



**COUNCIL**

**19 OCTOBER 2022**

**SUPPLEMENTARY AGENDA 1**

**PART I**

**7. QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC**

Answers to the questions submitted by the members of the public are attached.

Pages 5 - 8

**11. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS TO COMMITTEE CHAIRS / PORTFOLIO HOLDERS**

Answers to questions submitted by members to Committee Chairs / Portfolio Holders are attached.

Pages 9 - 14

**13. ELECTIONS ACT 2022**

To update Members on the progress of the Elections Act 2022, that received Royal Assent on 28 April 2022.

Report attached – Pages 15 - 24

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**COUNCIL – 19 OCTOBER 2022**

**QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC**

**Questions to Portfolio Holders**

(A) Question from Mr Jim Borchers

“Stevenage Borough Council has a duty to encourage the use of sustainable travel rather than car usage in the Town. For this to be done residents need to have confidence that the network of cycle paths and footpaths around the town are being looked after and kept clear of hazards.

In June 2022 there were areas of the Cycleway network that still had leaves on them that fell in the Autumn of 2021, these areas had obviously not been swept in over six months.

On a recent occasion I had an email 10 days after reporting glass on the cycleway, letting me know that “This case has been closed because it will be resolved soon by the already planned programme of works” – case reference RIC448883495

As I understand it the system in Stevenage for maintaining the footpath and cycle path network involves mechanically sweeping the cycle paths every 8 weeks, litter picked once per week, and reports of problems like glass being resolved within 48 hours.

I also understand that it is policy to start to clear fallen leaves from the network from 1st November unless they are reported. I understand that there is a map showing the locations of persistent leaf fall that the Council uses to manage its work on clearing leaves.

Many residents and visitors to Stevenage use the FixMyStreet system to inform local authorities of problems. A benefit of the FixMyStreet system is that users can see other reported problems (unlike the Stevenage Borough Council system). My understanding is that Stevenage Borough Council does not subscribe to FixMyStreet.

From the examples I have given there is clearly a mismatch between what is supposed to happen and what does.

Can you give details of what plans Stevenage Borough Council has to improve the reporting and resolution of problems on the footways and cycleways so that less people are discouraged from using them?”

***Answer (Cllr Simon Speller):***

*Cycle tracks are swept approximately every 12 weeks. There are though many variables that can impact this schedule such as staffing, weather, seasonality and vehicle / equipment performance. Unfortunately, due to staff vacancies and some technical issues with the new Sweeper vehicles which we are striving to resolve with the manufacturer, the service has been affected in recent months.*

*Litter picking takes place fortnightly. The leafing programme starts 6 weeks before Christmas and continues 6 weeks into the new year.*

*All cycle tracks are on the schedule. It is possible that the leaves could have been missed due to the current challenges as previously mentioned. In addition, leaves accumulate in wind traps throughout the year, so may not have been in situ for as long as might appear.*

*We have a list and maps that are issued to the leafing teams. These maps identify known hotspots. Leaf accumulations can change yearly depending on the wind, therefore the programme is supported by a reactive team. We welcome feedback and if problem locations are encountered please provide the details and this can be cross checked with our operational information.*

*Regarding broken glass on footpaths, reports are received via the Council's 'Report It' system, and are then triaged by the business support team. Priority works are raised and issued and we aim to complete them within 48 hours from when the report is processed by the business support team, Monday to Friday. A challenge with glass reports is the information received is often not detailed enough to locate the exact location, and on most occasions no contact details are provided. Including the 'what 3 Words' location identifier to narrow the area to a 3m square can be very helpful in pinpointing these locations. Automated emails are sent if contact details are provided, once the works order is processed and closed.*

*The Council no longer uses FixMyStreet. 'Report It' is the system that is used and this is where reports should be directed: <https://www.stevenage.gov.uk/report-online>*

*We continually review and adapt our service offers to seek to optimise them.*

**(B) Question from Mr Paul Dawson**

**"The United Nations and World Health Organisation both mandate the setting of a maximum 30km/h (20mph) speed limit wherever vulnerable road users mix in a frequent and planned manner with motor vehicles, except where strong evidence exists that higher speeds are safe.**

