



Select Committee on the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013

Corrected oral evidence: Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013

Tuesday 3 September 2019

3.30 pm

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Members present: Lord Shutt of Greetland (The Chairman); Lord Campbell-Savours; Lord Dykes; Lord Hayward; Lord Janvrin; Lord Lexden; Baroness Pidding; Baroness Suttie; Lord Wills.

Evidence Session No. 4

Heard in Public

Questions 45 - 61

Witnesses

I: Glynn Morgan, Electoral Services Manager, Pembrokeshire County Council; Clare Oakley, Electoral Services Manager, London Borough of Camden; Andrew Tiffin, Elections and Registration Manager, Hart District Council.

Examination of witnesses

Glynn Morgan, Clare Oakley and Andrew Tiffin.

Q45 **The Chairman:** Good afternoon. Welcome to this evidence session of the Select Committee on the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013. You have in front of you a list of interests that have been declared by members of the Committee. The meeting is being broadcast live by the parliamentary website. A transcript will be taken and published on the Committee website. You will have the opportunity to make corrections to that transcript where necessary.

That is the formal bit. You may well have been advised that certain questions will be put to you in this sitting. I will kick off with the first question, and I put it to the three of you. If you want to deal with it by sharing it out, we do not need to hear the same words from all three, but you are all welcome to contribute. We have about an hour, bearing in mind everything concerned.

Has the introduction of individual registration been a positive development overall, from the point of view of the electoral administrators? What are its advantages and disadvantages by comparison with the old household registration system?

Andrew Tiffin: It is a mixed bag of good and bad things, as you might expect. It has created a single point of registration, the GOV.UK Register to Vote website, which has been very well received by the general public and people who work in electoral registration. The benefit that that has created should not be underestimated. It is automated, it validates ID, it is available 24 hours a day. That significant change has brought electoral registration into the modern era. It has created accountability for individuals to register themselves. The old household facility whereby a householder registered people in the house has gone, which is a good thing.

There is another side to it, of course. The process has a brilliant online front end, but behind that sits quite a convoluted paper system, particularly for updating the register during the annual canvass. That is a lot more onerous and expensive than it used to be. We have to send out a large A3 form to people to confirm their details, which is a lot more expensive than sending out the old single A4 sheet. People do not understand the double process whereby the householder who receives the canvass form can roll the details of existing electors forward from one year, but they cannot add extra people on.

They effectively just tip us off by putting new electors on to the registration form. People do not understand that double-stage process; it takes a lot of explanation. The form is quite complex to look at. Because there is more paperwork associated with it, the staffing resource at each authority is greater. Central government funding to offset the extra costs has gone into recruiting and paying extra staff to process the forms.

The immediacy of the system and the fact that it is so easy to register means that there are registration spikes very close to electoral events. Even talk in the last 24 hours of an electoral event has resulted in calls and interest this morning and in duplicate entries being made via the online system because it is so easy to register. That creates a workload that perhaps had not been anticipated

The Chairman: Are there any other points?

Clare Oakley: We all have the same points, and Andrew has covered them.

The Chairman: How have you sought to manage the challenges such as the new registration system and these surges of interest for general elections or referendums? There seems to be a bit of interest in an election now, yet we have all had the form to fill in within the last month or so for what will be the December published register. How does the rolling register and the form filling that is going on now fit in with the surge of interest? Would you sooner be back at the ranch than here at this time, bearing in mind all that is going on? When you booked to come, you did not know that you would be in this febrile atmosphere. How is it all going to fit together?

Andrew Tiffin: I think we would probably be here, because I hope that by being here we can influence what happens in future; there is always some value in that.

How does it fit together? It goes back to the points that were raised previously. The electorate forget, or do not see, how the full system works. They do not necessarily connect the annual form with registering for a general election that may come in the future. Because the online registration system is so simple—you can access it on your smartphone—if there is talk about a general election people just register. It is so easy to do. We have married a very modern method of collecting registration with a very old system of the annual production of a register. If there is a fault in the system, it is that we have not modernised the whole thing and produced a much more dynamic registration system.

Q46 **Lord Campbell-Savours:** May I ask a question of each of you that would elicit a single-word response? Prior to the introduction of this legislation, was there electoral fraud in your area?

Andrew Tiffin: There was, yes.

