



City of Doncaster Council

Report

Date: 7 February 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. One of the upcoming major changes to be implemented is from May 2023; voters across England will be required to bring photo ID to vote in person in a polling station. A new form of identification, the Voter Authority Certificate (VAC), will be introduced as a form of ID for those who do not have another form of eligible ID.

EXEMPT REPORT

3. This is not an exempt report.

RECOMMENDATIONS

4. 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?

5. While Doncaster does not have any scheduled elections in 2023, photo ID measures would 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.

VOTER IDENTIFICATION

6. 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 will apply to the following polls (elections) from 4 May 2023 onwards:

- Local Government elections (Borough and parish)
- Police and Crime Commissioner elections
- Combined Authority Mayoral elections (South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority)
- Referendums
- Parliamentary by-elections (It will also apply to Parliamentary General elections from 5th 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.

7. If an elector 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.

Any application for a Voter Authority Certificate must contain:

- full name
- the address at which they are registered to vote (or have applied to be registered at), or in the case of special category electors, their present, correspondence or BFPO number address
- date of birth
- National Insurance Number
- a statement as to whether they consider it necessary to collect the Voter Authority Certificate in person instead of it being delivered to the relevant delivery address, and the reason for collection
- a declaration that the contents of the application are true, either by signature or some mark that shows that they have made the declaration
- the date of the application

Any application must also contain a suitable photograph of the elector, meeting the relevant size and resolution requirements. The photo must be similar to passport standard and can be taken on a mobile device or camera, but it needs to meet the following requirements to be accepted:

The digital photo must be:

- clear and in focus
- in colour

- against a plain, light-coloured background
- a true likeness, with no photoshop or filters
- at least 600x750 pixels
- JPG, PNG or GIF format — min 50KB, max 20MB

In the photo the applicant must:

- face forwards, looking straight at the camera
- be alone, with no other objects or people
- have a plain expression
- have eyes open and visible, with no hair in front of them
- not wear sunglasses, but normal glasses are fine if they typically wear them
- not have a head covering (apart from religious or medical reasons) not have 'red-eye', glare or shadows over their face

Once an application has been successfully processed, the data is sent to the supplier appointed by the UK Government who will produce the document and then deliver it directly to the applicant via Royal Mail first class post. A Voter Authority Certificate should be printed within one to two working days after an application has been successfully processed.

8. The online application portal www.gov.uk/voting-photo-id where an elector may apply for a Voter Authority Certificate went live on Monday 16th January 2023. So far the City of Doncaster Council has received 46 applications which have been processed as follows:

- 35 applications have been sent a Voter Authority Certificate
- 9 applications are on hold (not a suitable photo or register to vote application not yet cleared by DWP etc)
- 2 applications have been rejected (one duplicate application and one not registered and when contacted didn't want to register or vote)

9. Applicants without internet access can visit the Civic Office where a member of staff will take their photo and help them complete an on-line application. A paper application form can also be posted to the applicant by Electoral Services, however, the applicant will need to provide a suitable photograph. If they are not able to do this themselves, then they will need to visit the Civic Office to have their photograph taken.

10. The Council's Elections team will be taking an active interest in the experiences of areas holding elections in May 2023 and their feedback from administering an election requiring Voter IDs. The Electoral Commission's best practice guidance suggests that additional staff should be used to administer elections and negate the risks of Polling Station queues.

ANNUAL ABSENT VOTE REFRESH

11. By 31 January each year the Electoral Registration Officer must write to each elector who has an absent vote (postal, proxy and postal proxy voters) whose

signature on the postal identifiers register is more than five years old, informing them they must refresh their signature in order to maintain voting by post. This is known as the absent vote refresh and it takes place in January every year in all Local Authorities. Absent voters who have been granted a waiver are not affected by the refresh provisions, as they do not have a signature on the personal identifiers record. Letters and forms have been sent to 3,318 electors in Doncaster who are due to refresh theirs. Electors have six weeks to return their refreshed signature forms, a reminder is sent after 3 weeks. Should they not reply then the elector will lose their entitlement to vote by post and they will need to re-apply by completing a full fresh new postal vote application (including DOB) should they wish to remain a postal voter.

12. From August 2023 changes under the new Elections Act 2022 (subject to secondary legislation) it is expected that the requirement will change to postal voters having to reapply every three years, replacing current rules of refreshing their signature every five years. This will affect the number of refresh application letters from January 2024.

UPCOMING BY-ELECTIONS AND REFERENDUMS


13. The Planning department have indicated that the Auckley Neighbourhood Plan is at the final stages and will shortly following the external examiners recommendations be ready to go to a Referendum. There are currently 3,600 electors of which 1,023 are postal voters. There will be two polling stations and it is likely that the Referendum will take place in March/April time. The costs associated with a Neighbourhood Planning Referendum are claimed back by the Planning Department from Central Government.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED OPTION

14. This report is primarily for information only.

IMPACT ON THE COUNCIL’S KEY OUTCOMES

- 15.

Great 8 Priority	Positive Overall	Mix of Positive & Negative	Trade-offs to consider – Negative overall	Neutral or No implications
 Tackling Climate Change				✓
Comments:				

 Developing the skills to thrive in life and in work				✓
Comments:				
 Making Doncaster the best place to do business and create good jobs				✓
Comments:				
 Building opportunities for healthier, happier and longer lives for all				✓
Comments:				
 Creating safer, stronger, greener and cleaner communities where everyone belongs				✓
Comments:				
 Nurturing a child and family-friendly borough				✓
Comments:				
 Building Transport and digital connections fit for the future				✓
Comments:				
 Promoting the borough and its cultural, sporting, and heritage opportunities				✓
Comments:				

Fair & Inclusive	✓			
<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: 27/01/2023]

16. 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

17. The Elections Act 2022 received Royal Assent on 28 April 2022 and the secondary legislation which provides for how new voter ID measures from the Election Act will work in practice was laid in parliament on 3 November 2022.

Financial Implications [Officer Initials: PH | Date: 27/01/2023]

18. 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.

19. The first 'round' of funding will be for the implementation of the accessibility policy changes and the introduction of voter identification. An Initial grant of £12,952 was received in November 2022, with further grant payment expected in April 2023 of £7,123.

20. Any Parish By-elections are claimed back in full from the Parish and any Neighbourhood Planning Referendums are claimed back from Central Government via the planning department.

Human Resources Implications

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

Technology Implications

22. Technology Implications have not been requested for this report

RISKS AND ASSUMPTIONS

- 23.** 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.
- 24.** There is national concern about finding additional staff to work on polling stations and that experienced staff may no longer wish to do the role due to the added responsibility and potential for abuse from electors regarding producing valid ID before issued with a ballot paper. There is no legislative requirement for a female member of staff on each polling station but the need to consider electors who may not wish to reveal their face to a male staff member for religious/cultural reason. There will be a need for an in depth training session for all polling staff, particularly POs regarding the photo IDs accepted and new forms to be completed. There will also be a need to purchase additional polling station equipment such as privacy booths and mirrors.

CONSULTATION

- 25.** Not applicable

BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 26.** Association of Electoral Administrators newsletters www.aea-elections.co.uk
The Electoral Commission newsletters <https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/>

GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

27.

ERO	Electoral Registration Officer
RO	Returning Officer
PO	Presiding Officer
PCC	Police and Crime Commissioner
DLUHC	The Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities
VAC	Voter Authority Certificate

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