

Woking May 2018 voter identification pilot evaluation

Summary of key findings

The voter identification pilot scheme in Woking required voters to produce one form of photographic identification or a Local Elector Card in order to meet the requirements to vote. 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 significantly deterred electors from voting.** In our public opinion surveys one non-voter told us that ID was the reason they had not voted. Also, turnout at the 2018 polls was similar to the 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.
- **The delivery of this pilot was manageable for the Returning Officer and their staff and there is nothing in their experience of the pilot to suggest that Woking would face significant issues with the administration of a similar ID requirement in the future.** Some additional staffing and training were in place for the pilot. However the Returning Officer has indicated that the extra staff would not necessarily be required to deliver this type of ID requirement at future local elections.
- **Some public attitudes to electoral fraud improved from before to after the pilot.** Fewer people said they felt electoral fraud is a problem in Woking in May 2018 than did so in January 2018. However, we cannot definitively link this change to the pilot.

Our findings suggest that the 2018 local elections in Woking 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 Woking 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 findings for Woking. 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 Woking required voters to produce one form of photographic identification or a Local Elector Card in order to meet the requirements to vote.

Impact on voters

Headline findings

1.9 Data provided by Woking, 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. Many of these electors later returned and were able to cast a vote.

Table 1.1

| Electorate | Electors initially unable to vote (no ID) | Electors initially unable to vote (wrong ID) | Electors not returning with correct ID | No. not returning as % of polling station votes cast |
|-------------------|--|---|---|---|
| 74,000 | 47 | 42 | 51 | 0.3% |

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 types of ID used also suggests that voters were able to meet the requirement with little difficulty. The most common ID used by voters was a photocard driving licence. Over 97% of polling station voters used one of three photographic IDs:

- Photo driving licence (used by 60% of polling station voters)
- Passport (25%)
- Surrey Senior Card (12%)

1.11 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.

1.12 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.

1.13 The reasons given by non-voters were largely in line with those we usually see in response to this question. For example, 20% of non-voters in Woking said they were not registered or registered elsewhere and 15% said they did not have time, were too busy or had work commitments. One respondent in our survey in Woking said that the ID requirement was the reason they had not voted.²

1.14 Evidence from our public opinion research suggests that the public awareness activities run by Woking 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 Woking the proportion of the public who said they had heard something about the ID requirement rose from 53% in our research conducted in January 2018 to 68% 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 – 92% of polling station voters in Woking said they were aware.

1.15 Respondents in Woking were most likely to have heard about the ID requirement via various council communication, e.g. inserts with council tax bill etc., with two thirds (67%) citing that as a source of information. The next

² In our survey in Woking, 68% of respondents said they voted on 3 May, with 30% saying they did not. This is similar to the figure for all areas piloting ID requirements, of 67% voters to 32% non-voters. 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. Note that findings relating to non-voters are on a small base size.

most commonly cited source of information (60%) was some form of local press (TV, radio, newspaper).

Turnout

1.16 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 Woking. The turnout in 2018 was similar, at 38%, to the 39% recorded at the last comparable elections (the local government elections in 2016).

1.17 We cannot be certain that the ID requirement did not affect overall turnout – beyond those electors who were refused a ballot paper. For example, Woking’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.

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

1.19 Our analysis did not find any clear indication of linking changes in turnout to demographic differences across electoral wards. We found no pattern in relation to age, economic activity, ethnicity or tenure.

Table 1.2

| Ward | 2016 turnout | 2018 turnout | Change |
|--------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------|
| Byfleet and West Byfleet | 40% | 33% | -7% |
| Canalside | 38% | 36% | -2% |
| Goldsworth Park | 36% | 35% | 0% |
| Heathlands | 39% | 41% | 2% |
| Hoe Valley | 37% | 32% | -6% |
| Horsell | 44% | 45% | 2% |
| Knaphill | 35% | 32% | -2% |
| Mount Heron | 38% | 41% | 4% |
| Pyrford | 43% | 43% | 0% |
| St John’s | 36% | 39% | 3% |

Accessibility and ease of use

1.20 The evidence above suggests that the majority of voters found the ID requirement easy to comply with. We asked people in Woking if they needed to provide identification at future elections, how easy they would find it to access it. The vast majority (87%) said it would be easy.