Lord Campbell-Savours: Was there in your area as well, Ms Oakley?

Clare Oakley: Yes.

Lord Campbell-Savours: And in your area, Mr Morgan?

Glynn Morgan: No.

Lord Campbell-Savours: None at all. In your area, Mr Tiffin, was it extensive?

Andrew Tiffin: No.

Lord Campbell-Savours: What form did it take?

Andrew Tiffin: The commonest form relating to registrations being stopped was what we called roll stuffing—people just putting fake names on. They were often spotted simply because they were a cartoon character, or Elvis Presley, or something like that. That was a problem.

Lord Campbell-Savours: But that was easily identifiable, and under the old system you could sort it out?

Andrew Tiffin: Under the old system, you could not identify it if people were more subtle and put a fake name on.

Lord Campbell-Savours: Did you ever prosecute anybody?

Andrew Tiffin: Never.

Lord Campbell-Savours: Why? Because you could not prove it?

Andrew Tiffin: Yes.

Lord Campbell-Savours: Was it like that in Camden?

Clare Oakley: Ours was mainly to do with identify theft. Under the old system, it was easy for someone just to fill in a form with their name and address and send it in signed. We took it on face value. Now you need a date of birth and national insurance number, and it will often come down as a red elector because they have tried to put in someone else's details that do not marry with the records kept. They do not go on the register; we immediately have to investigate further. That has reduced the number of attempts to go on the register for identity theft. Credit is the other one that we used to get.

Lord Campbell-Savours: In the case of Pembrokeshire, there was no fraud?

Glynn Morgan: No.

Lord Campbell-Savours: Thank you. That is all I need to know.

Lord Janvrin: You said that part of the system has been—I cannot remember how you phrased it—taken into the 21st century by online registration, and the other part of the system has not. Could you expand on how you could get the second half into the 21st century?

Andrew Tiffin: The main challenge is still the annual production of the register, using a document that is sent out to properties. Rather than having a continuous registration system that may be triggered at certain points when an elector changes address—say, through the DVLA, the Passport Office, or other government departments that immediately link through to the registration system—that process does not happen. So we are still reliant on marrying the old household form for confirmation and

rolling over the register from one year to the next with a modern, online entry point to the system.

Glynn Morgan: I support what Andrew is saying. The online part of registration is the modern element of it, but it is still based on a paper-based registration process and, if anything, it has been made more complicated because it is now a two-stage process.

That is what I think a lot of electors find confusing. Previously, they had to return one form. Now it is a two-stage process and that has caused some confusion. Hopefully that will be addressed in the canvass reform.

The Chairman: We heard from a representative of the Cabinet Office—it seems like last week, but it was in July—who said that they had made some changes to the GOV.UK registration website to reduce the number of duplicate registrations and that there are now fewer duplicates. Have you seen evidence of this?

Clare Oakley: No. I sometimes think that the duplicates come from the message that goes out from the political parties, and even, dare I say it, from the Electoral Commission saying that an election is coming and that you must register to vote. People think that they have to go on and register again, even though they are already on the register.

We had an issue with the May elections when that message went out and people thought they had to reregister. We got an awful lot of people coming down, but luckily our system identifies them and puts them in a separate place as duplicates. We can just check them and get rid of them if they are already on the register. The message that went out there and the message on the front of the online portal was not clear to electors. It just says, “Would you like to register to vote?”, and they start. If they are already on the register, it does not stop them.

Lord Hayward: I have asked this question elsewhere. On that very point, if people could have read-only access to the registration for their address, the vast majority of those would presumably disappear. They are only interested in Camden, or Pembrokeshire, or Herts or wherever. If somebody was in Camden and followed that policy would that help you?

Clare Oakley: Yes, immensely.

The Chairman: That is helpful.

Q47 **Baroness Pidd:** Has the introduction of individual electoral registration had any impact, positive or negative, on the efforts to identify and reach under-registered groups? In particular, do you have any examples of good practice in identifying and registering people in these hard-to-reach groups?

Clare Oakley: We have discovered that it has had an effect on under-registered groups, especially those for whom English is not their first language. They may be new to the country and do not understand the

registration process. Some do not have national insurance numbers. Some minorities do not even have exact dates of birth. This causes problems because, even if they understand how to go online, they struggle to fill in the forms and give up. There is a lack of understanding of the registration system in the under-registered groups.

