

Watford May 2018 voter identification pilot evaluation

Summary of key findings

The voter identification pilot scheme in Watford required voters to produce to produce their poll card in order to meet the requirement to vote. The poll card contained a QR code which was scanned in the polling station. If a voter did not bring their poll card they could show photo ID (from a specified list) or a valid debit/credit card. Our evaluation of the scheme found that:

- **The majority of voters were able to meet the identification requirements upon arriving at the polling station.** However, some electors did not have the required ID available when they came to vote on 3 May. The majority later returned and were able to cast a vote.
- **There is no evidence that the ID requirement deterred electors from voting.** In our public opinion survey no non-voter in Watford told us that ID was the reason they had not voted. 2018 turnout was higher than the, most comparable, elections in 2016. It is possible that some electors were deterred from voting, believing correctly or incorrectly that they did not have ID, but this seems unlikely to apply to significant numbers.
- **We cannot draw firm conclusions about whether the ID requirement had a disproportionate impact on particular groups of people, for example those with a learning or physical disability.** While we have seen no evidence that specific groups struggled with the ID requirement it is challenging to gather evidence in this area as relatively small groups of people could have been affected in different ways. A disproportionate number of those unable to show ID on 3 May were from electoral wards with higher proportions of people with an Asian background. However, this does not mean that electors from the Asian community were more likely to be affected by the ID requirement.
- **The delivery of this pilot was manageable for the Returning Officer and their staff and, aside from the IT element, there is nothing in their experience of the pilot to suggest that Watford would face significant issues with the administration of a similar ID requirement in the future.** While the IT worked well on 3 May the development and set up was a significant demand on time and resource.
- **Some public attitudes to electoral fraud improved from before to after the pilot.** Fewer people said they thought electoral fraud was a problem in May 2018 than in January 2018. However, we cannot definitively link this change to the pilot.

Our findings suggest that the 2018 local elections in Watford were not significantly affected by the voter ID pilot in either its impact on voters or on the administration of the poll. However, it is important to be cautious when drawing conclusions from this pilot about the impact of any wider application of voter ID.

Background

1.1 At the May 2018 elections five local authorities tested the impact of requiring voters at polling stations to show a form of identification before being issued with a ballot paper. Each area defined their own list of acceptable ID for the pilot, in consultation with the Cabinet Office. The full list of ID accepted in Watford is set out in Appendix A. Each pilot required a Pilot Order which legally allowed the changes to be tested at the May 2018 local elections. These orders also include details of amendments to existing processes. All the orders can be found on [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk).

Evaluation criteria

1.2 The Electoral Commission is required to evaluate any pilots carried out under Section 10 of the Representation of the People Act 2000. The Commission's evaluation must consider several criteria set out in the legislation. They are whether:

- the turnout of voters was higher than it would have been if the scheme had not applied
- voters found the procedures provided for their assistance by the scheme easy to use
- 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
- those procedures led to any increase in expenditure, or to any savings, by the authority

1.3 In addition, the UK Government set two objectives for these pilots:

- That proposed 'ID at polling stations' policy measures are proportional to the policy objective of reducing the opportunity for electoral fraud.
- That the proposed 'ID at polling stations' policy measures enhance public confidence in the security of the electoral system.

1.4 Our assessment below is structured in order to consider all the aspects of both the statutory criteria and the Government's objectives.

Our research

1.5 We have collected information from different places to help us answer these questions:

- Public opinion surveys asking people about the elections and what they thought of the pilot.

- A survey of people who worked in the polling station.¹
- Data about what identification people showed when they voted, and the number of people who were turned away because they didn't have the right identification.
- Feedback from Returning Officers and their staff
- Feedback from organisations that represent different groups of voters.
- Feedback from observers on polling day.

1.6 [View the full datasets from our research.](#)

Evaluation findings

1.7 This report sets out our detailed findings for Watford. We have produced a similar report for each of the other individual pilot areas. We have also published [an overarching report](#) setting out our assessment of the pilots as a whole.

1.8 The voter identification pilot scheme in Watford required voters to produce their poll card in order to meet the requirement to vote. The poll card contained a QR code unique to each individual which would be scanned in the polling station. If a voter did not bring their poll card they could show one of a passport, photo card driving license, valid debit/credit card, Northern Ireland Electoral Identity Card, Biometric Immigration Document or EEA Identity Card.

