

Report to: Policy and Resources Committee, 21st March 2023

Report of: Returning Officer / Deputy Returning Officer

Subject: ELECTIONS ACT 2022 – PROGRESS ON IMPLEMENTATION

1. Recommendation

1.1 That the Committee notes the progress made to date on the requirements and measures being taken by the Registration/Returning Officer to implement the Voter ID and accessibility provisions of the Elections Act 2022.

2. Background

2.1 The Elections Bill was introduced in the House of Commons on 5th July 2021. The Bill has now completed all its stages and been passed. It received Royal Assent on 28th April 2022.

2.2 The Elections Act 2022 introduces new duties on local authorities for the management and running of elections, with the first elections affected being the scheduled polls to be held on 4th May 2023. The new duties on local authorities required to be in place for the 4th May 2023 polls specifically relate to the implementation of the Voter Identification Regulations 2022, and the Assistance with Voting for Persons with Disabilities (Amendments) Regulations 2022.

2.3 The full provisions in the Act will commence at a later stage once detailed regulations on how the legislation will operate in practice have been made.

2.4 The full provisions of the Act are listed at **Appendix 1** to this report.

3. Introduction

3.1 At its meeting on 14th December 2022 the Personnel and General Purposes Sub-Committee received a report from the Registration/Returning Officer which identified the requirements for voter ID as set out in the Elections Act 2022 and new provisions for disabled voters. The report also identified the preparation work carried out to date to implement voter ID and further measures to be taken by Electoral Services under the guidance of the Returning Officer and Deputy Returning Officer.

3.2 At the meeting it was agreed that the Registration/Returning Officer would provide an update on the progress made to date on the requirements and measures being taken to implement the provisions of the Elections Act 2022, relating to Voter ID and assistance with voting for persons with disabilities.

4. Progress Made to Date

| Preparation Measures | | |
|-----------------------------|--|-----------------------------|
| No. | Measure | Timescale |
| Partnership Working | | |
| 1. | <p>Member of the "Business Change Network" which is overseen by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) acting as a Change Agent to engage with other local authority elections teams in the West Midlands and the Regional Lead, ensuring local authorities are aware of the changes and providing feedback to the DLUHC and Electoral Commission.</p> <p><u>Progress to Date</u> A senior member of the Electoral Services Team has been designated a Regional Change Agent and has attended 10 Business Change Network Meetings to date. Updates received at meetings are given to the Returning Officer and Deputy Returning Officer and incorporated into the Elections Project Plan where appropriate.</p> | In Place – September 21 |
| 2. | <p>Member of the Association of Electoral Administrators (AEA), which provides ongoing support and information about developments.</p> <p><u>Progress to Date</u> Receiving weekly updates from the AEA. Attended quarterly regional meeting in January 2023 to discuss the introduction of the Electoral Registration Officer Portal for the processing of Voter Authority Certificates.</p> | In Place – long standing |
| 3. | <p>Access to the "Elections Act Forum" hosted on the Association of Electoral Administrators Website.</p> <p><u>Progress to Date</u> On-going.</p> | In place – January 21 |

| 4. | <p>Elections Delivery Project Plan to identify cross service dependencies to support the delivery of the May 2023 Local Elections including the new requirements of the Act.</p> <p><u>Progress to Date</u></p> <table border="0"> <thead> <tr> <th data-bbox="231 421 678 459">Cross Service Dependency</th> <th data-bbox="710 421 853 459">Purpose</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td data-bbox="231 497 574 535">Communications Team</td> <td data-bbox="710 497 1129 535">Public Awareness Campaign</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="231 573 606 611">Community Engagement</td> <td data-bbox="710 573 1045 689">Distribution of key information to specific community groups</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="231 701 678 772">Corporate Strategy and Policy Team</td> <td data-bbox="710 701 1093 817">Provide training to Polling Station Staff regarding Disability Awareness</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="231 981 622 1019">Customer Services Centre</td> <td data-bbox="710 855 1129 927">Voting instruction printed in different languages</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="231 1093 430 1131">Legal Service</td> <td data-bbox="710 981 1165 1052">Supporting voters to apply for Voter Authority Certificates</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="231 1205 430 1243">Finance Service</td> <td data-bbox="710 1093 1161 1164">Support with interpreting new legislation</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="231 1328 470 1366">Finance Service</td> <td data-bbox="710 1205 1161 1355">Allocation and accountability of Government Support Grant and justification lead bid process</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="231 1377 406 1415">ICT Service</td> <td data-bbox="710 1377 1141 1527">Support to implement the Electoral Registration Officer Portal for the processing of Voter Authority Certificates.</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="231 1568 550 1639">South Worcestershire Procurement Service</td> <td data-bbox="710 1568 1109 1639">Support with procurement code requirements</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> | Cross Service Dependency | Purpose | Communications Team | Public Awareness Campaign | Community Engagement | Distribution of key information to specific community groups | Corporate Strategy and Policy Team | Provide training to Polling Station Staff regarding Disability Awareness | Customer Services Centre | Voting instruction printed in different languages | Legal Service | Supporting voters to apply for Voter Authority Certificates | Finance Service | Support with interpreting new legislation | Finance Service | Allocation and accountability of Government Support Grant and justification lead bid process | ICT Service | Support to implement the Electoral Registration Officer Portal for the processing of Voter Authority Certificates. | South Worcestershire Procurement Service | Support with procurement code requirements | In Place – September 22 |
|--|---|---------------------------------|----------------|---------------------|---------------------------|----------------------|--|------------------------------------|--|--------------------------|---|---------------|---|-----------------|---|-----------------|--|-------------|--|--|--|----------------------------|
| Cross Service Dependency | Purpose | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Communications Team | Public Awareness Campaign | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Community Engagement | Distribution of key information to specific community groups | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Corporate Strategy and Policy Team | Provide training to Polling Station Staff regarding Disability Awareness | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Customer Services Centre | Voting instruction printed in different languages | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Legal Service | Supporting voters to apply for Voter Authority Certificates | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Finance Service | Support with interpreting new legislation | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Finance Service | Allocation and accountability of Government Support Grant and justification lead bid process | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| ICT Service | Support to implement the Electoral Registration Officer Portal for the processing of Voter Authority Certificates. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| South Worcestershire Procurement Service | Support with procurement code requirements | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