We contact our local community groups for different ethnic minorities around the borough and give them information in other languages. We also visit them and explain registration to someone who understands and can then pass that on. We also try to get our councillors involved. They can advise their electors on being registered to vote. We have a high churn of movers in our borough, which is another problem area. When people move, the last thing they are thinking about is changing their registration. The fact that they have to reregister causes complications. If we had access to information from estate agents or rental companies, that would help, because we would be able to target them better.

The Chairman: Could that not be done by electoral registration officers (EROs)? Could they contact all the estate agents and solicitors once a year and tell them that registration ought to be of interest to the people they are conveying houses to and from?

Clare Oakley: We have tried, but they will not give us the information.

The Chairman: They do not necessarily have to give it to you, but they could give it to their own clients. It could be part of the code of conduct of those professions.

Clare Oakley: Yes.

Glynn Morgan: Some EROs do leaflets, which they hand out to estate agents to give to prospective buyers. They are getting that information from the ERO via the estate agent.

Q48 **Lord Wills:** I have two quick questions, if I may. You agree that it had an impact, and from what you said I assume you meant that it had a negative impact.

Clare Oakley: Yes, I did.

Lord Wills: I will ask the same question of each of you. I know it is difficult to be precise about this, but if you had to give an order of magnitude to the negative impact of the introduction of the Act, what would it be? Did it affect these under-registered groups by a few per cent, 10%, 20%? Can you give us a feel for it?

Clare Oakley: I am trying to do a mental calculation. I would say that our registration rate has dropped by 5% to 6%.

Lord Wills: Would the other witnesses agree?

Andrew Tiffin: We are a rural shire county, so it would be considerably less.

Glynn Morgan: In Pembrokeshire, we do not have many difficult or under-registered groups. We have a Polish section, more so in Carmarthenshire than Pembrokeshire, and we deal directly with its leaders at registration time.

Lord Wills: I have a follow-up question, if I may. You have made admirable attempts to reach these groups. This is resource-intensive, is it not?

Clare Oakley: Yes.

Lord Wills: Could you have done more if you had more resource when the Act was introduced?

Clare Oakley: Yes, if we had the resource to visit and engage more often. We rely on people we know in other council departments getting the information out for us. We do not have the resources to physically go out and talk to them.

Lord Wills: I do not want to put words into your mouth, but if the Government had put in extra funding, along with the introduction of the Act, could the 5% or 6% decrease that you talked about have been eradicated, or possibly improved?

Clare Oakley: We had money to start with, but there was so much going on. Also, the money has obviously decreased and we do not have the extra funding now to carry on the work. It is an ongoing thing; you have to do it each year, but we do not have the money now.

Baroness Pidding: Do you have an ad-hoc programme, or is it in the diary that you go and see a certain group of people every month?

Clare Oakley: We tend to do it around canvass time to make sure that people understand how to fill in the forms that we are sending them. We work closely with our Bangladeshi community, for example. We also help them with their local elections, so the connection is there. They often ask us for information. If we have the time, yes, but in the past year we have not had a lot of time to do that.

Lord Lexden: How successful have the efforts you are able to make been?

Clare Oakley: Where we have gone out you see an increase in forms coming back from that ethnic minority. It is gradually going back up after the introduction of IER.

Q49 **Baroness Pidding:** Do you have concerns about people who may seek to avoid registering, particularly with regard to the lack of effective enforcement measures to ensure that they are registered?

Clare Oakley: We find that if you analyse the addresses that do not respond to the annual canvass and remain empty each year, it is the same kind of properties.

There are regular properties that we know we will not get an answer from, partly because those people do not want to engage; they do not want their name. Sometimes they see it as another way for Big Brother to keep an eye on them. Also, it costs more to enforce the £80 fine for not responding to the registration officer's invitation to register, and we have to pay to chase that person. But we do not get the fine back, so we are out of pocket. So the incentive for us to spend time on that is not there. It is not worth our while.

Lord Wills: I have a quick follow-up question on something you said. Obviously, the under-registered groups cover a very wide spectrum of types of potential voters. You seem to be focusing your remarks on ethnic minorities, which is obviously very important, but wondered specifically about attainers, which must affect all three of you. Have any of you made particular efforts to work with schools, for example, or other efforts to get young people to register when they are just coming up to the age when they can vote?

