

WOKING BOROUGH COUNCIL

NOTES OF A MEETING OF THE ELECTIONS AND ELECTORAL REGISTRATION REVIEW PANEL

HELD ON 4 JULY 2019 IN THE BOARD ROOM - CIVIC OFFICES

Present: Councillor Simon Ashall
Councillor Ann-Marie Barker
Councillor David Bittleston
Councillor John Bond
Paul Bradley, Liberal Democrat Agent
Peter Bryant, Democratic Services and Legal Services
Charlotte Griffiths, Electoral Services Manager
Councillor Deborah Hughes
Douglas J Spinks, Deputy Chief Executive
Claire Storey, (In the Chair)
Richard Squire, UKIP Agent
Councillor Melanie Whitehand

Absent: Ray Morgan

Actions

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies of absence were received from Ray Morgan.

2. Voter ID Pilot Review

Charlotte Griffiths, Electoral Services Manager gave a brief overview on the Voter ID Pilot, which was held on 2 May 2019. The Cabinet Office offered all local authorities in Great Britain the opportunity to pilot the scheme during the May 2019 elections and ten local authorities participated in the pilot. This was to further collect evidence about the best means to implement voter ID in polling stations nationally.

The report before the Panel included electoral activities from the May 2019 local elections. The Members of the Panel were informed that the pilot had been a success with 99.5% of electors bringing correct ID. Electors were required to present specified ID before being issued with a ballot paper to cast their vote.

The Panel noted that the list of specified ID had been amended to include Blue Badges and Military passes following feedback from Woking Borough Council last year.

Planning and Engagement

As in 2018 there was a comprehensive Equalities Impact Assessment carried out which formed the basis for the targeted communications work in the run up to the pilot.

ID Checking Process

The Chairman noted that whilst visiting various Polling Stations during the May 2019 elections she noticed that Polling staff were consistent in following the process stages of ID checking compared to the last election.

Councillor Bond reported that he received some negative comments from electors, who were unable to vote as they did not have the correct ID.

Charlotte mentioned that there had been minimal negative feedback received during the May 2019 elections in comparison to the previous year. It was noted that guidance for staff had been supplied at all Polling Stations on suggestions of actions to be taken in in circumstance if wrong or no identification was presented to Polling Clerks.

Data Collection

As part of the evaluation of the pilot staff at Polling Stations were required to record forms of ID presented, this included recording electors with no ID or the wrong ID.

Following a query regarding hearing difficulties between electors and staff at the St Dunstan Polling Station, Charlotte reported she had not received any complaints and agreed to investigate the matter further with the Presiding Officer.

C. Griffiths

The Chairman sought clarification on the 133 recording errors on the data collection form. Charlotte clarified that unfortunately errors had occurred at most polling stations.

Local Elector Cards

Charlotte confirmed that the Local Elector Card (LEC) had been issued again for those electors without the specified ID.

There were 27 LEC issued for the election. Additionally, all electors who had been issued with a LEC in 2018 were contacted in March 2019, confirming that they would be able to use their LEC in the polling station on 2 May. Electors had been able to apply using eforms as well as a paper form to make the process more accessible.

Media & Strategy & Public Engagement

Charlotte reported that roadshows and drop-in sessions had been held for electors to ask questions and raise any concerns on the Voter ID pilot, particularly relating to applying for a LEC. The drop-in sessions were said to have a positive impact.

The Panel had noted that a Sky Adsmart campaign was used for the first time for residents in the Borough who were targeted with an advert during television programme breaks.

Councillor Hughes welcomed the promotional materials that had been provided to candidates and agents for the pilot which were useful during campaigning.

Poll Cards

Councillor Barker enquired on the early timings of the issuing of poll cards. Charlotte confirmed that poll cards were issued when the Notice of Election was published to take into consideration any electors who may opt for postal or proxy voting. This would allow for sufficient time to register for a postal or proxy vote ahead of the application deadline. The Panel were advised the usual time frame for issuing poll cards was followed.

Postal Votes

Councillor Whitehand questioned the time frame for issuing postal votes. She explained it was difficult to canvass when postal votes were issued at such an early stage. The Panel was advised that electors were given sufficient time to complete and return postal votes in time to process the postal vote before the close of polls. In any event, Candidates and Agents are made aware of the postal vote issue dates prior to the election to assist with the campaign planning.

