

Electoral pilot scheme evaluation

Broxbourne Borough Council

August 2007



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Contents

	Summary	3
1	Introduction	4
2	Context	6
3	Pilot scheme description	7
4	Evaluation	11
	Efficiency	11
	Voting	12
	Turnout	15
	Security and confidence	16
	Cost and value for money	17
5	Conclusions and findings	19

Summary

In response to a prospectus issued to local authorities in England inviting applications for electoral pilot schemes at the May 2007 local government elections, Broxbourne Borough Council submitted an application to pilot a series of innovations, including:

- advance voting across the borough, with electors allocated by ward to the most geographically convenient of three advance voting stations in municipal locations
- a requirement for voters to sign for their ballot papers at the advance voting stations

Conclusions and findings

The pilot scheme facilitated and encouraged voting for a small number of electors. Advance voting gave electors more opportunity to cast their votes; just under 7% of those who voted at the May 2007 elections used the advance voting stations. The pilot also improved convenience for electors, allowing them to vote in person at a wider range of times and locations. In exit poll interviews, voters were positive about both the advance voting stations and the collection of signatures.

The pilot scheme appears to have had some limited impact on turnout. Overall turnout for the May 2007 elections in Broxbourne was 31.3%. While this was 2.5 percentage points less than in 2006, the number of advance voters ran against the overall voting trend, recording a 75% increase over the previous year. As in 2006, there is some limited evidence to suggest that a minority (15% of those surveyed) of those using advance voting stations would not have voted had the pilot scheme not been taking place.

The pilot scheme was easy to use. The research undertaken shows that those who did vote at the advance voting stations found them easy to use, as the ballot papers were essentially identical to those used on polling day. The collection of signature requirement also went smoothly, with no reported issues during the advance voting period.

The pilot scheme does not appear to have led to any increase in personation or other offences or malpractice. There is no evidence to suggest that the procedures provided by the pilot scheme led to any increase in electoral offences, or in any other malpractice in connection with elections.

The pilot scheme led to a slight increase in expenditure for the Council. Overall, the advance voting and signature collection pilot cost £3,159 more than a conventional election, the majority of which went towards providing advance voting station staff and publicity. This equates to an extra £2.24 per voter for the 1,412 voters who took advantage of the pilot. As there was no change to the process of voting and Council-owned buildings were used, other costs were kept to a minimum compared with other pilots.

1 Introduction

1.1 Under the Representation of the People Act (RPA) 2000, any local authority in England and Wales can submit proposals to the Secretary of State for Justice (prior to 9 May 2007, the Secretary of State for Constitutional Affairs) to carry out an electoral pilot scheme. Electoral pilot schemes can involve changes to when, where and how voting at local government elections is to take place, how the votes cast at the elections are to be counted, or candidates sending election communications free of postage charges. The Electoral Commission has a statutory duty to evaluate and report on any pilot scheme approved by the Secretary of State.

1.2 A total of 312 local authorities in England held elections in May 2007. In October 2006, the Department for Constitutional Affairs¹ and the Commission issued a joint prospectus to local authorities inviting applications for electoral pilot schemes at the May 2007 elections. Fourteen applications were received in response to the prospectus, and in January 2007 the Secretary of State for Constitutional Affairs announced that he had approved 12 pilot schemes in a total of 13 local authority areas. A full list of all the authorities that held pilot schemes in May 2007 is available on the Commission's website at www.electoralcommission.org.uk.

1.3 This report presents the Commission's evaluation of the electoral pilot scheme carried out by Broxbourne Borough Council at the elections on 3 May 2007. The evaluation includes a description of the pilot scheme and an assessment as to:

- the scheme's success or otherwise in facilitating voting or the counting of votes, or in encouraging voting or enabling voters to make informed choices at the elections
- whether the turnout of voters was higher than it would have been if the scheme had not applied
- whether voters found the procedures provided for their assistance by the scheme easy to use
- whether the procedures provided for by the scheme led to any increase in personation or other electoral offences, or in any other malpractice in connection with elections
- whether those procedures led to any increase in expenditure, or to any savings, by the authority

1.4 In addition to these statutory requirements, the Commission's evaluation also considers, where appropriate:

- the extent to which the pilot scheme facilitated or otherwise encouraged participation among particular communities, including young people, people from minority ethnic communities and disabled people
- overall levels of user awareness and comprehension of the voting method being tested, including an assessment of the effectiveness of any literature or other materials used in the promotion of the pilot scheme

¹ Hereafter referred to as the Ministry of Justice following the machinery of government changes on 9 May 2007.