Impact on voters

Headline findings

1.9 Data provided by Watford, and set out in table below, from all polling stations shows that the majority of voters were able to meet the identification requirements upon arriving at the polling station. However, some electors did not have the required ID available when they came to vote on 3 May. The majority of these electors later returned and were able to cast a vote.

Table 1.1

Electorate	Electors initially unable to vote (no ID/wrong ID)	Electors not returning with correct ID	No. not returning as % of polling station votes cast
70,685	170-194	42-66	0.2%

¹ The survey used in this study was developed from the 2015 Poll Worker study conducted by Alistair Clark and Toby James. Their input in adjusting it for the 2018 local elections was gratefully received. Clark A. & James T. (2017) Poll Workers in Pippa Norris et al (eds) Election Watchdogs, Oxford University Press.

1.10 The data provided by Watford shows that 170 registered electors turned up to vote on 3 May without the required ID. An additional 24 people also turned up without the required ID but did not give their name or address to polling station staff so we cannot be certain that they were registered to vote at that polling station. This means a maximum of 194 electors entered a polling station to attempt to vote on 3 May without the correct ID.

1.11 Watford's data also shows that of the 170 initially unable to vote, 128 returned with the correct ID and were able to vote. This means 42 did not return. We do not know if any of the other 24 individuals returned to vote or not (as it was not possible to capture their details on their first visit).

1.12 The types of ID presented also suggest that the majority of voters were able to meet the requirement with little difficulty. Unsurprisingly the most common ID shown was the poll card and 98% of voters shown one of the following three ID types:

- Poll card (87%)
- Photo driving licence (8%)
- Credit/Debit card (3%)

1.13 [View the full dataset showing which ID types were used by electoral ward](#)

1.14 This data can only tell us about the impact on some of those electors attempting to vote at a polling station. It does not include electors who may have gone to the polling station and decided not to attempt to vote when they became aware of the ID requirement (from posters, etc. at the polling station). It also does not include any electors who did not go to a polling station at all on 3 May because they felt (correctly or incorrectly) that they would not be able to provide the required ID. However, there is other available evidence which suggests that electors were not significantly affected in this way.

1.15 In our public opinion research conducted immediately following 3 May we asked respondents if they voted on 3 May or not. Those respondents that said they were non-voters were asked why they did not vote. This question was asked unprompted, i.e. respondents did not pick a reason from an existing list.

1.16 The main reasons given by non-voters in Watford were that they had no interest in voting, never vote or that they were away or on holiday. No respondents in our survey in Watford said that the ID requirement was the reason they had not voted. However, it is worth noting that our analysis is

limited here as we captured very few non-voters in our survey (93% of respondents said they voted).²

1.17 Evidence from our public opinion research suggests that the public awareness activities run by Watford in the months before 3 May did effectively contribute to the relatively low numbers of electors initially failing to present any or the correct ID. For example, in Watford the proportion of the public who said they had heard something about the ID requirement rose from 41% in our research conducted in January 2018 to 58% in the surveying carried out from 4 May. In our post-election survey, we also asked polling station voters in particular if they were aware they had to take ID to vote – 74% of polling station voters in Watford said they were aware.

1.18 Respondents in Watford were most likely to have heard about the ID requirement via some form of local press (TV, radio, newspaper) with nearly half (48%) citing that as a source of information. The next most commonly cited source of information (23%) was various council communications, eg inserts with council tax bill etc.

Turnout

1.19 If the requirement to show ID had deterred many electors from attempting to vote on 3 May we would also expect to see a drop in overall voter turnout at the 2018 local government elections in Watford. In fact the turnout in 2018 was slightly higher, at 39%, than the 37% recorded at the last comparable elections (the local government Borough council elections in 2016).

1.20 We cannot be certain that the ID requirement did not affect overall turnout – beyond those electors who were refused a ballot paper. For example, Watford's public awareness campaign, put in place to support the pilot, meant that electors saw substantially more advertising about the election than they usually would for a local government poll. In one scenario this activity could have encouraged some electors who do not normally vote while deterring others who usually do (because they felt they did not have sufficient ID). However this is unlikely and the results from our public opinion research suggest that this is not what happened.

1.21 We have also considered whether variation in turnout at ward level suggests any disproportionate impact on certain electors, for example by age or other demographic factors. As the table below shows there was variation

² This is unusually high. We know that claimed turnout in surveys is usually higher than official turnout figures partly due to over-claim and partly because surveys may be more likely to pick up responses from voters. However, we commonly see closer to a 50/50 or 60/40 split in voters and non-voters. In Watford there was also an election held for Watford's elected Mayor, in which 76% claimed to vote, compared with 24% who said they did not.

between wards in both 2016 and 2018. However, it is common to see notable differences between wards in different years even at comparable polls.