1.21 We have seen no evidence that specific groups, for example those with a learning disability or visual impairment, struggled with the ID requirement in Woking. 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 visual impairments have raised general concerns about the ID requirement.

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

Postal voting

1.23 We looked at levels of postal voting in Woking to assess whether the ID requirement had pushed voters towards postal voting. In 2018 18.2% 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 21.1% had a postal vote and is the same as the last Woking local elections in 2016 when 18.2% 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

1.24 The Returning Officer decided to deploy six additional staff at polling stations on 3 May to support the delivery of the pilot taking the total employed from 134 to 140. They also increased the fee payable to polling station staff to reflect the additional responsibilities of the pilot.

1.25 In their feedback after polling day the Returning Officer and the electoral services team at Woking have indicated that the additional staff were needed although much of the additional capacity was used to support the pilot-specific evaluation requirements (for example, the detailed recording of which ID types were used by each elector).

1.26 At an election with higher turnout the Returning Officer felt that there would probably be a need for the additional staff and they may also want to consider splitting some existing polling station (to reduce the number using each one) in order to avoid queues.

1.27 Longer training sessions were required to support the pilot (2.5 hours up from 1 hour) and to ensure that polling station staff were able to implement the ID requirement. However, the RO and their staff felt that the additional training was manageable for them to deliver.

1.28 The results from our survey of polling station staff suggest that the training was effective with 39% of polling station staff in Woking rating the quality of their training experience as excellent and a further 54% 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 (96%) and instructions received on requesting and verifying voter identification were clear (96%).

1.29 We also asked staff if they agreed or disagreed that the training had prepared them well for polling day and 90% agreed that it had.

1.30 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.

1.31 Overall the additional staff, increased fees and longer training meant that this element of the election cost approximately 30% more than at a standard local election.

Local certificate of identity

1.32 Woking had a system in place to provide locally issued ID for electors (Local elector card) unable to provide any of the listed document or combination of documents. A card could be issued up to 5pm on 2 May.

1.33 To get a card electors had to provide a photograph of themselves, two pieces of non-photo ID from a specified list and one piece of non-photo ID from a separate specified list. There was also a route for cards to be issued if an elector's identity could be attested to by someone else. The Returning Officer noted that they treated this in a similar way to the application for a passport where someone else needs to sign an application.

1.34 Woking issued 63 local elector cards (of which 43 were eventually used to vote). The Returning Officer indicated that the process for issuing cards was manageable for them although they would make minor changes if they were repeating the exercise.

Polling day

1.35 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 Woking on polling day.

1.36 Over half of staff felt that this election was easier (12%) or about the same (43%) as previous polls. About four in ten (42%) felt that this election was more difficult.

1.37 Around seven in ten (69%) 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 half agreed (54%) and 28% disagreed with this statement.

1.38 Polling station staff were also asked how confident they were that the requirement to ask voters to verify their identity could easily be replicated at another election. Six in ten (62%) of the staff surveyed in Woking were very confident that this requirement could easily be replicated, 35% were somewhat confident, 2% were not very confident and 2% were not at all confident.

Impact on security

1.39 We cannot judge the impact of the pilot on the security of the May 2018 elections in Woking. 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 Woking have been reported to the police following the May 2018 polls.

