



## Constitution Committee

### Corrected oral evidence: Voter ID

Wednesday 8 November 2023

10.15 am

Watch the meeting

Members present: Baroness Drake (The Chair); Lord Anderson of Ipswich; Baroness Andrews; Lord Falconer of Thoroton; Lord Foulkes of Cumnock; Lord Hope of Craighead; Lord Keen of Elie; Lord Mancroft; Baroness Suttie; Lord Thomas of Gresford.

Evidence Session No. 1

Heard in Public

Questions 1 - 17

### Witnesses

**I:** Craig Westwood, Director of Communications, Policy and Research, Electoral Commission; Tom Hawthorn, Head of Policy, Electoral Commission.

### USE OF THE TRANSCRIPT

1. This is a corrected transcript of evidence taken in public and webcast on [www.parliamentlive.tv](http://www.parliamentlive.tv).

## Examination of witnesses

Craig Westwood and Tom Hawthorn.

Q1 **The Chair:** Good morning. This morning the Constitution Committee is taking evidence in its inquiry into voter ID. We have joining us this morning Mr Craig Westwood, director of communications, policy and research at the Electoral Commission, and Tom Hawthorn, head of policy at the Electoral Commission. Good morning, gentlemen. Thank you very much indeed for coming.

You have given us the benefit of speaking to us during a seminar, but we are now in a formal evidence session. Thank you very much indeed. We do have some questions for you. Hopefully you have had some indication of them. Do you have any initial opening comments? I am conscious you have a hard stop and you have to go on to another commitment.

**Craig Westwood:** No, that is fine. We are happy to go straight into questions. Thank you.

**The Chair:** That is fine. If I could open with the first question, in your view—we have had a chance to read your submissions—what steps need to be taken to raise awareness of the voter ID requirements and the existence of the voter authority certificate? What are the things that need to be done to address that?

**Craig Westwood:** We are building on a firm evidence base of what happened at the May elections this year. We had a four-month lead-in period to those polls from the legislation being cleared to the actual polling day itself. Through that period, we led a fully integrated communications campaign. That was built on a foundation of paid advertising through all of the channels you would expect, both physical and digital.

We undertook partnership work, where we provided resources centrally, which we created, that were in line with our campaign. We then provided those to partner organisations. First and foremost, that was to local authorities, which have a reach into local communities that we could never hope to get and do incredible work across the country to make sure people are aware of how they can participate in the democratic process from registration through to voter ID.

We also engaged a whole suite of partners within civil society to engage the groups we know are most likely to struggle with the voter ID policy, to help those people understand it, how it impacts on them and, particularly, the voter authority certificate. We also supported that with media engagement work and work on our own channels.

Even though it only ran in four months, which was a shorter period than we would have liked, that campaign performed incredibly well. We managed to get to 87% public awareness just ahead of polling day. That was from a start of 22% just before the campaign. That was a really significant move. Awareness of the voter authority certificate was at

57%. That is not as high as 87%, but only 4% of the population need to know about the voter authority certificate. It is the 4% of people who do not have any of the eligible forms of ID. We need to make sure we are reaching the right people with that message.

The start of your question was about what needs to happen next. It is lots more of the same. We need to lean in on that campaign and make sure we are continuing with the proven advertising, which we have shown works. Particularly for the vast majority of the electorate, who have ID and just need to remember to bring it, it was proven to work.

The challenge that is in front of us, the wider sector and everybody who has a role to play is about really reaching those audiences who we know are less likely to own ID or to be switched on to messaging about elections, who will be more likely to vote in some of the elections that we know are coming up—I am thinking of the general election, which is likely to be next year—and who are not necessarily listening to some of the trusted institutions, such as the commission, and more likely to hear from those charity partners.

We really want to make sure that we and others are doing lots more work to lean in on that. That work is happening now. One of the things we have to benefit from now is time. We did not have that in the lead-up to May this year; we do have it now. We are not sitting on our hands, and neither is the sector. We are doing all of that work now. We are particularly thinking about the areas that have elections coming up that have not yet had them with voter ID, so particularly in Scotland, Wales, London and areas like Birmingham, for example. Next year will be the first time that they have to deploy this.

**The Chair:** You have referred to only 4% of the population needing to be aware of voter ID and voter authority certificate accessibility. When you look at it through the lens of different demographic groups, that can rise to 9% or 10%. There is a concentration risk in the barriers to voting. Would you like to tell us a bit more about your findings and your view about the different demographics in terms of ownership of ID and awareness of the requirements and the VAC? When you are looking at universal suffrage, you are interested in those groups most impacted.

**Craig Westwood:** Yes, absolutely. They have been at the forefront of our mind right from the outset of commenting on this policy when it was going through the House and then in implementing our work on it.

Both we and the Government did research about ID ownership as the policy was being formed. Those pieces of research had the same findings, which were that 4% of the population in total did not own ID. The areas within society, within the electorate, where people were more likely not to have ID included, in particular, the unemployed, people with lower educational attainment, people who were living in rented accommodation, and other groups such as the over-85s.

We also identified some other groups within society that had multiple and compounding barriers to engaging with the policy. They had lower levels of ownership of ID and faced other barriers. Particularly, this was people with disabilities, such as people with visual impairments or learning disabilities, Gypsy Roma and Traveller communities, people who are in refuges, people who are experiencing homelessness and the trans community. These are all groups that we identified as experiencing these barriers and issues with ID, which then require additional support from the commission to make sure they could be aware of the policy.

That was where we built partnerships with civil society organisations to co-create resources that those organisations could use to engage those audiences and make sure they were as aware as they could possibly be within the time available.

**The Chair:** For the particular demographics that have low awareness, where the evidence is showing that, the touchpoint with public bodies may be slightly different. There may be key touchpoints for them. Have you looked through that lens in terms of promoting awareness?

**Craig Westwood:** Yes, we have. One of the things I hope we can see going into next year much more is the UK Government leaning in much more to support the communications activity. Previously, particularly around voter registration, we had really good collaboration from the Government and government agencies to support the communications work we do to get the messages into the right hands. We did not see very much of that activity in May this year. That was disappointing, but we already have very promising signs that that engagement is going to come for next year, particularly thinking about the general election.

One example of that, which will be my priority to raise with them, is thinking about the unemployed. Is there a way that we can use the jobcentre network and any of the communications channels that the Government have, which we can lean in on and benefit from, to make sure we are getting the message in front of people who are unemployed? At the moment, our main route to reach them is through advertising. That is a perfectly suitable route to reach a general audience, but it may be that we can get additional messages across through a channel like that.