**St Albans District Council, Watford Borough Council and 11 other Parish and Town Councils across the county have already passed motions in favour of wide area 20mph speed limits in Hertfordshire. In addition, North Herts District Council and Royston Town Council, representing two of the three Hertfordshire Sustainable Travel Towns of Letchworth and Royston, have also passed 20mph motions.**

**Stevenage remains the only Sustainable Travel Town in Hertfordshire that has not passed a similar motion. Will Stevenage Borough Council, therefore, follow the lead taken elsewhere and propose a motion in favour of the implementation of a wide area 20mph speed limit on urban and residential roads in Stevenage and across Hertfordshire where pedestrians, cyclists and other vulnerable road users mix with motor vehicles?"**

**Answer (Cllr Simon Speller):**

*Thank you for the question, and for your shared commitment to tackling the climate crisis we all face.*

*We recognise the importance of sustainable travel, from walking and cycling, to use of buses and trains to help not only address climate change but to help improve health and wellbeing.*

*We are proud to be a Sustainable Travel Town, and benefit greatly from a fantastic network of separate and segregated cycleways from our proud New Town heritage.*

*Broadly, our approach is to promote 20mph zones where there is evidence it will protect public safety and we make the case for this to Hertfordshire County Council Highways who ultimately make the decisions.*

*We continue to work with our residents locally to identify which streets and neighbourhoods are most suitable for 20mph protection. We will also continue to engage with Hertfordshire County Council through the existing Sustainable Travel Towns forum, to understand their views, before determining whether a motion or any other form of action is appropriate.*

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**COUNCIL – 19 OCTOBER 2022**

**MEMBERS QUESTIONS**

**Questions to Portfolio Holders / Committee Chairs**

(A) Question from Councillor Bret Facey

‘Do you believe that SBC offers sufficient information about properties (such as their amenities and layout) to residents bidding for Council properties, to allow them to make an appropriate bid for a property which meets their needs?’

***Answer (Councillor Jeannette Thomas):***

*I agree that as much information as possible should be made available to residents to allow them to bid on the properties that best meet their needs. This helps to both avoid potential disappointment for our residents as well as ensuring properties are re-let more effectively. We have recently added a link to a map to show the general location of a property. It is though recognised that further improvements may be possible as the related technology develops. We are of course constrained by the immediate financial challenges to our Housing Revenue Account, following Government proposals on rent linked to the cost of living crisis.*

*Our Housing Team are working with the Community Select Committee to review the end to end process of re-letting a property to improve customer satisfaction and performance. Customer feedback will be gathered and the information included in our adverts will be carefully reviewed. The new Empty Homes Co-ordinator will also focus on ensuring the details of each property on our systems is up to date and available to our Lettings Officers before a property is advertised. The Housing Team are committed to making improvements to the Voids process. Improving the ways in which we match tenants’ needs to the homes which are available will be an important part of this.*

(B) Question from Councillor Adam Mitchell

‘Do you think the current SBC approach to Police Priority setting is still fit for purpose?’

***Answer (Councillor Jackie Hollywell):***

*The purpose of the Police Priority Setting sessions is to provide Members with an update concerning the overall crime figures and trends across the town ahead of then focussing upon specific issues and priorities at a more local level. These sessions are greatly valued by our Police colleagues for the insight SBC Councillors provide. If any Member has views as to how these sessions could potentially be run more effectively going forwards I would be happy to talk to them.*

(C) Question from Councillor Julie Ashley-Wren

'Since the changes to the carriageway of Lytton Way earlier this year, there continue to be many complaints and reports about regular, long traffic jams for vehicles exiting from the Town Centre onto Lytton Way. Acknowledging that HCC is the Highway authority, nevertheless this issue is causing huge inconvenience to Stevenage shoppers and should be of concern to SBC. What actions (with HCC) are SBC taking to put right this apparently erroneous new traffic flow design?'

**Answer (Councillor Lloyd Briscoe):**

*The works carried out to Lytton Way were designed by Hertfordshire County Council, who are responsible for the junction and road in question. SBC Officers are aware of ongoing issues of congestion at certain times at the Swingate/Lytton Road junction, and have asked HCC colleagues to explore options for remedial action.*

(D) Question from Councillor Stephen Booth

'What method does the Council use to track and monitor absenteeism amongst its employees?

