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Questions



**LOCAL ELECTIONS PILOT SCHEMES 2007**

**MAIN RESEARCH REPORT**

## **Acknowledgments**

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## 2. Executive summary

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Evaluating the relative success of the 2007 electoral pilot schemes from a public opinion perspective is a rather difficult task given the number of contradictions involved. For example, *users* of new voting arrangements were obviously thrilled with the choice and convenience afforded them, given the high levels of satisfaction associated with the method chosen. Moreover, many people think new methods should be rolled out to other elections. Yet on this occasion, so few people actually used these methods that the overall contribution to increased convenience and the associated impact on turnout is likely to have been negligible, therein rather defeating the point.

Yet perhaps we should be careful not to confuse behaviour with attitudes at such an early stage of development. Of course the public like to have choice – not only when it comes to voting but in most of the daily decisions they make. Of course people tend to trust what they know, and adapt slowly to what they don't. From this perspective we might expect new arrangements to catch on with glacial speed, but if the history of postal voting is anything to go by, catch on they will.

The public opinion research does much to sustain this postulation:

- Satisfaction among (the small numbers of) e-voters is higher than it is among polling station and postal voters
- Six in ten members of the general public across the pilot scheme areas think that Internet voting should be available in some form at future elections, with half saying the same as far as telephone voting is concerned
- Six in ten think that polling station advance voting will help to increase turnout, rising to 90% among those who used some such facility
- The signature requirement is considered to be fine as far as it goes, but many feel it should graduate to some form of signature checking

Yet a mere scratch on the surface of this data reveals uncomfortable truths. The provision of advance polling stations is a case in point. Without doubt, those people who took advantage of these stations very much appreciated the opportunity, but the stations were a great convenience to a tiny minority. More than this, however, they were a convenience to people who say they would mostly have voted anyway (74%).

In fact, the same could be said for Internet and telephone voting, which counter-intuitively, also appear to have preached to the converted. Indeed the profile of Internet voters (although based on small sample sizes) looks remarkably similar to that of all voters – disproportionately old, and disproportionately interested in politics. Some of the statistical work reported here does indicate that younger, disinterested voters do like the idea of e-voting, but actually getting round to casting an Internet vote is another matter for them entirely.

Telephone voting is viewed more suspiciously than Internet voting, and people appear less inclined to embrace it. Not only that, but its appeal on this occasion was limited to a relatively elderly demographic.

Election candidates and agents share many of these concerns, and heap a few more on top. Perhaps the most serious is the charge that democracy is being compromised given their inability to scrutinise e-votes at the count process.

This brings us to the electronic counting pilots, travails of which have been well documented elsewhere. This report can do little to assist their beleaguered status. It might well be thought that multiple e-count abandonment in May rather obviates the need to report the views of candidates and agents on the efficacy of the process. Yet their views are not solely conditioned by the failure of process, but also by the failure of political theatre. The excitement of traditional hand counts is something that candidates and agents cherish, and electronic counting was universally thought to have killed the atmosphere of the count. This emotional response should not be discounted when full evaluations of electronic counts take place – take away what little excitement candidates perceive themselves to have, and even fewer may stand in the future.

The cliché about leading a horse to water but not being able to make it drink would seem to be highly appropriate as far as these electoral pilots are concerned. The electorate has few qualms in demanding choice but then opting for their most familiar method. It seems reasonable to assume that if new arrangements for voting are to be a success, then electoral administrators will need to play the long game.

### 3. Background to the pilot schemes

The piloting of new electoral arrangements has been a feature of UK elections since the Representation of the People Act 2000 permitted local authorities in England and Wales to submit proposals to carry out some such scheme. Various voting and e-counting pilot schemes have subsequently been adopted across different elections, with the local authority elections of 2007 witnessing six different types of pilot scheme across twelve different local authority areas. Most of these schemes were aimed at improving voter convenience and hence helping to raise turnout, although one (electronic counting) was non-voter facing and more closely linked to the accuracy and efficiency of the count process.

The thirteen local authorities being evaluated, and the schemes implemented in each are shown in Table 1; combined, they imply a total of 26 different variations of pilot schemes after taking into account multiple piloting in single local authority areas.

**Table 3.1. Location and type of electoral pilot 2007**

	Advance voting	Signature checking	Internet voting	Telephone voting	Electronic counting <sup>1</sup>	Vote anywhere facility
Bedford BC	✓	✓			✓	
Breckland DC					✓	
Broxbourne Council	✓	✓				
Dover DC					✓	
Gateshead Council	✓	✓				
Rushmoor BC			✓			
Sheffield City	✓		✓	✓		
Shrewsbury & Atcham BC	✓		✓	✓		
South Bucks DC			✓	✓	✓	
Stratford-on-Avon DC & Warwick DC					✓	
Sunderland City	✓	✓				
Swindon BC	✓		✓	✓		✓

#### 1. Advance voting

Advance voting was offered in seven of the thirteen local authorities piloting new arrangements, making it the single most widely offered pilot scheme. Registered voters were able to cast a paper (or in the cases of Shrewsbury & Atcham and Swindon, an electronic) ballot before polling day on May 3<sup>rd</sup>. The 2007 schemes sought to further test how voting in different locations and at different times could enhance the voting process - similar schemes took place in 2006, on a limited basis in 2003, and in 2002 and 2000.

The availability of advance voting opportunities varied considerably, however, both in terms of the number of advance polling stations set up in each area and the number of days they were open. The areas and nature of each scheme were as follows:

<sup>1</sup> Non voter facing

➤ Bedford

Bedford had a single advance voter station open, at the Civic Centre. It was open on the weekend of the 27-28<sup>th</sup> April only, 9am-5pm. A total of 377 voters (1.05% of all votes cast in the borough) used the facility over the two days. ICM interviewers collected a total of 68 interviews among them, using an exit poll methodology.

➤ Broxbourne

Advance voting in Broxbourne centred on three locations: Hoddesdon One Stop Shop, Cheshunt Council Offices and Waltham Cross One Stop Shop. ICM interviewers were present at all three locations, collecting a total of 297 interviews with advanced voters using an exit poll methodology (1,412 advance votes were cast in total across the three locations, 6.8% of all votes cast locally).

➤ Gateshead

Advance voting occurred in Gateshead at a single, town centre location (Civic Centre) on 23<sup>rd</sup> April – 2<sup>nd</sup> May. ICM interviewers were present on each of the nine opening days, collecting a total of 171 interviews with advanced voters using an exit poll methodology (286 advance votes were cast in total, 0.53% of all votes cast in Gateshead).

➤ Sheffield

In Sheffield, a single, city centre location (Town Hall) was open from 26<sup>th</sup> to 29<sup>th</sup> April. ICM interviewers were present on four opening days, collecting a total of 258 interviews with advanced voters using an exit poll methodology (909 advance votes were cast, 0.67% of all votes cast here).

➤ Shrewsbury & Atcham

In Shrewsbury & Atcham, advance voting was available in conjunction with electronic voting. Voters could vote in advance at one of three designated advance voting stations: Pride Hill Shopping Centre, Bomere Heath Village Hall and Bayston Hill Memorial Hall. Access to the Village Hall stations was limited to a single morning or afternoon, although Pride Hill Shopping Centre allowed access for the period 21<sup>st</sup>-29<sup>th</sup> April. A total of 125 voters who had used the advance voting stations were interviewed by ICM across this period (270 kiosk advance votes were cast, 1.58% of all local votes).

➤ Sunderland

Advance voting at three central locations occurred from 23<sup>rd</sup> April – 3<sup>rd</sup> May inclusive. The three locations used were the City Library, Washington Library and Houghton Library and Customer Service Centre. ICM interviewers were present at all three locations, collecting a total of 178 interviews with advanced voters using an exit poll methodology (1,162 advance votes were cast here, representing 1.6% of all votes in the local council election).

➤ Swindon

Swindon permitted advance electronic-only voting at five library locations. ICM was unable to generate exit interviews given the difficulty of establishing whether people had been in the facilities to vote, or to borrow a book. Advance voting in Swindon was delayed by one day due to connectivity and application problems. It began on 27<sup>th</sup> April.

## **2. Signature requirement**

The Electoral Administration Act 2006 included provision for a requirement for electors to provide a signature before being issued with their ballot papers in polling stations. While no checking of the signature actually takes place at present, the intention of the scheme is to inspire confidence in the security and veracity of the voting process.

The signature requirement pilot schemes in May were fore-runners of the possible full implementation of the signature requirement at future elections. With this in mind, four local authorities piloted signature checking in these elections, with slight variations in process applying. The areas and nature of each scheme was as follows:

### ➤ Bedford

The provision to collect voter signatures prior to the provision of ballot forms applied to all polling stations in the local authority area (a total of 125 polling stations were used to pilot the signature requirement in Bedford).

ICM stationed interviewers at 10 polling stations, selected with a probability proportionate to size. In so doing, we generated a total of 246 interviews using an exit poll methodology.

### ➤ Broxbourne

The collection of signatures only applied to three advance polling stations, which were open on 25<sup>th</sup> April – 2<sup>nd</sup> May. The signature requirement was not enforced at any Broxbourne polling station on May 3<sup>rd</sup> itself.

ICM interviewers generated a total of 183 interviews with voters who provided a signature at these polling stations, using an exit poll methodology.

### ➤ Gateshead

In Gateshead, signatures were only collected at a single advance polling station at a town centre location (Civic Centre) location on 23<sup>rd</sup> April – 2<sup>nd</sup> May. The signature requirement was not enforced at any Gateshead polling station on May 3<sup>rd</sup> itself.

ICM stationed interviewers at the single location on three separate days, generating a total of 36 signature check interviews.

### ➤ Sunderland

Signature checking with voters at all polling stations took place on the day of the election. A series of 10 x 6 hour interviewer shifts were carried out to get feedback on this pilot scheme, generating 270 interviews with voters who had signed for their ballot forms. Polling stations were randomly selected with a probability of selection proportionate to size.

In total, ICM collected 735 interviews with voters who had signed for their ballot papers across the four local authority areas, using the same exit methodology in each case.

### **3. Internet Voting**

In 2003 The Electoral Commission stated that “in relation to electronic voting, we are clearly some way from the prospect of an e-enabled election” but work continues to test the efficacy of various forms of e-voting arrangements.

In 2007, use of the Internet as a voting channel occurred in five separate local authority areas. They included:

- Rushmoor (3,825 Internet votes cast, 17.8% of all votes in the borough)
- Sheffield (3,690 Internet votes cast, 2.7% of all votes cast here)
- Shrewsbury and Atcham (1,075 Internet votes cast, 6.3% of all votes)
- South Bucks (1,735 Internet votes cast, 76% of all votes)
- Swindon (10,142 e-votes cast)

An Internet vote could, of course, have been cast in a private location such as home or work, or a public location such as a library or Internet café. A further option for some (Swindon voters) was the opportunity to vote electronically in a controlled environment provided by the local council for the purposes of pilot scheme i.e. an advanced internet voting station. However, this report deals with private/public internet voting only i.e. those voters who applied for an internet vote and cast their vote in a private/public location.

### **4. Telephone voting**

Telephone voting was also tested in 2003 and 2002, and was generally considered to have fared well on various public opinion measures. In 2007, it was piloted in four local authority areas, which included:

- Sheffield (931 telephone votes, 0.7% of all votes cast in the city )
- Swindon (1,423 telephone votes cast)
- Shrewsbury and Atcham (403 telephone votes cast, 2.4% of all votes cast here)
- South Bucks (543 telephone votes cast, 24% of all votes cast)

### **5. Vote anywhere**

The ability of voters to cast an electronic vote in any polling station within their local authority area only occurred in Swindon, and was little used. While it obviously does constitute a pilot scheme in its own right, it was almost impossible to locate and interview voters who utilised this option, and as such, ICM has little to report on public attitudes towards it.

### **6. Electronic counting**

Among the proposed pilot schemes, this alone is defined as ‘non-voter facing’, being a count facility for votes cast. Systems have been extensively piloted in previous English local authority elections, including those in 2000, 2002, 2003 and 2006 GLA elections and Scotland elections. On these occasions, electronic counting has been relatively well received by electoral administrators, with the perception being that electronic count systems do improve the accuracy and efficiency of the count process.

As we say, this pilot scheme type differed from the others being trialled in that it had no obvious potential to impact on voter behaviour (particularly but not exclusively in terms of likelihood to vote) either in the run up to or on the day of the election.

Electronic counting was piloted across five different local authorities. The aim of the scheme was twofold: to improve the accuracy and efficiency of the count, and to try and reduce the costs associated with the count.

The five authorities taking part in the trial were:

- Bedford
- Breckland
- Dover
- South Bucks
- Stratford & Warwick combined count

### **The role of The Electoral Commission**

The Electoral Commission is required by law to evaluate each pilot scheme, and must consider whether each:

- Helped to make voting or counting the votes easier
- Helped to improve turnout
- Helped to facilitate voting
- Led to a reduction or increase in electoral fraud
- Led to a reduction or increase in the cost of voting

In line with these statutory reporting requirements, the Electoral Commission wished to conduct a research programme that provided robust, informative and representative data on public attitudes towards the pilot schemes described above. It commissioned ICM to undertake a programme of such research, which combined quantitative and qualitative methods to meet the stated purpose. This report is designed to help inform the Commission's own statutory report on each pilot scheme, reports which have to be published within three months of the election taking place.

#### 4. Research methodology

The diverse nature of the 2007 pilot schemes necessitated the use of a multi-methodological approach to the research programme. In total, ICM undertook five separate quantitative surveys and simultaneously conducted a total of 36 depth interviews with election candidates and agents, and another 38 depths with voters who used specific pilot arrangements.

The full methodological approach is as follows:

##### 1. Main telephone survey

ICM Research interviewed a total of 2,412 adults aged 18+ by telephone across the 9 voter-facing pilot areas on 4<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> May 2007. An average of 268 interviews was conducted in each pilot location, broken down as follows:

**Table 4.1. Distribution of interviews on the main telephone survey**

	N
Bedford	268
Broxbourne	269
Gateshead	272
Rushmoor	267
Sheffield	267
Shrewsbury & Atcham	264
South Bucks	268
Sunderland	265
Swindon	272
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,412</b>

The sample structure was purposively constructed and controlled in order to meet the requirements of the Commission. Chief among these was the need to generate representative data in each area, while also ensuring that half the sample was comprised of voters, with the other half being non-voters. This is an internal contradiction in survey methodology (given turnout itself was not 50%) that ICM attempted to overcome with various methodological techniques that have been found to work well.

The prospect of turnout below 40% implied that a nationally representative survey would fail to produce sufficient numbers of voters for analysis purposes. However, to purposively seek a sample of voters or non-voters also implies that the sample would not be representative of the UK population. In order to overcome this, ICM interviewed approximately 60% of each regional sample in a representative way and then interviewed a sample of voters OR non-voters in order to achieve a final sample that contained equal numbers of each. Then initial 60% were weighted to the profile of people living in each pilot area. The remaining interviews were each given a weight of '1'. As the methodological approach is not 'purely representative' in the way most opinion polls are, the reader is advised to bear this in mind when considering any "all respondents" top line findings in this report, or cross-area top line comparisons. Other comparisons – such as voter versus non-voter or demographic comparisons – are entirely valid and no caveats apply.

## **2. South Bucks Telephone & Internet voter boost**

Given the likely low incidence of Internet and telephone voting, attempts were made to generate interviews with people who registered to vote using one of these pilot methods in South Bucks. Samples were provided to ICM of people who had registered and had previously agreed to be subsequently contacted for research purposes, representing about one in five registered Internet/telephone voters in the area.

Attempts were made to interview all voters whose details were passed to us.

ICM administered the same survey online and over the telephone on 4<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> May 2007. A total of 66 telephone voters and 139 Internet voters were interviewed. A total of 109 were interviewed using a telephone methodology and 96 were interviewed using the online questionnaire (implying that 90 of the 139 online voters were interviewed online, and 60 of the 66 telephone voters were interviewed over the telephone).

## **3. Swindon boost**

In order to provide additional robustness and detail to the Swindon pilot area, 301 telephone interviews with voters were conducted on 4<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> May 2007. A pure random telephone approach was adopted, using a random selection of telephone numbers allied with the 'next birthday' rule for in home respondent selection.

## **4. Advanced voters exit survey**

A total of 1,097 interviews with people who voted using one of the advance voting polling stations were conducted on 21<sup>st</sup> April-2<sup>nd</sup> May 2007. Interviewers were stationed outside the polling station and attempted to interview the 'next' voter after the completion of their previous interview.

Details of the advance voting facilities have been described above. The breakdown of interviews across the six areas is as follows:

**Table 4.2. Distribution of interviews on the advanced voter exit survey**

	N
Bedford	68
Broxbourne	297
Gateshead	171
Sheffield	258
Shrewsbury & Atcham	125
Sunderland	178
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,097</b>

### 5. Signature requirement exit survey

A total of 735 interviews with people who provided a signature before receiving their ballot forms at polling stations were conducted on 24<sup>th</sup> April-3<sup>rd</sup> May 2007. Interviewers were stationed outside the polling station and attempted to interview the 'next' voter after the completion of their previous interview.

Details of the signature requirement voting facilities have been described above. The breakdown of interviews across the six areas is as follows:

**Table 4.3. Distribution of interviews on the signature requirement exit survey**

	N
Bedford	246
Broxbourne	183
Gateshead	36
Sunderland	270
<b>Total</b>	<b>735</b>

#### Technical information

It should be remembered at all times that only a sample of the actual population has been interviewed. Consequently, all results are subject to sampling tolerances, which mean that not all differences are statistically significant.

We can, however, predict the variation between the sample results and the 'true' values (if everyone in the population had been interviewed) from knowledge of the size of the samples on which the results are based and the number of times answers are given. The confidence with which we can make this prediction is usually chosen to be 95% - that is, the chances are 95 times out of 100 that the 'true' value will fall within a specified range. The table below illustrates the predicted ranges for different sample sizes and the percentage results at the 95% confidence level.

