![Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities]

Electoral Integrity Programme Evaluation: Year 1

IFF Research for DLUHC

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Introduction

Policy background

The Elections Act 2022 contained measures designed to strengthen the integrity of the electoral system and ensure that elections remain secure, fair, modern and transparent. These measures are being delivered through the Electoral Integrity Programme (EIP) as part of the UK Government's electoral reform agenda. The measures are likely to be implemented by the end of the current Parliament with two having already been introduced for the May 2023 local elections. These were to:

- Introduce photographic identification requirements for voting in polling stations; and

- Require Returning Officers to consider the needs of disabled electors and make specialist equipment available to support them to vote if needed and reasonable to do so; and allow anyone over the age of 18 to accompany disabled electors in the polling station.

To evaluate the implementation and impact of these measures, in May 2023, the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) appointed IFF Research to synthesise the findings from a wide range of research, data collection and analyses that have been conducted as part of DLUHC's monitoring and evaluation activities for the EIP as well as conducting new qualitative research.

The evaluation approach

The evaluation included both process and impact components. The process elements gathered evidence on how Electoral Registration Officers, Returning Officers, electoral services teams and polling station staff had implemented the measures. The impact evaluation elements assessed the effectiveness of the measures and their impact on both electoral staff and electors.

The evaluation adopted a theory-based approach using theory of change models to set out how each of the voter identification and accessibility measures might affect change in the short, medium and long term. IFF Research then used contribution analysis developing a series of contribution claims to articulate how each measure within the theory of change models could lead to change, while recognising the importance of other influencing factors. The extent to which claims had been met was then assessed using evidence from a broad range of data sources including implementation surveys and monitoring data gathered by DLUHC, public opinion surveys conducted by Ipsos, research published by the Electoral Commission and new primary qualitative research conducted by IFF Research among electoral services teams, polling station staff and selected groups of electors. In the compressed timeframe, not all claims could be assessed conclusively and the report highlights where further investigation is needed to reach a more definitive view.

Key findings: Voter identification

Eight contribution claims were developed from the voter identification theory of change to examine how the measures were implemented for the May 2023 English local elections. They covered the preparedness and capabilities of electoral services teams within local authorities and polling station staff to deliver the measures, awareness and response among voters, and impact on personation.

The evaluation found that electoral services teams and polling station staff were well prepared for the implementation of the measures for the May 2023 elections and checks on voter identification were conducted efficiently with very few voters initially turned away because they did not have any, or any accepted, photographic identification.

Communications designed to raise awareness of the voter identification requirement by both the Electoral Commission and local authorities were generally effective, but for future elections, consideration could be given to targeting audiences found to be less aware, such as those who rarely vote, members of ethnic minorities and young people. Local authorities had sufficient resources to process Voter Authority Certificates (VACs) for those without accepted photographic identification, but more could be done to raise awareness among those who do not have photo identification. For those wishing to have their identification checked privately, polling station staff felt they were able to make sufficient provision using privacy screens or private rooms. However, given the very small number of voters taking up this option, the evaluation was not able to conclude on the voter experience of this measure.

The Electoral Commission reports that allegations of personation reported to the police from the May 2023 English local elections were very low (two) and consistent with previous elections. It is not possible to conclude in this evaluation whether any of the small number of voters turned away on polling day were attempting to use fraudulent identification or if the measure has had a deterrent effect on those who might attempt personation.

Overall, the introduction of the photographic identification requirement did not impact on the likelihood or experience of voting in the May 2023 English local elections among voting age adults with accepted photographic identification and trust in the in-person voting system remains high. However, those without accepted photographic identification were much more likely to say that the voter identification requirement made them less likely to vote.

Claim 1: Local authority staff and the electoral services teams meet the requirements of law

Electoral administrators made effective use of the Electoral Commission's guidance to deliver appropriate levels of staffing and training to process Voter Authority Certificate (VAC) applications and conduct the required identification document checks in polling

stations. Nearly four in five (79%) Returning Officers deployed more Poll Clerks and over half (56%) more Polling Station Inspectors, whilst most managed VAC applications using either electoral services teams or by transferring staff internally from other duties as required. Only 3% of electoral administrators felt they had inadequate resourcing to process VAC applications and only 4% felt they had too few Poll Clerks (May Reflections Survey of Electoral Administrators). Some electoral administrators had been concerned about the impact of the new measures on the recruitment and retention of polling station staff. Although around 10% of polling station staff dropped out between recruitment and polling day, dropout was mainly attributable to personal circumstances, including holidays around the Bank Holiday, with only one fifth (18%) of those who dropped out citing the new measures.

Reflecting on the May 2023 experience, around a quarter (26%) of local authorities surveyed felt they would make little to no changes to their preparations for any future elections (May Reflections Survey of Electoral Administrators). Although the claim was strongly evidenced for the May 2023 election, some electoral administrators anticipated greater resource needs to process a higher number of VAC applications and recruit more polling station staff for a UK Parliamentary General Election and had concerns about sufficient lead in time to do so.

In total, the review of the evaluation evidence found this claim has been met.

Claim 2: Returning Officers and polling station staff meet the requirements of law

Nearly all (95%) polling station staff surveyed recalled being trained in checking voter identification (Electoral Commission's Polling Staff Survey). In the qualitative research, polling station staff said that they found guidance from the Electoral Commission, as well as information provided in polling stations to remind voters of accepted identification, useful to refer to on polling day. Although the majority of polling station staff surveyed felt that the process of voting took longer than previous elections (62% said a little longer, 3% said a lot longer), the difference was not substantial and nearly all (99%) staff felt the polling day still ran smoothly (Electoral Commission's Polling Staff Survey).

The qualitative interviews suggest that Returning Officers and polling station staff did not deviate from the requirements and instructions they received in training, even when faced with challenging situations in the preparation for and during polling day. This suggests a high level of confidence amongst polling station staff, and good understanding of their role. That said, polling station staff were less confident about explaining why some types of photographic identification are accepted and others are not and how to identify voters if they had changed significantly in appearance since their photographic identification was issued. Further training in these areas would be valued and could improve the voter experience.

Overall, the review of the evaluation evidence found this claim has been met.

Claim 3: Communication campaigns raise electors' awareness of voter identification

Nearly all (99%) electoral services teams, often drawing on material provided by the Electoral Commission, issued communications to the electorate about the photographic voter identification requirements, whether directly to households or via on street billboards, social media and local radio. By May 2023, 84% of voting age adults living in areas holding local elections were aware of, that is had heard a great deal or fair amount about, the voter identification measures (Public Opinion Survey Wave 2), partly as a result of these communications but also due to national and local news and other media coverage. But awareness was not consistent across the electorate. Those most likely to have heard nothing at all about the requirement were people who *rarely* or *never* vote at local elections (18%), ethnic minorities (12%) and younger adults (11% of those aged 18-34) (Public Opinion Survey Wave 2). The evaluation did not find examples of local authorities delivering targeted communications campaigns to reach these specific audiences on voter identification measures. Some electoral services staff attributed this to the limited timeframe to prepare for the elections.

The proportion of voters who were initially turned away – usually because they had not brought an accepted photographic identification document – was small (0.7%) (Voter Identification Monitoring Data). However, this cannot be entirely attributed to the communications campaigns given many voters were carrying accepted photographic identification documents as a matter of course. Future campaigns will be able to take the learning from the Public Opinion Surveys together with feedback from local advocacy organisations given subsequent to the May 2023 local elections to develop more targeted communications to raise awareness about the types of photographic identification that are accepted.

In conclusion, the evidence reviewed indicates that this claim was partially met.

Claim 4: Communication campaigns raises electors' awareness of Voter Authority Certificates (VAC)

In May 2023, 96% of voting age adults in England owned an accepted form of photographic identification, 2% did not, 1% preferred not to say and 1% did not know (Public Opinion Survey Wave 2). Those who did not have an accepted form of identification could apply for a free VAC to present as accepted photographic identification in order to vote at a polling station in the local elections. In response to communications from both the Electoral Commission and local electoral services teams, awareness of VACs did increase from 9% of voting age adults in England in January 2023 to 21% in May 2023, suggesting that the campaign raised awareness to some extent (Public Opinion Survey Wave 2). But awareness was not much higher among voting age adults with no accepted photographic identification of whom only a quarter (26%) were aware of the VAC by May 2023 (Public Opinion Survey Wave 2; note that this figure includes Wave 1 re-contacted sample in addition to Wave 2 'fresh' sample, and low incidence and resulting sample size for voting age adults with no accepted photographic identification).

The evaluation did not find evidence of VAC awareness communications being targeted at those with no accepted photographic identification. Future evaluative work could monitor the design, reach and impact of VAC messaging for a UK Parliamentary General Election to assess effectiveness more thoroughly. Continuing to work to increase awareness among the general population will also be of benefit as those who need a VAC may hear about them via friends and family.

The evidence for this claim was therefore sufficiently consistent and strong to conclude that the claim has not yet been met.

Claim 5: Electors who want a VAC, and are eligible, are able to obtain one

Electoral administrators reported that VAC application and issuing processes went smoothly. They felt all the necessary resource and training was available to deliver against this requirement at the scale required for the local elections.

A total of 70,017 applications were submitted in the run up to the May 2023 local elections in local authorities that held elections (usually using the online service; 95% of applications) with half (50%) submitted in the month prior to the VAC application deadline on April 25th (Voter Identification Monitoring Data). Overall, 92% of VAC applications (equating to 64,240) resulted in a VAC being issued before the closure of the poll. Although some initial teething issues were flagged as challenges, the online Electoral Registration Officer Portal (EROP) was generally viewed as an enabler and effective tool in processing VAC applications. While providing suggestions for improvements to the Portal, electoral services staff were confident that it will be effective for a UK Parliamentary General Election.

Electoral administrators felt they had sufficient staff to process VAC applications for May 2023, but largely attributed this to the low numbers of VAC applications, and expressed concerns about the potential increase of applications for a UK Parliamentary General Election. Although awareness of DLUHC support for VAC processing was fairly high, nearly one in five electoral administrators (17%) remained unaware of it by May 2023 (May Reflections Survey of Electoral Administrators). Electoral services teams would benefit from a reiteration of this message from DLUHC in preparation for future elections.

The most common issue with applications was non-compliant photographs (33% of rejected applications had a non-accepted photograph) (Voter Identification Monitoring Data), and time spent chasing electors who submitted applications with issues was sometimes resource intensive. Steps to improve electors' understanding of the type of photograph required could reduce this need.

Raising awareness of the availability of in-person applications could challenge some negative elector perceptions about the accessibility of the VAC application process for electors who may not have access to a computer or struggle with an online application.

The evaluation evidence is consistent and strong in supporting a conclusion that this claim has been met. However, it is important to note that there was uncertainty on whether electoral services teams could manage the greater demands of a UK Parliamentary General Election, especially if many VAC applications were received close to polling day.

Claim 6: Electors who want to have their identification checked in private, are able to do so

In preparation for the May 2023 local elections, nearly all (95%) of polling station staff recalled receiving training on how to help voters show their photographic identification in private (Electoral Commission's Polling Staff Survey). All electoral services teams and polling station staff felt they were able to provide appropriate privacy arrangements, whether that was with privacy screens or alternatives using old polling booths, screens or separate rooms. The discretionary nature worked well to allow electoral staff to be proportionate to likely demand in their local area.

In total, 2,250 voters had their identity checked in private across all local authorities holding English local elections in May 2023 (Voter Identification Monitoring Data). Around half (51%) of local authorities did not receive any requests for a private identification document check on polling day, whilst 46% received between one and 50 requests, and seven (3% of) local authorities received more than 50 requests. Given the very small numbers of electors using private identification checks it was not possible to gather evidence on their experience of the process or any perceived barriers to requesting private checks.

Although the evidence indicates that provision was made effectively, without more detailed evidence from voters who used, or might have wanted to use, this provision, it is difficult to firmly conclude that this claim has been met.

Claim 7: Personation is identified more easily and reduces in the longer-term

In preparation for the local elections, nearly all polling station staff surveyed (95%) recalled receiving training on how to review photographic identification and generally felt well prepared to carry out their duties on polling day (Electoral Commission's Polling Staff Survey). [The Electoral Commission's Handbook for polling station staff](#), (particularly Annex 12) consolidated this training effectively and provided guidance for polling station staff on the day. On the day of the May local elections, around 14,000 (or 0.25%) people who tried to vote at a polling station were turned away and did not return later in the day with accepted photographic identification (Voter Identification Monitoring Data). Similarly, across the UK parliamentary by-elections held in July and October, around 350 (0.25%) people who tried to vote at a polling station were turned away and did not return (Voter Identification Monitoring Data).

The Electoral Commission reports that allegations of personation reported to the police from the May 2023 local elections were very low (two) and consistent with previous elections ([Electoral Commission Report on the May 2023 local elections in England](#)).

Similarly, confidence in the protections from fraud for in person voting remain consistently high among polling station staff, electoral administrators and electors alike. When it comes to getting away with electoral fraud in polling stations, half (51%) of voting age adults think it is difficult, a small increase of 3 percentage points since January. Amongst voting age adults in areas that held English local elections in May 2023, there was evidence of higher public confidence that it would be difficult to get away with fraud in a polling station (52%) than those areas that did not hold elections (48%) (Public Opinion Survey Wave 2). In the qualitative research, some polling station staff did, however, raise concerns about their ability to detect a counterfeit identification document, but generally all groups held the perception that fraud was more likely to be conducted via postal or proxy voting.

It is not possible from the evidence available to the evaluation to assess the impact of the voter identification measures as a deterrent to those who might have otherwise attempted personation at a polling station. But, contextually, there was no associated fall in in person voting (with turnout, at 32.0%, comparable to the last similar set of local elections in 2019, when it was 32.5%) or shift to postal or proxy voting, with the proportion of voters opting for a postal vote falling slightly from 19.9% to 19.0% and proxy votes remaining constant at 0.1% between 2021 (the first local elections post-pandemic) and 2023 ([Electoral Commission Report on the May 2023 local elections in England](#)).

In total, the evaluation evidence reviewed is inconclusive in determining whether the claim has been met.

Claim 8: Electors remain satisfied with the process and ease of in-person voting

In terms of voter experience, the evidence reviewed consistently suggests that the introduction of the photographic identification requirements did not impact on the local election experience of voting age adults with accepted photographic identification. However, of the 2% of voting age adults in England without accepted identification, over four in ten (41%) of those in areas conducting local elections in May 2023 reported that the photographic identification requirements made them less likely to vote compared to fewer than one in ten (8%) of all voting age adults in areas holding English local elections in May 2023 (Public Opinion Survey Wave 2).

Evaluation of voter satisfaction concluded that, although satisfaction with the voting process fell slightly among voting age adults in England from 74% in January 2023 to 69% in May 2023 (Public Opinion Survey Wave 2), many other factors could impact voter satisfaction and so the change cannot be attributed to the voter identification measures.

Trust in the voting system remains high with 82% of voting age adults in England in May 2023 feeling confident in the way elections are run (Public Opinion Survey Wave 2) and findings from the qualitative research indicate that electors did not perceive election fraud to be an issue prior to the introduction of the measures. Shifts in trust may emerge over

the longer term but it is too early at this stage to assess whether this element of the claim has been met.

Given the weakness and inconsistencies in some of the evidence for elements of this claim, it is therefore not possible to draw a conclusion on whether the claim has been met. For the claim to be met in future elections there would need to be more sustained and consistent intention to vote and satisfaction with the process across different types of voters.

Key findings: Accessibility measures

Four claims were developed from DLUHC's original theory of change to examine how the accessibility measures were implemented for the May 2023 local elections. These covered the preparedness and capabilities of electoral services teams within local authorities and polling station staff to deliver the measures, plus awareness and experience of disabled voters.

Electoral services teams and polling station staff were well prepared to implement the new accessibility measures including providing equipment to support in-person voting for electors with disabilities and delivered provision effectively on the day. Training and provision could potentially be improved through more engagement with disability advocacy groups in preparation for future elections. However, there was low awareness of the measures among disabled voters in areas conducting elections in May 2023 and some local authorities did have difficulties engaging with disability advocacy groups in the time available before polling day. But when told about the measures, more than three-quarters of voting age adults in England with a disability anticipate that the accessibility measures will make it easier for them to vote in person.

Claim 1: Local authority staff in electoral services teams with Returning Officers meet the requirements of law

By March 2023, nearly all electoral administrators in England holding local elections in May 2023 (99%) felt they were prepared to implement the accessibility measures of providing equipment to support in-person voting for electors with disabilities and allowing a wider range of people to act in the role of companion to assist disabled people to vote in polling stations (March Readiness Survey of Electoral Administrators). Confidence was similarly high in Northern Ireland. Most (80%) electoral administrators had engaged with voters with disabilities by this stage also, either through direct communications or engagement with local advocacy groups. They were confident (98%) that they had sufficient staffing to meet the requirement (March Readiness Survey of Electoral Administrators).

Views on the levels of discretion in the guidance were inconsistent, with some local authorities' electoral services teams interviewed appreciating the levels of discretion while others were looking for a firmer steer on minimum levels of provision. Most electoral

services teams offered the provisions that the Electoral Commission's guidance said they 'should provide' (May Reflections Survey of Electoral Administrators). In preparation for the UK Parliamentary General Election, some electoral administrators indicated that they would benefit from greater clarity on how to apply the guidance.

Overall, the evidence supports a conclusion that the claim has been met.

Claim 2: Returning Officers with polling station staff meet the requirements of law

Nearly all (94%) polling station staff recalled being trained in supporting disabled electors to vote and polling station staff's confidence in their ability to support electors with disabilities increased and was very high by May 2023, ranging from 88% confident they could assist a voter to use a tactile voting device to 97% confident they could assist a voter with mobility issues (Electoral Commission's Polling Staff Survey). But some polling station staff interviewed in the qualitative research felt accessibility requirements were not given sufficient attention, with a greater focus on training for the voter identification checks. That said, polling station staff confidence in supporting electors with different disabilities to vote in-person has increased since 2022 (Electoral Commission's Polling Staff Survey).

One in ten (10%) of polling station staff reported voters having difficulties with accessibility at polling stations on the day, but around two-fifths of these (43%) were difficulties accessing the building which is part of the Electoral Commission's guidance on venue accessibility rather than the new legislation (Electoral Commission's Polling Staff Survey).

In planning for a UK Parliamentary General Election, the evidence suggests that it would be beneficial to allow more time to engage with disability advocacy groups to help in delivering the training and identifying ways of improving support for disabled voters on the day. Evidence for this claim was limited by the very low incidence of disabled electors who wanted to vote in person and were either unable to or did not attempt to. Future evaluations should also engage with disability advocacy groups to engage these electors in the research.

The current evaluation evidence indicates that the claim that Returning Officers and polling station staff are delivering the requirements of the new accessibility measures is being met.

Claim 3: Communications effectively raise awareness of reforms amongst electors with disabilities and their carers

Although many local authorities attempted to engage disability advocacy and support groups to increase awareness on the new accessibility measures, by May 2023, only a minority of disabled adults of voting age in England knew a great deal or fair amount about the new accessibility measures (12% in England and 10% in Northern Ireland for companion changes, and 12% in England and 10% in Northern Ireland for equipment measures) (Public Opinion Survey Wave 2). Some local authorities (11% of those surveyed) did identify engaging with advocacy and support groups in the time available as

a challenge in meeting accessibility measures more broadly, including their role in raising awareness, however 62% of local authorities surveyed stated there were little to no problems in this area (May Reflections Survey of Electoral Administrators). There was also limited evidence on the outcomes of that engagement. This evaluation did not collect evidence directly from advocacy groups and this could be considered for future investigation to better understand the barriers to engagement with local authorities on the disability measures.

The evaluation found little evidence of direct communications with disabled electors. If communications via advocacy and support groups are proving challenging, more direct or alternative approaches could be considered for a UK Parliamentary General Election. Furthermore, these efforts do not necessarily need to be targeted; raising awareness generally will increase the likelihood of awareness of these new measures reaching disabled electors (for example, by reaching friends or family of disabled electors). These approaches could be further supported with more communications guidance from the Electoral Commission.

Given the low awareness levels and difficulties with engagement, the evidence suggests that this claim has not been met.

Claim 4: Disabled electors are enabled to vote in-person as a result of the new measures

There is consistent evidence that attitudes towards in-person voting among disabled electors are largely positive and unchanged (Public Opinion Survey Wave 2 and qualitative interviews) with over eight out of ten (83%) voting age adults in England with a disability limiting their activity a lot found the process of voting in person at the May local elections easy. However, satisfaction with voting in general was significantly lower among voting age adults with a disability that limits their activities a lot (60%) compared to among all voting age adults in England (69%) (Public Opinion Survey Wave 2).

Some electoral services teams feel they are still in the early stages of implementing the accessibility measures. There was consistent evidence that electoral services teams intend to draw on engagement with local advocacy groups that occurred close to, or since, the May 2023 local elections to prepare for a UK Parliamentary General Election. (May Reflections Survey and qualitative research).

A strong majority of voting age adults in England with a disability and those with an adult with a disability in their household continue to feel the changes will make it easier for people with disabilities to vote in person at a polling station (77% for providing a wide range of equipment; 77% for allowing more people to act as a companion) (Public Opinion Survey Wave 2) and a similar sentiment was shared in qualitative interviews. Similarly in Northern Ireland, strong majorities of voting age adults feel that both policy changes will make it easier to vote in person for those with disabilities (78% for providing a wide range of equipment and 75% for allowing more people to act as a companion). The focus

therefore needs to be on ensuring that those that would benefit from these changes are aware and able to make use of them.

In total, this evaluation cannot conclude on whether the claim that disabled electors are enabled to vote in-person as a result of the new accessibility measures has been met yet. Future evaluation of a UK General Parliamentary Election will need to assess whether engagement with local disability advocacy groups has been more effective and examine the in-person voting experience of disabled voters in more depth.

1 Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Policy background

The Electoral Integrity Programme (EIP) is delivering a number of manifesto and other ministerial commitments, as part of the UK Government's electoral reform agenda. The Programme goals are to strengthen the integrity of the electoral system and ensure that elections remain secure, fair, modern and transparent.

The legal framework for the EIP has been set through the Elections Act, which received Royal Assent in April 2022. The provisions in the Elections Act 2022 are being implemented through a wide-ranging programme of secondary legislation, with the Government's stated intention that all of the following electoral measures will be in force before the end of the current Parliament:

- The introduction of voter identification requirements to show an accepted form of photographic identification at polling stations at UK Parliamentary Elections, Police and Crime Commissioner elections in England and Wales, and at local elections and referendums in England. This is supported by a free of charge service available to all electors with another form of accepted identification upon request – a Voter Authority Certificate (VAC) – to use when voting in person at a polling station.

- Changes to postal and proxy votes will apply at UK Parliamentary Elections in Great Britain, Police and Crime Commissioner elections in England and Wales, and at local elections and referendums in England. These include:

  - changes to the duration of postal voting arrangements (setting a maximum length of three years),

  - the handling and secrecy of postal votes, limiting the number of electors for whom someone can be appointed to act for as a proxy to a maximum of 4 electors,

  - the introduction of an identity checking process for absent voting applications, and;

  - a new online service for absent vote applications.

  The proxy limits measure and the handling and secrecy of postal votes measure will also apply to UK Parliamentary Elections in Northern Ireland, local elections in Northern Ireland, and elections for the Northern Ireland Assembly (though noting that postal votes cannot be handed in at polling stations and can only be returned to the Returning Officer in Northern Ireland).

- Changes to allow all British Citizens living abroad who have been previously registered or resident in the UK the right to vote in UK Parliamentary Elections, beyond the previous 15-year limit. In addition, following the UK's departure from the European Union, the introduction of new eligibility rules for EU citizens voting and standing in local elections in England, Police and Crime Commissioner elections in England and

Wales, local elections in Northern Ireland and elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly.

- New requirements relating to the accessibility of voting at polling stations during local elections in England and Northern Ireland, elections for the Northern Ireland Assembly, Police and Crime Commissioner elections in England and Wales, and UK Parliamentary Elections. This broadens the requirement for Returning Officers to provide support for people with a wide range of disabilities to vote in the polling station and removes restrictions on who can act as a companion to assist disabled voters, giving a disabled voter the choice of anyone over 18 years of age to assist them.

- Changes to electoral campaigning rules (referred to as Campaigning Measures), namely:

    a. To improve the accountability of the Electoral Commission to the UK Parliament, four related measures were introduced – the power for the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to designate a Strategy and Policy Statement for the Electoral Commission, changes to the powers and membership of the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission and changes to the Commission's powers to remove the potential for the Electoral Commission to bring criminal prosecutions in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

    b. To improve transparency of digital campaigning, a new digital imprint regime was introduced. It requires anyone paying for digital political material to be advertised to explicitly show who they are, and on whose behalf, they are promoting the material. Certain campaigners are also required to include an imprint on their other electronic material.

    c. The introduction of measures relating to political finance to strengthen fairness, transparency, and controls against foreign spending by:

        - introducing a lower registration threshold for third-party campaigners spending more than £10,000 during the regulated period before an election,

        - restricting all third-party campaigning spending at elections over £700 to UK-based (or otherwise eligible) campaigners,

        - introducing a duty for the Electoral Commission to prepare a statutory code of practice providing guidance to third-party campaigners on the application of the expenditure controls in the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000.

