

# What was in an election observer report covering both an inspection and a polling station visit in the Metropolitan Borough of Wirral in May 2021?



**Wirral Tennis and Sports Centre entrance (Bidston, Wirral) 5th May 2021**

## Executive Summary

This is a report of John Brace who was an accredited election observer (accredited by the Electoral Commission as an individual but independent of the Electoral Commission) number 11,058. Accreditation was for the period 29th April 2021 to 14th May 2021.

This brief report covers electoral observations regarding the Metropolitan Borough of Wirral (Wirral Council) by John Brace from the following:-

- (i) an announced prearranged inspection of 53 candidates' nomination papers and candidates' consent to nomination on the morning of the Wednesday 5th May 2021 at Wirral Tennis and Leisure Centre, Valley Road, Birkenhead, Wirral, CH41 7EJ

and

(ii) an unannounced visit to a polling station for the AC district (Bidston and St James ward) at Holy Cross Catholic Primary School, Gautby Road, Birkenhead, CH41 7DU on the morning of Thursday 6th May 2021.

A copy of this report will also be sent by email to Wirral Council's Returning Officer Paul Satoor and the Electoral Commission.

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**Part A – Inspection of candidates' nomination papers and candidates' consent to nomination (Wednesday 5th May 2021)**

**Report**

1. The location for this inspection (Wirral Tennis and Leisure Centre, Valley Road, Birkenhead, Wirral, CH41 7EJ) had changed this year as inspections are usually at Wallasey Town Hall, Brighton Street, Seacombe, CH44 8ED.

2. The pedestrian gate to Wirral Tennis and Leisure Centre from the footpath (that runs from Valley Road to Bidston Link Road) to the west of Wirral Tennis and Leisure Centre was padlocked, therefore couldn't be used, so instead I entered from the car park entrance (on Valley Road) to the south of Wirral Tennis and Leisure Centre and proceeded to make my way north across the car park to the main entrance to the building (which is near the north-west corner). Photos were taken (included with this report below) that illustrate this better.



**Wirral Tennis and Sports Centre (Bidston, Wirral) 5th May 2021**



**Wirral Tennis and Sports Centre entrance (Bidston, Wirral) 5th May 2021**

3. When I reached the entrance I noticed a pedestrian gate to the north was open, had I known this in advance I would have approached using this gate from the north rather than the south.

4. It had been arranged in advance through contact with the Returning Officer Paul Satoor that I would meet Kate Robinson (Principal Electoral Services Officer) (see photo of Kate Robinson from 2015 below) at 10.30 am outside the main entrance to Wirral Tennis and Leisure Centre. Due to the hail, thunder and lightning happening at the time, I sheltered under the cover of the covered walkway by the entrance.



**Kate Robinson (Wirral Council) 2nd September 2015**

5. Kate Robinson met me and escorted me to from the entrance to the room used for the inspection (which was on the ground floor after a short walk from the reception). En route she queried verbally the reason/s why I was not wearing a face covering (this was despite the fact I was wearing at th time a sunflower lanyard and card detailing why).

6. The inspection room was much larger than those used at Wallasey Town Hall, better lit and better ventilated. Inside the larger than usual room used for the inspection was a table with two chairs. On the aforementioned table was a box of face

masks, a bottle of hand sanitiser and cleaning materials. There was sufficient space on the table for the inspection to be undertaken.

7. Inspection was of copies of the nomination papers, candidates' consent to nomination and pages of legislation for 53 candidates named below (which were not all the candidates standing in these elections). It should be noted that this was not an inspection of all candidates' papers – but roughly half as approximately a hundred candidates were standing in the 22 areas (electing 23 councillors). In addition there was a copy of my original request.