**Table 4.4. Sampling tolerances**

SAMPLE SIZE	SAMPLING TOLERANCES APPLICABLE TO %'S AT OR NEAR		
	10% OR 90% + / -	30% OR 70% + / -	50% + / -
100 interviews	5.88%	8.98%	9.80%
267 interviews	3.60%	5.50%	6.00%
500 interviews	2.63%	4.02%	4.38%
1000 interviews	1.86%	2.84%	3.10%
1500 interviews	1.52%	2.32%	2.53%
2412 interviews	1.20%	1.83%	2.00%

For example, with a sample size of 267 interviews where 50% (the worst case scenario as far as tolerances are concerned) give a particular answer, we can be 95% certain that the 'true' value will fall within the range of 6.0% from the sample result.

When results are compared between separate groups within a sample (say, between men and women), different results may be obtained. The difference may be 'real' or it may occur by chance (because a sample rather than the entire population has been interviewed). To test if the difference is a real one, i.e. if it is 'statistically significant', we again have to know the size of the samples, the % giving a certain answer and the degree of confidence chosen. If we assume the 95% confidence level again, the differences between the results of two separate groups must be greater than the values given in the table below:

**Table 4.5 Tests for statistical significance**

SAMPLE SIZES TO BE COMPARED	DIFFERENCES REQUIRED TO BE STATISTICALLY SIGNIFICANT AT OR NEAR		
	10% OR 90% + / -	30% OR 70% + / -	50% + / -
100 and 100	8.3%	12.7%	13.9%
200 and 200	5.9%	8.9%	9.8%
267 and 267	5.1%	7.8%	8.5%
500 and 500	3.7%	5.7%	6.2%
1000 and 1000	2.6%	4.0%	4.4%

**Table 4.6. Social class definitions**

Most market research projects classify the population into social grades, usually on the basis of the Market Research Society occupational groupings (MRS, 1991).

They are defined as follows:

A.	Professionals such as doctors, solicitors or dentists, chartered people like architects; fully qualified people with a large degree of responsibility such as senior civil servants, senior business executives and high ranking grades within the armed forces. Retired people, previously grade A, and their widows/wers.
B.	People with very senior jobs such as university lecturers, heads of local government departments, middle management in business organizations, bank managers, police inspectors, and upper grades in the armed forces.
C1.	All others doing non-manual jobs, including nurses, technicians, pharmacists, salesmen, publicans, clerical workers, police sergeants and middle ranks of the armed forces.
C2.	Skilled manual workers, foremen, manual workers with special qualifications such as lorry drivers, security officers and lower grades of the armed forces.
D.	Semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers, including labourers and those serving apprenticeships. Machine minders, farm labourers, lab assistants and postmen.
E.	Those on the lowest levels of subsistence including all those dependent upon the state long-term. Casual workers, and those without a regular income.

### **Qualitative research**

The qualitative aspect to the research involved tele-depth interviews with selected candidates and agents plus voters who used specific piloted methods. Interviews with candidates (18) and agents (18) were split as follows:

- 3 per pilot area (including electronic count-only pilot schemes)
- 18 interviews with candidates, split equally between the three main parties and a combination of other parties
- 18 agents on the same basis as the candidates
- Each pilot scheme being covered in proportion to incidence.

The framework for the tele-depth interviews with voters (38) followed a similar design. The table below summarises the distribution of interviews across the different voter and pilot area types.

**Table 4.7. Number of voter depths by scheme and area**

	Advance voting	Signature checking	Internet voting	Telephone voting	TOTAL
Bedford BC	2	2			4
Broxbourne Council	2	2			4
Gateshead Council	2	2			4
Rushmoor BC			2		2
Sheffield City	2		2	2	6
Shrewsbury & Atcham BC	2		2	2	6
South Bucks DC			2	2	4
Sunderland City	2	2			4
Swindon BC			2	2	4
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>38</b>

Depth interview voters were sourced from the quantitative surveys being conducted simultaneously. For example, the details of advance voters who were interviewed at polling station exits were asked whether or not they would be willing to participate in further research. If they were, their details were forwarded to the qualitative recruitment team at ICM. All quantitative surveys were used for this purpose.

## 5. Advance voting pilot report

### Awareness of advance voting facilities

Advance voting at polling stations has to be taken in the context of the other new arrangements for voting that were also being piloted in the May elections. General unprompted awareness on whether or not a participating local authority was actually piloting *any* scheme (that is, no indication was given that it was) appears to be correlated with which type of scheme was on offer locally. This especially relates to the piloting of Internet voting, which appears to be the main factor in driving higher awareness of piloting arrangements. For example, Bedford, Broxbourne, Sunderland and Gateshead were piloting both advance voting and signature requirements, but as table 1 (below) demonstrates, awareness is low in each of these areas.

*I've heard about it but I don't really know anything about it either in terms of the run up to or after the election. I did read something on it in the local paper.*  
(Sunderland candidate)

*I think voters were less aware this time round and unaware that there was a pilot scheme. There probably was information out there but in a world where we are bombarded with info, how do you get through to people?*  
(Gateshead agent)

*Got there, went straight through and everybody was very helpful. I wasn't aware it was a pilot scheme.*  
(Bedford advance voter)

In Sheffield, Swindon and Shrewsbury - where both advance voting in polling stations and Internet voting was present - awareness is statistically significantly higher.

**Table 5.1 Unprompted awareness of whether the local authority was piloting new voting arrangements(advance voting areas only)**

	% aware
Broxbourne	27%
Gateshead	33%
Bedford	38%
Sunderland	39%
Sheffield	58% *
Shrewsbury & Atcham	64% *
Swindon	73% *

\* Internet voting pilot scheme areas

Although the data cannot be definitive on this matter, we can infer that the presence of advance voting does not appear to have been widely known (spontaneously) unless it was accompanied by specific other new arrangements. This should perhaps be no surprise. The availability of advance voting in polling stations was fairly limited, with no more than three advance polling stations set up anywhere other than Swindon (5 locations).

*I was a bit concerned that there was only one location available thus excluding large numbers of constituents from the process. I would have liked to have seen multiple stations spread across the borough thus giving all voters the option to vote in advance.*  
(Gateshead candidate)

In the absence of blitz advertising arrangements – and in all probability ignoring information on the polling card - it would have been incumbent on the voter to happen to pass an advance polling station – and this seems to be an unlikely prospect for most people in the relevant areas.

*The advanced voting at the Town Hall I thought was excellent.....it was just luck, I hadn't seen it written down anywhere or advertised anywhere but it was very time saving as I was passing.*  
(Sheffield advance voter)

Prompting with the availability of advance voting did (that is, informing respondents that such a scheme was available within the context of the question), however, have the effect of significantly raising awareness of its existence in the local areas in which it was piloted. Voters (70%) were statistically significantly more likely than non-voters (37%) to be aware of the advance polling stations, and this differential cannot be attributed to post-vote rationalisation among people who did actually use one such facility - only 3% say they voted early using a paper ballot form thus discounting exposure as a factor. As we might intuitively expect, there is something specific about the act of voting that makes people more aware of issues linked to that act – it might be simply taking more note of the polling card details, or indeed more generally having a greater interest in politics. In fact, the latter is certainly true, with Table 2 establishing the link between political interest and advance vote awareness.

**Table 5.2 Prompted awareness of advanced stations by interest in politics**

	% aware of advanced voting stations
High interest in politics	61%
Medium interest in politics	52%
Low interest in politics	41%

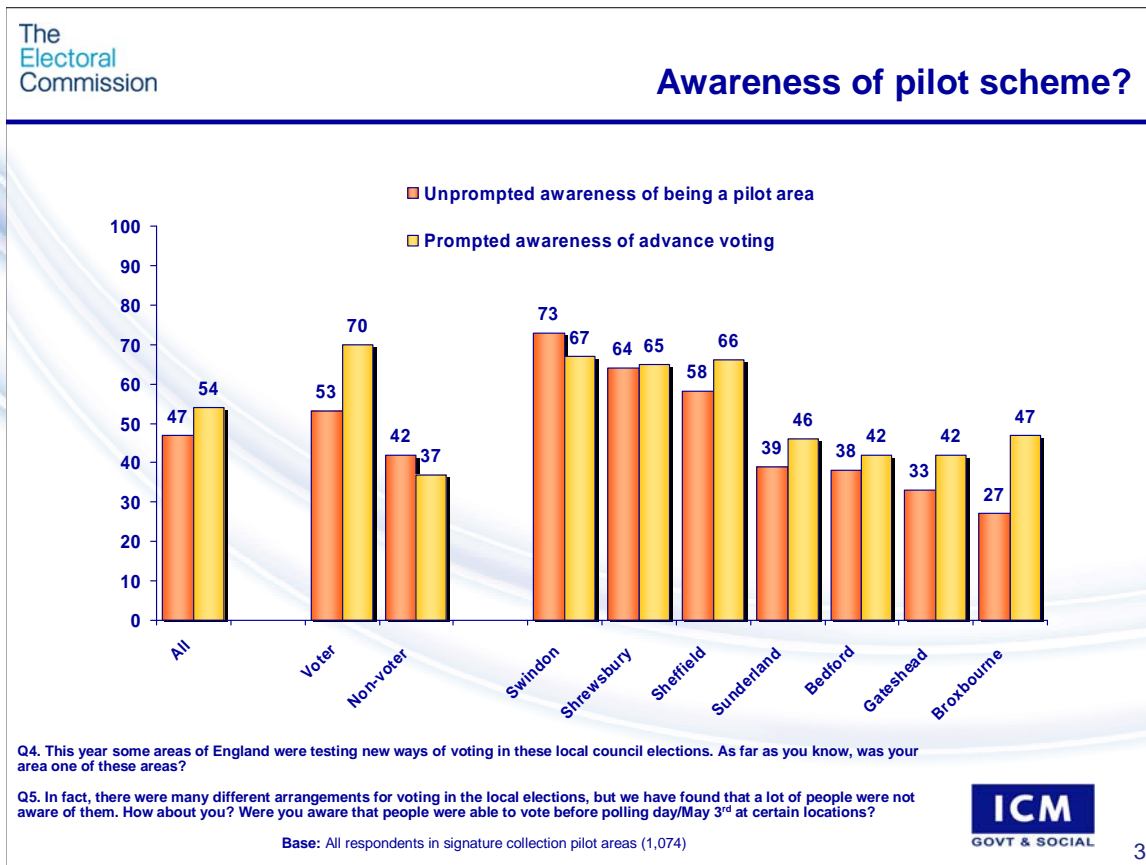
Other factors sustain this effect. Those satisfied with the voting process were statistically significantly more likely to be aware (59%) than those dissatisfied (47%); while regularity of voting is clearly another political behaviour that underpins awareness. Those who always vote in local elections were significantly more aware (69%) than both infrequent local election voters (44% aware) and (significantly in turn) serial non-voters (26% aware). It is clear that people with more developed forms of political attitude and behaviour have raised consciousness of the political arrangements that are being organised in their locality.

Awareness was highest in Swindon (67%), which of course had more advance polling stations open than any other pilot area. However, the variation in awareness across the schemes is otherwise unlikely to be linked to the number of advance stations open. For example, Sheffield only had one open but produced a significantly higher level of awareness than Broxbourne, which had three. It is apparent that (as we mention above) awareness is more linked to the simultaneous presence of electronic voting than the provision of additional advance stations. It is perhaps likely that e-voting is itself a more memorable concept than more traditional visits to polling stations, even if they are open early.

Demographic considerations also provide interesting insights. Age is obviously a variable of primary focus, and we can see that the pattern of awareness is exactly as we might have expected. One in three 18-24's (32%) were aware of advance voting stations, but the level of awareness rises proportionally with age, with three-quarters (73%) of those aged 75+ aware. Indeed, a step-change in awareness occurs at the 45-54 age band, where all of this age or above are statistically significantly more likely to be aware than those who are younger than this.

The other variable that demands attention is work status. It may well be argued that advance voting services the need of busy full-time workers, who are typically the group most unable to get to polling stations. Unfortunately, they are also the (work status) group who are least aware (48% aware vs 55% part-time, 49% unemployed and 62% other) of its availability. If advance polling stations are intended to help people with time management issues, then a more targeted communications message advising them of the possibility to vote this way needs to be developed.

**Chart 5.1. Unprompted and prompted awareness of pilot schemes/advance polling stations**



The primary source of awareness among those people who actually used advance polling stations was predominantly the polling card (49%).

*The council did have clear information on all the poll cards but the experience is that however clearly it is presented, voters do struggle to take it all on board and commit it to memory.  
(Broxbourne candidate and agent)*

Other factors did apply, including letters and leaflets from the council (18%) and local media reporting (13%). The 'information source question' on the main (all people) telephone survey suggested, however, that council letters and leaflets were much more of a factor, with 53% citing them as their primary source. The differential might be attributable to methodological factors – the telephone survey asked about general awareness of any pilot scheme rather than specifically about advance voting. On the other hand, use of council leaflets was much higher in areas where Internet/telephone voting applied. We might speculate that the council's objective was to produce information about electronic voting first and foremost, and this contributed to more wide ranging awareness of other pilot schemes. It also appears to be the case that most advance polling station visitors would have voted anyway, in which case we should not be surprised that they consulted their polling card more so than others.

Despite the cross-survey differences on council leaflets, the main telephone survey does identify them as the main source. However, we can see that different methods of communication are more effective among specific target groups. Young people, for example, are least likely to be reached through local media sources (18-24: 11%, 65+: 29%) and depend more than most on interpersonal communication, such as friends and family (18-24: 18%, 65+: 5%).

Those people who did receive specific information about the advance stations had few complaints about them, with 98% saying the information was easy to understand.

### **Incidence of advance voting**

The critical questions linked to the availability of advance voting are the extent to which people used it, and how far it encouraged people to vote who otherwise would not. We should remember though, that advance voting was available outside the context of polling stations or indeed pilot schemes. Postal voting is an increasingly important contributor to turnout, and it should come as no surprise that it was by far the biggest source of advance voting at these elections.

Three in ten (29%) voters say they voted before May 3<sup>rd</sup>, but most of these (81%), did indeed vote early by sending in a postal vote. We can also eliminate another 8% (from this analysis) who voted early via electronic pilot arrangements (reported elsewhere). We are left with 8% of early voters who visited an advance polling station, representing only 2-3% of all voters across the advance polling station areas. Clearly, on this analysis alone the answer to the first question (above) has to be that advance polling stations have negligible impact on turnout given the ready availability of postal voting.

This was something that candidates and agents also recognised. There is some uncertainty about the role of advance stations, particularly in the context of postal voting, which itself probably has the benefit of even greater convenience:

*It might benefit those people going on holiday who prefer to vote in person but who else is going to be interested when there is the option for a postal vote? I'm not against the scheme in principle but I'm not sure there are enough benefits to justify it.  
(Sunderland agent)*

*I tend to try and sign up disabled voters to postal votes, so an advanced voting scheme is not that relevant.*

*(Bedford candidate)*

This finding is reinforced by evidence from the exit poll at advance polling stations. Three-quarters (74%) of advance voters said they would have been 'likely' to have voted anyway, even without the opportunity to visit an advance station – indeed, most of this group (62%) were 'very' likely to have done so. If three-quarters of the 2% of voters who used a facility would have voted anyway, it is evident that advance stations are little more than a convenience factor for a tiny segment of voters, and their absence would have precious little effect on overall turnout.

*Was very convenient for us, voted on the Friday before....we probably would still have voted somehow because we were both brought up firmly believing one should exercise one's right to vote.*

*(Bedford advance voter)*

The profile of advance polling station voters shows the extent to which such facilities' appeal to the converted. Nine in ten (91%) voted in the 2005 General Election, and 80% have some form of political interest (source: advance voter exit survey). Advance voters were more female (55%) than male (45%) and very much dominated by the older age groups.

**Table 5.3. Demographic profile of advance polling station voters – May 3rd elections**

	Profile of advance voters %	Profile of all voters in pilot areas %
Male	45%	52%
Female	55%	48%
18-24	4%	6%
25-34	8%	14%
35-44	12%	16%
45-54	13%	17%
55-64	24%	17%
65-74	24%	18%
75+	15%	12%
Working full time	28%	41%
Working part time	9%	12%
Retired	49%	34%
Not working/other	14%	13%

It is not even the case that advance stations help out busy full-time workers who find it otherwise difficult to get to their polling station on polling day. Only 28% of advance voters work full-time, which compares to 44% incidence within the total population. It would appear that these stations are predominately used by the retired, who are most likely to vote anyway.

Yet research for the Electoral Commission in the past has consistently found that the electorate requires choice on the ways in which it can vote, as it does on many other aspects of modern life. Within this context, support for advance polling stations is evident, even if use of them is not. Of the voters ICM spoke to outside such stations, nine in ten (90%) agreed that they should be rolled out at

all future elections. Support in Bedford was unanimous (100%) and was above the 90% mark everywhere except Broxbourne (88%) and Shrewsbury (74%, where advance voting was combined with electronic voting in kiosks). So the desire for choice remains, but voters clearly reserve the right not to use them. This is, of course, an easy thing for voters to say – having additional services laid on for them is difficult not to like, unless perhaps, the associated level of use and cost is simultaneously revealed to them.

*If people just brought forward their voting as opposed to being a new voter and voting early, then that would bring into question whether the exercise justifies the resources put into it.*  
(Broxbourne candidate and agent)

*I think it cost £1 million for the pilots in Shrewsbury and I said for that amount you could give everyone a tenner to vote and increase turnout that way.*  
(Shrewsbury agent)

### **The convenience factor**

There can be little doubt that what advance polling stations do offer: convenience for the people who use them. The data suggests that there are two aspects that require consideration. Firstly, it can be argued that six in ten advance polling station voters used the service because it fitted in with their behaviour on the day they voted.

*I remembered seeing advanced voting advertised in The Chronicle and I was going to the Civic Centre anyway so it was just smashing for me.*  
(Gateshead advance vote)

*I used this method. Thought it was brilliant being able to do this. I was going to be away during polling day and wouldn't have gone to the bother of doing a postal vote.*  
(Broxbourne advance voter)

One in ten (11%) were truly spontaneous voters who decided to vote early on the spur of the moment, while the others (50%) used the facility in conjunction with other things they needed to do while out and about. Both of these groups can be considered to have benefited from the availability of the polling stations.

