUESTION 10: In 29% of cases, our observer team identified so-called ‘family voting’. OSCE/ODIHR, which monitors elections within the UK, describes ‘family voting’ as an ‘unacceptable practice’.² It occurs where husband and wife voting together is normalised and women, especially, are unable to choose for themselves who they wish to cast their votes for and/or this is actually done by another individual entirely.

Our team of observers identified 15 separate cases of family voting. In these cases, only once did the polling station staff prevent this from continuing and, in another case, polling station staff intervened but voters persisted in their practice.

¹ This question did not just relate to literature specific to this election but observers were also asked to identify if other literature, such as MP or councillors’ surgeries were on public display – advertising the names of candidates and/or parties.

² <http://www.osce.org/>

Q11. What percentage of voters did not have their polling card with them?



QUESTION 11:

In 2017, with the planned pilot projects for the ‘Pickles Report’ likely to take place in 2018, we are evaluating the numbers of voters who attend the polling stations with, or without, their polling card. Although not a formal form of ID the card is also not a requirement to vote but is clearly evidence that the voter can provide to the polling staff that they are the registered voter and that they are eligible to vote.

In Pendle, 78% of the electorate attended with their polling card and 22% did not.

POLITICAL ACTIVITY:

There was evidence of political activity in and around polling stations in Pendle. These took the form of tellers taking numbers from voters as they left the polling stations. The majority of these tellers were representatives of the Conservative Party but, tellers from the Labour Party, the Liberal Democrats were observed as well as some ‘unknown’ tellers.

In most cases, the tellers were identifiable by party colours but in some cases they were not wearing rosettes which made it difficult to determine which party they represented.

In 85% of cases where tellers were present, voters were allowed unimpeded access to the polling station, however, in the remaining 15% of cases, voters seem to have been prevented from accessing the polling station without interference and in one case the tellers were inside the polling station, on the phone, blocking access for voters. In another case, the presiding officer seems to have been confused by tellers and allowed them to stay within the polling station as well as a voter wearing party colours.

In one case a party campaigner was observed loitering in the polling station for no apparently justifiable reason and there was no intervention by polling station staff.

CONCLUSIONS

Despite some isolated incidents, the process seemed to be well run with most integral parts to the process functioning, however, the fact that some of the ballot boxes were of a certain type meant that it was difficult to assess whether or not they were properly sealed.

In the instances of family voting observed by our observers, staff seemed unwilling or unaware of how to deal with this phenomenon except in a couple of cases.

However, an awareness of the nature of observation, and even the existence of observers, seemed entirely new and the process by which they should deal with observers seemed unclear, mostly demonstrated by the fact that in the majority of cases the identification recorded was that of the observers' names and not badge ID number.

Political activity from a number of parties was high and often observers identified issues with tellers inside polling stations and some taking numbers from voters as they entered the polling station, but more often found issues regarding the display of party colours by tellers making it difficult for voters to identify who they were giving numbers to.