

### Electoral Pilot - South Bucks District Council

- 1 In advance of the May 2007 local government elections, local authorities were invited to submit applications to undertake electoral pilots. 12 pilots took place for the polls in May 2007 which covered e-voting, e-counting, advance voting and signing for ballot papers at polling stations. South Bucks District Council submitted an application to pilot a series of innovations such as remote electronic voting using the internet and touch tone telephone in the two weeks preceding polling day and electronic counting. Legislation was required in the form of an Order for the pilots to take place.
- 2 The Electoral Commission carried out an evaluation of pilot and published the report in August 2007.
- 3 All electors who wished to vote by internet or telephone had to be registered for the service in advance and once the electors had opted for electronic voting, they were not able revert to traditional voting methods. The registration required name, address, date of birth, five-digit passcode and a signature. 5,261 electors opted to use e-voting, which was 5.7% of the total eligible electorate.
- 4 All registered electronic voters were sent a secure poll card containing a unique voter identification number (VIN). Electors could vote using the website address or freephone number included on the poll card. Electors had to enter their passcode and VIN to access the e-voting system and then were able to cast their vote.
- 5 Once an elector had voted using the e-system, a receipt was produced which showed that the ballot had been recorded successfully but did not show how the elector had voted. The e-system did not allow over-voting or for an unmarked or spoiled vote.
- 6 Ballots were stored in an encrypted form and were only decrypted at the count where the results from the electronic voting were inputted into the system for the e-counting.
- 7 E-counting was carried out using scanners and image recognition software. Changes to the design of the ballot paper were required.
- 8 The findings of the pilot where that scheme facilitated and encouraged voting. 16.3% of voters used the electronic voting methods, of which 76% used the internet option. User feedback was generally good but there were accessibility issues such as users forgetting their passcodes and there being a number of failed log on attempts.
- 9 The pilot scheme was found not to facilitate the counting of votes due to technical issues. It was estimated that without the technical issues the scanning would have saved 90 minutes of count time compared with manual counting.

- 10 There was some evidence that there was a slight impact on turnout but it was unlikely that electronic voting was the only cause of this. The majority of e-voters were predisposed to vote regardless of the method.
- 11 The pilot scheme provided e-voting services which were, in the main, easy to use. 87% of internet voters and 67% of telephone voters found the process easy.
- 12 There was no apparent increase in personation, other offences or examples of electoral malpractice.
- 13 The pilot scheme resulted in an increase in expenditure. The cost per elector who registered to vote electronically was £113.14 and the cost per e-vote was £239.24.

### **Electoral Pilots 2007 - Evaluations**

- 14 In August 2007, the EC published the key issues and conclusions of the May 2007 electoral pilot schemes.
- 15 E-counting was found to have mixed outcomes for the May 2007 pilots but it was concluded that there was the potential to increase efficiency and accuracy of the counting process. It was noted that pilot project had achieved its objective for e-counting and that the practices for its successful implementation had been identified. The EC did not recommend any further e-counting pilots.
- 16 The EC recommended that no further e-voting pilots were undertaken and that it could not support any further e-voting until there was a framework which included Individual Electoral Registration (IER), sufficient time to plan for the pilots, a central process in place to ensure secure and transparent e-voting solutions which have been tested and approved and a comprehensive electoral modernisation strategy.
- 17 The EC recommended that there should be no further pilots of signing for ballot papers in polling stations.
- 18 It was recommended that a Government decision should be made on advance voting as part of the wider electoral modernisation strategy.