Report on the May 2022 local elections in England | Electoral Commission   Search
Report on the May 2022 local elections in England   You are in the England local
council elections section Home   England local council elections Currently reading: of
4 - Show page contents On this page Voting at the elections Campaigning at the
elections Delivering the elections Supporting evidence Summary This report looks at
how the May 2022 elections in England were run, how voters and campaigners found
taking part, and what lessons can be learned for the future. We have reported
separately on elections held in Northern Ireland , Scotland and Wales . On 5 May
elections took place in many areas of England, including in all London boroughs.
There were also six local mayoral elections and the South Yorkshire combined
authority mayoral election. Overall, people were confident that these elections were
well-run and were highly satisfied with the process of registering to vote and
voting. Turnout at these elections was broadly consistent with previous elections,
although it remains low. Almost everyone who voted was able to use their preferred
method and found it easy to fill in their ballot paper, but we continue to see a
small proportion of postal ballot packs rejected. s engaged with voters in a range of
ways ahead of the elections and felt able to get their views across effectively.
Voters generally found it easy to access information about the elections, but this
did not necessarily translate to them feeling well-informed about the elections and
who they could vote for. A notable proportion of candidates told us that they
experienced some form of abuse or intimidation. Robust debate is an essential feature
of election campaigns, but this must not lead to threats, abuse or intimidation that
discourage candidates from standing for election or campaigning. We will work with
the UK's governments and the wider electoral community to make sure we understand
what is driving candidate abuse and intimidation, and to ensure this issue is
addressed as a matter of urgency. The pattern of elections was less complex this year
than in May 2021, with fewer combinations of elections and unscheduled elections.
However, the resilience of electoral administration teams remains a concern, with
staffing and booking venues posing a significant challenge in some areas. The range
and scale of changes to be introduced by the Elections Act adds to this concern, with
some significant changes intended to be delivered for the first time in England at
the May 2023 local elections. Effective implementation will rely on the detailed
secondary legislation being in place in time to allow the necessary preparations to
be made. Voting at the elections The experience of voters at the May 2022 elections
Most people were confident that these elections were well-run and were highly
satisfied with the process of registering to vote, and 96% of voters were satisfied
with the process of voting. This is consistent with findings from recent elections.
Polling station voters felt confident that they could vote safely in person and
almost everyone who voted was able to use their preferred method and found it easy to
fill in their ballot paper. Almost everyone who voted by post said that they knew how
to complete and return their postal vote, and found the postal voting instructions
useful. However, we continue to see a small proportion of postal ballot packs
rejected. Overview On 5 May 2022, there were elections for local councillors in many
areas of England, including in all London boroughs. There was also a combined
authority mayoral election in South Yorkshire and six local authority mayoral
elections. A total of 22.4 million people across England were registered to vote in
these elections. Voters continue to have positive views about how elections are run
After each election we ask members of the public who were eligible to vote for their
views on voting and elections, which helps us understand if views have changed since
the last comparable set of elections. Satisfaction with the registration and voting

process remains high People continue to have high levels of satisfaction with the process of registering to vote and voting. Our research shows that: 79% of people in England were satisfied with the process of registering to vote. This is consistent with the levels of satisfaction reported by people after the most recent comparable elections held in 2018 96% of voters in England were satisfied with the process of voting. This is an increase from 2018 when 90% of people were satisfied older age groups are more likely to say that they are satisfied with the process of registering, while people who say that they have been 'limited a lot' by health or disability over the previous 12 months are slightly less likely to be satisfied with registering and with voting almost everyone (97%) who voted in person at a polling station felt safe voting with relevant Covid provisions in place. 