**The Chair:** What assessment have you made of the impact that voter ID will have on turnout at the next general election, in particular in relation to the demographics that may meet the greatest barriers? Are you assessing what you have learned and applying it to the general election?

**Craig Westwood:** We do not do projections on turnout because there are so many different factors that can play on it, from party policies to the weather on the day and the particular timing of the poll. We look at where participation is likely to be impacted.

If you compare the local elections this year to the nearest comparable poll, which was in 2019, turnout was pretty much the same. There was a

difference of half a percentage point. There was nothing we could particularly tie to voter ID as an impact on turnout overall. Of course, we did see those concerns about ownership of ID and awareness of the policy carrying through into the experience of voters, particularly those who were wanting to vote at the polling station. People do not need to show ID for absent voting options. There are other security provisions that are in place for that.

We have shared the data with you, but, for the people who were coming to vote in person, we know there were people who were not aware of the policy and who were turned away because they did not have an eligible ID. Quite a lot of those people did come back, but a number of them did not. Of the people who were not able to vote, 0.25% did not come back. That sounds like a very small number, but of course we want everybody who wants to vote to be able to vote. It equated to about 14,000 people on polling day at this set of elections.

**Q2 Lord Anderson of Ipswich:** I have some logistical questions about the issue of voter authority certificates. I understand that the number of applications was relatively low ahead of the local elections, and indeed lower than anticipated. You still recommended that the Government improve the operation and functionality of the central digital portal for processing voter authority certificate applications, which is perhaps a little alarming when one reflects that we might be looking at much greater numbers ahead of a general election.

Could you explain in a little more detail what problems arose with the portal ahead of the May elections and how it could be improved to avoid those problems in future?

**Tom Hawthorn:** The main issue we saw ahead of the elections this year was that the full functionality of the system was not in place at the point at which the system was launched. The system was launched in mid-January. That was the point at which voters could submit applications.

Although electoral registration officers were able to use the portal to process applications, a lot of the functionality that was needed to make that more efficient was not available at the time that was launched. There were a number of updates to the system that were made during the period between January and the May polls. Lots of those improved the system; some of them caused their own problems; and there were also updates that were issued very close to polling day itself.

Some of the feedback and the issues we heard from electoral administrators trying to use the system included people having to use manual workarounds because they could not access the full functionality. The usability of the system for electoral administrators was not as good as it was on the front end. For voters it was a good usable system, but for the people operating the system in elections teams it was less useable.

In one particular instance the system was not able to process applications for voter authority certificates easily if an application were made at the

same time as an application to register to vote. There was difficulty with being able to send follow-up communications to applicants where more information was needed.

The rationale behind our recommendation was really about looking forward to the future, to elections next year, making sure that the Government have put in place a fully functional system at the point electoral administrators need it to be delivered. That means any changes need to be well designed, fully tested and fully operational in good time before polling day.

We want to make a specific point to the Government about avoiding making updates to the system in that very specific period roughly a month before polling day, when electoral administrators are having to deliver the election rather than make updates to their software systems.

**Lord Anderson of Ipswich:** Putting in place a fully functioning system is obviously a good aspiration. Have you made any assessment of what that would involve from a technical point of view and how long it would realistically take?

**Tom Hawthorn:** There is no great concern that the system itself is not operating. It is more a question of ensuring that any updates to that system or any further changes are well planned and delivered in good time ahead of polling day so they are not impacting on the delivery of the election.

There will always be changes that are needed. The Association of Electoral Administrators and the Electoral Commission are very good at feeding back issues to the government department, to DLUHC. Its officials are making changes to the systems. The key point is to make sure those are well tested so we are confident they are operating as expected and in place in good time ahead of polling day.

**Lord Anderson of Ipswich:** Are these broadly in the nature of tweaks to the system? You are not envisaging that any of these changes would require a new procurement process.

**Tom Hawthorn:** No, not at this stage.

**Lord Anderson of Ipswich:** You have also recommended that the Government should explore whether the deadline for voter authority certificate applications could be moved closer to polling day. One can understand why. The question is whether that creates the risk of a greater burden for electoral administrators. Do you have a view on where that deadline could realistically be fixed?

**Tom Hawthorn:** The current deadline—it is six working days before polling day; effectively, it is more than a week before polling day—is significantly longer than the Government's original intention. In the policy analysis they set out while the Bill was in Parliament, they articulated an aspiration for a deadline of the day before polling day. We understand that they moved away from that specifically because of the concerns

raised by electoral administrators about the impact of being able to deliver that change.

It is important to continue to explore whether a change to move the deadline closer to polling day could be feasible, particularly because any voter who does not have access to one of the other forms of ID is effectively shut out from voting on polling day if they only realise that or decide they want to vote close to polling day. We think there is quite a lot of scope for improving that.

Having said all of that, it is clearly very important that the operational workability of that system is thoroughly tested. We do not want administrators to be overwhelmed by applications they cannot process.

There are two key issues that need to be explored there. First, we need to ensure there are the right tools and functionality in the software system and the right capacity within elections teams to be able to deliver that. Also, on the supply of the certificates themselves, we need to ensure there is enough time, once an application has been processed, for the certificate to be created, printed and sent or made available to the voter so they can use it on polling day.

Without that analysis, we think there will still be a risk that voters' expectations would not be met and accessibility would not be improved. We think it is important to explore the feasibility of making that change, but we are not naive about some of the practical implications and the operational challenges.

**Lord Anderson of Ipswich:** I have one last question, if I may. It is slightly off-piste. We had some interesting written evidence from the chief electoral officer for Northern Ireland to the effect that the Northern Ireland voter ID card, unlike ours, is a laminated card with photographic ID; it is reused as a de facto free form of identification in other contexts by banks, airlines and so on. I know the duration of a VAC is 10 years, but it does not sound as though it will necessarily be very durable if it is a piece of paper.

Was any thought given to the idea of a laminated card and the possibility of it being used for purposes other than electoral purposes? Is that really a question for others?

**Tom Hawthorn:** I am happy to answer as far as we understand the situation. The design and procurement process for issuing the certificates has sat with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. There was a very clear policy choice from Government that they did not want the voter authority certificate to be seen as an alternative form of proof of identity or indeed proof of age. That was part of the policy development from the Government's perspective.

There had been an assumption that the certificate would look like a plastic driver's licence or the electoral identity document in Northern Ireland. Part of the procurement process identified that in operational

terms it was not feasible to be able to produce those kinds of documents in the timescales that would be required to make sure they could be issued to voters ahead of polling day.

