

# SPECIAL REPORT

Voter ID Pilot Councils  
(Bromley, Gosport, Swindon, Watford and Woking)  
3rd May 2018



Dr John Ault

3<sup>rd</sup> May 2018



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# English Local Elections – May 3<sup>rd</sup> 2018

## Special Report on Election Observation of Voter ID Pilots Areas

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### Objectives

1. To objectively observe the electoral process in the five councils – Bromley, Gosport, Swindon, Watford and Woking.
2. To advise the local councils 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 them as part of an assessment of the pilots.

### Methodology

Democracy Volunteers deployed teams across the five councils conducting Voter ID Pilots on May 3<sup>rd</sup>. Teams of observers were deployed as follows:

Bromley	2 Teams of four observers
Gosport	1 Team of four observers
Swindon	2 Teams of four observers
Watford	1 Team of four observers
Woking	2 Teams of two observers

The number of polling stations to visit differed dramatically between the council areas and this explains the differences in deployed team size. As such the number of polling stations observed across the five councils was:

Bromley	63 Polling stations out of a possible 185	(34%)
Gosport	27 Polling stations out of a possible 44	(61%)
Swindon	72 Polling stations out of a possible 102	(70%)
Watford	47 Polling stations out of a possible 58	(81%)
Woking	34 Polling stations out of a possible 43	(79%)

This meant the 29 observers visited 243 (56%) of the polling stations across the five council areas.

As well as observers from the United Kingdom (15), teams that covered these councils included election experts and experienced observers from Republic of Ireland (3), Russia (3), Germany (2), Canada (1), France (1), Hungary (1), Lithuania (1), Italy (1) and Poland (1). All observers were accredited by the Electoral Commission to observe the elections.

Observers attended polling stations in teams of two. This started with the opening of polls at 7am and ended at 10pm. Observations lasted no less than 30 minutes and no more than 45 minutes per polling station. On exiting the polling station, the two observers completed an online form with their immediate report of their observations at that polling station.

## Meetings in advance of the Election

As well as our normal polling station observations we also met with several interlocutors to discuss the proposals before polling day to assess the various reasons that the Government was conducting the pilots and from organisations who were concerned about the proposals. These meetings were with the Electoral Commission, The Association of Electoral Administrators, The Electoral Reform Society, The Labour Party and the Liberal Democrats (a list of those specific interlocutors we met are listed in Appendix A).

We also requested meetings with the Minister for the Constitution (Conservative Party), The Cabinet Office and the Green Party.<sup>1</sup> Neither the Conservative Party nor the Cabinet Office responded to our requests for a meeting to discuss the pilot projects. The Green Party did respond but no suitable time to meet was arranged before polling day.

In our meetings with our interlocutors we were especially interested to discover answers to a series of questions, some of which were based on media concerns and those from civil society whilst also appreciating that concerns had been raised in the report by Sir Eric Pickles – ‘Securing the Ballot’.<sup>2</sup>

The use of ID to vote in the UK is not new. Northern Ireland has used ID for several years and this experience has encouraged authorities, including the Electoral Commission, to recommend this as being a possible way forward to securing the ballot, whilst its recommendations tried to ensure that ID was available, for free, to those who do not have photographic ID. The use of ID to vote is common place around the world, most of western Europe uses it whilst other ways of proving identity that are less formal than a passport or driving licence, are also widely used. It is, in fact, generally considered an international standard for elections, but invariably this is because there is some form of compulsory national ID system, which the UK does not have.

We were especially interested to assess, from the Electoral Commission, what their assessment for success would be for the trials, these included:

- If the experience for the voters is made worse or improved
- The impact on polling station procedures and consistent implementation of the process
- The capacity to secure private areas for some aspects of checking ID

We also discussed how fundamentally difficult it might be for the local councils and the Electoral Commission to evaluate the process and feedback this information to the Cabinet Office. One of the possible problems with evaluating the impact on certain demographic groups might be difficult in areas with limited socio-economic diversity, racial diversity and those areas which do not have high numbers of those in Higher Education.