Table 1.2 Turnout by electoral ward³

Ward	2016 turnout	2018 turnout	Change
Callowland	35%	40%	5%
Central	34%	37%	4%
Holywell	29%	33%	4%
Leggats	33%	39%	6%
Meriden	35%	31%	-3%
Nascot	43%	43%	0%
Oxhey	39%	46%	7%
Park	48%	49%	1%
Stanborough	36%	35%	0%
Tudor	39%	40%	1%
Vicarage	36%	43%	7%
Woodside	33%	34%	0%

1.22 Our analysis did not find any clear evidence linking changes in turnout across electoral wards to demographic differences such as age, economic activity or ethnicity. However, we do see a moderate relationship between the number of people trying to vote without ID (and also the number not returning) and the proportion of the ward from an Asian/Asian British ethnic minority background. Of the 42 people not returning to vote, 23 (55%) were in the two wards with the highest proportion of people from an Asian background.⁴

1.23 This data only shows us the relationship or correlation between the two variables. For example, it is important to remember that we do not know whether any or all of these 23 people were from the Asian communities in those wards. This does not therefore tell us that those from the Asian community were disproportionately affected by the ID requirement in Watford but it does highlight an area where it would be helpful to have more evidence in any future pilots.

Accessibility and ease of use

1.24 The evidence above suggests that the majority of voters found the ID requirement easy to comply with. We asked people in Watford if they needed

³ Note: rounding may mean there is a discrepancy between the 'difference' shown and the turnout figures

⁴ These are Holywell and Vicarage wards based on 2011 census data.

to provide identification at future elections, how easy they would find it to access it. The vast majority (91%) said it would be easy.

1.25 We have seen no evidence that any other specific groups, for example those with a learning disability or visual impairment, struggled with the ID requirement in Watford. However, it is challenging to gather evidence in this area as relatively small groups of people could have been affected in different ways. We also know that many organisations representing those with learning disabilities and/or a visual impairment have raised general concerns about the ID requirement.

1.26 We cannot therefore draw any firm conclusions about whether the ID requirement had a disproportionate impact on these particular groups.

Postal voting

1.27 We looked at levels of postal voting in Watford to assess whether the ID requirement had pushed voters towards postal voting. In 2018 18.0% of the electorate were issued with a postal vote for the May elections. This is down from the recent peak at the EU referendum where 20.4% had a postal vote and is relatively small increase on the last Watford local elections in 2016 when 17.1% were postal voters. This data does not suggest any notable move towards postal voting instead of polling station voting.

Impact on administration

Staffing and training

1.28 The Returning Officer decided not to deploy more staff at polling stations on 3 May. An additional two polling station inspectors were used in 2018 to ensure that inspectors would be able to respond to any issues with minimal delay. The Returning Officer felt that the poll card approach should not add significantly to the administrative challenge on polling day – particularly as the scanning of the poll cards made the process even more streamlined. Although Watford always use a minimum of three staff in all polling stations (one presiding officer and two poll clerks) which is more than some other areas.

1.29 In their feedback after polling day the Returning Officer and the electoral services team at Watford have indicated that they had enough staff and that they believe their decision not to increase capacity was correct. While there were sporadic instances of queues in polling stations they felt that this was mainly caused by the usual peaks of voting at busy times of the day. They also did not think that an election with a higher turnout would require additional staff (if the ID requirement was the same as the pilot).

1.30 Watford ran more training sessions than usual because they reduced the number of staff in each session. The IT training was delivered by the software supplier with the rest of the training delivered by Watford's electoral services manager as usual. The RO and their staff felt that the additional training was

manageable for them to deliver although it would have been challenging without the involvement of the software supplier.

1.31 The results from our survey of polling station staff suggest that the training was effective with 33% of polling station staff in Watford rating the quality of their training experience as excellent and a further 59% as good. In terms of the instructions they received the vast majority agreed that the instructions received on the what types of identification were acceptable were clear (97%) and instructions received on requesting and verifying voter identification were clear (98%). Also, 93% agreed that the instructions they received on how to use the IT equipment were clear.

1.32 We also asked staff if they agreed or disagreed that the training had prepared them well for polling day and 93% agreed that it had.

