

Review of District and Parish Elections 2023

Date: 2 August 2023

Agenda Item:

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Key Decision? No

Local Ward Members



OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 Members have requested an opportunity to review the delivery and outcomes of the District and Parish Elections undertaken in May 2023.
- 1.2 Once every four years Lichfield District undertakes local elections to appoint 47 district members and appointments to the 27 Parish Councils that operate within the electoral area.
- 1.3 This year's election saw the introduction of Voter ID and was the first election under the new Chief Executive and Returning Officer, Simon Fletcher, and without a dedicated election team.
- 1.4 Despite many challenging aspects due to the changes made by the Elections Act 2022, the 2023 local the elections were delivered and no challenge to the results has been made.
- 1.5 Several learning points have been suggested in the post-election review and a formal lessons learned report is being collated to form the basis of an action plan to improve and streamline future elections.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members note the content of the report and pass on observations and comments regarding the recent elections.
- 2.2 Members consider future activity and determine the requirement for future updates on this topic.

3. Background

- 3.1 Lichfield District is made up of electoral areas which form the basis of:
 - 22 District Council Wards (with between 1 and 3 seats in each, based on population numbers)
 - 27 Parish Councils (some of which are warded)
- 3.2 The Notice of Election was published on 20 March 2023, with 3 training sessions available to parish clerks and potential candidates on 14 and 24 March to advise on the nomination process and candidacy rules.
- 3.3 Nominations opened on 20 March and 356 were received by the team before the 4pm deadline on 4 April. Informal checks were available to nominees leading up to this every weekday between 10 and 4pm or by arrangement. However, due to the volume of nominations received in the last 72 hours of the nomination process, not all were double checked by a Deputy Returning Officer before the

deadline and 3 invalid nominations for parish appointments were received in this timescale which could not be accepted. (208 nominations for contested seats)

- 3.4 As a result of there being the same or fewer nominations than member vacancies one district member was elected at the close of nominations (Bourne Vale). 138 Parish members were also immediately elected, removing the need for elections in the following parish councils: Alrewas, Armitage with Handsacre, Burntwood Chase Terrace and Chasetown, Clifton Campville, Chasetown, Curborough and Elmhurst, Drayton Bassett, Edingale, Elford, Fisherwick, Fradley, Hammerwich, Harlaston, Hints and Canwell, Kings Bromley, Longdon, Mavesyn Ridware, Shenstone, Streethay, Swinfen and Packington, Thorpe Constantine, Wall, Weeford, Whittington, Wiggington & Hopwas (Hopwas).
- 3.5 Contests still took place in 21 district wards and 9 parish councils and wards, a total of 15 ballots. One Parish Council sadly received no nominations within the deadline (Farewell & Chorley) and resulted in a Notice of by election published on 10 May. Nomination papers were received for this parish council sufficient to appoint councillors without the need for a ballot in June.
- 3.6 Polling was undertaken on 4 May 2023 and an overall turnout of 25.3% was achieved, with turnout in each district poll varying from between 20% and up to 44% in some wards. Some parish ballots received a turnout of almost 49%, which is a slightly higher turnout than expected, given recent trends.
- 3.7 Thanks to an awareness campaign in the lead up to the elections the majority of voters who attended polling stations were fully prepared for Voter ID and there was only one reported incident by Presiding Officers.
- 3.8 Voter ID Evaluation Forms (VIDEF) were used by Presiding Officers on the day to capture details of those unable to vote due to Voter ID and out of 69,946 registered voters, 17,721 did so at a polling-stations, 24 were initially unable to vote, 16 of these later returned with an acceptable form of ID. In total, 8 voters were not issued with a ballot paper – a full breakdown of our statistics is available in the weblinks at the end of this report along with an interim analysis issued by the Electoral Commission on the national impact of Voter ID following the elections in May 2023.
- 3.9 This is the only local election at which VIDEF data is required to be captured. For the next two Parliamentary elections we will also need to complete VIDEF to provide statistics to the Electoral Commission and Secretary of State. Information collected via this process is published on our website, any other data we have at a more granular level can only be disclosed to the Secretary of State as detailed in the [Electoral Commission Guidance to Returning Officers](#)
- 3.10 Anecdotally, Voter ID had very little impact on polling day with the majority of voters aware of the requirement and prepared to show their ID. Of those reported as unable to vote at all (8) there was no noticeable trend that could be attributed from the information available/collected.
- 3.10 The additional training, processes and paperwork made recruitment to this election one of the main risks. This risk will be ongoing as many that did undertake roles this time found the new requirements complex. Options are being considered for future elections to ensure the process is as slick as possible for voters and staff working elections including:
- New polling system to replace paper documentation as polling stations – this will reduce paperwork at polling stations, ensure the ballot issuing process becomes fool proof, support effective record keeping and reduce receipting times
 - Increased recruitment, training and support for election and polling staff – with many new and less experienced poll staff it will be critical to provide sufficient support in advance of the next election for them to become more familiar with the technology and revised processes.
 - Revisions to staffing in the governance and election teams in the run up to elections – a wider pool of staff is required to deliver the elections effectively without staff having to work excessive hours. This will be particularly important in the next few elections which will run alongside normal council business and operations.

