

INTERIM REPORT

Alyn & Deeside – National Assembly for Wales By-election
6th February 2018



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Interim Report on Election Observation – Alyn and Deeside

Objectives

1. To objectively observe the electoral process across the Alyn and Deeside National Assembly constituency on 6th February 2018.
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 the local council and national election bodies with constructive feedback on areas of concern so that they may consider remedial action.

Methodology

A team of 6 observers registered with, and accredited by, the UK's Electoral Commission, made 44 separate observations in 41 different polling stations across the Alyn and Deeside National Assembly constituency. This constituted approximately 98 percent of the polling stations in the area.

Each observation was conducted in 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.

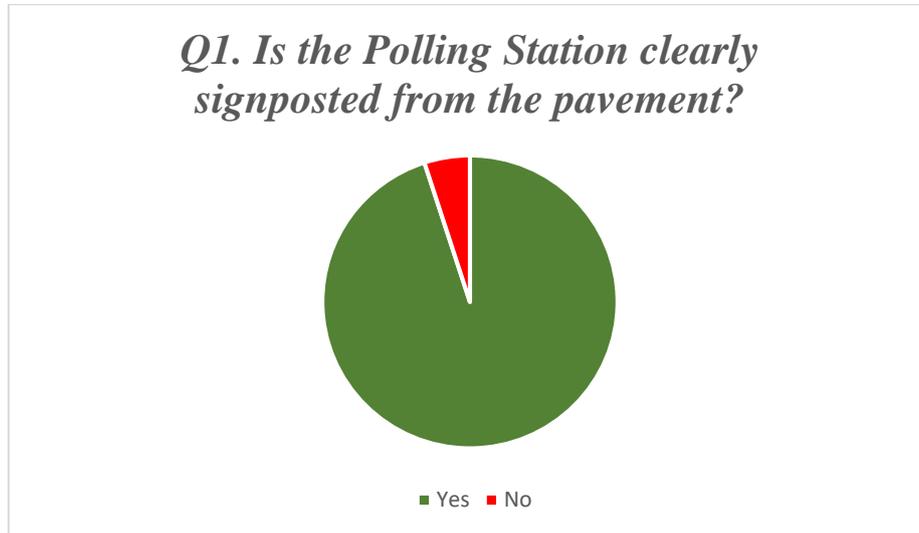
The observations generally took between thirty and forty-five minutes per polling station as the observers were asked to ensure that they attempted to see the entire process, which included staff greeting electors on arrival at the polling station.

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

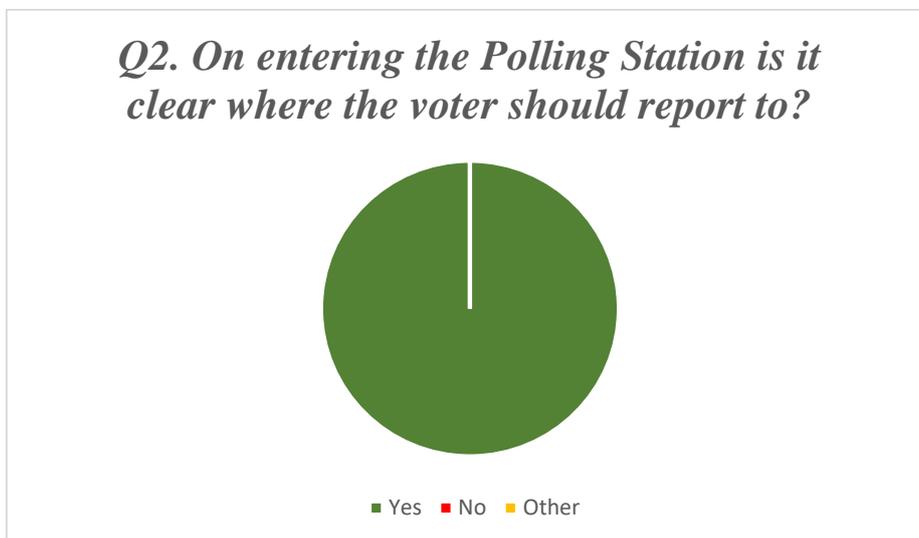
The organisation of polling stations was generally very well run across the council area, voters could clearly see how to access voting and staff were trained to manage the process.

