

# RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL REPORT TO POLICY & FINANCE COMMITTEE

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meeting date: TUESDAY, 7 NOVEMBER 2023  
 title: LOCAL ELECTIONS MAY 2023  
 submitted by: CHIEF EXECUTIVE  
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## 1 PURPOSE

1.1 To inform Committee of the Report of the Electoral Commission on the May 2023 local elections in England and the additional measures which the Council has put in place following the elections.

1.2 Relevance to the Council's ambitions and priorities:

- Council Ambitions - }
  - Community Objectives - }
  - Corporate Priorities - }
  - Other Considerations - }
- The Council aims to be a well managed Council. The electoral process is a vital part of the Council's role within the community it serves.

## 2 BACKGROUND

2.1 In September 2023, the Electoral Commission produced its report on the May 2023 Local Elections in England. A copy of the complete report can be found on the Electoral Commissions [website](#). The report looks at how the May 2023 elections in England were run, how voters and campaigners found taking part, and what lessons can be learned for the future. The Council has considered this report and issues which arose in its own procedures and has made changes to ensure that issue do not reoccur.

## 3 ISSUES

3.1 The elections which took place in May 2023 were the first since the first tranche of changes introduced by the Elections Act 2022 were in place, including the requirement for Voter ID. The report makes a number of findings and recommendations which are set in general terms below:

### Voting at Elections

- Most people are confident elections are well-run and are satisfied with registrations and voting practices. – The EC research found that 68% of people said they were confident that the elections were well run. This is consistent with the 64% who said they were confident after the 2019 elections.
- Most people think voting is safe from fraud and abuse – The EC research found that 81% of people in England said they thought voting in general was safe from fraud and abuse with the same proportion (81%) saying this after the 2022 elections.
- Few allegations of electoral fraud have been reported so far. The full details will be published in Spring 2024.

- Turnout at the elections was slightly lower than at recent comparable elections. Turnout was 32% compared to 32.5% in 2019. Although it was not one of the most common reasons given for not voting 3% of non-voters said they did not vote because they did not have ID, and 1% said it was because they did not agree with the requirement to show ID to vote at a polling station.
- Most voters could vote using their preferred method.
- Returning Officer provided a range of support at polling stations, but further work is needed to ensure voters receive the support they need.

### Voter ID at the Elections

3.2 The EC has undertaken further data collection and analysis of evidence to establish a clear picture of the impact of the requirement for Voter ID. This has confirmed their interim analysis that some people found it harder than others to show accepted voter ID, including disabled people and the unemployed. They found that this stemmed from two overlapping issues; the variations in ownership of accepted photo ID and in the awareness of the need to show photo ID when voting in person. The EC also found that particular types of voters faced greater problems and were turned away from polling stations in greater numbers. Those particular types of voters were:

- Disabled people
- Unemployed people
- People from ethnic minority communities (although it was not clear to what extent this varied between distinct ethnic minority backgrounds)
- Younger age groups.

The EC highlights its view that this is likely to have a greater impact in the 2024 elections and the general election thereafter and that changes are needed to improve accessibility and support to people who do not have accepted ID.

3.3 The EC made a number of recommendations. These are set out below.

- Recommendation 1 – Increase awareness of the support available for disabled voters.
- Recommendation 2 – Review the list of accepted ID. The EC considers that the Government should review the current list to identify any additional documents that could be included to improve accessibility for voters. Particularly to support those groups who are currently being affected most, e.g., disabled, and unemployed voters.
- Recommendation 3 – Improve access to the Voter Authority Certificate for Voter. The EC considers that the government should explore whether the deadline for the VAC applications should be moved closer to polling day to extend its availability for voters who do not have ID.
- Recommendation 4 – Provide options for voters who do not have or cannot access any form of accepted ID. The EC proposes introduced a form of “vouching” at the polling station whereby a voter who does have the accepted form of ID can vouch for one who does not.
- Recommendation 5 – Polling staff should continue to collect data on the impact of voter ID at future elections.
- Recommendation 6 – The electoral community should work to improve the collection of data at polling stations for future elections.
- Recommendation 7 – The electoral community should take action to protect voter trust and confidence in the democratic system. – This recommendation arises from findings that abuse, and intimidation of candidates has persisted.

- Recommendation 8 – Ensure centrally provided digital systems are operational and updated in good time ahead of scheduled polls. This recommendation relates to the Governments ERO portal through which Voter Authentication Certificates are currently applied for and which is to be extended to absent voting on 31 October 2023.
- Recommendation 9 – Ensure that dependencies and delivery risks are carefully managed for future changes to elections – this recommendation sought to ensure that the government had considered capacity and that there were fully functional operating resources before making final decisions on implementation of further tranches of the Elections Act 2022. This has been overtaken by the Orders which bring those tranches into force on 31 October 2023.

#### Election Register

- 3.4 Committee will be aware that the Council found a number of errors in its electoral register following the May 2023 election. The reason for this occurring were investigated and the required amendments were made to the register. The Council has introduced a number of additional control measures to its processes to seek as far as possible to prevent errors occurring in the future. The Council has changed its processes for new or altered properties being added to the register. This will include checks being carried out between the Council Geographical Information System (GIS) and its Electoral System as properties are added to the register, with any differences being raised at that point, discussed, and agreed before being added. Once added a further check will be carried out by a third officer to ensure it has been added in the agreed polling district. The Council will also implement a separate and additional check of all electoral polling districts within the register on its electoral system against those in its GIS system before the electoral register is produced at an election. This will act as an additional safety measure.

#### 4 RISK ASSESSMENT

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

- Resources – N/A.
- Technical, Environmental and Legal – The Council will continue to work on its processes to ensure that the public can have confidence that elections are run in accordance with statute. The work which the Council has undertaken to ensure that voters are informed in respect of the changes introduced by the Elections Act 2022 will be built upon for Voter ID and the accessibility provisions and will be launched for the requirements relating to absent voting once the resources have been provided by the Electoral Commission.
- Political – N/A.
- Reputation – N/A.

#### 5 CONCLUSION

- 5.1 Committee is asked to note the content of this report.

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BACKGROUND PAPERS

1                   None.

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