1.33 Our survey asked staff to tell us what they thought would improve their training experience. The improvement that was most often mentioned was further practical training such as a roleplay exercise replicating the interaction between staff and a voter asked to provide identification and more hands on experience with the IT equipment.

Local certificate of identity

1.34 Watford did not issue a separate local form of identification because the poll card was their main accepted ID. A poll card should be delivered to all eligible electors and so, unlike the ID requirement in some of the other pilot areas, no electors should be unable to meet the requirement. However, in order to address the possibility of lost poll cards Watford did issue replacements, on demand, up to 9pm on polling day. In total they issued three replacement poll cards.

1.35 The fact that so few replacement poll cards were issued may be at least partly because Watford's also allowed electors to use a valid credit or debit card as identification. Therefore while there is no evidence that issuing replacement poll cards proved challenging for Watford that is in the context of a limited test.

Polling day

1.36 Overall, feedback from polling station staff indicates that delivering the ID requirement at this pilot did not present significant challenges. This is consistent with our own staff's observations in Watford on polling day.

1.37 Over half of staff (63%) felt that this election was easier (28%) or about the same (35%) as previous polls. About four in ten (37%) felt that this election was more difficult.

1.38 Around half (54%) of polling station staff said that they had no problems at all in checking voters' identity. When asked whether they agreed that asking voters to prove their identity had little or no impact on their work at

polling day about three-quarters agreed (74%) and 15% disagreed with this statement.

1.39 Polling station staff were asked how confident they were that the requirement to ask voters to verify their identity could easily be replicated at another election. Around two-thirds (65%) of the staff surveyed in Watford were very confident that this requirement could easily be replicated, 33% were somewhat confident, 2% were not very confident and 1% were not at all confident.

IT

1.40 The IT used in polling stations on 3 May worked well. There were very few problems reported by staff and this agrees with our observations in Watford on polling day. The Returning Officer told us that, as a result of the IT system, the additional information available throughout polling day was useful, for example on levels of turnout at individual polling stations. This would be an even more helpful facility for electoral staff at higher turnout polls where it could be used to allocate resources as needed on polling day.

1.41 However, the Returning Officer was also clear that the time and resource required to put the IT in place for 3 May was significant. This required input from staff from Watford, the software supplier and Cabinet Office in order to ensure the IT had the necessary functionality and level of security needed for the effective running of the poll.

1.42 While much of the time and resource used for the pilot would not be needed in the future (because it related to product development) it would not be realistic to expect software suppliers and Returning Officers to devote a similar level of resources to this in the future. This potentially undermines the scalability of this approach.

1.43 In terms of cost, while some of the costs incurred in the pilot related to development work which may not need to be repeated there would still be ongoing costs which local authorities would need to meet in order to use these systems. These include software licensing, hardware (tablets/scanners) and additional staff training.