- the attitudes and opinions of key stakeholders, including voters, with a view to determining overall levels of confidence in the voting method being tested
- whether the pilot scheme resulted in measurable improvements, or had any adverse impact, with respect to the provision of more efficient and effective service delivery to voters
- whether the pilot scheme resulted in measurable improvements to, or had any adverse impact on, the existing system of electoral administration
- whether the pilot scheme represented good 'value for money'

1.5 Where appropriate, the Commission may also make recommendations as to whether changes should be made to electoral arrangements more generally through roll-out of the pilot scheme procedures.

1.6 The Commission is required to submit its evaluation report to the Secretary of State and any of the local authorities involved in the pilot scheme, and those local authorities are required to publish the evaluation report within three months of the elections. The Commission has also published this report on its website, together with a copy of the Statutory Order that allowed the pilot scheme to take place.

1.7 In preparing this report, the Commission has drawn on its own observations and assessment of the pilot scheme, as well as on the views expressed to it by a number of other stakeholders. The report also incorporates findings from work undertaken by the following contractors:

- public opinion research carried out by ICM Research
- an accessibility evaluation of the pilot by PA Consulting, Equal Ability CIC and Churchill, Minty & Friend Ltd

1.8 Copies of the reports produced by the Commission's contractors are available from its website, and in other formats on request.

1.9 The Commission would particularly like to thank the Returning Officer and the Electoral Services department of Broxbourne Borough Council for their assistance in undertaking this evaluation and for supplying it with the information and data to support the evaluation.

2 Context

The area

2.1 The borough of Broxbourne is situated in south east Hertfordshire in the East of England region. It is a mainly urban area on the northern boundary of Greater London, with a Census 2001 population of approximately 87,000 and a population density of approximately 17 persons per hectare. The main urban areas are Cheshunt, Hoddesdon and Waltham Cross.

2.2 According to Census 2001 data, 96.1% of the population was of white ethnic origin compared with the national average of 90.9%. Some 14.7% were over 65 years old (compared with a national average of 15.9%), while 4.3% of the population were 16–19 years old (compared with a national average of 4.9%).²

2.3 In 2004, Broxbourne was ranked at 216 out of 354 local authorities in England on the indices of deprivation (where the first ranked was the most deprived area) in research conducted by the then Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM).³ Some 79.8% of households are owner-occupied, just over 10% more than the figure for England as a whole, which is 68.7%.

The Council

2.4 Broxbourne Borough Council is elected by thirds and is made up of 13 wards with 38 councillors. At the May 2007 elections, all 13 wards had elections for one Councillor each. There is one two-member ward and 12 are three-member wards. The total electorate for Broxbourne at the 2007 elections was 66,935.

2.5 The Council is controlled by the Conservative Party and has been since 1973. Prior to the elections, there were 35 Conservative, two Labour and one British National Party councillor. The Member of Parliament for the Broxbourne Parliamentary constituency is Charles Walker (Conservative).

2.6 The Council has previously carried out an advance voting pilot scheme in 2006, and electronic counting pilot schemes in 2000, 2002 and 2003.

² Except where otherwise stated, all demographic information was obtained from the census carried out in 2001 by the Office for National Statistics.

³ Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, *The English Indices of Deprivation 2004 (revised)* (2004), www.communities.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1128440

3 Pilot scheme description

The pilot scheme application

3.1 In response to the October 2006 electoral pilot scheme prospectus, Broxbourne Borough Council (hereafter known as 'the Council') submitted an application to pilot 'out of ward' advance voting facilities allowing electors to vote in person at the Council's main offices and in two of its one-stop shops before polling day.

3.2 Following discussions with the Ministry of Justice, the Council also agreed to pilot a requirement for voters to provide a signature before their ballot papers would be issued by staff at advance voting stations. A similar measure requiring signature collection at polling stations was included in the Electoral Administration Act 2006 but has yet to be commenced. A sanction was included in the Statutory Order for electors at advance voting stations to not be issued with a ballot paper if they refused to provide their signature.