        - prohibiting groups from registering on both the political party register and third-party register (dual registration) and so potentially bypassing existing spending limits, and;

- improving transparency in political party finance through a new requirement to produce an assets and liabilities declaration for new political parties registration.

d. Clarifying the law on notional expenditure, so that candidates and their agents can have full confidence about their legal responsibilities and do not need to fear being responsible for benefits in kind of which they had no knowledge,

e. The offence of undue influence is designed to ensure that voting choices are made freely. The offence has been updated with modern terminology to provide greater clarity to the police and prosecutors so that intimidatory behaviour can be dealt with properly.

f. The intimidation sanction is designed to protect individuals who participate in public life from intimidation. It bans individuals from standing in an election for 5 years where the individual is convicted of an intimidatory offence.

DLUHC has also previously published several impact assessments supporting the Election Act 2022 and subsequent secondary legislation. The total net present social value (the value of all monetised benefits, less all monetised costs) for the introduction of the Election Act measures is estimated by DLUHC in these impact assessments to be -£231 million over a ten-year period. However, the majority of monetised impacts are costs, and a monetised value has not been placed on the intended key benefits including reduced opportunities for electoral fraud and enhancing support for disabled voters in polling stations.

1.2 Evaluation objectives

In December 2022, the UK Government committed to appoint an external research agency to synthesise the findings from various strands of research and analyses being conducted and to carry out primary research to evaluate the implementation of measures in the Elections Act 2022, with a commitment to publish a first report in November 2023. IFF Research was appointed to deliver this research in May 2023.

The Elections Act 2022 requires the implementation of the voter identification policy to be evaluated at the first stand-alone set of local council elections at which it is introduced and the following two UK Parliamentary Elections. The evaluation, however, will go beyond what is required in legislation and evaluate the impact and implementation of the Elections Act as it is introduced.

This report presents the findings from the first year of the evaluation. It covers the introduction, at the English local elections held in May 2023, of the requirement for voters to show photographic identification in polling stations, and the introduction of accessibility measures at the May 2023 local elections held in England and Northern Ireland.

The evaluation included both process and impact components:

- The process component gathered evidence on implementation to examine the activities that were undertaken to deliver the voter identification and accessibility measures, and the ways in which they were delivered by electoral services teams in local authorities and polling station staff. The analysis draws out lessons that can be learned about barriers and facilitators to effective implementation in the May 2023 local elections that can inform their delivery at the next UK Parliamentary General Election.

- The impact evaluation assessed the effectiveness of voter identification and accessibility in relation to the programme's goals, and to understand their impact on both electors and the electoral sector, including Electoral Registration Officers, Returning Officers and staff in electoral services teams and working in polling stations.

The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) developed research questions for the evaluation, covering the implementation (process) and impact of both the voter identification and accessibility measures. The full list of research questions can be found in Appendix 1. These formed the initial basis for questionnaires and discussion guides used across the evaluation.

1.3 Methods

1.3.1 Theory-based evaluation design

The evaluation adopted a theory-based approach drawing on theory of change models and contribution analysis. The theory of change models set out how each of the voter identification and accessibility measures is expected to affect change in the short, medium and long term by mapping the expected inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes and impacts. The models were initially drafted by DLUHC and further developed by IFF Research.

Contribution analysis was then used to explain and test the validity of the theory of change models. A series of contribution claims were developed to articulate how each measure leads to change, while recognising the importance of other influencing factors. The contribution claims are simply subsets of the theory of change model that isolate the relevant inputs, activities, and outputs related to specific outcomes and impacts.

The contribution analysis tested the validity of the contribution claims (meaning, the extent to which they had been met) using a range of evidence from different strands of research and analyses that have been conducted as part of DLUHC's monitoring and evaluation activities for the EIP. These are summarised in the section on 'Evidence and Data Sources'.

Figure 1.1 provides a visual illustration of the evaluation design. It shows how the different strands of research and analyses feed into the overarching theory-based evaluation led by IFF Research. IFF Research's synthesis and reporting of the evidence is structured around the theory of change models, contribution claims and research questions.

Figure 1.1 Overview of the EIP evaluation design

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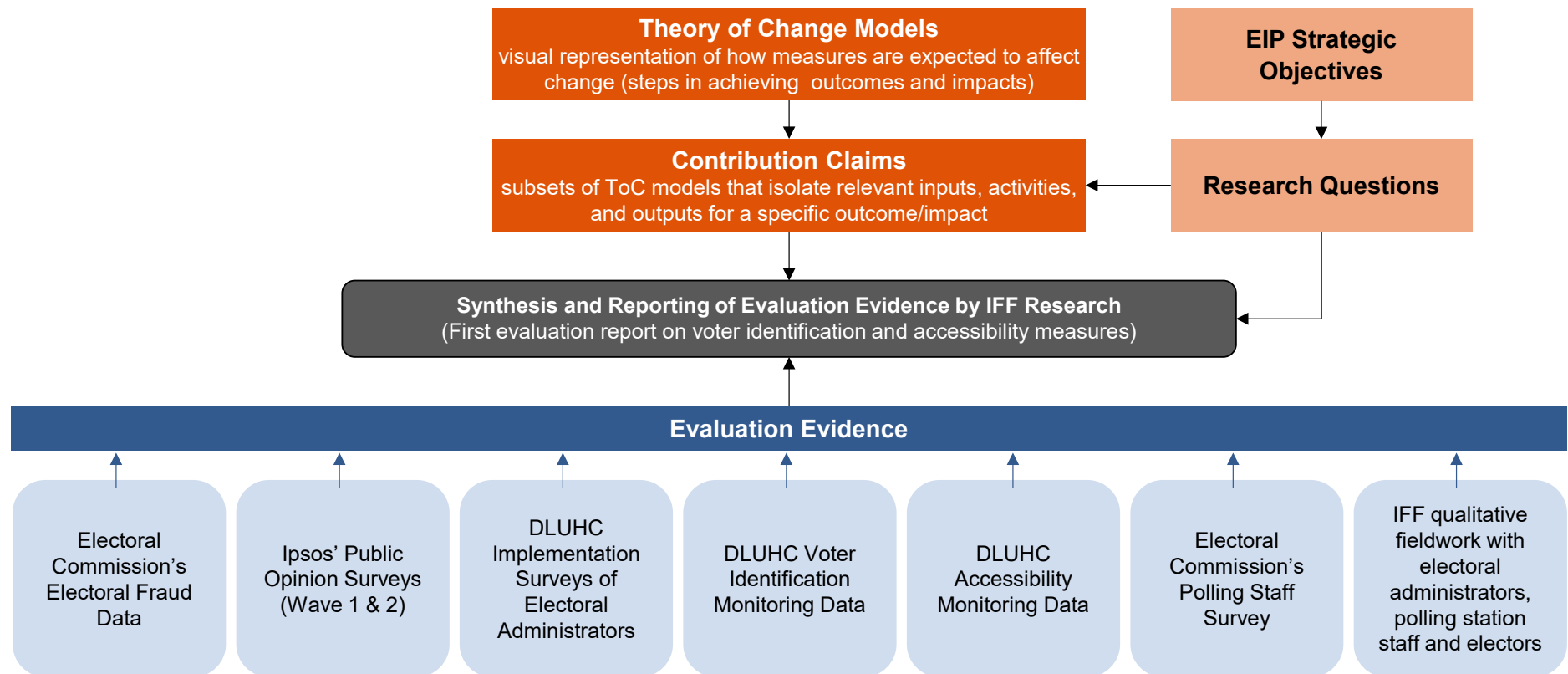
The following steps were undertaken for the contribution analysis.

Scoping and theory of change development (Stages 1 and 2)

The theory of change models were initially developed by DLUHC and reviewed by the IFF evaluation team. Then a first set of contribution claims were developed by the IFF evaluation team in partnership with DLUHC.

Collect available evidence (Stage 3)

The evaluation evidence (see Section 1.3.2: Data Sources) was mapped against the contribution claims.

Contribution workshop (Stage 4)

The contribution claims and evidence were validated at a contribution workshop. Each claim was critically assessed to identify whether links between inputs and activities to outputs, outcomes and impacts were strong or weak, and for its overall credibility.

Seek additional evidence (Stage 5)

Contribution analysis works best when there is time to be iterative allowing the claims to evolve, along with the theory of change models, to take account of available evidence and to seek additional evidence, where possible. However, due to the timeframe for the evaluation, the IFF Research team compressed this stage and were not able to thoroughly address all gaps identified in the evidence base. Limitations of the evaluation design and how they can be addressed in the second year of the evaluation are discussed in Section 1.4 (Key considerations and caveats) and Appendix 2 (Methodology: IFF qualitative research).

Synthesis (Stage 6)

Finally, all the evaluation evidence was mapped against the contribution claims to present a coherent set of findings.

The mapping of evidence against each claim formed the basis of the analysis. It is important to note that the claims differed in the type and amount of evidence available.

Once the evidence for each of the components of the claim was assembled, IFF assessed whether the claims had been achieved. There was no simple rule on which to base the assessment. It relied on critical review from the IFF evaluation team. On the basis of the assessment, it was concluded whether a claim was 'met', 'partially met', 'not met', or 'inconclusive'.

There are several elements that influenced the assessment. The most important considerations were the strength of the evidence base and the degree of consistency across multiple sources of evidence. Confidence in the assessment was highest when there were two or more sources congruent to the theory of change that showed consistent findings. Confidence in the assessment was rated lower when i) the assessment was

based on a single data source; ii) the evidence congruence with the underlying theory was low, or iii) when evidence from multiple sources was contradictory.

1.3.2   Data Sources

The evaluation brought together data from a range of qualitative and quantitative research, data collection and analyses, carried out by DLUHC, the Electoral Commission, Ipsos, and IFF Research.

The main sources of evidence for the evaluation were as follows:

- Electoral Commission's Electoral Fraud Data: Data reported from 2022 and 2023 on the incidence and nature of electoral fraud.

- Public Opinion Surveys (Ipsos): Ipsos conducted 2 waves of a Public Opinion Survey, before (in January 2023, Wave 1, creating a baseline) and after the local elections (in May 2023, Wave 2). The survey is nationally representative and includes samples in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. It collects data on public perceptions of voter identification and accessibility measures, attitudes to voting, trust and satisfaction with the electoral system, and ease of voting. Note that where wave 2 data is used to explore change in awareness of new measures over time, figures stated in this report are focused on the 'fresh' sample (meaning they exclude the longitudinal sample) as key measures such as levels of awareness would otherwise be artificially skewed by this data.

- March Readiness and May Reflections Survey of Electoral Administrators (Implementation Surveys, DLUHC): Data on local authorities' implementation of voter identification and accessibility measures was collected via an online survey. These were completed by electoral administrators (this includes Electoral Registration Officers and Returning Officers) and were administered in March (to explore 'readiness') and following the May elections (to explore 'reflections') in local authorities in England that held May 2023 local elections, and with the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland (EONI). It is important to note that elections in Northern Ireland are administered centrally by the EONI. Therefore, for Northern Ireland there is only one individual response.

- Voter Identification Monitoring Data: Including data collected in polling stations (both at the May 2023 local elections, and the parliamentary by-elections in July and October 2023), from the VAC application process, from the Electoral Commission's survey of electoral administrators, as analysed and reported by DLUHC. This includes data collected by Poll Clerks in polling stations on the number of voters turned away from polling stations at English because they did not bring accepted photographic identification, and of those, the number who later returned to vote (this data from the May 2023 elections has also been [published](#) by the Electoral Commission). It also includes analyses of applications for VACs, including the number of VACs issued and then used, and the number of Anonymous Elector Documents used at the English May

2023 local elections. Data on applications for VACs is from the ERO Portal. Finally, it includes analysis on the numbers of electors requesting their identity to be checked in private. The parliamentary by-elections included in this data took place in the following six constituencies: Uxbridge and South Ruislip, Somerton and Frome, Selby and Ainsty, Rutherglen and Hamilton West, Mid Bedfordshire, and Tamworth. This data does not include the number of those turned away for the recall petition in Rutherglen and Hamilton West.

- Accessibility Monitoring data: Including data sourced from DLUHC's Implementation Surveys, the Electoral Commission's Polling Staff Survey, and the Electoral Commission's Electoral Administrator's survey. This includes data on accessibility measures (such as availability of accessibility provisions), as analysed and reported by DLUHC.

- Electoral Commission's Electoral Administrators Survey: Data on electoral administrator's delivery of the voter identification and the accessibility measures was collected by the Electoral Commission via a post-election online survey of electoral administrators in local authorities in England that held local elections in May 2023.

- Electoral Commission's Polling Staff Survey: Data on polling staff's delivery of the voter identification and the accessibility measures was collected by the Electoral Commission via a post-election online survey of Poll Clerks in local authorities in England that held local elections in May 2023.

- Qualitative research (IFF Research): IFF undertook qualitative research on the impact and implementation of the voter identification and accessibility measures with electoral services teams in local authorities, polling station staff and key groups of electors. Sixteen local authorities were selected as case studies across the English regions outside London that held local elections in May 2023. Within each case study local authority, depth interviews were completed with staff responsible for delivering elections and electoral registration including Electoral Registration Officers and Returning Officers and Electoral Services Managers. Additionally, depth interviews and focus groups were carried out with polling station staff and electors in 8 of the 16 local authorities.

In some instances, data was drawn from outputs outside of the main sources listed above. Where this is the case, the sources are directly signposted (via hyperlink) in the text.

The full methodology for the qualitative research, including the process for selecting case study local authorities and characteristics of these areas (for context) are outlined in Appendix 2 (Methodology: IFF qualitative research).

More information on the sample sizes, including limitations for the other data sources are available in Appendix 3 (Methodology: Quantitative data sources).

1.4 Key considerations and caveats

Conclusions drawn in this report are based on the introduction of the voter identification and accessibility measures at the May 2023 local elections. It is important to acknowledge that the nature of local elections is somewhat different to UK Parliamentary General Election – turnout is typically a lot lower, and those that do vote are, more politically engaged. Throughout, the assessments on whether the claims have been met are within the context of a local election, although reflections and implications for the UK Parliamentary General Election may be outlined.

Relatedly, local elections were not held in all parts of England in May 2023. Findings in the areas that conducted elections may not be necessarily generalisable to nations and areas yet to hold elections with the new measures. Furthermore, some statistics from the Public Opinion Surveys are based on all adults of voting age in England rather than only those living in areas that held local elections in May 2023. Whether statistics refer to all adults in England, only adults in areas which held elections in England, or to adults in Northern Ireland is made clear in the report.

The new measures were expected to have a greater impact (whether positive or negative) on specific groups of electors. For example, electors with no accepted photographic identification were of particular interest when exploring the requirement to show photographic identification and availability of VACs. Likewise, the new accessibility measures were expected to have a greater impact on electors with disabilities who vote in-person. Therefore, these groups were of particular interest for the qualitative research. However, the incidence of both groups is relatively low, which made it challenging to recruit them and subsequently explore their views in the qualitative fieldwork.

As outlined in the Section 2.1 (Theory-based evaluation design), contribution analysis works best when there is time for iterative adaptation of claims as originally planned. However, it was not feasible to adopt an iterative approach or gather more data and evidence when gaps were apparent, given the evaluation timeframe in the first year. Similarly, the evidence base was not sufficiently developed to tell us whether the medium-term and long-term outcomes (for example, public perception of electoral fraud, cases of personation in the longer term) were being met or not with confidence. To allow sufficient time for these impacts to manifest, they need to be tracked over a longer period that extends beyond the timeframe for this report, and in some cases, beyond the timeframes for the wider evaluation. Given that it was not feasible to apply an iterative approach or track outcomes over a longer period, IFF's assessment on whether some of the claims have been achieved or not is inconclusive.

Across all sources where perspectives are collected from staff and electors, they are subject to social desirability bias, a tendency to answer questions in ways that will be viewed favourably by others. This is where a theory-based approach, using evidence from

multiple sources, shows its strength – this type of approach involves critiquing evidence and considering how consistently a finding is coming through from a range of perspectives.

The possibility of selection bias is another important consideration: acknowledgement that the types of electors and delivery staff who chose to engage with the research may differ from those who did not respond.

In addition to the broader caveats and considerations, each evidence source also has its limitations. These are outlined in detail in the Appendix 2 (Methodology: IFF qualitative research) and Appendix 3 (Methodology: Quantitative data sources), but also referenced in the body of the report where most relevant.

2 Chapter 2: Findings -Voter identification

2.1 Theory of change: voter identification measures

The Elections Act 2022 introduced the legal requirement to show an accepted form of photographic identification at polling stations in Great Britain, with the English May 2023 local elections bringing this into effect for the first time. The forms of accepted photographic identification are specified in the legislation (and can be found on [GOV.UK](GOV.UK)).

Expired photographic identification is also accepted if it is on the list of accepted photographic identification documents and if the photograph is of a good enough likeness to allow polling station staff to confirm the identity of the holder.

All electors may apply for a free Voter Authority Certificate (VAC), issued by their local authority. VACs are a new form of photographic identification designed by the Electoral Commission intended for electors who do not own another form of photographic identifications. Electors can apply online at the GOV.UK page, by post or in person at a local authority office.

The voter identification theory of change (see Figure 2.1 or Appendix 4 for a plain text version) sets out the process of implementation of the voter identification measures. Key factors in the context for the voter identification measures are:

- o There is potential for personation to occur in polling stations without detection,

- o Most people vote in polling stations, and the potential of personation can undermine trust and confidence in the integrity of our voting and democratic process,

- o There is some evidence of personation occurring in polling stations, however some cases may go unreported.

Overall, the rationale is that voter identification aims to strengthen the integrity of the electoral system and ensure elections remain secure, fair and modern.

When identifying claims, it was important to cover the key stakeholders (i.e., electoral services teams, Electoral Registration Officers, Returning Officers, polling station staff, and electors), and to ensure the assessment would provide useful insights to the research questions. Aiming to strike this balance, and acknowledging a very large set of potentially relevant 'claims' this evaluation is designed to assess whether the following eight claims relevant to the photographic voter identification requirement have been achieved:

- Claim 1: Local authority staff in electoral services teams and Electoral Registration Officers meet the requirements of law

- Claim 2: Returning Officers and polling station staff meet the requirements of law

- Claim 3: Communication campaigns raises electors' awareness of voter identification

- Claim 4: Communication campaigns raises electors' awareness of Voter Authority Certificates

- Claim 5: Electors who want a VAC and are eligible are able to obtain one

- Claim 6: Electors who want to have their identification document checked in private, are able to do so

- Claim 7: Personation is identified more easily and reduces in the longer-term

- Claim 8: Electors remain satisfied with the process and ease of in-person voting

In the subsections that follow evidence is presented to assess the extent to which each claim has been met.

Figure 2.2 Voter identification theory of change

Inputs *What is needed for the intervention to take place?*	Activities *Activities, actions and processes to take place to underpin effective delivery*	Outputs *Quantifiable deliverable resulting from the intervention activities*	Outcomes *Early 'consequential changes' from the outputs and activities*	Impacts *Longer 'consequential change' to meet the long-term goals*
Primary and secondary legislation introduce the requirement to bring accepted photographic identification to vote in polling stations	Local authorities and the Electoral Commission to deliver communication campaigns to raise awareness	Electors are aware of the requirements, understand what is accepted identification, and remember to bring accepted identification to polling stations	Local authorities feel confident delivering the requirements and applying them in accordance with the legislation	Cases of personation decrease in the longer term
Local authorities are engaged on voter identification changes and how they should be implemented in accordance with the legislation	Local authorities staff provided guidance and training on how to deliver the requirements	In person voters who present accepted identification and have it checked are able to vote	Polling station staff feel confident delivering the requirements and applying them in accordance with the legislation	No new opportunities for electoral fraud arise elsewhere in the electoral system due to the introduction of the voter identification requirements
Provisions are provided to ensure electors without another form of accepted identification can obtain free of charge a Voter Authority Certificate (VAC)	Polling station staff provided guidance and training on how to deliver the requirements	Electors without accepted photographic identification, who want to vote in person, either apply for the VAC by the deadline or obtain another form of accepted identification	The policy is accessible to all electors	Polling station staff and electoral administrators are more confident in the electoral process and its protections from fraud
Digital platforms and services for VAC applications are built and meet minimum service requirements	Local authorities have systems in place to implement the VAC application process		Electors are not deterred from voting as a result of the requirements	Electors have more trust and confidence in the integrity of our voting and democratic process
There are sufficient numbers of staff in local authorities to process VAC applications and undertake communication campaigns	Provisions are in place in polling stations for voters to show their identification in private should they wish to	Local authorities are able to process VAC applications (and produce temporary VACs as needed) and these are delivered to or collected by electors in time for elections	Voters remain satisfied with the process of voting in person	Public perception of electoral fraud occurring in polling stations decreases
Provisions are provided to local authorities to ensure voters can show their identification in private in polling stations	Polling station staff carry out voter identification checks according to legislation		Personation that does occur is detected	
There are sufficient numbers of polling station staff to carry out new identification checks in polling stations	Polling station staff record voters turned away and those who return according to legislation	Private areas and other support provisions in polling stations are used by those who need them		
Police are engaged to support enforcement of the requirements				

2.2 Claim 1: Local authority staff in electoral services teams and Electoral Registration Officers meet the requirements of law

Claim 1 aims to assess the degree to which local authority electoral services teams and Electoral Registration Officers fulfilled the photographic voter identification requirements set out in the Elections Act 2022 and subsequent secondary legislation. This is a critical causal step for the voter identification theory of change to hold true, as the work undertaken by the local authorities is an essential prerequisite for successful implementation of the voter identification measures in polling stations on polling day. For this claim to be met, local authority staff in electoral services teams and Electoral Registration Officers must have engaged with the voter identification changes in accordance with the legislation and taken practical steps to ensure voter identification measures can be implemented (for example, they deployed and trained staff, and have systems in place to implement the processing of VAC applications). If these steps are met, the assumption is that local authority staff's confidence in delivering the new voter identification requirements will increase. Another expected consequence will be increased confidence that the electoral process is protected from fraud (discussed further in Claim 7: Personation is identified more easily and reduces in the longer-term).

Appendix 5 sets out the elements in the voter identification theory of change that describe the pathway to change for Claim 1.

2.2.1 Readiness for implementation

To understand how local authorities met their requirements, IFF Research and the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) identified which activities were of key importance to achieve the outcomes under Claim 1. These were selected based on the theory of change and are discussed in turn here. Electoral administrators needed to ensure that:

- there were sufficient polling station staff to manage the additional tasks associated with the new measures, without causing any disruption or delays to the election process; and

- all processes were in place to enable electors who do not have an accepted photographic identification to obtain a Voter Authority Certificate (VAC) should they wish to, so they can vote in person if they choose to (discussed further in Claim 5).

In qualitative interviews, the electoral administrators reported that they reviewed the legislation ahead of the elections and considered what this would mean in practical terms for the delivery of the elections. The administrators referred to the guidance that was provided from the Electoral Commission, but also considered the context of their locality

when implementing the new legislation. It is important to note that the guidance from the Electoral Commission was not prescriptive, rather it provided suggestions of practical steps that the electoral services teams should consider, with the intention that these would be implemented within the local context. For this reason, local knowledge was a key enabler for effective implementation.

Administrators' feedback in the qualitative research suggests that they felt that their knowledge and familiarity with their local area was a key facilitator to effective implementation of the voter identification measures. In practice this meant that administrators used their judgement on what processes would be appropriate and the level of resource that would be required to deliver the measures, and thus appeared to have been able to avoid waste and implement effective processes for their locality.

> *"Putting an extra person in a polling station that receives a maximum 200 voters, there's no way we were going to put in an extra member of staff because it was ridiculous… bearing in mind this is an electorate of two to three thousand, so in some cases we only had 70 people turn up, so for 16 hours you're not going to employ an extra member of staff for that."*

> (Electoral Services Manager)

On resourcing, feedback from administrators in both the qualitative research and the May Reflections Survey suggest that resourcing was appropriate. In preparation for the May 2023 elections, 60% of surveyed local authorities deployed the same number of staff for pre-election work, while 34% deployed more, usually by moving staff from other areas of local authority work. Eighty-eight per cent reflected that they had used the right number of staff, while 5% felt they had too many and 3% felt they had too few (May Reflections Survey of Electoral Administrators).

Most of the local authorities' electoral services teams also recruited and deployed more polling station staff for the May 2023 elections, taking on board the Electoral Commission's guidance predicting more staff would be needed to handle the voter identification process. Seventy-nine per cent of surveyed local authorities' electoral services teams deployed more Poll Clerks, 56% deployed more Polling Station Inspectors, and 7% deployed more Presiding Officers (May Reflections Survey of Electoral Administrators).

These findings are consistent with the evidence from the qualitative research where administrators commented that they did not need to open more polling stations, but instead focussed on increasing the number of staff in existing stations to deliver the additional task of voter identification without causing delays and long queues.