How does absenteeism compare with surrounding authorities?'

**Answer (Councillor Joan Lloyd):**

*Council employees report sickness absence via a third-party sickness reporting company called Good Shape. Good Shape provide a nurse lead triage service allowing employees to talk to a clinically qualified professional when they report their sickness absence. Absence reporting is available real time through this platform for line managers and assistant directors. The Good Shape service also provides proactive absence monitoring and follow up with employees who remain absent from work for longer periods of time. Absence is then monitored and managed in line with the SBC sickness absence policy. Overall absence rates are reported to Executive on a quarterly basis as part of the Executive performance reporting report. Absence is reported as day lost per FTE over a rolling 12-month period.*

*SBC largely provides its services directly in-house rather than via contractors. This is not the case in all councils which makes benchmarking difficult because we would not be comparing apples to apples. However, the Office of National Statistics reported that the 2021 Public Sector absence rate was 3% and it is forecast to increase in 2022. At the end of Quarter 1, SBCs sickness absence was at 11.07 days per FTE (4.54%) which included the impact of a significant Covid 19 spike in May/June of this year. This reduced slightly to 10.54 days per FTE (4.32%) for Quarter 2, again with another significant Covid spike in July 2022. Although levels of absence vary, the trend of increasing absence since the national record low levels of 2020 are broadly consistent with what is being experienced at other authorities as are sickness absence levels.*



(E) Question from Councillor Andy McGuinness

'What steps are the Council taking, in conjunction with the Highway authority HCC, to ensure that the proposed redesigning of Lytton Way (Station Gateway Area Action Plan) will not result in a clogged up town?'

**Answer (Councillor Simon Speller):**

*The Council is developing options for the 'Station Gateway' area and has consulted widely with residents, businesses and interested groups to gather their views. Over 300 responses have been collected so far, and further consultation will take place in the months ahead. This is a key area of the town, and the draft Area Action Plan (AAP) sets out the vision and objectives to help ensure it will be a high quality, well connected, attractive and sustainable area.*

*The Council is working closely with Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) Highways, using their Highways modelling software to fully understand the impacts of car traffic displacement related to the different options. Mitigation and improvements to those more heavily used road and junctions will form an integral part of any final APP or and subsequent Planning Permission. As we have this work underway with HCC Highways, the current stage of the consultation is about exploring a vision for the space and to understand what local people might want from it. There will be further rounds of consultation including with Planning & Development Committee, Executive and Overview and Scrutiny.*

(F) Question from Councillor Robin Parker CC

'Following the partial collapse of Swingate House earlier this year, several reports were due from a number of sources (e.g. SBC, HSE, the demolition contractor and maybe others) on the causes and blame for the incident – which could have so easily proved fatal.

Have any of these reports yet been received and, if not, when do we anticipate them? Will they be made public?'

**Answer (Councillor Sharon Taylor):**

[ANSWER TO FOLLOW]

(G) Question from Graham Snell

'Has working WiFi yet been installed in the new Bus Interchange, so that passengers can receive real time information on bus services? If not, when will it be installed?'

**Answer (Councillor Sharon Taylor):**

[ANSWER TO FOLLOW]

(H) Question from Councillor Tom Wren

'Not only did the SBC housing development at Tabor Close result in trees being felled without permission but, although the dwellings were complete months ago, the houses (as of October 2022) are still not occupied because – we are told – a short length of highway was not complete. What exactly was the problem with allowing occupation? And why is it taking so long to resolve the issue, thereby leaving 13 badly needed Council housing units standing empty for many months?'

