May 2018 voter identification pilot schemes

First published: 25 July 2019 Last updated: 29 July 2019 Intro This page contains evaluations of the individual schemes in each local authority holding a pilot. Local authorities holding pilot schemes Bromley In the Bromley voter identification pilot, voters were required to show one form of photographic identification or two forms of non-photographic identification (one of which needed to include the full registered address of the elector) in order to be given a ballot paper. We found that: The majority of voters were able to meet the identification requirements upon arriving at the polling station. However, some electors did not have the required ID available when they came to vote on 3 May. The majority later returned and were able to cast a vote. There is no evidence that the ID requirement significantly deterred electors from voting. In our public opinion survey only one respondent told us that they had not voted as a result of the ID requirement. Also, turnout at the 2018 polls was similar to the comparable elections in 2014. We cannot draw firm conclusions about whether the ID requirement had a disproportionate impact on particular groups of people, for example those with a learning or physical disability. While we have seen no evidence that specific groups struggled with the ID requirement it is challenging to gather evidence in this area as relatively small groups of people could have been affected in different ways.. The delivery of this pilot was manageable for the Returning Officer and their staff and there is nothing in their experience of the pilot to suggest that Bromley would face significant issues with the administration of a similar ID requirement in the future. Additional staffing and training were in place for the pilot. However the Returning Officer has indicated that the extra staff would not necessarily be required to deliver this type of ID requirement at future local elections. Public attitudes to electoral fraud improved from before to after the pilot. More people said that electoral fraud is not a problem in Bromley in May 2018 than did so in January 2018. However, we cannot definitively link this change to the pilot. Our findings suggest that the 2018 local elections in Bromley were not significantly affected by the voter ID pilot in either its impact on voters or on the administration of the poll. However, it is important to be cautious when drawing conclusions from this pilot about the impact of any wider application of voter ID. Gosport The voter identification pilot scheme in Gosport required voters to produce one form of photographic identification or two forms of non-photographic identification (one of which must have shown the full registered address of the elector) or an electoral identity letter in order to meet the requirements to vote. Our evaluation of the scheme found that: The majority of voters were able to meet the identification requirements upon arriving at the polling station. However, some electors did not have the required ID available when they came to vote on 3 May. The majority later returned and were able to cast a vote. There is no evidence that the ID requirement significantly deterred electors from voting. In our public opinion surveys two non-voters told us that ID was the reason they had not voted. Also, turnout at the 2018 polls was similar to the comparable elections in 2016. It is possible that some electors were deterred from voting, believing correctly or incorrectly that they did not have ID, but this seems unlikely to apply to significant numbers. We cannot draw firm conclusions about whether the ID requirement had a disproportionate impact on particular groups of people, for example those with a learning or physical disability. While we have seen no evidence that specific groups struggled with the ID requirement, it is challenging to gather