> *"We increased it by an extra one polling station inspector so that they had a smaller area each to cover compared to the last district and parish elections that we ran, so that they could spend more time just going*

through those additional bits of paperwork with the presiding officers and making sure that everybody understood what was required during polling day. Obviously, we trained in advance but it's just that additional pair of eyes to make sure everything was running as it should on polling day".

(Electoral Services Manager)

When asked what administrators would approach differently in future elections, around a quarter (26%) said they would make little to no changes as they felt that the new requirements in the May 2023 elections went well. Nearly one in four (24%) local authorities surveyed felt they would need to deploy more staff and one in five (20%) train more staff for a UK Parliamentary General Election (May Reflections Survey of Electoral Administrators); a view echoed in the qualitative interviews with administrators.

In the qualitative research, administrators commented that they generally relied on a large existing pool of polling station staff, who have worked in elections for many years and were highly experienced: a key enabler to meeting the requirements. This continuity was reflected by the one third (33%) of surveyed local authority electoral services teams who felt the process and success of recruiting polling station staff was about the same as previous elections (May Reflections Survey of Electoral Administrators).

"But actually, for polling day, we started recruitment very early. We have a large database of staff who work regularly on elections and so we were able to contact them very early and get availability early, start recruiting to fill where we had a gap in terms of the numbers. So I think we were quite fortunate compared to what I understand other local authorities experienced in that we did get sufficient numbers of staff at a sufficiently early stage".

(Returning Officer)

But over half (58%) felt that recruitment for this election was worse or much worse than previous years and 82% of surveyed local authorities reported that they had some issue with the recruitment of polling station staff, ranging from using inexperienced staff, managing dropouts, pay, the election falling in a bank holiday week, as well as the additional requirements introduced by the Elections Act 2022 (May Reflections Survey of Electoral Administrators).

Some administrators commented in the qualitative research that before the May 2023 election they had concerns that experienced polling station staff might not want to work in the May 2023 elections due to the additional responsibilities required for the voter identification measures. A number of administrators reported that late dropouts of polling station staff was an issue and some did attribute this to the responsibilities of the voter identification requirement. Among those surveyed, the median dropout rate of initially

recruited polling station staff was 10%. The majority (59%) were attributed to unforeseen personal circumstances plus a further 21% reporting 'other' where reasons listed included hospital appointments and holidays, including the bank holiday that fell in the week of the elections. Nearly one fifth (18%), however, were attributable to either voter identification or another new electoral measure being introduced (12% stated that drop out was due to an aspect of the Elections Act 2022 and 6% stated that this was for an 'other' reason relating to the voter identification measures specifically) (May Reflections Survey of Electoral Administrators). Administrators in the qualitative research also commented that pay rates were an issue for recruitment. While rates have increased, administrators felt that they were not sufficient to attract polling station staff to the role.

> *"What we did experience was quite a lot of people dropping out quite late on. So said they would work for on the election and then as it got closer, as they did the training and or shortly afterwards, you know, in the couple of weeks leading up to polling day were then dropping out".*

<div align="right">(Returning Officer)</div>

> *"We had so many more dropouts than usual this year, and I can tell you anecdotally, I'm fairly confident in that was the Election Act and the additional responsibilities that were going to be on the polling station staff and people's reluctance to get involved in that. But directly all sorts of excuses were given, but ultimately the drop off has was much higher this year than what we've experienced in the past, even through COVID."*

<div align="right">(Electoral Services Manager)</div>

Some administrators commented that a few long serving polling station staff were disrupted and potentially lost because of the new requirements. First, the recommendation for a gender mix at polling stations (to enable gender appropriate identification document checks in private if requested) meant some staff in rural areas with very small polling stations had to be moved away from their usual station.

> *"It was one of the things that we were mindful of when we were scoping out the various polling station teams was that, because of this new requirement we were going to potentially have to disrupt some quite long-standing pairings".*

<div align="right">(Returning Officer)</div>

Also, a few administrators commented that in their areas some polling stations were deemed no longer appropriate by the administrators for the new privacy requirements and new venues had to be found. In interviews, administrators commented that they were mindful of the impact these changes could have on experienced staff who had worked in the same station for many years. Administrators noted that this was something that they

discussed with their Returning Officer's as part of the allocation process, to ensure this was dealt with sensitively.

In terms of learnings that can be applied to the UK Parliamentary General Election, in the qualitative research, administrators commented on the tight timeframe for completing recruitment (especially where greater numbers were needed), developing training materials for the new measures, delivering training and processing VAC applications. They felt that although they had managed to meet their requirements for the May 2023 local elections, they expected that they would need to deploy more staff resource, and would require more lead in time to process VACs applications to meet the deadline, and recruit polling station staff.

> *"I think our concern is, if this ramps up for the general election and we're into the thousands looking for voter certificates, then we probably would have to recruit additional member of staff for that period of time".*
>
> (Returning Officer)

> *"I anticipate that recruiting staff will get harder. We are not seeing enough young people interested in working in polling stations."*
>
> (Respondent to Reflections Survey)

> *"My biggest concern to be honest with you going forward, is that if the evaluation is done off the back of the local elections, then just the number of people turning out at polling stations, it is a lot less in the local action than it will be in a national election."*
>
> (Returning Officer)

2.2.2 Delivery of voter identification measures in the May 2023 local elections

The evidence suggests that the preparation for the May 2023 local elections went well and administrators faced the challenges of resourcing both staff and facilities in the run up to polling day sufficiently well to meet the requirements of law. On the day only a small minority of local authorities' electoral services teams surveyed felt they had insufficient Poll Clerks (4%), Presiding Officers (1%) or Polling Station Inspectors (3%) and similarly only 3% of local authorities' electoral services teams felt they had deployed too few staff to process VAC applications (May Reflections Survey of Electoral Administrators).

2.2.3 Conclusion

The evidence suggests that the claim 'Local authority staff in electoral services teams and Electoral Registration Officers meet the requirements of law' has been met. There is strong and varied evidence that electoral services teams were able to meet the requirements of

law to implement the voter identification measures for the May 2023 elections. They were able to follow the guidance issued by the Electoral Commission to achieve appropriate levels of resourcing and staff training to process VAC applications and sufficiently resource polling stations to check voter identification documents on polling day.

In the qualitative research, electoral administrators cited their local knowledge and familiarity with their local area as a key enabler to effective implementation, although how this impacted on decisions about resourcing, facilities and training across different types of local authority cannot be assessed from the other evidence sources.

While local authorities met the requirements of law in the local elections, to do the same in a UK Parliamentary General Election, administrators indicated that it would be beneficial to have a longer lead in time in order to:

a) Process the anticipated larger volume of VAC applications; and
b) Recruit and train sufficient polling station staff to process voter identification documents when turnout is higher.

Whilst the latest date for the UK Parliamentary General Elections is known (i.e. it must be held by 28 January 2025), the Prime Minister can request a dissolution of Parliament at an earlier date. This means that local authorities have little control over lead time, making it more challenging for them to plan resourcing. While local authorities can start recruiting and training polling station staff at any time, they still face a risk of people dropping out as they come close to polling day, due to unforeseen circumstances and commitments.

2.3 Claim 2: Returning Officers and polling station staff meet the requirements of law

Returning Officers and polling station staff are key to ensuring the voter identification measures are effectively implemented on polling day. Their readiness to implement the new voter identification measures is considered critical for the EIP's success. The theory of change assumes that polling station staff are provided with sufficient guidance and training to enable them to conduct voter identification document checks on polling day according to legislation. The outputs and outcomes expected from this process are that electors who present an accepted identification document and have it checked are able to vote; polling station staff feel more confident delivering the voter identification requirements and applying them in accordance with the legislation. Secondly polling station staff and electoral administrators are more confident in the electoral process and its protection from fraud (discussed in more detail for Claim 7).

Appendix 5 sets out the process relevant to Claim 2.

2.3.1 Preparedness to deliver the requirement

Almost every member of polling station staff surveyed (98%) received training before polling day (with 1% saying they were unable to attend and only 1% saying they were not offered training) and 95% recalled being trained in how to review people's photographic identification. Nearly all surveyed (94%) agreed that the training prepared them well for the elections (Electoral Commission's Polling Staff Survey). The qualitative findings from focus groups conducted with polling station staff were consistent with these findings. Although some staff were initially uncertain about the new measures and not confident in their ability to carry out the requirement, after they attended the training they felt reassured and much more confident that they understood what was required of them to implement the voter identification measures.

"I think the training was really useful and answered load of questions".

(Polling station staff)

"The training was really good, so it helped us deal with it".

(Polling station staff)

That said, polling station staff in one region said that following the training they felt somewhat unprepared on the new voter identification measures. In another area the Returning Officer commented that the need to include new material covering the voter identification requirement in one training session meant that some of the routine information and instructions were covered in less detail than usual.

"Obviously it [the training session] did touch upon the new legislation around voter ID, but it did kind of feel it was a little bit rushed… on that section. And I think that did actually heighten my anxiety a little bit, because I did kind of think, oh gosh, we are really still don't know what to expect on the day, but to go back to what we were saying earlier, those fears were unfounded. But I still feel maybe that area of the training could have been improved, but the rest of it was fine."

(Polling station staff)

Although polling station staff were overall confident that they understood how the new measures were being implemented and what was required of them by law, in discussions they reported feeling less confident that they could explain to electors why the measures had been introduced and the criteria that determined which forms of photographic identification are accepted. This posed a minor challenge on polling day, when electors presented an identification document that was not accepted (for example NHS or police staff ID, firearms licences or young persons' Oyster or rail card) and polling station staff felt less confident explaining why it could not be accepted.

"It was more around the frustrations around the types of ID. So I had two professions: I had an NHS [worker] and I had a police officer who assumed they'd be able to use their photo ID cards for work. So, I had a nurse on their way, probably a thirteen-hour shift, called in and then said look, I haven't got time to go back home again. She's just assumed that the NHS ID would have been sufficient and the same with the police officer so I could understand their frustrations. But then it's kind of where do you draw the line? What work ID [workplace employer identification document] would you then have to stop at?"

(Polling station staff)

In terms of preparedness to deliver the photographic voter identification requirements, the evidence indicates that both the coverage and content of the local authority training was highly effective, with some scope for improvement in communicating the rationale for the measures and its processes to ensure polling station staff can give a consistent and clear message to electors when required.

2.3.2 Delivery of the voter identification measures on polling day

Nearly all (99%) of polling station staff surveyed agreed with the statement that the election was run well at their polling station, with over three quarters (77%) strongly agreeing (Electoral Commission's Polling Staff Survey). Polling station staff taking part in the qualitative research gave similar feedback, with those who had initial concerns about the measures often saying they were pleasantly surprised on the day. They credited the successful delivery to three main elements:

- Good planning and organisation by the local authority' electoral services teams in preparation for the election and on the day itself;

- Provision of guidance for staff and information for electors within polling stations;

- High level of awareness amongst electors about the new requirement for a photographic identification combined with a high proportion of electors carrying accepted photographic identification as a matter of course.

"It was better than I expected. Actually, I was kind of prepared for some potentially difficult situations to deal with and actually we had couple of people turned up without [photographic identification] … *There's only one person who came without ID who was sent away, who didn't come back. Everybody else kind of looked down, came back and were fine about it as well".*

(Polling station staff)

Polling station staff and Returning Officers commented that when polling stations were organised well, it reduced pressure on staff and enabled smoother voter processing. Some mentioned the value of placing greeters at the entrance to prompt electors to prepare their identification document and prevent delays in processing. Where the Electoral Register was provided on tablets/laptops in polling stations, staff also felt this improved their ability to carry out their tasks (Electoral Commission's Polling Staff Survey).

> *"I think it was important at the polling station to have that big chart at the front and a Poll Clerk there to actually say, look, these are the IDs, have you got it? And that seemed to simplify things before they came in and were directed to my actual desk to get their vote".*

> (Polling station staff)

> *"I mean, it was so publicised that a lot, the majority of people that came to my polling station, they had their passport or driving licence in their hand".*

> (Polling station staff)

Although it had been a concern for some before polling day, only 3% of polling station staff surveyed felt that it took a lot longer to process each voter on the day. Nearly two thirds (62%) thought it generally took *a little* longer and three in ten (30%) about the same amount of time (Electoral Commission's Polling Staff Survey). Similarly, there were no reports from the qualitative research of queues or other delays for voters on the day and staff felt the identification process generally went smoothly.

2.3.3 Impact on polling station staff confidence in delivering the requirements

The training and guidance appeared to have been effective in providing polling station staff with the confidence to deliver the new measures and successfully manage a range of difficult situations. For example, in the qualitative research polling station staff spoke about electors who refused to show their photographic identification when first asked to, '*just to see if they could get away with it'*, or to register a protest about the new measures, but staff followed their training to explain that these are new requirements of law, and in most cases electors conceded, showed their photographic identification and were allowed to cast their vote. As well as their training, staff mentioned the images examples of accepted photographic identification in Annex 12 of the Electoral Commission's [Handbook for polling station staff](#) as a key enabler in boosting staff confidence when carrying out voter identification document checks.

> *"If somebody came in and you just couldn't, if it wasn't a driving license or a passport, you have to refer to the [Electoral Commission's Handbook for polling station staff – Annex 12] and you had the pictures of the ID, which were very helpful, especially if you started to get a queue".*

> (Polling station staff)

However, in discussions, polling station staff said they felt less confident in situations where an elector's appearance had changed substantially and a fair few said they did not feel sufficiently trained to identify a fraudulent identification document (discussed further for Claim 7). Some Poll Clerks mentioned examples of awkward situations where the elector was much younger in the photograph or presented as a different sex since the photographic identification was issued, which made it very difficult for the Poll Clerk to confidently identify the elector. In some particularly challenging cases, the Poll Clerks felt unsure whether they should have accepted the identification document, or what steps they should have taken to confirm the elector's identity. Some pointed to the more detailed training given to Border Force staff in how to recognise features when a person's appearance has changed.

> *"And although the training was very good, I think I felt that that particular aspect* [recognising people who now present as a different gender] *was a little bit glossed over. I think they could have been a little bit more detailed in just to show people and to teach people what they need to really look for when they are looking at photographs in front of a person. And I have to say that I have found it as going from a customs officer to an immigration officer, one of the hardest things to do. You would think it would be very, very simple, but it is not".*
>
> (Polling station staff)

2.3.4 Impact on polling station staff confidence in the electoral process

While there is strong evidence that Returning Officers and polling station staff met the requirements of law, over four in ten (44%) of those with previous polling station experience, that were surveyed, reported that they found the May 2023 local election experience at least slightly more difficult than previous elections, with 4% finding it a lot more difficult. About the same proportion (45%) found it around the same as previous years (Electoral Commission's Polling Staff Survey).

The qualitative research did not find any substantive impact of the photographic voter identification requirement on polling station staff experience. Overall, it appears that the set up for the elections, especially the training and guidance provided, enabled staff to feel confident carrying out the new requirements. As noted, the only exception was when some were challenged to explain the reasons for the measures or rationale for the inclusion or exclusion of certain types of identification documents and were not as confident in how to answer.

2.3.5 Conclusion

The evaluation evidence is sufficiently strong and consistent to conclude that the claim 'Returning officers and polling station staff meet the requirements of law' was met. Polling station staff received training, which was reported by the vast majority as effective in

providing them with the knowledge and confidence to implement the voter identification measures in the May 2023 elections. Although the majority of polling station staff surveyed felt that voter processing took longer (62% 'a little longer' and 3% 'a lot longer') than previous elections, most felt the difference was not substantial and almost all (99%) of polling stations staff surveyed felt the polling day still ran smoothly (Electoral Commission's Polling Staff Survey).

The qualitative interviews suggest that Returning Officers and polling station staff did not deviate from the requirements and instructions they received in training, even when faced with challenging situations in the preparation for and during polling day. This suggests a high level of confidence amongst polling station staff, and good understanding of their role.

That said, insights from the focus groups indicated that polling station staff were less confident about explaining why some types of photographic identification are accepted and others are not. They were also less confident that they could identify electors if their photographic identification did not resemble the individual because the photograph was very old or the individuals has had significant change in appearance since the photograph was taken. The evidence suggests that additional training on what photographic identification documents are accepted and why might be beneficial. This may increase polling station staff confidence in managing tricky and awkward situations with electors around their photographic identification.

2.4 Claim 3: Communication campaign raises electors' awareness of voter identification

A fundamental contributor to the success of the introduction of the voter identification measures is ensuring that individuals who are eligible to vote and wish to vote in-person, are aware of the new voter identification measures.

The voter identification theory of change model outlines that, to achieve this, local authorities engage in communication campaigns to increase awareness in their locality. Ahead of the May local elections 2023, this was accompanied by the Electoral Commission's national campaign and provision of communication materials directly to local authorities. These activities were expected to raise awareness among all electors: for the need to bring photographic identification, of what identification documents are accepted, and ensure that electors know to bring such identification documents on the day in order to vote.

Ultimately, these campaigns should be reaching all electors, to ensure that the voting process is accessible to all, and communicated in a way that ensures electors are not deterred from voting.

Appendix 5 sets out the elements in the voter identification theory of change model that describe the pathway to change for Claim 3.

2.4.1 Delivery of communication campaign on voter identification

Ninety-nine per cent of local authorities' electoral services teams surveyed reported sending communications to voters on the requirements to show photographic identification at the May 2023 elections, and a similar proportion – 98% - were (very or fairly) confident in the effectiveness of the work being delivered by their press office to raise public awareness (March Readiness Survey of Electoral Administrators).

In the qualitative research, electoral administrators described the range of communication methods used by local authorities. Most adopted 'through-the-letterbox' approaches, such as posting leaflets or letters to each household in the areas with information on the requirement, in addition to this information was also printed on Poll Cards.

> *"In February, we wrote out to every elector, just to check the registration details are correct and remind them an election is coming. We included one of the Electoral Commission's leaflets about voter ID. That went to every household; regardless of if they were postal voter or [polling] station voter, everybody received that leaflet."*

> (Electoral Services Manager)

Electoral administrators also described the use of physical advertising around the local area, such as on electronic billboards in city centres and posters along bus routes or outside schools. Various media campaigns (for example, via social media, local radio or local magazines) were also used.

It was common for local authorities' electoral services teams to use the Electoral Commission materials, particularly the leaflet and graphics, as or alongside communications produced by the local authority. Administrators felt these materials were helpful tools for communicating the requirements, as they were clear and informative.

> *"We worked with our comms team and people in the council to deliver this and we very much used the Electoral Commission resources, we didn't alter them."*

> (Electoral Services Manager)

In March, about six weeks before the election, nearly a quarter (23%) of local authorities surveyed were still concerned that electors were not very aware or not at all aware of the new voter identification measures (March Readiness Survey of Electoral Administrators). In qualitative interviews, administrators tended to see themselves as following up, or 'piggybacking on', the Electoral Commission's national campaign which started much earlier (electors recalled seeing this as early as January). Electoral administrators described how they were trying to strike a balance with timing of communications – they wanted to give those without photographic identification time to prepare, while reducing the risk of the message being forgotten.

It was the general consensus among electors that the combination of national and local efforts to raise awareness made the message difficult to miss, and that the message was simple: you would now need photographic identification to vote in elections.

> *"I thought it was quite good because even if you don't use social media, you're not online or watching the news. I did see a lot of ads. You're driving around and there's ads on the wall…I did see quite a few of those saying remember to bring your photo ID. So, if you're not online, the message was still portrayed."*

> (Elector, voted, younger (18-29))

In qualitative interviews, electors were also likely to identify sources outside of official campaigns. This included reports on news outlets and political programmes (such as debates), and – for young people in particular – political commentators and pages on social media.

Electoral administrators made few mentions of targeted campaigns to reach specific or hard-to-reach audiences. Examples where this had been done included use of local parish newsletters, posters in warm space buildings (heated public facilities and venues, free to enter, such as churches, libraries, pubs, cafes and community buildings), and disability forum groups. Some administrators also ensured materials were translated into common languages within their area (such as Urdu, Polish, Punjabi). One case study area described extensive work targeting hard-to-reach audiences. This included 'on-the-ground' outreach work with their communication and neighbourhood teams, dissemination through disability and other support groups, and translating materials into 22 different languages (informed by the demographic profile of their area).

Some electoral administrators identified targeted communications work as a focus for improvement for the next UK Parliamentary General Election. There was particular interest in ensuring the message was reaching electors from ethnic minority groups, students, and those with disabilities (for example, those with visual impairments who would not see posters in the local area). The timescales for preparing for the local election was seen as a main barrier for delivering this work for the May 2023 elections. Electoral administrators felt that they did not have enough time to effectively engage the voluntary and community sectors to help with disseminating the message.

In the qualitative interviews, some electors raised concerns on behalf of individuals who may have greater barriers to comprehension (for example, if English was not their first language, or they had a visual or learning disability).

> *"I think there's quite a lot of text on it [the Poll Card]…if you have a learning difficulty or you're partially sighted, you would be at more of a disadvantage in understanding and what it said. You could easily miss it."*

> (Elector, voted, opposed to voter identification measures)

One suggested solution to these potential barriers, put forward by electors, was to ensure communications that relied on text also included as many visual cues as possible – for example, on a Poll Card having images indicating that a photographic identification document is needed, alongside text describing this requirement (note that this would add significant cost to Poll Card production and distribution, however; the value-for-money of such as change should be considered).

2.4.2 Electors' awareness of voter identification

Among voting age adults in England, awareness of the voter identification measures increased substantially between January and May 2023. In January, 34% heard a great deal or fair amount about the requirement; this proportion increased to 76% in late May. A small minority (5%) of voting age adults in England had heard nothing at all about the change in late May. In areas holding local elections, awareness was higher in both January and May; starting at 35% and rising to 84% in May, with 4%having heard nothing at all about the change at the later time point (Public Opinion Survey Wave 1 & 2).

However, awareness was not evenly spread among the population. In England, awareness was highest among older people (89% of those aged 65+), those with a greater interest in politics (88%), those who regularly vote in local elections (87%), and adults with photographic identification (82%). Those most likely to have heard nothing at all about the requirement were those who rarely or never vote at local elections (18%), ethnic minorities (12%) and younger adults (11% of those aged 18-34) (Public Opinion Survey Wave 2).

Evidence from the Public Opinion Survey and qualitative interviews with electors aligned with electoral administrator descriptions of information being disseminated through a range of sources. Among the three-quarters (76%) of voting age adults who had heard about the changes, 37% recalled seeing national advert on TV/radio, 22% in a newspaper/magazine, and 20% on social media (note that respondents could select all sources that applied) (Public Opinion Survey Wave 2).

It was common in both the Public Opinion Surveys and qualitative interviews for individuals to reference the Electoral Commission's national campaign on the new policy. Prompted awareness of this advert (i.e., recognition of the advert when shown) increased significantly between January and May among voting age adults, from 16% to 48%. Recognition in May was slightly higher in areas holding local elections (52%) (Public Opinion Survey Wave 1 & 2).

In May, half of voting age adults aware of the changes living in areas holding English local elections (50%) recalled communications from the local council, whether that be via post (26%), newspapers/magazines (18%), on TV/radio (18%), or via social media (16%) (note that respondents could select all sources that applied) (Public Opinion Survey Wave 2).

These sources were also reflected in qualitative interviews with electors, in which Poll Cards, letters through the door, and billboards / posters at bus stops were identified as

particularly effective. In line with survey findings, social media campaigns were also mentioned, although less frequently.

During recruitment for the qualitative research, it was extremely difficult to find electors who were not aware of the new voter identification measures. This, taken together with the quantitative data, and the findings on where electors had seen/heard about the photographic voter identification requirements, suggests that the national and local campaigns were successful in raising elector awareness. Furthermore, in qualitative interviews, electoral administrators and polling station staff reported that awareness among electors turning up to vote was high.

"In terms of the number of people that we are aware that turned up to polling stations blissfully unaware that they needed ID, it was a phenomenally small number."

(Returning Officer)

The proportion of voters initially turned away from polling stations for not having any accepted photographic identification was small (around 37,000 or 0.7% in the local elections and around 1,000 or 0.7% in the parliamentary by-elections) (Voter Identification Monitoring Data); which could suggest high levels of awareness. Some caution with this interpretation is needed, however, as qualitative interviews with both polling station staff and electors highlighted how it was fairly common for individuals to not be aware of the requirement on arrival at the polling station but to already be carrying an accepted form of identification (usually a driving licence).

There was also a lot of variability between local authorities, with some reporting less than 0.1% of voters being initially turned away and others reporting around 3%. Furthermore, the proportion of electors who turned up without an accepted photographic identification document but were reminded by greeters or by informative posters outside the polling station and left before entering and were not therefore recorded as 'turned away' is unknown. The data from polling stations does show that the proportion of people turned away from polling stations is slightly lower where a greeter was present (0.6%) (Voter Identification Monitoring Data).

In terms of electors understanding what photographic identification was accepted, in qualitative interviews most said that they had assumed a driving licence or passport would be a form of accepted identification and, as they had one or both of these, did not seek information about what forms of identification were accepted. Many indicated that they knew information on accepted photographic identification was available (for example, they had seen signposting to a website with this information), if needed.