**Q3** **Baroness Andrews:** Good morning, gentlemen. My question is going back to where we started the questioning, about access to those groups that are hard to reach in terms of demographics and location. The question put by the Chair was about those parts of the system that might be able to help you locate people who have neither the knowledge nor the identification.

Many of the people that you identify as difficult to reach will have no contact with the system, other than possibly to be on benefits, either through child credit or pension credit. Some will have no location at all if they are simply renters on minimum wage, for example. The voluntary sector is very diverse and very broad in scope, but it still does not reach into any of those situations. Is there any possibility of the Government being prepared to put a notice about the need for voter ID into a benefits statement or online, specifically for those groups?

I know the black and minority-ethnic community are well represented in terms of the voluntary sector, but are there other sectors where you think more lateral out-of-the-box thinking might work?

**Craig Westwood:** To the first part of your question, yes, absolutely, I would love for the Government to do that. I am sure there are lots of other calls on using that particular route and others to reach audiences so I am going to be pragmatic about whether we are likely to get that. Yes, it is a great suggestion. I would love to see the Government doing that kind of communication to support this objective.

You are right to point out black and minority-ethnic communities. They were a particularly interesting group in our data because they were one example where there was not a demonstrably lower level of ID ownership—they were not identified as a particular target challenge audience by us at the beginning of the process—but that demographic group did come through in the data as having lower levels of awareness of the voter ID requirements and the voter authority certificates.

The same is true of younger people, who over-index on ID ownership and therefore were not specifically targeted. Everybody could see our general awareness advertising, whether it was on television or social media. We are now doing more to engage civil society organisations with those particular demographics in mind to make sure we are plugging any gap that is left there.

**Baroness Andrews:** This may be even more difficult in a way, but what about women? Do you have data to show that women, particularly ethnic women or younger women, are less reachable because they are less connected economically or socially to some of these obvious structural organisations?



**Craig Westwood:** I do not have the data with me specifically on the gender breakdown. We could write to the committee with that. The example you have given of Muslim women is a perfect one. We have done specific engagement with a civil society group to reach those audiences to make sure we are doing absolutely everything we can to get information directly into people's hands.

**Baroness Andrews:** Finally, can I just mention carers? Carers tend to be disconnected. Some will be on benefits, but not all. They are a huge part of the population. They also find it difficult to get out. Will you think hard about how you could reach adult carers and people who are caring for young people with disabilities?

**Craig Westwood:** Yes, absolutely. That is a really good example of how the voter ID communications work is not just about reaching the individual themselves; sometimes it is about reaching somebody who can support others.

Our communications work, particularly with the media, in the lead-up to polling day had an awful lot of messaging in it around thinking about people in your network. Do you have a vulnerable neighbour, somebody in your family or somebody who you are caring for who you need to support to make sure that, if they want to vote in person, they have thought about the ID provision and thought about what they need to bring?

Q4 **The Chair:** Just before we leave this question, Mr Hawthorn, you gave detailed replies to Lord Anderson's question. Could I ask what engagement on or response to your recommendations you have had from the government department? How are they going? Have you had them?

**Tom Hawthorn:** Yes, we have regular and frequent engagement with officials. Certainly, our chair has regular meetings with Ministers. We are discussing all of the issues, the evidence and the data analysis that we have done frequently.

We have not had a response to our recommendations yet. We understand that the Government are intending to publish their own evaluation of the data from this May's elections at the end of this month or by the end of this month. We would expect in that analysis a response to our recommendations. We certainly would be hoping for a positive response and a constructive approach to making the changes that we think are necessary.

**Craig Westwood:** I might just add to that, if I may. One of the things we have been very aware of is that some of the recommendations we have made require legislative change. Obviously, legislative change takes time, as you all very well know.

We have been talking to the Government about these recommendations from the first point they were coalescing for us. We have not waited until the report came out to present them with a finished product. We have made sure we have been sharing that information as early as we possibly

could to enable them to engage with the thinking and to think about how they might take those recommendations forward.

The other aspect of this is that, in line with what Tom was saying earlier, we want to make sure any change that is brought in is brought in on a sensible timeframe so that administrators and all of the other people who play a part in elections have time to understand the change and implement it properly, so that we can be sure of well-run elections.

Time has moved on. The window to deliver legislative change ahead of the scheduled May elections has closed. Depending on the timing of a general election, that window may not have closed. The eye is on the prize of those two big sets of elections we have next year, but we are also thinking beyond that.

If something were not possible to be delivered for a general election next year, that does not make it any less important for us still to consider it as a policy change. Voter ID is on the statute book. We want to continue making it work as well as possible so that those changes would still be valid beyond a general election.

**The Chair:** Surely you need a fairly early response from the Government on the portal because electoral administrators need to know whether they are going to get any easement or not on the burdens they face and the issues they might find. That is something we can pursue with them.

Q5 **Baroness Suttie:** Good morning. I would like to turn to the administration of the next general election. We have had the experience of the local elections and indeed parliamentary by-elections. What impact do you anticipate the introduction of voter ID will have on the general election? In particular, from previous experience, where has the cost burden of voter ID typically fallen?

**Craig Westwood:** It is probably useful to start with the context in which voter ID arrives as a policy. The administration sector is made up of incredibly dedicated and experienced people across the country who do amazing work every year to make sure the elections in their areas are well run.

As you all very well know from your reading, elections are not a one-day event. A huge amount of preparation goes into making them happen and then a huge amount of activity happens afterwards to finalise all of the details, not least sending the data submissions they need to send to the commission, for which we are very grateful.

That sector is incredibly stretched. We have reported that in our post-poll reports after a number of elections over recent years. There might be a risk of that being seen as crying wolf, because time and time again the administrator sector has been able to pull it out of the hat and deliver a set of well-run elections in the face of a huge amount of risk and the challenges it faces.

We know electoral law is incredibly complicated. Some of it goes back to the Victorian period. There are layers upon layers of changes that they have to find their way through, particularly when they are delivering two different polls on the same day, for example, with different sets of rules, different boundaries or even different franchises, if you are in Scotland and Wales. That is the context in which this arrives.

We then have a set of changes being taken forward through the Elections Act, which will bring benefits to voters and to the system but which are being delivered all at the same time and at a very fast pace. We are on record as saying that we wanted voter ID to be delivered at a slower pace to enable preparations to happen properly and in an orderly way.

We always talk about six months being the threshold beyond which the Government should not be making legislative changes that will have to be implemented. That is not six months ahead of a poll; it is six months ahead of the point at which the change will affect either the administrator or indeed the regulated audience. That might be a party having to pick up a new responsibility or new responsibilities for candidates. They need to have that six-month lead-in time to make sure they can understand it before having to deploy it.

