

REPORT FROM: CORPORATE DIRECTOR

TO: COUNCIL

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ELECTORAL INTEGRITY PILOT

PURPOSE OF REPORT:

To seek agreement to the Council taking part in an electoral integrity pilot at the May 2019 local elections.

RECOMMENDATION

- (1) That the Council's willingness to take part in the pilot be confirmed.
- (2) That a further report be submitted in due course.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- (1) To help shape the eventual form of the requirement for Voter ID and develop understanding on the part of the electorate ahead of national introduction.
- (2) To help combat well documented concerns around postal and proxy voting.

1. Members may know that in May this year a number of pilots were held around the country trialing a requirement for voters to produce ID at polling stations.
2. When the invitation to take part in the pilots was issued by the Cabinet Office the Council resolved at the meeting on 23rd March 2017:

“That the Returning Officer inform the Cabinet Office that the Council at this stage did not want to submit an expression of interest in a Voter ID pilot, but that if the Government were minded to consider pilots related to postal voting then it would be very keen to take part.”

3. The Cabinet Office has now issued an invitation to councils to take part in another round of Voter ID pilots at the May 2019 elections. In initial discussions with them they have indicated that they would agree to a pilot relating to postal and proxy voting running alongside a Voter ID pilot.

4. The proposed postal voting pilot would be around random sampling and contacting of applicants to verify the issue and return of votes. All members will be aware of the widespread concerns about postal voting in Pendle in particular allegations of pressure put on applicants and the level of their understanding of the process.
5. The proposed proxy voting pilot would be to require proxies to produce ID at polling stations. The last two years have seen significant increases in the number of proxy votes in Pendle and some concerns have been expressed about the identity of persons turning up at polling stations claiming to be the appointed proxies.
6. It is intended that the Voter ID pilot would be on the requirement to produce photographic evidence at the polling station.
7. Managing a pilot would be a significant undertaking but Officers feel that it would help develop understanding amongst the electorate on the requirement to produce ID at polling stations which seems very likely to be introduced nationally. An accompanying postal and proxy pilot could be a useful engagement exercise with voters and also help identify instances of actual fraud and undue pressure.
8. In consultation with the Leader of the Council a formal expression of interest was submitted by the deadline of 10th September. If selected then participation will be subject to agreement on the precise format of the pilots and the evaluation requirements, and the Council being satisfied that sufficient resources are made available by the Cabinet Office to cover the additional work.

IMPLICATIONS

- Policy:** The Council's policy is to have fair and well run elections with electors provided with the necessary information when casting their votes.
- Financial:** Participation in the pilot will be subject to satisfactory additional resource being provided.
- Legal:** A Statutory Order will be made detailing the precise form of the pilot.
- Risk Management:** None arising directly from the report.
- Health and Safety:** None arising directly from the report.
- Sustainability:** None arising directly from the report.
- Community Safety:** None arising directly from the report.
- Equality and Diversity:** None arising directly from the report.