Richard Squire, UKIP Agent queried the time line for notifying those electors whose postal votes were rejected. Charlotte advised that electors were notified in writing within three months of the election date.

The Chairman sought clarification on the number of returned of postal votes after election day. It was reported that the post box at the Civic Offices was checked at 10:00pm and a final sweep had been undertaken by the Royal Mail at their delivery office. This resulted in minimal votes being received after election day.

ID Provision

The Panel noted that driving licences and passport were the most popular forms of ID presented at the polling station.

It was highlighted that the number of electors who did not return to the polling station with correct ID after having attended the polling station with no ID or the wrong ID was halved compared to 2018, which was very pleasing.

Verification of Count

Following a query on security of the ballot boxes after the election, Charlotte confirmed that once ballot boxes were returned to HG Wells

they were stored in the Wells Room with two security staff until Officers returned on Friday morning.

Electoral Integrity

The Deputy Returning Officer received a number of complaints on publicity materials and conduct of other candidates. Members were informed that additional guidance set out in Appendix 4 to the report would be circulated to all candidates and agents at future elections. The guidance clarified what candidates and their campaigners can and cannot do as part of their campaign.

Panel Members sought clarification on publicity in the vicinity of a polling station including temporary Head Quarters, candidates and tellers engaging with electors at the polling station and rosettes for tellers and candidates. Charlotte informed Members that the guidance document would be updated to reflect the queries raised.

Discussions ensued on campaign material content and Members noted that queries relating to Council business were a matter for the Council's Monitoring Officer not for the Returning Officer.

The Chairman and Members took opportunity to thank Charlotte and the Elections Team on the conduct of the election.

3. European Parliamentary Elections - 23 May 2019

The Panel noted that the European Parliamentary Elections were called at short notice and held on the 23 May 2019. Panel Members were advised that a significant challenge nationally was the registration of EU Citizen electors who were required to complete a separate declaration form. Only 948 electors returned valid declarations which equated to 18.0% of all eligible EU electors.

The election ran smoothly and the count was held on Sunday, 26 May 2019 without any incidents.

The Chairman and Members took opportunity to thank Charlotte and the Elections Team on the conduct of the EU election.

[Please Note: The figures for the EU electors valid declarations has been revised on further analysis after the Elections Panel Meeting].

4. 2020 Canvass Reform

Panel Members were advised on changes to the Annual Canvas process which were being introduced in 2020. The changes sought to make the process more efficient and cost effective. The main change introduces a data matching step using national and local data which will identify properties where there are no changes to occupants. This would enable resources to be focused on properties where there are changes.

5. **Oaktree School - Polling Station Review.**

Following the Parliamentary Polling District and Polling Place Review which was carried out in autumn 2018, and reported to Council in December 2018, Officers undertook to develop proposals in 2019 for permanent community facilities in the area, which would remove the need to use the school as the polling place for the area.

Members were updated on the progress of this issue. Officers had visited the area in order to identify possible sites for a community facility. It had become apparent that this would not be resolved in the short term and would take longer to finalise proposals. Alternative arrangements had been investigated including the possibility of all electors in the area using the St. John's Memorial Hall as a polling station. However, this had been discounted as it would have an adverse impact on electors living in the Hermitage estate, many of whom may find it difficult to travel further to the polling place.

The Panel were advised that at recent elections, an arrangement has been in place with the school to use the front class room as the polling station, which enables the school to remain open on polling day. This compromise is preferable to the school being required to close. This arrangement would need to continue whilst Officers continue to investigate alternative provision in the area.

6. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of the Review Panel held on 24 January 2019 were received.

7. **Matters Arising from the Last Meeting**

It was noted that Could You Be A Councillor event was held on Wednesday, 3 July 2019 and had been attended by 10 members of the public.

It was further noted that no press release had been issued in relation to the individual referred to Surrey Police in 2018 in connection with the May 2018 election as no formal response had been received from Surrey Police.

8. **Any Other Business**

Queries were raised on polling district boundaries in Goldsworth Park and Mount Hermon areas. Charlotte requested Members to send specific details to her for further investigation.

It was also noted that voters in the Madeira Road area showed some confusion as to whether they fell within West Byfleet or Pyrford.

9. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Review Panel would be held on 23 January 2020.

The meeting commenced at 7.00 pm
and ended at 8.25 pm