evidence in this area as relatively small groups of people could have been affected in different ways. The delivery of this pilot was manageable for the Returning Officer and their staff and there is nothing in their experience of the pilot to suggest that Gosport would face significant issues with the administration of a similar ID requirement in the future. Additional staffing and training were in place for the pilot. However, the Returning Officer has indicated that the extra staff would not be required to deliver this type of ID requirement at future local elections or those polls with higher turnout. Public attitudes to electoral fraud did not significantly change from before to after the pilot. Slightly more people said they think electoral fraud is a problem in Gosport in May 2018 than did so in January 2018. Our findings suggest that the 2018 local elections in Gosport were not significantly affected by the voter ID pilot in either its impact on voters or on the administration of the poll. However, it is important to be cautious when drawing conclusions from this pilot about the impact of any wider application of voter ID. Swindon The voter identification pilot scheme in Swindon required voters to produce their poll card in order to meet the requirement to vote. The poll card contained a QR code which was scanned in the polling station. If a voter did not bring their poll card they could show photo ID (from a specified list) or have their identity 'attested' by another elector (with ID) registered at the same polling station. Our evaluation of the scheme found that: The majority of voters were able to meet the identification requirements upon arriving at the polling station. However, some electors did not have the required ID available when they came to vote on 3 May. The majority later returned and were able to cast a vote. There is no evidence that the ID requirement deterred electors from voting. In our public opinion surveys no non-voter told us that ID was the reason they had not voted. Also, turnout at the 2018 polls was higher than the comparable elections in 2016. It is possible that some electors were deterred from voting, believing correctly or incorrectly that they did not have ID, but this seems unlikely to apply to significant numbers. We cannot draw firm conclusions about whether the ID requirement had a disproportionate impact on particular groups of people, for example those with a learning or physical disability. While we have seen no evidence that specific groups struggled with the ID requirement it is challenging to gather evidence in this area as relatively small groups of people could have been affected in different ways. The delivery of this pilot was manageable for the Returning Officer and their staff and, aside from the IT element, there is nothing in their experience of the pilot to suggest that Swindon would face significant issues with the administration of a similar ID requirement in the future. While the IT worked well on 3 May the development and set up was a significant demand on time and resource. Public attitudes to electoral fraud did not significantly change from before to after the pilot. The same proportion of people said they think electoral fraud is a problem in Swindon in May 2018 as did so in January 2018. Our findings suggest that the 2018 local elections in Swindon were not significantly affected by the voter ID pilot in either its impact on voters or on the administration of the poll. However, it is important to be cautious when drawing conclusions from this pilot about the impact of any wider application of voter ID. Watford The voter identification pilot scheme in Watford required voters to produce their poll card in order to meet the requirement to vote. The poll card contained a QR code which was scanned in the polling station. If a voter did not bring their poll card they could show photo ID (from a specified list) or a valid debit/credit card. Our evaluation of the scheme found that: The majority of voters were able to meet the identification requirements upon arriving at the polling station. However, some

electors did not have the required ID available when they came to vote on 3 May. The majority later returned and were able to cast a vote. There is no evidence that the ID requirement deterred electors from voting. In our public opinion survey no non-voter in Watford told us that ID was the reason they had not voted. 2018 turnout was higher than the comparable elections in 2016. It is possible that some electors were deterred from voting, believing correctly or incorrectly that they did not have ID, but this seems unlikely to apply to significant numbers. We cannot draw firm conclusions about whether the ID requirement had a disproportionate impact on particular groups of people, for example those with a learning or physical disability. While we have seen no evidence that specific groups struggled with the ID requirement it is challenging to gather evidence in this area as relatively small groups of people could have been affected in different ways. A disproportionate number of those unable to show ID on 3 May were from electoral wards with higher proportions of people with an Asian background. However, this does not mean that electors from the Asian community were more likely to be affected by the ID requirement. The delivery of this pilot was manageable for the Returning Officer and their staff and, aside from the IT element, there is nothing in their experience of the pilot to suggest that Watford would face significant issues with the administration of a similar ID requirement in the future. While the IT worked well on 3 May the development and set up was a significant demand on time and resource. Some public attitudes to electoral fraud improved from before to after the pilot. Fewer people said they thought electoral fraud was a problem in May 2018 than in January 2018. However, we cannot definitively link this change to the pilot. Our findings suggest that the 2018 local elections in Watford were not significantly affected by the voter ID pilot in either its impact on voters or on the administration of the poll. However, it is important to be cautious when drawing conclusions from this pilot about the impact of any wider application of voter ID. Woking The voter identification pilot scheme in Woking required voters to produce one form of photographic identification or a Local Elector Card in order to meet the requirements to vote. Our evaluation of the scheme found that: The majority of voters were able to meet the identification requirements upon arriving at the polling station. However, some electors did not have the required ID available when they came to vote on 3 May. The majority later returned and were able to cast a vote. There is no evidence that the ID requirement significantly deterred electors from voting. In our public opinion surveys one non-voter told us that ID was the reason they had not voted. Also, turnout at the 2018 polls was similar to the comparable elections in 2014. It is possible that some electors were deterred from voting, believing correctly or incorrectly that they did not have ID, but this seems unlikely to apply to significant numbers. We cannot draw firm conclusions about whether the ID requirement had a disproportionate impact on particular groups of people, for example those with a learning or physical disability. While we have seen no evidence that specific groups struggled with the ID requirement it is challenging to gather evidence in this area as relatively small groups of people could have been affected in different ways. The delivery of this pilot was manageable for the Returning Officer and their staff and there is nothing in their experience of the pilot to suggest that Woking would face significant issues with the administration of a similar ID requirement in the future. Some additional staffing and training were in place for the pilot. However the Returning Officer has indicated that the extra staff would not necessarily be required to deliver this type of ID requirement at future local elections. Some public attitudes to electoral fraud improved from before to after the pilot . Fewer