Some electors expressed surprise that certain forms of photographic identification were not accepted. Forms of identification mentioned by a few in this regard included: an NHS

staff identification pass, a Firearms Licence, and bus passes for younger people (especially as bus passes for older people are accepted).

> *"I remember how I was seeing that there were loads of options for older people with like bus IDs, but none for young people."*

<div align="right">(Elector, voted, younger (18-29))</div>

Electoral administrators and polling station staff commented in the qualitative interviews that some electors made assumptions about what photographic identification was accepted, and initially presented other types not on the accepted list. Examples of identification electors attempted to use are in line with those mentioned by electors - NHS staff identification documents, local government / Civil Service staff identification documents, and bus passes among younger groups were common examples. This suggests that, although awareness for the requirement to present photographic identification appears high, understanding of which forms of identification are accepted is lower. Communications for future elections should aim to combat common, but incorrect, assumptions about what identification documents are accepted.

> *"We did have one or two people coming in with work ID passes, for example, and obviously that's not allowed, and the staff knew that. I think you're always going to find that some people are coming in with, with the incorrect ID. I think maybe they just need to be a little bit more awareness about what ID can be included."*

<div align="right">(Electoral Services Manager)</div>

2.4.3 Conclusion

The evidence suggests that the claim 'communication campaign raises electors' awareness of voter identification' is partially met.

Overall, national and local communication campaigns were successful in raising awareness of the new photographic voter identification requirement. By May, 84% of electors in areas holding local elections were aware of the voter identification requirements (Public Opinion Survey Wave 2).

In qualitative interviews, electoral administrators identified the Electoral Commission's communication materials as an enabler of this. However, there is evidence that national and local campaigns have not been accessible to all, with lower levels of awareness among those who rarely vote in local elections, those from ethnic minority groups, and younger people (18%, 12% and 11% were not aware at all, respectively) (Public Opinion Survey Wave 2).

In qualitative interviews, there was limited evidence of local authorities designing and delivering targeted campaigns to ensure the message is reaching individuals who may not be exposed to or may struggle to comprehend general audience media campaign communications. In some instances, the intention was there for the May 2023 local elections, but local authorities identified engaging local organisations who could support with an approach for or provide access to these groups as a key challenge within the timeframe.

Future communication campaigns from the Electoral Commission and local authorities should consider more proactive attempts to raising awareness generally among groups shown to have lower awareness, and across all electors in terms of the types of photographic identification that are accepted (as there is evidence of misunderstandings or gaps in knowledge about what is an accepted form of identification).

2.5 Claim 4: Communication campaign raises electors' awareness of Voter Authority Certificates

The availability of Voter Authority Certificates (VACs) is a crucial step to ensuring that electors who do not have an accepted photographic identification document can vote in-person at polling stations, should they wish to. For context, in May 2023, 96% of voting age adults owned an accepted form of photographic identification, 2% did not, 1% preferred not to say and 1% did not know (Public Opinion Survey Wave 2).

Similar to Claim 3, the voter identification theory of change outlines that local authorities engage in communication campaigns to increase electors' awareness on VACs. It is also important that electors understand how to apply for a VAC should they need to, including the different application routes available (via the online service, by post, or in person). If communicated successfully, awareness should reach electors who do not have an accepted form of photographic identification and encourage them to apply before the VAC application deadline (i.e., by 5pm six working days before the date of the election; for the May 2023 English local elections this was 5pm on the 25th April 2023).

Appendix 5 sets out the elements in the voter identification theory of change model that describe the pathway to change for Claim 4.

Note that the impact of availability of VACs, processes for obtaining them, incidence of applications and use in polling stations, from the elector perspective are explored under the next claim ('Claim 5: Electors, who want a VAC and are eligible, are able to obtain one').

2.5.1 Delivery of communication campaigns to raise awareness of Voter Authority Certificates

Evidence on how the VAC measure specifically was communicated is limited. In qualitative interviews, electoral administrators mentioned that the availability of VACs were

communicated within both the Electoral Commission's and local authorities' wider campaigns to raise awareness of the new voter identification measures. This was usually a note within the communication that if individuals did not have accepted photographic identification, they could apply for one free of charge. Typically, this signposted electors to the website (GOV.UK) for finding out more information on VACs.

There was no evidence in these interviews of local authorities doing targeted campaigns to reach groups in which individuals are less likely to have accepted photographic identification and inform them about VACs.

The proportion of voting age adults who did not own an accepted form of photographic identification was 2%, although this varied among different groups. The groups with the highest proportions of people without an accepted form of photographic identification were those not registered to vote (10%), those with a disability which prevents them from voting in person on their own (10%), council renters (8%), those who rarely or never vote in General elections (7%) and those with a disability which limits their activities 'a lot' (6%) (Public Opinion Survey Wave 2).

Future evaluative work should look to address the current gap in understanding for whether and how the Electoral Commission and local authorities are attempting to raise awareness for VACs specifically, particularly among those who do not have accepted photographic identification.

Some electoral administrators mentioned the importance of raising awareness in good time, so those without accepted photographic identification had adequate time to apply and obtain one and the workload for processing applications was not too concentrated for staff.

> *"We want to ensure that as many residents in [our local area] were aware of the new measures, but also we want to try and ensure that they were aware of them in advance of the election timetable as well, and so if anybody wanted to apply for a Voter Authority Certificate, we want to encourage them to do that before we got into the peak time of the election timetable and so we try to raise awareness as much as we could."*

> (Electoral Services Manager)

2.5.2 Electors' awareness of Voter Authority Certificates

In January 2023, only 9% of voting age adults knew a great deal or fair amount about the introduction of VACs; this increased to 21% in May 2023 (Public Opinion Survey Wave 1 & 2). Awareness in May 2023 was higher among voting age adults with a disability (35%), and those with an increased interest in politics (37%). Although the increase is positive, this still shows that a relatively small proportion were aware of VAC availability even after the local elections. In areas with May 2023 local elections, following the elections 31%

were aware of VACs, 40% had heard nothing at all about them (Public Opinion Survey Wave 2).

Low levels of awareness may reflect the fact that the proportion of electors without accepted photographic identification (and therefore needing to explore other options) is very small (96% of voting age adults owned an accepted form of photographic identification, 2% did not, 1% preferred not to say and 1% did not know) (Public Opinion Survey Wave 2).

That said, focusing on voting age adults without accepted photographic identification – only a quarter were fairly aware of the VAC (26%) in May 2023, while a further (35%) said they knew not very much but had heard of it (Public Opinion Survey Wave 2; note that this figure includes Wave 1 re-contacted sample in addition to Wave 2 'fresh' sample, and low incidence and resulting sample size for voting age adults with no accepted photographic identification means this finding should be treated with caution).

Low awareness was also evident in qualitative interviews, where very few electors (regardless of photographic identification ownership status) had come across information on VACs. Those that had tended to comment that they 'vaguely' knew there was an option for individuals without accepted photographic identification, and some recalled that this was free. Recall for where electors had heard about VACs was poor. Those that did recall, thought that they had come across this information at the same time as seeing or hearing about the photographic voter identification requirement more broadly. Only some electors who knew about this option were aware that it was called a Voter Authority Certificate and/or had gone on to read further information about VACs.

Many attributed their lack of awareness to the fact that they had an accepted form of photographic identification (usually in the form of a passport or driving licence) and had no need to explore alternatives.

Exploring awareness among individuals without accepted photographic identification in qualitative interviews was very difficult – this audience was extremely hard to recruit due to their low incidence. This, and the low incidence and resulting sample size for individuals without an accepted photographic identification in the Public Opinion Survey (Wave 2), means it is difficult to make a conclusive assessment based on this evidence at this stage.

2.5.3   Conclusion

Evidence was sufficiently consistent and strong to support the conclusion that the claim 'communication campaign raises electors' awareness of Voter Authority Certificates' has not yet been met. VAC awareness remained low in May 2023, even among those without accepted photographic identification (Public Opinion Survey Wave 2).

The evaluation found no evidence of local VAC awareness campaigns being targeted at those with no accepted photographic identification. Future evaluative work could monitor the design, reach and impact of VAC messaging for the UK Parliamentary General Election to assess effectiveness more thoroughly.

Local authorities' electoral services teams and the Electoral Commission should also be encouraged to place greater emphasis on raising awareness for VAC, if they are not already. Raising awareness in the general population of electors will also increase the likelihood of those who need a VAC hearing about them (through the 'snowballing' effect). As such, national and local campaigns should consider communications that put the option of VAC at the forefront of their messaging.

2.6 Claim 5: Electors who want a Voter Authority Certificate and are eligible, are able to obtain one

Ensuring electors without accepted photographic identification are able to get a Voter Authority Certificate (VAC) depends on local authorities' electoral services teams having the necessary resources (time, staff with the appropriate training) and effective systems (for example, the digital Electoral Registration Officer Portal (EROP) which this report will refer to as the "Portal") to process and administer VAC applications in time for their use on polling day.

The voter identification theory of change model outlines that first, to achieve this, the option of VACs needs to be introduced, and the necessary resources for handling VAC applications - such as, sufficient staff, and a well-functioning digital Portal for managing applications – need to be in place. Staff then need to be trained in how to process VAC applications and engage with the Portal.

Electors without accepted photographic identification, who want to vote in person, can obtain a form of accepted identification or should apply for the VAC before the application deadline, and have this application processed and obtain the VAC in time for elections. The online service allowing members of the public to apply for a VAC was launched on 16th January 2023 and has been consistently available since its launch. The VAC application deadline ahead of the May 2023 English local elections was 5pm on the 25th April 2023.

Ultimately, it is crucial that local authorities feel confident in delivering VAC processes, and the process does not create unnecessary barriers for electors in need of a VAC (either by being inaccessible or acting as a deterrent for these electors).

Appendix 5 sets out the elements from the voter identification theory of change model that describe the pathway to change for Claim 5.

2.6.1 Delivery of Voter Authority Certificate requirements

In March 2023, almost all (97%) local authorities surveyed felt prepared for processing VAC applications and the vast majority (93%) were on course to train their staff on the requirements (March Readiness Survey of Electoral Administrators).

In total, 70,017 applications were submitted in the local authorities with local elections, with the majority being submitted through the online application system (95%), and small numbers through post (4%) or in person (1%). About half of applications were submitted in the month prior to the deadline on 25th April, with almost 1 in 20 (5%) submitted on the day of the deadline (Voter Identification Monitoring Data).

Ensuring local authorities had the appropriate staff levels to process this number of VAC applications was a key consideration in preparation for the May elections. In March 2023, local authorities with May local elections reported that they deployed, on average, 4.3 core staff to do pre-election work, 68% of whom were working on VAC applications (March Readiness Survey of Electoral Administrators). By May 2023, around one-third of respondents reported (34%) having more staff than usual devoted to pre-election work. At this time, 25% of local authorities had moved staff from other teams or areas to help process VAC applications (May Reflections Survey of Electoral Administrators).

On reflection, most local authorities (88%) felt they used the right number of staff for processing VAC applications (May Reflections Survey of Electoral Administrators).

In qualitative interviews, electoral administrators described having initial concerns about whether their staffing levels would be enough as they did not know what the scale of demand would be. This made it difficult for them to plan for resources to feel confident that they would respond to the demand in a timely manner. However, when the time came, most used their existing electoral services team members to handle VAC processes, and the volume of applications did not require them to take on additional staff. Only a few electoral administrators mentioned onboarding temporary staff to support with administration processes. Usually, these staff helped with a variety of election preparation tasks, including VAC processing.

It was very common in the qualitative research for electoral administrators to express apprehension about the next UK Parliamentary General Election and processing the potential volume of VAC applications. Most assumed they would need additional support. One Electoral Services Manager felt managing resource for VAC applications would be particularly challenging in the context of a snap election, where electors might rush to apply online.

In addition to the New Burdens funding provided by DLUHC, the external resource offered by DLUHC to help local authorities' electoral services teams process VAC applications may be an important enabler moving forward. In May, 77% of local authorities were aware that DLUHC offered this external resource support, 17% were not aware. No electoral services teams used the DLUHC external resource support to process VAC applications for the May 2023 local elections, which could be an indication that the New Burdens funding provided for the May 2023 local elections was sufficient, at least in relation to VAC application processing. When asked why not, electoral services teams said that they either did not have enough VAC applicants (48%) and/or they wanted to train their own staff on processing VACs (41%). As administrators anticipated that volume of VAC applications is

likely to substantially increase for the next UK Parliamentary General Election, there may be a much greater demand for this service and/or New Burdens funding. This is reflected in over three-quarters (67%) of local authorities saying they would consider requesting this support under other circumstances, such as the UK Parliamentary General Election (May Reflections Survey of Electoral Administrators).

A key enabler in processing and managing VACs was the Portal. In qualitative interviews, electoral administrators tended to describe the Portal as helpful and effective. A number of electoral administrators commented that, at the start, there were a few technical issues, but these were largely resolved. For example, the ability to send templated communications out via the Portal – a function that was introduced after the launch - was praised.

Some electoral administrators felt the Portal was still missing core elements of functionality. A few commented that the audit trail for communications with applicants, and case management (for example, if you had to chase them for a new photograph) needed to be logged outside of the Portal in a separate spreadsheet, so the data was retained after automatic data deletion policies. This was information they wished was held within the system, so statistics could be generated from the data, and case history could be accessed (for audit trail purposes). Administrators also expressed desire for the Portal to interact with the electoral management software, so that they could review registration at the same time as VAC applications without having to work in two systems.

Electoral administrators felt that applicants were happy with the online GOV.UK VAC application service for electors and found making applications through it straightforward. This perception was supported by user satisfaction data from the online service, wherein 85% of electors who applied for a VAC between its launch on 16th January and the 25th April (the deadline for receiving a VAC in time for the local elections) and rated the service (10% of all those who applied online) reported being 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with the service (Voter Identification Monitoring Data). To support individuals who were either struggling with the process, did not have a computer, or otherwise knew they would benefit from application support, some administrators had set up spaces for face-to-face sessions where they could go through the online application with electors. This approach included training local library staff on submitting VAC applications online, creating a schedule of when these staff would be available, and signposting individuals struggling with their application to these sessions. Some electoral administrators also provided this support to electors directly.

> *"I think it's really easy to use for a punter because we had a couple of people that didn't have access to computer, and they wanted to come in. Because there were so few, we said, look, you come in and we will talk you through it on the computer because it's quicker if you submit the application form. We had about a half dozen that came in and did that and*

*they were over the moon because they could see what was happening.
And I said, by the time I walk upstairs, it'll be waiting for me. I know the
photos are right because I took it."*

(Electoral Services Manager)

Staff training on the Electoral Registration Officer Portal appeared fit for purpose, although some commented that the training was delivered quite late which created some challenges upfront when getting used to the Portal.

*"The training was done really late. I think it was like December and then
there were updates done incrementally after that. I know and understand
what some of the challenges were around decision making. But I think that
was very much you learn as you do it and I know all of them put in place
on escalation processes to make sure the right people were rejecting
applications or going back on applications."*

(Electoral Services Manager)

Administrators commented that they could have benefited from a physical manual to have to hand while working with the Portal, as they usually had too many windows open to refer to guidance online.

Further supporting the claim that the processing of VACs was sufficiently resourced for the May 2023 local elections, staff were able to process the vast majority of applications by polling day. Most applications (92%, equating to 64,240 applications) were approved and sent to print, while 5% of applications (equating to 3,606) were rejected. Only 3% of VAC applications were left with no outcome by polling day; there are several potential reasons for this, such as still awaiting requested information from the elector required to continue the application (Voter Identification Monitoring Data).

Although the rate of rejected applications was relatively low, handling applications with issues presented a key challenge in VAC processing. The most common issue was non-compliant photographs (33% of rejected applications had a non accepted photograph) (Voter Identification Monitoring Data). In these instances, or when other points of clarification or amends were needed, electoral administrators described having to put a lot of resource into chasing, and this often did not result in resolution.

*"We chased people because we have to and we didn't want to
disenfranchise in that way. But, I mean, I rang someone up and they said,
'Yeah, I know it's not a very good photo, so we'll take another one'. Six
weeks later this person had not done it. What do you do? How far do you
go?"*

(Electoral Services Manager)

Another common reason for rejection was VAC applicants not being on the electoral register (31% of rejected applications) (Voter Identification Monitoring Data). In qualitative interviews, staff described how, in these instances, they attempted to get in touch with the applicant to let them know they needed to register and then apply again in time for polling day. The third most common reason was given as "Other" (23% of rejected applications), followed by a lack of response from the applicant (19%), submitting an incomplete application (7%), or including inaccurate information (6%). A small portion of applications were also rejected due to being a duplicate application (4%), fraudulent application (0.3%), no franchise to vote (0.2%), or finally meeting all criteria for rejection (0.1%) (Voter Identification Monitoring Data).

The impact of these challenges was reflected in the average time it took from the submission of an application to reaching an outcome to accept an application (2.5 weekdays, with the submission day counting as 1 day) compared to an outcome to reject an application (20.2 weekdays) (Voter Identification Monitoring Data). In qualitative interviews, electoral administrators mentioned that rejection took a lot longer than accepting, and often resource was being used in that time to follow-up with applicants.

Some electoral administrators also felt electors were applying for VACs when they already had an accepted identification document. Indeed, in May, 19% of voting age adults in England with accepted photographic identification said they would be likely to apply for a VAC in the future (Public Opinion Survey Wave 2). In qualitative interviews, one elector described applying for a VAC despite having a driving licence (and using this licence to vote) as they were 'curious' about this option. Although this was not a big problem in the context of local elections, where overall application volumes were low, this could have an impact on processing applications for the UK Parliamentary General Election, where volumes are likely to be a lot higher. A resulting risk could be electors who truly need the VAC option to vote not receiving them. It is therefore highly recommended that the process stresses the importance of applying only if another accepted form of identification is not available: a great deal of design work has already been done to mitigate this during the online application process, by a thorough triage process that precedes the application itself. The focus moving forward should therefore be making this messaging on VAC clear in the communication campaigns.

2.6.2 Elector use of Voter Authority Certificates

In May, only 1% of voting age adults said that they had a VAC. This proportion was marginally higher among ethnic minorities (3%), renters (3%), and those with a disability that prevents them from voting in person on their own (4%). Of the very few who do have a VAC, around half say they applied for it shortly before the May local elections (note the very small base size here; Public Opinion Survey Wave 2). Less than half (44%, equating to 28,160) of issued VACs were used on the May polling day (Voter Identification Monitoring Data).

In May 2023, just a quarter of those without accepted photographic identification (25%) say they would be certain or likely to apply for a VAC (Public Opinion Survey Wave 2). This represents a decrease from the 36% stating this in January 2023 (Public Opinion Survey Wave 1).

In qualitative interviews, some electors felt the online VAC application process created barriers for individuals without accepted photographic identification. Electors explained how some individuals with comprehension or computer literacy barriers may not be able to follow the online VAC application process and are therefore at a disadvantage in terms of being able to vote.

> *"I do think, though, that that missed out like a whole level of people that weren't computer literate. I used to volunteer at Citizen's Advice, and the amount of people coming in that could not get onto a basic website in order to apply for things. And, obviously you're like looking at a whole range of people. Maybe that's people who don't have access to computers, don't have Wi-Fi, but then also people that don't speak English; older generations.*

These concerns were mirrored in the experiences of some electoral services teams, who described how those without accepted photographic identification were often those less likely to be computer literate or have access to a computer or smartphone to apply online.

The solution of face-to-face sessions via their office or local libraries, as outlined by electoral administrators in some areas, could address these concerns and widen access to VACs. However, there is still a risk that (in rural areas in particular) access for some individuals to get to a physical location for this support may also be challenge. Some outreach work – for example, house visits with tablets if requested – could be an option for these electors.

2.6.3 Conclusion

The evaluation evidence is consistent and strong in supporting a conclusion that the claim 'Electors who want a Voter Authority Certificate and are eligible, are able to obtain one' has been met. However, it is important to note that there was uncertainty on whether local authority staff can manage the greater demand of the UK Parliamentary General Election.

Overall, electoral administrators qualitatively interviewed reported that VAC application and issuing processes went smoothly. They felt all the necessary resource and training was available to deliver against this requirement at the scale required for the local elections. In total across areas holding May 2023 local elections, 92% of VAC applications (equating to 64,240) resulted in a VAC being issued ahead of the local elections ((Voter Identification Monitoring Data).

Although some initial teething issues were flagged as challenges in qualitative interviews, the Electoral Registration Officer Portal was generally viewed as an enabler and effective

tool in processing VAC applications. The lessons learned from May 2023 should serve preparations for the UK Parliamentary General Election well.

Electoral administrators felt they had sufficient staff to process VAC applications, but largely attributed this to the very low volume of applications. Looking to the UK Parliamentary General Election, the resource needed to process the potential volume of VAC applications was a main concern for electoral administrators. It is likely that some local authorities will wish to access DLUHC resource support for processing applications. Although awareness of this DLUHC support for the May 2023 local elections was fairly high, there were still 17% of local authorities unaware suggesting that clearer communication about this support and how to access it would be beneficial in preparation for future elections (May Reflections Survey of Electoral Administrators).

Non-compliant photographs was the main challenge for processing applications – it was the leading reason for rejections, and time spent chasing electors who submitted applications with issues such as this could be resource intensive. Steps to improve electors' understanding of accepted photograph could reduce this need.

Raising awareness for the availability of in-person applications would address some concerns and challenge any negative perceptions about the accessibility of the process for electors who do not have access to a computer, are not computer literate, or would otherwise struggle to understand or follow the online application process.

2.7 Claim 6: Electors who want to have their identification checked in private, are able to do so

The voter identification legislation included the requirement that electors who want to have their identity confirmed in private at a polling station are able to do so. The extent to which this claim is achieved is largely dependent on the extent to which the earlier claims in this evaluation were achieved. If local authorities and polling station are resourced and appropriately trained (Claims 1 and 2) and communications have been effective (Claim 3) then electors who wish to take up this facility will come forward and polling stations will be ready to provide this facility. If this claim is met then no-one will be deterred from voting due to privacy concerns. In turn this will contribute to trust in the integrity of the process among both those taking up the option of the privacy provisions and the wider electorate.

Appendix 5 sets out the elements from the voter identification theory of change model that describe the pathway to change for Claim 6.

2.7.1 Preparedness to implement identification checks in private

Nearly all (95%) of polling station staff surveyed recalled receiving training on how to help voters show their identification document in private, although, as for training in checking photographic identification documents, this is slightly lower than the 98% who reported receiving training (Electoral Commission's Polling Staff Survey).

"We also had a booth for people who didn't want to show their faces as well […] and we got shown the booth in the training. So, we knew what to expect on the actual day in the stations themselves."

(Polling Station Staff)

All electoral administrators and polling station staff in the qualitative research reported that they were able to comply with the requirement. At some polling stations, this requirement was met using privacy screens, other repurposed old polling booths, pull up banners to create screening, or a private room set aside for this purpose. All areas who took part in the research were also able to ensure that male and female staff were available at every polling station so, as far as possible, checks could be done by staff of the elector's preferred gender (though this was not a requirement).

2.7.2   Delivery of private identification checks on polling day

In total, 2,250 voters had their identity checked in private across all local authorities in the May 2023 elections. Around half (51%) of local authorities did not receive any requests for a private identification check on the day, whilst 46% received between one and 50 requests, and seven (3%) of local authorities received more than 50 requests (Voter Identification Monitoring Data).

Consistent with this, polling station staff taking part in the qualitative research often reported no requests for a private identification check.

"I've never used the screens to be honest with you ... and nobody came to use them."

(Polling Station Staff)

Although some electors recalled observing privacy screens, the absence of the observation does not mean this requirement is not being met – some screens may not have been obvious to electors, and some polling stations make have used alternative methods of fulfilling this requirement (for example, private rooms) but when the provision of private identification checks was raised in discussions, electors were supportive of actions to remove barriers to voting for anyone choosing to wear a face covering for religious, cultural or health reasons.

2.7.3   Impact on electors that require private checks

Electoral administrators and polling station staff were positive about the preparedness and provision for private identification checks and felt they used their discretion about the type of facility offered depending on the characteristics of the local area. Given the very small numbers of electors using private identification checks it was not possible to identify this group through the qualitative fieldwork. Resultingly, there is no evidence from the

perspective of relevant voters on their experience of the process or any perceived barriers to requesting private checks.

2.7.4 Conclusion

Overall, the evidence suggests that we cannot fully conclude whether the claim 'electors who want to have their identification checked in private, are able to do so' has been met. Evidence from both electoral administrators and polling station staff indicates that the provision is available for voters who wanted to have their identification checked in private and is therefore at least partially met. However, there is currently no evidence from the important perspective of voters who used, or might have wanted to use, this provision. Ensuring that this perspective is explored in future research is important.

All polling station staff surveyed felt they were able to provide appropriate privacy arrangements, whether that was with designated privacy screens or alternatives using old polling booths, screens or separate rooms. The discretionary nature worked well to allow administrators to be proportionate to likely demand in their local area.

2.8 Claim 7: Personation is identified more easily and reduces in the longer-term

To achieve its goal of strengthening the integrity of the electoral system, the voter identification measures are designed to prevent personation and provide the electorate with greater confidence in the security of the voting system. As part of this, the introduction of the photographic voter identification requirement is intended to raise the detection rate, and ultimately reduce the incidence, of electoral personation in polling stations: the offence of someone pretending to be someone else so they can use that person's vote.