3.3 In a Written Ministerial Statement on 29 January 2007, the Secretary of State for Constitutional Affairs announced that the Government had given approval for the Council to pilot the above innovations.⁴ The Broxbourne Borough Council (Advance Voting) Pilot Order 2007 was made on 26 March 2007 and came into force on the same day.⁵

Pilot scheme summary

3.4 The Council proposed using its main borough offices in Cheshunt and two of its one-stop shops in the towns of Hoddesdon and Waltham Cross as advance voting stations. These advance voting stations, designed to replicate the polling station experience, would enable electors to vote from Wednesday 25 to Saturday 28 April and from Monday 30 April to Wednesday 2 May. The stations were open from 9am to 5pm on all days except on Saturday 28 April, when the operational hours were from 9am to 1pm. The seven days of advance voting was an increase on the four days available in 2006.

3.5 Electors were allocated on a ward-by-ward basis to a particular advance voting station. The allocation of wards to advance voting stations shown in Table 1 was based on geographical proximity. The Council chose the same locations as were used for advance voting in 2006, based on the fact that the use of one-stop shops would facilitate easy access for electors conducting other business at these premises or otherwise visiting the town centres. The choice of the Council's main borough offices was similarly made because of the daily throughput of visitors.

⁴ Official Record (House of Lords), 29 January 2007, Column WS1.

⁵ The Commission's response to all Pilot Orders can be found on the Commission website at www.electoralcommission.org.uk/files/dms/All_Responses_25780-19142_E_N_S_W_.pdf.

3.6 The advance voting stations were laid out to replicate a conventional polling station with a designated area for voting to take place. Voters signed their names on the corresponding number list,⁶ after which staff issued ballot papers to voters and observed the placing of the ballot papers in the ballot boxes.

Table 1: Allocation of wards to advance voting stations

Advance voting stations	Wards allocated to advance voting stations
Borough offices (in Bury Green ward)	Bury Green, Cheshunt Central, Cheshunt North, Flamstead End, Goffs Oak, Rosedale
Hoddesdon (in Hoddesdon Town ward)	Broxbourne, Hoddesdon North, Hoddesdon Town, Rye Park, Wormley/Turnford
Waltham Cross (in Waltham Cross ward)	Theobalds, Waltham Cross

3.7 As well as enabling advance voting, the pilot required all voters at the advance voting stations to provide their signature before they were issued with a ballot paper. Voters were asked to provide their signature in a designated space on a corresponding number list, next to the relevant ballot paper number and elector number. Once the voter had provided their signature, advance voting station staff would provide them with a ballot paper.

3.8 The Presiding Officer could dispense with the requirement for a voter to provide a signature, and instead mark the space with the letters 'PI' for physical incapacity, if they were satisfied that it was not reasonably possible for a voter to sign in a consistent or distinctive way because of any incapacity or inability to read.

Objectives of the pilot scheme

3.9 In its pilot scheme application, the Council stated that the proposed innovations aimed to:

- make the elections more accessible to electors by significantly lengthening the period during which votes could be cast in person
- increase the overall turnout, thus resulting in greater numbers of people engaging in local democracy
- provide a relatively low-cost and secure advance voting solution, since the one-stop shops and council offices to be used were owned by the Council
- apply the learning and conclusions from the Commission's evaluation of the 2006 pilot
- provide an opportunity for the Commission and the Council to compare the 2006 pilot as a benchmark for measuring outputs (turnout and convenience) and inputs (cost per vote) with a second, extended advance voting scheme

3.10 In commenting formally to the Secretary of State on the application, the Commission noted that it was pleased to see the Council proposing to explore the

⁶ A corresponding number list is a list of the ballot paper numbers associated with the ballot papers supplied to a polling station.

impact on awareness of advance voting of repeating the pilot scheme for a second year, and that it had sought to improve the design of the scheme by increasing the advance voting period. It agreed that there would be value in exploring the impact of this pilot scheme, and supported the application.⁷

3.11 The Commission also subsequently commented on the proposal to pilot a signature collection requirement at advance voting stations. It questioned the effectiveness of this measure in the absence of individual voter registration and the collection of personal identification details against which to check the signatures. However, it indicated that it was ready to evaluate these trials and assess the views and reactions of voters.