1% said they felt fairly unsafe while the remaining 2% said they did not know Most people were confident that the elections were well-run More than seven-in-10 (73%) people said they were confident that the elections were well-run. Just under one-in-10 (9%) said they were not confident, and people who didn't vote were more likely to say they were not confident the elections were well-run than voters. When we asked people why they were not confident that the elections were well-run, the most commonly chosen reasons were: there wasn't enough information about the candidates (32%) there wasn't enough information about the elections (25%) I did not see any candidates campaigning / canvassing (25%) media / TV / press coverage was biased (23%) campaigning was based on incorrect information / made untrue claims (21%) Views about the safety of voting and whether electoral fraud is a problem were also consistent with the most recent comparable elections. In 2022, 81% of people in England said they thought voting was safe from fraud and abuse. When asked if they thought electoral fraud was a problem, 19% of people in England said that they thought it was. This is consistent with the 21% who saw it as a problem after the 2018 elections. Concerns were raised before the elections in some areas that voters' rights to a secret ballot could be compromised. It is vital that voters can cast their vote in secret, and anyone attempting to interfere with how a person votes is breaking the law. We work closely with the police and the electoral community to ensure the secrecy of the ballot. Our guidance for Returning Officers and polling station staff makes clear that voters must go to polling booths individually so that their right to a secret vote is protected. We also have a role in raising public awareness; ahead of every election, in partnership with Crimestoppers and the Cabinet Office, we run the 'Your Vote Is Yours Alone' campaign. This targets areas with historic concerns around electoral integrity to empower people to protect their vote and encourage them to report any concerns. In Tower Hamlets, where specific concerns had been expressed about the risk of electoral fraud, the Returning Officer and the police took a range of additional actions to help ensure the secrecy of the ballot at this year's polls. This included assigning an additional member of staff to each polling station to help direct voters individually to polling booths and police officers being on duty at polling stations throughout the day, so that anyone with concerns about intimidation or fraud was able to raise these with the police. We worked closely with them to provide guidance and advice. A range of communications were sent to voters and campaigners, highlighting that everyone must be able to vote in secret and free from intimidation and undue influence. At all polling stations there were prominent posters displayed both outside of polling stations and at the point of issue of ballot papers to reinforce the message that voters must enter the polling booth alone. On polling day, we visited a selection of polling stations and observed a small number of cases where someone tried to go with a voter into the polling booth. We also saw polling station

staff stopping this happening, so that voters could cast their vote in secret. An accredited observer organisation, Democracy Volunteers, has reported that their observers 'saw several challenges to the electoral process' and 'once again these focused around the challenge of family voting, where more than one person attempts to vote together in a polling booth, or affect, direct, or oversee the vote of another', concluding that family voting 'continues to be a challenge, despite the many actions taken by polling staff to attempt to prevent it at these elections.' 1 It is completely unacceptable for anyone's vote to be watched or pressured inside a polling station, but concerns remain in this area. We are committed to tackling any such influence, working in partnership with polling station staff and the police. We will continue to work with the electoral community to identify opportunities to enhance our guidance and training for polling station staff to reinforce the importance of secrecy and the actions that should be taken to address any issues that arise on polling day. Throughout the year, all police forces across the UK send us data about allegations of electoral fraud that they receive and investigate. We will publish the full data in the spring, including the number, type, and outcome of any allegations relating to the May 2022 elections. Turnout at these elections was consistent with previous comparable elections Turnout at these elections (33.6%) was broadly consistent with previous comparable elections, although it remains low compared with some other types of elections. Overall, estimated turnout decreased by one percentage point compared to the last time there were comparable elections for district, metropolitan, unitary councils and London boroughs in 2018. There was a larger decline in turnout in elections in London, with a decrease of 3.4 percentage points. The most common reasons given by people who told us that they didn't vote were: lack of time / too busy / I was busy at work (18%) I'm just not interested in politics / fed up with politics (11%) there was no point in voting because it was obvious who would win / my vote wouldn't have made a difference to the outcome / my vote doesn't count (9%) I was away on 5 May / voting day (8%) I didn't like the candidates / parties / they didn't represent my views (7%) People were confident that they could vote using their preferred method In England, people can choose to vote in one of three ways: they can vote in person at their polling station, by post, or by proxy (asking someone they trust to vote on their behalf). If their situation changes close to an election due to work or disability, people can appoint an emergency proxy up to 5pm on polling day. Ahead of the 2021 elections, the law was changed so that anyone who had to self-isolate close to polling day because they had tested positive for Covid, or had been in close contact to someone who had tested positive, could also appoint an emergency proxy. This change remained in place for the 2022 elections in England. People knew that other options were available if they didn't want to vote in a polling station Most people said that they found it easy to find information on how to vote either in person at a