That has not been the case for many of the things coming out of the Elections Act, both the ones that have already happened that we are implementing and the other ones that are coming next year. That is the other bit of context. There are other changes beyond voter ID where the legislation is just passing now and will be in place for next year, such as the extension to the overseas franchise and changes to the way in which absent votes can be applied for.

These are all new processes, layers of complexity and unknown risks in terms of the audience. For example, on overseas voters, we do not know how many people will be applying to join the register and the franchise. Those people have been away from the country for over 15 years. It will be their right to do that, but it is going to be a new process for those people to engage with the local authority where they had the most recent connection, to prove that connection and for the administrator to engage with them to make sure they have the right documentation and that the administrator feels confident that that person has that local connection and should be on the electoral register. We do not know the volume of that at the moment because it is untested.

That will come at a very busy period for administrators. We know that people tend to take action just ahead of a poll. People have very busy lives. They are not thinking about elections. We are thinking about them 24/7, but unfortunately the rest of the electorate are not. They necessarily take decisions quite late. We see that with voter registration and with the voter authority certificate applications, and I suspect we will see the same with applications for overseas voters. All of that provides extra challenge and context to a sector that is already stretched.

The final aspect of this, for the moment, is the general election context. There are some things about delivering a general election that are simpler than other polls. There is one set of rules. It is the same for everybody. From the perspective of the communications work we were just talking about, there is much more profile. You are much more able to get people interested in the topic and get traction for your messaging.

In terms of delivering it at a local level, you have every local authority delivering it at the same time. In May this year, an awful lot of local authorities were helping each other out, particularly on staffing. We know that staffing has been a significant and growing problem in recent years. Local authorities are not able to get as many of the volunteers they are used to getting. It tends to be an older population who are interested in doing that work, and people are stepping away from doing it. They are also losing experienced staff. Hiring staff is a problem.

In May this year, neighbouring authorities without elections were able to help and share volunteer staffing expertise. The electoral community is incredibly well networked and shares all of that best practice, expertise and learning. With an all-out election, that is not an option. That is another one of the practical challenges you face when you are going into a general election.

We always want to be very cautious, as the commission, about risking undermining confidence in the delivery of elections. That cry we make about heeding the pressures on the administrator sector is a really important one to listen to. The risk is that, if it is just presumed that administrators will carry on pulling it out of the hat, there will be a point when that will not happen. We will then have a major problem with an election, which will cause an issue for that poll and will risk fundamentally undermining public confidence.

With elections, once you undermine public confidence it can take a generation to build it back up again.

**Baroness Suttie:** Thank you. That was a very comprehensive answer. Are you aware of instances of abuse of staff at polling stations either at the May elections this year or at various parliamentary by-elections this year?

**Tom Hawthorn:** We have not seen significant instances of abuse. When we ask the police to let us know about cases of electoral fraud after each election, we also ask them whether they have dealt with any cases.

There were two cases. One was a public order incident that related to voter ID but did not involve any staff, and one was sadly a case where it appears that a voter had taken out their frustrations on a member of polling station staff. We are not saying that there was nothing at all, but it was not widespread.

In the guidance materials that are available to staff in polling stations and in the training materials we provide, we are able to give them information

and advice about how to deal with voters who are unhappy about the requirement to show ID.

We have also continued, ahead of this May's elections and looking at the next May's elections, to work with police forces to make sure they are ready to respond to and react appropriately to any potential instances of disturbances at polling stations.

**Craig Westwood:** Could I come back to the bit of your question that I did not answer on cost burdens? Apologies for not addressing that. The majority of the cost falls to returning officers and their teams within local authorities. I suspect Peter Stanyon, who you are seeing later, will be able to talk a bit more to the detail of that.

We have been clear in all of our messaging to the Government that they need to make sure that they are funding that proportionately where that activity is happening. There is a set of costs for the commission, particularly in the area of public awareness, such as the campaign I was describing earlier.

We have a number of processes within that to make sure we are delivering value for money, but it does come with a price tag. The campaign we did for the local elections in May was roughly £5 million. It would be significantly more for a general election just simply by geography. You would be covering a much wider area of the country, particularly thinking about Scotland and Wales as well.

**Q6 Lord Thomas of Gresford:** You say that polling staff are incredibly stretched. That was for the local elections this time. Polling staff have become gatekeepers to voting in a way that was not the case before. They have to check identity and they can turn people away. Is there a general apprehension among potential polling staff, which will be a problem particularly in a general election, when the temperature will be very much higher? Although there have only been very limited records of abuse in May, are you expecting there to be much more drama and strife in a general election?

**Craig Westwood:** It is a really interesting question. In the lead-up to the May elections, we were having detailed conversations on an ongoing basis with lots of different returning officers and their teams across the country. We were hearing anecdotal reports that, where they were seeking to engage staff, including some of the people who they have called upon time and time again for previous elections, they were experiencing that people were hesitant about the voter ID policy and how it would be administered.

There were people who declined to participate on that basis, and there were also people who did the training and then stepped away. Having become more aware of what would be required of them, they did then step away from it. That was one of the drivers around needing to call on neighbouring local authorities because then there was that extra issue about getting the staffing in.

At this stage, I do not know the extent to which those concerns will have been assuaged by the fact that the policy was, from an administrative perspective, well delivered in May thanks to the work of the administrators and our teams. Hopefully, that will act as proof that this can be delivered well and the electorate can accept it. Even for the people who are being turned away, the majority of them tend to come back. The process was administered well. Returning officers will be able to reassure potential members of staff about that, to then encourage those people to come back.

**Lord Thomas of Gresford:** What plan or steps are you taking to deal with that possible apprehension? You hope that the electoral administrator will be able to change people's minds if they have apprehensions, but is that enough? Is there something more you can do to plan? In a general election, when you cannot call upon neighbouring authorities, do you have steps in mind to deal with that problem?

**Tom Hawthorn:** I would point to two things. Earlier you talked about polling station staff taking on a gatekeeper role. It is worth making clear that in lots of instances polling station staff are already doing that because they have to check that a person is on the register. Quite a lot of the time they are having to turn people away because they are not on the register. Understandably, voters are not happy about that. It is not ideal and it is not a pleasant experience, but polling station staff do have that experience to build on.

On the wider question about the plan for addressing the issue of staffing ahead of next year's elections—the several elections that we know are likely to take place—we have brought together a group of returning officers across the sector, involving the LGA and SOLACE, the senior local authority managers' and chief executives' organisation, to develop a number of strategies to get out and promote this role a bit more and provide more information for people about what the role involves.

