

Xpress partners with Swindon Borough Council to deliver first fully digital register to be used in UK elections



Using technology to drive efficiency, Swindon's Electoral Services team have achieved significant benefits including valuable real-time information, reduced staffing requirements and paper use. The digital register has the capacity to revolutionise the voting experience and tackle ever declining voter turnout.

The challenge

Swindon Borough Council was one of five local authorities to participate in the Electoral Commission's voter identification pilot scheme in May 2018. The Swindon pilot required voters to produce their poll card in order to vote. Voters who did not bring their poll card could show other forms of ID including, passport, photo card driving licence, Northern Ireland Identity card, Biometric Immigration document or EEA Identity card. Another elector registered at the same polling station (with the required ID) could also attest to the identity of up to two other electors unable to show ID.

In order to conduct this pilot, Swindon Borough Council's Electoral Services team partnered with Xpress, the UK's leading provider of electoral management software, to deliver a digital register in all 102 polling stations. The project team had only a short time window of 4 months to design, build, user test, train staff and make sure voters knew what was required of them.



LGC Awards Recognition

This innovative project was recognised by the 2019 LGC Awards, being Highly Commended in the 'Driving Efficiency through Technology' category.

The solution – Digital Register

This was the first fully digital electoral register to be used in polling stations in the UK, replacing the traditional paper polling station register, absent vote and proxy voter lists. Poll cards featured a QR code which allowed polling station staff to quickly find electors or proxies by scanning their poll card, or by searching for their name or address. Using the digital register provided instant information, increasing the speed and efficiency of the process, which allowed electors to be processed more quickly, reducing queues and waiting times at polling stations. The digital register also significantly reduced paper usage, contributing to Swindon's wider aim to move from handling 15 million paper documents a year to just one million by 2021.

Key features of the digital register:

- ▶ Replaces the need for the traditional paper polling station register, absent vote and proxy voter lists
- ▶ Provides 360 degree vision of election day in real time
- ▶ Only contains the register for the specific polling station where it is used
- ▶ Records electors who have voted
- ▶ Guides staff through the process of issuing ballot papers and ensures only eligible electors are issued a ballot paper
- ▶ Accommodates election day clerical changes and emergency proxies
- ▶ Produces a marked copy of the electoral register in digital format at the close of poll
- ▶ Enables electoral teams to demonstrate auditable integrity and performance of polling staff

"The project successfully achieved its primary aims to facilitate the implementation of the voter ID requirement and ensure the efficient issuing of ballot papers to eligible voters. It also delivered significant additional benefits, from valuable real-time information to reduced staffing requirements and paper use. It is an outstanding example of a partnership between a local authority and a private sector supplier successfully delivering efficiency through technology."

Matt Box, Electoral Services Manager,
Swindon Borough Council



The outcomes

Increased turnout, fewest people turned away

Of the five pilot areas, Swindon had the fewest people turned away from the polling station and the biggest increase in turnout. Turnout in 2018 was higher (39%) than the 34% recorded at the last comparable elections (2016 local government elections).

Easy to use and instant access to information

Using the digital register provided instant information, increasing the speed and efficiency of the process, which allowed electors to be processed more quickly, reducing queues and waiting times at polling stations. 86% of polling station staff surveyed who had worked at a previous election in Swindon said they felt this election was either easier (48%) or about the same (38%) as previous years.

Reduced paper use

The digital register also significantly reduced paper use, saving the printing of 8000 documents and contributing to Swindon's wider aim to move from handling 15 million paper documents a year to just one million by 2021.

Reduced staffing requirement

While Swindon had not deployed additional staff in polling stations for the pilot, feedback from the Returning Officer and Electoral Services team after polling day concluded that 'with the process for scanning poll cards working well, as it was, it would have been possible to manage with fewer staff'.

Valuable real time information

The digital register provided 360 degree vision of election day in real time – something that has never been done before. This valuable real-time information offers much needed insight and meaningful statistics for use by the Electoral Commission and the Cabinet Office to evaluate the pilot scheme and inform any future UK legislation. In its evaluation of the pilot scheme in Swindon, the Electoral Commission stated:

"The IT used in polling stations worked well. There were very few problems reported by staff and this agrees with our observations in Swindon on polling day. The Returning Officer told us that, as a result of the IT system, the additional information available throughout polling day was useful, for example on levels of turnout at individual polling stations. This would be an even more helpful facility for electoral staff at higher turnout polls where it could be used to allocate resources as needed on polling day."

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degree vision of election day

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