polling station or remotely by post or proxy. Our research showed that: 73% of people said they found it easy to get information about the different methods of voting they could choose from 82% of people who voted in a polling station and 84% of people who voted by post said they found it easy to get information about different methods of voting 10% of postal voters told us that these elections were the first time they had voted by post. The most common reasons for choosing to do so were convenience and being too busy to go to the polling station, with most finding it easy to understand how to apply for their postal vote Voting using their preferred method was possible for most voters The majority of people (80.4%) were eligible to vote in person, while 19.5% were sent a postal vote and 0.1% (20,191) appointed a proxy, of which 1,417 were an emergency proxy. This represents a

slight increase in the number choosing a postal vote compared to the last time these elections took place in 2018, but is similar to the proportion who did so at the elections in 2021. Most people who voted were able to use their preferred method: 95% of voters said they were able to use their preferred method of voting, compared to 4% who said they were not voters aged under 34 were slightly less likely than other age groups to have used their preferred method to vote, while voters identifying as Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic were less likely than white voters to have voted using their preferred method Most people were confident they knew how to vote without making a mistake Nearly all voters said that they found it easy to fill in their ballot paper or to complete their postal vote, but some votes continue to be rejected and not included in the count. Most voters found filling in the ballot paper very easy Nearly all voters (97%) said that it was easy to fill in their ballot paper, with three-quarters (76%) saying they found it very easy. Only 1% of voters said that they found it difficult. Data from electoral administrators shows that 0.5% of all ballot papers (approximately 39,500) were rejected and not included in the count. The most common reason for ballot papers to be rejected was because they were unmarked, with this accounting for almost three-quarters (72%) of all rejected ballot papers. Most people who voted by post were confident they knew how to vote without making a mistake Almost everyone who voted by post said that they knew how to complete and return their postal vote and found the postal voting instructions useful. Our research showed that: 96% said that they found useful the written instructions included with their postal vote on how to vote and return the vote 96% said it was easy to complete and return their postal vote, compared to 4% who said it was difficult Data from electoral administrators shows that, in the metropolitan, London borough, unitary and district elections, 2.8% of returned postal votes (approximately 80,000 votes in total) were rejected and were not able to be included in the count. The most common reason for postal votes being rejected was that the personal identifiers (their signature and/or date of birth) that voters provided on the postal voting statement did not match those that they had previously provided to the Electoral Registration Officer. This is the same as the last time these elections took place. Other reasons for postal votes being rejected included where voters did not provide either or both of their personal identifiers, or where the ballot paper or postal voting statement was missing. The Elections Act includes a new requirement for voters to reapply for a postal vote every three years. This may help to ensure that voters' personal identifiers are up-to-date and accurate, and we will monitor whether this change has an impact on the number of rejected postal votes at future elections. We will also continue to explore ways of improving the electoral system to better meet voters' needs. As part of this, we will consider evidence about whether changes to postal voting documents or processes could help to reduce the number of postal ballot packs that are rejected at future elections. Campaigning at the elections The experience of campaigning at the May 2022 elections s felt that they were able to get their views across to voters, using a range of face-to-face, online and printed campaign methods. Traditional campaigning methods (leafletting and canvassing) were the most popular. A notable proportion of candidates responding to our survey said that they experienced some form of abuse or intimidation. In most cases this involved verbal or online abuse, and the majority of instances came from members of the public. We will work with the UK's governments and the wider electoral community to make sure we understand what is driving candidate abuse and intimidation, and to ensure this issue is addressed as a matter of urgency. Although voters generally found it easy to access information about the elections, this did