*It was worth trialling this scheme as it gives people the chance to vote in town at weekends. This means it can be carried out as part of another activity e.g. shopping. That said, it benefits those who shop in town but not many others.*  
(Bedford candidate)

One in three (37%) made a specific trip to vote early. This rises to 46% in Shrewsbury and 44% in Bedford. We might consider this group to be highly motivated by voting and curious to see what advance voting is like (particularly in Shrewsbury where the electronic kiosks were in operation). A statistically significant 56% of this group said they were highly interested in politics, and 93% of them voted in the 2005 General Election.

The second convenience factor is linked to opening times. There is no denying that most people who used them thought the facilities were fine on this measure, with 93% finding the opening times convenient. Convenience scores were above 90% everywhere, except Broxbourne, where 86% of voters found them convenient.

*I suppose there was a little advance convenience, yes, I've got to admit that.  
(Sunderland agent)*

However, the convenience of advance voting in polling stations does need to be put in context of other forms of advance voting. All early voters were asked how convenient they found the voting method they used, (although the numbers of advance polling station users (24), Internet voters (16) and telephone voters (10) are very small, which the reader should be keep this in mind). The data does imply, however, that fewer people are saying that early polling station voting (58%, along with telephone voting (59%)) is convenient, compared to postal voting (71%) and Internet voting (80%). If any trust can be placed in such small sample sizes, we would conclude that advance polling stations are not only thinly used, but are not considered to be as convenient as other forms of advance voting by people who use them.

### **E-voting kiosks in Shrewsbury & Atcham**

Shrewsbury & Atcham installed e-voting kiosks in the advance voting stations, which voters could use instead of paper ballot forms. For the most part, voters found the electronic system easy to use, with four in five (78%) saying so – most of whom (52%) found them 'very' easy. Only one in seven (15%) had some difficulty.

As we might expect, there is a substantive age consideration involved in the kiosk use. Young people are mostly at ease with computer technology, and no-one under the age of 55 reported any difficulty. It was only those over 55 who had problems, with one in four (26%) of those aged 65+ saying they had difficulty. This difficulty was spread across the social classes in equal measure, so we can perhaps be clear that problems associated with electronic voting are linked to age rather than other factors.

*So we went in and it was a new system with this computer. She did show us how to go on and how to vote. It was a bit complicated like, the finishing and switching off and what not but we had plenty of help.*

*(Shrewsbury advance kiosk voter)*

Few people had any qualms over the security aspect of the electronic vote. Four in five (79%) were confident (50% were very confident) that it was a secure method of voting, with only 7% saying otherwise. The few who held suspicions, tended to be older people.

*They're ideal. You just walk in and the computer does the rest. We have to trust everything we do or what's the point of voting?*

*(Shrewsbury advance kiosk voter)*

### **Perceived impact on non-voters and future turnout**

Depending on your point of view, advance voting facilities either fail to encourage a majority of non-voters to consider voting even allowing for the easier circumstances in which they can do so; or else increase the chances of four in ten non-voters (40%) turning out – which is a very sizable chunk of the electorate and which would boost turnout considerably if these non-voters followed up on their word.

Overall, one in three (31%) of those people in advance voting pilot areas who either didn't vote or who voted on polling day itself said they would have been likely to use the early voting facility had

they had known about them. Polling day voters are much less likely to say so (18%) than non-voters (40%). However, we should adopt a position of scepticism and restraint on the likely behaviour of non-voters in counter-factual situations such as this. There will be some non-voters who are perhaps embarrassed to admit they generally would not vote even if opportunities to do so are made more convenient for them, and combined with the low use of advance stations in this election, we should wonder whether higher turnout is a realistic outcome?

*The options were there for the voter but some people aren't interested in voting whatever the choice.*

*You aren't going to get through to everybody. The unawareness of what voting means, what the political parties mean is a grey area to at least 20-30% of people and they aren't going to take time out to vote.*

*(Gateshead agent)*

The profile of potential, additional voters is, however, worth comment. Electoral administrators know that young people are most disinclined to vote, but we see here evidence that advance polling stations are proportionately more likely to encourage this age group to vote than any other, even if, as one agent suspected, this is merely by default:

*I think voting this way will appeal to younger people because there are so many options now and it is something new for them to be excited about but a lot of other people don't like change.*

*(Gateshead agent)*

The proportion of non-voting/May 3<sup>rd</sup> voting 18-24's who say they would have been likely to vote early had they known about the opportunity reaches 45% - a statistically significantly higher proportion than for all other age groups except 25-34's.

**Table 5.4. Likelihood of non-voters/May 3<sup>rd</sup> voters voting early had they known about the facility, by age**

	%
18-24	45%
25-34	36%
35-44	33%
45-54	27%
55-64	24%
65+	21%

In addition, there is a clear understanding that the availability of advance polling stations in future elections can only help to increase turnout. Six in ten (58%) think it would increase, with 25% saying by a lot and 33% by a little. Only 2% think turnout would fall for whatever reason. This certainly fits in with previous thinking on advance polling stations. The public want choice in the way they vote, and they presumably see little in the way of downside in offering alternative arrangements such as these. It is hard to see how setting up advance polling stations could have a negative impact (although 2% do see the possibility of them actually causing turnout to fall), so their attitude is: why not?

However, some candidates and agents are not convinced about the advanced stations and clearly side with the 2% who think turnout could actually fall. The premise of the argument is that the increased complication of piloting arrangements merely serves to confuse people, therein reducing the incentive to vote:

*The postal voting worked and there were never any problems with it. People were very happy with it. They are confused now and it is harder for them to vote....It has been made more difficult to vote – signatures, dates, advanced voting, no postal voting – and for what reason?  
(Gateshead agent)*

*I think each successive pilot scheme is having a counter productive effect. I think the whole turnout was up but I'm not suggesting that's because of the pilot schemes.  
(Sunderland agent)*

Others have concerns that relate to their own practical considerations. Some comments were forthcoming about the lack of marked up registers being made available, which made targeting non-voting households less easy:

*We used to get an update of who had voted each day which meant you didn't have to bother them, but this doesn't happen any more which means it becomes more difficult to target voters.  
(Shrewsbury candidate)*

### **Summary & comment**

The provision of advance polling stations is, without doubt, very well received by the people who use them, and the concept slots in comfortably with the voter request for greater choice in the way people can cast their vote. Closer analysis of the data, however, presents the inescapable truth that these polling stations are little more than a reconnaissance mission in the battle for higher turnout. Hardly anyone uses them, and those that do would mostly have voted anyway.

It is not for ICM to judge the cost-benefit analysis involved in their introduction (although some candidates did not hold back on the cost issue), but we cannot conclude other than by saying that advance polling stations currently provide a great convenience to a tiny minority. On the other hand, these stations do appeal to young non-voters, which itself is a tantalising prospect given this group's general apathy and disengagement.

## 6. Signature requirement report

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### **Awareness of the signature requirement**

The requirement to provide a signature in the polling station before ballot forms were handed out was piloted in Bedford, Broxbourne, Gateshead and Sunderland. Although all four local authorities were piloting advance voting in addition to the signature requirement, general (unprompted) awareness of the implementation of *any* pilot scheme was relatively low. Only one in three (34%) knew that their local authority was piloting some new form of voting arrangement, with voters (38%) statistically significantly more likely than non-voters (30%) to be aware.

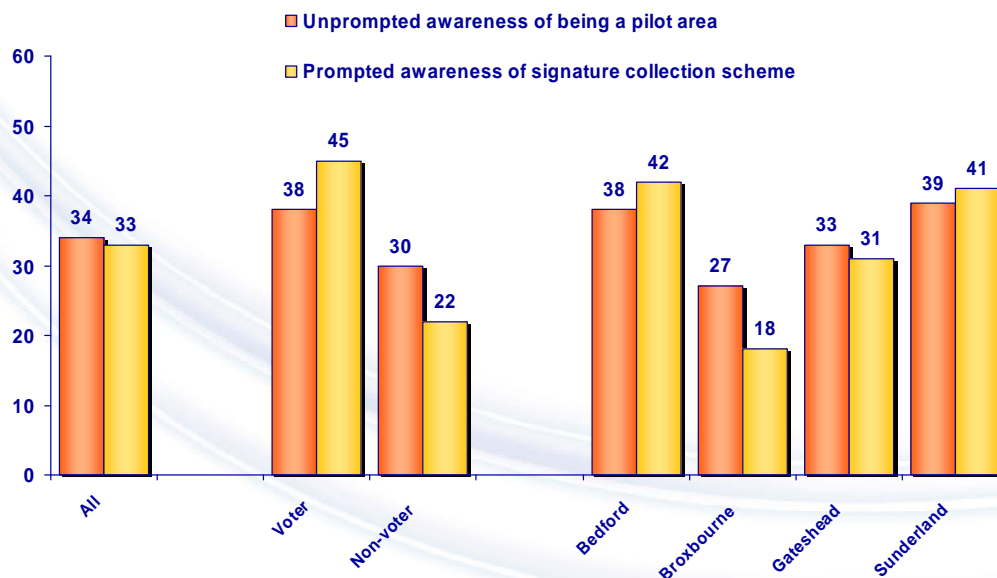
*I was surprised I had to do it. I didn't know it was going to happen but other than that it was fine.*  
(Sunderland voter)

Awareness across the four pilot areas was fairly consistent. We can see that people in Broxbourne (27%) were statistically significantly less likely to be aware than those in Bedford (38%) and Sunderland (39%), with awareness in Gateshead standing at 33%. Whether the low level of awareness observed in Broxbourne is linked to demographic factors or lack of local engagement it is difficult to say, but what we can surmise, however, is that the communication information sent by the council did not hit the targets in Broxbourne (31% recall receiving council leaflets) in the way they did in Gateshead (47%) and Sunderland (55%). This may have had an impact on the low awareness score.

Otherwise, many of the 'usual suspects' apply when focussing on unprompted awareness. Regular local election voters were more aware that pilot schemes were in place (40%) than irregular council elections voters (29%) or regular non-voters (30%); while the usual correlation between increasing age and higher awareness is also present. On the other hand, we see (somewhat unusually) that those classified as being members of social grade DE were significantly more aware (41%) than those in the more affluent social classes (AB: 33% aware).

Upon prompting, awareness of the signature requirement inevitably rises significantly, although it is lower than for other forms of piloting on this occasion. However, we should remember that the incidence of signature checking in Broxbourne and Gateshead was limited in scope, while all polling stations in Bedford and Sunderland enforced the requirement. Inevitably, there will be some post-event rationalisation that artificially boosts the awareness score, particularly in those areas where it was uniformly employed. Given that, awareness of the signature requirement is statistically significantly higher in Bedford (42%) and Sunderland (41%) than Gateshead (31%) and Broxbourne (18%).

### Awareness of pilot scheme?



Q4. This year some areas of England were testing new ways of voting in these local council elections. As far as you know, was your area one of these areas?

Q5. In fact, there were many different arrangements for voting in the local elections, but we have found that a lot of people were not aware of them. How about you? Were you aware that people were required to sign their names before they could be issued with their ballot paper at certain locations?

Base: All respondents in signature collection pilot areas (1,074)

As we might expect, voters (45%) were twice as likely as non-voters (22%) to be aware of the scheme, and those who always vote in such elections were similarly more engaged (44% aware) than others (irregular voters: 24%, regular non-voters: 20%). Interest in politics is also clearly a factor, with awareness rising to 41% among those with a high interest, compared to 28% among those with medium levels of political interest and 24% among those with little or none.

Men (38%) reveal significantly higher levels of signature requirement awareness than women (28%) while Table 1 below demonstrates the strong correlation between awareness and age, although we do see a tailing off of awareness among the most elderly. DE's were again most likely to be aware (38%) with AB's also showing higher levels (34%) compared to C1 (25%) and C2's (31%).

**Table 6.1. Awareness of the signature checking requirement by age**

	% aware
18-24	10%
25-34	24%

35-44	32%
45-54	36%
55-64	43%
65-74	51%
75+	41%

It would seem evident that it is difficult to extend awareness beyond the ‘usual suspects’. Non-voters remain relatively disengaged and uninformed, and if their turnout is linked in some way to fears over the security of ballot forms then the utilisation of signature collection appears unlikely to alleviate their concerns and hence motivate them to vote. Similarly, the attention of young people remains relatively distracted or elusive from a participatory perspective.

### **Comfort with signature collection**

Signature collection schemes adopted for the May 2006 elections revealed that voters overwhelmingly provided their signature without concern or complaint, and this again appears to have been the case in 2007. Overall, nine in ten voters (92%) at polling stations say they were comfortable doing so, with most of these (79%) saying they were *very comfortable* signing their name. The remainder (13%) were *fairly* comfortable doing so.

Depth interviews very much reinforce this point of view. Voters took signing for their ballot forms in their stride, on occasion not even thinking about it particularly:

*I can't remember if I did it before or after voting but I do remember I had to sign my name. I didn't really give it a thought, but I saw other people signing and thought, 'well, I'll sign as well'*  
(Broxbourne voter)

*I had to do this and thought it was quite satisfactory. It wasn't something I was expecting.*  
(Broxbourne voter)

*I certainly didn't mind that. It was no problem.*  
(Sunderland voter)

By deduction, it is obviously the case that few had concerns. Only 7% did, with 2% saying they were *very* uncomfortable and the remainder *fairly* uncomfortable. Discomfort does appear to be more evident in Bedford (12% overall) than elsewhere, with 5% in Sunderland revealing some concern. No Gateshead signature check voters were uncomfortable, although sample size was very small at this venue.

However, comparison with the more general telephone survey does highlight some variation in response. One in five (21%) people on this survey say they were or would have been uncomfortable, with voters (19%) and non-voters (23%) saying so in fairly equal measure. Of course, the non-voters spoken to – and very many voters also spoken to – did not participate on the pilot. We can speculate that exposure to the signature requirement process has the effect of instilling comfort and confidence in the integrity of the voting process. There is some evidence to support this. On the main telephone survey, it is still the case that 16% of those who signed for a ballot paper were uncomfortable, but this proportion increased to 22% among those who voted but didn't sign or else did not vote (23%). This may not be much more than an indication, but it still suggests that the more people get used to signing, the more at ease with the process they will get.

Reverting back to the exit survey of signature-providing voters, we can see that discomfort with the experience of the signature collection is more likely to be linked to bemusement than a tangible objection on principled grounds. Those few voters who were somewhat uncomfortable were more likely to say that they simply didn't see the point of it (43%), than say it was an invasion of privacy or a means of undermining the secrecy of their vote decision (16%). Depths again confirm this point of view:

*I wasn't happy with it at all. I could not see the point of it at all. There was nothing to cross-check your signature with so there is concern that anybody can see your signature.*  
(Bedford voter)

*At first I thought 'what the bloody hell are they talking about?' but I didn't really care about having to sign; I wasn't upset by it but I failed to see why it was relevant. How the hell is that going to stop fraud if somebody is determined to defraud the system?*  
(Bedford voter)

### **The potential impact of signature collection**

Seven in ten (71%) polling station voters who signed for their ballot papers do consider it to be a good idea, and think that all polling station voters should be made to do so before being allowed to vote. Less than one in ten (9%) think it is a bad idea, with a relatively high number of others not sure (21%). Voters on the main telephone survey are similarly inclined to think this way, with 68% saying it is a good idea. Non-voters are more sceptical, with only 56% saying so. Broxbourne (56%) residents reveal the lowest level of positive inclination, although no significant variations are present across the four signature collection pilot areas.

It is also the case that no substantive demographic or behavioural variations can be observed on this measure, with the slight exception that property owners (76%) and AB's (78%) are most likely to think it a good idea.

The primary reason given by signature collection polling station voters for it being in place is the prevention of fraud (38%), with another one in five (21%) similarly saying that it proves the identity of the voter. Others give slightly different answers but all basically mean the same thing: that signature collection helps to prevent the possibility of electoral fraud, and on this basis we can easily understand why so many people accept the concept.

*I think the spirit is right and it's trying to add extra security.*  
(Gateshead voter)

*I agree with that because it safeguards it. It means someone cannot go and vote for you because they have to have a signature, so it safeguards the vote better than it did in the past.*  
(Sunderland voter)

Indeed, half (52%) of those who submitted a signature for their ballot forms agree that electoral fraud would decrease as a result. This rises to 61% in Bedford and 56% in Sunderland – where all had to sign for their papers. In the other two areas - where only very limited signature collection occurred - the proportion is statistically significantly lower. Only 39% (of voters who signed) said so in Broxbourne and even less (17%) in Gateshead. As far as non-voters are concerned, only three in ten (30%) suspected it would reduce fraud (source: main telephone survey). Once again, there

appears to be some evidence that more extensive signature collection pilots, and/or the process involved, instils greater confidence in its perceived ability to combat fraud.

This is reinforced by a follow up question on exactly this issue. Six in ten (59%) polling station signers said it instilled more confidence in the voting process, with hardly anyone saying (1%) less confidence. One in three (34%) said it would make no difference. Voters who did not sign for papers were less convinced, with 36% saying it would give them more confidence. Non-voters were the most sceptical of all, with only 25% saying they would have more confidence.

### **Signature checking**

As we have seen, the simple collection of signatures was perceived to be rather pointless, as signatures would not be checked against any records already held – and thus the act of signing would fail to provide any verifiable evidence of fraud. This was confirmed by one candidate:

*Signing for ballot papers – I didn't think that was a problem for voters, although as there was nothing to compare the signature against there is little or no value in the system. The only way it could uncover a potentially fraudulent attempt by someone to cast a vote on behalf of another would be if that person challenged the authenticity of the vote/signature and this is unlikely to happen.  
(Bedford candidate)*

The postal vote system now in place contends with this problem, by requiring a signature at registration and a subsequent signature on the ballot form that may be checked against the original. Respondents at polling stations were advised of the postal vote system and asked whether they thought its application would be good or bad within the polling station context?

Seven in ten (70%) polling station voters participating on the signature pilot thought it would be good, rising to 72% among Sunderland polling station voters, with 69% of their counterparts in Bedford (69%), Broxbourne (69%) and Gateshead (64%) similarly inclined to think this way. Few variations occur across demographic variables, although a slight increase saying so is observed with increasing age (18-24: 65%, 65+: 72%). A more developed interest in politics also increases the tendency to view it positively (71% high interest, 63% low interest), as does voting in the 2005 General Election (71% vs 65%).