For lots of people, this is not something that they come across very often. It is perhaps not something they considered volunteering to do. We want to look at how we can provide more information to the public at large about what the role involves and what people in the role are and are not required to do, and to encourage them to consider taking up that role. That is not to replace but to support the work that individual returning officers are doing to build up their staffing locally.

**Lord Thomas of Gresford:** I am sure you will agree there is a difference between turning somebody away because he is not on the register, which is something that is obvious, and turning somebody away because, although he is on the register, he has only produced his work identification card. There is a very significant difference between them.

**Tom Hawthorn:** Yes, I would agree there is a difference. That is why we have provided guidance to polling station staff and each returning officer will have provided extensive training to their staff before polling day about how to deal with particular instances where there are problems.

There are always escalation procedures. An individual polling station staff member will not have to be the final point of contact for that voter. It may be that there is no other option—there is not a way for that voter to vote—but there will always be an option for them to speak to either the elections team in the office or one of the senior members of staff who can explain the position a little bit more. I absolutely agree that it is a different type of dispute or disagreement. Polling station staff do have some of that experience to build on.

**Lord Thomas of Gresford:** If the voter could swear a statutory declaration at the time, it would deal with that problem, would it not? At the moment, you cannot do that. If a voter could, at the polling station, swear a statutory declaration or have somebody vouch for them, it would make a great deal of difference.

**The Chair:** Lord Thomas, if I might, we are going to come on and drill down into attestation. Can we reserve that point? I will call you back in then.

**Lord Thomas of Gresford:** Yes, I am sorry.

Q7 **Lord Foulkes of Cumnock:** Thank you for your very helpful answers. I have been interested in a couple of points about polling staff being stretched and the desirability of a six-month lead-in for what you are doing. After yesterday's King Speech, there is increasing speculation that there may be a general election on 2 May to coincide with the local elections in London and the police and crime commissioner elections and local elections elsewhere. Have you started thinking about the additional problems that might arise if the general election were to be held on 2 May?

**Craig Westwood:** Yes. I hope you will be reassured to know the commission has contingency plans for general elections on standby at any point. We do that with specific scenarios in mind. At the moment we have three particular scenarios around timing. That is all driven by the kind of risks and challenges you are indicating.

One of those is for it to be scheduled at the same time as the scheduled polls in May. There are earlier potential dates and there are later potential dates. We make sure we are balancing all of our planning on those different scenarios so that we can then work with the sector and make sure we are all prepared in the event that the general election is scheduled.

**Lord Foulkes of Cumnock:** Would 2 May be the worst option, as far as you are concerned, or—let me put it this way—the most difficult option to deal with? Is that right?

**Craig Westwood:** It does pose particular challenges. For returning officers who are dealing with multiple polls on the same day, for a start, there are the legislative foundations of all of the different rules you have to make sure you are following for those different sets of elections. Clearly, you are managing different counts at the same time. Just the

volume of paper and administration related to delivering multiple polls at a time does pose particular challenges.

**Lord Foulkes of Cumnock:** You said you were discussing further legislation with the Government. Given the opinion polls, are you not also discussing it with Opposition spokespeople?

**Craig Westwood:** Yes, we make sure we are completely transparent about our policy recommendations. They are all made through either reports such as the post-poll report, which you will have seen from the May election, or more policy-based reports. We make sure they are freely available and put into the hands of politicians from all parties that are interested.

We also make sure we provide briefings to Members of both Houses to make sure the case for those changes can be seen. We are absolutely happy to talk to any legislators about those changes.

Q8 **Lord Keen of Elie:** Good morning, gentlemen. You mentioned your research on identity ownership. From that research and indeed your wider experience, have you been able to judge the extent to which an expanded list of acceptable forms of ID would improve accessibility for voters?

**Tom Hawthorn:** Yes. As Craig has mentioned and as you mentioned in the question, we know there are variations in the level of ownership of ID, both across different parts of the UK and within different demographic groups. For non-voters at this year's elections, not having access to ID was more of an issue than for people who voted.

We have recommended that the Government should look at expanding the list of accepted ID, particularly to focus on those groups who perhaps we know from that evidence have found it less easy to access ID. We think that should focus on some of the groups Craig mentioned, such as people who are currently unemployed or people with particular disabilities, for example, to make sure they can have equal access to that list of ID.

It is also really important to make sure any forms of ID that are added to the list are reasonably accessible and understandable for polling station staff. There is a great long list at the moment in the legislation, which is really helpful. We have to provide some information in our advice and guidance to polling station staff to help them recognise and understand which forms of ID are acceptable. It would be a risk to add a significant number of things to that list that then make the process in the polling station much harder.

We have had some suggestions about particular forms of ID that might be suitable for inclusion in the list, particularly different types of travel passes. Certainly here in London there have been some questions raised about why younger people's Oyster cards are not acceptable but older people's Oyster cards are acceptable.



We have certainly heard people talking about particular work passes, perhaps for the NHS or for police forces, where there might be a bit more security around that process. The key point is for the Government to take forward that work because they have access to comprehensive data about potential ownership and they also have a responsibility for making the assessment about security as well as the coverage of the ID that would be required.

**Lord Keen of Elie:** You mentioned a number of demographic groups. The homeless are a particular problem because they have an issue not just with ID but with registration itself. If we take some of the other groups you mentioned, you mentioned the unemployed, renters, those over 85 years of age and those with disabilities. Generally speaking, most of these groups will be in receipt of some sort of benefit credit.

Would there be any merit in trying to link the identification of the receipt of such a benefit to their voter identification applications? Surely the Government will have a complete list, which they take as being conclusive, as to where they are registered or should be registered and what their identity is. Could we not transfer over that information to the idea of voter authority certificates, for example?

**Craig Westwood:** Yes, it is a really interesting question. There is a committee in the other House that is looking at the issue of registration at the moment. We have been talking to them about the potential reforms that could be made and the possibility of using public datasets that exist to make sure we are sweating that asset of public data as much as we possibly can to benefit the voter.

If we can move to a system of registration that is based on that dataset, which supports people going on the electoral register either through an automated process or automatically, that will really help to get people on to that first step of participation. Ultimately, if somebody is not on the electoral register, it does not matter whether they have ID or not; they cannot vote.

That is the other challenge that we are not taking our eye off. We are pursuing that constant challenge of keeping the registers up to date and making sure that, as new people are added to the franchise, particularly as they reach 18, they are aware of the need to register. We see very low levels of registration of those younger age groups. Would it not be brilliant if we could link up the issuing of the national insurance card to voter registration? The next step from that, as you indicate, is supporting voter authority processes, if people need those.