3.12 The background paper attached to the Secretary of State's Written Ministerial Statement announcing approval of the May 2007 pilot schemes noted the Government's view that:

the piloting of advance voting will add to the evidence available about the longer term impact of providing additional flexibility for electors to choose when they cast their vote, building on Broxbourne's May 2006 advance voting pilot scheme. The requirement for electors to provide their signature before voting will enable us to identify any practical issues remaining to be addressed before the requirement is rolled out nationally.⁸

3.13 The following section outlines the key objectives of the pilot scheme, as they relate to the statutory evaluation criteria specified in Chapter 1, 'Introduction'.

Facilitating voting and ease of use

3.14 The Council hoped that the advance voting pilot would make the elections more accessible to electors by significantly lengthening the period during which votes could be cast in person, at locations expected to be convenient for electors. The pilot scheme allowed electors who may not have been able to vote in person on polling day (and who may not have wanted, or have had time to apply for, a postal or proxy vote) the opportunity to cast their vote in advance, in person. Postal voters were also able to drop off their ballot papers at the advance voting stations.

3.15 By placing the advance voting stations in council offices, including one-stop shops, it was hoped that voting would take place in premises that electors would be likely to visit as part of their normal routines, whether they knew about the pilot scheme or not, and which would be widely known to the public.

3.16 An assessment of the requirement to sign and its impact on voters' experiences was carried out through analysis of a record of queries raised, which was kept by advance voting station staff and which recorded the details of any electors refusing to sign. It was supplemented by observation at the advance voting stations and through analysis of opinion research and exit polls.

⁷ Comments by the Commission on pilot scheme applications under Section 10, RPA 2000, December 2006, www.electoralcommission.org.uk/templates/search/document.cfm/17797

⁸ Official Record (House of Commons), 29 January 2007, Column 3WS.

Facilitating the counting of votes

3.17 There was no advance counting of the votes received at the advance voting stations, and therefore it was not expected that the advance voting pilot would affect the counting of votes on polling day.

Turnout

3.18 At the 2006 local government elections, during which advance voting was also piloted, turnout rose to 33.7%, compared with 25.3% at the last comparable elections in 2003. The Commission's 2006 pilot evaluation report concluded that there was some limited evidence to suggest that the provision of advance voting had contributed slightly to this increase. It was therefore hoped by the Council that the continued piloting of advance voting in 2007 would make the elections more accessible, thereby increasing overall turnout.

Security and confidence

3.19 Trialling signature collection at the advance voting stations provided a further opportunity to evaluate the views and reactions of voters to this measure before it is rolled out more widely. Security was not expected to be a particular issue in relation to advance voting, since the advance voting stations were in effect only traditional polling stations that were open earlier than usual.

Efficiency

3.20 The main impact of the pilot scheme on the overall efficiency of the elections was expected to be the staffing and advertising costs associated with advance voting stations. As Council-owned property was used for the advance voting stations, there were no additional costs associated with their use.

3.21 Notwithstanding these issues, no overall impact on the efficiency of the electoral process was expected as a result of this pilot scheme, since the advance voting stations were in effect only traditional polling stations that were open earlier than usual. No difficulties in implementing the signature collection requirement were anticipated given the low levels of usage likely for advance voting.

4 Evaluation

Efficiency

Project management

4.1 Advance voting was managed by the Council's Electoral Services department, with the team for the project consisting of one Project Manager and one Project Support Officer. The Returning Officer (the Council's Chief Executive Officer) was kept up-to-date by regular reporting throughout the duration of the pilot. Highlight reports were also provided by the Council on a fortnightly basis. These reports included a progress update against key deadlines, a risk register, a list of issues affecting the pilot and a section on lessons learned.

4.2 The co-ordination of the pilot scheme formed part of the overall management process for the 2007 elections and was a regular agenda item at management meetings. The pilot element of the elections did not require extensive project management as the issues were felt to be essentially the same as those that would normally be encountered on polling day, with the exception of the signature requirement.

