

**Manchester City Council  
Report for Resolution**

**Report to:** Constitutional and Nomination Committee – 12 July 2023

**Subject:** Electoral Commission interim report on the impact of Voter ID on the May 2023 local election

**Report of:** The Chief Executive

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**Summary of the Report**

To inform the Committee of the Electoral Commission’s interim findings of the impact of Voter ID on the recent May 4 local election, which was held in Manchester and in 229 other Councils.

**Recommendations**

1. To note the Electoral Commission’s interim report on the impact of photo ID on the recent local election.
  2. To support the Electoral Commission’s key recommendation around the collection of data at polling stations in upcoming elections.
  3. To await the findings of the Commission’s final report due out in September to determine other future actions.
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**Wards Affected:** All

**Alignment to the Our Manchester Strategy Outcomes (if applicable)**

<b>Manchester Strategy outcomes</b>	<b>Summary of how this report aligns to the OMS</b>
A thriving and sustainable city: supporting a diverse and distinctive economy that creates jobs and opportunities	The Our Manchester Strategy sets out the vision for the city to 2025.  The Electoral Commission’s interim report on the impact of photo ID has relevance to how the Councils organises future elections. Elections are a way the public can influence change in the city.
A highly skilled city: world class and home-grown talent sustaining the city’s economic success	
A progressive and equitable city: making a positive contribution by unlocking the potential of our communities	

A liveable and low carbon city: a destination of choice to live, visit, work	
A connected city: world class infrastructure and connectivity to drive growth	

**Full details are in the body of the report, along with any implications for:**

- Equal Opportunities Policy
- Risk Management
- Legal Considerations

**Financial consequences - Revenue**

None.

**Financial consequences - Capital**

None

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**Background documents / relevant legislation:**

The full Electoral Commission interim report can be found at this weblink –  
<https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/who-we-are-and-what-we-do/our-views-and-research/our-research/voter-id-may-2023-local-elections-england-interim-analysis>

## 1. Background and context

- 1.1 The recent May 4 local election was the first to implement two new duties from the Elections Act 2022 – the use of photo ID in order for electors to vote in a polling station, and to increase accessibility to all voters at polling stations. A detailed report on the election and how the duties were implemented in Manchester can be found in a report to the Resources and Governance Scrutiny Committee held on the 22 June 2023 – <https://democracy.manchester.gov.uk/documents/s40661/Elections%20Act%20Update%20Report.pdf>  
An identical copy of this report has also been tabled to the Constitutional and Nomination Committee meeting on the 12 July 2023 for its consideration.
- 1.2 On the 23 June 2023 the Electoral Commission (EC) published its interim report on the impact of Voter ID on the 4 May local election, at which 230 Councils held polls. As noted in section 1.1 above, this was the first election that this new duty was implemented for. The EC's interim analysis provides information and evidence about how the new Voter ID requirement was implemented and how voters found taking part in the election.
- 1.3 The EC comment that there are several areas where further analysis is necessary to establish a clearer and fuller picture. They will publish a final report on the May 2023 elections in September which will include this additional analysis.

## 2. Core findings of the EC interim report:

- 2.1 ***Awareness of the need to bring photo ID to vote at a polling station was high -***
- EC research found that immediately before polling day, 87% of people in England (excluding London, where there were no elections) were aware that they needed to show photo ID to vote at a polling station.
  - Awareness varied across the population and was lowest among younger age groups (82% for 18 to 24-year-olds), black and minority ethnic communities (82%) and those who said they never vote in local elections (84%).
  - Awareness was significantly lower among people who said they did not have an accepted form of ID (74%) compared with those who did have ID (94%).
  - While overall awareness levels were high, some groups of people were significantly less likely to know about the requirement. This means that some people may not have known that they needed to show ID until they arrived at the polling station.
- 2.2 ***Awareness and take-up of the Voter Authority Certificate was low -***
- Approximately 89,500 people applied for a Voter Authority Certificate before the deadline on 25 April. Around 25,000 certificates were used as a form of ID on 4 May.
  - In May 2023, awareness of the Voter Authority Certificate was at 57%, both among the overall population and those who said they did not

already have photo ID.

- The overall number of Voter Authority Certificates applied for and used was low compared with estimates of the number of voters who might not have any other accepted ID (250,000 to 300,000).