### **Bebington**

1. MUSPRATT (Labour)
2. JONES (Conservative & Unionist)
3. DOWNIE (Vicky) Lib Dem

### **Bidston & St James**

4. MCMANUS (Labour)
5. JOHNSON (Green)
6. MCDONNELL (Conservative)
7. PARSONS (Lib Dem)

### **Birkenhead & Tranmere**

8. GLEAVES (Green)
9. MAHONEY (Labour & Co-operative)

### **Bromborough**

10. BIRD (Labour)
11. DRURY (Conservative & Unionist)
12. NEWTON (Lib Dem)

### **Clatterbridge**

13. POVALL (Conservative & Unionist)
14. DAVIES (Labour)

### **Claughton**

15. DAVIES (Labour)
16. ELZEINY (Conservative)
17. TEGGIN (Lib Dem)

### **Eastham**

18. GILCHRIST (Lib Dem)
19. SYED (Labour)

### **Greasby, Frankby & Irby**

20. ANDERSON (Conservative)
21. JENKINSON (Labour)

### **Heswall**

22. HODSON (Conservative & Unionist)

23. BURTON (Green)

**Hoylake and Meols**

24. GARDNER (Conservative)

25. HOUGHTON (Labour)

**Leasowe and Moreton East**

26. COLLINSON (Labour)

27. CAPLIN (Local Conservatives)

**Liscard**

28. BRENNAN (Labour)

29. OWENS (Local Conservatives)

**Moreton West and Saughall Massie**

30. BOOTH (Local Conservatives)

31. WILLIAMS (Labour)

**New Brighton**

32. JONES (Labour)

33. MARTIN (Labour)

34. MAY (Conservative)

35. PRITCHARD (Conservative)

**Oxton**

36. KELLY (Lib Dem)

37. JOBSON (Labour)

**Pensby and Thingwall**

38. CAMPHOR (Conservative)

39. WATSON (Labour)

**Prenton**

40. GORMON (Green)

41. DAVIES (Labour)

**Rock Ferry**

42. O'HAGAN (Labour)

43. DAVIES (Independent)

**Seacombe**

44. STUART (Labour)

45. CULLEN (Green)

**Upton**

46. ROBINSON (Labour)

47. SELLMAN (Conservative)

48. DAVIES (Lib Dem)

**Wallasey**

49. LEWIS (Conservative)

50. USHER (Labour)

**West Kirby and Thurstaston**

51. MOUNTNEY (Conservative)

52. REECEJONES (Labour)

53. MCGINLEY (Green)

8. The papers for each candidate were stapled together, in the same order as the original request.

9. Kate Robinson indicated that she would leave me to the inspection and return in five minutes.

10. Checks were then done by myself on the approximately 290 A4 pages to check if any pages were missing and/or duplicated.

11. Candidate 11 (Drury) standing in Bromborough ward had 1 missing page and 1 duplicate page. Numbered page 4 of the attached pages of legislation was missing and there was a duplicate of page 2 (also of the attached pages of legislation in place of page 4). This set of candidate's papers was put aside, until Kate Robinson's return. It was raised with Kate Robinson on her return as to whether:-

(i) a human error had been made in the copying or whether

(ii) this was indeed a copy of those pages (as a missing page would technically invalidate the nomination)?

12. Kate Robinson was apologetic and stated she would return to the photocopier to see if a page had been missed.

13. I continued checking the remainder of the roughly half a dozen candidates' papers while she did this.

14. On her return I re-checked the altered Drury papers which now contained the missing page 4 and the duplicate page 2 had been removed.

15. I indicated that there were no discrepancies with the remainder of the candidates' papers that I had checked in her absence.

16. It had been agreed that I could take the paper inspection copies with me, so I packed up the paper inspection copies, my notes and anything else I'd brought.

17. I was then escorted by Kate Robinson back to the entrance to the Wirral Tennis and Sports Centre using the same route.

18. Thankfully the weather was better by this point, I then left the Wirral Tennis and Sports Centre via the car park and left via the vehicular entrance to the south on Valley Road. Part A of this report ends.

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**Part B – Inspection of polling station AC in Bidston & St James ward (Holy Cross Catholic Primary School, Gautby Road, Birkenhead, CH41 7DU) (6th May 2021)**

19. I (John Brace) visited this polling station on the morning of 6th May 2021. This is the polling station for the AC district for Bidston and St James ward and is located at Holy Cross Catholic Primary School, Gautby Road, Birkenhead, CH41 7DU. It is the polling station for (according to the published Notice of Poll) 2,436 people living in polling district AC. It is the polling station for the largest polling district (by number of electors) in Bidston and St James ward.

20. The car park for Holy Cross Catholic Primary School looked pretty full. Despite School Keep Clear markings outside on the road, restricted parking due to the speed bumps and nearby driveways of residential properties, it was however possible to park on Gautby Road (on the same side) a short distance away.

21. The signs facing Gautby Road on the spiky fence that indicated it was a polling station were present.

22. Entering through the gates, a sign (previously attached to an external wall and presumably previously indicating the direction from the entrance through the gates on Gautby Road to the entrance to the part of the building used for a polling station) had fallen down and was upside down on the ground.

23. On entering through the doors there was a one-way system in place. This required those following the one-way system to go up steps, however disabled electors/those with mobility issues were required to use a ramp and go the wrong way round the one way system causing potential conflict/collision with those using this route to leave and following the one way system.

24. Following this corridor led to an anteroom which in previous years has been unused.

25. However, this year the anteroom to the room used for the poll had now been repurposed as a cleaning station.

26. The number of staff at this polling station had been increased from the 3 in previous years observed to 4 this year.

27. On entering the room used for polling, on tables to the right, plastic screens had been erected between 3 of the staff (whose purpose was to hand out 3 ballot papers to electors and take their details). As the plastic screens muffled the sound/voices of the staff, it was observed that this caused minor problems with understanding for two different hard of hearing electors (to varying degrees).

28. Each member of staff at this table handed a different ballot paper which were different colours (more specifically a ballot paper for the election of a councillor to the Metropolitan Borough of Wirral (Wirral Council) (Bidston and St James ward), a ballot paper for the election of a Police and Crime Commissioner for Merseyside and finally a ballot paper for the election of a Liverpool City Region Combined Authority Mayor (although not necessarily in that order).

29. The 4 voting booths contained pencils for those who had not brought their own pen or pencil, although this year those voting were instructed (if they had used a pencil provided) not to leave it behind in the polling booth but to deposit it in a jar near the ballot box. One of the voting booths was at a different height for disabled voters.

30. In another corner of the room, there was the fourth member of staff at a table with the black ballot box (used for all 3 different ballots). The jar for depositing pencils and the log of visits by police officers to that polling station was also on this table. The police officer log showed that there had been no visit by police officer or officers yet to that polling station at the time of the visit, however as observed elsewhere on the Wirral on the same day by myself, Merseyside Police police officers in the Wirral area were conducting high visibility patrols.

31. On leaving the room used for voting, as the observations on leaving would be exactly the same as outlined already above in paragraphs 19-23, I have nothing further to report for Part B.

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32. In one other matter partly related to the above, it is noted that the photo ID (and accompanying letter) from the Electoral Commission identifying John Brace as an accredited election observer (individual) did not arrive through the post to John Brace's home address between the date of accreditation in late April 2021 and the date this report was finalised (9th May 2021).