This claim is fundamentally linked to the achievement of the earlier claims in this evaluation, particularly Claims 1 and 2 concerned with local authority electoral and polling station staff meeting the requirements of law. If the outcomes relating to those claims had not been achieved, by definition, it would not be possible to tackle personation effectively. This section builds on the conclusion that these objectives were achieved for the May 2023 English local elections and looks at the rates of detection of potential personation and the impact of the measures on confidence and trust in the integrity of in-person voting among electoral staff and the electorate alike.

Appendix 5 sets out the elements in the voter identification theory of change model that describe the pathway to change for Claim 7.

2.8.1 Preparedness for carrying out Identification checks

The evidence from the various data sources, as discussed in Claims 1 and 2, indicates that the training the polling station staff received was effective and built their confidence in implementing the voter identification measures.

"So yeah, I found it really helpful. It was quite simple, quite quick. Got me into the zone if you will, albeit you know, like any, any training, it's only when you actually get into the environment and doing the processes, that it sort of, the dots join up properly."

(Polling Station Staff)

Polling station staff also said that the [Electoral Commission's Handbook for polling station staff](), in particular Annex 12 which provided common examples of accepted photographic identification, was very helpful when they had doubts about the acceptability of an identification document.

If it wasn't a driving licence or a passport, you have to refer to the handbook and you had the pictures of the ID, which were very helpful, especially if you started to get a queue."

(Polling Station Staff)

There were also some reports of large charts at polling station entrances depicting the accepted forms of identification, which helped electors to check if they had brought the right identification document but was also useful for staff to refer to.

As presented in detail in Claim 2, most local authorities' electoral services teams also fielded additional polling station staff to conduct identification checks. The fact that only 4% of local authorities surveyed felt they had too few Poll Clerks on the day (May Reflections Survey of Electoral Administrators) was reflected in the qualitative research that found no evidence of staff feeling under time pressure to check identification because of queues building up, which could have impacted on the thoroughness of the checks.

2.8.2   Delivery of voter identification checks

Nationally, 0.7% (around 37,000) of electors presenting at a polling station were turned away at the polling station desk due to the photographic voter identification requirement. More than half (63%) of those initially turned away eventually returned and were issued with a ballot paper, resulting in 0.25% of electors (around 14,000) being turned away at the polling station desk and not later returning to vote. Similar to the proportion of electors who presented at a polling station for the UK parliamentary by-elections in July and October who were initially turned away (0.7% or around 1,000 electors) and did not eventually return (0.25% or around 350) (Voter Identification Monitoring Data).

Although numbers turned away were very small, over one in four (27%) of local authorities surveyed reported facing issues with checking photographic identification documents. These issues were not necessarily related to personation, but tended to include having to explain the requirement to voters who were confused or angry about accepted forms of photographic identification and confidence rejecting non accepted identification documents

that electors wanted to use despite being in possession of an accepted photographic identification.

In the qualitative research some polling station staff said that accepting an expired, accepted photographic identification document made it harder for them to carry out their duties to detect personation. Staff found it difficult to match people to old photographs and sometimes did not feel comfortable challenging people to provide more recently issued identification documentation. In other cases, the name of the elector in the photographic identification document did not match the name in their Poll Card (due to name change) and polling station staff were not certain whether to accept the identification document. Others were more comfortable applying the guidance in the [Electoral Commission's Handbook for polling station staff](#) strictly if an elector did not resemble their photograph.

> *"If they didn't resemble the photo then then it would allow you to detect that and then escalate that as inappropriate. So that would allow you to do that."*

(Electoral Services Manager)

2.8.3 Impact on identifying personation

Identified cases of personation and perceptions of the risk of personation remained stable before and after the May 2023 elections. Only 1% of polling station staff surveyed reported experiencing any suspected cases of personation at their polling station (Electoral Commission's Polling Staff Survey) and by September 2023, only two allegations of attempted polling station personation had been made to the police in the year up to September 2023 ([Electoral Commission Report on the May 2023 local elections in England](#)), compared to a total of seven in 2022 (Electoral Commission's Electoral Fraud Data; it is important to note that this data only captures potential fraud that is reported to the police).

In terms of perception, among all adults of voting age in England, most people believe that voting in person is very or fairly safe from fraud, a figure that remained stable across the January and May 2023 waves (84% and 85%, respectively). When it comes to getting away with electoral fraud in polling stations, half (51%) of voting age adults think it is difficult, a small increase of 3 percentage points since January. Adults in areas that held elections in May 2023 were also slightly more likely to think it was difficult (52%) than those in areas that did not hold elections (48%). (Public Opinion Survey Wave 1 & 2).

Similarly in the qualitative research, a few electoral administrators and electors thought the new measures would reduce in person election fraud, but most were unchanged in their views. They tended to hold the opinion that rates were very low before the reforms and while most did not object to the new requirement, a few questioned the value for money

and net benefit of the measures for electors due to their perceptions of the scale of this issue.

"From doing previous elections, I've never felt that there's ever been an issue around personation. And so for me. It didn't really make a difference."

(Polling Station Staff)

"I don't disagree that it will impact fraud, but the cost of it is greater than the benefit of stopping a minute amount of fraud."

(Elector, voted, younger (18-29))

"I can categorically state that I've had more people that were disenfranchised from voting in the last election that I'm aware of then in terms of any issues of personation over the last decade, so more people lost the right to vote because of these measures than we had issues with personation. And I think that's not a criticism of the policy or the law. It is a simple statement of fact."

(Returning Officer)

Staff in electoral services teams, polling station staff and electors alike were more concerned about potential for fraud from proxy or postal voting. Across England, 61% of voting age adults think postal voting is safe from fraud, and 50% think the same of proxy voting (Public Opinion Survey Wave 2) and a similar sentiment emerged from the qualitative research.

"I think if you wanted to impersonate someone and vote on their behalf, you'd probably just be doing it through the postal vote system somehow or other."

(Returning Officer)

In terms of combatting personation using fraudulent identification documents, polling station staff felt they would need more advanced training to feel confident detecting a counterfeit document if presented with one. Consistently, voters observed that the checks conducted on their identification documents were light touch.

"They didn't do a thorough check at all as far as I remember, they just had a quick look really just very brief. Look at your photo and you and that was it."

(Elector, voted, younger (18-29))

It is not possible from the evaluation evidence to assess the impact of the voter identification measures as a deterrent to those who might have otherwise attempted personation at a polling station. But, contextually, there was no associated fall in in person

voting (with turnout, at 32.0%, comparable to the last similar set of local elections in 2019, when it was 32.5%) or shift to postal or proxy voting (with the proportion of voters opting for a postal vote falling slightly from 19.9% to 19.0% and proxy votes remaining constant at 0.1% between 2021 (the first local elections post-pandemic) and 2023 ([Electoral Commission Report on the May 2023 local elections in England](#)).

2.8.4 Conclusion

It is not possible from evaluation evidence available for this claim to draw conclusions whether the claim has been met or not, that is we cannot conclude if 'Personation is identified more easily and reduces in the longer-term'.

Nearly all polling station staff surveyed, (95%) recalled receiving training on how to review photographic identification and generally felt well prepared to carry out their duties on polling day (Electoral Commission's Polling Staff Survey). Annex 12 in the [Electoral Commission's Handbook for polling station staff](#), which includes common examples of accepted photographic identification consolidated this training effectively and provided guidance for polling station staff on the day. On polling day of the May 2023 local elections, around 14,000 (or 0.25%) electors presenting at polling stations were turned away and did not return later in the day with accepted photographic identification (Voter Identification Monitoring Data).

Formal allegations of personation were very low and consistent with previous elections and confidence in the protections from fraud for in person voting remain consistently high among polling station staff, electoral administrators and electors alike. In areas that held elections in May 2023, there was evidence of a slight increase in confidence that it would be difficult to get away with fraud in a polling station. In the qualitative research, some polling station staff did raise concerns about their ability to detect a counterfeit identification document but generally all groups held the perception that fraud was more likely to be conducted via postal or proxy voting.

2.9 Claim 8: Electors remain satisfied with the process and ease of in-person voting

In this section we present the evidence on whether the new voter identification requirements have strengthened electors' confidence and trust in the voting and democratic process. To observe this longer-term change, the theory of change specifies that the new voter identification measures will lead to multiple early observable outcomes: electors would remain satisfied with the process and ease of in-person voting; and the new requirement to present photographic identification will not deter electors from voting. Claim 8 can only hold true if the earlier claims around implementation of the voter identification requirement (see claim 3, 4, 5 and 6) have been met. If the core activities relating to those claims had not been achieved, by definition, it would not be possible for electors to remain

satisfied with the process of voting and consequentially to have increased trust and confidence in the integrity of the voting process.

Appendix 5 sets out the elements in the voter identification theory of change model that describe the pathway to change for Claim 8.

2.9.1 Electors' propensity to vote in person at the local elections

Looking at the evidence on whether the new voter identification requirements had any impact on voter participation, it indicates that for the majority of voting age adults in England, it made no difference to their likelihood to want to vote at all (79%), or in the English May local elections specifically (82%) (Public Opinion Survey). Sentiments from the interviews with electors indicated that the requirement to present photographic identification did not impact voters' decision to vote, corroborating insights from the Public Opinion Surveys.

"I would say my decision to vote was completely unrelated to the ..[requirement to show photographic identification document]… I was going to go anyway, regardless of the ID or not".

(Elector, voted, younger (18-29))

"I'll always vote at the election. I think it's important".

(Elector, voted, opposed to voter identification measures)

However, a small proportion (8%) of voting age adults in England areas conducting elections in May 2023 indicated that the photographic identification requirement made them less likely to vote. The proportion who felt less likely to vote were higher among ethnic minorities (15%), renters (14%), electors in deprived areas (11%) and electors with disability that prevents them from voting in person on their own (22%). The group that felt the most impact were voting age adults with no photographic identification, where four in ten (41%) said they were less likely to vote as a result of the measures. (Public Opinion Survey Wave 2).

2.9.2 Ease of in-person voting

With regards to how easy or difficult the process of voting has been since the introduction of the voter identification measures, for the majority of voting age adults in areas holding May 2023 local election, it made no difference (68%). A small proportion of voting age adults in areas holding May 2023 local elections felt that voter identification made voting easier (5%), although there is no further information to indicate in what way. A slightly higher proportion of voting age adults in areas with local elections indicated that voting in the local elections became more difficult (12%). This view was more common amongst particular groups, including electors without an accepted photographic identification (47%), those dissatisfied with the voting process (33%), long-term unemployed/never worked

(22%), ethnic minorities (18%, though 16% also said it made it easier); or electors with disability that has impact on their ability to vote in person on their own (18%) (Public Opinion Survey Wave 2).

These findings were corroborated in the qualitative research, where majority of electors said that the new measures had no impact on their propensity to vote. However, some electors commented that the new measures might pose a barrier for electors who do not have a photographic identification document. One elector who did not have photographic identification and could not obtain a driving license because of a medical condition said that they did not vote for the first time since they were eligible, because of the new voter identification measures. When asked, this elector was not aware of the VAC.

Reports from the case studies confirm that for most voters the new measures made no difference to their voting experience – processing time at the polling station was the same and queues did not appear to be longer. This was confirmed by polling station staff expressing that they feel electors got used to the new requirements very quickly.

> *"Very easy. I gave the lady my passport. She found my name on the list, checked my voter ID from the Poll Card, looked at me, signed me off, sent me to do my voting. It was very quick".*

> (Elector, voted, accessibility needs)

> *"There was nobody who was really bothered about* [showing] *their ID and for me it was a lot better because I do get a lot at the station who do try and come in and vote twice, so at least then it was easier for me as a presiding officer to check that. At least I knew with the ID that the people were who they were".*

> (Polling station staff)

However, some voters were concerned that the identification requirements could pose a barrier to voting for certain groups such as: young people, neurodiverse people (relating to the accessibility of information), people with a low level of English, and those from a low socio-economic background.

> *"I remember how I was seeing that there were loads of options for older people with like bus IDs, but none for young people".*

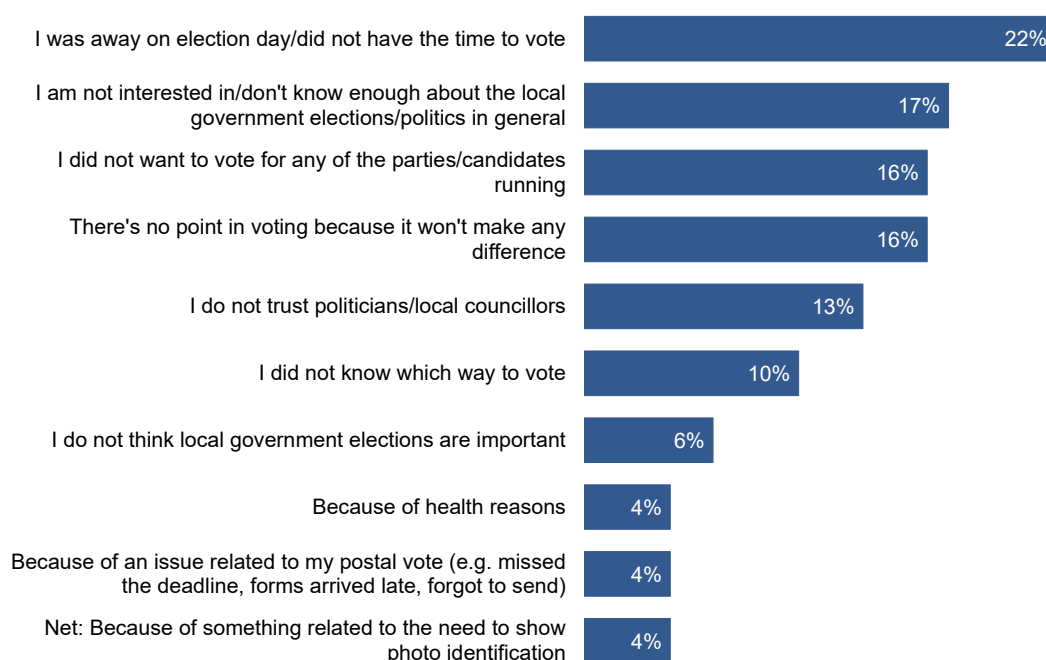> (Elector, voted, younger (18-29))

This perception highlights the importance of raising awareness for accepted documents such as PASS cards for young people.

2.9.3 Sentiments from non-voters

When we look specifically at voting age adults who did not vote in the local elections (see Figure 2.2), only 4% indicated that they did not vote because of something related to the need to show accepted photographic identification.

Figure 2.3 Reasons electors were not able to vote in the May 2023 local elections

Answers selected by 10% or more of qualifying participants shown – as well as that related to photographic identification

Reason	Percentage
I was away on election day/did not have the time to vote	22%
I am not interested in/don't know enough about the local government elections/politics in general	17%
I did not want to vote for any of the parties/candidates running	16%
There's no point in voting because it won't make any difference	16%
I do not trust politicians/local councillors	13%
I did not know which way to vote	10%
I do not think local government elections are important	6%
Because of health reasons	4%
Because of an issue related to my postal vote (e.g. missed the deadline, forms arrived late, forgot to send)	4%
Net: Because of something related to the need to show photo identification	4%

(Public Opinion Survey Wave 2)

Within the 4%, half did not have accepted photographic identification (2% of all non-voters), around a quarter who did not agree or did not feel comfortable with the requirement (1% of all non-voters), and others were not able to find their photographic identification or cited other minor reasons (1% of all non-voters). However, certain groups were more likely to cite the requirement for photographic identification as a barrier to voting: including those who do not have accepted photographic identification (36%), social renters (8%), those living in the most deprived areas (7%) or those with disability impacting their ability to vote in person on their own (7%) (Public Opinion Survey Wave 2). The majority of electors did not vote in the May 2023 local elections (overall turnout was 32% based on data provided by the Electoral Commission), which is common in local elections.

Sentiments from the qualitative interviews indicate that where electors did not vote it was mostly because they did not want to vote for any of the candidates, although there were a few cases of electors not voting because of the new voter identification measures (either because they misplaced/forgot their identification or did not want to show their identification).

2.9.4 Confidence in the voting process

When asked if the introduction of photographic identification will make any difference in their confidence in the security of the voting system, in May 2023 half of voting age adults in England (51%) indicated that they were more confident in the security of the voting system (Public Opinion Survey Wave 2). However, there has been a six percentage point decrease in the share of voting age adults saying that the new voter identification measures will instil confidence in comparison in January 2023 (57%, Public Opinion Survey Wave 1).

Correspondingly, there was a five percentage point increase in voting age adults saying it would make no difference to their confidence in the voting system (from 33% in January 2023 to 38% in May 2023) (Public Opinion Survey Wave 1 & 2). In May 2023, a small proportion of voting age adults (6%) expressed that the new measures would make them less confident in the security of the voting system, in line with January. Three in five electors aged 65+ (61%) thought the introduction of the photographic identification would improve the security of the vote, compared to two in five (40%) voters aged between 18 and 34 (Public Opinion Survey Wave 2).

The comments from the electors who participated in the qualitative research indicated that the new voter identification measures did not have an impact on the security of elections. Most electors did not think there was an issue with the security of the elections anyway, hence they were not convinced the measures were necessary.

> *"If you look at the statistics surrounding electoral fraud, there's absolutely no scientific evidence to back up any of the claims they made about voter ID being necessary… But the reasons why they were putting out that they were doing it seemed to be like they were trying to solve a problem that didn't really exist in the 1st place".*

> (Elector, voted, younger (18-29))

> *"To a certain extent, I go with the adage, don't fix something that isn't broken".*

> (Elector, did not vote, opposed to voter identification measures)

Voting age adults' confidence in the election process, more broadly, remained largely unchanged between January and May 2023. A majority indicated that they were confident in the way elections were run (84% compared to 82%) (Public Opinion Survey Wave 1 & 2). Confidence in the election process was higher among older age groups (93% of those aged 55+), those that are interested in politics (90%), and those that are registered to vote (85%) (Public Opinion Survey Wave 2).

Of the voting age adults in England who said they are not confident in the election process, a large proportion stated that they believed elections were affected by fraud/corruption (43% in January 2023, decreasing to 32% in May). When asked why they stated that they are not confident that the elections are run well, 20% said they did not agree with the plans to introduce photographic identification checks, an increase from 12% in January 2023, and it was also more likely to be given as a reason among those in areas holding local elections (23%) (although due to the change in question structure between waves of the Public Opinion Survey, this question in the survey between the two waves is not directly comparable) (Public Opinion Survey Wave 1 & 2).

These findings were corroborated by comments made by electors in the qualitative research, which indicated that for most electors the process of voting was not substantially different to previous elections and, overall, they did not feel an impact on their voting experience and confidence in the voting process since the new measures were introduced.

"I'd say it wasn't necessarily any different to having your ID checked anywhere else. If you go to a bar or a club or something, but I'd say maybe it was a bit more thorough, which I'd expect … I didn't necessarily feel like there was any added pressure".

(Elector, voted, opposed to voter identification measures)

2.9.5 Satisfaction with the voting process

In May 2023, around seven in ten voting age adults in England (69%) were satisfied with the voting process at elections in England, compared to three in four (74%) in January 2023 (Public Opinion Survey Wave 1 & 2). In May, the level of satisfaction was higher among electors aged 55+ (81%). Levels of satisfaction were lower amongst those without an accepted photographic identification document (38%) (Public Opinion Survey Wave 2). However, it is not possible to draw a conclusion in relation to the impact of the new measures on the satisfaction of those without an accepted photographic identification document, due to small sample sizes for this group in both the Public Opinion Surveys and the qualitative research.

In the qualitative research there was little evidence of an impact on voter satisfaction from the elections process. Most electors who participated in the research were happy with the process and the new measures did not change their opinion.

"Now … it's just something I got on with cause it had to be done so didn't impact me".

(Elector, voted, accessibility needs)

That said, a few electors commented in the qualitative research that in their opinion the new voter identification measures were discriminatory and could prevent people with no accepted photographic identification document from exercising their right to vote.

2.9.6 Conclusion

In assessing whether the assumptions and processes in Claim 8 have been met, it is important to consider the short and immediately observable elements (i.e., voting experience and satisfaction) and longer consequential elements (i.e., increased trust in the voting system). In addition, this claim is highly dependent on the conclusions from previous claims. The variable conclusions in relation to the previous claims, combined with the relative weakness of evidence in relation to electors' satisfaction of those without an accepted photographic identification document, and inconsistencies in relation to changes in the level of trust means that it is not possible to draw a conclusion on whether the claim has been met. Taking each element in turn:

- Voter experience – the evidence is consistent for voting age adults with accepted photographic identification in suggesting that the introduction of the voter identification requirements did not have any impact on their voting experience. The findings suggest that the requirement could have the highest impact on the likelihood to vote on voting age adults who do not have an accepted photographic identification document. While the incidence rate of voting age adults with no photographic identification is low, over four in ten of these adults (41%) indicated that the new photographic voter identification requirement made them less likely to vote (Public Opinion Survey Wave 2). The low awareness of VACs reported for Claim 5 may be a contributing factor affecting the motivation of those without accepted photographic identification to vote, as they may perceive the process of obtaining an accepted photographic identification to be too complicated or expensive.

- Voter satisfaction - Satisfaction with the process has fallen slightly from 74% in January 2023 to 69% after the May 2023 English local elections (Public Opinion Survey Wave 1 & 2). However, this cannot be attributed to the voter identification measures only as there can be many other factors that can have an impact on voter satisfaction. Given the weakness of evidence and variability in trends it is not possible to conclude from the current evidence whether the introduction of the voter identification measures affected the electors' satisfaction levels with the voting process.

- Electors trust in the voting system - Confidence in the way elections were run remained high (82%) (Public Opinion Survey Wave 2), and findings from the qualitative research indicate that the electors did not perceive electoral fraud to be a substantive issue in elections prior to the introduction of the measures. As the impact on electors' confidence levels are likely to be observable more strongly in the long term, it is too early at this stage to assess whether this element of the claim has been met.

For the claim to be met in future elections there would need to be more sustained and consistent intention to vote and satisfaction with the process across different types of voters.

3 Chapter 3: Findings - Accessibility

3.1 Theory of change: Accessibility measures

The aim of the accessibility measures is to improve the accessibility of polling stations for people with disabilities. The Elections Act 2022 is requiring electoral services teams make reasonable adjustments in polling stations to enable disabled electors to cast their vote in person. The two key legislative changes introduced regarding accessibility include the following:

- Changes to the provision of a range of equipment to support electors with disabilities when voting in person;

- Changes allowing a wider range of people to act in the role of companion to assist disabled people to vote in polling stations, giving a disabled elector the choice of anyone over 18 years of age to assist them.

To support these changes, legislation required the Electoral Commission, in consultation with disability support and advocacy groups, to produce guidance for electoral services teams. The guidance, directed to Returning Officers, outlines how to comply with legislative changes, and how to ensure polling station staff are adequately prepared and equipped to support those with disabilities voting in person.

The accessibility measures are being introduced to local elections and local referendums in England, local elections in Northern Ireland, elections for the Northern Ireland Assembly, and Police and Crime Commissioner elections in England and Wales, Recall Petitions across the UK, and UK Parliamentary elections. This evaluation aimed to understand and assess how the accessibility measures were applied for the first time in the May 2023 local elections in England and Northern Ireland.

The theory of change presented in Figure 3.1 (or Appendix 4 for a plain text version) sets out the process of implementation of the accessibility measures.

The claims were developed by the IFF evaluation team in discussion with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC), undertaking a similar process as explained for the voter identification measures, which ensured the claims cover the key a stakeholders, and address the research questions. The following four claims were considered to be most relevant:

- Claim 1: Local Authority staff in electoral services teams with Returning Officers meet the requirements of law

- Claim 2: Returning Officers with polling station staff meet the requirements of law

- Claim 3: Communications effectively raise awareness of reforms amongst electors with disabilities and their carers

- Claim 4: Disabled electors are enabled to vote in-person as a result of the new measures

In the subsections that follow, evidence is presented to assess the extent to which the claims have been met.