- Revisions to the Nominations process to ensure all forms received are signed off by a Returning Officer before the 4pm cut off. This will require all staff doing informal checks to be updating the system in real-time to ensure nominees are registered in the correct electoral area and not oversubscribed during the appointment.

3.11 Members should note the exceptional support provided by the governance, customer services, communications, HR and ICT teams and an army of volunteers from within the council and casual staff who went above and beyond to ensure delivery of this years' elections. Almost 400 staff in total worked to make it a success.

4. Future Milestones

- 4.1 We will of course implement any learning into future elections, the next planned election being 2 May 2024 PCC Elections.
- 4.2 Additional support has been appointed to lead the development of an action plan and carry out the revisions necessary in the next 6 months. Significantly more staff will need system access and training to support future elections from governance and other teams.
- 4.3 In October this year further aspects of the Elections Act will come into effect with the launch of a new online portal to allow absent voters to apply and renew their absent vote. Similar to the online Voter ID portal, this will replace the current paper-based system for absent vote applications and will require staff training to check and authorise postal and proxy votes. The new system will also issue a reminder to refresh absent voters' signature and vote every 3 years, rather than the current 5-year time limit.
- 4.4 In November 2023 the final aspects of the Elections Act 2022 will be made covering undue influence, intimidation, and digital imprints for those campaigning. By December this year we will also need to have removed all ineligible EU nationals from the revised electoral register.

Alternative Options	Not required for this report
Consultation	Not required for this report.
Financial Implications	<p>The Council has an election's earmarked reserve to fund the cost of District Council elections and 'smooth' the financial impact over the four-year election cycle.</p> <p>The balance of the District Council elections earmarked reserve at 1 April 2023 was £220,013.</p> <p>Any new electoral responsibilities required under law should be funded by New Burden's funding from the Government in order that the cost is not borne by local Taxpayers.</p> <p>Lichfield has received £19,443 to implement changes for May 2023, with a further £40,013 for costs incurred during the remainder of 2023/24. Further bids will be made to cover the additional costs caused by the new processes to mitigate the risks and ensure delivery.</p>
Approved by Section 151 Officer	Yes
Legal Implications	None.
Approved by Monitoring Officer	Yes
Contribution to the	To ensure we are an effective council

Delivery of the Strategic Plan	
Equality, Diversity and Human Rights Implications	Electoral changes were subject to EIA prior to implementation. Any action plan resulting from the lessons learned report will also be assessed for impact.
EIA logged by Equalities Officer	Equalities Officer confirmed not required.
Crime & Safety Issues	Not required for this report
Environmental Impact (including Climate Change and Biodiversity).	Not required for this report, though it is noted that elections are very paper heavy and efforts to streamline in future will assist in reducing carbon impact.
GDPR / Privacy Impact Assessment	Not required for this report

	Risk Description & Risk Owner	Original Score (RYG)	How We Manage It	Current Score (RYG)
A	That processes are not in place to deliver fair and transparent elections	Yellow (material) or as determined by the Likelihood Yellow and Impact Yellow	We will continue to review development of election processes and the changes to Electoral statutes.	Green (tolerable) as determined by the Likelihood Green and Impact Yellow
B	Staffing is not in place or sufficiently trained to deliver elections effectively	Yellow (material) or as determined by the Likelihood Yellow and Impact Yellow	New technology is being explored and plans developed to ensure staff are identified, trained and have the right support to deliver in future.	Green (tolerable) as determined by the Likelihood Green and Impact Yellow
C	New Burden's Funding does not reflect the full cost of implementing new electoral requirements and the cost is inadvertently borne by Local Taxpayers	Yellow (material) Likelihood: Yellow Impact: Yellow	The cost of implementing new Electoral Requirements is monitored and included on any financial returns to the Government. Where there are any 'caps' to funding levels that mean full cost reimbursement is not received, then this is communicated through consultations and other communication channels.	Yellow (material) Likelihood: Yellow Impact: Green

Background documents

[Agenda for Overview & Scrutiny Committee on Thursday, 16th March, 2023, 6.00 pm \(lichfielddc.gov.uk\)](https://lichfielddc.gov.uk)
[Agenda item - Voter ID Update \(lichfielddc.gov.uk\)](https://lichfielddc.gov.uk)

Relevant web links

[View the results of the local election – View the results \(lichfielddc.gov.uk\)](https://lichfielddc.gov.uk) (VIDEF data)
[Parish councils contact details \(lichfielddc.gov.uk\)](https://lichfielddc.gov.uk)
[Election results \(lichfielddc.gov.uk\)](https://lichfielddc.gov.uk)
[Voter ID at the May 2023 local elections in England: interim analysis | Electoral Commission](https://www.electoralcommission.gov.uk)