Results of the Observation

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

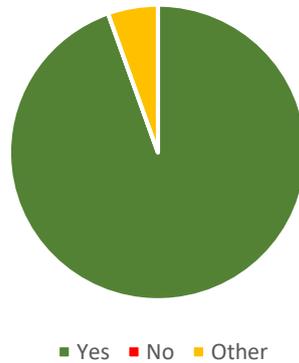


QUESTION 1: Despite the inclement weather and long hours of darkness our observers identified several issues the main one being some signs being obscured by building works at one polling station concerning the signing of polling stations.



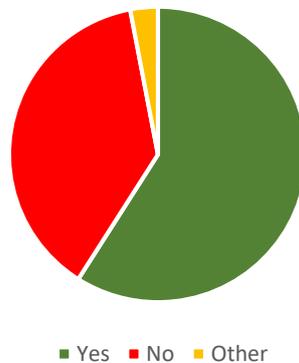
QUESTION 2: Observers identified no issues in terms of where voters should report in the polling stations.

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



QUESTION 3: 92% of observations indicated that access to the polling station was clear, whilst none indicated that access was not. Another 8% suggested that some aspects of the polling station (one polling station was on a large hill which made it not entirely suitable for disabled access while another was in a very small room in a primary school making it imperfect for access) was inadequate.

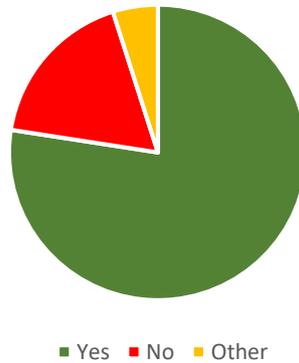
Q4. Did the polling staff ask to see your ID on arrival?



QUESTION 4: Polling staff seemed to be more aware than usual that an observation team might be operating across the constituency, the formal procedure for identifying, and then recording, that observers had visited the polling station was followed in the majority of cases.

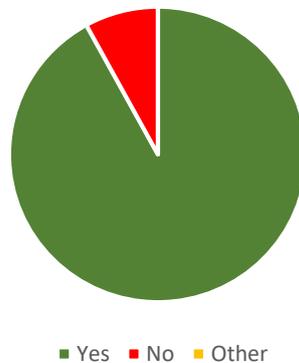
59% of observers had their credentials checked on arrival at the polling station. However, only 38% did not check the ID of observers on arrival at the desk in the polling station.

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



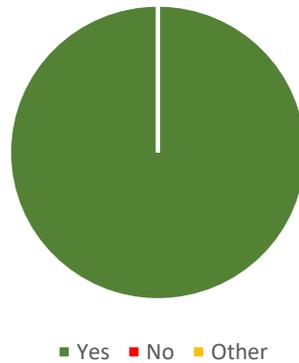
QUESTION 5: Similarly, we asked observers to note if the polling staff took a note of the ID that the observer was wearing. In each case this was an Electoral Commission badge which was numbered. 79% recorded this detail at some point during the observation, however, this was not always at the start of the observation. 18% of polling stations did not record attendance at all.

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



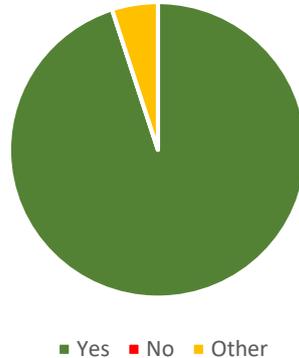
QUESTION 6: 92% of polling stations had two members of polling staff on duty as observers arrived at the polling station.