4.3 Given the limited costs involved in the pilot and the relatively limited availability of staff, the use of highlight reports as the key method of project management appears to have worked reasonably well.

Training

4.4 The advance voting stations were operated by staff who were not members of the Electoral Services team, but who had experience of previous elections. As they had previously worked at elections, with some having worked on the advance voting pilot in 2006, training for all staff was felt to be unnecessary, particularly as the only difference to either regular polling stations or the previous year's pilot was the implementation of a signature collection requirement. However, written guidance concerning the pilot was produced and was available to all staff working at the elections. Presiding Officers were personally briefed on the pilot and were also encouraged to draw attention to visitors to the premises that an advance voting opportunity was available.

4.5 There were no significant concerns raised by staff about the practicalities of the polling arrangements at any of the three advance voting stations. There was no specific training arranged for candidates and agents, although all were written to and briefed about the pilot arrangements.

Supplier management

4.6 The advance voting pilot scheme had a limited impact on the printing of election materials. The format of the poll card was changed to include details of advance voting, and therefore had to be supplied by the printer in time for electors to have sufficient notice. However, the printer's production schedule for election stationery was sufficiently in advance of the elections, due to the need for the timely issue of postal ballot packs, so as not to present a problem.

4.7 The corresponding number lists, which included a field for the collection of signatures from voters at the advance voting stations, were produced in-house, with no impact on the printer.

Voting

Public awareness and feedback

4.8 Upon the completion of the previous advance voting pilot in Broxbourne in 2006, Council officers stated that if it were to be repeated then further priority would need to be given to publicity and communication. Promoting awareness of the advance voting stations was therefore central to ensuring the success of the pilot.

4.9 A number of publicity channels were utilised to inform electors of the pilot, including:

- an article in the Council magazine
- advance voting information on poll cards for both in-person and postal voters
- paid press advertisements and press releases
- posters at advance voting locations
- posters on refuse vehicles operating in the borough
- information on the Council's website

4.10 Candidates and agents were directly informed of the pilot via their election packs and through Council responses to enquiries.

4.11 The ICM Research post-election survey of members of the public found that only 27% of respondents had unprompted awareness of the pilot scheme, with half (52%) of those able to identify either advance voting or the signature requirement as the innovations being trialled. Awareness was significantly lower than in every other area (bar one) in which pilot schemes were taking place.

4.12 More respondents to the survey were aware of the advance voting pilot (47%) than were aware of the signature requirement (18%), which is probably due to the latter only being used at advance voting stations. This figure is higher than in 2006, when only 14% of respondents said they knew that a pilot scheme was being held. This finding could be an indicator of the benefit of a similar pilot being held in consecutive years.

4.13 ICM Research found that awareness of the pilot was built on Council leaflets, poll cards and local media sources, with 31%, 23% and 19% of those who were aware of the pilot citing these means as their respective source of information.

Impact on voting

4.14 In total, 1,412 voters made use of the advance voting stations over the course of the pilot, constituting 6.8% of those who voted (20,830) and 2.1% of the total electorate (66,935). This suggests that the pilot scheme did indeed improve accessibility and convenience for some electors. Table 2 provides a breakdown of the wards and days on which individuals voted.

Table 2: Use of advance voting by station and by ward

Daily votes cast	25 April	26 April	27 April	28 April	30 April	1 May	2 May	Total
Borough offices								
Bury Green	6	13	16	8	33	19	38	133
Cheshunt Central	3	1	6	8	7	7	2	34
Cheshunt North	3	5	7	4	8	4	9	40
Flamstead End	11	6	4	7	5	3	7	43
Goffs Oak	3	9	6	6	6	10	12	52
Rosedale	9	3	13	8	10	7	6	56
Subtotal								358
Hoddesdon								
Broxbourne	14	5	16	9	9	3	9	65
Hoddesdon North	13	12	24	5	19	11	12	96
Hoddesdon Town	33	26	36	19	39	39	39	231
Rye Park	21	8	16	14	8	9	16	92
Wormley/Turnford	12	7	8	3	10	12	17	69
Subtotal								553
Waltham Cross								
Theobalds	15	20	15	9	22	33	37	151
Waltham Cross	46	38	48	27	72	46	73	350
Subtotal								501
Total	189	153	215	127	248	203	277	1,412

