

Gosport May 2018 voter identification pilot evaluation

Summary of key findings

The voter identification pilot scheme in Gosport required voters to produce one form of photographic identification or two forms of non-photographic identification (one of which must have shown the full registered address of the elector) or an electoral identity letter 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 two non-voters 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 Gosport would face significant issues with the administration of a similar ID requirement in the future.** Additional staffing and training were in place for the pilot. However the Returning Officer has indicated that the extra staff would not be required to deliver this type of ID requirement at future local elections or those polls with higher turnout.
- **Public attitudes to electoral fraud did not significantly change from before to after the pilot.** Slightly more people said they think electoral fraud is a problem in Gosport in May 2018 than did so in January 2018.

Our findings suggest that the 2018 local elections in Gosport 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 Gosport 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 Gosport. We have produced a similar report for each of the 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 Gosport required voters to produce one form of photographic identification or two forms of non-photographic identification (one of which must have shown the full registered address of the elector) or an electoral identity letter in order to meet the requirements to vote.

Impact on voters

Headline findings

1.9 Data provided by Gosport, 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)	Electors initially unable to vote (wrong ID)²	Electors not returning with correct ID	No. not returning as % of polling station votes cast
62,000	73	47	54	0.4%

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.

² Includes those marked 'refused'. Note that all those marked refused were instances where the elector actively refused to present ID and asked to have that refusal formally recorded.

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 photographic. Over 90% of polling station voters used one of three photographic IDs:

- Photo driving licence (used by 55% of polling station voters)
- Passport (21%)
- Concessionary travel card (17%)

1.11 Some voters did use the combination of two pieces of non-photographic identification. The most commonly used non-photo ID was a Council Tax Bill which was shown by 1% of polling station voters. [View the full dataset showing which ID types were used by electoral ward.](#)

1.12 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.

1.13 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.

1.14 The reasons given by non-voters were in line with those we usually see in response to this question. For example, 32% of non-voters in Gosport said they did not have time, were too busy or had work commitments and 13% said they were away or on holiday. These were also the most common reasons across the other (non-pilot) local authorities holding elections in May 2018. Two respondents to our survey in Gosport said that the ID requirement was the reason they had not voted.³

1.15 Evidence from our public opinion research suggests that the public awareness activities run by Gosport 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 Gosport the proportion of the public who said they had heard something about the ID requirement rose from 27% in our research conducted in January 2018 to 61% in the surveying carried out from 4 May. In our post-election survey, we also asked polling station voters in

³ In our survey in Gosport, 59% of respondents said they voted on 3 May, with 39% saying they did not. This is similar to the combined 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.

particular if they were aware they had to take ID to vote – 91% of polling station voters in Gosport said they were aware.

1.16 Respondents in Gosport were most likely to have heard about the ID requirement via some form of local press (TV, radio, newspaper) with over half (55%) citing that as a source of information. The next most commonly cited source of information (49%) was various council communication, eg inserts with council tax bill etc.

Turnout

1.17 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 Gosport. The turnout in 2018 was similar, at 33%, to the 32% recorded at the last comparable elections (the local government elections in 2016).

Table 1.2

Ward	2016 turnout	2018 turnout	Change
Alverstoke	39%	42%	3%
Anglesey	41%	45%	4%
Bridgemary North	32%	31%	-1%
Bridgemary South	29%	29%	0%
Brockhurst	30%	30%	0%
Christchurch	33%	33%	0%
Elson	31%	33%	2%
Forton	29%	27%	-2%
Grange	19%	20%	1%
Hardway	28%	33%	5%
Lee East	33%	35%	2%
Lee West	43%	44%	1%
Leesland	28%	33%	5%
Peel Common	35%	36%	1%
Privett	36%	36%	0%
Rowner and Holbrook	25%	25%	0%
Town	32%	35%	3%

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

1.19 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.

1.20 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.

Accessibility and ease of use

1.21 The evidence above suggests that the majority of voters found the ID requirement easy to comply with. We asked people in Gosport if they needed to provide identification at future elections, how easy they would find it to access it. The vast majority (90%) said it would be easy.