### 2.3 ***At least 0.25% of people who tried to vote at a polling station in May 2023 were not able to because of the ID requirement -***

- Data collected in polling stations from the 230 Councils shows that at least 0.25% of people who tried to vote at a polling station were not issued with a ballot paper because of the ID requirement. At least 0.7% of people who tried to vote at a polling station were initially turned away but around two-thirds of those people (63%) returned later in the day and were able to vote.
- In actual numbers for this election, **0.25% of polling station voters** at these elections is **approximately 14,000 voters** who were not issued with a ballot paper because they could not show an accepted form of ID.
- However, the EC say this is an underestimate, partly due to data quality issues but also because some people will have been reminded of the ID requirement before they could be recorded in the data.
- Returning Officers were required to separate out data for polling stations with and without staff acting as greeters. Where that data could be provided it shows that polling stations with greeters recorded that a smaller proportion of people were initially turned away (0.55%) compared to those without greeters (0.8%). Overall, the data shows that 38% of polling stations had a greeter.
- Among those recorded as being turned away from a polling station, 68% had not brought any ID and 28% brought a type of ID that was not accepted. The remainder were refused a ballot paper where the photo on their ID was not recognisable, the polling station staff suspected the ID was forged or where the person had failed to answer the statutory questions, which can be used to ask a voter to confirm their name and address.
- Any voter showing ID could ask to have their identity checked in a private area of the polling station. Approximately 2,250 voters were recorded as having asked to have this check done in private.

### 2.4 ***Around 4% of all non-voters said they did not vote because of the voter ID requirement -***

- Some people who would have wanted to vote at a polling station may have decided not to try, because they realised they did not have accepted ID before attempting to vote. To understand the broader impact of the voter ID requirement, the EC carried out a representative public opinion survey across the areas with elections in May. The survey asked people if they voted in the elections and, if not, why not.
- The survey found that 4% of people who said they did not vote in these elections gave an unprompted reason related to the ID rules – 3% said they did not have the necessary ID and 1% said they disagreed with the need to show ID. The proportion of non-voters giving an ID-related reason rose from 4% to 7% when survey respondents were selecting

from a list of reasons.

- There is evidence that some people found it harder than others to show accepted voter ID, including disabled people and the unemployed. However, further data collection and analysis are needed to establish a clearer picture and the EC have advised this will include additional information in its final report in September.

## 2.5 ***Levels of voter confidence and satisfaction were similar to in previous elections -***

- There were high levels of satisfaction with the process of voting, in line with previous comparable elections; 89% of polling station voters said they were very or fairly satisfied.
- Voters were significantly more likely than non-voters to say that voting is safe. 90% of all voters said voting in a polling station is safe compared to 79% of non-voters. These results are also similar to those recorded after previous comparable elections.
- One potential impact of the new ID rules could have been that more people chose to vote by post instead of at a polling station. The EC do not know if that was the case, as data on levels of postal voting at these elections is not yet available. The EC will include an assessment of any change in their full election report in September.

## 3. **Key recommendation of the EC interim report**

3.1 The EC provide one major recommendation in their interim report on the impact of photo ID on the May local election – that ***the UK Government and the wider electoral community should work to improve the collection of data at polling stations.***

3.2 The EC specifically recommends that the UK Government should ensure that Returning Officers are able to collect and report monitoring data on the impact of voter ID at future elections, and they also assert that work is also needed to improve the quality and reliability of data collected at polling stations in future.

## 4. **Next steps for the EC**

4.1 As highlighted throughout the EC report, there are areas it believes more research is required to understand the full impact of the new voter ID requirement. This will be covered in its September election report. These include how the implementation of voter ID:

- may have differently affected people across society who wanted to vote and what actions can be taken ahead of the next set of elections to address these issues. This includes looking at varying levels of awareness of the ID requirement, patterns in the numbers of people being turned away from polling stations and demographic / socio-economic differences in the data the EC has collected through its public opinion research
- impacted on the administration of the polls. This will incorporate views from Returning Officers and their teams responsible for planning the elections, as well as the polling station staff responsible for managing

the processes on 4 May (Manchester Electoral Services Unit has given its views to the EC on these matters)

- changed how political parties and election candidates approached their campaigns for these elections.

4.2 As noted, the final EC report is due to be published in September and it will also include its usual analysis of all other core aspects of the May local election. The UK Government has commented that it will also be publishing its own analysis on the impact of the local election later in the year. It welcomed the interim EC report and commented that it "...shows that the vast majority of voters – 99.75% – were able to cast their vote successfully. These encouraging findings are also reflective of the confidence we always had in the ability of local authorities to implement these changes while continuing to deliver our elections robustly and securely."

4.3 The Electoral Services Unit is considering the interim report and will determine full actions following the publication of the final EC report on the elections due in September 2023. Officers will keep the Committee informed on the conclusions of the final report and actions that are required as a result of it.

## **Recommendations**

5.1 Recommendations to the Committee appear at the front of this report.