Impact on security

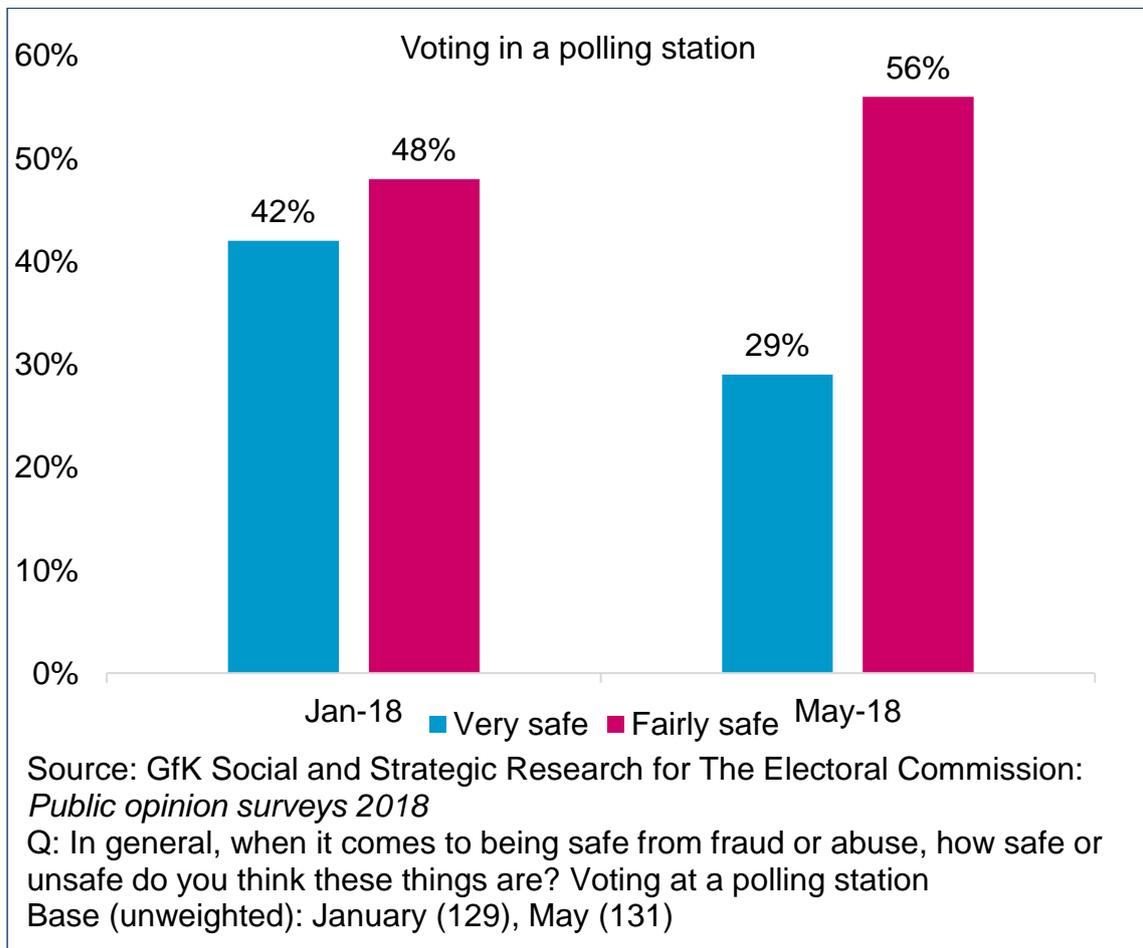
1.44 We cannot judge the impact of the pilot on the security of the May 2018 elections in Watford. This is one of the key limitations of any evaluation of these pilots – we cannot say if the requirement to present ID at polling stations prevented any fraud that would have occurred if the pilot had not taken place. We do know that no cases of allegations of electoral fraud in Watford have been reported to the police following the May 2018 polls.

Impact on public confidence

1.45 We have used our public opinion survey results to explore whether the pilot in Watford had an impact on public confidence in the security of the election. It is important to remember that even where we see changes in the survey results before and after the pilot we cannot be certain those changes were the result of the pilot.

1.46 We asked respondents to our public opinion survey whether a requirement for voters to show identification at the polling station would make them more or less confident in the security of the voting system, or if it would make no difference. In Watford 36% said they would be more confident (of which 12% said they would be a lot more confident) and 4% said it would make them less confident.

Figure 1.1 In general, when it comes to being safe from fraud or abuse, how safe or unsafe do you think these things are?

