



# City of Doncaster Council

## Report

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Date: 18 July 2023

To: The Chair and Members of the

### ELECTIONS AND DEMOCRATIC STRUCTURES COMMITTEE

Report Title: Elections Update

Relevant Cabinet Member(s)	Wards Affected	Key Decision?
Portfolio Holder for Corporate Resources	All Auckley	No

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. This report is designed to provide an update on current Elections Activity and any upcoming changes, By-Elections and Neighbourhood Planning Referendums.
2. This report provides members with detailed information and results from the Auckley Neighbourhood Planning Referendum which took place on Thursday 20 April 2023.
3. This report also provides members with an update on the implementations from the Elections Act. Major changes have now been implemented from May 2023; voters across England are now required to bring photo ID to vote in person in a polling station. A new form of identification, the Voter Authority Certificate (VAC), was introduced as a form of ID for those who do not have another form of eligible ID.

### EXEMPT REPORT

4. This is not an exempt report.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

5. This report is for information, the Committee is asked to note the report and make any additional comments in relation to the contents.

## WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR THE CITIZENS OF DONCASTER?

6. Having accessible and well-organised elections and referendums are key to public engagement in the democratic process. Elections are the cornerstone of our democratic process and are important to all of our residents. Elections give the electorate the opportunity to hold politicians to account and shape the future direction of national and local government.
7. While Doncaster did not have any scheduled elections in 2023, photo ID measures will apply to any by-elections from 4 May 2023 onwards. Electoral Registration Officers (ERO) are to provide those electors without a valid form of Photo ID with a free voter identification document called a Voter Authority Certificate (VAC) from January 2023, whether they have polls or not.

### **Auckley Neighbourhood Planning Referendum - 20 April 2023**

8. A Neighbourhood Planning Referendum took place in the Auckley area, (Auckley Parish Boundary polling districts KA and KF). The eligible electorate was 3,624 electors of which 1,007 were postal voters and of those, 332 postal votes (32.97%) were returned and personal identifiers correctly verified. 1 postal vote was rejected due to signature or date of birth not matching and that elector has been notified accordingly
9. On polling day 119 (4.55%) electors cast their vote in the two polling stations, adding that to the postal votes, gave a total of 451 ballot papers verified and a total turnout of 12.44%.
10. The outcome of the Referendum was in favour of using the Neighbourhood Plan for Auckley to help decide planning applications in the neighbourhood area. A full breakdown of the results can be found below:

### **Results**

The 'Question' asked in the referendum was:

Do you want the City of Doncaster Council to use the Neighbourhood Plan for Auckley to help it decide planning applications in the neighbourhood area?

	<b>Number of Votes</b>
Number of votes cast in favour of a 'YES'	405
Number of votes cast in favour of a 'NO'	46

<b>The number of ballot papers rejected was as follows:</b>	<b>Number of ballot papers</b>
A want of an official mark	0
B voting for more than one answer	0
C writing or mark by which voter could be identified	0
D unmarked or void for uncertainty	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>

<b>Electorate:</b> 3,624	<b>Ballot Papers Issued:</b> 451	<b>Turnout:</b> 12.44 %
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## ELECTIONS ACT UPDATE

### Voter identification

**11.** The Government has introduced legislation to require electors to show an official form of photographic identification (ID) when voting in a polling station. This requirement came into force from 4 May 2023 onwards for the following polls (elections):

- Local Government elections (Borough and parish)
- Police and Crime Commissioner elections
- Combined Authority Mayoral elections
- Referendums
- Parliamentary by-elections (It will also apply to Parliamentary General elections from 5<sup>th</sup> October 2023)

Electors voting by post are not affected by the requirement for photographic ID. Electors who do not wish to show photographic ID can apply for a postal vote or a proxy vote in the normal way.

**12.** Any elector that does not have any suitable form of photographic ID, and an expired ID is no longer a good likeness or their name appears differently on the electoral register, they can apply for a free Voter Authority Certificate (VAC) - an A4 document containing a photograph of the applicant, supplied by the ERO. The online application portal [www.gov.uk/voting-photo-id](http://www.gov.uk/voting-photo-id) where an elector may apply for a Voter Authority Certificate went live on Monday 16<sup>th</sup> January 2023. Despite Doncaster having no polls on the 4<sup>th</sup> May we still received a high number of applications for the free photo ID - Voter Authority Certificates on the deadline day. Since the launch of the Voter Authority Certificate service on 16<sup>th</sup> January up to the May election deadline day of the 24<sup>th</sup> April - Doncaster received 406 applications in total despite no scheduled May elections.

**13.** The Council's Elections team took an active interest in the experiences of areas holding elections in May 2023 and their feedback from administering an election requiring Voter IDs. Several members of the Elections team supported Sheffield City Council during their May local and Parish Elections. This enabled the team to deal with voter queries on polling day regarding Voter ID by taking telephone calls in the office. Also visiting polling stations as an Inspector to see first hand photo ID being provided to polling staff and help deal with any queries. This will help prepare the team for when any by-elections occur before next May's Elections and focus on training needs to be provided to staff.