Voter Engagement

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| 5. | <p>Returning Officer to compile and implement a Public Engagement Strategy. The Public Engagement Strategy to take into account the Council's recently published Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Strategy. Council officers will engage with stakeholders across the city, including SEN and learning disability charities, to share the resources produced by the Electoral Commission to ensure all those eligible to vote are prepared and equipped to vote in their polling station in May 2023.</p> <p><u>Progress to Date</u></p> <p>Communications Plan agreed which includes:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Social media posts.2. Paid promotional posts.3. Press release sent and printed in the Worcester News on 24th January 2023.4. Article on Voter ID published in the new edition of City Life magazine, distributed week commencing 6 March.5. Council webpages updated.6. Electoral Commission posters and leaflets adapted, printed and distributed to public venues across Worcester and also in parks and green spaces.7. Pull-up banner designed, printed and displayed within the Customer Service Centre. Promotional messaging appearing on digital bus shelters and other displays, in cooperation with the County Council.8. Members of staff encouraged to raise awareness within family and friend's networks.9. A5 page on Voter ID included in information leaflet accompanying Council Tax bill. <p><u>Activities Planned for March and April 2023:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Pull up banners placed in the Guildhall Forecourt2. Community Engagement to deliver posters and leaflets to identified "community hubs" around the city, including venues used by disability groups.3. Social media campaign to coincide.4. Electoral Services Team to visit "community hubs". across the City to promote awareness of Voter ID and support voters to apply for Voter Authority Certificates.5. Increasing social and print media campaigns as election timetable begins.6. Demonstration for media of polling station procedure with mock station set up at the Guildhall. | January / February 2023 |
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| Member Engagement | | |
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| 6. | <p>Returning Officer to ensure Members are fully briefed on the requirements of the Act for the May 2023 Local Elections and respond to any concerns.</p> <p><u>Progress to Date</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Weekly updates provided in the Members Weekly Bulletin. 2. Member Briefing held at the Guildhall on 11th January 2023. | In Place - October 2022 – May 2023 |
| Voter Authority Certificates (VAC) | | |
| 7. | <p>Returning Officer to deliver a service to assess applications for a VACs to electors who apply for one from mid-January.</p> <p><u>Progress to Date</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Electoral Services Team commenced the processing of VAC's on 16th January 2023 To date 90 applications have been processed. 2. Customer Services Centre assisting with in-person applications. To date 8 in-person applications have been made. 3. As from 6th March additional staff resources will be employed to meet any increase in demand. | January 2023 |
| Privacy Screens | | |
| 8. | <p>Returning Officer to ensure all designated polling stations are assessed to determine their suitability to comply with the voter ID requirements of the Act including the availability of private areas for voters to use if they so wish. For those polling stations that do not currently have suitable private areas, privacy screens to be procured and utilised.</p> <p><u>Progress to Date</u></p> <p>The preferred privacy screen has been identified and ordered.</p> | In Progress - January 2023 |
| Voter Equipment | | |
| 9. | <p>Returning Officer to consider guidance provided by the Electoral Commission and local disability groups when determining and providing what equipment is required for polling stations.</p> <p><u>Progress to Date</u></p> <p>Electoral Commission guidance now published. The Returning Officer will be providing the following equipment in accordance with the advice and guidance issued by the Electoral Commission:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additional waiting chairs • Magnifiers • Tactile Voting Devices • Wheelchair accessible booths • Staff ID badges | In Progress – February 2023 |

| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pencil grips • Ramps • Temporary doorbells • Additional lighting • Reserved parking spaces where possible | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--|---|--------------------------|-----------------|-------------------|-----------|----------|---------------------|-----|----------------|----------|--------------------|-----|--------|----------|--------------------|-----|-----------------|--------------------------|
| Polling Station Staff Resources | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 10. | <p>Returning Officer to review the current pool of casual elections staff to ascertain if there is sufficient staff resource to employ an additional Poll Clerk at each polling station to assist voters with the requirements of voter ID.</p> <p><u>Progress to Date</u> An additional Poll Clerk and a minimum of one female member of staff has been allocated to each Polling Station.</p> <p>7 Polling Station Inspectors have been employed as opposed to the usual number of 5 and will be the first contact to provide support to Presiding Officer throughout Polling Day.</p> | In Place - December 2022 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Polling Station Staff Training | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 11. | <p>Returning Officer to identify training provider to carry out all necessary training to election staff to ensure a detailed understanding and delivery of the new requirements.</p> <p><u>Progress to Date</u> Training provider agreed. Both on-line and face to face training with practical demonstrations will be given to all Poll Clerks, Presiding Officers and Polling Station Inspectors.</p> <p>Specific disability awareness training will also be given to Poll Clerks and Presiding Officers.</p> | In Place – May 2023 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Election Team Core Staff Training | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 12. | <p>Returning Officer to ensure core Elections Team receive necessary training to understand and implement the requirements of the Act.</p> <p><u>Progress to Date</u> The following training has been undertaken:</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Date</th> <th>Training</th> <th>Training Provider</th> <th>Attendees</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>16/02/23</td> <td>Delivering Voter ID</td> <td>AEA</td> <td>MC, EM, CC, SF</td> </tr> <tr> <td>19/01/23</td> <td>Elections Act 2022</td> <td>AEA</td> <td>MC, EM</td> </tr> <tr> <td>12/01/23</td> <td>Elections Act 2022</td> <td>AEA</td> <td>MC, EM, CC, SF,</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> | Date | Training | Training Provider | Attendees | 16/02/23 | Delivering Voter ID | AEA | MC, EM, CC, SF | 19/01/23 | Elections Act 2022 | AEA | MC, EM | 12/01/23 | Elections Act 2022 | AEA | MC, EM, CC, SF, | In Place – February 2023 |
| Date | Training | Training Provider | Attendees | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
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| | | | | PSI's Comms, Legal, Equalities, IT, Finance, Facilities. | | |
| | 05/01/23 | ERO Portal | DLUHC | CC | | |
| | 14/12/22 | ERO Portal | DLUHC | MC, EM | | |
| | Shane Flynn (SF) Claire Chaplin (CC) Ellen Meachen (EM) Matthew Comber (MC) | | | | | |

5. **Financial Implications**

- 5.1 Funding is provided to local authorities to meet the cost of implementing the Elections Act, in accordance with the New Burdens Doctrine. Worcester has been allocated grant funding of £17,097 for 2022/23 and £30,636 for 2023/24 to cover costs as below. It is not known at the current time the level of Government funding beyond 2024.

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| Dec 2022 | Accessibility (Grant) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General Equipment • Training (Electoral Services Team) | Voter ID (Grant) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Electoral Staff costs • Training (Electoral Services Team) |
| April 2023 | Accessibility (Grant) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training (poll staff) | Voter ID (Grant) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Electoral staff costs • Polling station staff costs • Training (poll station staff) • Poll cards |
| Nov 2023 | Accessibility (JLB) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equipment costs • Staff time costs | Voter ID (JLB) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equipment costs (privacy screens, mirrors, cameras) • Electoral staff costs • Equipment storage costs |

Ward(s): All Wards

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Background Papers: DLUHC - The Elections Bill Equality Impact Assessment
- Electoral Integrity Programme
- The Electoral Commission – Planning for the Election Act changes

Provisions of the Elections Act 2022

The Act will:

- Deliver on the government's commitment to stop postal vote harvesting by changing the rules so that people can apply for a postal or proxy vote online through a new online system for absent voters. Applicants can use the online platform as part of the register to vote process or, for those who are already registered, as a stand-alone online submission. These measures will introduce safeguards against the abuse of postal voting.
- Introduce photographic identification for voting in polling stations in Great Britain.
- Changes the voting system for mayoral and PCC elections to First Past the Post, meaning that the candidate who wins the most votes in each constituency is elected.
- Require authorities to provide voters with disabilities with specialist equipment to support them to vote if need, and allow anyone over the age of 18 to accompany disabled voters in the polling station.
- Removes the 15-year limit on British citizens overseas voting in UK Parliamentary elections, allowing any British citizen previously registered or resident in the UK to register to vote.
- Introduce a new electoral sanction for those convicted of intimidation against a candidate, campaigner or elected office holder. The sanction would ban offenders from standing for election for 5 years, as well as the punishment for the underlying criminal offence which can include a fine or imprisonment, depending on the severity of the intimidation.
- Update undue influence to include a wide range of harms, such as physical violence, damage to a person's property or reputation, undue spiritual pressure and injury, or inflicting financial loss.
- Update the political finance regulatory framework, by increasing transparency, fairness, and strengthening controls against ineligible foreign spending on electoral campaigning.
- Introduce a new digital imprints regime that will go much further than the print imprint regime, increasing transparency and empowering voters to make informed decisions about the material they see online.