**Answer (Councillor Jeannette Thomas):**

*Members may recall from previous information provided concerning this scheme (dating back to July 2022) that this is not an SBC Housing Development. It is in fact a scheme led by a private developer, Keepmoat Homes Ltd, and Origin Housing Association (HA).*

*The Council's role in this has been limited to promoting and securing the scheme for affordable housing development. This goal was successfully achieved. From this November, 13 families will be living here with affordable rents.*

*As was previously explained, it has never been in the Council's gift to nominate to these homes sooner than was lawfully possible. Planning & Highways regulations exist principally to protect public safety and ensure development takes place in a consistent and approved manner. These regulations mandated that the highways works were completed to the satisfaction of the Highways authority prior to occupation. A number of factors related to the pandemic, a shortage of materials, a shortage of skilled contractors, as well as a backlog of highways works throughout the County, have contributed to the delay in carrying out and inspecting these highway works. Both Keepmoat Homes Ltd and HCC Highways have worked hard to ensure challenges were overcome.*

*HCC Highways have now inspected the works to the highway and determined them to be substantially complete. As such, they have begun the process of certifying completion and we would expect the homes to be in occupation during November. This will follow a process whereby Origin HA as landlord will request nominations from Stevenage Borough Council.*

(I) Question from Councillor Alex Farquharson

'Is SBC satisfied that our grass cutting program is thorough enough?'

**Answer (Councillor Simon Speller):**

*There are approximately 4 million square metres of grass in Stevenage that is maintained to different cutting frequencies depending on location, usage and environmental management.*

*We are satisfied that we are able to respond to the grass cutting demands each year, which can vary, and the programme generally consists of grass being cut*

*on a 3 to 4 week rolling schedule, between late March and early November each year.*

*We have also reduced the amount of grass cutting in recent years through the creation of additional areas of meadow grass, which is generally cut and collected once per year.*

*We regularly review our operations in light of sector developments and will continue to optimise the service wherever possible.*

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Part I – Release to Press



Agenda item: **##**

**Meeting** Council  
**Date** 19 October 2022



## ELECTIONS ACT 2022

Author – Luke Fattorusso

Lead Officer – Matt Partridge

Contact Officer – Luke Fattorusso

### 1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To update Members on the progress of the Elections Act 2022, that received Royal Assent on 28 April 2022

### 2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That the contents of the report be noted and that Members highlight any related matters for consideration.

### 3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Elections Act 2022 will make a number of substantial changes to how Elections are administered. The provisions contained within the Act will apply at UK Parliamentary Elections in Great Britain, Local Elections and Referendums in England, and Police and Crime Commissioner Elections in England and Wales. Certain elements of the Elections Act will come into force at the next scheduled elections on 4 May 2023, with others expected to come into force from June 2023 onwards.

## **4 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED COURSE OF ACTION AND OTHER OPTIONS**

- 4.1 The introduction of the Elections Act presents significant challenges to Returning Officers and Electoral Registration Officers. This report provides Members with details in respect of the provisions being introduced noting that some policy details have not been finalised, and legislation yet to be made.

## **5 IMPLICATIONS**

### **Financial Implications**

- 5.1 The Government has committed that, where changes in the Act will result in a new burden on local authorities, these costs will be initially covered in line with new burdens principles. However, at this stage we don't have all the details beyond confirmation of the cost lines that will be funded via the New Burdens Funding process. Indicative costs are not provided and remain subject to clearance. Funding mechanisms and payment timelines are being finalised by DLUCH.

### **Legal Implications**

- 5.2 The Elections Act 2022 makes significant changes to how elections are administered. The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) are still developing the policy and secondary legislation, and more detail will be shared when it is available.

### **Risk Implications**

- 5.3 The Association of Electoral Administrators' (AEA) have written to the Minister on several occasions, most recently on 29 September 2022 ([AEA-letter-to-Andrew-Stephenson-MP-29-09-2022.pdf](https://www.aea-elections.co.uk/letter-to-andrew-stephenson-mp-29-09-2022.pdf) ([aea-elections.co.uk](https://www.aea-elections.co.uk))), to continue to express their concerns. In their letters, they have stressed that "should there be any slip in the already tight timelines to introduce Voter ID, EROs, ROs and electoral professionals will struggle to deliver the trusted elections expected of them. With ROs individually and directly liable for the outcome of elections, a huge amount is being asked of them professionally and personally and should there be any additional timetable delays for whatever reason, the sector will have no choice but to recommend postponement."
- 5.4 The strong messages delivered by the AEA reflect the fact that key policy details are still yet to be confirmed and secondary legislation is still yet to be published. For example we are yet to receive documentation from the Electoral Commission in respect of comprehensive guidance, revised forms, or education and engagement campaigns, and on 12 September at an Elections Act Seminar, officers saw, for the first time, the functionality of the ERO (Electoral Registration Officer) Portal which will be used to process applications for voter ID. However it is still not clear how this will integrate with our Electoral Management Systems.