Clare Oakley: We have access to education records through the Camden Resident Index, so we can look to see where we have 16 and 17 year-olds, do a data match, and then send out an invitation to register. We identify them through data matching. So we can send an invitation to register out to their homes that says, "You can now register".

Glynn Morgan: In Pembrokeshire—I will discuss this in the next question—because Wales will register 16 year-olds onwards, and attainers from 14 onwards, we have already met with our youth Parliament in Pembrokeshire and have had a number of engagement days with it already. I am sure we will see that develop throughout the Principality over the next 12 months when we engage with that age group.

Andrew Tiffin: We have also done work with adjacent boroughs. We do not have any sixth-form colleges in our district, but we have done work with them to get publicity material and contacts established within those colleges, just to encourage registration.

Q50 **Lord Janvrin:** This follows on from Lord Wills's question. Are there other under-registered groups, in particular—it may not necessarily apply to your areas—a big student population, frequent movers and the elderly? Are these areas of concern in your particular areas as regards whether they are under-registered groups?

Andrew Tiffin: I will pick up on two of those categories. We have an elderly retired population in a number of our areas, so we do personal canvassing with care homes and talk to residents there to make sure that we get registrations with the elderly population. It is harder when they are living by themselves, but we probably need to do more work there.

In our area, another hard-to-reach group is an RAF station and a military base. We have done work with them, because we find it difficult to track whether forces personnel are registered through a service registration in

our area or somewhere else. We have attended forces days at the local bases again to ensure that the profile is raised so that serving personnel are aware that they can register. Again, we try to encourage that.

- Q51 **The Chairman:** Pursuing the same line, do you in your individual local authorities have access to the council tax records—the fraternity between your records and the council tax records and the whole business of the 25% reduction for single households, and so on? How do you cope with that, and is it any help?

Clare Oakley: Yes, we do. Once a month throughout the year we get a list of new residents from council tax. We can data match against single occupancy, and we also use discounts for students, if they are in private rented accommodation, to identify students through the council tax rates.

Andrew Tiffin: We do. We have been less successful. We are not a unitary authority, so accessing the records is often harder. The issue for us with council tax is that it is an outsourced service that is provided by another provider, and that means that the relationships are harder to establish and the integration between two different software systems is harder. That is probably becoming more typical in lots of authorities where services are provided across authorities or between private sector providers.

- Q52 **Lord Hayward:** You touched on the question for Wales. Are there any particular challenges associated with implementing the Act in a devolved Administration, and what challenges might be posed by potential future Wales-only challenges for electoral law, such as votes at age 16 or automatic registration?

Glynn Morgan: In Wales, we are very much in that evolution of devolution, which is an ongoing process. The Wales Act 2017 amended the Government of Wales Act 2006, and devolves further powers to Wales. One of those devolved powers is the ability for the National Assembly for Wales to administer Welsh elections—National Assembly and local government elections.

As a result of the 2017 Act, two Bills are currently being drafted. They have both gone through the stage 1 process, as I understand it. There is the Senedd and Elections (Wales) Bill—the Senedd will be the new name for the National Assembly, which is the Welsh Parliament—and the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Bill. They are running side by side, and both the Assembly Commission and the Welsh Government have interacted regarding the delivery of both Bills, especially with regard to the introduction of voting at 16. So there is general agreement there.

However, there is some divergence in Wales between the two institutions on prison voting rights and the franchise for foreign nationals. The prisoner voting rights Assembly committee does not consider that the amendment should be introduced to the Senedd Bill to address the issue of prisoners voting, but on the local government Bill the Welsh Government intend to enfranchise prisoners serving a sentence of less than four years.

There is an element of divergence there, but there will be a further plenary debate later this month with the Assembly, and it is anticipated that, as a result of that plenary session, amendments on prisoner voting rights will be tabled to the Senedd Bill. We will have to see what comes out of that.

On franchise for foreign nationals, again the Senedd Bill currently contains no provisions to extend the franchise to non-EU and non-Commonwealth citizens who have legally registered in Wales to vote in the Assembly elections. However, the Welsh Government have already tabled amendments to the local government Bill, and it is their intention to enfranchise foreign nationals. Again, on those two subjects there is a bit of divergence, but there will be further meetings, so we are hoping that the alignment of the franchises will iron out and that they will reflect each other more closely.

