

RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO POLICY AND FINANCE COMMITTEE

meeting date: TUESDAY, 8 NOVEMBER 2022
title: ELECTIONS ACT 2022
submitted by: MARSHAL SCOTT – CHIEF EXECUTIVE
principal author: MAIR HILL – HEAD OF LEGAL AND DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

1 PURPOSE

1.1 To information Committee of the provisions of the Elections Bill 2021.

1.2 Relevance to the Council's ambitions and priorities:

- Community Objectives – } The Council aims to be a well-managed Council. An
- Corporate Priorities – } early understanding of the changes to the electoral
- Other Considerations – } process will assist in this.

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 Members will recall receiving an information report in September 2021, outlining the Government's proposals for reform of electoral law. Those proposals have been encompassed in the Elections Act 2022 ("Act"). The full copy of the Act can be found at <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2022/37/contents/enacted>

3 ISSUES

3.1 The Act introduces several significant changes which will apply at the following election types:

- UK parliamentary elections in Great Britain
- Local elections in England – including mayoral elections
- Police and Crime Commissioner elections in England and Wales

3.2 The following provisions are expected to be in place for the May 2023 elections:

- Making it easier for people with disabilities to vote
 - Disabled voters can choose anyone who is over 18 to accompany them in the polling station, to help them vote
 - Requirement for Returning Officers to take all reasonable steps to provide equipment to support disabled voters to vote independently and in secret at the polling station, and in doing so to have regard to any relevant guidance issued by the Electoral Commission
- Requirement for voters at polling stations to show photographic identification before they receive their ballot paper. Anyone who does not have one of the required forms of photographic identification will be able to apply for a Voter Authority Certificate, to be issued for free by the Council.

- Change to the coting system for mayoral elections from supplementary vote to First Past the Post.

3.3 Members will appreciate that the time scales in which to implement these changes are extremely tight and in order to provide Returning Officers with some guidance prior to the Regulations being laid, the Electoral Commission have published a document entitled “Planning for Elections Act changes: early preparations. The Council’s Elections team including the Returning Officer and Deputy Returning Officers have utilised this document to commence planning and programme works to be completed.

Make it easier for people with disabilities to vote

3.4 When considering what action to take in this respect the Council is to have regard to any relevant guidance issued by the Electoral Commission. The Electoral Commission has produced draft guidance. A copy of that draft guidance can be found at <https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/who-we-are-and-what-we-do/our-views-and-research/our-consultations/consultation-draft-guidance-returning-officers-assistance-voting-persons-disabilities/draft-guidance-returning-officers-assistance-voting-persons-disabilities> A statutory consultation will be take place on this guidance from 28 November 2022 to 10 January 2023.

3.5 The Council will use this draft guidance to inform its early preparations. This will need to be reviewed if there are changes to the guidance following the consultation.

Voter Authority Certificate

3.6 The Council has outline information currently on how this system is to be administered. It is liaising with its electoral system software provider to ensure that the system will integrate with the government’s centralised systems. Once full details are available it will also need to procure equipment to produce VAC where an application is made directly to the Council and also in polling stations to ensure privacy for voters who do not wish to reveal their face in public,

3.7 The provisions in respect to both accessibility and voter authority certificates will involve significant additional resources in the planning the May 2023 elections. In particular:

- Additional staffing will be required to process and assist the public in their application for Voter Authority Certificates and to check these in polling stations
- ,Staff will require additional training on these issues to ensure that they are properly implemented.
- All venues and equipment will need to be assessed to ensure they are appropriate in terms of accessibility; voters taking more time to progress through the voting process and that they can accommodate the necessary number of staff to provide a good service for voters.
- A communications plan and engagement strategy to ensure that the public have timely information about the new provisions.
- Working with suppliers to ensure that the changes to size and content of the poll card can be accommodated.

A further report will be brought to this committee once the Regulations are available.

4 RISK ASSESSMENT

4.1 The approval of this report may have the following implications:

- Resources – Significant additional resources will be required in order to implement the provisions of the Act. The Government has indicated that New Burdens funding will be available, but it is not yet clear the level of this or when it will be received.
- Technical, Environmental and Legal – Incorporated in the body of the report.
- Political – No implications identified.
- Reputation – Proper implementation of the provisions will enhance the Council's reputation.
- Equality & Diversity – The Government has completed an Equality Impact Assessment for the implications of the proposed amendments to the voting process. The provisions on accessibility are intended to enhance disabled voters experiences and to ensure that they are no disadvantaged.

6 CONCLUSION

6.1 Note the content of this report.

MAIR HILL
HEAD OF LEGAL & DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

MARSHAL SCOTT
CHIEF EXECUTIVE

For further information please ask for Mair Hill, extension 4418.