

## SERVICE UPDATE

<b><u>Name of Function:</u></b>	Commissioning
<b><u>Date:</u></b>	14 February 2024
<b><u>Title of Update:</u></b>	Preparation for the implementation of Photographic Voter ID at UK Parliamentary Elections
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### **UPDATE:**

#### **Background**

The Elections Act 2022 introduced several changes to the conduct of UK elections and these include the requirement for voters to show photographic identification (photo ID) before being issued with a ballot paper at a polling station. In Scotland the provisions of the Act apply only to UK Parliamentary by-elections, UK Parliamentary general elections and to UK Parliamentary recall petitions.

The requirement to use photo ID has now been in place for a number of polls. These include local council elections in parts of England on 4<sup>th</sup> May 2023 and in Scotland, the recall petition and subsequent by-election for the UK Parliamentary by-election in the Rutherglen and Hamilton West constituency.

#### **Photo ID Requirements**

There is a defined list of acceptable types of photo ID. The voter only needs to show one form of acceptable Photo ID in order to vote. It needs to be the original version and not a photocopy.

Acceptable forms of Voter ID can still be used to vote if they are out of date. The photograph needs to look like the voter and the name on the ID needs to be the same name by which the voter is on the electoral register.

A voter without an acceptable form of Photo ID can apply for a Voter Authority Certificate (VAC) from the Electoral Registration Officer free of charge. Applications can be made online and by post. Whilst applications for VAC's can be made at any time, the deadline for a particular election is 5pm, 6 working days before polling day.

If a voter arrives at a polling station without an acceptable form of Photo ID, they will be asked to return with ID that is accepted.

## **Electoral Commission Reporting on the Local Elections in England in May 2023**

Reporting on the local elections in England in May 2023, the Electoral Commission's interim findings were that awareness of the need to bring ID was high; that only 0.25% of voters did not vote because of the ID requirement; and that around 4% of non-voters said they did not vote because of the ID requirement. However, there were concerns expressed about the completeness of the data being collected.

In its later statutory report, the Commission confirmed its interim findings that most people who wanted to vote were able to do so, but some found it harder than others to show accepted voter ID, including disabled people, younger voters, people from ethnic minority communities, and the unemployed.

Turnout at these elections was slightly lower than at recent comparable polls. Turnout was 32.0%, which was slightly lower than at the last comparable set of elections in 2019, when it was 32.5%.

The most common reasons given by people who told researchers that they did not vote were:

- a lack of time or being too busy at work (mentioned by 15% of non-voters)
- a lack of interest in, or being fed up with, politics (13%)
- medical reasons unrelated to Covid (8%)
- being away on polling day (8%)

Although it was not one of the most common reasons given, 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.

The Electoral Commission conducted a public awareness campaign in England from January to May 2023, in order to raise awareness of the need to show photo ID and the availability of free voter ID (the Voter Authority Certificate) for those who have no other form of accepted photo ID. The Electoral Commission reported that awareness of the need to bring voter ID increased from 23% in December 2022 to 92% in May 2023 following the elections. The Electoral Commission are planning to repeat that campaign in Scotland ahead of any UK Parliamentary election.

## **Findings of the House of Lords Constitution Committee's inquiry into the introduction of Voter ID**

The House of Lords Select Committee on the Constitution conducted a preliminary enquiry into Voter ID and published their conclusions in December 2023.

Their conclusions focussed upon areas they considered could be improved so as to minimise any negative effects on the ability of people to cast their votes. These included the impact of Voter ID on particular demographic groups, the potential impact on turnout at the next general election and the additional burdens placed on electoral administrators.

The Committee noted that research consistently suggests that people from particular demographic groups are disproportionately negatively affected by the Voter ID requirement in comparison to the overall electorate. In response to this, it recommended fully funded, local, tailored engagement campaigns that highlight the Voter ID requirement and the availability of the Voter Authority Certificate. In addition, it stated that national campaigns to raise awareness of the Voter ID requirement should continue until the requirement becomes 'business as usual'.

The Committee noted that according to the Government, approximately 4 per cent of people currently eligible to vote do not own a form of ID included on the list of acceptable forms of Voter ID. It stated that Electoral Commission research has indicated that those renting from a social landlord, the unemployed, lower social grades, the over-85s and disabled people were less likely to have one of the accepted forms of ID. The research found that people with disabilities such as visual impairment or learning disabilities, Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities, people living in refuges, people experiencing homelessness and the trans community had "multiple and compounding barriers" to engaging with the voter ID policy, including lower levels of ownership of ID.

The Committee recommended that the Government consider adding to the list of acceptable forms of ID and invest in publicity campaigns aimed at the population who do not currently have an accepted form of ID in order to publicise the availability of the Voter Authority Certificate.

The Committee noted that the electoral sector currently operates under a concerning degree of strain and that this has been exacerbated by the introduction of Voter ID and other policies. It recommended that the Government explore means by which it can assist Returning Officers in running elections.

### **Implementation of Voter ID by the Returning Officer for Aberdeen North and Aberdeen South**

The date of the next general election is unknown and can be called with 25 working days' notice. The latest it can take place is 28 January 2025.

The Elections Team will continue to work closely with the Electoral Registration Officer in order to plan for the successful implementation of Voter ID.