On the subject of divergence, it is also worth noting Scottish legislation; they have just laid their franchise extension Bill, and it is their intention to enfranchise all people legally resident in Scotland and prisoners serving a sentence of less than 12 months. Therefore, there are already franchise issues where not quite everything matches up.

The introduction of votes for 16 year-olds will be a challenge. It will also be a challenge because the annual canvass process, the first one to engage with 14-to-15 year-old attainers and upwards to 16-to-17 year-olds to register their vote for the first time, coincides with the first annual canvass reform that we are seeing at the moment. The canvass reform is intended to be more of a light-touch registration process so that people will not have to respond to the form sent to them if there are no changes, but in a way it is compounded, because if anyone in the household is aged 14 to 17, the forms will have to be returned.

We will not see the savings and benefits of the new annual canvass process for at least another 12 months following the 2020 canvass review. So there will be challenges. Awareness will be a challenge, but I know that the National Assembly and the Welsh Government are already working together on a campaign, and the Electoral Commission will also run one.

When we have held engagement days with the youth section in Pembrokeshire, people tend to get wrapped up in the votes for those aged 16, but what is more important is the registration of 16 year-olds, 14 year-olds and so on, because if they do not register they cannot vote. We are trying to put that point across. An education campaign has to be very much a part of saying, "This is how you can register. This is where you go to register", whether that is done online or in paper format.

Lord Campbell-Savours: Mr Morgan, I have read about your considerable experience in this area and I want to draw on that. In our last evidence session we were told that the driver was fraud, yet in your area you have not experienced fraud.

Glynn Morgan: No.

Lord Campbell-Savours: The description of your history shows that you are in contact with all other electoral registration officers in Wales.

Glynn Morgan: Yes.

Lord Campbell-Savours: Would you say that this is a problem in Wales?

Glynn Morgan: No, I honestly do not think it is. Depending on where you are in the UK, there is a perception which I would imagine is possibly more—

Lord Campbell-Savours: Would you draw a distinction between your area and, let us say, Tower Hamlets or the other 15 or 16 authorities that have been identified by the Electoral Commission as having a particular problem? Would you say that there is a distinction between your areas in Wales and that sort of authority?

Glynn Morgan: Yes.

Lord Campbell-Savours: I know you have been very much at the centre of introducing electoral registration as a system, but would it not have been possible to have a two-tier process so that the areas such as those you know so well in Wales and where I come from, where there is no evidence of fraud, could be dealt with under a separate system, as against a system that has to be applied more rigorously in authorities where there is a clear problem?

In other words, could there be a two-tier system in operation? Could you have envisaged that? I know that the work has now been done, the scheme is in place and you have played your part in creating it. However, there is a little additional factor, which is to have a stronger system of individual identity actually at the ballot box, which might be a national identity card or something like that. Could that have been a substitute in many ways for the system that has been introduced nationally, although often it may not be needed?

Glynn Morgan: I think a two-tier system would be confusing for those who have to administer registration.

Lord Campbell-Savours: If a particular authority opted for one system and another authority opted for the other one, why would that be confusing?

Glynn Morgan: It would be confusing for both the elector and the administrator if there is no continuity of process. The idea of identification at polling stations is being dealt with by the Electoral Commission at the moment, and I think we intend to bring in voter ID for the next United Kingdom parliamentary election, although there would not be time for that if anything happens this autumn. That is definitely on the cards and it is intended to take place.

Lord Campbell-Savours: But is it not possible to argue that you would have had just as effective a registration system if you had a lighter-touch one in certain areas where there is no evidence whatever of fraud?

Glynn Morgan: I do not think so, to be honest.

Lord Campbell-Savours: Why not?

Glynn Morgan: It would be confusing.

Lord Campbell-Savours: I do not understand. Who would be confused?

Glynn Morgan: It would be more difficult to administer and it would be confusing for the elector, as well as for those who want to register, because you would also be dealing with that process in slightly different ways.

Lord Campbell-Savours: But not within a single authority.

Glynn Morgan: No, not within a single authority.

Lord Campbell-Savours: So how is it confusing?