Figure 3.4 Accessibility theory of change

Inputs *What is needed for the intervention to take place?*	Activities *Activities, actions and processes to take place to underpin effective delivery*	Outputs *Quantifiable deliverable resulting from the intervention activities*	Outcomes *Early 'consequential changes' from the outputs and activities*	Impacts *Longer 'consequential change' to meet the long-term goals*
Legislation that requires Returning Officers to make equipment available at polling stations to help voters with a disability to vote	Returning Officers engaged and provided with guidance on the appropriate equipment to provide in polling stations	Electors with disabilities and those who support them are aware of the changes and the provisions that are available	Disabled voters are supported to vote in person if they choose to	The process of voting meets the requirements of the Equality Act by ensuring reasonable adjustments for electors with disabilities
Legislation that removes the current restrictions on who can act as a companion to voters with a disability	Polling station staff provided guidance and training on how to deliver the requirements	Electors with a disability can contact Returning Officers to request provisions	Polling station staff can offer support to voters with a disability and feel confident doing so	The number of voters with disabilities who vote in person is unaffected, or increases, as disabled voters feel they have the necessary support to vote in person
Electoral Commission produce guidance for local authorities on the range of support available for disabled voters in polling stations	Electoral Commission, local authorities and disability charities produce and distribute communications materials raising awareness among electors with a disability and those who support them	Returning Officers engage with local disabled people, or organisations that represent them, regarding the support provided at polling stations	Voters with disabilities are more satisfied in the process of voting in polling stations	
Provisions are provided to local authorities to obtain equipment to help voters with a disability vote in polling stations	Returning Officers have systems in place to establish the required provision at each polling station	Polling stations follow guidance to provide suitable measures to support voters with a range of disabilities		Electors with disabilities have greater confidence that they can vote in person if they choose to
Local authorities are engaged on accessibility measures and how they should be implemented in accordance with the legislation and Electoral Commission guidance				Public perception of the accessibility of voting for those with disabilities improves
Disability charities are engaged on accessibility measures				

3.2 Claim 1: Local authority staff in electoral services teams with Returning Officers meet the requirements of law

The first accessibility claim examines the degree to which local authority staff in electoral services teams and Returning Officers (ROs) fulfilled the requirements of law to introduce new accessibility measures in polling stations.

For this claim to be met, local authority staff in electoral services teams and Returning Officers are assumed to have engaged with the guidance produced by the Electoral Commission and taken practical steps to ensure the new accessibility measures are in place. Namely, allowing electors to be accompanied by any voting age adult when casting their vote on polling day, and ensuring there is access to the required equipment and resources in the polling station that will serve the needs of disabled electors. The resulting outcomes are that reasonable adjustments are made, and disabled electors are supported to vote in person. While the Electoral Commission's guidance also covers the accessibility of the polling place (for example, reserved disabled parking spaces, ramps, temporary alerters for doors which provide a way for voters to let polling station staff know that they need assistance to open the door), the Elections Act 2022 is concerned with equipment inside polling stations to support disabled voters to vote in person. Findings relating to the accessibility of polling stations are considered in this evaluation, but do not contribute to the validity of this claim as they are not covered by the Act.

Appendix 6 sets out the elements in the accessibility theory of change model that describe the pathway to change for Claim 1.

3.2.1 Preparedness for implementation

As with voter identification, electoral administrators valued the Electoral Commission's guidance on: the new accessibility requirements, how to prepare adjustments, and how to communicate with electors with disabilities and representative organisations to raise awareness that requests for reasonable adjustments could be made in advance of polling day. They also valued the additional guidance on checking the suitability of polling stations venues themselves (as noted above, this was outside of the Elections Act 2022 and scope of the EIP, but important for further supporting the accessibility of in-person voting). By March 2023, nearly all surveyed electoral administrators in England holding May 2023 local elections (99%) felt they were prepared to implement the accessibility measures, with 19% feeling very prepared (March Readiness Survey of Electoral Administrators). The Electoral Office for Northern Ireland (EONI) also reported high levels of preparedness to implement these measures (May Reflections Survey of Electoral Administrators).

In terms of sufficient resourcing, nearly all (98%) surveyed electoral administrators reported they felt they had sufficient staff to meet the requirements (March Readiness Survey of Electoral Administrators). This seemed to reflect a view that the requirements would not place any significant additional burden on polling station staff. Similarly, the

qualitative evidence indicated that 'New Burdens' funding had been provided by DLUHC for the additional provisions, and the cost of these provisions did not pose any issues.

> *"So, we spent some money, not a great deal, to be honest. I mean, you could put it under four figures and what we spent money on."*

<div align="right">(Electoral Services Manager)</div>

In preparing for the new accessibility measure relating to available equipment, some electoral administrators felt that the guidance could have been clearer on what provisions 'should' be made available versus those that 'could'.

> *"I found it incredibly frustrating that there is guidance on [accessibility measures], but there are no prescribed minimum requirements as such, so it's very much a sort of would see what works for you."*

<div align="right">(Electoral Services Manager)</div>

Again, by March 2023, 98% of local authorities surveyed reported that staff had received or were on schedule to receive training on how to implement the new accessibility measures (March Readiness Survey of Electoral Administrators); discussed further for Claim 2.

3.2.2 Delivery

In qualitative interviews, most electoral administrators felt that they had sufficient provision for polling station staff to support in-person disabled voters on the day.

Both the quantitative and qualitative data evidence indicated sufficient provisions were made to enable disabled electors to vote.

As shown in Figure 3.2, which shows a range of provisions that were offered, most of the accessibility provisions suggested in the Electoral Commission's guidance were made available in polling stations. These included pencil grips, appropriate lighting, and for most polling stations, reserved disabled parking. Other than parking spaces and temporary alerters for doors (which were contingent on location), the provisions that the Electoral Commission's guidance had suggested 'should' be offered were generally delivered. Those that 'could' be offered, such as audio devices and hearing loops, were far less commonly provided (Accessibility Monitoring Data).

The picture in Northern Ireland was broadly similar. Further, everyone in Northern Ireland also had access to a telephone service that EONI ran in partnership with the Royal National Institute of Blind People (May Reflections Survey of Electoral Administrators).

Figure 3.5 Availability of provisions to support disabled voters with in-person voting, before/after the Elections Act 2022

Labels are displayed only for values over 5%

Proportion of local authorities

Legend: ■ All polling stations ■ Approximately 75% of polling stations ■ Approximately 50% of polling stations ■ Approximately 25% of polling stations ■ < 25% of polling stations ■ None

(Accessibility Monitoring Data)

73
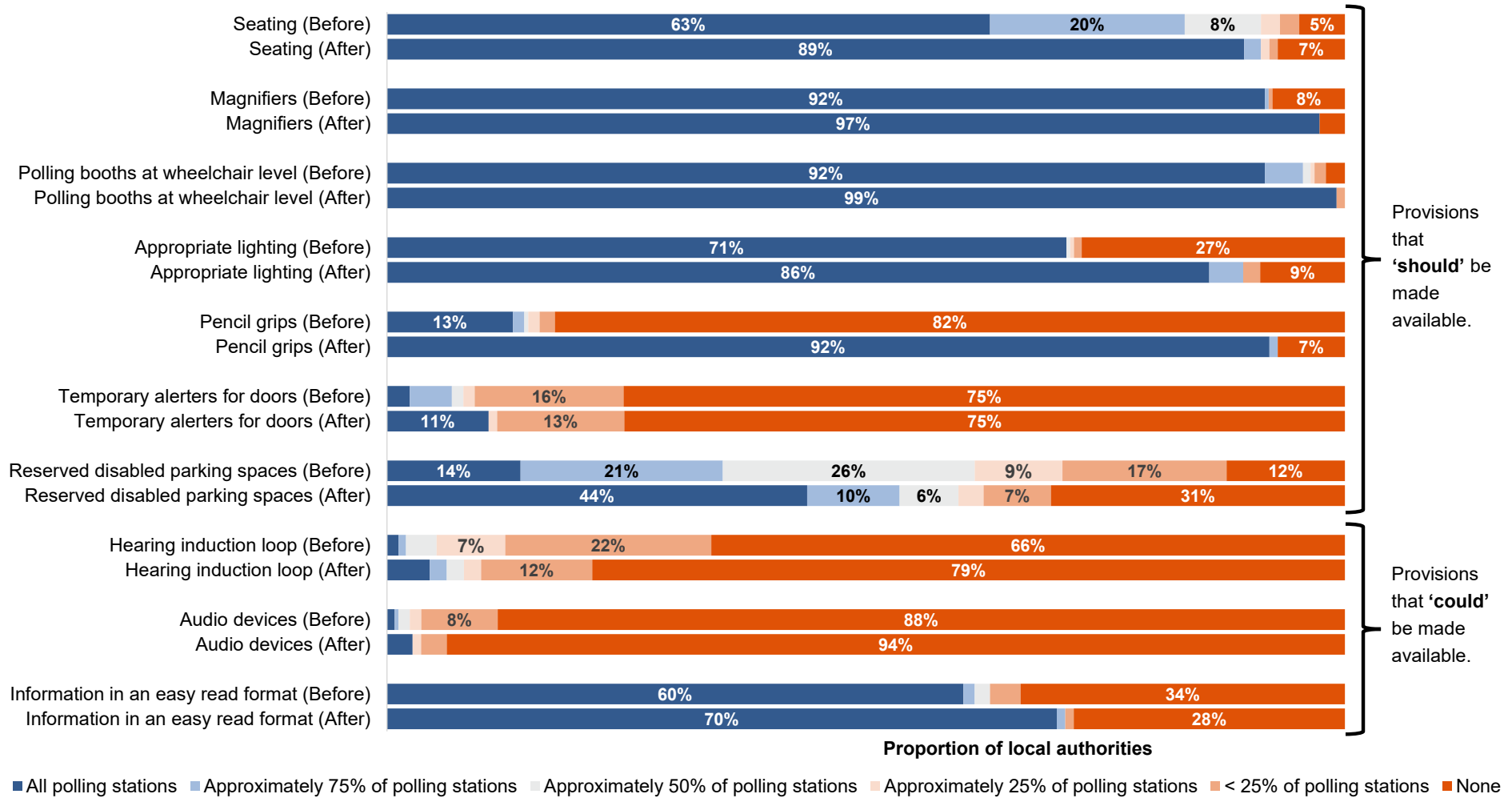
3.2.3 Conclusion

Overall, the evidence supports the conclusion that the claim has been met.

There was strong evidence that electoral administrators felt prepared (99% of those surveyed) in both England and Northern Ireland to implement the new accessibility measures. Most local authorities' electoral services teams offered the provisions that the Electoral Commission's guidance said they 'should provide' (May Reflections Survey of Electoral Administrators).

In qualitative interviews, views on the levels of discretion in the guidance varied, with some local authorities' electoral services teams appreciating the levels of discretion, while others were looking for a firmer steer on minimum levels of provision. In preparation for the UK Parliamentary General Election, some electoral administrators indicated that they would benefit from greater clarity on how to apply the guidance.

3.3 Claim 2: Returning Officers with polling station staff meet the requirements of law

As with the implementation of the voter identification measures, polling station staff and Returning Officers play a pivotal role in ensuring the accessibility requirements and associated processes are effectively implemented on polling day. Returning Officers and polling station staff tend to be responsible for the actual delivery and operational implementation of the accessibility measures. Readiness of Returning Officers and polling station staff to follow the guidance and effectively serve the needs of disabled electors is a prerequisite for successful delivery of the accessibility measures. Therefore, this claim assesses how Returning Officers and polling station staff have prepared for and implemented the new accessibility requirements. To ensure that the process of voting meets the accessibility requirements, Returning Officers need to receive appropriate guidance, polling station staff need to be trained on the new measures, and Returning Officers must have systems in place to provide the required provision at each polling station. If these elements are achieved, electors with a disability should be able to request and receive reasonable adjustments before or on polling day to enable them to vote in person in accordance with the Equality Act.

This claim pathway is mapped out in Appendix 6.

3.3.1 Preparedness for implementation

As for voter identification, providing effective training for polling station staff was key to delivering the new accessibility measures. By the time of the May 2023 elections, all local authorities surveyed reported that they had delivered accessibility training to polling station staff (100%), and all were also confident that they were prepared to support accessibility requirements (100%) (Accessibility Monitoring Data). This is slightly higher than the 94% of polling station staff who recalled being trained in supporting voters who need additional

assistance (Electoral Commission's Polling Staff Survey). EONI also reported that relevant staff had received training to support disabled voters (May Reflections Survey of Electoral Administrators).

In the qualitative research some polling station staff felt that more emphasis had been placed on the voter identification measures, sometimes at the expense of accessibility. A few polling station staff reported that the training they received was primarily focused on the voter identification measures rather than accessibility because the former was deemed to be newly introduced in comparison to the latter – despite the fact that the Elections Act 2022 introduced measures for both simultaneously.

"Because the new thing that was coming along was the ID issue, there was more emphasis on that than on accessibility… the ID thing was the new thing and it that's the thing that needed to be reinforced."

(Polling station staff)

"…too much focus may have been on the [voter] ID because that covered everybody coming to vote without enough circus being made around those …other [accessibility] requirements."

(Polling station staff)

As shown in Table 3.1, by the time of the May 2023 election, polling station staff felt considerably more confident than in 2022 that they could assist disabled voters across a wider range of disabilities (Electoral Commission's Polling Staff Survey).

Table 3.1 Percentage (%) of polling station staff confident in supporting voters with specific disabilities / accessibility needs

Accessibility need	% confident in 2023	% confident in 2022
Visual impairment	94%	86%
Mobility issues	97%	91%
Learning disability	90%	79%
Hearing impairment	89%	78%
Voter needs to use tactile voting device	88%	76%

(Electoral Commission's Polling Staff Survey)

Although the physical accessibility of polling station venues themselves sits outside of the Elections Act 2022, it is important context for understanding the overall experience of in-person voting for electors with a disability. Existing legislation requires Returning Officers to ensure polling station venues are accessible as far as reasonably and practically

possible. It acknowledges that some areas may not have suitable options available, for example, polling station venues with wheelchair access. Furthermore, some of the Electoral Commission's guidance on meeting the new accessibility requirements refers to the accessibility of venues (for example, the availability of disabled parking spaces).

In qualitative interviews, some electoral administrators appreciated the level of discretion in the guidance that allowed them to make proportionate provision according to the nature of their polling station venues and facilities. For example, in a rural area:

> *"… you are going to have places out in the sticks that [are] just not going be as compliant as you'd like them to be... we make sure that staff [at] those polling stations understand that… [if] someone with mobility issues or whatever [turns up]… they understand the workarounds basically to make sure that no one is deprived of the ability to vote."*

<div align="right">(Returning Officer)</div>

Some did report changing the venue for the polling station to be more accessible for electors with a disability, despite this not always being popular.

> *"We just don't have infrastructure to support us, […] the odd polling station we had in a pub so we moved it to a church and all hell broke loose [..]. That is not ideal, and the accessibility in the pub was awful. So, what we did was we improved."*

<div align="right">(Electoral Services Manager)</div>

In total, few local authorities surveyed (6%) had difficulties sourcing sufficient accessible venues for the May 2023 elections (Accessibility Monitoring Data). These were reported to be due to:

- Increasing reluctance of accessible venues to make themselves available to be polling stations (schools were often cited as an example).

- Closure of community venues leading to local authorities' electoral services teams resorting to using non-conventional and often non-accessible venues (portacabins and pubs were cited as examples).

3.3.2 Delivery

On polling day there was very little evidence of Returning Officers or polling station staff being unable to support disabled people to vote once they had accessed the polling station and many went 'above and beyond' to overcome accessibility barriers at their polling station.

> *"The person could not come into the polling station as there were steep steps and the disabled access was a ramp. The presiding officer went out so they could vote in their car."*

But this evidence may overlook the experience of disabled electors who did not attempt to vote in person as they were deterred by the inaccessibility of the building. The physical accessibility of buildings appears to still be an important issue to overcome:

> *"Many polling stations are still so inaccessible, like especially for wheelchairs. If I'd tried to go in when I was in my wheelchair, no chance, I wouldn't have been able to get inside. So even if I had shown up with my voting ID and even with those disability measures in place, if you don't improve physical accessibility, it does nothing."*

(Elector, voted, accessibility needs)

Nonetheless, only a minority of polling station staff (10%) reported disabled voters experiencing difficulties at their polling station and around two-fifths (43%) were difficulties accessing the building rather than with voting. These included: lack of step-free access; the inability to accommodate mobility scooters; a lack of available disabled parking; and having to try and deal with ramps with steep gradients (Electoral Commission's Polling Staff Survey).

3.3.3 Conclusion

The current evaluation evidence indicates that this claim has been met.

Nearly all (94%) polling station staff recalled being trained in supporting disabled electors to vote (Electoral Commission's Polling Staff Survey) but, in qualitative interviews, some felt accessibility requirements were not given sufficient attention, with a greater focus on training for the voter identification checks. That said, polling station staff's confidence in supporting electors with different disabilities to vote in-person has increased since 2022 (Electoral Commission's Polling Staff Survey).

A minority (10%) of polling station staff reported voters having difficulties with accessibility at polling stations on the day. However, nearly half of these reported difficulties meeting the Electoral Commission's guidance on venue accessibility rather than the new legislation on widening the companion option and equipment (Electoral Commission's Polling Staff Survey).

In planning for the UK Parliamentary General Election, the evidence assessed in this section suggests that it would be beneficial to allow Returning Officers and electoral services teams more time to engage with disability advocacy groups to help develop training for polling station staff and   identify ways of improving support for disabled voters on polling day.

It is important to note that the conclusion on the extent to which this claim has been met is limited without more evidence from disabled electors who wanted to vote in person and

were either unable to or did not attempt it. As noted in the methodological limitations (Section 1.4), given the very low incidence of this group (with many disabled people choosing to use a postal vote), it was difficult to recruit and include them in the qualitative research. Future evaluation should ensure more disabled electors are included, for example, by engaging disability support and advocacy groups.

3.4 Claim 3: Communications effectively raise awareness of reform amongst electors with disabilities and their carers

The successful delivery of the accessibility measures relies on individuals with disabilities being aware of the new accessibility provisions. The claim pathway outlines that to achieve this, local authorities, together with the Electoral Commission and disability charities, raise awareness among disabled electors through communications and direct engagement. As a result, disabled voters will be supported to vote in person if they choose and be more satisfied with and confident about voting in person.

Appendix 6 sets out the elements in the accessibility theory of change model that describe the pathway to change for accessibility Claim 3.

3.4.1   Communications delivery

Unlike the new voter identification measures, where national and local campaigns were used to communicate changes to all electors, the intention for the new accessibility measures was that engagement would take place locally with disabled electors and groups representing them, in line with the Electoral Commission's guidance.

In March 2023, surveyed electoral administrators generally felt prepared in terms of communicating the new measures (93%). By then, most local authorities' electoral services teams (80%) said that they had already engaged with disabled electors or groups representing them to explain the new accessibility provisions under the Elections Act 2022. Local authorities explained that this engagement involved meetings with local advocacy groups and was focused on understanding the requirements of voters with disabilities better (March Readiness Survey of Electoral Administrators).

In line with this, by the May 2023 local elections, 74% of surveyed local authorities indicated that they had engaged with local advocacy groups for disabled people, while 18% had not. Engagement with local advocacy groups continued right up to the May 2023 elections and several local authorities reported that, although they were limited by time for the May 2023 local elections, they are planning to implement suggestions from the groups in the future. In Northern Ireland, EONI also reported engaging with organisations that support disabled people (May Reflections Survey of Electoral Administrators).

Although most had been confident during preparations, around one in ten surveyed local authorities (11%) reflected that engagement with local advocacy groups had been a

significant challenge within the timeframe for the May 2023 elections (May Reflections Survey of Electoral Administrators). Issues encountered included:

- Too few groups representing electors with disabilities in the local area.

- Groups representing electors with disabilities not responding.

- Local authorities lacking the resources and connections to do this outreach work.

Indeed, in qualitative interviews, evidence of local authorities engaging effectively with disabled electors and advocacy/support groups was weak. Few electoral administrators were able to talk in detail about what awareness raising for the new accessibility measures involved. Those that could, described having meetings and discussions with advocacy and support groups to discuss the new accessibility measures and what provisions may be required in their areas. However, some flagged that turnout in these meetings had been low and limited follow-up had taken place to explore the outcomes of these meetings.

> *"I would rather have had more people turn out [to the webinars and for the consultation groups] than did, but the message was out there. Maybe they just felt that they had that information to pass on. I would have liked to have seen more people come back or engage, but you can't insist on that, can you? I'm happy that the message got out there and the contact information was available for those that wanted it."*

> (Electoral Services Manager)

In qualitative interviews with electoral administrators, there was a general consensus that greater effort went into raising awareness of voter identification in the lead up to the May elections. Where this perception came from varied: some electoral administrators decided, in the context of a limited timeline and resources, to prioritise communication of photographic voter identification requirements as the most important requirement to vote, others commented that the Electoral Commission was not urging the communication of the new accessibility measures, so they did not feel a need to.

> *"We were doing nothing specific around [raising awareness for disability measures] to be honest. I think the accessibility stuff was probably given less attention, both nationally and locally, to be honest with you. I didn't see quite as much comms from the Electoral Commission around the accessibility provisions."*

> (Returning Officer)

Electoral administrators went on to explain that, where communications on new disability measures were lighter touch, they tended to have just been via the Poll Cards, where a reference to the accessibility of polling station venues was included.

"When we put our Poll Cards out and things like that, we make sure people are aware that they can access the station. We don't advertise anything specifically to do with accessibility we're expecting everyone to be able to go to the station. We're not expecting any issues. And we've never had any issues."

(Electoral Services Manager)

In interviews, some electoral administrators commented that they wished they had been able to do more engagement and awareness work with disabled electors, and those who support them, ahead of the May elections.

3.4.2 Impact and learning

Awareness of existing and new accessibility measures and legislation was low, even among individuals with a disability and their carers. Changes in awareness between January to May were also minimal, indicating a limited impact of any communication and engagement.

In May 2023, around one-fifth (19%) of voting age adults in England were aware of the existing measure in place for disabled voters to have a companion to help them vote in person at a polling station (Public Opinion Survey Wave 2). This is in line with the proportion aware in January 2023 (20%) (Public Opinion Survey Wave 1). Awareness of this measure in May was higher among those with a disability (29%). This increased to one in three (33%) for those whose disability impacts their ability to vote in person. Among those who have a disabled person within their household, awareness in May was slightly higher than average, with three in ten (30%) saying they were aware of the measure and 3% having voted with, or acted as, a companion. However, there are still 38% of people who live with someone with a disability, who know nothing about the provision. In Northern Ireland, one in five voting age adults (21%) say they are well aware of the provision for companion voting and 5% have acted with or as a companion in the past. Among those with a disability in Northern Ireland, awareness levels are similar to those of the population as a whole, one in four (23%) are aware of the provision but almost half (48%) say they know nothing about it (Public Opinion Survey Wave 2).

In May, overall awareness of the policy and legislative changes to make voting in person at a polling station more accessible for voters with a disability remains low among voting age adults in England.

Awareness of allowing more people to act as companion to assist in person disabled voters increased from 8% to 14% among voting age adults in England (with relatively little difference between the longitudinal (14%) and fresh (12%) sample). Those with a disability impacting their ability to vote in person were only slightly more likely to be aware of the policy change than overall (18% said they knew a great deal or fair amount). Similarly, people living with a disabled household member were only slightly more likely than

average to be aware of the policy change than overall (16% said they knew a great deal or fair amount (Public Opinion Survey Wave 1 & 2).

On the policy change to provide a wide range of equipment to support disabled people when voting in person, awareness levels were very similar to those of companion voting. Just 13% said they know a great deal or fair amount about the policy, a 5ppt increase since January (again awareness was similar for the longitudinal (13%) and fresh (12%) samples). For those whose disability impacts their ability to vote in person, awareness was again slightly higher than overall at 17% (Public Opinion Survey Wave 1 & 2).

Among those aware of the changes in May 2023, awareness tended to come from outside of local authority communications, for example hearing about them on TV/radio (26% for both measures), in newspapers or magazines (22% for both measures) or on social media (18% for companions and 19% for equipment measures). Around one in five, said that they heard about the changes from the council (20% for widening companions, 21% for equipment measures) (Public Opinion Survey Wave 2).

In May 2023, one in ten of voting age adults in Northern Ireland knew a great deal or fair amount about each of the two accessibility measures (10%). Awareness for the range of equipment available was higher in Northern Ireland among those with a more severe disability that prevents them from voting in person (18%). Similarly on widening the companion option, those with a more severe disability that prevents them from voting in person are twice as likely (20%) than all voting age adults in Northern Ireland to have heard of the measure to allow more people to act as a companion (Public Opinion Survey Wave 2).

Qualitative interviews also indicated that awareness of the new measures was low. There was almost no awareness of the new accessibility measures, even among electors with a disability. Electors with a disability, those with partners or close family members with a disability, and those engaged in disability advocacy and support groups were pleased that these changes had been introduced, but many were disappointed and surprised not to have heard about them.

> *"It's great that these measures were put in, but I'm really disappointed that it was not more widely known."*

> (Elector, voted, younger (18-29))

> *"I would consider myself quite up to date with this kind of thing. So to me, the fact that we've all seen like so much to do with the idea [of photo identification] and then so little to do with the accessibility measures [is surprising]."*

> (Elector, voted, accessibility needs)

3.4.3 Conclusion

The evidence indicates that this claim has not been met. Although local authorities attempted to engage disability advocacy and support groups to increase awareness on the new accessibility measures, awareness increased only slightly between January and May (Public Opinion Survey Wave 1 & 2). By May, only a minority of disabled adults of voting age knew a great deal or fair amount about the new accessibility measures (12% in England and 10% in Northern Ireland for companion changes, and 12% and 10% in Northern Ireland for the equipment measure) (Public Opinion Survey Wave 2).