1.22 We have seen no evidence that specific groups, for example those with a learning disability or visual impairment, struggled with the ID requirement in Gosport. 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.

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

Postal voting

1.24 We looked at levels of postal voting in Gosport to assess whether the ID requirement had pushed voters towards postal voting. In 2018 13.3% 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 14.1% had a postal vote and is relatively small increase on the last Gosport local elections in 2016 when 11.7% 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

1.25 The Returning Officer decided to deploy additional poll clerks at all polling stations on 3 May to support the delivery of the pilot. The increase meant that all the polling stations in Gosport were staffed at the ratios (of staff to electorate) recommended by the Electoral commission. This meant that an additional 42 poll clerks were deployed on 3 May – taking the total to 93 from 51.

1.26 In their feedback after polling day the Returning Officer and the electoral services team at Gosport have indicated that the additional staff were not needed. They also do not think the additional staff would be required at an election where turnout was likely to be higher.

1.27 Gosport revised their approach to training in order to support the pilot and to ensure that polling station staff were able to implement the ID requirement. Their standard training session for polling staff runs for one and half hours. This core training was reduced to 40 minutes with an additional hour focused solely on the ID requirement. The overall length of training was therefore similar. The RO and their staff felt that the 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 55% of polling station staff in Gosport rating the quality of their training experience as excellent and a further 42% 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 (93%) 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 96% 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 and associated extra training meant that this element of the election cost approximately one third more than at a standard local election. However, as above, Gosport have indicated that they would not need the additional staff again and this does not therefore mean that there would be an ongoing increase in costs if the ID requirement was introduced permanently.

Local certificate of identity

1.32 Gosport had a system in place to provide locally issued ID for electors unable to provide any of the listed document or combination of documents. A local identity letter could be issued up to 5pm on 3 May.

1.33 No letters were issued in Gosport as part of this pilot. The elections team indicated that they received a small number of enquiries about applying but in discussions with the elector it always became apparent that they already possessed one of the accepted ID types.

1.34 The fact that no letters were issued is very likely to be the result of Gosport's relatively long list of acceptable ID types. However, it does mean that the pilot did not test the resources required to process applications and issue letters.

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 Gosport on polling day.

1.36 About half of staff felt that this election was easier (4%) or about the same (45%) as previous polls. Although 46% felt that this election was more difficult.

1.37 Around six in ten (61%) 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 57% agreed and 26% 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. Seven in ten (69%) of the staff surveyed in Gosport were very confident that this requirement could easily be replicated, 29% were somewhat confident and 2% were not very confident.