Although we have seen that seven in ten do think it would be good to introduce the signature check, fewer (61%) say it would give them more confidence in the voting process. A quarter (25%) thinks it would make no difference, and one in twenty (5%) believes that the voting process would be compromised in some way, giving them less confidence in it. 'Signature collected' voters in Sunderland (64%) and Bedford (63%) are more positive on this than their counterparts in Broxbourne (57%) and Gateshead (56%). Clearly, it is still the case that a majority do think positively towards the signature check concept, but not quite all of them are convinced that the voting process would be greatly improved as a result of its introduction.

Yet signature checking has wider implications, not the least of which is the potential impact on turnout. The question we need to consider is whether the full introduction of signature checking would encourage more people to vote. Unfortunately, the research data available to us is limited, with only signature checked polling station voters asked about their future voting behaviour. This group, of course, must already have a predilection to vote given that they have just turned out in a lower order council election. That said, it does seem that the further down the road electoral administrators go in terms of the development of signature checking, the more likely these people

are to vote. Table 2 demonstrates the likely impact of three potential variations in the signature checking process, with increasing likelihood to vote correlated with additional components associated with the signature requirement:

**Table 6.2. Likelihood to vote under different signature collection/checking scenarios**

	% more likely to vote	% less likely to vote	No difference/DK
As in the past no form of signature is required	7%	6%	87%
Like today, you simply have to sign your name before being allowed to vote	16%	4%	80%
Full signature checking *	18%	6%	76%

*\*When you register to vote in advance of elections, you have to provide a signature which is then checked against a signature in the polling station. If they are found not to match, the vote might be discarded.*

### **In summary**

Concerted opposition to signature collection is minimal, but what does detract from the concept in the eyes of the voting public relates more to its current defined scope rather than inherent problems. Generally speaking, this may be a comforting finding as the signature requirement will be implemented at next year's elections. When you have 90%+ of those experiencing it being comfortable with it, then wider ranging public acceptance is more than likely to follow if it is not there already (and as we have seen, it is more or less is). If anything, this research indicates that the pilot scheme for signatures should focus on checking, rather than mere collection. If the cry is currently: "what's the point?" then clearly the public want there to be more of one: and voters' positive reaction to the postal vote system of checking implies that 'the point' *can be* cross-matching of signatures in polling station environments. This would possibly go some of the way to appeasing the few dissenting voices that remain:

*I would say that alone it's not enough of an incentive to stop people abusing the system....it's an extra level of security, but it's not infallible.  
(Gateshead voter)*

## 7. Internet voting pilot report

### Awareness of internet voting

Unprompted awareness of 'any' pilot scheme averaged 60% across the five pilot areas in which internet voting was being trialled. Prompted awareness of pilot schemes across the five areas was relatively high with 82% aware that at least one scheme was being piloted in their area. Highest awareness was in Swindon with 93% aware of at least one scheme being trialled, with lowest awareness in South Bucks where only 75% were aware of at least one scheme.

Prompted awareness of internet voting averaged 72% across the five pilot areas. Prompted awareness of internet voting varied across each of the five pilot areas in which it was being trialled, with Swindon and Rushmoor demonstrating statistically significantly higher levels than South Bucks, Sheffield and Shrewsbury.

**Table 7.1. Awareness of Internet voting by area**

	% aware
Swindon	85%
Rushmoor	76%
South Bucks	67%
Sheffield	67%
Shrewsbury & Atcham	65%

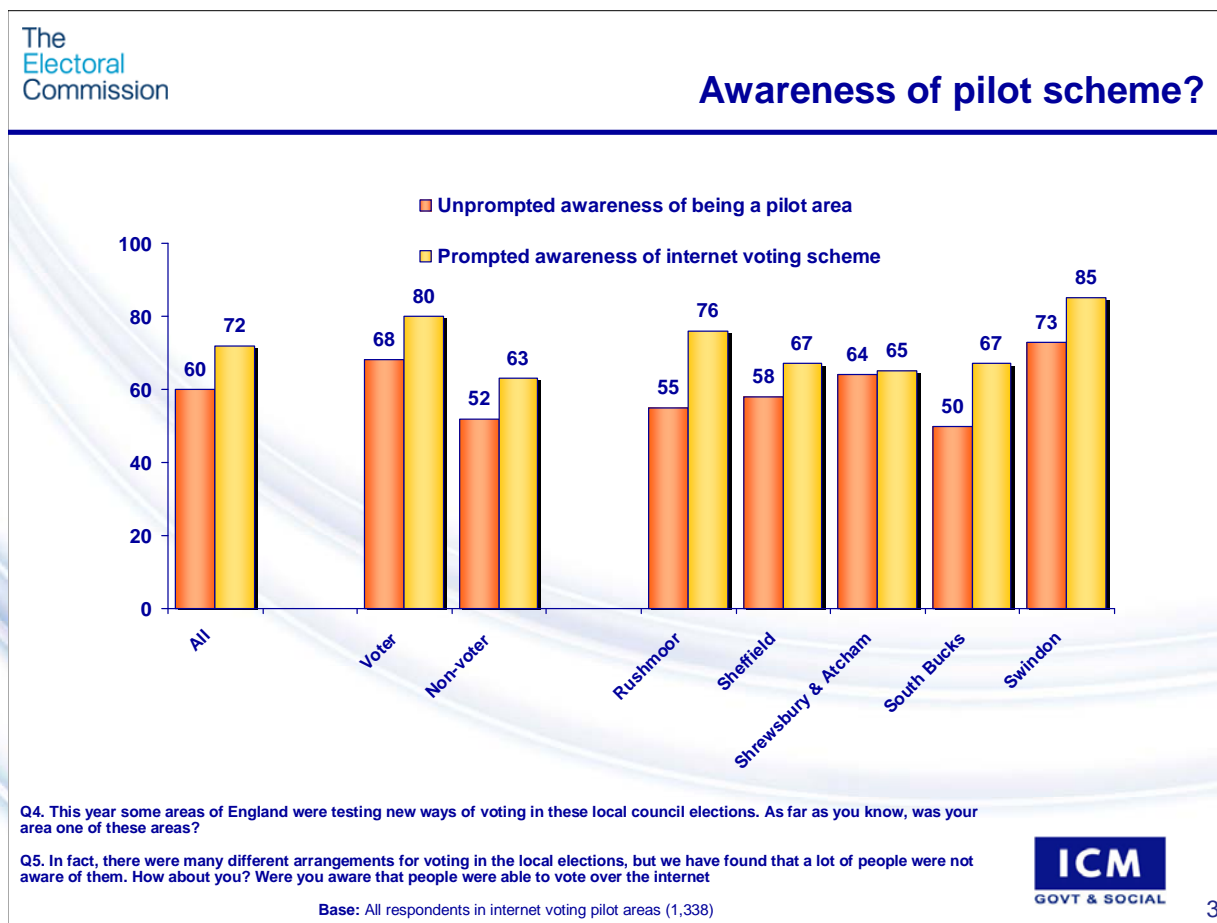
Awareness of the internet voting pilot was higher amongst voters (80% aware) than non voters (63% aware). There was no difference in terms of awareness between men and women although some variation by age occurs, with youngest residents the group revealing the lowest level of awareness. Given that, we should recognise that the age gap on awareness for Internet voting is much less than on the other pilot schemes.

**Table 7.2 Awareness of Internet voting by age**

	% aware
18-24	61%
25-34	66%
35-44	75%
45-54	78%
65-74	81%
75+	72%

Awareness of the internet scheme was fairly high amongst those who had voted using a different method i.e. ballot paper, postal, telephone etc. This would suggest that a lack of awareness of the scheme was not a significant factor in determining use - voters who were aware of the scheme more often than not chose to vote using a different method. Lowest level of prompted awareness amongst other voter groups was amongst postal voters but even in this case 68% of them were aware that the scheme was in operation.

*I was informed about it several months in advance when I registered so it seemed to be well organised. (Internet voter, Swindon)*



Many of the same problems of reach apply to Internet voting as they do to other methods - it remains difficult to extend awareness to the typically hard to reach voter groups. Non-voters and those dissatisfied with the voting process remain relatively disengaged and uninformed. Young people - who many would speculate would be most switched on to Internet voting - remain one of the least involved and least conscious of Internet voting options. If internet voting is meant to be offering young people an interesting alternative to voting in person, it needs first to be fully communicated to them, and as people in many other research sectors have found, this is no easy task.

Awareness of the internet pilot scheme was primarily driven by council literature (66% of those aware mentioned), with local media (20%), friends & family (7%), and polling card (7%) also mentioned as primary sources.

### **Profiling internet voters**

The profile of internet voters does not differ significantly from that of the general voter but the average age of an internet voter is somewhat younger at 45 years old, compared to an average of 52 years old for all voters. (On the South Bucks survey, the average age of internet voters is higher

(56), although we should be careful in this interpretation as no control over sample provision could occur). No differences exist by gender with both men and women equally as likely to vote this way.

Table 7.3 Voting method by age

	Average age of voter in Internet voting pilot areas
Paper ballot	52.4
Electronic polling station	45.1
Post	53.8
Telephone	57.9
Internet	45.0
Average voter age	51.7

There is some evidence that internet voting does appeal to the full-time employed, with a higher than average 55% saying they used an online vote on the main telephone survey, and a higher than average 44% saying so in South Bucks.

Generally speaking however, what this tells us is that the internet voting has not tapped into the younger vote. Taken alongside the figure that three quarters of those who cast an internet vote would have voted anyway, it tells us that internet voting is offering more choice to those who are already part of the voting process rather than attracting those disaffected or disengaged voters who would not have voted had internet voting been unavailable. This was a pattern recognised by an agent in Shrewsbury who had previous experience of internet voting.

*I suppose from previous pilots I'm not sure that any of the methods made any difference. It seemed that the internet votes came from people who would have voted anyway either by post or in person. I don't think it increased the turnout  
(Agent, Shrewsbury)*

#### **Advanced voting via the internet**

Of the 73 people who voted via the internet 23 (32%) still voted on the day of the election. The remaining 68% chose to cast their internet vote in advance of polling day. This figure of 32% (roughly a third of those who voted via the internet) is an interesting one. It would suggest that even though they have opted for a less conventional voting system they still take a fairly traditional slant on when to vote. It would seem that the internet vote for this group was not about having the convenience to vote at any time and more about having access to a new voting technology.

The majority of those who voted in advance across the five pilot areas claim that had advanced voting in some format not been available then they would have voted anyway. Only 26% said that it would have been unlikely they would not have voted. The same pattern emerges for internet voters. Of those who voted via the internet in advance of polling day 77% claim they would have been likely to vote had advance internet voting not been available to them. This would suggest that even amongst those who voted prior to polling day the option to do so was not a deciding factor in whether or not they would vote. Internet voting as with other forms of advance voting is appealing to those who are committed voters anyway.

The majority of those that voted in advance of polling day found the opportunity a convenience. Of those who voted in advance by internet, 87% said that the opportunity to do so was more convenient than it would have been otherwise.

### **Registration**

In order to be eligible for an internet vote, voters had to pre-register to be issued with a log in and password. Qualitative evidence suggests that it is this requirement to pre-register that may in part account for the relatively low uptake of internet voting, particularly amongst those groups that are considered to be difficult to reach. If on the one hand internet voting is meant to be providing greater convenience to the voter, and making it easier for those who are not engaging with the current voter processes, the question that some posed was why there was a requirement for pre-registration? It effectively reduced the process to the same level of convenience as a postal vote. Only a true online system where both registration and voting are carried out exclusively online would deliver a completely new and potentially more convenient format.

*I did wonder why I received an electronic invitation but then had to write to the council and say 'dear council please send me the voting forms'. Once that was through it was straightforward to follow the instructions and do it. I was a bit surprised one couldn't register online though*  
(Voter, Swindon)

The actual process of pre-registration was seen as straightforward by the majority of those who voted over the internet. Only 4% described the registration process as not being straightforward.

*I registered and got my details through the post as per the guidelines a few days prior to the elections*  
(Voter, Swindon)

### **Attitudes towards internet voting**

Convenience was given as the main reason for choosing to vote via the internet rather than by ballot paper or post (67% mentioned). Other reasons included not leaving the house (11% mentioned), straightforward (11% mentioned), time saving (8% mentioned) and it was new/wanted to try it out (5% mentioned).

*I think that conventional voting, going to the polling station, in today's hectic and busy lifestyle that we all have isn't as convenient. It's more convenient to sit down at the computer checking your e-mails or something and vote online*  
(Voter, Rushmoor)

Candidates and agents think internet voting can offer a degree of convenience to younger voters that is otherwise missing from current voter systems. It's not that younger voters can't be bothered to go to the polling booth, they also can't be bothered with the process of a postal vote. By offering a way of voting that taps into the technology that dominates their life and offers greater convenience and familiarity there is a greater chance they will vote. However this theory is partially undermined when voters are required to register by post in order to qualify for an internet vote.

*It's about offering a greater breadth of ways to vote in order to encourage greater participation and a high level of turnout*  
(Agent, South Bucks)

*I think we're all worried that governments can have a majority on 30% of the electoral vote. By offering new ways to vote you're trying to get that figure up...I'm not sure it's working though  
(Candidate, Shrewsbury & Atcham)*

In terms of future behaviour the majority of voters (54%) and non voters (59%) believe that internet voting should be made available at all future elections. Overall 14% think it should be available at some future elections and 22% think it should not be available at any future elections.

Attitudes of candidates and agents are mixed. Some are keen for internet voting to continue. They feel that anything that offers more choice is a good thing, but more specifically that internet voting has the capability to appeal to the more difficult to reach voter groups, particularly young people.

*Younger voters are not that interested in local elections and the novelty factor of internet voting might appeal to some and actually get them to cast a vote  
(Candidate, Rushmoor)*

Not all candidates and agents are in favour of continuing with such a scheme though. A lack of transparency is a major concern for many, with negligible impact a concern for others. They argue that if internet voting isn't actually driving increased voter turnout what is the point in continuing with it?

*They are obscure and impossible to monitor...It's an un-seeable process.  
(Agent, Sheffield)*

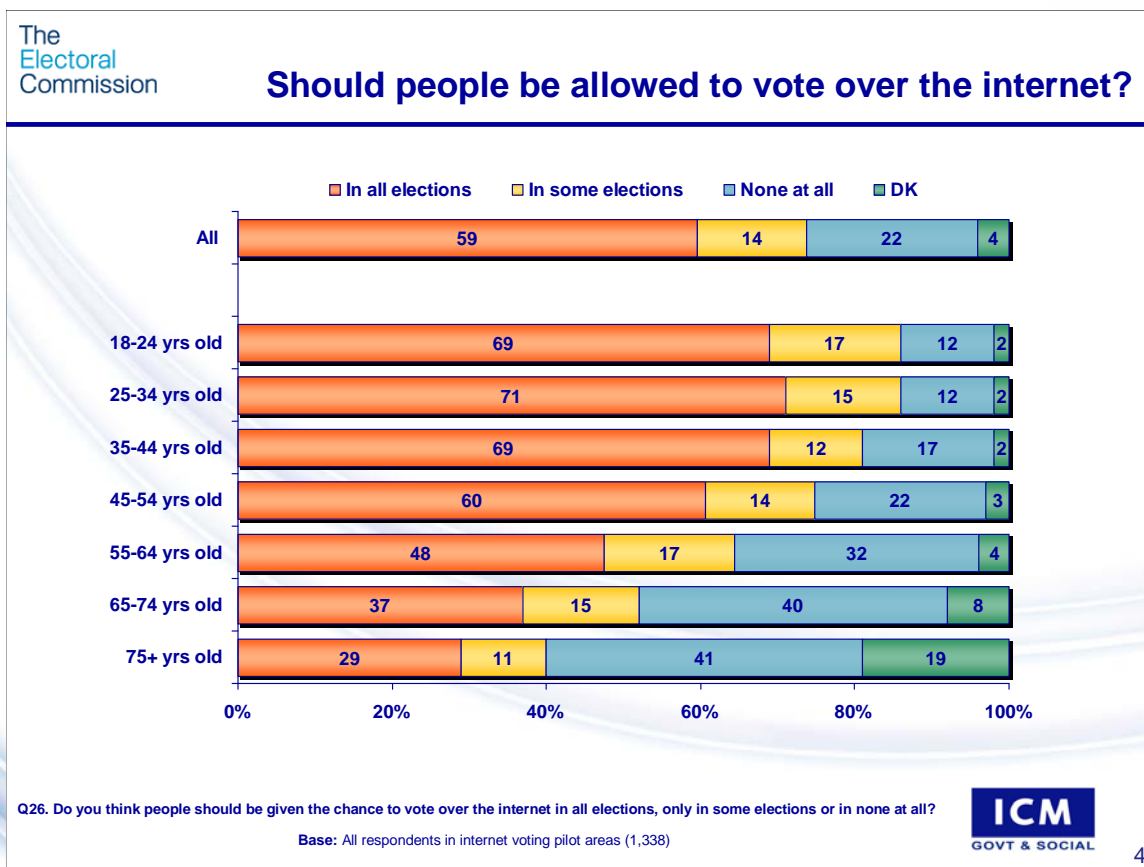
*How can parties, candidates and agents scrutinise the online voting?  
(Candidate, Rushmoor)*

*Keep to the old tested method. I don't see any reason for changing it. There is this feeling that if you change something it'll be better, but you tell me where the new voters are?  
(Agent, South Bucks)*

Unsurprisingly those who voted by internet in the pilot scheme are the strongest advocates of the future of online voting, with 85% saying it should be rolled out to all future elections. Those strongest in opposition to e-voting tend to be those who class themselves as disabled (29% object), those with a high interest in politics (26% object) and social class DE's (34% object)

*It's very secure at present, it's convenient and doesn't take very long to do.  
(Voter, Swindon)*

Some interesting differences in opinion exist by age, which are revealed in the chart below.



4

Young people are the group most interested in seeing such a scheme rolled out to future elections, yet conversely are the group least likely to be aware of the scheme - or to use it when piloted.

There is an issue of confidence with internet voting systems. Attitudes are fairly evenly divided between those who are confident that such a system would be a secure method of voting (42%) and those who are not confident in such a system (45%), with the remainder (11%) neither confident nor unconfident. Confidence in the system follows a similar pattern by age to that observed with roll out of Internet voting. Younger voters are the most confident in the system whilst older voters have greater concerns. Only 30% of those aged 18-24 are unconfident such a system is a secure method of voting compared to 64% of 55-64 year olds and 61% of over 75 year olds. Those who cast an internet vote are universally (97%) confident that the system is a secure method of voting.

