

## SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL

**REPORT TO:** Council **DATE:** 24<sup>th</sup> April 2018

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**WARDS:** All

### PART I FOR DECISION

#### RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FROM ITS MEETING HELD ON 12TH APRIL 2018 – B VOTES AT 16

#### 1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To consider a recommendation from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 12<sup>th</sup> April 2018 on a proposal to reduce the age for the national franchise to 16.

#### 2. Recommendations

The Committee recommends that the Council resolve to support the principle of reducing the national voting age to 16; take an active leadership role in any appropriate campaign(s) to further this objective; and requests scrutiny to establish a task and finish group to examine and propose practical measures to improve the security of the ballot, including potentially voter identification, and promote youth participation.

#### 3. Other Implications

##### (a) Financial

There are no financial implications of this report.

##### (b) Risk Management

Recommendation	Risk/Threat/Opportunity	Mitigation(s)
To support the principle of reducing the voting age to 16 and exploring other practical measures to improve the security of elections and increase youth participation.	If the national campaign is successful, there are opportunities to increase the engagement of young people in the democratic process and identify practical measures to address concerns about electoral fraud.	The establishment of a task and finish group will ensure that the specific risks and opportunities are carefully considered.

(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 11<sup>th</sup> 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 requested that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee set aside time to clarify its views on the matter. It was recognised that the Committee did not have the capability to determine Slough Borough Council's stance on the franchise and it decided to make a recommendation to Council to agree the authority's position on this matter.
- 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 At its meeting on 12th April 2018, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee discussed the possibility of supporting a reduction in the voting age to 16. This is in the context of the various developments discussed elsewhere in this report. In broad terms, the Committee was supportive of such a change in the franchise. They stated that it would encourage youth participation in public life and ensure that work of bodies such as the Slough Youth Parliament was supported by allowing 16 and 17 year olds the chance to take part in local and national elections.
- 5.2 However, the Committee did ask for other matters to be considered alongside this. Issues such as voter ID and security, possible use of parental pressure to point young people towards voting for specified candidates and the involvement of the Slough Youth Parliament on matters beyond turning out for elections were raised as matters to consider. Given this, the Committee requested that a Working Group be established to consider a range of key questions and Slough's response to them.
- 5.2 Members are also reminded of the decision of the Council on 21<sup>st</sup> April 2015, at which 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 Council is being asked to consider the recommendation of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee in relation to the voting age and its views on extending the franchise to 16 and 17 year olds.

7. **Appendices Attached**

None.

8. **Background Papers**

None.