

REPORT TO FULL COUNCIL

OBJECTION TO VOTER ID REQUIREMENTS



Report Reference C-23-08
Meeting Date 12th June 2023
Agenda Item 11
Prepared by Town Clerk

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The May local government elections were the first to require voters to present photographic ID in order to cast a ballot. Those without valid ID were turned away from polling stations. ID requirements did not apply to postal voting. The requirement was introduced in the Elections Act 2022.

A BBC report of the 20th May cites data from 160/230 election authorities which showed 26,165 voters were turned away for lack of ID, 9,577 of which did not later return to cast a ballot. To date, the data from Cheshire East Council has not been published. The Town Clerk has enquired with officers at the council who advise that when data is available it will likely be authority wide rather than broken down by ward. It is possible to compare turnouts for Knutsford ward elections in 2023, 2019 and 2011¹. In 2023 turnout for this ward was 36.8%, as slight increase on the 2019 figure of 32.57% but still lower than 2011's 47.9%. However, turnout data does not indicate the impact of the measure as there may have still been people prevented from voting due to the requirement e.g. turnout could have been higher.

2.0 BACKGROUND

Cllr Banks requested this debate for the Town Council to consider submitting objections to Esther McVey MP regarding the introduction of Voter ID.

The grounds put forward are:

- 1) There has been no evidence of widespread voter fraud has been uncovered
- 2) Postal votes have been identified as the most likely source of any fraud, but are not included in this scheme
- 3) Voter turnout for local elections is already very low and additional complexity endangers democracy
- 4) The young and the less well-off are those least likely to have legitimate ID, and although free cards are available, it is an extra barrier. The young and the less well-off are the least likely to vote for the party presently in government which introduced the legislation.
- 5) The required ID did not include the young persons' rail card but did include pensioner's bus passes.
- 6) The resultant turning away of voters from polling stations who do not have ID, reduces turnout. They may not come back even if they have ID

¹ 2015 local government elections coincided with the general election and therefore turnout was significantly higher at 68.74%.

- 7) There has been a public admission from previous senior member of the Government (The Rt Hon Jacob Rees-Moog MP) that the measures were gerrymandering.

3.0 DECISION REQUIRED

Council should consider whether it wishes to write to Esther McVey MP expressing an objection to the introduction of voter ID requirements and calling on the government to reverse the measures for the reasons outlined.