not necessarily translate to them feeling well-informed about the elections and who they could vote for. A perceived lack of information also affected people's confidence that these elections were well-run. Transparency about who is responsible for political campaign activity online remains important for voters. New transparency requirements are expected to come into force for UK Parliament and local elections from the end of 2023. Campaigning at the elections overview More than 15,000 candidates stood for election to local authorities on 5 May 2022. Three quarters of those candidates stood for either the Conservative, Labour or Liberal Democrat parties, and 15% stood for the Green Party. Candidates standing for other parties represented 7% of the total. A further 3% of candidates were independents who did not stand for any political party. A total of 37 candidates stood for election as directly-elected mayors across the six local authorities where those positions were also contested. There were six candidates for the South Yorkshire combined authority mayoral election. 2 s were able to engage with voters but some raised concerns about intimidation s engaged with voters in a range of ways ahead of the elections and the majority felt able to get their views across effectively. Our research does, however, find that some campaigners raised concerns about intimidation. s used a variety of methods to communicate with voters At the 2022 elections, people continued to receive information about candidates and parties from a range of different sources, and in a variety of formats. The most common ways people reported seeing information on parties and candidates were: leaflet or flyer, either from a candidate / political party (49%) or another source (23%) word of mouth / mentioned by friends / family / carer (12%) social media (generic posts or adverts which did not seem targeted) (10%) newspapers (10%) posters or billboards (10%) I talked to a candidate / candidates directly (10%) Older age groups (65+) were more likely than the youngest age group (18 to 24) to say that they had seen a leaflet or flyer from a candidate or political party, and to say that they had spoken to a candidate or political party. Younger age groups were more likely to mention seeing information on social media. Findings from our survey of candidates were consistent with what voters reported, with traditional campaigning methods (leafletting and canvassing) being the most popular, specifically: over half of the candidates (51%) told us that their most used campaigning method was leaflets, newsletters or flyers, with 90% of candidates saying this was one of their top three campaigning methods door-to-door canvassing was second most popular, with three-quarters (76%) listing it in their top three methods Social media was the most popular digital campaigning tool, compared with targeted emails, website or in-app advertising or other types of digital campaigning. Around a third (35%) of candidates said social media was their third most used campaigning method, although it was primarily used to support more traditional campaigning methods. Free methods of digital campaigning were more popular than paid-for tools with candidates who responded to our survey. We found that: just under two-thirds of candidates (64%) said they posted on social media about their campaign a third (33%) said they asked supporters to share their posts almost a third (31%) said they emailed their supporters only 16% of respondents said that they paid for adverts on social media Most candidates did not experience problems campaigning, but some raised concerns about abuse and intimidation Just under three-quarters of candidates (74%) responding to our survey said that they felt able to get their views across to voters effectively. While not directly comparable, due to the different elections taking place and the sample not being representative of all candidates who stood at the elections, this is an improvement on 2021 when fewer than half of respondents to the survey said this. Due to the improved public health situation, official restrictions

on campaign activities were no longer in place, but Covid did continue to affect campaigners. Three-quarters (76%) of candidates who responded to our survey said that Covid affected at least one aspect of their campaign, with a quarter (26%) of respondents saying that it impacted a lot on their ability to enlist volunteers and get assistance with campaigning. When asked about whether they had experienced some kind of problem with threats, abuse or intimidation, more than half of the candidates (60%) told us that they did not have a problem at all. Our research with candidates did highlight some significant concerns about abuse towards campaigners, specifically: two-fifths of respondents (40%) said they experienced some kind of problem, rating this as a 2 or above on a scale from 1 to 5 just under one in 10 (8%) reported having a serious problem (rated 4 or 5 out of 5) nearly a fifth (18%) witnessed threats, abuse or intimidation towards those campaigning on their behalf of those that said they experienced some kind of abuse, the most common sources were verbal (62%) and online (52%), and most reported receiving it from members of the public (71%) one in 10 (10%) of those who said that they experienced threats or abuse told us that these would discourage them from standing as a candidate again in the future Evidence collected by the Local Government Association has also highlighted the democratic impacts of abuse and intimidation, including the impact on local councillors and candidates' willingness to stand for election. 