Andrew Tiffin: I do not think that electors necessarily associate their residency with a particular authority. You would have a system of registration that uses personal identifiers, which is effectively what we have at the moment—date of birth and national insurance number—which are validated in order to register, but in certain areas that information would not be requested and validated. That would lead to confusion, because you would be creating different entry points for a similar process.

We have very little fraud, but as I outlined at the beginning, we have had fake names put on to the register. One of the advantages of the new system removes that completely. Having one simple entry point with some validation of ID means that we can be sure that people going on to the register are in most instances genuine people.

Lord Campbell-Savours: I have one final question. Would you all accept that the introduction of a national identity card would have solved a lot of problems?

Glynn Morgan: Yes.

Lord Campbell-Savours: Is that the view of the others as well?

Clare Oakley: Yes, but there is the additional administration of that which again would probably come down to us. It would add another layer of administration.

Q53 **Lord Janvrin:** I turn now to costs and resourcing. My question is to do in particular with the Government's resourcing of the cost to councils. We have heard that the Government do not adequately compensate councils for the cost of electoral registration and administration. Do you agree? I think you have already stated that resources have reduced over the

years. We have had some figures from the Cabinet Office in a supplementary briefing which suggests that that is indeed the case. Could you expand on the way you see the Government resourcing what you are doing?

Andrew Tiffin: The resourcing when the Act came in and the changes were made were based on quite detailed work by the Cabinet Office on extra volumes of letters, correspondence and work that would go out. A lot of good-quality work was done at the time. When the Act came in and the changes were made, we did get adequate funding, but as you have suggested, the funding has gone down, which has made the need to make savings more challenging.

The difficulty is that some of the changes that have been made have meant that registration is no longer a single event. We have touched before on how it is influenced by what is happening in the wider political world and how we have had to deal with spikes of activity related to electoral events that are not adequately funded because the old system of a once-a-year register with no real updating process taking place has been replaced by a more fluid and dynamic system.

As we have said, people leave registration until the last minute, they may register again just to be sure, and there is no way in which they can check their registration without telephoning us. There are activities now that we did not anticipate when this system came in that are not being adequately funded at all. We saw that with the EU parliamentary elections in May, which were unexpected. A large amount of activity was required in order to register EU nationals. That was a spike of activity that was not adequately funded by central government but is the result of central government activity. Whatever happens over the coming weeks, months and years relating to a subsequent general election, there will be electoral activity associated with that which is not being funded at all yet is directly connected to an electoral event.

Lord Janvrin: I have in front of me a Cabinet Office note on this: "Local authorities have also had the opportunity to bid for additional funds through what is known as a justification-led bid process". Are you saying that that does not answer the point you are making, or has it been brought in as a result of some of the pressures over recent years?

Andrew Tiffin: A justification-led bid process allows us to deal with particular issues such as perhaps those relating to under-represented groups, so it is valuable if there are specific local experiences that need to be addressed with more funding, but it does not help us with registration activity that is now being driven increasingly by electoral activity.

Glynn Morgan: With regard to funding for IER, the Cabinet Office funds what is supposedly the extra work incurred through the annual canvass process through the original financial allocation. That has been reduced each year. If we find that, coming towards the end of our annual canvass process when we check our costings, the money has been insufficient to

deal with purely the IER element of the canvass, we then submit a justification-led bid. We have been successful every year and it has been fully funded. As Andrew has said, we all agree that the old process of registration has to be paid for by the ERO, but, because there is an election event, by its very nature it means that the registration side of the work increases but the ERO is not compensated for that.

The Chairman: One thing that has occurred to me is that there are two registers: the register for electoral purposes and the register for other purposes, and that there are people who would like to buy copies of the register for other purposes. I do not know how many of those there are and how many are sold, and indeed what happens to the money.

Does it go into the electoral returning officer's funds or does it go to the treasurer of the local authority's summary income fund? Do you benefit from it? That is what I am really asking. Indeed, will this differ from authority to authority as to whether people want to register in the affluent heart but may not want to in places that are not so affluent and do not want to buy these registers because the names and addresses will not bring in any dividends from trying to sell things and so on?

Clare Oakley: We get requests for the open register, which is the one that can be sold to marketing companies and the like. We probably have three a year, mainly from estate agents. I had a request recently from a new business that was opening and that wanted to be able to leaflet people directly in the surrounding ward in order to say that it was starting up.