Candidates and agents were not aware of any problems linked to the process of internet voting, but were somewhat dismayed at the lack of transparency involved. A number were concerned that there was no way to check the authenticity of the figures and no way for them in their official capacity to access the systems or scrutinize the outcome.

*You had no way of knowing how they came to the final figures... You need openness so that the system is above suspicion and everyone can be confident the right outcome has been reached  
(Candidate, Swindon)*

### **South Bucks**

Of the 205 completed interviews carried out with voters in South Bucks (based on the sample provided) a total of 139 were completed with internet voters, all bar one had voted at a private location. The remaining 66 interviews were carried out with voters who had cast their vote over the telephone.

Awareness of the internet pilot scheme in South Bucks was primarily driven by leaflets from the council (81% mentioned) although polling card was also mentioned by 21% and local media by 6%.

*I don't remember seeing anything about it in the press, even the local press, which I thought was a bit odd. All I got was a letter from the council saying they were doing it  
(Voter, South Bucks)*

Key reasons for using an internet vote in South Bucks were a mixture of convenience and curiosity, rather than necessity. Around half (54%) said it was at least in part because they perceived it as being easier than using a ballot paper, and 53% said it was because they like to use modern technology. This compared to just 11% who said it was because they could not easily get to their polling station and 12% said it was because they were not going to be present on polling day.

Had it not been available the majority (73%) of those who cast their vote via the internet claim they would have voted anyway. So once again it would seem that internet voting as with other advance voting options is appealing to the committed voter rather than the more apathetic or disengaged.

As with the other pilot schemes internet voters in South Bucks were fairly comfortable with the registration process with only 4% saying they were uncomfortable giving personal details as part of the process of pre registration.

Those using the internet voting facility were generally happy with the level of information they were given via the website. Only 7% described the information as difficult to understand.

The process itself was generally seen as an easy one. 87% of those who cast their vote over the internet described it as easy (66% saying very easy). This is a significantly higher proportion than those in South Bucks who cast their vote by telephone, only 67% of whom described the process as easy. The main reason for this difference in opinion was probably the prevalence of technical problems in the South Bucks telephone voting system. Nearly half (48%) of those who voted by telephone compared to just 12% of those who voted over the internet said they experienced technical problems during the voting process.

*The actual process itself was a piece of cake. (Voter, South Bucks)*

*It was a lot easier than finding time to queue up and go and vote. Online it's 3-4 minutes and then you're done. (Voter, Sheffield)*

Confidence in internet voting as a secure method of voting is reasonably high amongst this group although not as high as for the main telephone survey carried out across the five pilot areas with 68% saying they are confident in the scheme and 12% saying they are unconfident.

Generally it was believed that a vote cast over the internet was a secret vote that no-one else would have been able to see at the time it was cast. However 13% said there were others around at the time that could have seen, and 6% said there were others present but they wouldn't have been able to see how the vote was cast.

As with the main telephone survey those who have tried internet voting are strong advocates for it being made available at all future elections (87% agree). Only 6% think it should never be made available. The majority (74%) of those who cast an internet vote think it would be a secure method of voting at future elections.

### **In summary**

Overall reaction to internet voting is mixed. On the one hand it offers more choice to the voter and anything that increases voter choice has the potential to increase voter turnout and that is generally regarded as a good thing. However the group that such a system was expected to have the greatest appeal for, namely young voters, seem to be the group least aware and the least engaged with the process. With this in mind, we should perhaps warn against changes to the voting process when such a variance exists between public opinion and behaviour. Just because people say they want something, doesn't mean they'll ever use it.

There were a number of concerns raised by the candidates and agents in the depth interviews. Namely that internet voting systems are not open to scrutiny and rely almost entirely on trust. Also that internet voting is not going to address the problem of low voter turnout, merely offering more choice to those who are already going to vote (although we recognise that higher turnout is not the only objective behind the pilot schemes). Yet some candidates still wonder whether the cost can be justified, especially when many see the responsibility for raising turnout laying at the door of politicians themselves, particularly in terms of their ability to shift the agenda in such a way that they can reconnect with the uninterested:

*You get the feeling that these pilots are tinkering with the edges. What we need to do is improve the politics. (Candidate, Sheffield)*

There is a further concern that if such a system is to be perceived as offering greater convenience to the voter, there needs to be a change in the process so that internet voters are no longer required to pre-register by post in order to be eligible for an internet vote.

## 8. Telephone voting pilot report

### **Awareness of telephone voting**

Unprompted awareness of 'any' pilot scheme averaged 61% across the four pilot areas in which telephone voting was being trialled. Unprompted awareness was higher amongst voters (68%) than non voters (54%). Some variation existed by area:

**Table 8.1 Unprompted awareness of any pilot scheme by Telephone voting pilot area**

	% aware
Swindon	73%
Shrewsbury & Atcham	64%
Sheffield	58%
South Bucks	50%

All four areas were simultaneously testing Internet voting, and as we explain elsewhere, the presence of Internet voting does appear to be most highly correlated with higher awareness of *any* pilot scheme (as opposed to those pilot areas not testing Internet voting). However, that does not explain why the public in Swindon are statistically significantly more likely to be aware that their local authority was piloting new arrangements (and indeed, as we see below, testing telephone voting itself). While we can only speculate, it is perhaps no coincidence that Swindon was testing more forms of new voting arrangements than anywhere else (including 'vote anywhere'). Although incidence of use is generally low, it is quite possible that voters were exposed to one such form therein driving awareness of the overall piloting arrangements.

Prompted awareness of pilot schemes across the four areas was relatively high with 83% of all those interviewed (including non voters) aware that at least one scheme was being piloted in their area. Highest awareness was found in Swindon, with 93% aware of at least one scheme being trialled, with lowest awareness in South Bucks where 'only' 75% were aware of at least one scheme.

Prompted awareness of telephone voting averaged 55% across the four pilot areas. Prompted awareness of telephone voting varied across each of the four pilot areas in which it was being trialled, as table 8.2 demonstrates:

**Table 8.2 Prompted awareness of telephone voting by area**

	% aware
Swindon	66%
Shrewsbury & Atcham	55%
Sheffield	50%
South Bucks	51%

In line with findings above, it is evident that something different applies to Swindon, with prompted awareness of telephone voting statistically significantly higher there than elsewhere. Given low incidence of use, it cannot be this that drives the awareness. It is more likely that the extensive

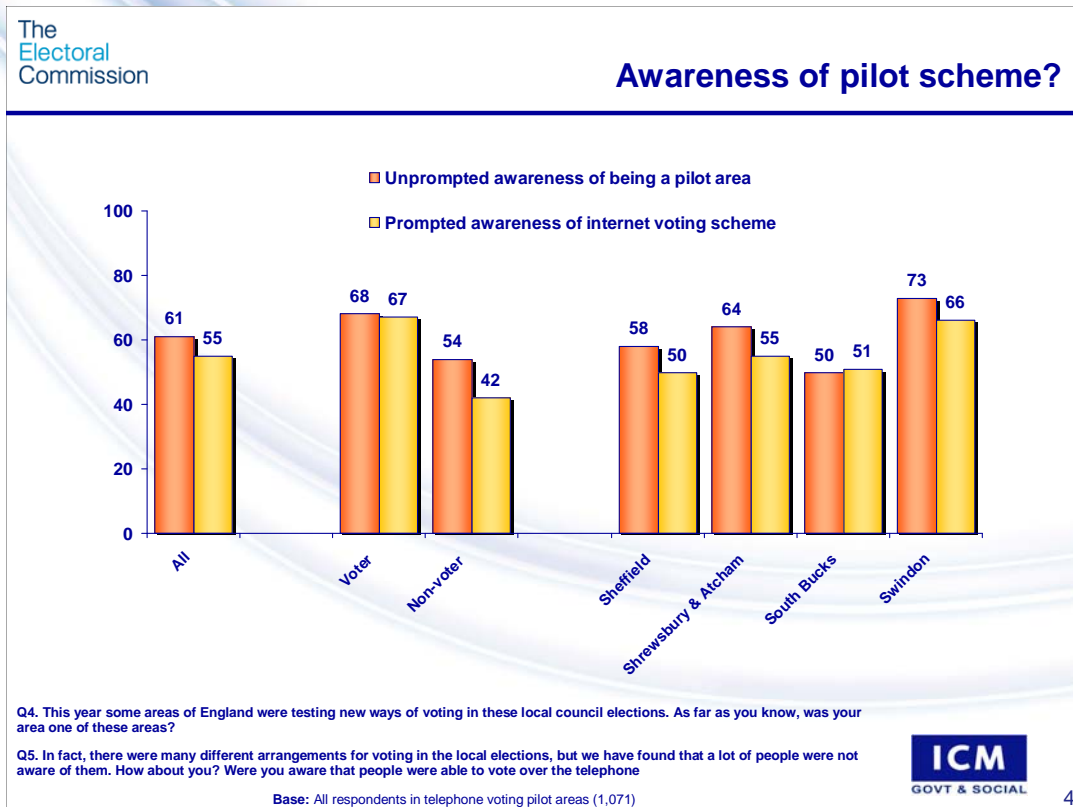
efforts of the local authority in putting on the pilots and the associated communication of those schemes to the local public secured the higher level witnessed here.

Awareness of the telephone voting pilot was higher amongst voters (67% aware) than non voters (42% aware). Those who always vote in local elections had higher awareness (68% aware) than those who only voted sometimes (43% aware) and those who never voted (36% aware). There was only a slight difference in terms of awareness between men (53% aware) and women (57% aware) although some variation by age was observed, with awareness lowest amongst the youngest age groups:

**Table 8.3 Prompted awareness of telephone voting by age**

	% aware
18-24	42%
25-34	42%
35-44	51%
45-54	66%
55-64	67%
65-74	62%
75+	71%

Awareness of the telephone pilot was highest amongst those who had cast their vote via the internet (87% of internet voters aware of telephone voting), which might simply imply that information pertaining to the two schemes was delivered simultaneously.



The three groups with the lowest levels of awareness of telephone voting are the same three groups that consistently display the lowest levels from any of the new arrangements. Those dissatisfied with the voting process (50% aware), those with a low interest in politics (50% aware), and those who never vote in local elections (44% aware) are clearly groups that are detached from political matters and as such, it is probably no surprise that they took little note of the possibility of telephone voting. It is likely that for these groups, not voting is linked more to disinterest, disillusionment with politics and apathy rather than convenience factors that telephone voting (arguably) remedies.

Awareness of telephone voting was primarily driven by council literature highlighting the new voting arrangement (69% mentioned), followed by local media (21% mentioned) and information on the polling card (8% mentioned)

### **Profiling telephone voters**

The profile of telephone voters is difficult to ascertain given the limited sample from the main survey, but if we take the results from South Bucks we see that they are typically much older (67 years old) than the average voter across the pilot schemes areas (52 years old), and consequently more likely to be retired (64% vs. average of 34% for voters across the pilot areas). As well as telephone voting having relatively limited overall appeal it would appear to have only really captured the interest of a fairly elderly demographic. However, around a fifth (22%) of those who cast their vote over the phone said they did so because they couldn't get to the polling station - this would suggest that the system is delivering a real benefit to the relatively small proportion of those who used it.

*I think they are trying to make life easier for people who can't get to the polling station.  
(Voter, South Bucks)*

For one disabled voter the telephone option proved to be a valuable time saving system.

*I am disabled myself and it (the polling station) is not particularly convenient...It (telephone voting) was very easy to do, it was very time saving for me.  
(Voter, Shrewsbury & Atcham)*

### **Registration and casting of votes**

Those wishing to cast their vote over the phone were required to pre-register in order to vote this way. Overall voters were fairly comfortable with this process with only 4% saying they were not comfortable giving personal details such as name, address, DOB etc. The registration process itself was seen as fairly simple and straightforward.

*It was all very straightforward really, I just sent the form off and received a letter back and followed the instructions.  
(Voter, Sheffield)*

The main concerns among the very small numbers who were unhappy about handing over personal details were linked to data protection and privacy.

There was a higher than expected number of difficulties arising over the casting of votes by telephone. Although 67% described the process as easy, a third (32%) said they found the experience difficult. Nearly half (48%) of those who cast their vote by phone said they experienced some form of technical problem.

*I thought it was lousy. It took me four attempts to get through and then I wasn't sure if I had got through because it finished so abruptly. On the day before the election I tried again and was told I couldn't vote because I'd already voted so it clearly had gone through but I'd no knowledge of that.*  
(Voter, Swindon)

*The system tends to fire questions at them, they put their numbers in and the system tells them to press the hash key. A lot of people don't know what the hash key is.*  
(Agent, South Bucks)

### **Attitudes towards telephone voting**

Based on the South Bucks data, issues of convenience and curiosity were the main reasons for choosing to vote over the telephone, although necessity plays a more important role (probably because of age) than it did for internet voters. 'It's easier than using a ballot paper' was mentioned by 52% of telephone voters and 'I like to use modern technology' by 47%. Almost a fifth (22%) said it was because they couldn't easily get to their polling station and 13% said it was because they weren't going to be around on polling day.

*I was aware of the pilot scheme and interested to see how efficient it would be and just how it worked exactly.*  
(Voter, Sheffield)

*Going to the polling station was a problem this time.*  
(Voter, Sheffield)

*Very flexible and time saving, I could just pick up the phone and do it at my convenience.*  
(Voter, Shrewsbury)

*I chose it purely for ease. You are not tied down to getting to a polling station.*  
(Voter, Swindon)

Of all the pilot schemes telephone voting was the one that candidates and agents seemed to know the least about. Candidates and agents were fairly uninformed and had little or no involvement in the pilot schemes. Most didn't know of many constituents who had voted in this way, and as a consequence were unable to comment with any authority on how the pilot had performed.

*I didn't have a lot to do with it, I also don't know anyone who telephone voted.*  
(Candidate, Sheffield)

*I wasn't aware there was telephone voting.*  
(Agent, Sheffield)

There was some concern amongst both candidates and agents that telephone voting, whilst offering more choice to the electorate, has little or no impact on voter turnout. The problem is not that people are finding it difficult to vote, rather that they've no interest in voting in the first place. This is a problem that affects all the alternative voting systems and not just telephone voting.

*I don't think it made any difference as the turnout was pretty much the same.*  
(Agent, South Bucks)

*People in theory will have no excuse not to vote, unless they don't like the politicians which is more than likely the case.  
(Agent, Swindon)*

*People are apathetic. I don't know if the different arrangements make any difference or not...If you're keen enough to vote and your local candidate is good enough you'll go out and vote.  
(Agent, South Bucks)*

*I suppose from previous pilots I'm not sure that any of these methods made any difference...It seemed that the votes came from people who would have voted anyway either by post or in person. I don't think it increased the turnout and recently the turnout, apart from a couple of wards, was low.  
(Agent, Shrewsbury)*

Other concerns regarding telephone voting (voiced by candidates and agents) included security (telephone voting was potentially open to abuse in the same way postal voting had been in the past), a lack of publicity (these schemes would only work if they were publicised properly and this hadn't always been the case), a lack of transparency (they had no way of checking the telephone voting system or scrutinising the votes), and the impact such a scheme had on canvassing (candidates and agents could not tell who had voted already so targeted campaigning and 'knocking up' became more difficult)

*You can give your PIN to someone else in your house and they can easily vote for you.  
(Agent, Shrewsbury & Atcham)*

*All these schemes lack transparency. There's no way of telling who has used what system or is the vote legitimate, whereas in a polling station it is much more tangible. You can see the ballot papers in front of you, you can see the people coming in and out of the polling booth.  
(Candidate, Shrewsbury & Atcham)*

Despite all these concerns, the majority of voters (53%) and non voters (56%) believe that telephone voting should be made available at all future elections. Overall 11% think it should be available at some future elections and 31% think it should not be available at any future elections.

*It makes life easier for people who can't get to the polling station and don't have internet access.  
(Voter, South Bucks)*

*Everyone has access to a telephone so it should be easy for everyone, and from this experience it is quick and simple. (Voter, Swindon)*

Attitudes of candidates and agents are mixed on this issue. On the one hand giving voters more choice is beneficial, especially those who may find it hard to get to the polling station. On the other hand the introduction and trial of systems such as telephone voting do not seem to have any discernable impact on voter turnout, so can they really be justified? There are also concerns about the transparency of such systems.