**Lord Keen of Elie:** In other words, we do not have to reinvent the wheel. We already have the data, albeit it may not be immediately accessible to us for the purposes of voter identification.

**Craig Westwood:** Yes, and we have done feasibility studies to demonstrate how this could work practically. It is not just a recommendation that we have made and handed over to the Government

to work out how to make it work. We have done the feasibility studies that show this can be done in a way that is fully secure and integrated with existing registration systems. The template for the work is there.

**Lord Keen of Elie:** Could I come back to voter authority certificates just for a moment? Have you perceived that there may be a reluctance in some parts of Government to see voter authority certificates properly developed lest they develop into de facto identity cards, much as they have in Northern Ireland?

**Craig Westwood:** The Government took a policy decision not to have it be a form of ID. It says on the back that it cannot be used for any other purposes. That was not a conversation we were involved in.

Q9 **The Chair:** I have a couple of supplementaries before we leave this. On the evidence we have received to date, the recruitment of polling staff is one of the most prominent issues with organising the forthcoming general election. You have told us in great detail about consultations and initiatives to encourage people to come forward to become staff.

In the end, if, on the eve of the general election, some local authorities are clearly facing a shortage of staff, what are the contingency measures going to be? What discussions are going on between yourselves, the Government and the administrators about the default contingency to move in at short notice and deal with that?

**Tom Hawthorn:** It is always going to have to be a local issue. Each individual returning officer is responsible for maintaining those local staffing plans. There is not an overarching pool of staff that could be parachuted into any given area.

Each returning officer will always aim to over-recruit and to have a pool of stand-by staff that could be required if needed. They will also have contingency plans about the level of staffing in each polling station and where they feel they can move staff safely from one polling station to another. The aim would always be to have those plans in place well in advance of polling day so they are not left with the position where decisions are having to be made right at the last moment.

The one thing I should say is that we have talked about some of the scenarios for next May's elections and the potential for a parliamentary election to be held on the same day. One of the key risks and planning assumptions that needs to be considered is the fact that for a general election to take place in May, it might only become clear that the election is going to happen quite a short period of time before polling day.

The election timetable is 25 working days, which gives roughly five or six weeks. At some points it can be quite difficult to ensure there is sufficient staffing where that additional electoral event is happening at very short notice.

**The Chair:** You do have an oversight role, even though it is down to local

government. You would have to satisfy yourself that you have a level of confidence. Otherwise you have to blow a whistle somewhere and say, "We do not have confidence that every local authority has the capacity to meet this demand".

**Tom Hawthorn:** Yes, and that is why we work to engage with each and every local authority and to understand the pressures they are facing locally and where they have particular risks they need to deal with. We have teams based in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and we have teams based in each part of England, whose role is to liaise with and talk to local authorities, to understand their staffing plans, their plans for the elections and what concerns and risks they have.

We also have a wider group, which I mentioned earlier on. This is a group of more senior stakeholders, which includes the Government and representatives from the AEA, SOLACE and the Electoral Management Board for Scotland, which is taking that broader overview of preparedness and looking at where each of us can push slightly harder on any of the levers we have available to us to make sure those plans are in place and they are appropriately addressing some of the risks.

**The Chair:** I have one final point. On the issue of incidents of abuse of staff, the LGIU in its submission said there were concerns, on the evidence it collected, that disturbances might be higher at a general election. It recommended ensuring that the local police are aware of any areas where there could be potential disturbances and consider additional methods to collect information. Do you have a view on that? Is it appropriate or not appropriate?

**Tom Hawthorn:** Yes, it is absolutely appropriate that the police are well engaged with planning for elections. Again, that has been an area of focus for us over recent years. We have very well-developed relationships with police forces. We have an excellent relationship with the National Police Chiefs' Council lead for electoral matters, and we also have relationships with single point of contact officers in each of the UK's police forces.

We make sure they are engaged with their local authority election teams and they are part of the planning process. We normally hold a seminar for those police officers at the beginning of each year. We are making plans for a seminar next year, looking ahead to the types of challenges that might come up at the scheduled elections and making sure they have the opportunity to discuss those challenges and to think about what mitigation strategies they might need to put in place.

Q10 **Lord Foulkes of Cumnock:** You have suggested that this is an alternative to showing a photo ID and that attestation by another registered voter should be accepted. That looks as if it knocks a big hole in the whole scheme. I could go along with my wife, who did not have a photo ID and say, "Yes, this is a registered voter". If I was a registered polling agent for the Labour Party, which is not impossible, I could go and say, "Yes, this is a registered voter. This person is who he says he is".

How would it work in practice?

**Tom Hawthorn:** The first thing to say is that we have seen forms of vouching or attestation used in other democracies. In Canada for federal elections, in Sweden and in some US states, attestation or vouching is available.

Typically in these examples, as you mentioned, voters must attend a polling station with another voter who is registered in that polling station. The polling station staff will be able to check that that person is on the register. That person would have to show an accepted form of ID. They would have to go through the same check, and both would have to complete a statutory declaration.

That would be available after polling day in case of any queries or prosecutions. Clearly, in line with other declarations that are made in the election process, completing a false declaration would need to be an offence. It means there would be a written record of the identity of the voucher and the person who had been vouched for available for investigations.

The other thing to mention is that similar types of attestation as a way of proving identity are already available in other areas in the electoral process. In relation to applications for voter authority certificates and in some cases in relation to absent vote applications, the ability to attest another person's identity is already available.

**Lord Foulkes of Cumnock:** I am not against it, but I just want to be clear. Suppose I have registered at my local polling station and I am the polling agent for the Labour Party, registered there. I can attest to every person I know who comes in and we can each sign an attestation. That would be accepted, would it?

**Tom Hawthorn:** The other thing to note is that, in many of the examples I mentioned, the ability to attest is limited. It might be limited to either one or two voters on behalf of each person. It would not be an open opportunity.

**Lord Foulkes of Cumnock:** Does it work in Canada and Sweden?

**Tom Hawthorn:** Yes, it appears to. There have been implementation challenges, as you expect with any new process, but it is an established part of the process there now.

**Lord Foulkes of Cumnock:** Would a change in legislation be necessary to enable this to be introduced?

**Tom Hawthorn:** It would need a change in the legislation, yes.

**Lord Foulkes of Cumnock:** What reaction have you had so far?

**Tom Hawthorn:** The recommendation to consider including an attestation or vouching option was something we suggested to Government ahead of the Bill being introduced and we mentioned while

the Bill was being considered. I know a number of amendments were tabled to the Bill to introduce the option of attestation or vouching. The Government did not support those amendments.