The cost equates to roughly £20 for a ward, while the cost for the whole of the borough, because it is based on the number of names on it, is around £146. We have very few names as a percentage on that open register. A lot of people, at least 60%, opt out of having their details sold. The money is kept by the authority, but obviously we do not make a lot of money out of this.

The Chairman: You do not see it.

Andrew Tiffin: Similarly, we make £1,200 from selling the register, which we get to keep, but that does not really offset the tens of thousands of pounds that it costs to produce.

Clare Oakley: There is also the fee that we charge credit agencies when they request the electoral register. They get the full register because it is for anti-fraud measures. The fee is set in legislation and equates to £532 for the whole of the borough.

The Chairman: But you sell more to more than one agency.

Clare Oakley: We sell four registers to the four main credit agencies. In our view, it is a ridiculous sum when you look at how much money the credit agencies make from that information.

The Chairman: That is interesting.

Q54 **Lord Wills:** We have some figures from the Cabinet Office which suggest that your specific funding for IER reduced by getting on for 40% over the first four years for which we have the figures. The Cabinet Office has justified this by saying that the funding was deliberately front-loaded to support transition, and it has declined as processes have been established and new efficiencies found. Would you say that you have managed to make savings efficiencies worth 40% of your funding and thus justify this reduction?

Clare Oakley: No.

Glynn Morgan: The process is exactly the same now as it was when IER was introduced. It is the funding that has reduced.

Lord Wills: That is what I suspected. Another note tells us that local authorities are obliged by law to maintain sufficient resources for electoral registration. But at a time when local authorities in particular have seen their funding decimated, would you say that the resources made available to you by your local authorities—I understand that this may be a sensitive area—have been maintained over the past few years, unlike social care and pretty much every other service provided by local authorities, or would you say that you have suffered along with all of your colleagues in local government?

Andrew Tiffin: We have suffered to varying degrees, and the word “sufficient” in this context is interesting. We have talked about reaching out to hard-to-reach groups, but when your funding goes, things that might called add-ons and nice-to-dos disappear. We may have sufficient funding to put stamps on envelopes, but everything else has to contract.

Clare Oakley: I have managed to keep my team exactly the same since IER, purely because I say that if a snap election comes along I cannot run it on less than what I have. We are at literally 5.5 full-time equivalence to run all the elections and the registration. If I go below that, there is a risk to the election running, so I have always managed to maintain that level.

There is also the fact that as local authorities’ budgets are cut, and staffing in other departments is reduced, we have fewer resources there for us to go to. Some 160 people are needed to run the accounts, while I need 300 people to run the polling stations, so we need extra help. I cannot decimate the whole council, because somebody has to be at a desk answering the phone. The resources are not there in the council to help us to run elections or carry out canvassing.

Lord Wills: Would it be true to say—I do not want to put words into your mouth—that all of you have managed to stay within the law on maintaining sufficient resources by varying your definition of the word “sufficient”? In other words, what was sufficient 10 years ago might be regarded as excessive nowadays, and the definition of “sufficient” is now much more restrictive. Because of that, you are unable to keep within the law.

Glynn Morgan: I always use the argument with my ERO that this is his personal responsibility and that the legislation states that they have to provide sufficient resources to be able to run the registration process. We have not really seen a reduction in resources in Pembrokeshire, predominantly because I keep using that argument.

Q55 **Lord Campbell-Savours:** Moving on to populations, you have 5.5 staff. What is the electoral population that you cover?

Clare Oakley: The electorate is 154,000.

Glynn Morgan: We have 92,5000. That is the electorate, but I am not sure what the population is.

The Chairman: How many people do you have in your department to do this work?

Glynn Morgan: We have 3.5 people.

Lord Campbell-Savours: And what is yours, Andrew?

Andrew Tiffin: We have 74,000 electors and two full-time equivalent staff.

The Chairman: We shall move one. Lord Lexden has the next question.

Q56 **Lord Lexden:** My question is about finance. What assessment has been made of the total costs of the new system in your local authorities?