Impact on security

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

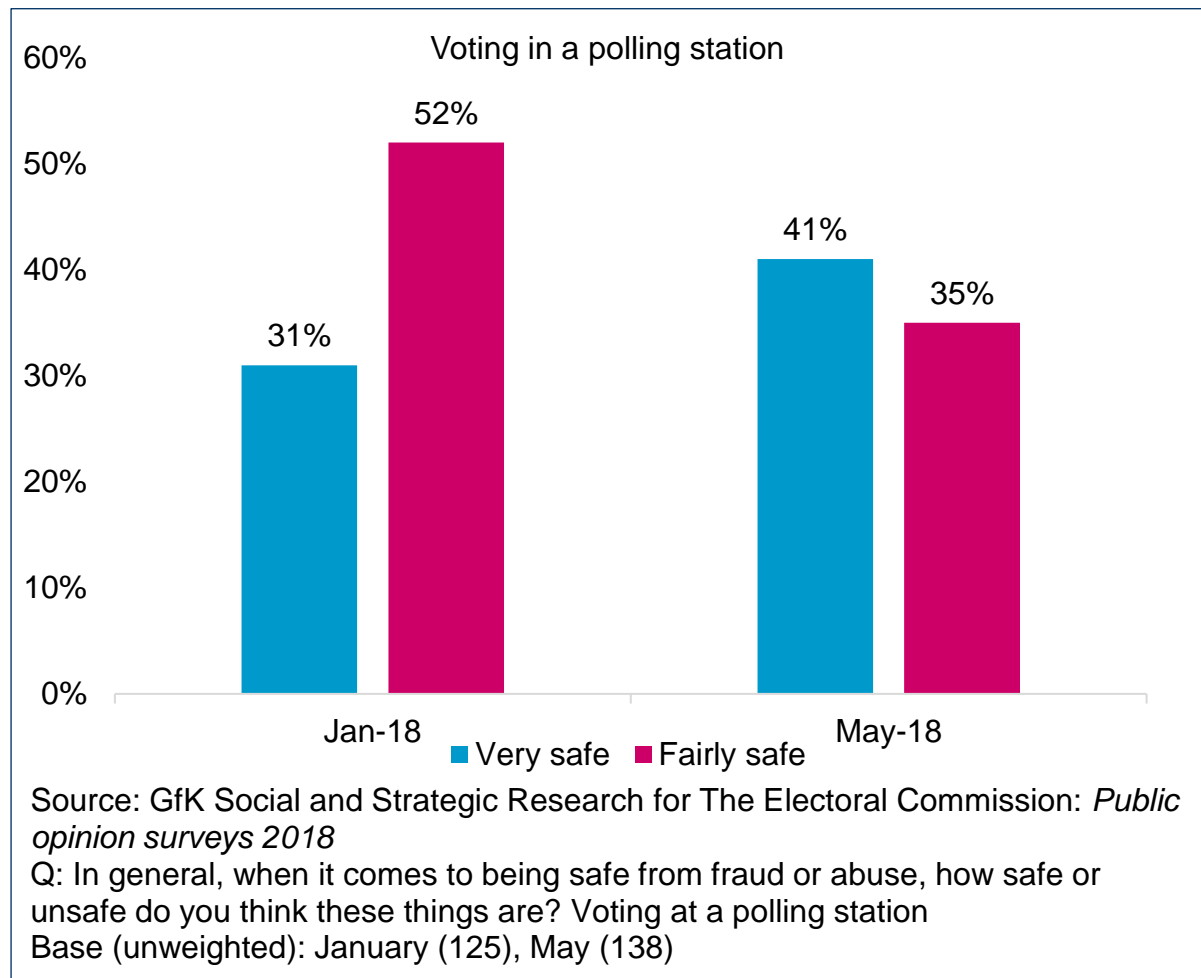
Impact on public confidence

1.40 We have used our public opinion survey results to explore whether the pilot in Gosport 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 Gosport 57% said they would be more confident (of which 45% said they would be a lot more confident). Those who said it would make them less confident made up 2%.