There are a number of practical arrangements within polling stations that Returning Officers must make in order to facilitate the implementation of the new Photo ID requirements. The voter can request that their ID be checked by a female member of staff and this should be granted if it is possible. Facilities should be available to view Photo ID in private if the voter wishes it. This can be done by using either a private area or some type of privacy screen. Mirrors should be available within the polling station to assist voters in replacing face coverings if these have been removed in order to check Photo ID. Polling staff are required to collect a number of data items relating to the implementation of Photo ID throughout polling day.

It is clear from the findings of the Electoral Commission and the House of Lords Constitution Committee that a targeted Communications Strategy is going to be of vital importance in raising awareness of the new Photo ID requirements.

The Elections Team will continue to work with Electoral Registration and Communications colleagues in planning and implementing a Communication Plan for the introduction of Voter ID. The aim will be to increase awareness of the new requirements and in particular to reach those demographic groups identified by the Electoral Commission and the House of Lords Constitution Committee as being at risk of being disproportionately negatively affected. This work will be designed to support the national publicity campaign being organised by the Electoral Commission.

## **Background Reading**

The Elections Act

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2022/37/contents/enacted>

Voter ID Regulations

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2022/1382/contents/made>

Electoral Commission Report June 2023: Voter ID at the May 2023 local elections in

England: interim analysis

<https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/research-reports-and-data/our-reports-and-data-past-elections-and-referendums/voter-id-may-2023-local-elections-england-interim-analysis>

Electoral Commission Final Report on the May 2023 local elections in England published 13 September 2023

<https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/research-reports-and-data/our-reports-and-data-past-elections-and-referendums/report-may-2023-local-elections-england>

The Electoral Commission, Voter ID Guidance

<https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/voting-and-elections/voter-id>

The Electoral Commission, Acceptable forms of Photo ID

<https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/voting-and-elections/voter-id/accepted-forms-photo-id>

UK Government, Voter Identification FAQ's

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/voter-identification-faqs>

Please note that the Voter ID Public Awareness and Communications Plan is a fluid document which will be added to and further developed in the lead up to the UK Parliamentary General Election.

## Voter ID Public Awareness and Communications Plan

Phase	Phase 1- Early Awareness	Phase 2 – February onwards	Phase 3 – Register to vote	Phase 4 – Remember to vote and Voter ID
Timescale adjustable depending on election announcement	Autumn 2023-February 2024	TBC	TBC	TBC
Aberdeen City Council activity	<p>Social media posts on Voter ID scheduled throughout November and December using Electoral Commission materials.</p> <p>Voter Week social media posts scheduled w/c 22/01/24 and w/c 29/01/24.</p> <p>Voter Week participation materials sent to all Aberdeen schools.</p>	<p>E-mail: key messages emailed via Gov.notify to all tenants for whom we have email addresses.</p> <p>Social media / Digital: the intranet; ACC website/online newsroom; ACC social media channels; all social media posts will be assigned #aberdeenelectionoffice.</p> <p>This will include repeated boosted Facebook postings aimed at target audiences.</p> <p>Briefing sheets / email cascade (key messages to</p>	<p>E-mail: key messages emailed via Gov.notify to all tenants for whom we have email addresses.</p> <p>Media: proactive press releases to reach those residents who don't use social media, reactive statements, emphasising key messages.</p> <p>Social media / Digital: the intranet; ACC website/online newsroom; ACC social media channels; all social media posts will be assigned #aberdeenelectionoffice.</p>	<p>E-mail: key messages emailed via Gov.notify to all tenants for whom we have email addresses.</p> <p>Media: proactive press releases to reach those residents who don't use social media, reactive statements, emphasising key messages.</p> <p>Social media / Digital: the intranet; ACC website/online newsroom; ACC social media channels; all social media posts will be assigned #aberdeenelectionoffice.</p>

		<p>be used as basis for content) and cascaded to carers, staff and target groups by the individual and partners above.</p> <p>Use Electoral Commission resources.</p>	<p>This will include repeated boosted Facebook postings aimed at target audiences.</p> <p>Use Electoral Commission resources.</p>	<p>This will include repeated boosted Facebook postings aimed at target audiences.</p> <p>Use Electoral Commission resources.</p>
Electoral Registration Officer activity	TBC	TBC	TBC	TBC
Stakeholder / partner activity		<p>Council social media messaging will also be amplified by partner individuals and groups including Rachel Harrison and Baldeep McGarry in Early Intervention and Community Empowerment, Amanda Farquhar, Traveller Liaison, Katharine Paton, Service Manager, Adult Learning Disabilities, Aberdeen Health and Social Care Partnership, Four Pillars (LGBT+), Progress in Dialogue (Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities), Andy Miller, Scottish</p>	<p>Council social media messaging will also be amplified by partner individuals and groups.</p> <p>Briefing sheets / email cascade (key messages to be used as basis for content) and cascaded to carers, staff and target groups by the individual and partners.</p>	<p>Council social media messaging will also be amplified by partner individuals and groups.</p> <p>Briefing sheets / email cascade (key messages to be used as basis for content) and cascaded to carers, staff and target groups by the individual and partners.</p>

		<p>Commission for Social Disability, ACVO, ENABLE (charity working with people with learning disabilities).</p> <p>Briefing sheets / email cascade (key messages to be used as basis for content) and cascaded to carers, staff and target groups by the individual and partners above</p>		
Electoral Commission activity	National Voter ID Campaign	National Voter ID Campaign	National register to vote campaign	National remember to vote + voter ID campaign
Other	TBC	TBC	TBC	TBC