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<sup>1</sup> Caroline Lucas MP.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/securing-the-ballot-review-into-electoral-fraud>

However, we were informed that Returning Officers and Local Authorities were doing their best to make the process work as smoothly as possible. The choice of councils comes from expressions of interest, from local authorities, not an imposition from central government which possibly explains the reason why few of the pilot councils are ‘Pickles councils’. We understand that further pilots are planned for 2019 in other councils. The Cabinet Office and the Electoral Commission are conducting independent evaluations, but we understand that the success for returning officers is that there is no discernible disruption of the voter flow. It was not clear to us that councils were directly concerned about the impact this might have on those being discouraged from voting because of the new requirements to present ID.

When we recently observed the local elections in The Netherlands we identified that local presiding officers are supplied with a visual compendium of acceptable IDs from across the countries that the UK’s present election law allows for local elections, like those rules in The Netherlands, namely those EU citizens who live locally. We understood that the use of EU IDs was a fundamental part of the training for polling staff but in the polling station, the presiding officers still had the final say because members of staff have to be satisfied it is genuine.

Those interlocutors we met seemed satisfied that the councils running the pilots were prepared for the process and had made necessary arrangements for the process to function well. Indeed, we were informed that Bromley would be having three members of staff in polling stations compared the usual two – we did question whether this would be replicated in normal circumstances.

Concerns were raised by opposition parties and civil society that the use of ID could restrict the rights of some groups which were enunciated in a letter, coordinated by the Electoral Reform Society.<sup>3</sup> The specific groups that considered that this might be a limitation on their access, if ID were to be used, included:

- Young people/Students
- Older people
- Disabled people
- Transgender and gender non-conforming people
- BAME communities
- The homeless

This led some to suggest that, like some other countries, this might be considered a form of voter suppression – where some groups, including those mentioned above might be directly, or indirectly, disadvantaged from voting because of the use of ID. We were concerned that this might be difficult to evaluate through election observation, especially because many of the areas being piloted did not necessarily have significant numbers of these minority groups to

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.electoral-reform.org.uk/latest-news-and-research/media-centre/press-releases/unprecedented-coalition-of-charities-and-civil-society-demand-rethink-on-dangerous-voter-id-trials/>

assess whether it was a limiting factor on their capacity to vote. We also believe that fluctuations in turnout might be easily attributed to other causes rather than the use of ID.

## The Different Pilots

The five councils did not run the same pilot and we will give these differences different data sets later in the report. However, understanding the different ID thresholds is important.

	Preferred ID	Alternate ID
<b>Bromley</b>	One of the following: a UK, Commonwealth or EU Passport; a UK, Crown Dependency or EU Driver's Licence (inc. Provisional); an NI electoral ID card; a biometric immigration document issued by the UK (ARC card); EEA ID Card; Oyster 60+ London Pass; Freedom Pass (London); a PASS scheme card	Two of the following: a valid debit or credit card; poll card for the poll; non-photocard driver's licence; birth certificate; marriage or civil partnership certificate; adoption certificate; firearms certificate; the record of a decision on bail made in respect of the voter; a bank or building society cheque book; a mortgage statement, bank or building society statement, a credit card statement or a utility bill dated within 3 months of the date of the poll; a council tax demand letter or statement or a Form P45 or Form P60 dated within 12 months of the date of the poll
<b>Gosport</b>	One of the following: a UK, Commonwealth or EU Passport; a UK, Crown Dependency or EU Driver's License (inc Provisional); an NI electoral ID card; a biometric immigration document issued by the UK (ARC card); EEA ID Card; DBS certificate with registered address; MoD photographic ID card; MoD Defence Privilege Card; photo bus/travel pass from a Hants. Council.	Two of the following: (one must show address) non-photocard driver's licence; birth, adoption or marriage/civil partnership certificate, bank or building society debit/credit card; bank/mortgage statement, council tax demand or statement letter, utility bill, P2, P6, P9, P45, P60 or statement or entitlement to benefits dated within 12 months of the poll
<b>Swindon</b>	Barcoded poll card	Only one of the following: UK, EU, Commonwealth Passport (expired or valid); UK, Crown Dependency or EU photocard Driver's Licence (inc. Provisional); NI electoral ID Card; Biometric Immigration Document; EEA ID Card
<b>Watford</b>	Barcoded poll card	Only one of the following: UK, EU, Commonwealth Passport; UK, Crown Dependency or EU photocard Driver's Licence (inc. Provisional); NI electoral ID Card; Biometric Immigration Document; EEA ID Card; valid credit or debit card
<b>Woking</b>	One of the following (expired or valid): a UK, Commonwealth or EU Passport; a UK or EU Driver's Licence (inc Provisional); an NI electoral ID card; a biometric immigration document issued by the UK (ARC card); EEA ID Card; Surrey Senior Bus Pass; Surrey Student Fare Card; 16-25 Railcard; Rail Season Ticket Photocard	Local Elector Card (Applied for in advance).

