

SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Overview and Scrutiny Committee

DATE: 12th April 2018

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WARDS: All

PART I **FOR COMMENT AND CONSIDERATION**

VOTES AT 16

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 For the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to debate current proposals to reduce the age for the national franchise to 16 and consider suitable methods to indicate its support or otherwise.

2. Recommendations

That the Committee:

- a) discuss the themes in this report and indicate whether they are supportive of a change in the voting age.
- b) recommend as to the appropriate method to represent their views on a change in the voting age.

3. Other Implications

(a) Financial

There are no financial implications of this report.

(b) Risk Management

Recommendation	Risk/Threat/Opportunity	Mitigation(s)
Recommend as to the appropriate method to represent the Committee's views on a change in the voting age.	Overview and Scrutiny Committee's remit results in recommendations not being taken any further	Overview and Scrutiny Committee may wish to consider escalating the matter (e.g. motion to Full Council)

(c) Human Rights Act and Other Legal Implications

The Representation of the People Act 1969 stipulates that the voting age in national elections is 18. Any variation to this would require national legislation; progress on this is discussed in sections 4.1 – 4.3.

(d) Equalities Impact Assessment

This report does not require an Equality Impact Assessment.

4. **Supporting Information**

- 4.1 At present, the law in the United Kingdom stipulates that the voting age is 18. Whilst there have been variations to this (particularly since the Scottish Referendum of 2014, where 16 years olds were given the vote and are now allowed to participate in elections for local government and the Scottish Parliament), none of these have been effective in England.
- 4.2 However, there have been some moves to widen the Scottish policy. The Wales Act 2017 has been effective for over a year, and devolves the decision on the voting age to the Welsh National Assembly. Given the Welsh Government's support for a change in the age to 16, the Assembly is being asked to vote on this change later in 2018. This would allow 16 and 17 year olds to vote in Council elections, although would not apply to the Welsh Assembly or the General Election.
- 4.3 Meanwhile, the House of Commons received a Private Member's Bill (led by Jim McMahon, MP for Oldham West and Royton) on the matter. Entitled The Representation of the People (Young People's Enfranchisement and Education) Bill 2017 – 19, it was introduced to the House in November 2017 and will resume debate on its second reading on 11th May 2018. The Slough Youth Parliament has also signalled its support for a change in the voting age, launching a campaign on the issue in February 2018.
- 4.4 As a result, members have requested that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee set aside time to clarify its views on the matter. It is recognised that the Committee does not have the capability to determine Slough Borough Council's stance on the franchise. However, the Committee may wish to provide a view for wider consideration.
- 4.5 A national debate on this has also been requested by the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee. This is a Select Committee of the House of Commons, and has requested that a national discussion of the issue of voting age be held.
- 4.6 In terms of statistics, the number of 16 – 17 year olds in the United Kingdom at present was estimated to be 1,490,000 in 2016. However, the proportion of these who would be able to vote given the qualifications on voting rights is not entirely apparent.
- 4.7 The potential impact on overall voter turnout is also not predictable. Whilst it has traditionally been the case that younger voters are less likely to vote than their older counterparts, some (although not all) studies of the 2017 General Election indicated that this trend did not apply to last summer's vote. Equally, youth

participation in the 2016 Referendum had been higher than historical trends had suggested (although still lagged behind other age groups). Evidence from Scottish votes involving 16 and 17 year olds has not indicated a major impact on turnout. However, this evidence is limited given the small number of elections involved.

5. **Comments of other Committees**

5.1 This report has not been taken by any other Committee of Slough Borough Council.

5.2 At Full Council on 21st April 2015, the following motion was taken:

This Council resolves to:

- Support the recent proposals to extend the franchise in all elections to 16 and 17 year olds as they are knowledgeable and passionate about the world in which they live and are as capable of engaging in the democratic system.
- Ask our local MP and the current coalition government, and any government formed after May's election, to back the policy announced by the Labour Party, and extend the franchise in all elections to 16 and 17 year olds alongside strong citizenship education.
- Recognise the important steps taken this year to establish a Youth Parliament and commit to working with them alongside Slough's schools and colleges to enhance citizenship education for all young people in Slough.
- Continue working with community groups, faith organisations, residential associations and other groups and people to make the electoral register as complete as possible.

This motion was passed by 31 votes to 6 (with 2 abstentions). As a result of this, a letter was sent to Fiona Mactaggart MP supporting the proposals and asking for her support.

6. **Conclusion**

6.1 The Committee is being asked to debate the voting age and its views on extending the franchise to 16 and 17 year olds. Once this is clarified, the Chair will ensure that progress is made on the next steps to take on the matter

7. **Appendices Attached**

None

8. **Background Papers**

Agenda Papers and Minutes, Council 15th April 2015