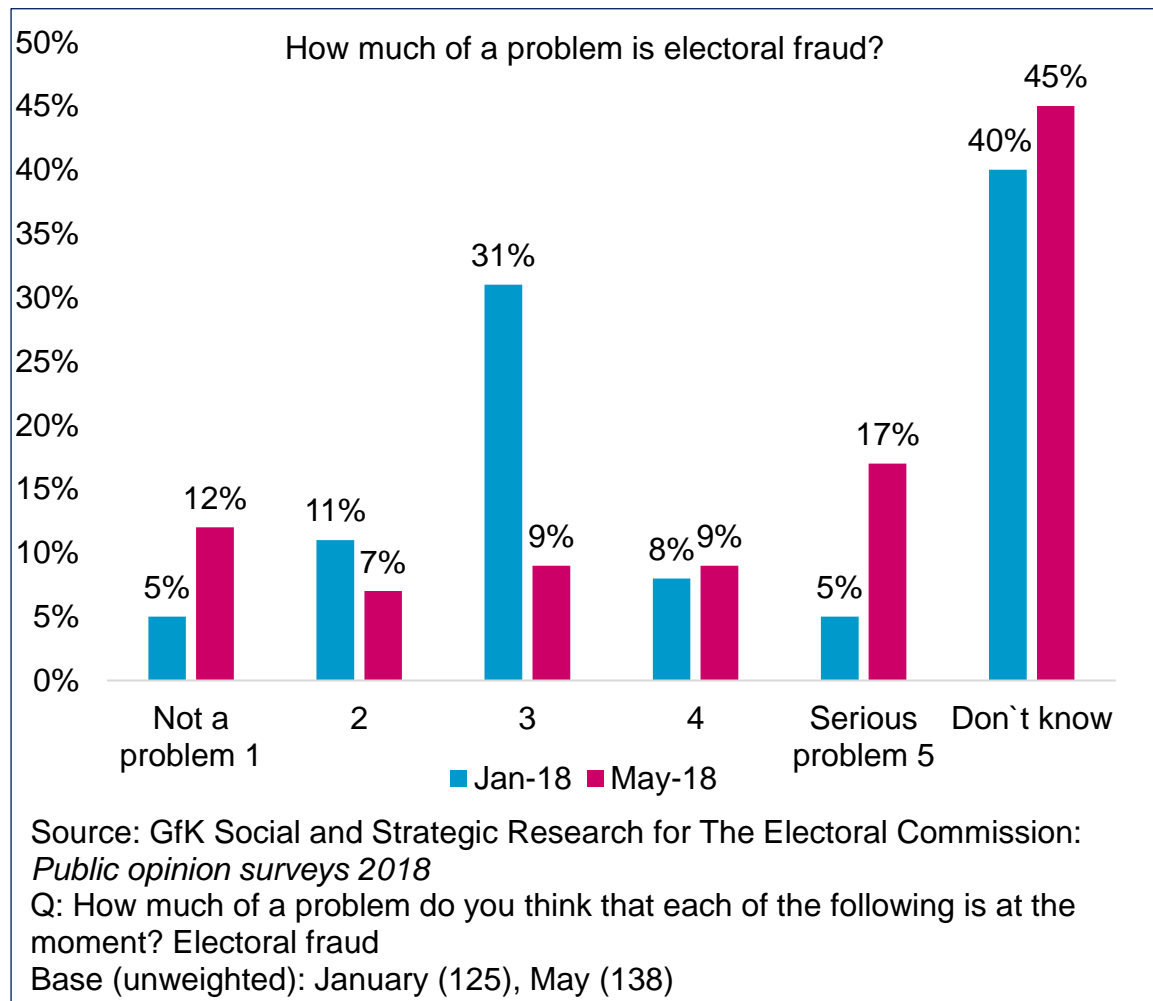
1.42 We also asked how safe or unsafe respondents considered voting in a polling station. In both survey waves (in January and May 2018) the percentages saying they think it is safe are high (83% and 76%) but there is no statistically significant change. There is also no statistically significant change (which we see in other pilot areas) in the proportion saying they think it is very safe.

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 some change in attitudes, most notably in the proportion giving a score of 3 which reduces from around a third (31%) to less than one in ten (9%). The overall change in Gosport appears to be a relatively well distributed move from the middle of the scale towards each end. The proportion saying there is no problem goes up as does the proportion saying it is a serious problem – although the latter is the more significant change.

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



1.44 It is possible that concerns about electoral fraud could have increased as the public saw or heard more about ID pilots. This is different to the change we see in three of the other pilot areas where the proportion of those believing electoral fraud is a problem drops between January and May 2018.

1.45 We also 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.

1.46 We have no evidence suggesting a positive link between public confidence and the pilot. 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 Gosport had to take either one type of photographic ID or two types of non-photographic or an electoral identity letter in order to vote in person at the polling station.

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
- a Disclosure and Barring Service certificate showing your registered address
- an MoD photographic ID card
- an MoD Defence Privilege Card
- a photo bus/travel pass from any Hampshire council

Non-photographic⁴:

- a valid bank or building society debit card or credit card
- a driving licence (including a provisional licence) which is not in the form of a photocard.
- a birth certificate
- a marriage or civil partnership certificate
- an adoption certificate
- a mortgage statement dated within 12 months of the date of the poll
- a bank or building society statement dated within 12 months of the date of the poll
- a credit card statement dated within 12 months of the date of the poll
- a utility bill dated within 12 months of the date of the poll
- a council tax demand letter or statement dated within 12 months of the date of the poll
- a Form P2, P6, P9, P45 or Form P60 dated within 12 months of the date of the poll
- a statement of benefits or entitlement to benefits

⁴ One to show the elector's registered address