Contribution from Lambeth Council

Dear Digital Democracy Commission

We hope it is not too late to register the views of Lambeth's electoral and democratic services team. We have discussed the issues at length amongst ourselves and with colleagues in political parties and in corresponding teams in other boroughs.

Please find our local response below:

What are the potential benefits and drawbacks of online voting (eg, voting via the internet using a computer or mobile device)?
1. We have conducted surveys with various groups of voters regarding their views on our electoral services, and by far the most common request is for online voting.
2. We believe this will be extremely popular with many groups of existing voters.
3. We also believe it may be an extremely popular option for people who do not currently vote.
4. The benefits are clearly a more accessible service to give people more choice and ability to cast their vote.
5. Potential drawbacks include a lack of trust in digital solutions, and various risks associated with the security and performance of digital solutions.

What impact, if any, would online voting have on voter turnout?
1. We believe it will not decrease turnout in any way
2. We also believe it has the potential to increase turnout.

Would online voting increase the 'digital divide' or increase accessibility in elections?
1. So long as there was no reduction in other options for casting a vote then the digital divide would not be a problem.
2. If all votes had to be made online then a simple solution would be to use digital products within polling stations.
3. Postal votes should continue to enable voter choice.

What are the cost implications of online voting?
1. The initial costs may be significant.
2. Some UK companies already provide this service and will be able to provide estimates.

What are the advantages and disadvantages to using electronic voting machines in polling stations instead of paper ballots?
1. Voter confidence. Some people will prefer this method and some people will not. Trust issues will go both ways. Many people have questioned the legitimacy of election results using both manual paper counting and electronic counting. People will always question the result if it is not what they want to see.
2. The cost of machines, storage, network, installation, security etc – these are all potential problems but nothing that cannot be overcome
3. Electronic voting might be quicker and might enable a quicker result

Would electronic voting at the ballot box be a useful step towards online voting?
1. Yes.

What can be learned from e-voting experiences in other countries?
1. Don't know.

What safeguards would be needed to reassure the public that their digital vote was secure?
1. There should be tests of the system.
2. Some contests should be digital and others manual – where the results are as expected then that should encourage confidence.

Would it be possible to guarantee the integrity of the ballot?
1. It is never possible to guarantee the integrity of any ballot. A lot of electoral administration involves mitigating risk. This would be another issue open to various risks and opportunities. Balancing those is the key to successful management.

Regards

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