## **Staffing and Accommodation Implications**

- 5.5 Additional staff will be required to administer the changes of the Elections Act, which Government recognises and is providing additional funding for. As mentioned previously, these details are being finalised.

## **Equalities and Diversity Implications**

- 5.6 An Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken by Government in respect of the Elections Bill. This is available to view at [Elections Bill equality ass \(parliament.uk\)](https://www.parliament.uk/elections-bill-equality-ass)

## **Policy Implications**

- 5.7 Major policy changes will take place following implementation of the act and the subsequent Statutory Instruments. The secondary legislation is expected to be passed in November, to come into effect in mid-January 2023. The draft versions of these Statutory Instruments are currently out for consultation with the Electoral Commission and have also been shared with the AEA and SOLACE.

## **Information Technology Implications**

- 5.8 Digital applications and paper applications will utilise the ERO Portal (EROP) to check National Insurance Numbers with the Department for Work and Pensions. There will also be a need for our Electoral Management Systems to work directly to the Central Government ERO portal, via an application programming interface (API).

## **6 DETAILS**

- 6.1 The changes being introduced as part of the Elections Act 2022 will seek to:
- require voters to show photo ID at polling stations before a ballot paper is issued.
  - require Electoral Registration Officers based in local authorities to issue free electoral identification documents – so called 'Voter Authority Certificates' to eligible electors who apply for one.
  - extend accessibility to elections including requiring Returning Officers to take all reasonable steps to provide support for those with a disability in polling stations.
  - require postal voters to reapply for a postal vote every three years, replacing current rules of refreshing their signature every five years.
  - restrict the handling of postal votes, including limiting the number of postal votes an individual can hand in at a polling station or council office.
  - further limit the number of people someone may act as proxy for.
  - simplify and clarify the offence of undue influence.
  - change the voting and candidacy arrangements for EU voters.

- allow all British citizens living overseas to vote in UK Parliamentary elections, regardless of when they left the UK.
- 6.2 The provisions of the Elections Act that are imminent and are intended to come into force at the next scheduled elections on May 2023 are the requirement for voters to show photo ID in polling stations, the requirement for local authorities to issue free photo ID to eligible residents, and the requirement for RO's to take all reasonable steps to support voters with a disability in polling stations.
- 6.3 The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) are still developing the policy and secondary legislation, and more detail will be shared when it is available. Therefore, as policy is still being determined, some elements may change, or are awaiting further development.

### **Voter Identification**

- 6.4 Electors will be required to show an approved form of photo ID before receiving their ballot paper at the polling station. It is understood that photographic identification which can be used includes passport, driving license, immigration document, a PASS card, Ministry of Defence Form 90, concessionary travel pass (excluding railcards) and national ID card.
- 6.5 Work/student passes, railcards and photocopies of identification documents or pictures on mobile phones will not be acceptable. The photographic identification does not need to be in date to be used, it just needs to bear a likeness to the voter.
- 6.6 If electors cannot provide one of the required forms of identification as set out in legislation, they will be able to apply for a free 'Voter Authority Certificate' from their respective Electoral Registration Officer (ERO).
- 6.7 The Voter Authority Certificate is likely to be an A4 paper-based document with inherent security features. It will display the elector's name and photograph, the date of issue and the issuing local authority.
- 6.8 Electors will have a range of options to choose from when applying for a Voter Authority Certificate; either in person, by post or online, ensuring accessibility for all electors. Regardless of the way a person applies, there will be a check as to the person's electoral registration status, and their identity will need to be confirmed.
- 6.9 The deadline to apply for a Voter Authority Certificate will be set at 5pm, 6 working days ahead of the poll.
- 6.10 Voter Authority Certificates will not have an expiry date but will include a recommended renewal date, with words along the lines of "This document is only valid so long as the photograph remains a good likeness of you – we therefore recommend that you apply for a new document before [10 years after issue date]". 10 years has been used as this is the standard length of validity for passports and driving licenses and aims to keep the photo up to date. The Voter Authority Certificate would not need to be renewed should the person move to another Local Authority Area.



