

**To the Members of the  
ELECTIONS & DEMOCRATIC STRUCTURES COMMITTEE**

**PROPOSAL TO TEST SMARTPHONE TECHNOLOGY FOR VOTING**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

1. The purpose of this report is to examine the possibility of piloting new a voting method in elections, beginning with a non-statutory election.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

- a) The Committee is asked to approve a request to Children and Young People's Services that the election of Doncaster Youth Council representatives is undertaken using smartphone technology; and
- b) That a report is brought forward to this Committee's next meeting to consider the first election that this technology could be piloted.

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

2. Doncaster seeks to be an enabling Council, which seeks to modernise access to Council services and decision-making, and to strengthen governance within the Borough.
3. Measures which increase electoral awareness and participation, and which make voting easier for all voters, and particularly young, disabled or vulnerable voters, increases legitimacy and strengthens the governance of the council. The successful participation of Doncaster in a new electoral pilot would enhance the reputation of the Borough as a forward-looking, modern Council.

**BACKGROUND**

4. Electoral pilots are only allowed under specific legislation. They apply to specific areas and to specific elections or periods of time; the pilots are controlled by the Government under the relevant Orders to ensure the integrity and security of elections and electoral registration.
5. Section 10 of the [Representation of the People Act 2000](#) allows the Secretary of State, after consultation with the Electoral Commission, to approve a request from a local authority in England and Wales to run an electoral pilot to trial schemes of innovative electoral procedures at a particular local election. Orders made by the Secretary of State under this Act for electoral pilots are not subject to Parliamentary proceedings and once made can come into force forthwith.

6. A number of pilot schemes took place between 2000 and 2007. For further information see the House of Commons Library Briefing, [Electoral pilot schemes](#). These pilot schemes included trialling longer voting periods, e-voting, all-postal ballots and telephone voting amongst other new voting arrangements. The primary purpose of the pilot schemes was to raise participation rates.
7. Pilot schemes may only be employed in local elections. They are prohibited at general elections.
8. Doncaster took part in the first wave of pilots, conducting an all-postal election in Conisbrough ward. This increased the turnout from 1998 25.7% and 1999 24.6% to 39.9% in 2000. This was followed by an all-postal Mayoral election in 2002.
9. One conclusion of the first wave of pilots was that extending postal voting increased participation. The law was subsequently changed to enable any citizen to apply to vote by post.
10. The Electoral Commission reviews each pilot and considers whether the pilot scheme:
  - Helped to make voting or counting easier.
  - Helped to improve turnout.
  - Helped to facilitate voting.
  - Led to a reduction in electoral fraud.
  - Led to a reduction in the cost of the elections.
11. The Electoral Commission published a summary of the [Key issues and conclusions: May 2007 electoral pilot schemes](#) which gave details of the pilots held that year and the issues arising from the pilot programme. However, in 2016, the Government approved some pilot schemes which explore electronic registration (that is, online registration).
12. There have been no pilots held under the provisions of this legislation since 2007. The 2007 pilots included electronic voting. The Sheffield pilot of e-voting required pre-registration and additional security measures. The evaluations concluded that the voting method was expensive, primarily because of the software and security measures required for online voting.
13. Changes since 2007: The major change that provides an opportunity for a new pilot in e-voting, is that today, unlike in 2007, when voters had to use a PC or laptop to vote, voters can use smartphones.
14. Voting can be conducted by downloading an app onto a phone. Voters can be sent details of the candidates directly to their phone. And the security of their vote can be protected by Blockchain technology.
15. The Blockchain offers the opportunity to increase participation in the democratic process by allowing citizens to use the technology to securely vote electronically in elections. It can be used to:
  - Easily verify their citizenship and right to vote.
  - Receive electoral material from all candidates.
  - Vote securely from any location.

16. Any pilot scheme would seek to establish whether a Blockchain voting option can increase voter participation (especially amongst the smartphone generation), increase voter satisfaction and trust, as the transparent nature of the Blockchain will allow voters to verify that their vote is counted.
17. The Blockchain technology is being promoted in a variety of ways aimed to improve lives and governance.
18. The first step proposed is for Doncaster to test the concept among the smart phone generation, by seeking to use the technology for the election of the Doncaster Youth Council representatives, who are currently elected, area by area, with voting taking place among pupils age 16+ in Doncaster's schools. These elections are due to take place in February 2017.
19. If the pilot proved successful, this may assist Doncaster in submitting any future request to trial the new method as an additional option for voters in a local election setting, which would take place after May 2017. Therefore, Doncaster's local and Mayoral elections held on 4 May 2017 would be unaffected.

### **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

20. As the Youth Council elections are non-statutory, this stage would have no legal implications.
21. Should the Council decide at a future date to trial the technology in a local election or neighbourhood referendum, Government consent would be required. There are also comprehensive statutory provisions covering the delivery of elections.

### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

22. The Council would seek to minimise the cost and staffing implications of a youth pilot by requesting free use of the app and necessary IT support.

### **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- The Electoral Commission Key Issues and Conclusions – May 2007 electoral pilot scheme.
- The Blockchain Trust Accelerator

### **REPORT AUTHOR**

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Chair of Elections & Democratic Structures Committee

## HOW E-VOTING WOULD WORK USING BLOCKCHAIN TECHNOLOGY – A CASE STUDY

### How the process would work

1. The Council will run a PR campaign to encourage the electorate to vote through Blockchain on their smartphones. They will be told all they have to do is download a free App.

2. Once Ms Brown has downloaded the App she will be asked if she has registered to vote.

2.1 If her answer is yes she will be asked to register her unique ID number on the system (see 2.3)

2.2 If the answer is no she will be directed to <http://www.doncaster.gov.uk/services/the-council-democracy/register-to-vote> and asked to register.

2.3 Once registered she will receive her unique voting ID number by post.

2.4 Once she has her ID number she can return to the App and register her number on the system.

3. When her ID number is registered on the system she will be sent by post all the encryption details she needs to vote in the designated election.

4. At this point the Council will also be able to send her information on her candidates via our App.

5. Her vote when cast will be encrypted and transmitted through the Blockchain to the returning officer.

5.1 Without knowing who she voted for, the Blockchain network will:-

- (a) Validate her right to vote.
- (b) Record she has voted.
- (c) Prevent her from voting a second time in that election.

6. Her vote is delivered to the Returning Officer, counted and recorded in hard copy.

7. The Returning Officer then excludes her from voting again on Election Day.

### For a school-based election

The voting register is prepared by the school/ in co-operation with Children and Young People's services. The PR campaign is conducted within schools. The Unique voter ID would be distributed via school.