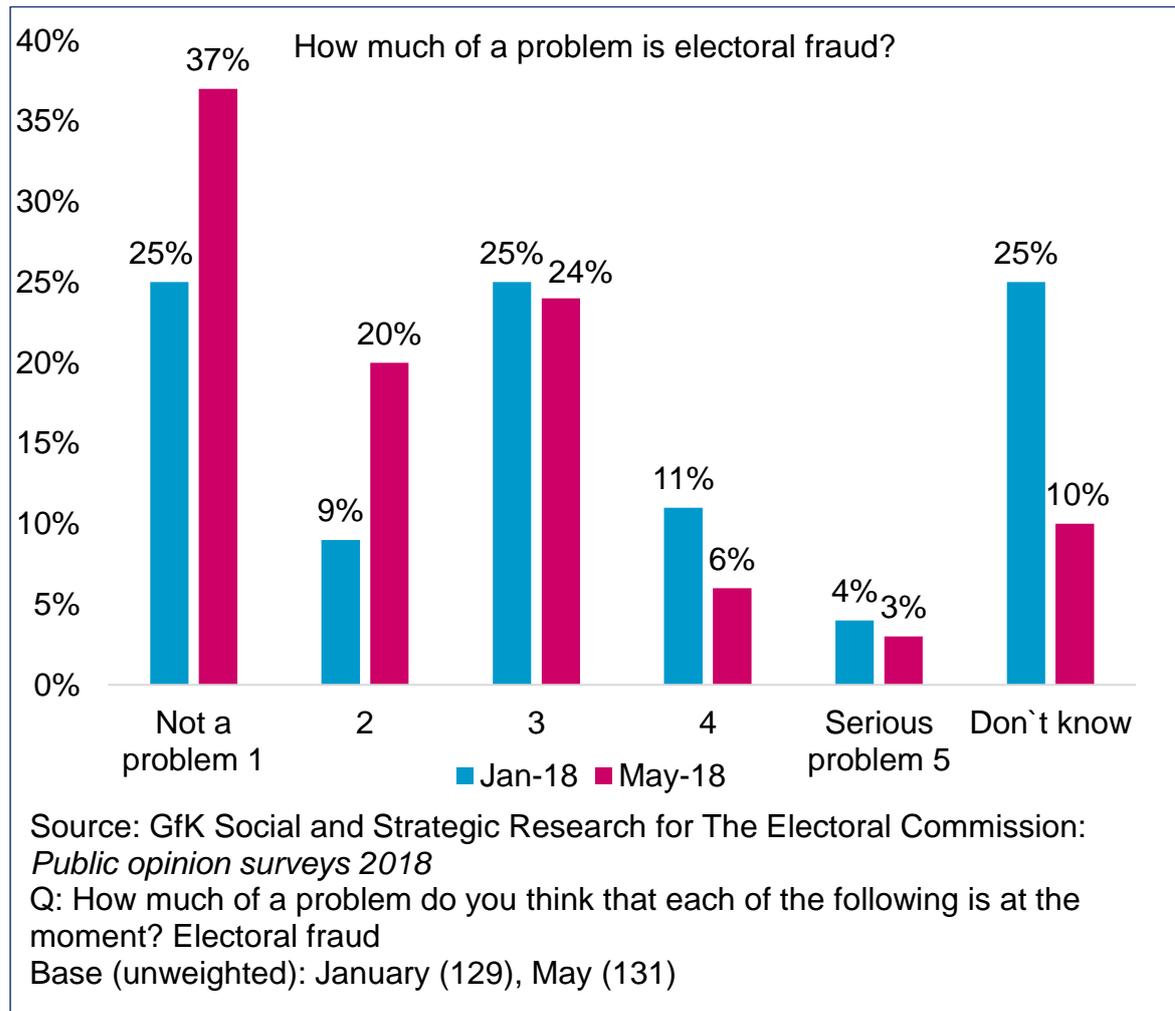


1.47 We also asked how safe or unsafe respondents considered voting in a polling station. In both survey waves (in January and May 2018) the percentages saying they think it is safe are high (90% and 85%) but there is no statistically significant difference between the two points. There is a decline in the proportion of people who say they think it is very safe (from 42% to

29%). It is unclear what is driving this decline and we do not see this in the other pilot areas.

1.48 Respondents in both January and May were also asked how much of a problem they thought electoral fraud is at the moment. As the chart below shows the surveys show a change in attitudes with the proportion of respondents saying they believe electoral fraud is not a problem (those rating it 1 or 2) rising from 34% in January to 57% in May.

Figure 1.2 How much of a problem do you think that electoral fraud is at the moment?



1.49 It is possible that concerns about electoral fraud could decrease as the public engage more with the reality of an election as polling day approaches. However, the shift seen in Watford does not appear to reflect a general shift in attitudes in this period. We asked the same question of people in areas holding elections in May without pilots. There is little difference in these areas between January and May in those saying they think electoral fraud is a problem.

1.50 The survey results show some change in attitudes between early 2018 and the immediate post-election period. Respondents were less likely to see fraud as a problem in May 2018 than they were in January but were no more

likely to believe voting in a polling station is safe from fraud (indeed fewer were likely to see it as very safe). We have no evidence to link any changes in attitude to the pilot although it seems likely that there is some connection. However, we should be cautious about drawing any wider conclusions about the impact of voter ID requirements on public confidence as these findings relate to a single local authority area.

Appendix A

People in Watford could take their poll card so that they could vote in person at the polling station. If a voter could not bring their poll card then could use one of the following forms of identification:

- a passport issued by the United Kingdom, a Commonwealth country or a member state of the European Union
- a photocard driving licence (including a provisional licence) issued in the United Kingdom or by a Crown Dependency, or by a member State of the European Union
- a valid credit or debit card
- an electoral identity card issued under section 13C (electoral identity card: Northern Ireland) of the Representation of the People Act 1983
- a biometric immigration document issued in the United Kingdom in accordance with regulations made under section 5 of the UK Borders Act 2007
- an identity card issued in the European Economic Area