*It offers convenience to the voter as it allows them to cast their vote in advance. This benefits those who know they are going to be away, those who are going to be abroad, and those who can't make it to the polling station on the day of the election.*

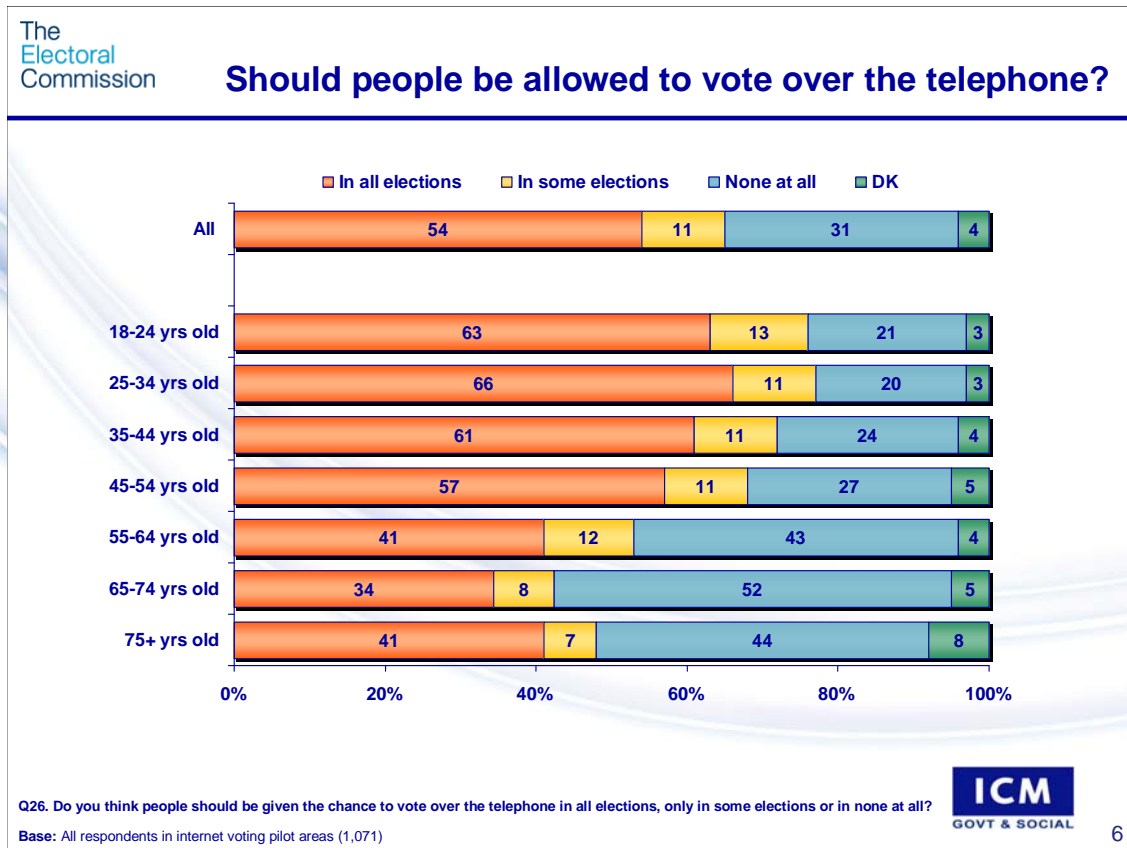
*(Agent, Sheffield)*

*Anything that offers more choice and convenience is good.  
(Candidate, Shrewsbury & Atcham)*

*I don't think we should bother with telephone and internet voting and concentrate on keeping it simple and getting it right.  
(Agent, Shrewsbury)*

Based on the South Bucks data we can see that those who participated in the pilot scheme and voted by telephone are generally happy to see the scheme rolled out to future elections. 70% think it should be made available at all future elections, 15% said at only some future elections, with 8% unhappy to see the scheme advance any further.

Some interesting differences in opinion exist by age



Despite telephone voting having the highest level of uptake among older age groups, they are the ones least keen to see telephone voting made available at future elections. Younger voters are happy to see the scheme develop but uptake amongst these groups was low for the pilot scheme.

As with internet voting there is an issue of confidence with telephone voting systems. Opinion is divided as to whether such a system is a secure method of voting. 45% are confident that such a system is secure, whilst 41% are not. Least confident are the older age groups with 65-74 year olds the least confident of all (61% unconfident). Younger residents are the most confident (63% of 18-24 year olds confident it is secure). Confidence is lower amongst voters (39% confident) than non voters (52% confident). Figures from the South Bucks survey show that those who cast a vote over the telephone are some of the strongest advocates of the scheme. Four in five (78%) of those who cast a telephone vote believe that it is a secure method of voting.

Voters as well as candidates and agents have some concerns regarding the transparency of such a system. There is no way of telling how the votes are counted and no access to this information.

*We don't see how it's counted do we? We should be able to see it counted, we should know.  
(Voter, Swindon)*

*It seems that the more different ways of voting there are the more difficult it is to track the votes  
and keep record of them and harder to scrutinise.  
(Voter, Sheffield)*

### **Confidentiality**

Generally it was believed that a vote cast over the phone was a secret vote that no-one else would have been able to see at the time it was cast. However 18% said there were others around at the time that could have heard, and 6% said there were others present but they wouldn't have been able to hear how the vote was cast.

### **In summary**

Telephone voting would at first glance appear to be a relatively underused resource. On the basis of the main telephone survey, voter uptake was low, although a significant minority (22%) of those that used it said it gave them access to a vote that would have been difficult to cast had the pilot not been running. Telephone voting is a fairly niche offering that appeals primarily to an elderly demographic (paradoxically, the group who are least keen to see it rolled out to future elections).

Candidates and agents were fairly uninformed on the subject of telephone voting, with some unaware it was even operating as a pilot scheme. Several of those who were aware of the pilot had reservations about such a system including the potential for fraud, a lack of transparency and a lack of impact on voter turnout. Overall it was not felt to be able to justify its inclusion in the voting systems unless taken from the standpoint that it offers access to those who might not be able to vote otherwise. It does not currently meet the objective of raising voter turnout, as far as candidates and agents are concerned.

## 9. Comparing attitudes toward administrative reform

So far we have examined separately for each of the various reforms that were piloted how attitudes to their introduction vary from one group to another. However, there are two important limitations to that kind of analysis.

First, it is not always possible to identify which differences are key. For example, we know from past research that younger people are less interested in politics. If therefore we find both that younger people are less in favour of a particular reform together with those who are less interested in politics, we cannot be sure that one of these patterns is not simply a consequence of the other. Multivariate analysis, however, enables us to assess whether a relationship exists between a 'dependent' variable, such as attitude towards electronic counting, and an 'independent' variable, such as age, after taking into account the relationship between our dependent variable and one or more other independent variables too (such as interest in politics).

Second, by simply examining each reform separately it is not immediately apparent whether the pattern of attitudes towards different reforms is much the same for each reform or whether that pattern varies. Because multivariate analysis can provide us with some simple statistics that summarise the relationship between variables, we can more readily identify whether patterns are the same or different.

Our attention here is focused on four reforms – the provision of signatures, electronic counting, and voting by telephone or by the internet. In each case the main telephone survey of people living in our pilot areas were asked questions that asked them to state whether or not a reform should be introduced in the administration of elections and/or whether the introduction of that reform would affect their confidence in the voting process in general.<sup>2</sup> These questions thus come reasonably close to providing an indication of overall support for or opposition to each reform

### **Good v.Bad Idea if everyone had to sign**

Satisfaction with voting process	.39 (.08) *
Voting in local elections	
(always vote)	
sometimes vote	-.22 (.17)
never vote	-.80 (.21)*
Never been eligible to vote	.30 (.39)

Nagelkerke R-squared = 9%

Model: Binary logistic regression. Main cell entries are parameter coefficients; figures in brackets are associated standard errors. Category in brackets is the reference category for that variable, and the parameter coefficients reflect the 'effect' of being in the category in question as opposed to the reference category. Where no reference category is shown, the variable is regarded as interval in character.

\* significant at 5% level

<sup>2</sup> We should note that the questions about the provision of signatures were only asked of those living in the four areas in which at least some people voting in person were required to supply a signature. The questions on electronic counting and both internet and telephone voting were asked of respondents in all nine areas in which a pilot was conducted.

First of all, let us look at one of two measures we have available of attitudes towards the idea of requiring everyone to sign their name when collecting their ballot paper. Our earlier analysis suggested that younger people were somewhat less likely to think that this is a good idea, as were those who tended not to vote, those who had a low level of interest in politics and those who were dissatisfied with the voting process in general. Which of these characteristics is the more important in accounting for differences in attitudes? To address this question we undertook a logistic regression analysis of whether people think requiring people to provide a signature would be a good idea as opposed to a bad one. All of the variables just mentioned as being associated with support for or opposition to the reform were eligible for inclusion in our analysis – so long as its (overall) association with our dependent variable was statistically significant at the 5% level.

As we can see this approach indicates that level of satisfaction with the voting process in general is clearly associated with attitudes towards the provision of a signature, while those who say they have never voted in local elections have different views from those who say they always vote in such elections. The more satisfied someone is with the process of voting at elections in the UK, the more likely they are to regard the provision of signatures as a good idea. Equally, those who never vote in local elections are less likely than those who always vote in such contests to think it is a good idea. In short it appears that it is those who are already the more psychologically and behaviourally engaged with the electoral process for whom this reform has greatest appeal. Whatever its merits as a means of reducing fraud, it is evidently not a reform that particularly appeals to those who are currently disinclined to vote.

At the same time we should note what is missing from our model – particularly the age variable. Evidently once we take into account someone's level of satisfaction and involvement with the electoral process, someone's age does not in fact make any difference to their attitudes.

We have, however, a second measure of attitudes towards the provision of signatures we can examine. This is whether or not people feel their level of confidence in the voting process would be affected if all voters were required to provide a signature. The results of a multivariate analysis of this variable are shown in the first column of the following table. In part it confirms the evidence of our first question. The more satisfied someone is with the process of voting, the more likely they are to state that the introduction of the provision of signatures would increase (yet further) their confidence in the voting process. However, we find that in this case even when we have taken this relationship into account the more interested someone is in politics, the more likely they are to state that the provision of signatures would increase their confidence. Moreover, even when we have taken both these patterns into account, those aged between 35 and 74 are significantly more likely than those aged 18 to 34 to state that the introduction of this reform would serve to increase their confidence. Here at least age apparently really does make a difference to people's attitudes.

### Impact of signature provision/electronic counting on confidence in voting process

	Signature Provision	Electronic Counting
Satisfaction with voting process	.33 (.07)*	.12 (.04)*
Voted in local elections	ns	-.33 (.11)*
Voting in local elections (always vote)		
sometimes vote		.27 (.11)*
never vote		.20 (.16)
Never been eligible to vote		.79 (.22)*
Interest in politics	.25 (.06)*	-.15 (.04)*
Age		
(18-34)		
35-54	.37 (.16)*	-.34 (.10)*
55-74	.67 (.17)*	-.55 (.12)*
75 plus	.34 (.28)	-.65 (.18)*

Nagelkerke R-squared

9%

7%

Model: Ordinal logistic regression. See also note to previous table.

ns = Not significant

Still, although the details in respect of this variable are rather different, the key message is much the same. The provision of signatures has most appeal to those with attitudes and attributes that already incline them to be involved in the electoral process. Unsurprisingly, perhaps it appears primarily to be a measure that encourages those who already vote to feel that elections are being administered properly.

The same cannot be said of electronic counting (see the second column of the above table). When asked whether its introduction at all elections would affect their level of confidence in the voting process, it was for the most part those who are not currently involved in the electoral process who gave a positive response. Those who did not vote on May 3rd (and beyond that also those who are only occasional voters in local elections in general) and those who are less interested in politics are more likely to state that the introduction of electronic counting would increase their confidence in the voting process. Moreover, even after we have taken those patterns into account, the younger someone is, the more likely they are to take a positive view of electronic counting.

There is just small pattern in a contrary direction. After taking all the other patterns into account those who are satisfied with the voting process are somewhat more likely to state that the introduction of electronic counting would increase their level of confidence. It may be that those who are satisfied with the voting process have a relatively high level of trust in those who administer elections, and thus, other things being equal, are somewhat more inclined to believe that any reform would be introduced effectively.

Still, it is the contrast between attitudes towards electronic counting and those towards the provision of signatures that is most striking. For those currently more likely to be engaged in the electoral process signatures appear to be a means of ensuring the integrity of the current way of doing things. Electronic counting, on the other hand, is seemingly regarded by some as an unnecessary if not indeed undesirable change to a system with which they are already familiar.

### **Allow people to vote by phone/internet**

	Phone	Internet
Satisfaction with voting process	.10 (.05)*	.15 (.05)*
Voted in local elections	-.35 (.09)*	-.26 (.09)*
Interest in politics	-.15 (.04)*	-.11 (.04)*
Age		
(18-34)		
35-54	-.34 (.10)*	-.45 (.10)*
55-74	-1.04 (.12)*	-1.37 (.12)*
75 plus	-.85 (.18)*	-1.66 (.19)*

Nagelkerke R-squared

12%

12%

Model: Ordinal logistic regression. See also note to earlier table.

Indeed, much the same seems to be true when we consider attitudes to two further possible reforms, voting by phone and voting over the internet. In both cases those who actually voted on May 3rd and those who are interested in politics are less likely to state that these methods should be made available at some or all elections (as are those who are less satisfied with the current voting process). Meanwhile we can also see from the table above that even after these patterns are taken into account older people are far less likely to support their introduction, and especially so in the case of the internet.

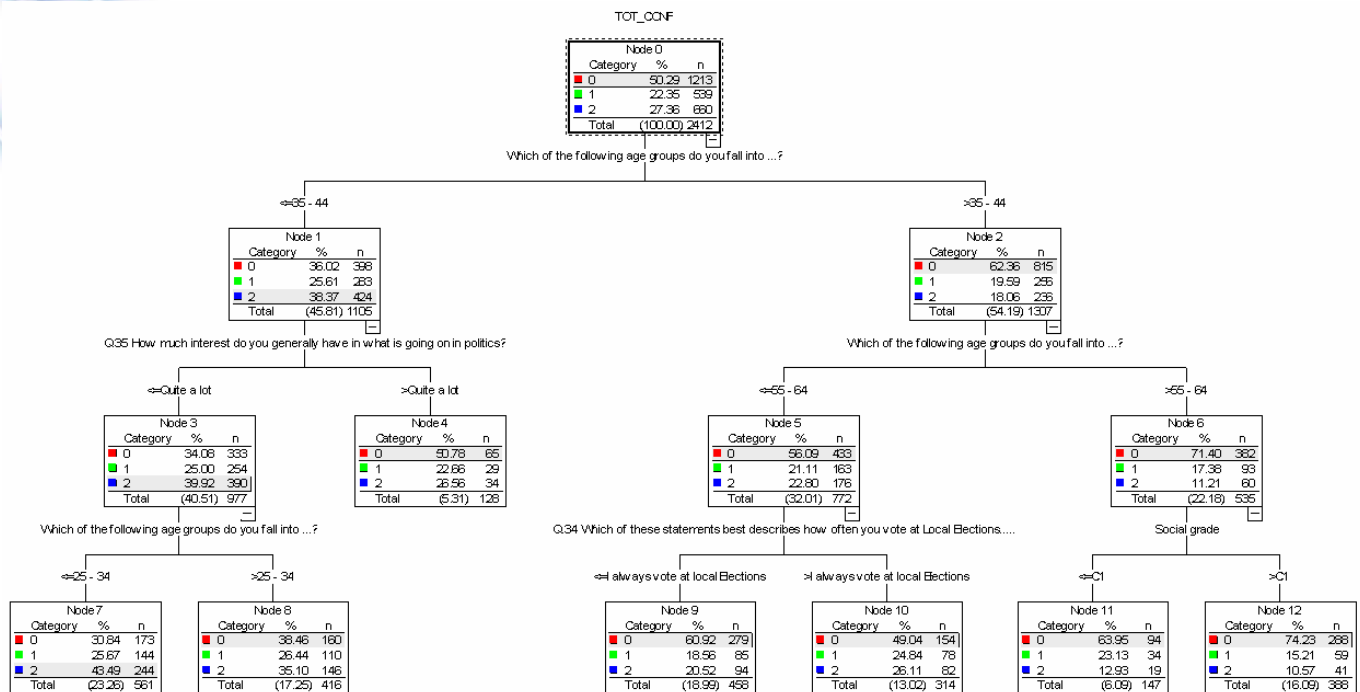
Of course in part these age patterns could in part be a 'life cycle' effect. Older people are less willing to embrace change to a process to which they have become accustomed. But it seems reasonable to suggest that they also reflect a 'generational' phenomenon. Unlike older generations, to-day's younger generation has grown up with the internet and the mobile phone (and especially the use of SMS text messaging) and is more likely to have integrated their use into their lifestyles. This is not a habit they are likely to lose as they get older. If so – and assuming they remain relatively enamoured of these technologies despite their potential pitfalls - we can anticipate that popular support for the use of the phone and the internet is likely to grow in future (although given what we have seen in previous chapters it doesn't necessarily follow that availability will make them vote more readily).

## 10. Modelling confidence in new e-voting arrangements

Thus far, this report has taken public attitudes at face value and views toward the separate pilot schemes independently of each other. With regard to Internet and telephone voting, we have seen that both are rarely used, appeal to typical voters rather than attracting the disengaged, and suffer from quite serious perceptions of security frailties.

Yet it has been possible to dig beneath the top line data in order to establish typologies that portray groups of people who may be more or less susceptible to the appeal of both of these forms of e-voting. ICM has undertaken a segmentation exercise that attempts to further explain the public's attitude toward e-voting. To this end, a CHAID model (Chi-square Automatic Interaction Detector) was developed. This is an exploratory method used to study the relationship between a dependent variable (in this case "total confidence in the security of both telephone and Internet voting") and a series of predictor variables (potentially including all other questions in our survey).

CHAID modelling selects a set of predictors and their interactions that optimally predict the dependent measure. The developed model is a classification tree that shows how major "types" form from the independent predictor variables, which differentially predict the total confidence score. Looking at the Correlation & Regression Tree below then (Node 0), we can see that half (50%) of the voters and non-voters spoken to do not have any confidence in the future security of either telephone or Internet voting. One in five (22%) have confidence in one form but not the other, while slightly more (27%) have confidence in both.



We can then predict how those proportions vary by revealing the interaction with the strongest predictor of total confidence – age. Node 1 separates those aged 34 and under from those aged 35+, and we immediately see that the proportion who have confidence in both voting systems rises to

38%, with a corresponding fall observed in the proportion predicted to have confidence in neither (36%). As we would expect, the more elderly Node 2 predicts the opposite: no confidence rising to 62% and confidence in both falling to only 18%.

The model further predicts confidence by sub-splitting each segment. For example, the prediction that just explained increasing levels of confidence among the young is improved by incorporating an 'interest in politics' independent variable. We can then isolate one group or segment (Node 4) who are young and politically interested (5% of all respondents) but whom have much less confidence in the security of e-voting than their politically disinterested counterparts. It can be seen that 50% of this group have no confidence in either voting method, and 27% have confidence in both.

However, the confidence in security of both methods of voting does rise among the young, politically disinterested group (Node 3). Confidence in both systems rises to 40% and falls to 34% as far as confidence in neither is concerned. This segment is then split one more time to reveal the group who demonstrate the highest level of confidence in both voting systems – Node 7 (representing 23% of all respondents, the biggest segment of all). The model predicts that 43% of this group would consider both telephone and Internet voting to be secure.

We can summarise the electorate as being comprised of the following seven segments:

1. Politically disinterested under 34's (Node 7)

This group is the largest segment by far (23%). Four in ten (43%) have confidence in both telephone and Internet voting, and another 25% have confidence in one method but not the other. Three in ten (31%) still have no confidence in either. It would seem apparent that e-voting appeals most to this group, which as we know, is the most politically disengaged – only a quarter (26%) actually voted in 2007. In one sense their disengagement is a positive – a new method of voting that appeals to young non-voters can only be a good thing. However, we also know that it is very difficult to actually draw this group to political water, never mind make it drink.