Because the pilots were testing different potential approaches to assessing the feasibility of ID as a requirement to vote, we were aware that it was possible to assess different aspects of this process before the trials formally took place. For the past eighteen months we have asked our observers to count both the number of voters attending a polling station but also the number of voters who failed to bring their polling card, bearing in mind this is not a requirement to receive a ballot paper until the ID trials. They have been in the ID trials in both Swindon and Watford.

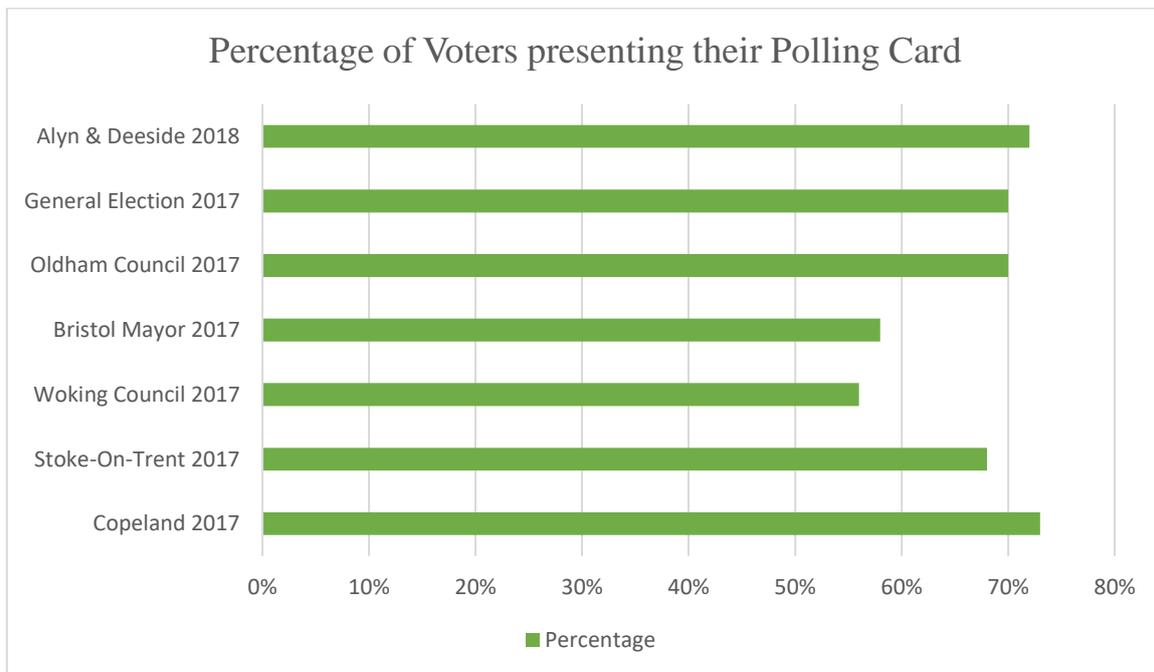


Figure 1 - Data from 2017 and 2018 observations for those attending with their polling cards

Our data suggests that those attending the polling stations with their polling cards is certainly not universal. Indeed, at the UK General Election in June 2017 those attending with their polling card was almost exactly 70% of those who attended the 642 polling stations we observed across 66 UK constituencies (sample size 3119 voters). Only the Alyn and Deeside Welsh Assembly by-election showed that 72% attended with their polling card and the Stoke-on-Trent Parliamentary by-election was 68% whilst the Copeland by-election was 73%.