- 6.11 In the unfortunate event that an elector loses all their forms of identification before the deadline for applications for a Voter Authority Certificate has passed, or if their identification is stolen, destroyed or damaged beyond use, they may apply for a Voter Authority Certificate using the usual application routes.
- 6.12 If they lose their identification after the deadline for applications for a Voter Authority Certificate, the ERO will have the ability to allow the appointment of an emergency proxy for that polling day.
- 6.13 After the 6-day deadline, there will be provision for EROs, at their discretion, to provide a temporary Voter Authority Certificate in contingency situations; this will only be in situations where the usual printing and distribution process is disrupted but where an elector's application has already been processed, determined and sent to the supplier
- 6.14 This temporary document will be valid only for the relevant polling day and the elector will need to collect it in person from the ERO's office (or other delivery or collection arrangement as agreed with the ERO).
- 6.15 Polling stations will be required to have a private area for the elector to produce identification in private if requested. Privacy screens may be used for this purpose.
- 6.16 A presiding officer must refuse to give an elector a ballot paper if they have reasonable doubt that the photographic identification does not look like the elector, or if they reasonably suspect the documents to be forged.
- 6.17 A refusal to deliver the ballot paper to the voter is final and may not be questioned in any way. A refusal to deliver the ballot paper to a voter is subject to review on an election petition.
- 6.18 The Voter Authority Certificate application process is due to launch in January 2023.
- 6.19 Current research undertaken by the Government suggests that around 2% of people may require identification issued by the ERO; however, the figure could be much higher than this and there is nothing preventing a person who already has an acceptable form of photo ID applying for a Voter Authority Certificate.
- 6.20 In respect of the Voter Authority Certificate process:
- The Government has contracted a Print Supplier for production and dispatch of substantive Voter Authority Certificates.
  - Digital applications and paper applications will utilise the ERO Portal (EROP) to check National Insurance Numbers with the Department for Work and Pensions.
  - Local Authorities will need the capability to process and print temporary Voter Authority Certificates.
- 6.21 Information on these requirements will also be included on the Poll Card, which will now be A4 to allow for all the additional information on voter ID.
- 6.22 The Electoral Commission will:

- run the national public communications campaign to raise awareness of the requirement to show identification and remind the public to bring their identification with them when they vote; and
- support those without eligible identification to understand how and when they can apply for an electoral identity document.

### **Voter Accessibility**

- 6.23 The Electoral Commission will produce guidance (final version expected end of January 2023) to aid Returning Officers in providing reasonable support to aid disabled people to vote in polling stations. The Commission's guidance will recommend a range of support that should be made available to voters with disabilities, and this will be developed in conjunction with organisations representing disabled voters and those from the electoral sector.
- 6.24 The draft guidance makes clear that the RO has a legal obligation to provide:
- A notice inside and outside the polling station providing instructions on how to vote at the election
  - A notice in each polling booth providing information on how to mark the ballot paper at the election
  - At least one large sample copy of the ballot paper must be displayed inside the polling station
  - An enlarged hand-held copy of the ballot paper
- 6.25 It also states that the following equipment should, as a minimum, be provided to all polling stations:
- Chair/seating – this provides a place to rest for voters who cannot stand for long periods and a seat for voters who would like to take some time to think before entering the polling booth
  - Magnifiers – these increase the size of the text on a document providing support for voters who are visually impaired to vote independently
  - Tactile voting device – this provides support for voters who are visually impaired to mark their vote on the ballot paper in the correct place.
  - Polling booth at wheelchair level – helps to ensure that voters who use a wheelchair are able access a lower writing surface to ensure they can cast their vote in secret in a booth that is accessible
  - Staff name badges – these help voters more easily identify that a person is a member of staff in the polling station and is someone they can approach for assistance
  - Pencil grip – these can help voters with dexterity impairments to more easily hold and use a pencil independently
  - Ramps (for buildings with steps) – these support access to a polling station for voters who use a wheelchair or have difficulty using steps

