

# Introduction of Digital Electoral Polling System

Report of the Leader of the Council

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Key Decision? YES

Local Ward Members All Wards



## Cabinet Member Decision

The Decision will be made on or after [allow 5 clear working days from the date of publication] unless called-in for Scrutiny.

## 1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 Technology (known as Modern Polling supplied by Modern Democracy) has been developed to use at polling stations to streamline the process for voters especially documentation required for Voter ID in local and UK national elections and to comply with legislation. With the increased difficulty in recruiting and securing staff, now is the time to introduce automation and digitisation into the polling day process and manage the key risk for future elections.
- 1.2 Digitisation within the polling station will alleviate some of the issues we are facing when managing the Poll. This will generate many additional benefits for Election staff, management, and stakeholders, but ultimately it will provide a better service and experience for the voter. The count process is expected to be quicker as data will be transferred as soon as polls close, this will also enable counters to be allocated in line with actual turnout.

## 2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Approve the immediate purchase of the Modern Polling system and to enter a 4-year contract for the system with Modern Democracy; and
- 2.2 Delegate authority to the Returning Officer to sign any required updated agreements to facilitate data sharing, data protection and cyber security to ensure compliance with requirements of the Elections Act 2022.

## 3. Background

- 3.1 Elections are a fundamental part of the democratic process, as such delivering well-run elections is a key priority for Lichfield District Council. Local authority election services are currently facing significant challenges, including staffing, venue shortages and changes introduced by the Elections Act 2022.
- 3.2 The Elections Act 2022 has significantly changed the administration of elections, introducing Voter ID, increasing the complexity of paperwork, additional documents and record keeping associated with elections. These changes are further exasperating the challenge of recruiting and training skilled polling stations staff.

- 3.3 Despite some digitalisation, the elections process remains very manual and paper-based. Coupled with the new burdens that the Elections Act 2022 has brought, this increases the risks of human error, and has had a detrimental impact on recruiting polling staff, in particular Presiding Officers.
- 3.4 Encouraging as many of our residents to register and participate in the democratic process is a core objective of the elections service. When a voter visits a polling station, they experience a very paper-based process, out-of-step with every other aspect of modern life. Digitisation of the service has the potential to speed up interactions at the polling station, improving voter experience.
- 3.5 Modern Polling is a cloud-based digital polling station platform currently being used by over 40 local authorities across the UK. It modernises the check-in and voter ID process at polling stations, making it an easier and quicker experience for both voters and polling station staff. Key features of the platform include:
- The use of QR codes on poll cards and ballot papers to support digital registration and voter verification;
  - It digitally marks the register, automatically completes the Corresponding Number Lists and the VIDEF, and calculates the Ballot Paper Account – a key document that currently Presiding Officers have to complete after a 16 hour day working the polling station.
  - It provides real-time analytics and insight. Elections staff can access hourly turnout figures, live ballot paper accounts, and station status throughout election day, enabling data driven decisions and timely communications between Election Managers, Returning Officers and Candidates. Live insight provides the opportunity to identify and remedy any bottlenecks or issues and intelligence to prepare for the count.
  - The system can work “offline” so a weak or no data signal is not a problem. The data will transfer as soon as the staff move to an area that does have signal e.g. on the way to the count venue. This is important as we have many polling stations in rural areas.
- 3.6 Further information can be found at the following link, including a video demo of the system [Modern Polling » Modern Democracy](#). Tamworth Borough Council use this system and did not encounter any problems during the recent Parliamentary By-Election in October 2023 which took on many of our station locations. Many of our elections staff also supported this election, which provided an opportunity for us to see how the platform worked first-hand.

**Benefits:**

- 3.7 Implementing Modern Polling would deliver the following strategic benefits:
- Quicker and more professional service within the polling station
  - Improved voter experience
  - More efficient receipting and close of poll process
  - Reduce time to verify and count the ballots
  - Reduce number of polling and administrative staff required
  - Reduces risks around recruitment and training for large and national polls
  - Supports net zero carbon agenda by reduction in paper usage and decreased storage requirements
- 3.8 The following operational benefits would also be delivered:
- Reduces the council’s risks from Voter ID and register management
  - Enables us to meet our legislative requirements and KPIs
  - Provides transparency and audit of the process
  - Provides consistency across all Polling stations

- Quicker staff onboarding and training – fewer polling clerks required
- Relieves polling station staffing pressures and paperwork
- Improved voter experience, less risk of being disenfranchised due to new processes or waiting too long to cast their vote
- Improved efficiency and sustainability
- Automated, accurate real-time reporting
- Has the ability to evolve as more parts of the Elections Act are enacted, e.g., delivery of postal votes to the polling station.
- Secure, GDPR-compliant data storage.
- Reduces the amount of physical storage needed for paper records as these would now be digital.
- Speeds up count process as work can begin prior to the ballot box(es) being delivered.
- Aids planning at larger scale polls as turn out by station can be seen and used to inform actions to be taken at the count e.g., ballot box allocation, staff resources.
- Reduces post-election collation and storage pressures and admin support costs required to deliver election return
- Makes paperwork quicker to access and clearer to understand e.g. marked registers.