However, what is notable, is that those attending in local elections in 2017, in Bristol and Woking, saw those attending with their card, lower at 58% and 56% respectively. However, Oldham Council elections in 2017 had 70% of voters presenting with their polling cards. This may suggest that voters may be less prepared to vote in local elections and possibly the impact of party turnout operations may be more effective in local elections, whereas national elections are much better advertised, and voters are more prepared for their election day plans. Turnout in some areas is significantly different and this may also affect the percentage of voters who attend with their polling card – those more habitual in their attendance at the polls.<sup>4</sup>

Further data will follow concerning the percentage of voters who attended at polling stations with their polling card on May 3<sup>rd</sup>, including Swindon and Watford where it was mandatory.

<sup>4</sup> In 2018, we have revisited both Woking and Oldham Council elections as part of our observations.

## Public Awareness Campaigns

For us to be satisfied that our observations of the voter ID pilots were to be fair to those undertaking them, at council level and those who were required to conform to the new regulations we felt it was important to ask our interlocutors, and to find out from our own investigations, that the pilots had received.



Figure 2 Woking Council Advertising

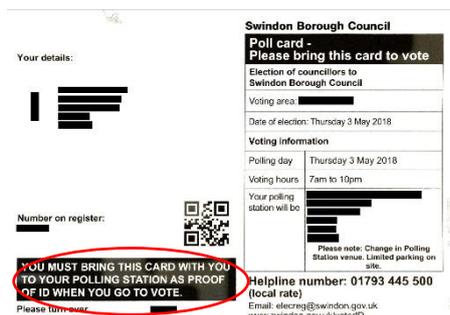


Figure 3 Polling Card – Swindon (Front)

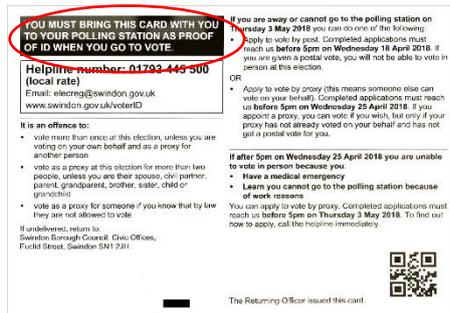


Figure 4 Polling Card - Swindon (Reverse)

Both the Electoral Commission and the Association of Electoral Administrators believed that the local information campaigns, supported and augmented by the press team at the Cabinet Office, had been of sufficiently high profile to ensure that local voters were fully conscious of the necessity to have the relevant ID, or information, to ensure that they did not have issues whilst attempting to vote.

This was clearly made obvious on polling cards in Swindon and Watford as well as through public information programmes, in the local press and at high footfall areas across the other three pilot areas. We also believe that local political parties, presumably in attempt to maximise their capacity for turnout, and to help voters through their own literature, also advertised the necessity to take the relevant ID for the council areas concerned.

We were, therefore, satisfied that the pilots were due to take place in areas that had received sufficient information to ensure that any of our observations were in a context which would reasonably assess the viability of the various options that were being piloted.