3 This research also found that there is a growing feeling that abuse and intimidation, particularly online, are becoming normalised. The Elections Act 2022 introduces a new electoral sanction for those found guilty of intimidating candidates, campaigners and elected representatives. Banning someone from standing for elected office, as well as imposing criminal sanctions, such as a prison sentence or fine, will strengthen the deterrent against this intimidating behaviour. Robust debate is an essential feature of election campaigns, but this must not lead to threats, abuse or intimidation that discourage candidates from standing for election or campaigning. Recommendation 1: Urgent action needed to prevent abuse and intimidation Recommendation 1: Urgent action needed to prevent abuse and intimidation Urgent action is needed to tackle and prevent abuse and intimidation of candidates and campaigners at elections. Candidates and campaigners should be able to participate freely in the democratic process, ensuring that voters can hear from a range of voices during elections. Tackling these problems will require coordinated action from a range of partners, including central and local government, police forces, social media companies and political parties and campaigners themselves. We will work with the UK's governments and the wider electoral community to understand what is driving abuse and intimidation and to develop effective responses to protect candidates and campaigners at future elections. People want more information about candidates and campaign material Many voters found it easy to find information about these elections, but this did not necessarily mean that they felt they had enough information. Our research also confirmed that people continue to value transparency about who is responsible for political campaign activity online at elections. Most people find it easy to get information but some do not feel well-informed about candidates Our research after the election found that: just under two-thirds of people (64%) said that they found it easy to find information on what the election was about / for a similar proportion (61%) felt that they found it easy to find information on the candidates and parties running for election Although the majority of people asked said they found it easy to find information, this did not necessarily mean that they felt they had enough information. Our research found that: four in 10 (42%) people agreed that that they had enough information on candidates to make an informed choice, but almost a third

(32%) disagreed younger age groups (18-34) were less likely to agree they had enough information to make an informed decision compared to older age groups (65+) non-voters were more likely to say they did not have enough information to make an informed decision, with 46% of non-voters disagreeing that they had enough information, compared to 26% of voters four in 10 (43%) felt they knew what the local elections were about, but three in ten (30%) did not agree There is also evidence that a perceived lack of information affected people's confidence that these elections were well-run. Our research found that many of those who were not confident the elections were well-run said this was because there wasn't enough information about the candidates (mentioned by 32% of people who were not confident) or about the elections more generally (mentioned by 25%). Transparency about who is producing election campaign material is important to build trust Our research after the elections confirmed that people continue to value transparency about who is responsible for political campaign activity online at elections. We found: two-thirds of people (64%) agreed that it is important for them to know who has produced the political information they see online half (51%) said they would trust digital campaigning material more if they knew who produced it one-in-three (31%) said that they cannot find out who has produced the political information that they see online The UK Government has introduced legislation that will require most campaigners to include information to identify who has promoted or published their online campaign material in future. This new digital imprint requirement will help voters understand who is targeting them online with information at elections and referendums in future. These changes are expected to come into force from the end of 2023. We will monitor any impact of the new digital imprint requirement on people's levels of confidence in political information online. Candidates were able to access strengthened support to understand and comply with election law We increased the opportunities for candidates and parties to access our support to understand and comply with political finance law both before and after the elections. We continue to recommend that candidate nomination requirements should be proportionate to reduce barriers to standing for election. Increasing opportunities for supporting candidates and parties We provide guidance to candidates and agents to help them understand their obligations under political finance laws and campaign with confidence. As part of our commitment to delivering more proactive support for candidates and parties and ensuring those taking part in elections have the right information, we held pre-election webinars to explain the law. The event for candidates and agents in England was attended by 160 people and the feedback was positive, and we received a number of requests for webinars to be held more regularly. We also held virtual advice surgeries that allowed candidates and agents to book an appointment to speak to one of our expert advisers and discuss specific issues around the spending and donation law. Due to the take up and demand, particularly from new and independent candidates, we offered further advice surgeries after the elections and in advance of the reporting deadlines, to provide support with spending returns. Our approach has been informed and led by the evidence and feedback we received in our most recent survey of the regulated community. We will continue to focus on delivering more bespoke advice and guidance resources so that parties and campaigners can easily understand the political finance law, regardless of their size or experience. Candidate nomination requirements should be proportionate To minimise the travel and personal contact involved in completing nomination forms during the Covid pandemic, the Government legislated to reduce the number of subscribers required by candidates to stand in elections in England in 2021. This change did not remain in place for the May 2022