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



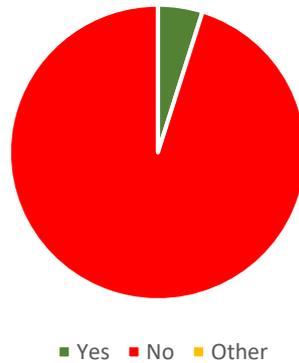
QUESTION 7: An important aspect of the electoral process is that the ballot should be secret and maintained as such allowing no one access to the ballot papers. The process for closing and sealing a ballot box, from the opening of the polls at 7am and closing at 10pm was observed. All the ballot boxes observed were sealed.

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



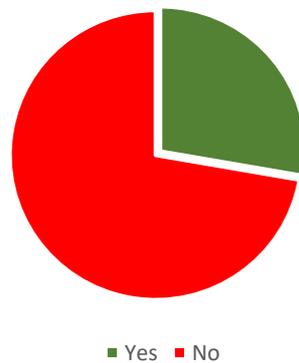
QUESTION 8: All but one of the polling stations were properly equipped with the requisite pencil and poster. The only polling station not to have the requisite equipment did so in some polling booths but not all. However, one had a discarded polling card in it which should have been removed.

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



QUESTION 9: This question was asked primarily to elicit whether improper political activity was taking place within the polling station.¹ On one occasion observers identified literature within the polling station which was biased towards one candidate.

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

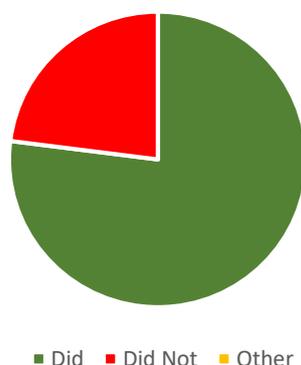


QUESTION 10: In 28% of polling stations, our observer team identified so-called 'family voting'. 7% of all voters observed were directly involved in 'family voting'. This was predominantly family members sharing polling booths, one spouse viewing the voting intentions of their spouse or direct collusion. The 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.

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/>

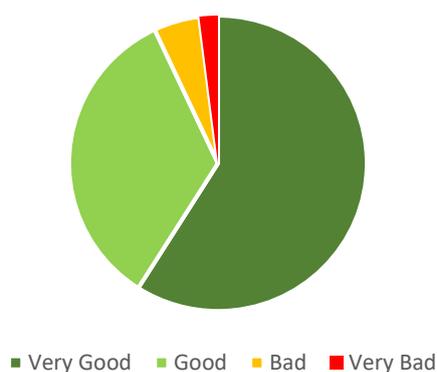
Q11. What percentage of voters did not have their polling card with them?



QUESTION 11: As in 2017, with the pilot projects for voter ID taking 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 Alyn and Deeside, 77% of the electorate attended with their polling card and 23% did not.

Q12. Overall how do you rate the quality of this polling station?



QUESTION 12: Observers were asked for an overall rating of the polling station they had attended. 59% of polling stations were reported to be 'Very Good', 34% 'Good', 5% 'Bad', and 2% were 'Very Bad'.

INTERIM CONCLUSIONS

This was an extremely well-run election. Access to voting was clear and despite the nature of the weather, throughout polling day, officials dealt well with the process. Staff had clearly been prepared for the possibility of observation teams, this was generally recorded successfully.

As with a number of recent elections that Democracy Volunteers have observed we continue to be concerned about the levels of ‘family voting’ at polling stations.

Although, as we have said, staff ran very efficient polling operations across the vast majority of the constituency, they invariably do not intercede when voters stand together in the polling booths or discuss whom they intend to vote for.

Our observer team saw ‘family voting’ in 28% of the polling stations attended which, bearing in mind the team records all the voters who attend polling stations, means that 7% of all the voters who attended polling stations were involved in this practice.

We would recommend that officers, and the presiding officers, take time to be aware of this and intercede when they see this. Evidence, as provided by the OSCE/ODIHR, suggests that this practice most affects women voters as the secrecy of their ballot is restricted.

On the 100th anniversary of the first enfranchisement of women it is unfortunate that women voters do not always have the right to vote in secrecy, from their spouse or other family member.