Impact on public confidence

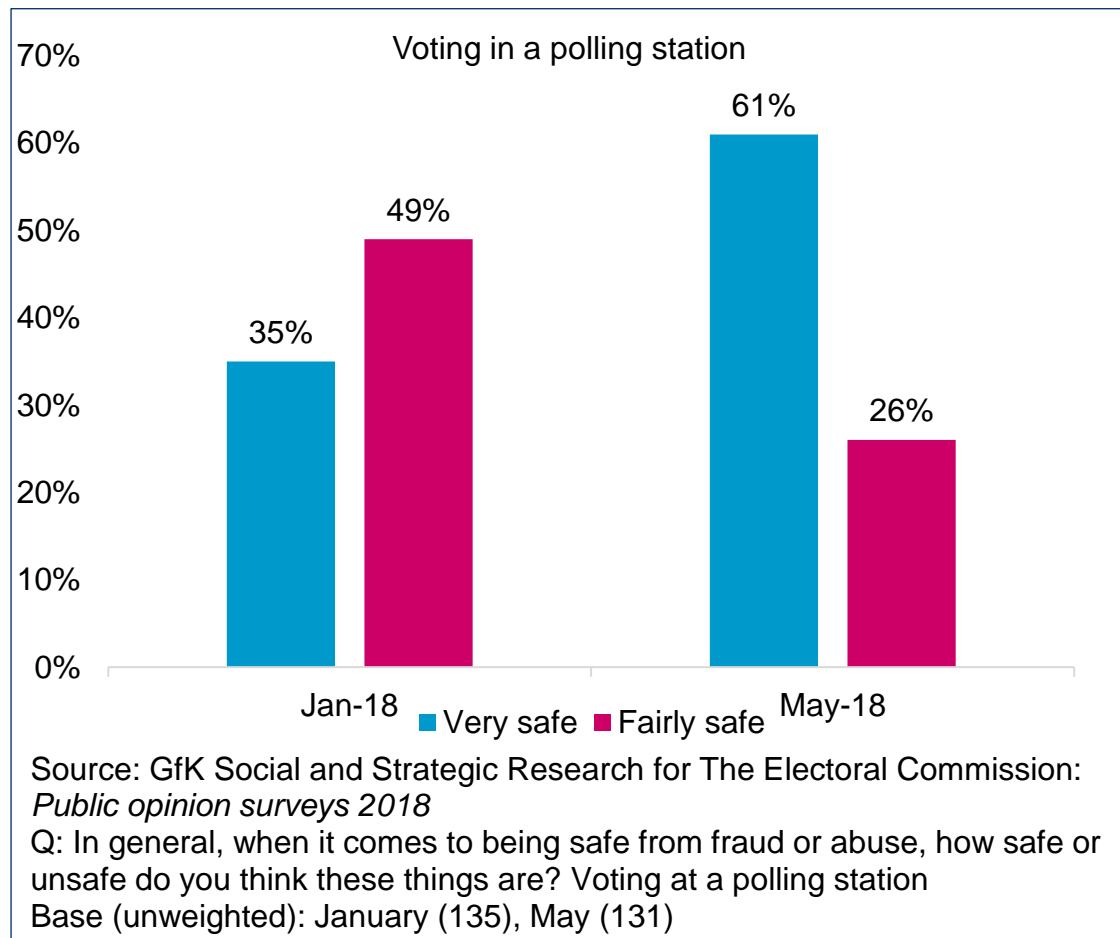
1.40 We have used our public opinion survey results to explore whether the pilot in Woking had an impact on public confidence in the security of the election. It is important to remember that even where we see changes in the survey results before and after the pilot we cannot be certain those changes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

1.41 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 Woking 39% said they would be more confident (of which 20% said they would be a lot more confident). Those who said it would make them less confident made up 1%.

1.42 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 (84% and 87%).³ However, there is an increase in the proportion of respondents saying they think it is very safe between January and May.

³ The difference here is not statistically significant.