4.15 The one-stop shop in Hoddesdon Town was the most used facility with 39% of the 1,412 advance votes being cast here, although this was closely followed by 35% at Waltham Cross, with 25% being cast at the borough offices (figures do not add up to 100% due to rounding). Although there was a general increase in the number of advance voters across the board when compared with 2006, Waltham Cross saw the most dramatic increase, rising from 190 to 501 votes being cast. Wednesday 2 May 2007 was the most popular advance voting day, attracting around 20% of

advance voters. Saturday 28 April was the least popular, although it still saw 9% of voters cast their ballot. The majority of advance votes were also cast in the three days before the elections, with the smallest numbers occurring in the first two days and on the Saturday.

4.16 While there was a marked increase in voter turnout at the advance voting stations compared with 2006 (rising from 808 to 1,412, a 75% increase), this can be directly correlated to the extension of the advance voting period in 2007 compared with the previous year. When a comparison is made on a day-to-day basis, the result is significant. On average, over the seven-day advance voting period in 2007, 202 voters (when rounded) cast their ballot each day, exactly the same number that did so on each of the four advance voting days in 2006. While some wards experienced a more marked increase in numbers than others, overall there was no indication that having advance voting stations at consecutive elections increased average daily usage.

4.17 ICM Research stationed exit poll interviewers at the advance voting locations and interviewed voters as they left the advance voting stations. Most advance voters (88%) stated that advance voting stations should be available at all elections. The majority of voters (67%) believed that advance voting was convenient. Fifteen per cent of advance voters claimed they would have been unable to have voted without this facility. This was confirmed by the depth interviews:

I used this method and thought it was absolutely brilliant. I was going to be away on polling day and would not have bothered with a postal vote.

Female advance voter

4.18 Advance voting tended to appeal to committed voters, especially older people. Looking at the voter demographics at the advance voting stations, 63% were over the age of 55, the segment of society most likely to vote regardless of circumstance.

Voting is a very habitual thing and a lot of people who were voting early for the most part were older voters.

Broxbourne agent

4.19 Nine per cent of voters decided to use the advance voting stations on the spur of the moment while passing by. This suggests that signage at the locations was useful in persuading some voters to vote who might not otherwise have chosen to do so.

Accessibility

4.20 Overall, organisations contacted by the Commission’s accessibility contractors were positive about the idea of advance voting. The Broxbourne website was also found to be accessible. However, there were a few issues identified in the access assessment:

- There was limited engagement with groups affected by accessibility issues, either directly or through their representative organisations. Organisations contacted by the Commission’s contractors were not found to be aware of the advance voting stations.
- The use of standard-print format in Broxbourne’s distribution material meant that the information was not necessarily easily accessible. The groups and communities contacted also would have preferred alternative print options and audio formats, publications in other languages and more advertising.
- The locations of the advance voting stations were also an issue for a few organisations as they were seen to be too far away by some of their members.

4.21 The signature requirement did not have to be waived by the Presiding Officers for any voters for accessibility reasons. However, the Statutory Order provided for a waiver due to incapacity or inability to read to be applied. If such a circumstance had arisen, staff were instructed to contact the Council’s Elections Office for guidance.

Campaigning

4.22 Feedback on the advance voting pilot was limited from candidates and agents, with only one agent responding. The view of advance voting stations was positive, although with so little input from candidates and agents there is little information from which to draw any conclusions.

Turnout

4.23 A review of turnout levels at recent local government elections reveals a slight decrease at the 2007 elections relative to 2006; the overall 2007 turnout was 31.3% compared with 33.7% in 2006 (see Table 3). This, however, is still higher than at all other local government elections since 2000 except 2004, when local government elections were combined with elections to the European Parliament.

Table 3: Turnout at local government elections in Broxbourne, 2000–07

Year	Turnout (%)
2000	22.7
2002	26.9
2003	25.3
2004	35.4
2006	33.7
2007	31.3

4.24 Fifteen per cent of those responding to interviewers at the advance voting stations said they would have been unlikely to have voted if the advance voting option had not been available.⁹ It is therefore possible to speculate that advance voting had a limited positive impact on turnout. However, the majority of those voting at the advance voting stations appear likely to have voted regardless of the availability.