elections. Our survey of candidates at these elections found that most thought the nomination process was clear and well run, with 84% of respondents agreeing that it was easy to get the number of signatures required to secure their nomination. Despite this, some respondents questioned the purpose of having this requirement at all. "Having to collect 10 signatures seems pretty pointless, it's high enough to be a task that takes time but not high enough to be a barrier to anyone standing (and I don't want any for local elections!)." "I suffer with disabilities meaning that going outside and getting 10 signatures was hard to do. We only needed 2 signatures last time, however, this has gone back up to 10. My agent had to collect the signatures instead. This was a barrier for me as a disabled person wanting to run for council." Recommendation 2: Review subscriber requirements for nominating candidates Recommendation 2: Review subscriber requirements for nominating candidates We continue to recommend that the Government should review whether the range of current subscriber requirements are proportionate for different elected offices, taking into account evidence from this year's elections and conclusions from our Standing for Election review in 2015 . This would help to ensure candidates do not face unnecessary barriers to standing for election, giving voters a more diverse range of views to choose from. We are aware the Government intends to introduce legislation to reduce subscriber requirements for local elections ahead of the next scheduled elections in May 2023. Delivering the elections The experience of electoral administration at the May 2022 elections The pattern of elections was less complex this year than in May 2021, with electoral administrators facing fewer combinations of elections and unscheduled elections. Our evidence indicates that these elections were relatively more straightforward to manage, with fewer issues emerging. However, the resilience of electoral administration teams remains a concern, with staffing and booking venues posing a significant challenge in some areas. Early clarity on legislative changes remains essential to allow Returning Officers and their teams sufficient time to plan for elections. The Elections Act makes a range of significant changes to how elections are run, and effective implementation will rely on the detailed secondary legislation being in place in time to allow the necessary preparations to be made. We continue to recommend that legislation is clear six months before it is required to be implemented or complied with by Electoral Registration Officers or Returning Officers. Delivering the elections overview Elections took place in 165 local authorities in England with local elections to district council, metropolitan borough and unitary authorities as well as all 32 London boroughs. There were also six local mayoral elections. The South Yorkshire combined authority mayoral election covered four local authority areas, including two which would not otherwise have had elections. Elections were also held in over 1,000 town and parish councils. There were 167 local authorities that did not have elections this year and, compared to 2019 and 2021, the pattern of elections in England this year was less complex, with fewer combinations of elections and unscheduled elections taking place. Local authority elections teams were responsible for delivering electoral registration, nominations, absent voting, polling stations and the counting of votes for the elections. Our evidence shows that these elections were well-run, and voters and campaigners reported high levels of confidence. However, underlying concerns relating to capacity and resilience remain, and there were a small number of issues that had an impact in some areas. The capacity and resilience of electoral administration teams remains a significant challenge We received feedback from around a quarter of local authorities after the elections. This relatively low response rate combined with the comments received from electoral

administrators suggests that, in comparison with last year, these elections were more straightforward to manage. But the feedback also shows that elections teams still struggled to recruit staff and find suitable venues for polling stations and the count. Reduced complexity helped administrators to run the elections effectively Alongside the continued effort and commitment of Returning Officers and electoral administrators, the less complex pattern of elections in England this year, with fewer combined polls, appears to have supported the delivery of well-run elections. There were a small number of minor errors with printed materials, but Returning Officers and their teams worked quickly to mitigate these and we will support them in learning any lessons for future polls. However, in one area there was a more significant issue at the count which had the potential to reduce the confidence of candidates, agents and voters in the count process and therefore the result. In the elections to Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council, a significant number of postal votes were not included in the final result for one ward, which has led us to conclude that the Returning Officer did not meet elements of the performance standards. The issue had no impact on the overall result. The Returning Officer has since commissioned an independent report on the conduct of the election by the Association of s, to help ensure lessons can be learned ahead of future polls. We are also continuing to work with the Returning Officer to support them as