They have a concern about whether it would be undermining the principle of requiring voter identification. For us, it is going back to that point about voters who only decide to vote or only realise they need ID to vote very close to polling day. They simply have no other option. For the very limited number of people who find themselves in that circumstance, this would provide an alternative. It would be a way of making sure voting remained accessible with some of the safeguards that are associated with the voter ID requirement.

**Lord Foulkes of Cumnock:** Have you been able to change the mind of anyone in government in relation to this?

**Tom Hawthorn:** As I said, we are awaiting their response to our recommendations in their own evaluation report. We hope there will be some positive movement, but we are very keen to keep exploring this. We are very happy to talk to committees such as yours about the practical implications and how it might be delivered to show that it could be something that might improve accessibility.

Q11 **Lord Mancroft:** Am I right in thinking that there was a serious case of electoral fraud in the East End of London in the mayoral election some years ago? The issue was husbands attesting for wives. A large number of voters had their votes made for them, but they were not aware it was happening. There was quite a lot about it in the newspapers. I think somebody went to prison or was banned or something.

It also happened at one point in the north-east. That was an issue quite recently. That was about people attesting for others who did not realise they were doing it. That is the danger that could happen, is it not?

**Tom Hawthorn:** The instances you are perhaps referring to happened in Tower Hamlets at the mayoral election that took place in 2014. That was the subject of an election petition after the event, which led to the winning candidate being removed from office.

The majority of the cases in that instance related to either false registration or postal vote offences rather than polling station voting. It is also important to reflect that in those cases there were certainly significant concerns about things like intimidation and abuse of voters in polling stations rather than impersonation. There was no evidence brought to that election petition of specific cases of personation fraud.

Q12 **The Chair:** I have a couple of points. We have talked about attestation. What about making a statutory declaration? Do you say that involves the same considerations?

**Tom Hawthorn:** You mean a statutory declaration without a requirement for somebody else to attest their identity. We would not go as far as supporting that proposal because it removes that check on someone's identity.

We accept that the purpose of introducing a voter ID requirement is to provide some greater assurance that the person presenting themselves is who they say they are. A declaration would provide an audit trail and a record but in practice would not provide an awful lot more assurance than the previous position before the introduction of voter ID, which is effectively to declare yourself and declare your identity before you were given a ballot paper.

**The Chair:** Just going back to the administration of the election, if there were a system of attestation, what impact might that have on deterring staff from coming forward to be engaged at polling stations? Would it impact the speed with which voters could be got through? We would like to have a total picture of the implications.

**Tom Hawthorn:** Yes, it would have an impact. It is another process that polling station staff would have to have to administer. It is another form. I am sure Peter Stanyon will tell you that there are a number of forms that polling station staff have to deal with already. It would be another piece of paper for them to work through.

Having said that, this is an instance or occasion where somebody otherwise would not be able to vote. It is the flip side of the concern about dealing with voters who are unhappy at being denied the opportunity to vote. This is an opportunity to give them that space.

**The Chair:** We will move on to the impact of cumulative changes to the voting system arising from the Elections Act 2022.

Q13 **Lord Thomas of Gresford:** We have covered very largely the impact on election staff, but what about suppliers, the people who print out the forms that have to be filled in, the declarations and so on? Is that all in hand for a snap election?

**Craig Westwood:** Yes. You are right to highlight suppliers as another area of risk. They play a really important role in the delivery of elections, often, as Tom has indicated, at short notice, when a general election is called.

That includes electoral management system software suppliers, which are a small bunch of companies that provide support to local authorities and, as you indicated, paper suppliers and printers. Of course, Royal Mail plays a fundamental role in making sure that absent votes can get to voters and back from voters in time to be counted as part of the poll. Particularly for overseas voters, we know that poses a massive challenge. The issues there are mostly related to overseas postal services.

They are parts of the puzzle where there are other risks. There have been issues at recent polls where, whether the issue has been related to printers, suppliers or indeed Royal Mail, alarms have been raised. We are very conscious of those and are engaging with those audiences where we can, as well as through the relationships that returning officers have at an individual local level, to see how we can support that process.

Particularly with Royal Mail, at a national level, we are making sure we are engaging at a chief exec level and with the right people within Royal Mail to ensure that priority is given to all of the electoral material that is delivered via the post.

**Lord Thomas of Gresford:** That was my follow-up question, really. Do you have priority arrangements with Royal Mail so that you are satisfied that the system is robust enough to keep to the various timetables or time restrictions you have, particularly with postal votes?

**Craig Westwood:** They have established processes, for example, for doing sweeps of sorting offices on polling data to make sure information is not left to one side or that there is not a pile of postal votes that they are not attentive to that is waiting and needs to be delivered to a count.

It is a huge administrative process so there are always issues. That is why we make sure that each time we are coming into a set of elections we are redoubling that relationship and, to the extent that we have responsibilities and we can help, making sure those plans are in place.

**Lord Thomas of Gresford:** Could the system cope with a snap election in November or December?

**Craig Westwood:** In the same way as for us and for returning officers, plans are in place. Snap elections automatically prove more challenging just because there is not the preparatory time, but the fact we do not know the date does not mean we and other stakeholders cannot prepare. The conversations we have with all of the suppliers we have talked about include the preparations for an unscheduled poll.

Q14 **Lord Keen of Elie:** We touched upon data collection earlier, but I wanted to ask you this. Clearly, data collection is critical to your assessment of how and to what extent voter ID is impacting turnout. Have you been able to accumulate sufficient data to make properly informed judgments about that issue?

**Tom Hawthorn:** Yes. We agree that the data collection is absolutely essential so that we can continue to monitor the impact of the policy and look at where improvements might make a difference for voters.

We received data from all of the local authorities that held elections this May. There was a legal requirement for them to provide us with that data, and we developed a data collection process, a portal for collecting that data.

We are happy with the overall coverage of the data. There were definitely some data quality and data collection issues. We certainly found some people providing data that appeared on the face of it to be incorrect, some missing pieces of data and some missing returns from some individual polling stations. In most of those cases, we were able to talk to the local authority and resolve those data queries. We are confident that overall we have a really robust dataset from this May's elections.

Looking ahead to next May's elections, however, there is not a statutory requirement for returning officers to provide that information. The only future elections where they will be required to provide that data will be the next two UK parliamentary general elections.

Having said that, we have a fairly strong degree of consensus across the electoral administration community that that data is really important. There is an agreement that returning officers should continue to collect that data. They are able to collect that data for next May's elections. We anticipate that we will be able to have access to the same type and quality of data and we will be able to carry out the same analysis.