4.25 While overall turnout was down from 2006, the percentage of voters casting ballots at advance voting stations rose from 3.7% in 2006 to 6.8% in 2007. While the number of voters casting ballots on a day-by-day basis at the advance voting stations was virtually identical in these two years, their overall numbers rose while the total number of voters declined.

4.26 Public opinion research conducted in the Broxbourne area indicates that the public were positive about the impact that advance voting might have on turnout at future local government elections. The research found that among respondents who were unaware of advance voting, or only found out about it after the event, 38% claimed they would possibly have been motivated to vote early had they known about the opportunity. This percentage is down from 47% in 2006, although this discrepancy could be accounted for in the larger number of advance voters in 2007 compared with 2006. Sixty-five per cent of respondents also felt that advance voting would increase turnout, this number being relatively steady with the findings from the previous year (68%).

Security and confidence

Security

4.27 The Commission has not been made aware of any allegations of fraud, malpractice or multiple voting arising from the pilot scheme at these elections. At present, therefore, there is no substantiated evidence to suggest that the procedures provided by the pilot scheme led to any increase in electoral offences, or in any other malpractice in connection with elections. The Commission notes that the period in which a prosecution can be launched is one year, and so such evidence may still come to light.

4.28 The risk of multiple voting was managed effectively by the Council. As in the first pilot in 2006, each advance voting station had registers for the relevant borough wards which were updated with a record of advance voters. These registers were then used on polling day, ensuring that anyone attempting to vote again would be prevented from doing so. No cases of attempted multiple voting were observed on polling day. Postal voters, again, were able to use the advance voting stations to drop off their ballots, although few (12) took up the option.

4.29 The use of Council property for advance voting stations helped ensure that advance voting took place at secure locations. Completed ballots from advance voting stations were secured overnight at each location following each advance voting day.

⁹ The base size for this question was 297 voters.

4.30 If an elector refused to sign for their ballot, written guidance had been provided to Presiding Officers suggesting they invite electors to vote in person on the normal polling day, when there was no requirement to provide a signature.

User confidence

4.31 Those interviewed in person at advance voting stations were positive about signature collection. Sixty-nine per cent thought this requirement was a good idea, with 57% also saying it would give them more confidence in the voting process.

Stakeholder confidence

4.32 Both voters (71%) and non-voters (71%) appeared to be equally comfortable with the signature collection requirement at advance voting stations, with only one in four uncomfortable (25%). Those who did actually sign for their ballot papers were even more likely to say they were comfortable with the signature requirement (94%).¹⁰

4.33 Among the minority of those who were not comfortable with the process, the main concerns were an invasion of privacy (34%), the perceived lack of voting secrecy (23%) and the pointlessness of it (18%).

4.34 Just over half of respondents (56%) considered that a requirement for everyone to provide a signature when voting in person was a good idea, while more (40%) thought it would reduce fraud rather than increase it (11%). Prior to responding, however, those surveyed were not informed that no verification of signatures was taking place. This might have produced a different result with respect to the public opinion on the signature requirement.

Cost and value for money

4.35 The additional costs to the Council of running the pilot were limited to £3,159, reflecting the fact that Council-owned buildings were used and the pilot scheme made no other changes to the voting process or to the administration of the elections.

4.36 Communications costs were one of the primary costs of running the pilot, with £852 spent on advertising and promotion materials such as amended poll cards, press advertisements and posters. The other key cost was staffing, with £2,277 spent on appointing Presiding Officers and Poll Clerks to advance voting stations. Sundries and stationery for the Presiding Officers were also required, at a cost of £30.

4.37 Table 4 provides a breakdown of the cost of the pilot per elector, per voter and per advance voter. This represents a very small charge per person entitled to vote and a relatively small charge per advance voter, one which was reduced from the 2006 numbers.

¹⁰ *2007 Local elections and pilot scheme – Broxbourne briefing summary* (ICM Research, for the Commission, 2007).