they review their election processes. Despite this broadly positive picture, the capacity and resilience of the electoral system remains a concern. The range and scale of changes to be introduced by the Elections Act adds to this concern, with some significant changes intended to be delivered for the first time in England at the May 2023 local elections. We have previously highlighted concerns about the resilience and capacity of electoral administration structures in the UK, which are not helped by the challenges of delivering elections within an outdated and increasingly complex electoral law framework. We will continue to work in partnership with the electoral community, the UK Government and local authorities to develop and deliver proposals to support resilient electoral services. Alongside this, we continue to call on the Government to set out how it will simplify and modernise election law, building on the comprehensive and well-supported recommendations of the UK's Law Commissions. Some Returning Officers struggled to find enough staff to work on polling day and at the count Recruiting staff to work at the elections remained a problem. This was highlighted by many of the electoral administrators responding to our survey. Administrators highlighted problems around finding experienced polling station staff and a high number of recruits dropping out ahead of polling day. While Covid had less of an impact on the administration of elections this year than last, it still remained a factor, despite many of the restrictions required in 2021 being removed. "We had significant numbers of staff not taking up their positions again and this seems to be an increasing problem. We were lucky in that our neighbouring authority did not have elections and loaned us a number of staff. If they had also had elections we'd have been struggling to fill vacancies. We appointed many more Presiding Officers who had had no experience of working in a polling station than we are usually comfortable with" "Staffing was a big issue this year as we are still feeling the effects of the pandemic. A lot of our staff were taking holidays, had hospital appointments etc. that had previously been postponed. We also had around 30 polling station staff that had tested positive the week of the election and so had to pull out" "The delivery of this election was challenging even though Covid restrictions had been removed, with our main issue this year relating to staffing which is expected to present ongoing challenges in future with Elections Act

requirements for example staff additional responsibilities and more staff required to work in polling stations" The scale and pattern of elections taking place this year meant that some electoral administration teams could call on neighbouring local authorities for support. But this is not a sustainable long-term solution, particularly at future England-wide or UK-wide elections. The changes being introduced by the Elections Act have the potential to increase the challenge of recruiting and retaining skilled and trained polling station staff for future elections. This is due to the additional responsibilities that poll clerks and Presiding Officers will need to deliver, such as checking the identification of voters. We have formed a sub-group of the Electoral Coordination and Advisory Board (ECAB) to discuss and identify solutions to the staffing, resilience and capacity challenges experienced by Returning Officers, Electoral Registration Officers and their teams. An immediate area of focus for the sub-group will be on addressing the challenges of recruitment of polling station staff. Fewer suitable venues were available for polling stations and the count Booking venues for polling stations and the count is another aspect of managing the elections that administrators highlighted as a continuing challenge. In part, this appears to be an ongoing impact of Covid, as some venues have permanently closed while others have increased hire fees. Comments suggest that the problem of securing appropriate venues is also exacerbated by difficulties with booking school buildings. "Schools are continually a problem, with school administrators fighting to not be used as polling stations. Some schools/headteachers are now being deliberately difficult and uncooperative in an attempt to force the Returning Officer away. Where we have to as a result move to either another building or a temporary mobile station, this is at significantly greater cost to the authority." The ability for administrators to be able to access suitable venues is key to ensuring the smooth delivery of the elections and a positive experience for all voters. The changes being introduced by the Elections Act will place additional demands on electoral administrators, as they will have to make sure polling station venues can be made suitable for disabled voters to support them to vote independently and in secret, as well as having space to allow voters to show their ID in private where required. We will continue to work closely with ECAB to explore options for addressing the challenges of finding suitable venues for polling stations and the count. "We are dealing with an ever-decreasing pool of available polling venues. Schools are down to the minimum and churches and other venues are either closing or becoming too expensive. The number of temporary buildings is likely to increase which is a concern in the light of the additional processes required at polling stations under the Elections Act." Early clarity on legislation is essential to support effective planning Early confirmation of legislative changes allowed Returning Officers to plan with certainty for the elections this year. The Elections Act makes a range