

Council Meeting

30th November 2022

Motion submitted by Councillor Scullion under Council Procedure Rule 14

Giving Everyone a Fair Chance to Vote: The Elections Act 2022

This Council notes:

- that the Elections Act received Royal Assent on April 28th, 2022, slipping into legislation during the short chaotic period of Liz Truss's premiership. Among its other provisions this Act would require voters in person to show photographic ID in order to get a ballot at polling stations from the next local election in May 2023. It means that those without such approved ID would have to apply for a Voter Authority Certificate in advance from the Council's Elections office at least six days in advance of an election.
- the Electoral Commission has warned that 3.5 million people (7.5% of the electorate) in Great Britain do not have access to any form of photo ID. In addition, new measures regarding postal voter identification are due to come into effect from July 2023.

This Council further notes that:

- the national costs of the new measures shown in the financial impact assessment provided with the original Bill came to at least £150m over a decade, based on an assumption that the estimated 2% of people without accepted forms of ID will apply for a voter card;
- the overall cost of this is estimated to increase nationally by £10m for each additional percentage point of the electorate who apply for a voter card, according to the impact assessment. There is no news of funding locally for elections services for this additional burden. This Council believes that the resources and capacity which will need to be dedicated to the implementation of this measure would be much better spent on encouraging people to register to vote and to use their vote at election time;
- in addition, this Act will put pressure on the already stretched capacity of councils to manage elections as well as the risk of making election staff recruitment even harder than it is with the possible refusal of votes at polling stations.

This Council believes:

- that this Act requiring photographic ID for all elections is disproportionate - a sledgehammer to crack a nut. Since 2016 there have been no cases of suspected electoral fraud in Calderdale. There have been no recorded cases of impersonation in Calderdale in recent memory. In the whole of 2019, when 58 million votes were cast across a number of elections during the year, there were 33 allegations of impersonation which resulted in one conviction and one caution for people casting votes illegally. The Electoral Reform Society has called this "an expensive distraction", which will discourage people from voting;
- the new Voter ID requirements will only serve to add barriers for those already least likely to vote, reduce voter turnout and that the resources needed for these proposals to be implemented would be better spent promoting voter registration and encouraging voting across all communities;

- that stricter voter identification laws disproportionately disenfranchises people from deprived backgrounds, people with disabilities and BAME communities, who already tend to be democratically marginalised;
- that this legislation represents an attempt to disenfranchise young people and deter young people from exercising their right to vote;
- that the current list of accepted documents, which includes driving licences, passports, European Economic Area (EEA) issued national identity cards, biometric immigration documents, Proof of Age Standards Scheme (PASS) cards, defence identity cards as well as adult travel cards is not sufficiently extensive to ensure every voter gets a fair chance to exercise their democratic right to vote;
- that there is provision within the Act to further amend the list so that additional forms of identification can be added and that this should be done as quickly as possible before the local elections. A cross party group of MPs has already tried without success to amend the provisions to include library cards, student travel passes and other forms of identification more frequently used by young people.

This Council therefore resolves:

- to call upon the Secretary of State at the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Government to act to make the process of voting in the forthcoming elections easier, not more difficult;
- to act quickly, well before the local elections, not to enact the legislation, or to use secondary legislation to extend the list of accepted documents so that people can actually vote without being turned away by unnecessary bureaucracy;
- to ensure that councils like Calderdale are adequately funded for this additional work;
- to give focus on promoting voter registration and actually voting, in the interests of ensuring higher participation rates in our already safe and secure elections system.

And further resolves:

- to ask the Chief Executive to write to our two local Members of Parliament asking them to lend their support to further enabling provisions which will help the people of Calderdale to get out and exercise their vote.

Seconded by Councillor