**14.** The Electoral Commission have produced a report on their key findings from May's Elections and the introduction of Voter ID. Their report is based on data recorded by polling station staff in May and states:

- 4% of all people who said they did not vote at the elections on 4 May listed the ID requirement as the reason. 3% said they did not have the necessary ID, and 1% said they disagreed with the new requirement.

- Of those that went to polling stations on 4 May, 0.25% of people who tried to vote were not issued with a ballot paper because of the new voter ID requirement.
- There were high awareness levels of the new requirement (87% immediately before the poll, and 92% immediately after). However there were lower levels of awareness among those without ID (74%).
- 89,552 people applied for a Voter Authority Certificate before the deadline and approximately 25,000 certificates were used as a form of ID on 4 May. The number of certificates issued and used was low compared with estimates of the number of voters who might not have any other accepted ID.
- At least 0.7% of people who tried to vote at a polling station were initially turned away but around two thirds of those people (63%) returned later in the day and were able to vote.

The full report can be found at <https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/who-we-are-and-what-we-do/our-views-and-research/our-research/voter-id-may-2023-local-elections-england-interim-analysis>

**15. Other changes that came into force on the 4<sup>th</sup> May 2023:**

- Accessibility Changes; Improvement of support in polling stations for people with a wider range of disabilities through a general responsibility on ROs to consider the needs of disabled people and provide equipment to support them to vote.
- First Past the Post voting system introduced for any Mayoral elections in England and Police & Crime Commissioner (PCC) elections in England and Wales held on or after 4 May 2023 (including by-elections).

**16.** The next set of changes to be delivered are expected to be in October this year which will be the changes to postal and proxy voting arrangements and the delivery of an online application service for absent votes. The draft Statutory Instruments for these measures will be published for enhanced scrutiny in the coming weeks, with an accompanying Written Ministerial Statement on GOV.UK to announce their introduction, before they are laid in Parliament later in the summer. A small number of local authorities are currently taking part in testing the new system ahead of the service becoming available to the public once the legislation is made.








**REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED OPTION**


**17.** This report is primarily for information only.

**IMPACT ON THE COUNCIL’S KEY OUTCOMES**

**18.**

<b>Great 8 Priority</b>	<b>Positive Overall</b>	<b>Mix of Positive &amp; Negative</b>	<b>Trade-offs to consider</b> –	<b>Neutral or No implications</b>
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			Negative overall	
 <b>Tackling Climate Change</b>				✓
Comments:				
 <b>Developing the skills to thrive in life and in work</b>				✓
Comments:				
 <b>Making Doncaster the best place to do business and create good jobs</b>				✓
Comments:				
 <b>Building opportunities for healthier, happier and longer lives for all</b>				✓
Comments:				
 <b>Creating safer, stronger, greener and cleaner communities where everyone belongs</b>				✓
Comments:				
 <b>Nurturing a child and family-friendly borough</b>				✓
Comments:				
 <b>Building Transport and digital connections fit for the future</b>				✓
Comments:				

 <b>Promoting the borough and its cultural, sporting, and heritage opportunities</b>				✓
Comments:				
<b>Fair &amp; Inclusive</b>	✓			
<p>The Council has a duty to ensure Elections and Referendums are well managed to allow all eligible electors to freely vote by secret ballot ensuring freedom of expression and political debate by exercising their vote. The Council has worked hard to ensure that voting is accessible to all. A full Polling Places review was carried out in 2019 and full risk assessment reviews in 2021 to ensure all Polling Stations are compliant with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and will continue to be reviewed to ensure they meet any new legislative requirements.</p>				

**Legal Implications [Officer Initials: SRF | Date: 06/07/2023]**

19. The arrangements detailed in this report are designed to ensure compliance with a range of statutory duties including:

- Local Elections (Principal Areas) (England and Wales) Rules 2006, 2014, 2018
- The Local Elections (Parishes and Communities) (England and Wales) Rules 2014, 2015 and 2018
- Representation of the People Acts 1983, 1985 and 2000
- Elections Act 2022

**Financial Implications [Officer Initials: CR | Date: 10/07/2023]**

20. The government have committed to providing New Burdens Funding to local authorities via Section 31 Grants to cover the increased costs resulting from implementing measures in the Elections Act. An Initial grant of £12,952 was received in November 2022, with further grant in April 2023 of £6,901. Further funding expected by Autumn 2023.

21. Any costs associated with Neighbourhood Planning Referendums are claimed back from Central Government via the planning department.

**Human Resources Implications**

22. Human Resources Implications have not been requested for this report.

**Technology Implications**

23. Technology Implications have not been requested for this report

## **RISKS AND ASSUMPTIONS**

24. Ensuring the necessary arrangements are in place to ensure the Council, RO and ERO meets the Electoral Commission's Performance Standards and complies with their legal statutory duties. Delivering well-run elections improve our reputation and meeting the Electoral Commission's Performance Standards.

## **CONSULTATION**

25. Not applicable

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

26. Association of Electoral Administrators newsletters [www.aea-elections.co.uk](http://www.aea-elections.co.uk)  
The Electoral Commission newsletters <https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/>

## **GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS**

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- |       |                                                         |
|-------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| ERO   | Electoral Registration Officer                          |
| RO    | Returning Officer                                       |
| DLUHC | The Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities |
| VAC   | Voter Authority Certificate                             |

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