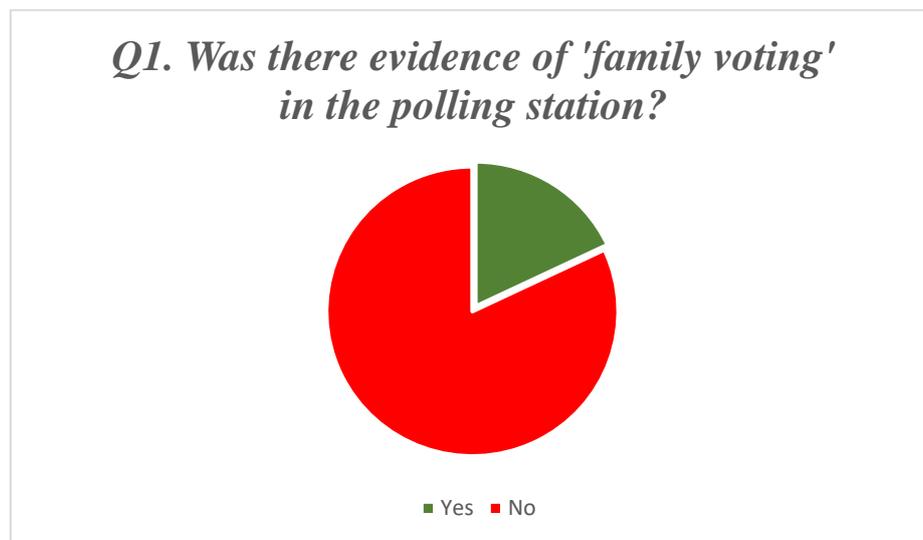
We were also conscious that the pilots took place in the context of significant local publicity, and to a lesser extent national publicity, over the trials, but we also believe that the significantly lower turnout seen at local elections compared to a Westminster election or national referendum probably suggests that those more engaged with local politics would be those most likely to have seen the local publicity.

On polling day, we observed that those voters attending the polling stations were generally aware of the new rules regarding the requirement for ID to vote and seemed engaged with the process.

## Preliminary Results of the Observation

As usual the observers asked a series of questions which will be reported in a separate report later. This report deals specifically with those issues associated with 'Securing the Ballot' and the voter ID trials in the five councils.

As with other observations Democracy Volunteers assessed a series of simple tests for polling stations such as the sealing of the ballot boxes and the accessibility issues of polling stations. These will be reported on at a later date.



**QUESTION 1:** In 18% 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'.<sup>5</sup> 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 done by another individual entirely.

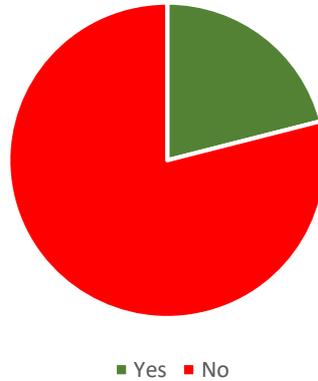
On one occasion the observers even saw a case of carousel voting where one person voted for herself and her partner.

Family voting invariably went unchallenged by staff in the polling stations as they were generally dealing with the ID requirements.

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.osce.org/>

***Q2. Were any voters refused a ballot paper because they did not have the correct ID?  
(All 5 ID Pilot Councils)***



**QUESTION 2:** Observers were asked to identify those voters who were refused a ballot paper because they did not have the correct ID. Across the five councils voters were refused a ballot paper in 21% of polling stations. This data broke down as Bromley 23% to 77%, Gosport 24% to 76%, Swindon 23% to 77%, Watford 19% to 81% and Woking 15% to 85%.

In terms of the actual percentage of voters that were turned away from voting this constituted (a sample size of 3229) 1.67% of all voters across the five pilot areas were unable to vote because they did not have the required ID to vote.

Of the 1.67% of voters who were excluded we cannot assert the number that later returned, if at all.

## **Appendix A**

### **The Electoral Commission**

Tom Hawthorn (Head of Policy)  
Phil Thompson (Head of Research)  
Katy Knock

### **Association of Electoral Administrators**

Peter Stanyon (Chief Executive)

### **Electoral Reform Society**

Jess Garland (Director of Policy and Research)

### **The Labour Party (Office of Cat Smith MP - Shadow Minister (Cabinet Office) (Voter Engagement and Youth Affairs))**

Liam Budd (Political Advisor to Cat Smith MP)

### **The Liberal Democrats (Spokesperson for Communities and Local Government)**

Wera Hobhouse MP