In qualitative interviews, some local authorities reported challenges to effective engagement including: time, lack of response from the groups representing electors with disabilities, or lack of resources and connections to do the outreach work. Future evaluation work could collect evidence from advocacy groups to better understand the barriers to engagement with local authorities and communication about the accessibility measures.

The evaluation found little evidence of direct communications with disabled electors. If communications via advocacy and support groups are proving challenging, more direct or alternative approaches could be considered for a UK Parliamentary General Election. Furthermore, these efforts do not necessarily need to be targeted; raising awareness generally will increase the likelihood of awareness of these new measures reaching disabled electors (for example, by reaching friends or family of disabled electors). These approaches could be further supported with more communications guidance from the Electoral Commission.

3.5 Claim 4: Disabled electors are enabled to vote in-person as a result of the new measures

The key aim of the new accessibility measures is to make reasonable adjustments that will improve the accessibility of polling stations for people with disabilities. The theory suggests that if the new accessibility requirements are delivered as intended, then disabled voters' support to vote in person will improve, and disabled voters will feel more satisfied with voting in polling stations. As a result, electors with disabilities will have higher confidence in voting in person, and the number of disabled voters casting their vote in person will be unaffected or increase in the longer-term.

This claim is fundamentally linked to the achievement of the earlier claims concerned with successful implementation of the accessibility measures (see Claims 1, 2, and 3 on the accessibility measures). If the evidence suggests that Claims 1, 2 or 3 have not been met, then it would not be possible to attribute improvements in the accessibility of polling stations for people with disabilities to the new accessibility measures.

Appendix 6 sets out the elements in the accessibility theory of change model that describe the pathway to change for Claim 4.

3.5.1 Disabled voters supported to vote in-person

There is a slight mismatch between the extent to which polling station staff feel their polling stations are accessible for in-person electors with a disability (views are very positive; Electoral Commission's Polling Staff Survey), and electors' perceptions of accessibility in polling stations (views are relatively neutral; Public Opinion Survey Wave 1 & 2). That said, neither audience demonstrated large shifts in perspectives over time, indicating there has been little change in the perceptions of how supported disabled electors are when voting in-person since the new measures have been introduced (Electoral Commission's Polling Staff Survey; Public Opinion Survey Wave 1 & 2).

Polling station staff tended to disagree with statements exploring barriers to in-person voting for disabled voters (Electoral Commission's Polling Staff Survey):

- In May/June 2023, 82% of polling station staff disagreed (53% strongly disagreed) that voters with disabilities had problems with the accessibility of polling stations. This is a decrease from 85% disagreeing (56% strongly disagreeing) in 2022.

- In May/June 2023, 82% of polling station staff disagreed (49% strongly disagreed) that voters with disabilities had problems completing ballots. These levels are similar to those in 2022 (82% disagreed, 51% strongly disagreed).

Only 39% of voting age adults with a disability in England perceived polling station staff to be properly trained to assist them in voting (6% felt they were not properly trained). Agreement rises to 52% in Northern Ireland. (Public Opinion Survey Wave 2). This presents an inconsistency between how confident polling station staff felt supporting individuals (generally confident; see Accessibility Claim 2), and how well supported voters with a disability felt.

However, it is important to note that, in May, the vast majority of voting age adults with a disability (93%) said that they did not request equipment to help them vote when at the polling station because they did not feel they needed it. Furthermore, very few voting age adults with a disability requested equipment but did not receive it to help them (1%) or would have requested it but were not aware they could (2%) (Public Opinion Survey Wave 2).

This is in line with the experience of local authorities: in March, nearly all local authorities surveyed reported that they either rarely (52%) or never (40%) received requests from voters for accessibility equipment (March Readiness Survey of Electoral Administrators), and similar proportions reported rarely (62%) or never (26%) receiving requests from voters during the May elections for accessibility equipment. EONI also reported a very limited number of requests from electors (May Reflections Survey of Electoral Administrators).

One interpretation is that the volume of requests did not necessarily reflect demand from disabled voters in the area given that the number of provisions that local authorities made proactively may have removed the need for requests. Provisions ranged from hearing induction loops (provided in all stations by 4% of local authorities) to pencil grips (provided in all stations by 92% of local authorities) (Accessibility Monitoring Data). However, in qualitative interviews, electors with disabilities tended not to have noticed any changes in terms of the support and equipment that was available on polling day.

3.5.2 Satisfaction with the in-person voting process

In May, satisfaction with the process of voting among those with a disability was high (70%), and in line with satisfaction among all voting age adults in England (69%) (Public Opinion Survey Wave 2). This is in the context of a small decline in satisfaction among all electors between January and May 2023 – 74% of voting age adults in England were satisfied in January (Public Opinion Survey Wave 1).

Compared to voting age adults overall in England, satisfaction with the voting process was a lot lower at both time points for people with a disability whose conditions limits their activities a lot (67% in January, 60% in May) (Public Opinion Survey Wave 1 & 2). In May 2023, this proportion was lower for those whose disability prevents them from voting in person on their own (Public Opinion Survey Wave 2).

In May 2023, satisfaction with the process of voting in Northern Ireland was similar to England among those with a disability (70%), but slightly lower than voting age adults overall in Northern Ireland (75%). Again, the proportion satisfied was slightly lower for those in Northern Ireland with more severe disabilities that prevent or impact upon their ability to vote in person (64%). One in five of those with such disabilities in Northern Ireland are dissatisfied with the voting process (20%) compared to 9% in Northern Ireland overall (Public Opinion Survey Wave 2).

It is important to note that these figures explore satisfaction with the process of voting generally, they do not isolate the experience of voting in-person. Therefore, it is difficult to draw conclusions about the in-person experience specifically.

Reporting on the ease of in-person voting sheds more light on this. Among voting age adults in England with a disability limiting their activity a lot, a smaller proportion (83%), than the 95% of all adults overall, found the process of casting a vote in person at a polling station at the recent local elections to be easy. However, difficulties were not widely reported, as just 5% of voters with a disability limiting their activity a lot said that the process of casting a vote in person was fairly or very difficult (Public Opinion Survey Wave 2).

Although we can isolate individuals with a disability to determine differences from the wider population of electors, both satisfaction with, and ease of,voting can hinge on numerous variables. It is therefore difficult to draw conclusions on the impact of the new accessibility

measures on electors' satisfaction with the process of voting and their views on ease of voting in person. Future evaluation work should seek to explore this nuance.

In qualitative interviews, some electoral administrators expressed the view this was difficult to explore. They had anecdotally formed the view that there were very few, if any, disabled voters who wished to or attempted to vote in person but were unable to do so.

> *Interviewer: "Amongst those who you know had accessibility requirements, to what extent do you think the measures affected satisfaction with voting and their experience?*
>
> *Respondent: "We can't really comment on it because I don't think there was any [disabled voters] … That's the problem - until you get an issue which means you can then do something about it [you don't know]."*

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Electoral Services Manager

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3.5.3 Participation of disabled voters in voting in person at the polling stations

In May 2023, individuals with a disability, however, were unlikely to anticipate these changes would make a difference to the likelihood of them voting in person (Public Opinion Survey Wave 2):

- Regarding the new provisions on widening the companion option, eight in ten (81%) of those in England with a disability say that expanding the list of those who can act as a companion would make no difference to their likelihood to vote in person with a companion in the future. Three quarters (74%) of those with a disability in Northern Ireland say the same.

- Eight in ten (79%) of those in England with a disability say providing a wide range of equipment to support people voting in person would make no difference to their likelihood to vote in person at a polling station on their own in future. In Northern Ireland, 79% said it made no difference to their likelihood to vote in May.

For some of these individuals, the new measures may not have been relevant to their disability or accessibility needs. These findings may also be due to the likelihood of individuals with disabilities remaining more likely to vote by post. Voters with a disability were more likely than non-disabled electors to report voting by post in May 2023 elections (41% compared to 37%). This was higher where their disability impacted them voting in person on their own (43%), and where their disability limited their activities a lot (48%) (Public Opinion Survey Wave 2).

In qualitative interviews, polling station staff agreed that disabled people were more likely to vote by post:

It will be good to monitor whether, over time, as awareness of the new measures hopefully increases, the minority who feel they would be more likely to vote in person following their introduction also increases.

Because of low levels of awareness for the new measures, their relative infancy in terms of delivery, and difficulties recruiting individuals with a disability, it was difficult to explore the extent to which the new measures have affected confidence in disabled electors' ability to vote in person.

3.5.4 Public perception of accessibility of voting

Around three-quarters of voting age adults in England with a disability were confident in the way that the May 2023 local elections were run (76%). This proportion was in line with all voting age adults in England (77%). However, for those with more severe disabilities, confidence was lower. A quarter (24%) of those whose disability limits their activities a lot said they were not confident that the recent elections were well run – rising to three in ten (30%) for those whose disability prevents them from voting in person on their own. When asked for the reasoning behind their lack of confidence, 14% of those with a disability said the way elections are run make it difficult for disabled people to vote. This increased to 20% for those with a disability that prevents them from voting in person on their own (Public Opinion Survey Wave 2).

These proportions suggest poorer perceptions of the way that the May 2023 local elections were run, compared to perceptions collected in January 2023 of how well elections are run more generally. In January 2023, 84% of all adults of voting age in England were confident that elections were well run, and 21% of those with a disability that limited their activities a lot were not confident (Public Opinion Survey Wave 1).

Despite low levels of awareness about the new accessibility measures (see Accessibility Claim 3). There is a widespread perception among voting age adults in England that the policy changes will make it easier for people with a disability to vote in person at a polling station. In May, a strong majority of voting age adults in England with a disability and those with an adult with a disability in their household felt the changes would make it easier for people with disabilities to vote in person at a polling station (77% for providing a wide range of equipment; 77% for allowing more people to act as a companion). Similarly in Northern Ireland, strong majorities of voting age adults feel that both measures will make it easier to vote in person for those with disabilities (78% for equipment provision and 75% for widening the companion option) (Public Opinion Survey Wave 2).

In qualitative interviews, no electors with disabilities were able to comment on whether the new companion measures would mean they felt better supported (they either already had a suitable companion, or this was not relevant to them), and none felt specific equipment would help their voting experience. There was generally a sentiment that it was good these measures were being introduced, so that they could have a positive impact where applicable. Some commented that they felt a greater a sense of belonging knowing that these measures had been introduced and their needs considered.

> *"It's making people just feel more, not accepted but… so you don't feel as different."*

> (Elector, voted, accessibility needs)

3.5.5   Conclusion

The evidence assessed above indicates that a conclusion on whether this claim has been met cannot be drawn.

Disabled electors' experience of the new accessibility measures and their impact on enabling in-person voting is largely dependent on the achievement of Claims 1, 2 and 3. Overall, the evidence suggests that electoral services teams, Returning Officers, and polling station staff delivered the new accessibility measures as set out in law and therefore that Claims 1 and 2 were met, however, the evidence suggests that Claim 3 on raising awareness among disabled electors was not met. Without electors being aware of these new measures, it is unclear if the necessary pathway is there for the measures to enable disabled electors to vote in person. Until we have more evidence to assess this Claim, it is not possible to establish whether it has been met.

Electors with a disability which limits their activities a lot in England are likely to say that voting in-person in the May 2023 local elections was easy (83%) . Disabled electors were generally satisfied with the process of voting generally (70%). Satisfaction is only significantly lower than all voting age adults among disabled electors with a condition that limits their activities a lot (60%) (Public Opinion Survey Wave 2). In May 2023, satisfaction with the process of voting in Northern Ireland was similar (to England) for those with a disability (70%), but slightly lower than all voting age adults overall in Northern Ireland (75%).

As mentioned under previous claims, in qualitative interviews local authorities explained that they are still in the early stages of understanding how to best implement the new accessibility measures, and they used the May local elections to scope out what may be needed in polling stations in the future.

More than three-quarters of voting age adults in England with a disability and those with an adult with a disability in their household anticipate that these changes will make it easier for them to vote in person (77% for equipment provision and 77% for widening the companion option). Similarly in Northern Ireland, strong majorities of voting age adults feel

that both measures will make it easier to vote in person for those with disabilities (78% for equipment provision and 75% for widening the companion option) (Public Opinion Survey Wave 2). A similar sentiment was shared in qualitative interviews. The focus therefore needs to be on ensuring that those that would benefit from these changes are aware and able to make use of them.

Future evaluation of accessibility measures at a UK General Parliamentary Election will need to assess whether engagement with local disability advocacy groups has been more effective and examine the in-person voting experience of disabled voters in more depth.

Appendices

The appendices included in the report are:

- Appendix 1: Research questions, which sets out the process and impact research questions developed by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) and IFF Research for the wider evaluation.

- Appendix 2: Methodology: IFF qualitative research, which outlines the methodological approach taken for this strand of the evaluation.

- Appendix 3: Methodology: Quantitative data sources, which outlines the sample sizes and considerations for each quantitative data source.

- Appendix 4: Theories of change for voter identification and accessibility measures: plain text versions.

- Appendix 5: Voter identification: Contribution Claim Pathways, which presents plain text summaries of each of the eight claims for voter identification.

- Appendix 6: Accessibility: Contribution Claim Pathways, which presents plain text summaries of each of the four claims for accessibility.

Appendix 1: Research questions

The evaluation includes both a process and impact evaluation.

The process component sought to gather evidence on implementation to describe the activities and processes that were undertaken to deliver the voter identification and accessibility measures, and the ways in which they were delivered by electoral services teams in local authorities and polling station staff. The aim was to identify lessons and draw out any barriers or facilitators from the implementation of the measures in the May 2023 local elections that can inform their delivery at the next UK Parliamentary election.

The objective of the impact evaluation was to assess the effectiveness of voter identification and accessibility in relation to the programme's goals, and to understand their impact on both electors and the electoral sector, including Electoral Register Officers, Returning Officers and staff in electoral services teams and working in polling stations.

IFF Research worked with DLUHC to develop the following research questions for the voter identification and accessibility measures that cover both the implementation (process) and impact of these measures.

Voter identification process research questions

Overarching process

1. Were all aspects of the voter identification measures delivered as set out in the Elections Act 2022 legislation?
2. How did local authorities approach the implementation of the voter identification and VAC measures?
3. What barriers or challenges did local authorities face in implementing voter identification and VAC measures?
4. What enablers helped local authorities to implement voter identification and VAC measures?
5. How, and to who, have local authorities communicated voter identification and VAC to the electorate?
6. What has been learnt so far from implementing the voter identification and VAC measures for May 2023 local elections?
7. What are the next steps for local authorities in implementing voter identification and VAC at the next UK Parliamentary General Election?
8. To what extent do electoral services staff in local authorities feel confident in delivering the voter identification and VAC measures?

Voter identification process in polling stations

9. What challenges did polling station staff face in implementing the voter identification measures?
10. What enablers helped polling station staff to implement the voter identification measures?

11.   To what extent do polling station staff feel confident in delivering the new process?

12.   What training was provided to polling station staff on voter identification?

VAC specific process questions

13.   What training was provided to electoral services teams on VAC?

14.   How well did the new online service and digital process for processing VACs work?

Voter identification impact research questions

Impacts on the electoral sector

1.   How have the voter identification and VAC measures affected the work of electoral services teams?

2.   How have the voter identification and VAC measures affected the work of polling station staff?

3.   To what extent have the introduction of the voter identification measures affected trust and confidence in the security of elections among staff running registration and elections?

4.   What impact has the implementation of the voter identification and VAC measures had on the cost of registration and elections?

Impacts on electors

5.   Are electors aware of the changes?

6.   To what extent does the VAC remove any potential barriers to voting for electors who do not have accepted photographic identification?

7.   To what extent do the newly available provisions in polling stations remove any potential barriers to voting for electors who do not wish to have their identification checked in public?

8.   To what extent have the voter identification measures affected the voting experience in polling stations for electors?

9.   To what extent have the voter identification measures affected electors' preferred method of voting and propensity to vote?

10.   To what extent have the voter identification measures affected electors' trust and confidence in the security of elections?

11.   To what extent have the voter identification measures affected electors' satisfaction with voting in polling stations?

Impacts on electoral fraud

12.   To what extent have the voter identification measures made it easier to detect cases of personation in polling stations?

13.   To what extent have the voter identification measures deterred attempts at electoral fraud in polling stations?

14.   To what extent have the voter identification measures impacted opportunities for electoral fraud arising in any part of the system?

15.   Did the implementation of the voter identification measures at the May 2023 local elections have any unintended outcomes?

Accessibility process research questions

1.   How did local authorities approach the implementation of the accessibility measures?
2.   What barriers or challenges did local authorities face in implementing the accessibility measures?
3.   What enablers helped local authorities to implement the accessibility measures?
4.   What training was provided to polling station staff on the accessibility measures?
5.   To what extent have local authorities been able to provide the accessibility equipment and support in line with the Electoral Commission's guidance?
6.   How and to who have local authorities communicated the accessibility changes?
7.   What has been learnt so far from implementing the accessibility measures at local elections?
8.   What are the next steps for local authorities in implementing the accessibility measures at the next UK Parliamentary General Election?

Accessibility impact research questions

Impacts on electors with a disability

1.   Are people with accessibility needs, their carers and disability Civil Society Organisations aware of the changes and how they affect disabled voters?
2.   To what extent do the changes remove barriers to voting in person at a polling station for electors with disabilities?
3.   To what extent have the changes affected the voting experience of voters with disabilities?
4.   To what extent have the changes affected the voting behaviour of electors with disabilities, both in terms of method of voting and propensity to vote?
5.   To what extent do the changes impact perceptions on the accessibility of elections among disabled electors?
6.   To what extent do the changes impact disabled electors' confidence in the process and accuracy of voting in person?
7.   To what extent do the changes impact disabled electors' satisfaction in the process of voting in person?

Impacts on electoral sector

8.   How have the changes affected the work of elections staff in local authorities?
9.   What impact has the implementation of the accessibility measures has on elections costs?
10.   How have the accessibility measures affected the work of polling station staff?
11.   Did the implementation of the accessibility measures at the May 2023 local elections have any unintended outcomes?

Appendix 2: Methodology: IFF qualitative research

IFF undertook qualitative research on the impact and implementation of the voter identification and accessibility measures with electoral services teams in local authorities, polling station staff and key groups of electors. This appendix outlines the methodological approach taken for this strand of the evaluation.

Selection of an initial 16 local authorities

DLUHC provided an initial long list of 32 local authorities with elections in May 2023. The rationale for selections in the initial long list were both broad (for example, ensuring a mix by region) and specific (for example, known for sharing good practice).

From this, a shortlist of 16 local authorities was selected; this was a joint decision process between IFF and DLUHC. The shortlist sought to achieve a mix by: region, previous voting behaviour, deprivation levels, area classification, and population density.

Table A.2.1 below presents the breakdown of the selected 16 by these characteristics, and how this compares to the wider cohort of local authorities with local elections in May 2023.

Table A.2.2 Overview of 16 selection local authorities by key characteristics, compared to all local authorities with May 2023 local elections

Characteristic	Selected 16 breakdown	All voting local authorities breakdown
Region	(n)	(n)
East	2	42
East Midlands	2	33
North East	1	10
North West	3	31
South East	2	56
South West	2	17
West Midlands	2	26
Yorkshire and The Humber	2	12
Voting behaviour	(%)	(%)
Conservative	19%	14%
Labour	31%	31%

Characteristic	Selected 16 breakdown	All voting local authorities breakdown
Lib Dem	19%	13%
Green	0%	0%
No party majority / Other	31%	42%
Deprivation index		
Deprivation - highest	40.00	45.00
Deprivation - lowest	8.40	5.50
Deprivation - average	22.2	19.67
Area classification		
Affluent England	6%	19%
Business, Education and Heritage Centres	25%	11%
Countryside Living	31%	15%
Ethnically Diverse Metropolitan Living	13%	1%
Services and Industrial Legacy	6%	12%
Town and Country Living	13%	23%
Urban Settlements	6%	19%
Population density		
Density - highest	4830	5321
Density - lowest	90	48
Density - average	1672	1208

Given the necessary timeline for the qualitative fieldwork, it was important that the selection would be engaged and supportive of the evaluation, to avoid delays in fieldwork delivery. As such, prior engagement levels with DLUHC were also a consideration – historic higher levels of engagement were a good indication for how engaged and quick to respond a local authority might be to the current evaluation. However, it was important not to bias the sample too much in this regard, so some with lower prior engagement were also included.

Interviews with Electoral Administrators in the initial 16 local authorities

Within each case study local authority, depth interviews were conducted with staff responsible for delivering elections including Chief Executive Officers, Electoral Registration Officers and Returning Officers (for a strategic perspective), and Electoral Services Managers, who were able to provide a more operational perspective on the day-to-day preparation, delivery and running of elections.

In some instances, the same individual held the role of Chief Executive Officer and Returning Officer or Electoral Registration Officer. Where held by different individuals, discussions were carried out as a paired interview, if preferred. All other interviews within an area were carried out on an individual basis, to avoid imbalances in seniority affecting responses.

Discussions were conducted over videocall or telephone, and lasted up to 60 minutes for individual interviews, and 90 minutes for paired depths.

A total of 24 interviews were completed across 14 local authorities, between 10th July and 14th September 2023. A key challenge for recruitment was the timing, with interviews necessarily taking place when many staff members were on summer annual leave.

The topic guide for these discussions was developed by IFF Research and reviewed by DLUHC. It was informed by the research questions and known (at the stage of development) gaps in evidence. Broadly, these discussions covered:

- Background / context: including key characteristics about the local area and previous elector behaviour, and the individual's job role in relation to elections and the new measures.

- Preparing for the May elections & Electoral Integrity Programme measures: including recruitment (for VAC processes, polling station staff, and more broadly for the May elections), staff training, selection and preparation of polling station venues, impact of boundary changes, communication of new measures to the public, changes in voter registrations.

- Voter identification measures:

  o Process questions: exploring implementation and delivery of the new requirements, what worked well and what challenges / areas for improvement arose, what elector awareness for the new measures was like, processes for VAC applications and delivery.

  o Impact questions: exploring perceived impacts on security / integrity of elections, elector engagement, voting experience, staff workload and costs, and any wider or unintended outcomes.

- New accessibility measures:

- Process questions: exploring implementation and delivery of the new requirements, what accessibility measures were required, what worked well and what challenges / areas for improvement arose, what elector awareness for the new measures was like.

- Impact questions: exploring perceived impact on elector engagement and perceptions, voting experience, staff workload and costs, and any wider or unintended outcomes.

- Evaluation and next steps: outlining the requirements for the evaluation, and seeking support from the local authority in these next steps (for example with polling station staff recruitment).

Selection of eight case study local authorities

Following the first few weeks of interviewing Electoral Administrators, IFF Research and DLUHC decided on eight local authorities to focus on as case study areas. Within these areas, focus groups with polling station staff and electors, and in-depth interviews with electors would be conducted.

Learnings from the first interviews with Electoral Administrators were used to inform this decision, both in terms of selecting areas with characteristics of interest and being engaged with the evaluation to date (as outlined above, to meet the necessary timeline for evaluation delivery).

'Characteristics of interest' meant areas with relatively higher proportions of population groups that had distinct experiences of, or perspectives on, the new measures, as known anecdotally and highlighted in previous research (for example, the Ipsos Public Opinion Survey). For example, older (75+) age groups were of interest as they stood out as a subgroup with different views/experiences in the Ipsos Public Opinion Survey, compared to the overall population of voting age adults. As such, some local authorities were selected as they had an older population.

Other population groups of interest included: ethnic minority groups, younger (18-29) age groups, those with low education levels, social renters, and those with low-income levels.

Focus groups with polling station staff

One focus group with polling station staff was conducted in each of the selected case study areas. Across all eight, a total of 53 polling station staff were involved, including 23 Presiding Officers and 30 Poll Clerks.

Focus groups took place between the 1st – 23rd August 2023. Each focus group was conducted via videocall, and lasted up to 90 minutes.

The topic guide for these discussions was developed by IFF Research and reviewed by DLUHC. It was informed by the research questions and known (at the stage of development) gaps in evidence. Broadly, these discussions covered:

- Background / context: including roles and responsibilities and previous experience in relation to elections.

- Preparing for the May elections and the Elections Act 2022 measures: including how they first heard about the new measures and staff training (generally and specifically on new measures.

- Voter identification measures:

  - Process questions: exploring implementation and delivery of the new requirements, what worked well and what challenges / areas for improvement arose on polling day, what elector awareness of the new measures was like (including incidence and reasoning for electors not having accepted identification).

  - Impact questions: exploring perceived impacts on the security / integrity of elections, elector engagement, voting experience, staff workload and costs, and any wider or unintended outcomes.

- New accessibility measures:

  - Process questions: exploring the implementation and delivery of the new requirements, what accessibility measures were required, what worked well and what challenges / areas for improvement arose, what elector awareness of the new measures was like.

  - Impact questions: exploring perceived impact on elector engagement and perceptions, voting experience, staff workload and costs, and any wider or unintended outcomes.

- Evaluation and wrap-up, allowing staff to express any points they had not been able to raise in the discussion.

Elector fieldwork

Elector fieldwork included two approaches:

- One focus group in each of the eight case studies.

- Depth interviews with electors, with characteristics specifically relevant to either the new voter identification measures, or the new accessibility measures.