That said, a fairly high proportion of voters within this segment (8%) voted over the Internet in the local elections. It is also the case that they are more likely than any other segment to say they would have been likely to vote had they been aware of advance voting (43%) and they are most inclined to think that people should be given the chance to vote over the Internet (63%) and over the telephone (53%) in all elections.

This is clearly a target group of haphazard voters who could be persuaded by new methods to turn out to vote, given more of a push in terms of raising awareness of the availability of e-voting methods.

2. Politically disinterested 35-44's (Node 8)

This group represents 17% of the public in the pilot areas. 35% have confidence in both methods of e-voting, while 26% have confidence in one, and 38% confidence in neither.

Only one in three (36%) say they turned out to vote in the local elections, but did disproportionately vote over the Internet (10%). They are most likely to say they are too busy to vote (25%), in theory making them vulnerable to the added convenience factors associated with e-voting. This is supported by the fact that a high of 68% say that they think more people would vote if advance voting were commonly available.

This group is second only to their politically disinterested juniors (see above) in considering that the roll out of Internet voting and telephone voting to all elections should occur (55% and 45% respectively).

### 3. Politically interested under 44's (Node 4)

This group is very small, representing only 5% of the pilot area electorate. Its higher level of interest in politics distinguishes it from the two groups above, but probably explains why more of them do NOT have confidence in either e-voting method (50%). We have seen that a higher level of political interest is correlated with distrust of the new methods.

Despite being relatively interested in politics, turnout among this segment (57%) is well below that observed in other segments (below) – a factor that is undoubtedly linked to age more than anything else, but time considerations (22%) were also a factor. As this group likes its' politics to be interesting, it is noted that a well above average 11% of non-voters cited the reason that there was a lack of information about the candidates, elections or parties.

Awareness of the pilot arrangements was relatively high (81% were aware of any pilot scheme), with 20% aware of electronic counting (higher than any other group). Awareness of telephone voting and Internet voting arrangements were above average.

Despite the relative youth of this segment, and a relatively high level of political interest, the prime feature is a mild antipathy toward e-voting. Six in ten (60%) do not want to see telephone voting in any future elections and four in ten (42%) think similarly with regard to Internet voting. As satisfaction with the current voting process is no higher than average, we are left to speculate that this group is rather traditionalist and conservative when it comes to political matters and electoral arrangements. E-voting appears to have a difficult task in converting this group.

### 4. 45-64 regular voters (Node 9)

One in five (19%) fall into this category. Six in ten (61%) members of this group do not have confidence in the security of either e-voting system while one in five (21%) have confidence in both.

This group nearly always votes, even though their interest in politics is not deeply ingrained. They are more satisfied with the process of voting than any other group and are highly likely to view voting as a civic duty. The introduction of new voting arrangements might prove to be convenient in some cases, but the vast majority would be unlikely to use it.

### 5. 45-64 irregular voters (Node 10)

One in eight (13%) fall into this category, and they appear to be slightly more inclined to be positive toward e-voting than their regular voting counterparts (but less than a number of other segments). Just under half (49%) have confidence in neither but 26% have confidence in both.

We might speculate that this is the group that most benefits from the convenience factor associated with new voting arrangements. It is certainly the case that the provision of advance voting stations was helpful, given that a high of 58% (of early voters) said they would otherwise have been unlikely to vote had the facility not been available in May. That said, this segment is rather ambivalent or perhaps simply apathetic about voting and the associated options for doing so.

6. 65+ ABC1's (Node 11)

Representing 6% of the electorate. Two in three (64%) do not have confidence in either form of e-voting, with only 13% having some confidence in both.

This group nearly always votes in every election that comes along, and is generally interested in politics. As such, it is probably no surprise to discover that they are overwhelmingly satisfied with the process of voting (87%) and it is, perhaps, for this reason that they see little need for the roll out of e-voting.

7. 65+ C2DE's (Node 12)

16% of the electorate. This group is the least convinced of all about the security of e-voting. Three quarters (74%) are not confident about either method of voting, with only 15% confident about one, and 11% confident about both.

Members do tend to vote most of the time, in all elections, but are deadily opposed to the introduction of e-voting. Seven in ten (68%) think that telephone voting should not be on offer at all, and 61% feel the same way about Internet voting.

This model probably does little more than re-establish known patterns and prejudices among the electorate. Predicting that e-voting appeals to the young and the politically disconnected more than most is not a conclusion that is likely to set pulses racing, but nonetheless, it remains true to say so. The problem remains, of course, in persuading those same groups to use their e-vote, rather than simply appreciate the opportunity to have it.

## 11. Electronic Counting report

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### Public perception and attitudes

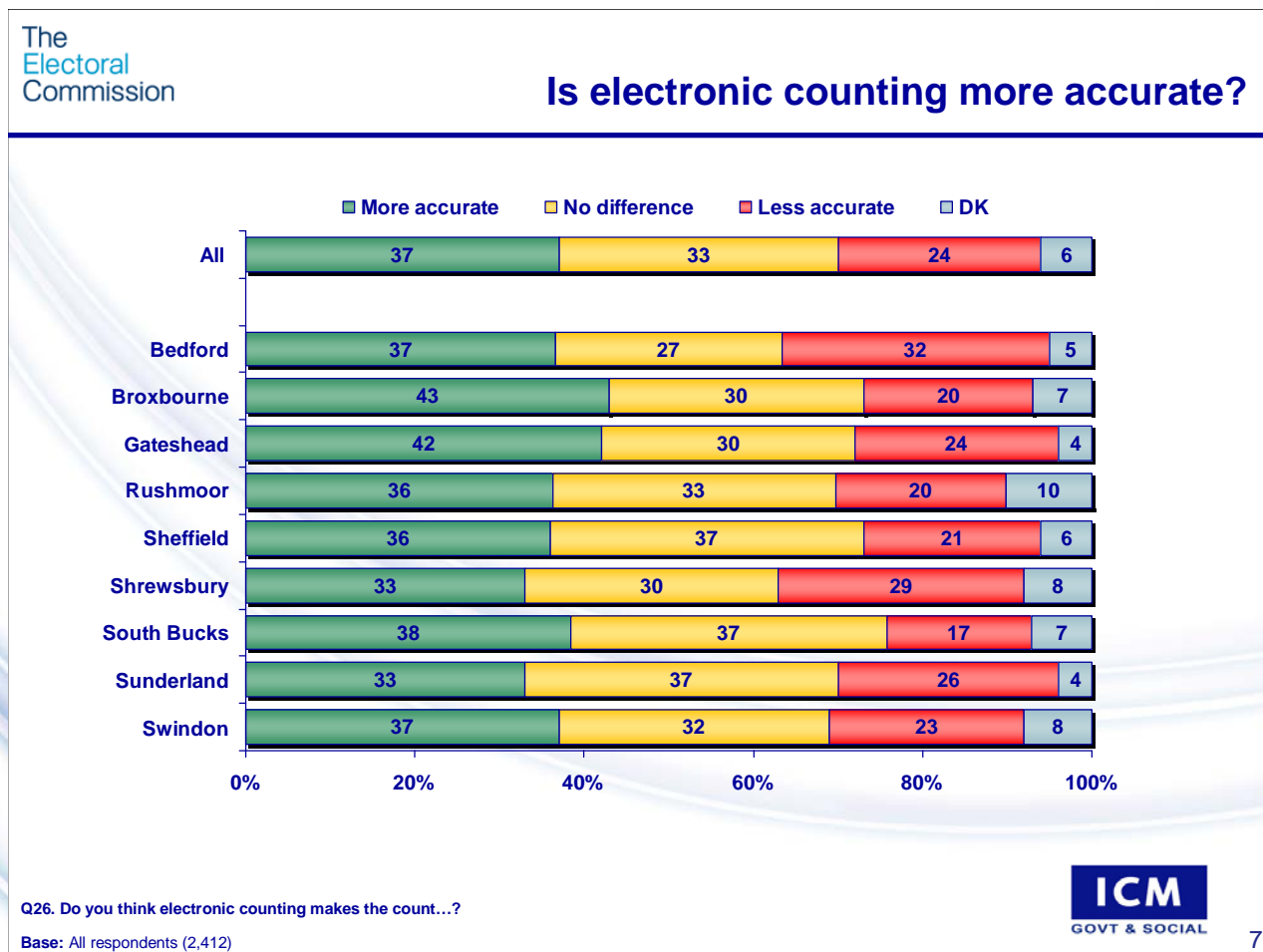
Remembering that quantitative data from the main telephone survey is available for Bedford and South Bucks only, we can immediately observe that a material difference in the level of awareness exists between residents of the two local authority areas. In South Bucks, half (50%) of the public were aware that their local authority was piloting some form of voting arrangement, but this compares to a statistically significantly lower 38% in Bedford. As we explain elsewhere, the variation is most likely to be linked to the form of pilot scheme occurring. In those areas where Internet and telephone voting was being trialled, overall awareness was higher – and of course, South Bucks was one such area. In Bedford, advance voting and signature requirements were in place, and like other such areas (for example, Broxbourne and Gateshead), the general public were much less likely to be aware of these voter arrangements.

Moving on specifically to prompted awareness of electronic counting, we can see that overall awareness equalises, with Bedford (51%) a single percentage point lower than South Bucks (52%). Awareness was statistically significantly higher amongst voters (61%) than non voters (41%), and those who always vote in local elections had significantly higher levels of awareness (61%) than those who only occasionally vote (46%), and those who never vote (33%).

In Bedford, (and less, but still evident in South Bucks), is the rather curious outcome that members of the public were more aware of electronic counting (51%) – which they themselves would not experience – than they were of advance voting (42%) and the signature requirement (42%). In South Bucks awareness of the electronic count (52%) was marginally higher than telephone voting (51%) and materially lower than Internet voting (67%). Intuitively, it is difficult to understand why awareness is higher for electronic counting than voter-facing arrangements? However, we should remember that this survey was conducted immediately post-election, and electronic counting was a primary source of media attention given the events that occurred. It may well be that voters and non-voters picked up on this media attention, which then naturally awakened their own recall of local counting arrangements.

Public perceptions as to the accuracy of the electronic counting systems are split. Just over a third (37%) of people across all the pilot areas think electronic counting produces a more accurate count, a quarter 24% think it actually makes the count less accurate and a third (33%) think it makes no difference. A small proportion (6%) did not know or did not have an opinion. Given that one of the aims of electronic counting is to improve count accuracy, we might conclude from these findings that the public is far from being convinced. That said, the point made above also might apply here: the timing of this survey (post election) was such that residents would have had the potential to be exposed to negative media coverage of electronic counting. It is doubtful that news of abandoned counts would have inspired much confidence in their accuracy.

As can be seen from the slide below, attitudes towards electronic counting are fairly consistent across the different pilot areas, with few differences between those areas taking part in the pilot scheme and those who did not.



Opinion is also divided as to whether having electronic counting instils more confidence in the voting process. A majority (52%) said it made no difference, 22% said it made them more confident and 24% said it made them less confident. These figures do not differ drastically across the pilot areas. Strongest advocates of electronic counting (as with other pilot schemes) were the youngest age groups, with 31% of 18-24 year olds saying such a system gives them more confidence in the voting system. However 58% of them said it makes no difference.

#### **Candidates and agents views pre election**

Candidates and agents were asked what they thought about the electronic counting scheme prior to the election. It would be impossible to deny the benefit of hindsight when answering this question but several candidates and agents claimed they had concerns prior to the election. Their main concerns were:

1. That there was no need to change from a manual hand count, and that electronic counting was not going to be any more quick or efficient than the old system

*Hand counts are reasonably quick so what was the benefit?  
(Candidate, Stratford)*

*Don't know why we needed to change really; there's never been any real problems with a hand count as far as I can tell  
(Candidate, South Bucks)*

2. That the electronic counting systems had not been trialled properly, particularly under stressful or high volume conditions

*We were invited to see how it all worked before the election but the demonstration only showed a few ballot papers going through, nothing like on election day  
(Candidate, Breckland)*

3. That the primary motivation for introducing electronic counting was to try and reduce costs rather than improving the accuracy or speed of the count

*I believe it has been sold to the Electoral Commission, or whoever sanctioned the use of the machines, on cost  
(Agent, Stratford)*

*Cost I would have thought. Can't think of anything else  
(Candidate, Stratford)*

4. That an over reliance on technology and automated systems has the potential for disaster and that trying to switch to a fully automated system in one move would be problematic

*That's the trouble when you put too much reliance on a computerised system. Something is bound to go wrong  
(Candidate, Bedford)*

5. That if systems such as these go wrong they can undermine voter confidence in the democratic process which in turn can negatively impact on turnout at future elections

*If the voters don't feel their votes are being counted correctly it is another reason for them to become detached and disenfranchised from the whole process. 'Why bother?' They will think.  
(Agent, Breckland)*

However there were a number of candidates who felt quite positive about the new systems before they were trialled. Electronic counting was seen as the future by some, the first step on the path towards a fully automated voting system. For others the perceived benefit was that the count would be completed more quickly. Not only would this allow candidates and agents to go home earlier, it would get the result out to the public more quickly thus helping to engage them in the democratic process.

Prior to the election several candidates and agents said they were invited to witness trials of how the new electronic counting systems would operate. Those that attended these trials were given a demonstration of how the new technology would operate including what happens to spoiled or difficult to analyse ballot papers. Looking back on these trials it is apparent now that they did not anticipate all of the potential problems that would arise on the day of the election.

*They showed us a demonstration, and put through a few papers that were spoiled but they were all really obvious things like someone putting two x's on the same page. What they didn't anticipate was that election staff would be tearing off the ballot papers wrong and that the machine would reject them. All the problems they showed us were the ones they'd thought of themselves not what would happen at a real election  
(Candidate, Breckland)*

*It later transpired the testing wasn't up to scratch and didn't account for the frenetic scenario of a hall on election day  
(Candidate, Breckland)*

### **Reaction to electronic counting system trials**

Of the five areas that trialled the electronic counting system all but one area (Dover) experienced a number of problems with their systems. In some cases these problems were so severe that the result could not be announced until the day after the election or the count had to be abandoned altogether in favour of a hand count.

*It seemed to be taking a long time. I didn't make it to the end, I had to be up for work the next day  
(Agent, South Bucks)*

*It was a bit of a failure really. They had to revert to hand counting. The machines were too sensitive and were picking up all sorts of things which weren't the elector's marks. It led to it being abandoned on the Thursday night and restarted on the Friday morning.  
(Agent, Stratford)*

Problems with the electronic counting systems arose fairly early on during the count, and got progressively worse as the day wore on. This cumulative effect led to the collapse of some systems as the backlog created in one area of the system impacted and slowed down other stages within the process.

*I first started noticing problems as early as 10am at first level adjudication. It basically went downhill from there  
(Candidate, Breckland)*

*The end result was that the e-counting system took longer than a manual count!  
(Candidate, Bedford)*

A number of technical and logistical problems were highlighted across the various pilot areas. In several cases these problems occurred in more than one location. The main problems were identified as:

1. The number of ballot papers going to first level scrutiny was way over expectations and created a bottleneck. This got worse to the point where the system ground to a halt. The problems included simple issues such as the mark of a tick rather than a cross, which would have been simply accepted during hand counts but had to be adjudicated on each occasion, or the system being unable to distinguish between a 1 and a 2 when written in a ballot paper. An increase in the number of disputed papers meant that impartial adjudication suffered as a result - it wasn't possible to keep up with all the ballot papers coming through the system.

*The electronic system was set up to read 1's and 2's but some had been written as a continental 1 which completely threw the machine and thus these ballot papers were referred to the first level adjudicator  
(Agent, Bedford)*

*I didn't feel you had the involvement with disputed papers where normally an agent or candidate would be involved in looking at the paper in question. Here there were too many screen, too many ballot papers being adjudicated at the same time and you couldn't see them all and keep track. It was not good at all  
(Agent, Breckland)*

2. Computer processors were too slow to cope. Computer freezes were believed to be linked to the transference of data rather than forms passing through the scanner. A lack of processing capability was felt to be the culprit in this case.

*I think their systems were a little slow, they couldn't scan and process the information fast enough and as the backlog grew the system slowed down even further  
(Candidate, Stratford)*

3. First level adjudication was a very inefficient and slow process. It required far too many clicks of the mouse and screen scrolls to get through the system. This slowed up the process and meant the adjudicators could not keep pace with the number of ballot papers coming through the system, which in turn had a knock on effect to the preceding levels until eventually the whole system slowed to a crawl.

*It was really inefficient. You need some short cuts in there rather than having to scroll through the screen every time  
(Agent, Breckland)*

4. Problems with the perforation of ballot papers not being aligned properly with the counting machine and thus being rejected. This came down to a lack of staff training on how to tear off and distribute the ballot papers. Staff were not informed that an exact tear was required or the paper would be rejected.

*If the ballot paper wasn't torn off precisely then it was rejected  
(Candidate, Bedford)*

5. Ballot boxes being cross-contaminated with papers for both District and Parish elections. This meant that the boxes had to be sorted by hand. If the wrong ballot paper went through the electronic counting system it would then be sent to adjudication. If the ballot boxes had been badly managed in the polling station this would be a common occurrence which in turn added to overloading the system at first level adjudication. These votes then had to be discounted as no more votes could be taken after a result had been declared. It wasn't a problem in this case as the result was never in any doubt, but if this situation had arisen in a closely contested election it could have been disastrous for the reputation of the electronic counting system.

*As the ballot boxes had been badly managed in the polling station these problems were occurring frequently which in turn added to the problem of overloading at first level adjudication  
(Candidate, Breckland)*

6. Ballot papers for postal votes were required to be folded in order to be sent back in the envelope provided. However the technology in place to count these ballots was designed to count flat ballot papers only and rejected those that had a crease in them. As with cross contamination of ballot papers this was felt to be an issue of staff training and was symptomatic of an over confidence in the new technology. There was felt by one candidate to be a complete lack of synergy between the technical teams responsible for the e-counting technology and the election staff at the polling stations on the day of the election.

