

Contact Officer: Jenny Bryce-Chan

KIRKLEES COUNCIL

CORPORATE SCRUTINY PANEL

Monday 7th February 2022

Present: Councillor Andrew Cooper (Chair)
Councillor John Taylor
Councillor Charles Greaves
Councillor Alison Munro

In attendance: Laura Burrell, Electoral Services Manager

Observers: Councillor Elizabeth Smaje, Chair of Overview and
Scrutiny Management Committee

Apologies: Philip Chaloner (Co-Optee)

1 Membership of the Committee

Apologies were received from Philip Chaloner.

2 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

That the minutes of the meeting held on the 13th December be approved as a correct record.

3 Interests

No interests were declared.

4 Admission of the Public

All agenda items were considered in public session.

5 Deputations/Petitions

No deputations or petitions were received.

6 Public Question Time

No public questions were asked.

7 The Elections Bill 2021 Update

Laura Burrell, Electoral Service Manager attended the meeting to provide an update on the Elections Bill 2021, advising that the Bill had recently progressed through the second stage in the Commons and is expected to have Royal Assent by May 2022.

The Panel was informed that the Elections Bill contains various proposals which will impact on how electoral registration and elections are delivered the UK, however, the Bill will have no impact on the upcoming District Council elections in May 2022.

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The scope of the Bill is wide ranging and covers the following areas:

- Requirement for voters to present ID at polling stations before a ballot paper is issued
- Requires Electoral Registration Officer (EROs) based in local authorities to issue free voter identification cards to those without a valid form of photo ID
- Requirement for postal voters to reapply for a postal vote every three years, this replaces the current rules whereby a postal voter must refresh their signature every five years
- The Bill seeks to restrict the handling of postal votes by campaigners and limits the number of postal votes that any individual can hand in at a polling station. The current suggestion is that this could be limited to two
- Requirement for applicants for postal votes to undergo identity checks.
- Online absent vote application portal to be implemented
- Further limit the number of people someone may act as a proxy for
- Allow all British citizens living overseas to register to vote for UK Parliamentary elections, regardless of when they left the UK. This would remove the current 15-year limit
- Change the voting and candidacy rights for European citizens
- Extend the accessibility to elections by requiring Returning Officers to take all reasonable steps to provide support to those with a disability whilst attending a polling station
- Simplify and clarify the offence of undue influence as well as introducing a new offence around intimidation of candidates, campaigners and elected office holders from intimidation and abuse
- The introduction of new digital imprint requirements, requiring campaigners to explicitly detail who they are and on behalf of whom they are promoting on all digital campaign materials

The Panel was informed that prior to the changes the aim will be to deliver a comprehensive communication campaign to make sure that all residents are informed on the changes before they get to the polling station. In Kirklees, there are local elections scheduled in 2023 and it is expected to see those changes at that election.

In response to the information presented comments were made and questions were asked including the following:

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- In relation to voter ID, the information states that voter ID cards will be issued to people who turn up without a valid form of ID. Will the individuals checking these know it is not valid because there is a range of ID voters can turn up with which will require a great deal of checking and could effectively become similar passport control?
- There is also an issue about women who wear a veil, will they be asked to remove their veil?
- There are cost implications for all these different passes and in this current economic climate where there is less money, this could potentially be a deterrent to people who have a valid right to vote
- There could be learnings picked up from Northern Ireland as the requirement to provide voter ID was brought in a while ago and is therefore well established. There will be processes and procedures developed in Northern Ireland that hopefully can be replicated here
- The information states that 'political campaigners' will be barred from handling postal votes; how will political campaigners be defined?
- In respect of voter ID who is going to be producing them and what level of resource will be needed?

The Panel was advised that written questions submitted by a Panel member would be responded to, the questions included:

- It will be important to establish the financial impact on the process to include extra staff and training to support this. The 'challenge' to poll staff is not to be underestimated and could potentially lead to abuse as seen in other areas of public service
- It is likely that there will be disenfranchisement among some voters who may not have approved identification and also those who would challenge this change

RESOLVED

That Laura Burrell be thanked for providing an update on the Elections Bill 2021.