- Across all discussions, it was agreed that electors needed to have voted or wanted to vote in the local elections, given that interviews and focus groups concentrated on voters' experiences of the voter identification and accessibility measures, and because those who choose not to vote have motivations requiring much wider research than the focus of this evaluation.

- Focus groups were designed to build the place-based evidence comprising electors from different groups of interest. Each local area was focused on one of these groups of interest. Overall the groups comprised of:

- Two groups of young people

- Two groups of older people

- One group with electors with low education levels

- One group with electors with low-income levels

- One group with electors with from ethnic minority groups

- One group with electors with who expressed reluctance towards the new voter identification measures

Across the eight groups, 36 individuals participated. Focus groups took place between the 29th August – 14th September 2023. Each focus group was conducted via videocall, and lasted up to 90 minutes.

For one-to-one, depth interviews, electors were recruited on the basis of having a characteristic of specific interest for the voter identification measures (for example, not having accepted photographic identification but wanting to vote, or having accepted identification but being opposed to the new measures) or accessibility measures (having a health condition or disability that made the new measures relevant to them).

In total, 14 interviews were conducted with electors selected for the voter identification measures, and 10 interviews were conducted with electors selected for the accessibility measures. All interviews covered questions in relation to both measures, however.

Interviews took place between the 29th August – 22nd September. Interviews were conducted over videocall or telephone, and lasted up to 45 minutes.

Analysis of qualitative interviews

To support the most thorough and systematic approach to the qualitative analysis, IFF Research securely (with the participant's permission) recorded all of the interviews and had them fully transcribed.

IFF Research then organised and coded this textual data using the Framework analysis approach, working with NVivo software. NVivo enables recurrent patterns in the data to be highlighted, ensuring that the analysis is firmly grounded in the views and experiences of participants.

Considerations and limitations for the IFF qualitative research

- Purposive sampling: as highlighted in Appendix 2, the qualitative research used a purposive rather than representative sampling for case study areas. This was to ensure that the evaluation was successful in meeting its goals (both in terms of the required timeline, and coverage of certain groups of interest). Although the selection sought to achieve a range by demographic and political characteristics, the purposive approach

means the findings are not representative of the wider group of local authorities and electors.

- Difficulties with recruiting niche groups: the incidence of the specific groups of interest (namely those with no accepted photographic identification, and those who applied for VAC) were extremely low, making this group very difficult to recruit. Recruitment for those with accessibility needs was also difficult. This means that the views and experiences included for these groups in the report are based on a very limited number of interviews and should be treated with caution.

- Social desirability bias: meaning that individuals, particularly those responsible for delivering the programme, might be inclined to answer in a 'positive' way. The approach taken for the wider evaluation (where evidence from multiple sources and perspectives is taken together to conclude a finding) somewhat mitigates the impact of this risk.

Appendix 3: Methodology: Quantitative data sources

Sample sizes

Table A.3.2 provides a summary of the sample that each data source draws on. It is important to note that this evaluation focuses only on local authorities in England that held the May local elections.

Table A.3.3. Overview of sample sizes for each survey

Data source	Sample summary
Public Opinion Survey Wave 1 (January 2023), Ipsos	England (n=9,186 electors)
Public Opinion Survey Wave 2 (May 2023), Ipsos	England (n=8,318 electors) and Northern Ireland (n=777 electors)
March Readiness Survey of Electoral Administrators, DLUHC	144 local authorities (sent to 387 local authorities and 10 valuation joint boards)
May Reflections Survey of Electoral Administrators, DLUHC	163 local authorities (sent to 387 local authorities and 10 valuation joint boards)
Electoral Commission's Electoral Administrators' Survey (May/June 2023)	114 local authorities
Electoral Commission's Polling Staff Survey (May/June 2023)	2,694 polling staff from 145 local authorities

Considerations and limitations for the other data sources

This appendix highlights some of the key considerations and limitations for the quantitative data sources and analysis, as identified by the organisations who conducted the data collection.

Across all sources, the following considerations and limitations apply:

- Data errors: local authorities may have made errors when reporting statistics. There is the potential for respondents to misunderstand questions and provide inaccurate or irrelevant information.

- Survey bias: response bias is inherent to survey methods. Respondents may respond inaccurately or falsely to questions, or feel they should respond in a certain way.

- The absence of a valid counterfactual comparison means that the design does not provide the same rigour that experimental and quasi- experimental designs have when assessing impact.

Public Opinion Surveys (Ipsos)

The following should be considered when interpreting survey findings:

- Selection bias: the types of individuals that chose to respond to the surveys may differ from the types of individuals who chose not to respond, leading to bias in the data.

- Social desirability effect: individuals are more likely to provide responses that are considered socially acceptable. For example, voting is seen as socially desirable action, therefore the proportion of those saying that they voted is often over-estimated by surveys.

Implementation Surveys (March Readiness and May Reflections) of Electoral Administrators (DLUHC)

- Representativeness:

  - The March Readiness Survey was sent to 387 local authorities and 10 valuation joint boards, and 218 responses were received. Only responses from local authorities that held local elections in May 2023 (230 in total) are used in this report, of which 144 responses were received, giving a response rate of 63%.

  - The May Reflections Survey was sent to 387 local authorities and 10 valuation joint boards, and 177 responses were received. This report draws on the responses from local authorities with local elections in May 2023, , of which 163 responses were received.   This gives a response rate of 67% based on areas that held elections (154 local authorities) and 9 local authorities who supported the delivery of elections in other areas.

- Selection bias: the types of local authorities that chose to respond to the surveys may differ from the types of local authorities who chose not to respond, leading to bias in the data. For example, local authorities who are struggling with implementation may be less likely to respond.

Voter identification monitoring data: data collection in polling stations

- The following limitations apply to the monitoring data collected in polling stations on voters turned away, and more generally data collected by the Voter Identification Evaluation Form (VIDEF) and ballot paper refusal list (BPRL).

- Presence of greeters: greeters were present in many polling stations to remind people about the photographic identification requirements. It is expected that fewer electors were turned away at the desk in polling stations with greeters, thus leading to an underestimation of the numbers of electors who were turned away. However, even polling stations without greeters could have had signage outside reminding people of

the identification requirements. Data on polling stations with greeters is available only from local authorities who had complete data on greeters (a total of 145 out of 230 local authorities).

- Recording turned away electors at polling station desks: the data presented in this report on the numbers of electors turned away only include people who are on the electoral register and eligible to vote.

- Missing data: many of the statistics based on data collected in polling stations are based on very small numbers as they report on the few instances in which what is being recorded happened, for example, electors being turned away. Therefore, it is difficult in some cases to distinguish whether data is missing, or it was supposed to be zero.

- Incomplete data: some local authorities reported being unable to collect certain statistics across all polling stations. This is particularly relevant to data on the reasons why electors were turned away.

- Data errors: some local authorities made errors in reporting the data. Although these have been largely fixed, it raises questions over the quality of the data.

- Demographic data: no demographic data was collected on turned away electors as this was deemed to be inappropriate to collect in the polling station.

- Generalising the results: these results are based on English local authorities that held local elections in May 2023. Therefore, these results cannot be generalised to other areas (Scotland, Wales, or London) or to UK Parliamentary General Elections, where turnout is almost double that of local elections.

Voter identification monitoring data: VAC data from the Electoral Registration Officer Portal (EROP)

- Data errors: for in person and postal VAC applications, the submission date was entered manually. In 21 cases, errors were found and the submission date was replaced with an auto-generated added date.

- Inconsistent use of intermediate application statuses: the statuses 'in progress', 'received' and 'on hold' were used inconsistently across local authorities, and possibly within electoral services teams. Due to this, it was not possible to attribute the applications that were not processed to local authorities not having capacity, or to the applicant not supplying additional information in a timely manner. Furthermore, additional statuses, such as 'rejection in progress' were added during the application period, meaning their use cannot be analysed across the period.

- Changes to the Portal: some processes within the ERO Portal were changed after launch, such as automating the change of statuses from "accepted" to "sent to print", and the automated identification of duplicates.

Survey of Electoral Administrators (Electoral Commission)

- Representativeness: The survey was sent to all local authorities in England that held local elections in May (230 in total) and 144 local authorities responded to the survey questions on accessibility measures, which formed part of the accessibility monitoring data drawn on in this report. This gave a response rate of 63%.

- Use of different surveys for the baseline and post-election accessibility monitoring data: the EC's Survey of Electoral Administrators was used to collect post-election follow-up data on accessibility measures, while the baseline data was collected via DLUHC's March Readiness Survey. Although survey questions were harmonised as far as possible across the surveys, small differences in methodology and question wording may affect the comparability of the accessibility data collected at the two time points.

Polling Staff Survey (Electoral Commission)

- Representativeness: A total of 145 local authorities in England responded to the survey and a majority of responses were concentrated in a few local authorities (12 local authorities represented 66% of the sample).

DLUHC Impact Assessments

- DLUHC has also previously published several impact assessments supporting the Election Act 2022 and subsequent secondary legislation. The total net present social value (the value of all monetised benefits, less all monetised costs) for the introduction of the Election Act measures is estimated by DLUHC in these impact assessments to be -£231 million over a ten-year period. However, the majority of monetised impacts are costs, and a monetised value has not been placed on the intended key benefits including reduced opportunities for electoral fraud and enhancing support for disabled voters in polling stations.

- The total net present social value has been constructed by totalled the net present social value published in the latest impact assessment for each Election Act 2022 measure (voter identification secondary legislation impact assessment, postal and proxy voting secondary legislation impact assessment, overseas electors secondary legislation impact assessment, voting and candidacy rights of EU citizens secondary legislation impact assessment and the figures for the accessibility measures and campaigning measures are taken from the Election Act 2022 impact assessment). Each of the impact assessments contains further detail on how the net present social value has been constructed and the associated caveats.

Appendix 4: Theories of change for voter identification and accessibility measures

This appendix shows the theory of change model for the voter identification and accessibility measures in plain text format, as shown in figures 2.1 and 3.1.

Each theory of change is made up of:

- Inputs: what is needed for the intervention to take place?

- Activities: activities, actions and processes to take place to underpin effective delivery.

- Outputs: quantifiable deliverable resulting from the intervention activities.

- Outcomes: early 'consequential changes' from the outputs and activities.

- Impacts: longer 'consequential change' to meet the long-term goals.

Voter identification theory of change

Inputs:

- Primary and secondary legislation introduce the requirement to bring accepted photographic identification to vote in polling stations.

- Local authorities are engaged on voter identification changes and how they should be implemented in accordance with the legislation.

- Provisions are provided to ensure electors without another form of accepted identification can obtain free of charge a Voter Authority Certificate (VAC).

- Digital platforms and services for VAC applications are built and meet minimum service requirements.

- There are sufficient numbers of staff in local authorities to process VAC applications and undertake communication campaigns.

- Provisions are provided to local authorities to ensure voters can show their identification in private in polling stations.

- There are sufficient numbers of polling station staff to carry out new identification checks in polling stations.

- Police are engaged to support enforcement of the requirements.

Activities:

- Local authorities and the Electoral Commission to deliver communication campaigns to raise awareness.

- Local authorities staff provided guidance and training on how to deliver the requirements.

- Polling station staff provided guidance and training on how to deliver the requirements.

- Local authorities have systems in place to implement the VAC application process.

- Provisions are in place in polling stations for voters to show their identification in private should they wish to.

- Polling station staff carry out voter identification checks according to legislation.

- Polling station staff record voters turned away and those who return according to legislation.

Outputs:

- Electors are aware of the requirements, understand what is accepted identification, and remember to bring accepted identification to polling stations.

- In person voters who present accepted identification and have it checked are able to vote.

- Electors without accepted photographic identification, who want to vote in person, either apply for the VAC by the deadline or obtain another form of accepted identification.

- Local authorities are able to process VAC applications (and produce temporary VACs as needed) and these are delivered to or collected by electors in time for elections.

- Private areas and other support provisions in polling stations are used by those who need them.

Outcomes:

- Local authorities feel confident delivering the requirements and applying them in accordance with the legislation.

- Polling station staff feel confident delivering the requirements and applying them in accordance with the legislation.

- The policy is accessible to all electors.

- Electors are not deterred from voting as a result of the requirements.

- Voters remain satisfied with the process of voting in person.

- Personation that does occur is detected.

Impacts:

- Cases of personation decrease in the longer term.

- No new opportunities for electoral fraud arise elsewhere in the electoral system due to the introduction of the voter identification requirements.

- Polling station staff and electoral administrators are more confident in the electoral process and its protections from fraud.

- Electors have more trust and confidence in the integrity of our voting and democratic process.

- Public perception of electoral fraud occurring in polling stations decreases.

Accessibility theory of change

Inputs:

- Legislation that requires Returning Officers to make equipment available at polling stations to help voters with a disability to vote.

- Legislation that removes the current restrictions on who can act as a companion to voters with a disability.

- Electoral Commission produce guidance for local authorities on the range of support available for disabled voters in polling stations.

- Provisions are provided to local authorities to obtain equipment to help voters with a disability vote in polling stations.

- Local authorities are engaged on accessibility measures and how they should be implemented in accordance with the legislation and Electoral Commission guidance.

- Disability charities are engaged on accessibility measures.

Activities:

- Returning Officers engaged and provided with guidance on the appropriate equipment to provide in polling stations.

- Polling station staff provided guidance and training on how to deliver the requirements.

- Electoral Commission, local authorities and disability charities produce and distribute communications materials raising awareness among electors with a disability and those who support them.

- Returning Officers have systems in place to establish the required provision at each polling station.

Outputs:

- Electors with disabilities and those who support them are aware of the changes and the provisions that are available.

- Electors with a disability can contact Returning Officers to request provisions.

- Returning Officers engage with local disabled people, or organisations that represent them, regarding the support provided at polling stations.

- Polling stations follow guidance to provide suitable measures to support voters with a range of disabilities.

Outcomes:

- Disabled voters are supported to vote in person if they choose to.

- Polling station staff can offer support to voters with a disability and feel confident doing so.

- Voters with disabilities are more satisfied in the process of voting in polling stations.

Impacts:

- The process of voting meets the requirements of the Equality Act by ensuring reasonable adjustments for electors with disabilities.

- The number of voters with disabilities who vote in person is unaffected, or increases, as disabled voters feel they have the necessary support to vote in person.

- Electors with disabilities have greater confidence that they can vote in person if they choose to.

- Public perception of the accessibility of voting for those with disabilities improves.

Appendix 5: Voter identification: Contribution Claim Pathways

As with the theories of change, each contribution claim pathway is made up of:

- Inputs: what is needed for the intervention to take place?

- Activities: activities, actions and processes to take place to underpin effective delivery.

- Outputs: quantifiable deliverable resulting from the intervention activities.

- Outcomes: early 'consequential changes' from the outputs and activities.

- Impacts: longer 'consequential change' to meet the long-term goals.

Pathway for Contribution Claim 1: Local authority staff in electoral services teams meet the requirements of law

Inputs:

- Primary and secondary legislation introduce the requirement to bring accepted photographic identification to vote in polling stations.

- Local authorities are engaged on voter identification changes and how they should be implemented in accordance with the legislation.

- Provisions are provided to ensure electors without another form of accepted identification can obtain free of charge a Voter Authority Certificate (VAC).

- Digital platforms and services for VAC applications are built and meet minimum service requirements.

- There are sufficient numbers of staff in local authorities to process VAC applications and undertake communication campaigns.

- Provisions are provided to local authorities to ensure voters can show their identification in private in polling stations.

Activities:

- Local authorities staff provided guidance and training on how to deliver the requirements.

- Local authorities have systems in place to implement the VAC application process.

Outputs:

- Local authorities are able to process VAC applications (and produce temporary VACs as needed) and these are delivered to or collected by electors in time for elections.

Outcomes:

- Local authorities feel confident delivering the requirements and applying them in accordance with the legislation.

- The policy is accessible to all electors.

Impacts:

- Polling station staff and electoral administrators are more confident in the electoral process and its protections from fraud.

Pathway for Contribution Claim 2: Returning Officers and polling station staff meet the requirements of law

Inputs:

- Primary and secondary legislation introduce the requirement to bring accepted photographic identification to vote in polling stations.
- There are sufficient numbers of polling station staff to carry out new identification checks in polling stations.

Activities:

- Polling station staff provided guidance and training on how to deliver the requirements.
- Polling station staff carry out voter identification checks according to legislation.
- Polling station staff record voters turned away and those who return according to legislation.

Outputs:

- In person voters who present accepted identification and have it checked are able to vote.

Outcomes:

- Polling station staff feel confident delivering the requirements and applying them in accordance with the legislation.

Impacts:

- Polling station staff and electoral administrators are more confident in the electoral process and its protections from fraud.

Pathway for Contribution Claim 3: Communication campaigns raise electors' awareness of voter identification

Inputs:

- Local authorities are engaged on voter identification changes and how they should be implemented in accordance with the legislation.

Activities:

- Local authorities and the Electoral Commission to deliver communication campaigns to raise awareness.

Outputs:

- Electors are aware of the requirements, understand what is accepted identification, and remember to bring accepted identification to polling stations.

Outcomes:

- The policy is accessible to all electors.

- Electors are not deterred from voting as a result of the requirements.

Impacts:

- None relevant to this contribution claim.

Pathway to Contribution Claim 4: Communication campaigns raise electors' awareness of Voter Authority Certificates

Inputs:

- Local authorities are engaged on voter identification changes and how they should be implemented in accordance with the legislation.

- There are sufficient numbers of staff in local authorities to process VAC applications and undertake communication campaigns.

Activities:

- Local authorities and the Electoral Commission to deliver communication campaigns to raise awareness.

Outputs:

- Electors are aware of the requirements, understand what is accepted identification, and remember to bring accepted identification to polling stations.

- Electors without accepted photographic identification, who want to vote in person, either apply for the VAC by the deadline or obtain another form of accepted identification.

Outcomes:

- The policy is accessible to all electors.

- Electors are not deterred from voting as a result of the requirements.

Impacts:

- None relevant to this contribution claim.

Pathway to Contribution Claim 5: Electors who want a VAC, and are eligible, are able to obtain one

Inputs:

- Primary and secondary legislation introduce the requirement to bring accepted photographic identification to vote in polling stations.

- Local authorities are engaged on voter identification changes and how they should be implemented in accordance with the legislation.

- Provisions are provided to ensure electors without another form of accepted identification can obtain free of charge a Voter Authority Certificate (VAC).

- Digital platforms and services for VAC applications are built and meet minimum service requirements.

- There are sufficient numbers of staff in local authorities to process VAC applications and undertake communication campaigns.

Activities:

- Local authorities staff provided guidance and training on how to deliver the requirements.

- Local authorities have systems in place to implement the VAC application process.

Outputs:

- Electors without accepted photographic identification, who want to vote in person, either apply for the VAC by the deadline or obtain another form of accepted identification.

- Local authorities are able to process VAC applications (and produce temporary VACs as needed) and these are delivered to or collected by electors in time for elections.

Outcomes:

- Local authorities feel confident delivering the requirements and applying them in accordance with the legislation.

- The policy is accessible to all electors.

- Electors are not deterred from voting as a result of the requirements.

Impacts:

- None relevant to this contribution claim.

Pathway for Contribution Claim 6: Electors who want to have their identification checked in private are able to do so

Inputs:

- Primary and secondary legislation introduce the requirement to bring accepted photographic identification to vote in polling stations.

- Local authorities are engaged on voter identification changes and how they should be implemented in accordance with the legislation.

- Provisions are provided to local authorities to ensure voters can show their identification in private in polling stations.

- There are sufficient numbers of polling station staff to carry out new identification checks in polling stations.

Activities:

- Local authorities and the Electoral Commission to deliver communication campaigns to raise awareness.

- Polling station staff provided guidance and training on how to deliver the requirements.

- Provisions are in place in polling stations for voters to show their identification in private should they wish to.

- Polling station staff carry out voter identification checks according to legislation.

Outputs:

- In person voters who present accepted identification and have it checked are able to vote.

- Private areas and other support provisions in polling stations are used by those who need them.

Outcomes:

- Polling station staff feel confident delivering the requirements and applying them in accordance with the legislation.

- The policy is accessible to all electors.

- Electors are not deterred from voting as a result of the requirements.

- Voters remain satisfied with the process of voting in person.

Impacts:

- None relevant to this contribution claim.

Pathway for Contribution Claim 7: Personation is identified more easily and reduces in the longer-term

Inputs:

- Primary and secondary legislation introduce the requirement to bring accepted photographic identification to vote in polling stations.

- Local authorities are engaged on voter identification changes and how they should be implemented in accordance with the legislation.

- Digital platforms and services for VAC applications are built and meet minimum service requirements.

- There are sufficient numbers of polling station staff to carry out new identification checks in polling stations.

- Police are engaged to support enforcement of the requirements.

Activities:

- Polling station staff carry out voter identification checks according to legislation.

Outputs:

- In person voters who present accepted identification and have it checked are able to vote.

Outcomes:

- Personation that does occur is detected.

Impacts:

- Cases of personation decrease in the longer term.

- No new opportunities for electoral fraud arise elsewhere in the electoral system due to the introduction of the voter identification requirements.

- Polling station staff and electoral administrators are more confident in the electoral process and its protections from fraud.

- Electors have more trust and confidence in the integrity of our voting and democratic process.

- Public perception of electoral fraud occurring in polling stations decreases.

Pathway for Contribution Claim 8: Electors remain satisfied with the process and ease of in-person voting

Inputs:

- None relevant to this contribution claim.

Activities:

- None relevant to this contribution claim.

Outputs:

- None relevant to this contribution claim.

Outcomes:

- The policy is accessible to all electors.

- Electors are not deterred from voting as a result of the requirements.

- Voters remain satisfied with the process of voting in person.

Impacts:

- Electors have more trust and confidence in the integrity of our voting and democratic process.

Appendix 6: Accessibility: Contribution Claim Pathways

As with the theories of change and voter identification contribution claims, each contribution claim pathway is made up of:

- Inputs: what is needed for the intervention to take place?

- Activities: activities, actions and processes to take place to underpin effective delivery.

- Outputs: quantifiable deliverable resulting from the intervention activities.

- Outcomes: early 'consequential changes' from the outputs and activities.

- Impacts: longer 'consequential change' to meet the long-term goals.

Pathway for Contribution Claim 1: Local Authority staff in electoral services teams with Returning Officers meet the requirements of law

Inputs:

- Legislation that removes the current restrictions on who can act as a companion to voters with a disability.

- Electoral Commission produce guidance for local authorities on the range of support available for disabled voters in polling stations.

- Provisions are provided to local authorities to obtain equipment to help voters with a disability vote in polling stations.

Activities:

- None relevant to this contribution claim.

Outputs:

- None relevant to this contribution claim.

Outcomes:

- Disabled voters are supported to vote in person if they choose to.

Impacts:

- The process of voting meets the requirements of the Equality Act by ensuring reasonable adjustments for electors with disabilities.

Pathway for Contribution Claim 2: Returning Officers with polling station staff meet the requirements of law

Inputs:

- Legislation that requires Returning Officers to make equipment available at polling stations to help voters with a disability to vote.

- Legislation that removes the current restrictions on who can act as a companion to voters with a disability.

Activities:

- Returning Officers engaged and provided with guidance on the appropriate equipment to provide in polling stations.

- Polling station staff provided guidance and training on how to deliver the requirements.

- Returning Officers have systems in place to establish the required provision at each polling station.

Outputs:

- Electors with a disability can contact Returning Officers to request provisions.

- Returning Officers engage with local disabled people, or organisations that represent them, regarding the support provided at polling stations.

- Polling stations follow guidance to provide suitable measures to support voters with a range of disabilities.

Outcomes:

- Disabled voters are supported to vote in person if they choose to.

- Polling station staff can offer support to voters with a disability and feel confident doing so.

Impacts:

- The process of voting meets the requirements of the Equality Act by ensuring reasonable adjustments for electors with disabilities.

Pathway for Contribution Claim 3: Communications effectively raise awareness of reform amongst electors with disabilities and their carers

Inputs:

- None relevant to this contribution claim.

Activities:

- Electoral Commission, local authorities and disability charities produce and distribute communications materials raising awareness among electors with a disability and those who support them.

Outputs:

- Electors with disabilities and those who support them are aware of the changes and the provisions that are available.

Outcomes:

- None relevant to this contribution claim.

Impacts:

- The number of voters with disabilities who vote in person is unaffected, or increases, as disabled voters feel they have the necessary support to vote in person.

- Electors with disabilities have greater confidence that they can vote in person if they choose to.

Pathway for Contribution Claim 4: Disabled electors are enabled to vote in-person as a result of the new measures

Inputs:

- None relevant to this contribution claim.

Activities:

- None relevant to this contribution claim.

Outputs:

- None relevant to this contribution claim.

Outcomes:

- Disabled voters are supported to vote in person if they choose to.

- Voters with disabilities are more satisfied in the process of voting in polling stations.

Impacts:

- The number of voters with disabilities who vote in person is unaffected, or increases, as disabled voters feel they have the necessary support to vote in person.

- Electors with disabilities have greater confidence that they can vote in person if they choose to.

- Public perception of the accessibility of voting for those with disabilities improves.