*All the papers came back folded but the machine didn't like them like that.*

*It comes down to a lack of staff training. The left hand not telling the right hand what it's doing. You get a new system like this and people think that's all there is to it but if you don't train people how to work with the technology then you're going to create problems for yourself  
(Candidate, Bedford)*

7. The number of votes counted not tallying with the number of ballot papers handed out. This effectively meant that votes had effectively been lost. There were a number of reasons for this happening. Cross contamination of ballot boxes, papers being rejected, papers moving through the system and being miscounted or not counted at all. The potential outcome of 'lost' ballot papers is major a lack of confidence in the system.

*If for example you were watching the screen and saw that 3 votes had been made but only 2 were counted it was then quite hard to recall the paper. It also meant that scrutineers had to sit there and watch every vote go through to ensure all votes were counted  
(Agent, Breckland)*

As well as these more technical problems, candidates and agents complained that the electronic counting system was detrimental to the democratic process in a number of other ways. The main complaints were:

1. That electronic counting destroys the theatre and atmosphere of the count. A traditional hand count allows candidates and agents to see the progress of the count by observing the piles of ballot papers on the tables in the polling station. This gives them a good idea of how the count is progressing throughout the night, and helps to sustain the interest and enthusiasm of those involved. The electronic counting system on the other hand gave no indication of the progress of the count. There were no updates, no way to tell what was going on, and no indication of what stage the count was at. This effectively killed the atmosphere in the count. The implication of this is that candidates could become less engaged in the process and therefore less likely to stand in the future.

*It wasn't very good. You couldn't see. When you see what votes are coming out of what boxes you get a good feel for what areas are good for you, what areas are bad for you. You couldn't see any of that, you were a bit remote from the count.  
(Agent, Stratford)*

*After twelve hours as an agent at the count I was very uncomfortable with the system itself and didn't feel it gave the candidates or the public the involvement that a traditional count does.  
(Agent, Breckland)*

*Candidates, agents and members of the public couldn't see the piles of votes building up so the tension and the drama of the situation was completely lost...Because of this the crowds dispersed throughout the day  
(Candidate, Bedford)*

2. By delaying the announcement of the election result until the next day a number of candidates and agents were unable to attend the final declaration. In the case of closely contested wards this meant that some candidates were unable to exercise their right to a recount.

*In the end the result wasn't announced until the next morning and because of this some candidates weren't able to attend. This meant that if the result was extremely close they were in no position to ask for a recount as they weren't present in person which I think is terribly unfair  
(Candidate, South Bucks)*

3. Access to the electronic counting systems appears to have been varied. In some polling stations there was a relative degree of openness, with candidates and their agents given free reign to view the proceedings and observe the scrutiny process. In others this was not the case leaving candidates and agents feeling cut off or ostracised from the process. This led to them seeing the count as a 'secret' count thus undermining their confidence in the democratic process.

*It felt like we were being kept at arm's length with the process of the counting  
(Agent, South Bucks)*

*There was a lack of visual; no participation. There was no visible trail that candidates and others of the party could follow...it was not an open and visible process. I'm not saying anything untoward happened but it was not open  
(Agent, Stratford)*

*People were behind a barrier, you were not allowed to check and people weren't saying anything. It's a step back as far as I'm concerned  
(Agent, South Bucks)*

According to a small number of interviews with candidates and agents in Dover, the counts in Dover would appear to have passed without many major incidents. Counts were slightly slower than anticipated, meaning that results were announced a little later than usual, but they did not experience delays or problems on the scale of some of the other pilot areas.

*There was talk of the count being done by 2am and in the event it wasn't done much before 4am. Having said that I've been to conventional counts which were late  
(Agent, Dover)*

A point of contention in one of the Dover wards was this problem where candidates have no idea of the progress of the count until the result is announced and, therefore, can not prepare themselves for the result in advance.

*I feel rather sorry for him, the press jumped on him. With the old fashioned count he would have had an inkling and could have prepared himself psychologically  
(Dover candidate)*

### **Future of electronic counting**

Should electronic counting be extended to future elections? Answers to this question were in part dictated by their experiences at the count and in many cases these were negative. The problem for candidates and agents was not just that the electronic counting system failed to deliver in terms of speed and efficiency; it also destroyed the atmosphere of the count. From their point of view the new systems made the whole process far less exciting and enjoyable, and for this reason - as much as the technical problems encountered - many of them would like to see the system scrapped in favour of the traditional hand count.

Not everyone was so negative though and a number of candidates and agents (including those in the problematic test areas) felt that there was a future for electronic counting. Obviously there would need to be significant improvements in terms of the performance of the systems, but that is not to say there is no future for electronic counting.

*There's nothing wrong with electronic counting in principle but some recognition must be given to the involvement of the candidates and public  
(Agent, Breckland)*

However it must be borne in mind that even those who see a future for electronic counting were generally happy with the old system of hand counts. They question whether electronic counting can deliver real benefits or is it simply technology for technology's sake? After this trial both candidates and agents are very much in the latter camp, and as such remain unconvinced of the need for such a system.

## 12. Questionnaire

### MAIN TELEPHONE SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

APRIL 2007

Hello, I am telephoning on behalf of ICM, the independent social research organisation. We are conducting a research project which requires us to talk to a representative sample of people throughout the country on issues that affect all people. We have selected your telephone number purely at random and would greatly appreciate your help for a few minutes to answer some simple questions.

⇒ **IF RESPONDENT SOUNDS LIKE THEY WANT TO REFUSE SAY.....**

For the purposes of our research project it is most important that we talk to a representative cross section of all people. Therefore, your views are extremely important to us and the interview will only take a few minutes of your time.

⇒ **IF RESPONDENT STILL SOUNDS LIKE THEY WANT TO REFUSE SAY....**

If you cannot spare the time at the moment I would really appreciate it if we could call you back at your own convenience over the next few days. As I say your own views are very important to us.

QS1 Can I confirm, what is the name of your local authority or council? CHECK AGAINST PRE-CODED LIST. PROMPT WITH COUNCIL NAMES WITHIN AREA IF NECESSARY.

Bedford	1	ASK QS2
Broxbourne	2	GO TO Q1
Gateshead	3	GO TO Q1
Rushmoor	4	GO TO Q1
Sheffield	5	GO TO Q1
Shrewsbury & Atcham	6	ASK QS2
South Bucks	7	ASK QS2
Sunderland	8	GO TO Q1
Swindon	9	ASK QS2

⇒ **IF BEDFORD, SHREWSBURY & ATCHAM, SOUTH BUCKS OR SWINDON ASK:**

QS2 As you may know, local council elections were held in some parts of ...QS1...but not others on May 3rd. Can you tell me, were elections held in your part of QS1? PROMPT IF NECESSARY: You would have received a polling card or postal vote pack if elections were being held.

Yes	CONTINUE
No	CLOSE
Don't know	CLOSE

⇒ **ASK ALL**

**Q1** Local council elections were held in your area on 3rd May. Talking to people, however, we have found that many did not vote. How about you? Did you manage to vote in the local council elections, or not?

Yes	1	GO TO Q2
No	2	GO TO Q3

⇒ **IF VOTED AT Q1**

**Q2** Did you vote in person at a polling station, by post, or using some other method? IF OTHER METHOD: Which method was that? IF IN SWINDON AND RESPONDENT SAYS: "IN PERSON AT POLLING STATION" ASK: Did you vote with a ballot paper or electronically? PROMPT IF NECESSARY

In person at a polling station using a paper ballot form	1
In person at a polling station electronically	2
By post	3
By telephone	4
Over the Internet in a private location (e.g. at home/work)	5
Over the Internet in a public place other than a polling station (e.g. library)	6
Other	7
Don't know	CLOSE

⇒ **ASK NON-VOTERS AT Q1**

**Q3** People have given many different reasons for not voting in the local elections on 3rd May 2007. How about you? Why didn't you vote on this occasion? Any other reason? PROBE FULLY FOR AT LEAST TWO RESPONSES WHERE POSSIBLE. WRITE IN

⇒ **ASK ALL**

**Q4** This year some areas in England were testing new ways of voting in these local council elections. As far as you know, was...QS1.... one of these areas?

Yes – it was	1
No – it was not	2
Don't know	3

**Q5** In fact, there were many different arrangements for voting in the local elections, but we have found that a lot of people were not aware of them. How about you? Were you aware that...READ OUT. CODE ANY YES

BEDFORD, BROXBOURNE, GATESHEAD, SUNDERLAND ONLY People were required to sign their names before they could be issued with their ballot paper at certain locations	Y N DK
BEDFORD, BROXBOURNE, GATESHEAD, SHEFFIELD, SHREWSBURY, SUNDERLAND, SWINDON ONLY People were able to vote before polling day/May 3 <sup>rd</sup> at certain locations	Y N DK
BEDFORD, SOUTH BUCKS ONLY Votes were counted electronically using machines	Y N DK
SHEFFIELD, SWINDON, SHREWSBURY, SOUTH BUCKS, ONLY People were able to vote over the telephone	Y N DK
RUSHMOOR, SHEFFIELD, SHREWSBURY, SOUTH BUCKS, SWINDON ONLY People were able to vote over the Internet	Y N DK
SWINDON ONLY People were able to vote electronically at polling stations other than their local polling station	Y N DK

⇒ **IF AWARE OF ONE OR MORE ARRANGEMENT, ASK**

**Q6** You mentioned .....Q5.....How did you first learn about this/these new arrangement(s) for voting?  
PROMPT TO LIST IF NECESSARY

Polling card	1
Local media/newspapers	2
Council website	3
Letters/leaflets/ from the Council highlighting new arrangement	4
Passing by on the day	5
Through family/friends/neighbours/work	6
Through a local canvasser/candidate	7
Advertising	8
When I went into the polling station and saw the laptops	9
TV	0
National newspapers	1
Magazines	2
Radio	3
Other	4
DK/Can't remember	5

**Q7 BLANK**

⇒ **NON-VOTERS SKIP TO Q11**

Q8 Can I just check, when did you vote – was it on 3rd May or before 3rd May?

On May 3 <sup>rd</sup>	1	GO TO Q11
Before May 3 <sup>rd</sup>	2	GO TO Q9
Can't remember	3	GO TO Q12

⇒ **IF VOTED BEFORE MAY 3RD ASK:**

Q9 How likely is it that you would have voted in these local elections if you had not been able to vote before May 3rd?

Very likely	1
Quite likely	2
Not very likely	3
Not at all likely	4
DK	5

Q10 And did you find having the opportunity to vote before polling day on May 3rd more convenient or less convenient, or did it make no difference one way or the other? Is that a lot or a little?

A lot more convenient	1	NOW GO TO Q12
A little more convenient	2	
No difference	3	
A little less convenient	4	
A lot less convenient	5	
DK	6	

⇒ **IF VOTED ON 3RD MAY (CODE 1, Q8), A NON VOTER (Q1 = 2) OR UNAWARE OF EARLY VOTING (AT Q5) ASK:**

Q11 If you had been aware that you could have voted before May 3rd, how likely do you think it is that you would have done so?

Very likely	1
Quite likely	2
Not very likely	3
Not at all likely	4
Was aware but didn't use opportunity	5
DK	6

⇒ **ASK ALL**

Q12 Do you think allowing people to vote before polling day in certain locations will increase or decrease the number of people who vote in local elections, or will it make no difference one way or the other? Is that a lot or a little?

Increase a lot	1
Increase a little	2
No difference	3
Decrease a lot	4
Decrease a little	5
Don't know	6

**SIGNATURE COLLECTION ASK IN;  
BEDFORD, BROXBOURNE, GATESHEAD, SUNDERLAND**

**Q13** As you may be aware, people were required to sign their name before they could be issued with their ballot papers at some polling stations in your area / [If in Bedford and Sunderland - say 'at all polling stations in your area'] How comfortable or uncomfortable were you/would you be signing your name at the polling station before being allowed to vote?

Very comfortable	1
Fairly comfortable	2
Fairly uncomfortable	3
Very uncomfortable	4
DK	5

⇒ **IF UNCOMFORTABLE, ASK**

**Q14** Why did you/would you feel uncomfortable? DO NOT READ OUT. CODE OR WRITE IN.

I don't see the point of it	1
It's inconvenient	2
It's an invasion of privacy	3
It means my vote is less secret	4
I found it difficult to sign	5
Other (specify)	6
Don't know	7

⇒

⇒ **ASK ALL IN ELIGIBLE AREAS**

**Q15** Do you think it would be a good idea or a bad idea if everyone who voted at a polling station had to sign their name before being allowed to vote?

Good idea	1
Bad idea	2
Don't know	3

**Q16** Do you think that requiring all voters to sign before being allowed to vote at a polling station would increase the amount of electoral fraud, decrease it, or would it make no difference one way or the other?

Increase	1
Decrease	2
No difference one way or the other	3
Don't know	4

**Q17** Do you think requiring everyone to sign their name before being allowed to vote at a polling station would give you more confidence in the voting process, less confidence, or would it make no difference?

More confidence	1
Less confidence	2
Make no difference	3
Don't know	4

### ELECTRONIC COUNTING ASK IN ALL AREAS

**Q18** As you may be aware, in some areas there was a new arrangement whereby electronic machines counted all the votes cast in this local council election. Some people have suggested that electronic machines should be used to count the votes cast in all elections. In your opinion, do you think using electronic machines to count votes makes the count...READ OUT

More accurate	1
Less accurate	2
Makes no difference	3
Don't know	4

**Q19** Do you think the use of electronic machines to count the votes cast in all elections would give you more confidence in the voting process, less confidence, or would it make no difference?

More confidence	1
Less confidence	2
Make no difference	3
Don't know	4

### TELEPHONE/INTERNET AREAS:

**ASK IN: RUSHMOOR, SHEFFIELD, SWINDON, SHREWSBURY, AND SOUTH BUCKS ONLY**

**TELEPHONE VOTING AVAILABLE IN:** Sheffield, Swindon, Shrewsbury, South Bucks,  
**INTERNET VOTING AVAILABLE IN:** Rushmoor, Sheffield, Shrewsbury, South Bucks, Swindon

⇒ **ASK TELEPHONE/INTERNET VOTERS (CODES 4,5,6 AT Q2). OTHERS SKIP TO Q24**

**Q21** When it came to registering to vote this way, did you find the process very straight forward, quite straightforward, not very straight forward or not straight forward at all? READ OUT

Very straightforward	1
Quite straightforward	2
Not very straightforward	3
Not straightforward at all	4
Don't know	5

**Q22** What was the main reason for you choosing to vote this way, rather than by paper ballot in the polling station or by post? WRITE IN

**Q23** DELETED

**ASK ALL PEOPLE, EVERYWHERE**

⇒ **ASK ALL**

**Q24** Do you think people should be given the chance to vote over the telephone in all elections, only in some elections or in none at all?

In all elections	1
Only in some elections	2
In none at all	3
Don't know	4

**Q25** DELETED

**Q26** Do you think people should be given the chance to vote over the Internet in all elections, only in some elections or in none at all?

In all elections	1
Only in some elections	2
In none at all	3
Don't know	4

**Q27** DELETED

**Q28** How confident do you feel you that: a) telephone voting, and b) internet/electronic voting, for future elections, would be a secure method of voting?

Very confident	1
Fairly confident	2
Neither confident nor unconfident	3
Fairly unconfident	4
Very unconfident	5
Don't know	6

⇒ **ASK POLLING STATION VOTERS ONLY (Q2, CODES 1 OR 2)**

**Q29** Was there anything about the polling station such as its location, access or layout, or the method of voting you yourself used, that made it difficult for you to vote?

Yes	1
No	2

⇒ **ASK ALL**

**Q30** Some people say that things such as the location or layout of the polling station, or indeed the method of voting present barriers to people that makes voting inaccessible. Others disagree and think that there are other reasons why many people don't vote. To what extent, if at all, do you think such barriers were a problem in the local elections on May 3rd? Would you say they were a...READ OUT

A big problem	1
A slight problem	2
No problem at all	3
Don't know	4

**Q31** How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the actual process of voting at elections in the UK? Would you say you are ... READ OUT

Very satisfied	1
Fairly satisfied	2
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	3
Fairly dissatisfied	4
Very dissatisfied	5
Don't know	6

**Q32** DELETED

**Q33** Which of these statements best describes how often you vote at General Elections? READ OUT

I always vote at General Elections	1
I sometimes vote at General Elections	2
I never vote at General Elections	3
I've not been eligible in the past to vote at General Elections	4
Don't know	6

**Q34** Which of these statements best describes how often you vote at Local Elections? READ OUT

I always vote at local Elections	1
I sometimes vote at local Elections	2
I never vote at local elections	3
I've not been eligible in the past to vote at local elections	4
Don't know	6

**Q35** How much interest do you generally have in what is going on in politics? Would you say..... READ  
OUT

A great deal	1
Quite a lot	2
Some	3
Not very much	4
None at all	5
Don't know	6

### CLASSIFICATION

⇒ **ASK ALL**

**Q36** Do you, or does anyone else in your household, have any long-term illness, health problem or disability which limits your/their daily activity?

Yes	1
No	2
Don't know	3

**D1. Gender**

Male	1
Female	2

**D2. Age**

18-24	1
25-34	2
35-44	3
45-54	4
55-64	5
65-74	6
75+	7

**D3. Working status**

Working full time (30+ hrs per week)	1
Working part time (1-29 hrs per week)	2
Unemployed, seeking work	3
Unemployed, not seeking work	4
Retired	5
Not working – disabled	6
Working - disabled	7
Student	8
Looking after house/children	9
Other	10

**D4. Tenure**

Own a property outright	1
Own with a mortgage	2
Council rent/housing association rent	3
Private rent	4
Other	5



**D5. Occupation of chief income earner:**

--

**D6. Social grade**

	AB	1
	C1	2
	C2	3
	DE	4

**D7** It is possible that we may want to contact you again to ask questions about similar issues. Would you be prepared for ICM to contact you if this was the case? There would be a financial payment for any extra research you take part in.

	Yes	1
	No	2

**D8.** Please may I take your contact details? ICM may select you for additional research which would take place over the telephone.

⇒ **IF YES:**

**NAME:**

.....

**HOUSEHOLD TELEPHONE NUMBER (INC. STD):**

.....

**MOBILE TELEPHONE NUMBER:**

.....