**Lord Keen of Elie:** Would it be sensible, nevertheless, to have legislative changes in place in order that the voluntary provision of such data becomes an obligation, as it was in the earlier local elections?

**Tom Hawthorn:** It would certainly make it easier for us to make sure that that data is provided. We are not anticipating any problems. One of the things that certainly became apparent after this May's elections was that it was very much in the returning officer's interest to have access to that information soon after the close of poll because they were receiving queries and requests for information themselves, not just to provide it to us but to deal with questions from local candidates, local parties and the media. A legislation change would be helpful but is not an absolute essential feature for us.

Q15 **The Chair:** I have one final point on that. There is a distinction between the requirement to collect data and the consistency of the data collected. In the evidence we have had so far, apart from the variable incidence of the collection of data, it was sometimes about the manner of the collection. The impact of greeters may hide a statistic. If a couple appear and the first one is rejected for voter ID, that might have been recorded as one voter but the couple leave. Have you done anything to control for the consistent quality of the data collected?

**Tom Hawthorn:** Yes. We have aimed to try to make the data collection process and the forms as simple as possible—they are not entirely straightforward—to minimise the risk of errors.

The point about greeters and their impact on the data was one that a number of people were concerned about before polling day. The legislation very specifically asks—and we have done this—for the data to be split so there is separate data for polling stations where greeters were employed to remind voters about the ID requirement before they got to the issuing desk and for those polling stations that did not employ those greeters.

We were able to see that there is a slight difference in the data. The number of people being recorded as having been initially turned away was slightly higher in those polling stations where there were not greeters compared to those where there were. We know there was an impact on the data collection, but it is also really important to recognise



that, for customer service purposes and for voters, having someone to explain that requirement before they get to the polling desk, before they have queued up to speak to the polling station staff, is probably going to be quite helpful.

In our guidance and our briefing for polling station staff ahead of next May's elections, we have reiterated and made even clearer that greeters should not be actively turning anyone away. They should be providing information. It should only be the polling station staff who are in a position to turn someone away and then make a record of that person being turned away.

**The Chair:** In a general election, the numbers are going to be much greater. Therefore, any differences in the impact of greeters or no greeters may be far greater. You cannot necessarily extrapolate the same ratios occurring in a general election.

**Craig Westwood:** One of the things we always do following a set of elections is, in the days after the poll, start a nationally representative public survey. That is the backstop that gets us a wealth of information about the experience of voters in all communities and all areas of the country to understand what their experience was; whether they voted or did not vote; the reasons behind that; and, if they did vote, how they felt about it. We have a huge wealth of data, built up over years, to understand the moving parts of elections.

Within those surveys, we have now added a section of questions around voter ID and the experience around it. That survey gives us an insight into the audiences who have, in the example you have given, been turned away from the polling station before getting to the desk and therefore have not been recorded in the data. Yes, they are not specifically in the polling-station-by-polling-station data, but we are seeing them in that broad-picture survey. We are getting a sense of what the voters' experience was and where the issues are.

Q16 **Lord Thomas of Gresford:** I am sorry. I understood that the greeters would tell the polling station if they had turned somebody away or certainly if they had advised somebody that they did not have the correct ID. Is that not the case?

**Tom Hawthorn:** The greeters are not an established role in electoral law. They do not have any powers in the same way as polling station staff, such as poll clerks and presiding officers. Our advice would have been for greeters only to provide that information and let voters decide whether they need to speak to polling station staff or not.

It may have been the case that in some instances greeters were collecting some information about what happened when they provided that information. They may have provided that to the presiding officer or the returning officer as well.

**Lord Thomas of Gresford:** They may not have.

**Tom Hawthorn:** They may not have.

**Lord Thomas of Gresford:** Are the greeters trained as to what is adequate ID?

**Tom Hawthorn:** Yes. Their role is purely to explain the voting process, explain what voters need to do when they get into the polling station and to provide information about what forms of ID are going to be accepted. They should not be sending somebody away on the basis of the ID they have or do not have. That is for the polling station staff and the presiding officer to make that determination.

Q17 **The Chair:** There is a behavioural assumption behind that, in terms of greeters providing information and saying, "You need ID", or being more proactive in saying, "If you do not have voter ID, do not come in". You are assuming that in the former case the behavioural response of the voter would be materially different. You cannot necessarily assume that, can you? If someone tells you, "You have to have voter ID", you may not need the follow-on comment for it to be a deterrent and for them to leave.

**Tom Hawthorn:** As Craig mentioned, the research we did with a large sample size after polling day was designed to draw some of that out. We also know that some people will almost certainly have found out about the voter ID requirement ahead of polling day, understood whether they did or did not have access to that ID and made a decision not to go to the polling station at all. Those people will not have been captured in the data recorded at polling stations, which is why, as Craig said, it is important for us to do that research to look at a range of different data sources.

That is also why we were clear in our initial analysis that our estimate of the number of people who were affected or recorded as having been affected by the ID requirement was likely to be an underestimate of the overall number of people who were not able to vote because of the ID requirement.

The point is that the polling station data gives us one snapshot of a particular process and the impact of that particular process. The wider-scale public opinion research gives us a much broader view of the impact over a range of different groups and over a larger timescale.

**Craig Westwood:** We are very conscious of making sure that, in devising the data collection process to understand what is going on with an election, we are not creating a disproportionate additional burden to the administrators who are running the poll. Ultimately, the main overall objective has to be delivering a well-run election, where the staff are able to deliver all of the different processes that are required of them in the polling station and the voter gets a good experience.

We need to make sure that, in trying to capture the data, we are not adding extra complexity to that process that risks overtipping the apple cart. I highlighted earlier some of the other challenges that administrators are experiencing.

We wanted to make sure we were doing something that was proportionate, that worked and that would give us a good enough sense of how the policy is working. We have that, through all of the data we have, without disturbing the process. Ultimately, greeters are there to oil the wheels of the process. They are there to get people into the polling station with everything they need in an orderly way, in and out as quickly as possible.

As you have indicated, the turnout at a general election is likely to be as much as double what we have experienced at the local elections, so there is an additional imperative for the role of the greeter, which is a really important tool in the returning officer's toolkit, to be able to help them where polling stations are known to be busier, or even just at times of day when they are known to be busier, to try to help oil the wheels, get the process working and get people through the polling station in good time.

**The Chair:** I accept that there is a trade-off in everything, but we have to be sure that certain groups do not find that they have barriers to voting.

Thank you very much indeed. Hopefully we have allowed you to get away to your next meeting in time. Thank you very much indeed for your detailed answers to our questions.