3.9 There is no requirement for voters to use any device or needing to produce a Poll Card as is the case currently so there is no risk of disenfranchisement.

3.10 Due to the uniqueness of the product, legislation (Public Contract Regulations 2015) dictates as competition is absent for technical reasons (namely no other products exist) there is no requirement for a procurement process to take place and the contract can be awarded directly. The procurement team have been engaged and ensuring any rules are complied with.

3.11 Alongside the procurement of Modern Polling the elections service has also been seeking out other opportunities for transformation and efficiencies, including how we process postal votes, which has generated revenue savings that we are proposing to invest in Modern Polling.

3.12 It is recommended that we enter into a 4 year contract for Modern Polling to ensure we get maximum value for money, a full price breakdown is included in Appendix 1 (confidential). The cost can be met from contributions from existing revenue budget, the use of the New Burdens Fund and the elections reserve.

Alternative Options	<p>Do nothing:</p> <p>Would leave the organisation exposed to high risk of being under resourced in polling stations as it has been increasingly difficult to attract staff in the past couple of years. This would also put pressure on existing Governance team and therefore have a detrimental impact on team members.</p> <p>The increased complexity of paperwork required by new processes being brought in by the Elections Act will also make it more difficult to train and retain existing staff without technology to support them.</p> <p>Do something else:</p> <p>There are no further options as this product is unique in the market. Govt plans to</p>
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	<p>further automate polling are many decades away from development. The current team do not have sufficient capacity to develop longer term plans to recruit train and develop processes without other forms of investment.</p>
<p>Consultation</p>	<p>1. The Tamworth Parliamentary By-Election was a good opportunity to get some live demonstration of the system and so, with TBC's agreement, we asked some of our internal staff who are experienced Presiding Officers to work the Poll. We have received their feedback which has been very positive and resulted in requests that the system is brought in at this authority.</p>
<p>Financial Implications</p>	<p><b>A full breakdown in costs can be found in the Confidential section of this report.</b></p> <p>The cost can be met from contributions from existing revenue budget, the use of the New Burdens Fund and the elections reserve.</p>
<p>Approved by Section 151 Officer</p>	<p>Yes</p>
<p>Legal Implications</p>	<p>1. There has been no challenge to the use of Modern Polling from the Electoral Commission or DLUHC</p> <p>2. To comply with the legal and operational requirements of the Elections Act the Council enter into agreements with DLUHC in respect of data protection, data sharing and cyber security therefore approval is asked to allow the Returning Officer to sign any updated agreements following this decision.</p>
<p>Approved by Monitoring Officer</p>	<p>Yes</p>
<p>Contribution to the Delivery of the Strategic Plan</p>	<p>1. The introduction of Modern Democracy will allow us to <b>Enable people to</b> collaborate and engage with us <b>Be a good council that is</b> transparent and accountable/responsive and customer focussed</p>
<p>Equality, Diversity and Human Rights Implications</p>	<p>1. The purchase and implementation of the modern polling system will assist with the introduction of the Elections Act which will support inclusivity for all eligible voters.</p>
<p>EIA logged by Equalities Officer</p>	<p>Yes Equalities Officer confirmed not required.</p>
<p>Crime &amp; Safety Issues</p>	<p>1. None</p>
<p>Data assessment</p>	<p>1. The <a href="#">social progress index</a> reports voter turnout for each district ward and it ranges from 21% in Summerfield and All Saints to 38% in Boley Park. An average increase in turnout may be experienced with the introduction of Modern Democracy due to the quicker, more positive voter experience. It may take a couple of polls to realise an increase.</p>
<p>Environmental Impact (including</p>	<p>1. Polling Station paperwork has been very heavily paper based with printed registers, absent vote lists and Voter ID recording (VIDEF and BPRLs). Across</p>

Climate Change and Biodiversity).	the number of stations Lichfield District has, this is a lot of paper, ink and use of printers. The removal of this requirement will reduce the carbon footprint for elections and the Council.
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GDPR / Privacy Impact Assessment	1. Modern Polling is ISO 27001 and GDPR compliant ensuring data is safely stored, encrypted and securely destroyed when no longer required. It is also approved by Government Digital Services and ITHC Compliant.
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	Risk Description & Risk Owner	Original Score (RYG)	How We Manage It	Current Score (RYG)
A	Complete failure of system during polling	Red (4)	Revert back to paper and manual systems. All registers and lists will be prepared and saved as a contingency. All data is backed up throughout polling day and so can switch with no loss of data. Being a cloud based polling system, it reduces the risk associated with business continuity, Modern Democracy have a robust, detailed and tested business continuity plan which ensures minimal system downtime.	green. (2)
B	Polling staff not willing to use technology	Yellow (4)	Full training and support will be given. The purchase of some iPads internally allows for the training package to be accessed throughout the year and so time can be taken. Modern Democracy also provide comprehensive training videos that can be sent out in advance.	Green (2)
C				
D				
E				

	Background documents None
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	Relevant web links <a href="#">Modern Polling » Modern Democracy</a>
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