- Temporary alerters or doorbells for any doors that are required to remain shut during the day (for example, fire doors) – these provide a way for voters to let polling station staff know that they need assistance to open the door so they can access the polling station
- Appropriate lighting – some polling station venues have good lighting but others may need additional lighting at the desk; to ensure that voters can clearly see the faces of staff, and in the polling booths; to support voters with visual impairments to be able to read and complete the ballot paper.
- Reserved parking spaces reserved for voters with disabilities (where parking is available at the venue) – this ensures that disabled voters can park as close as possible to the polling station

### **Absent Voting**

- 6.26 Political parties and campaigners will be banned from handling postal votes. There will also be a limit on the number of postal votes a person can hand in at polling stations or council offices (the limit will be set out in secondary legislation and is expected to be 5, plus the person's own postal vote).
- 6.27 Postal voters will need to make a fresh application every three years. Currently, electors are required to refresh their signature every 5 years.
- 6.28 The application process for absent voters will include a process for verifying identity, in a similar way to individual registration.
- 6.29 Electors will be allowed to act as proxy for no more than four people, of which no more than two can be 'domestic' electors (i.e. not overseas or service electors).
- 6.30 Secrecy and postal vote handling rules are expected to be in place after the May 2023 polls, most likely coming into force Autumn 2023.
- 6.31 Change to the three yearly application process will be transitional, starting from January 2024.
- 6.32 Postal vote application and new proxy limit expected for May 2024 polls

### **Online Absent Vote Applications and Verification**

- 6.33 Electors will be able to apply for an absent vote online (as well as by paper). Both online and paper applications will include a process for verifying the applicant's identity, which will be similar to the current process for individual electoral registration applications.
- 6.34 The postal vote online application service is estimated to be available from July 2023

### **EU Citizens' Voting and Candidacy Rights**

- 6.35 EU citizens will no longer automatically be entitled to register to vote, vote, and stand for election.

- 6.36 Two groups of EU citizens will retain their rights:
- ‘qualifying EU citizens’ from countries with reciprocal agreements, and who have leave, or do not require it, to remain in the UK. Currently these are Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal and Spain.
  - ‘EU citizens with retained rights’ who were resident in the UK before 1 January 2021
- 6.37 This does not affect Irish, Maltese and Cypriot citizens
- 6.38 The new rules will apply at local government elections, PCC elections and referendums in England.
- 6.39 Expected to be in place from Spring 2024 for elections in May 2024.
- 6.40 From June 2023, the ERO will need to review existing EU electors and process applications in line with new eligibility criteria
- 6.41 As yet the process for the review is still in development and we are awaiting more details.

### **Overseas Electors**

- 6.42 The 15-year limit on voting rights for British citizens living overseas will be removed.
- 6.43 Overseas electors will be able to register at an address where they were previously registered, or if they were never registered, where they were last resident
- 6.44 The registration period will be increased to 3 years, and renewals will be linked to a fixed point of 1 November
- 6.45 Applies at UK Parliamentary elections
- 6.46 Expected to be in place from Spring 2024 for elections in May 2024.

### **Undue Influence**

- 6.47 The Government wishes to simplify and clarify the offence of undue influence. Someone is guilty of undue influence if they use, or threaten to use, force or violence to make someone vote a certain way, or not vote at all. The proposed changes would make it simpler for the police to take action when allegations of undue influence are made.
- 6.48 The government plans to clarify the offence by setting out the ways someone might be found guilty of undue influence. There will be a broader definition of the offence, clarifying the types of illegal behaviour which people may use to unfairly influence someone’s vote. This may include physical violence, damage to someone’s property or damage to their reputation.
- 6.49 The proposals will apply to all campaign activity, including printed materials, and extend to anyone who seeks to intimidate a voter either inside or outside a polling station.
- 6.50 This is expected to come into force in November 2023.

## **Summary**

- 6.51 The implementation of the Elections Act will present numerous challenges for the RO, ERO, elections team and wider council. A variety of considerations will need to be given across a range of areas, including the managing of voter ID and the issuing of temporary Voter Authority Certificates; Core and election staff resources, including the recruitment and training of those staff; and communication and engagement; all against the backdrop of ever-changing timescales and developing policy.
- 6.52 While there will be national campaigns provided by the Electoral Commission, there will inevitably be a need to provide localised communications by the ERO and RO to link into the national campaign.

## **BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

None.

## **APPENDICES**

None.

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