of significant changes to how elections are run, and effective implementation will rely on the detailed secondary legislation being in place in time to allow the necessary preparations to be made. Legislative changes were made clear in good time to give Returning Officers the certainty they needed In 2021, owing to the uncertainty created by the public health situation, changes were made to nomination processes and emergency proxy rules shortly before the elections. This created additional challenges and risks to the delivery of those elections. In comparison to last year, feedback from administrators about changes to legislation was more positive. Confirmation of the changes to nomination processes and the extension of changes to the emergency proxy vote rules were communicated in good time. "The confirmation that Covid emergency proxy voting arrangements [were] to be

extended for 5th May was received in good time." "[…] Reversion to 10 signatures on nomination papers and continuation of Covid emergency proxies was communicated in good time. […]" We continue to recommend that the UK Government ensure that legislative changes are clear six months before they are required to be implemented or complied with by Electoral Registration Officers or Returning Officers in order to enable them to plan effectively. This is especially important given the range and scale of changes to be introduced by the Elections Act. Returning Officers need early clarity to be able to deliver significant changes introduced by the Elections Act Significant new policies from the Elections Act are expected to be delivered for the first time at next year's local elections in England, including introducing a requirement for voters to show identification before they can vote at polling stations. These will present new challenges for voters, campaigners and electoral administrators in England. There have been significant delays in the development and delivery of the secondary legislation that will set out the detail of how these changes will operate. Both the Commission and the wider electoral community need to undertake preparatory activity, which cannot be done without this detail. We are committed to supporting the effective implementation of voter ID and the other changes introduced by the Elections Act, but it remains vital that they are delivered in a way which ensures accessibility, security and workability. We know that electoral administrators are concerned about the short time now available before the new provisions are due to come into effect – whether they have scheduled polls in May 2023 or not – and that they will need to start taking steps soon to get ready for them. Given these delays, we are concerned about whether the voter ID requirement can be delivered in a way which is secure, accessible and workable, ahead of the next scheduled elections in May 2023 as planned. We are continuing to develop our plans for how we will support electoral administrators to prepare for and deliver the changes. We published some initial planning guidance in August to highlight key areas of planning that electoral administrators can take forward now, even in the absence of the detail on how the provisions will work. This guidance is based on our current knowledge of UK Government implementation plans. Recommendation 3: Ensure that the electoral community have sufficient clarity and funding to effectively prepare for Elections Act changes Recommendation 3: Ensure that the electoral community have sufficient clarity and funding to effectively prepare for Elections Act changes Electoral administrators need clarity and certainty in order to plan and prepare to deliver well-run elections in advance of the important polls that are scheduled to take place during the next two to three years. The UK Government should work with the electoral community to ensure they have clear and accurate information about how and when changes in the Elections Act are going to be implemented. This includes ensuring legislation is clear at least six months before any new changes are due to be implemented, so that Returning Officers, Electoral Registration Officers and electoral administrators have enough time to prepare. The UK Government should also ensure that the changes in the Elections Act are supported with the necessary funding required for the electoral community to be able to continue to deliver well-run elections. Supporting evidence England local elections May 2022 Public opinion research tables 2022 England Electoral data 1. Democracy Volunteers (2022), Final Report – UK Local and Assembly Elections 2022 (https://democracyvolunteers.org/uk-2022-final/) ■ Back to content at footnote 1 2. Democracy Club (2022), Local Elections Briefing (https://drive.google.com/file/d/1FsXy8IqwO7uWaRC8g-WAgiKpBDb9BMGK/view); House of Commons Library (2022), Local Elections 2022: Results and analysis

(https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-9545/CBP-9545.pdf) ■ Back to content at footnote 2 3. Local Government Association (2022), Debate Not Hate: The impact of abuse on local democracy (https://www.local.gov.uk/publications/debate-not-hate-impact-abuse-local-democracy) ■ Back to content at footnote 3 Page history First published: 21 September 2022 Last updated: 21 September 2022 Related content Report on the May 2022 Northern Ireland Assembly election Read our report on the May 2022 Northern Ireland Assembly election Report on the May 2022 Scottish council elections Read our report on the May 2022 Scottish council elections. Report on the May 2022 elections in Wales Read our report on the May 2022 elections in Wales. Looking back at the May 2022 elections Read our latest blog post on looking back at the May 2022 elections.