people said they felt electoral fraud is a problem in Woking in May 2018 than did so in January 2018. However, we cannot definitively link this change to the pilot. Our findings suggest that the 2018 local elections in Watford were not significantly affected by the voter ID pilot in either its impact on voters or on the administration of the poll. However, it is important to be cautious when drawing conclusions from this pilot about the impact of any wider application of voter ID. Postal and proxy voting pilot schemes At the May 2018 elections the Returning Officers (ROs) for Peterborough, Slough and Tower Hamlets ran pilot schemes focused on postal voting. The ROs sent information to postal voters about how to protect their vote. They then contacted a sample of postal voters, who had been sent postal voting packs, to check that they had applied for them. In Peterborough and Tower Hamlets, they also contacted a sample of postal voters, whose postal ballot had been returned, to check that they had completed and returned their own vote. Peterborough also ran a pilot scheme to require proxy voters at polling stations to show identification before issuing them with a ballot paper. Postal and proxy voting pilot schemes Impact of the pilot schemes The pilots were well delivered by the three ROs but we have not been able to draw firm conclusions on the impact of these pilot schemes. This was partly because in some cases there was no relevant data from before the pilots to compare against, and also because we were not able to tell what would have happened this year without the pilot schemes. Impact of the leaflet for postal voters There is no clear evidence about the impact of the leaflet for postal voters, although it is reasonable to conclude that well-designed and carefully worded information is likely to help encourage people to report evidence about electoral fraud. Impact of the follow-up contact with postal voters Postal voters welcomed the follow-up contact from the RO and the telephone activity was largely manageable with some additional staff. However, the household visit approach, as used in Peterborough, required more resources than the RO would normally be able to commit around a poll. There is no clear evidence about the impact on allegations of fraud and public confidence, although it may have provided reassurance to some voters. The follow-up contact provided the ROs with additional information about potential cases of electoral fraud. While they could use this information to raise specific concerns with the police, the activity did not directly lead to any allegations being referred to the police at these elections. Finally, the pilot allowed for the cancellation of postal votes where the elector said they did not want a postal vote or claimed that they had not completed a returned postal vote. The ROs did not need to make significant use of this power (one postal vote was cancelled for this reason in Peterborough) but it is logical that they should have this option available to them as part of any follow up activity with postal voters. Impact of the identification requirement for proxy voters The identification requirement for proxy voters was administratively manageable, and there is limited evidence of a negative impact on voters. Peterborough believe there may have been some effect in deterring fraudulent proxy activity as the number of proxies was notably lower than in recent polls. However, it is not possible to draw a clear conclusion from the information available. Impact on allegations of fraud We have looked at data from police forces about allegations of electoral fraud in these three areas. They received a very small number of allegations about postal voting at the May 2018 elections. We cannot draw any firm conclusions from this limited data, particularly because we cannot know what would have happened in these areas without the pilot scheme procedures. Related content Register to vote All you need to register to vote is 5 minutes and your National Insurance number. Our Commissioners Donations and loans Find out about

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