Table 4: Comparative unit costs of the advance voting pilot scheme

Category	Number of people	Cost of pilot per person (£)
Entitled to vote	66,935	0.05
Voted at 2007 elections	20,830	0.15
Voted at advance voting stations	1,412	2.24

4.38 When taken in comparison to the per person costs of the 2006 advance voting pilot, this pilot was £0.02 more expensive per person entitled to vote and £0.05 more expensive per voter. However, it was £0.47 less expensive per advance voter. The reason for these differences is that while the total cost of the pilot in 2007 (£3,159) was higher than in 2006 (£2,190), the increase in advance voters made this pilot even more cost effective.

4.39 The reason for the increased costs in 2007 over 2006 can be attributed to the extension of the advance voting period to seven days compared with four in 2006. While staffing and stationery costs were consequently higher, some savings were made on communications. Not only did the Council spend less per advance voter in 2007 compared with 2006, but less money was spent overall, with a decrease in communications spending of £168.

5 Conclusions and findings

Statutory criteria

5.1 In terms of the five statutory evaluation criteria, the Commission's conclusions in relation to the electoral pilot scheme in Broxbourne are as follows.

5.2 The pilot scheme facilitated and encouraged voting for a small number of electors. Advance voting gave electors more opportunity to cast their votes; just under 7% of those who voted at the May 2007 elections used the advance voting stations. The pilot also improved convenience for electors, allowing them to vote in person at a wider range of times and locations.

5.3 In exit poll interviews, voters were positive about both the advance voting stations and the collection of signatures.

5.4 The pilot scheme had no discernible negative impact on the counting of votes or on the ability of electors to make an informed choice at the elections.

5.5 The pilot scheme appears to have had some limited impact on turnout. Overall turnout for the May 2007 elections in Broxbourne was 31.3%. While this was 2.5 percentage points less than in 2006, the number of advance voters ran against the overall voting trend, recording a 75% increase over the previous year. As in 2006, there is some limited evidence to suggest that a minority (15% of those surveyed) of those using advance voting stations would not have voted had the pilot scheme not been taking place.

5.6 The pilot scheme was easy to use. The research undertaken shows that those who did vote at the advance voting stations found them easy to use, as the ballot papers were essentially identical to those used on polling day. The collection of signature requirement also went smoothly, with no reported issues during the advance voting period.

5.7 The pilot scheme does not appear to have led to any increase in personation or other offences or malpractice. There is no evidence to suggest that the procedures provided by the pilot scheme led to any increase in electoral offences, or in any other malpractice in connection with elections.

5.8 The pilot scheme led to a slight increase in expenditure for the Council. Overall, the advance voting and signature collection pilot cost £3,159 more than a conventional election, the majority of which went towards providing advance voting station staff and publicity. This equates to an extra £2.24 per voter for the 1,412 voters who took advantage of the pilot. As there was no change to the process of voting and Council-owned buildings were used, other costs were kept to a minimum compared with other pilots.

Learning

5.9 The Commission's evaluation of this pilot scheme has identified the following key learning points:

- The most popular advance voting locations were the one-stop shops, which were located in busy central shopping areas.
- Usage at advance voting stations was at its highest in the three days leading up to polling day and at its lowest on the Saturday.
- While total usage was higher in 2007 than during the similar advance voting station pilot in 2006, average daily usage was essentially unchanged.
- The pilot attracted more voters than in 2006, although the overall turnout in 2007 was down from the previous year. According to interview data, this was not, however, a result of historical knowledge of advance voting and instead may be directly correlated to the extended days of advance voting.
- Due to the higher turnout, the cost of the pilot per advance voter also decreased by £0.47 from 2006.
- The Commission's evaluation suggests that voters, candidates and agents seemed generally satisfied with advance voting.
- There is a high level of user and stakeholder confidence in the requirement to provide a signature, notwithstanding the small sample size on which this conclusion is necessarily based.

Issues

5.10 The following issues will need to be considered further in relation to any future pilot schemes or wider implementation of the processes trialled by the Council:

- Since levels of usage for advance voting increased despite the decrease in the communications budget from the previous year, further consideration should be given to what constitutes an effective and economic communications strategy for this service.
- The Council could also engage more effectively with particular communities by better identifying and meeting their access needs throughout the voting process. This could be achieved by providing more accessible information to and communicating better with these communities (including face-to-face outreach) and making available more appropriately supported advance voting stations.