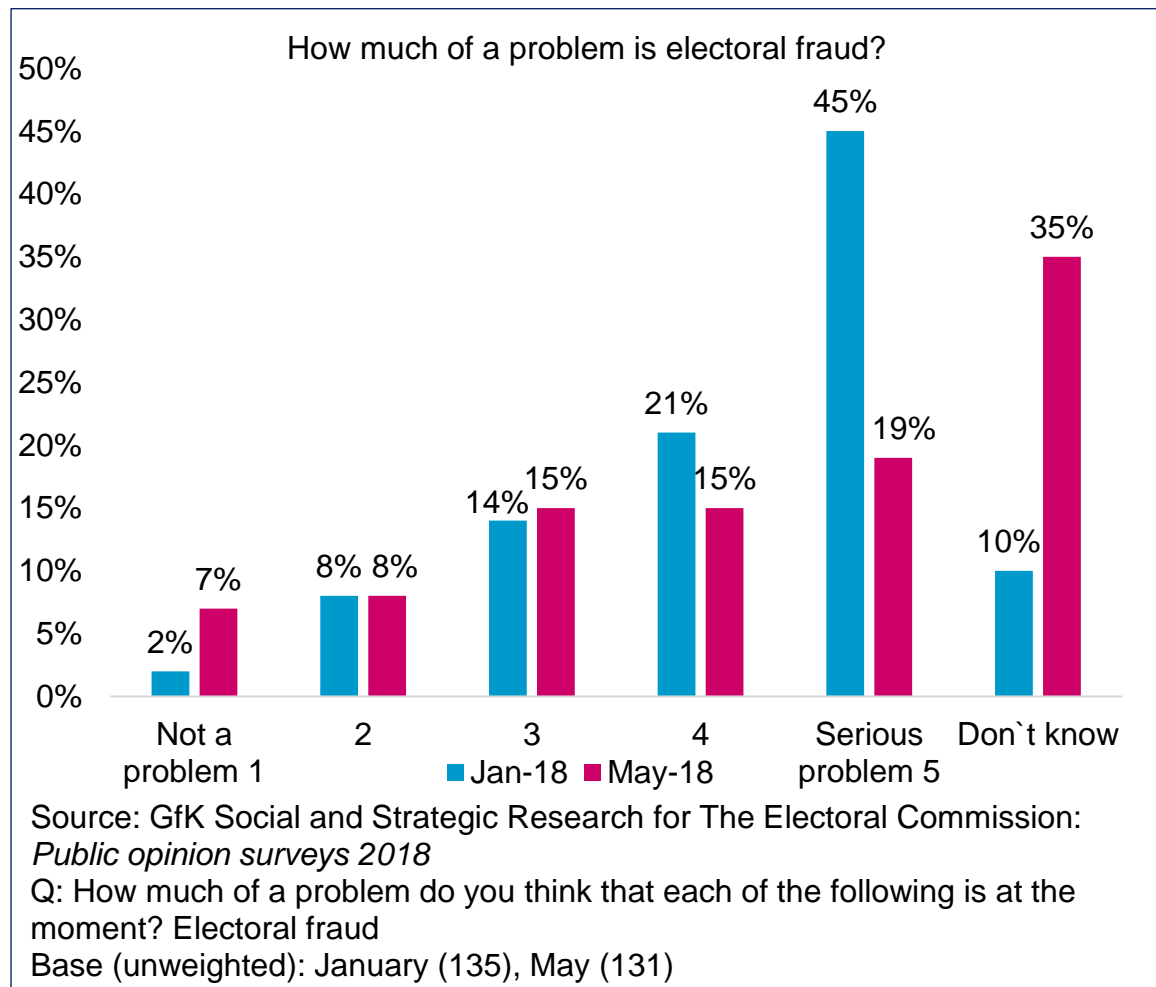
Figure 1.1 In general, when it comes to being safe from fraud or abuse, how safe or unsafe do you think these things are?



1.43 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 notable change in attitudes with the proportion of respondents saying they believe electoral fraud to be a problem (those rating it 4 or 5) falling from 65% in January to 34% in May.

1.44 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 Woking 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.

Figure 1.2 How much of a problem do you think that electoral fraud is at the moment?⁴



1.45 The survey results show a 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 and they were more likely to believe voting in a polling station is very safe from fraud.

1.46 We have no evidence to link this change 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.

⁴ Due to rounding of data, there may be small variations (c.1% point) between reported aggregated totals and the sum of disaggregated figures.

Appendix A

People in Woking had to take either one type of photographic ID or a Local Elector Card in order to meet the requirements.

Photographic:

- 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
- 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
- Surrey Senior Bus Pass
- Surrey Disabled People's Bus Pass
- Surrey Student Fare Card
- 16-25 Railcard
- Rail Season Ticket Photocard