Clare Oakley: We have kept a template, a running total, over the years of how much our printing and postage for electoral registration costs. This came about partly because we were a pilot authority for the canvass in 2017 and we trialled one of the different methods in the pilot, so we wanted to gauge the costs for that. We saw a drop in the costs when we did the pilot, mainly for printing and postage because a percentage of the borough did not get the extra reminders, so a slight reduction was made there. But when we moved back to normal canvassing the following year, our costs went back up and I had to make a justification-led bid in order to have the money to fund that.

We try to keep a record. It is not exactly exotic or anything like that; it is just about keeping track of invoices and how much everything costs, and then comparing that from year to year. From the pilot, the reduction in costs was not huge and not what we had expected it to be for the new canvass reform. One explanation is that the people who we sent only one form to were those who had been very good and had returned their form at the beginning of the canvass. However, we were still spending as much on the ones we had to send normal-route canvassing to and go out to canvass personally. That cost the same amount anyway. The only saving made was a little saving on not having to send reminders to the regulars who return anyway.

Andrew Tiffin: We had a pretty good handle on the increased costs related to extra stationary—physical, tangible items. What we found

challenging was the length and complexity of queries related to the double stage. We have not been very good at measuring it or understanding the impact that it had on us. The complexity and the cost of dealing with that took us from 1.5 equivalent full-time staff to an extra half person, so that was quite a substantive increase.

Q57 Baroness Pidding: My question is about electoral fraud, although I appreciate that we have already spoken about this. Are there any other comments that you want to make about it? How big a problem is it and what shape does it mostly come in? Do you feel that registration officers are equipped with adequate powers and resources to deal with instances of electoral fraud?

Glynn Morgan: As I said earlier, the perception of electoral fraud in electoral registration throughout the UK is somewhat subjective and seems to be more of a problem in larger urban areas than in rural areas. The potential for electoral fraud falls into three main areas: the ability to register at more than one address, the ability to register possibly at postal vote application time, and the ability to register possibly by proxy application.

The ability to register is still based on residency. The word “residency” has meaning in electoral law that is not equivalent to residence for other purposes such as income tax. When registering individuals, EROs have to exercise their judgment subjectively based on case law, if you like. We have to take it at face value using elements of fact and degree, if nothing else. In that case, the law we use goes back to 1868, while others regarding student registration or dual registration date back to the 1970s. We really need a firmer definition of residency and the Law Commission picked up on that in its interim report on how dual residency needs to be looked at and more work put in on defining it.

If students register for a postal vote, they declare on the postal vote application form that they will not be voting elsewhere. That takes away the perception of a student voting at home and having a postal vote as well. I must admit that we have not seen a pattern in that regard, but the perception of it remains. Postal vote applications are monitored by EROs, and again it is easier to do that monitoring in smaller authorities because staff get a feeling for more than one application from the same address.

Our software systems will also pick up on multiple applications, so this is constantly being monitored. We are now collecting personal identifiers—the date of birth and the signature of the individual—and those personal identifiers are then checked when the postal vote comes in at election time. If someone cannot give a signature, they can apply for a waiver so that the production of their signature is waived. That applies, for instance, where someone has a disability. That is taken at face value and the legislation may need to be looked at again in the future. It is possible that if someone applies for a waiver, that should be attested to by a doctor or carer just to ensure that it is a genuine application.

Proxies do not seem to be so much of a problem. We have seen a surge of applications for emergency proxies. While that is beneficial to the elector, they come in at a very busy time for the office. On the day of the poll, people can apply up until five o'clock, which is difficult in an already busy election office. It also has an effect, because the polling station has to be notified that someone will be coming in to vote on an individual's behalf. Again, as we discussed earlier, this is perceived depending on where you are in the UK.

Lord Campbell-Savours: I have looked at the figures you gave before. You all have roughly the same number of persons per thousand in the electorate, yet the problems in Camden must be substantially greater than the problems in Pembrokeshire. In Camden, there is one person for 28,000 people, while in Pembrokeshire there is one person for every 26,000.

It seems to me that Pembrokeshire is slightly better off than Camden in terms of equivalence. However, the problems seem primarily to arise in inner city areas. Is there some imbalance in the way that this is calculated at the moment? I am going by the figures that you have just handed to me.

Andrew Tiffin: It is one set of figures. Clearly work needs to be done on staffing levels across comparable authorities and different authorities so that we can see which are the most efficient. You get economies of scale in a larger authority which will make the operation more efficient. However, it is difficult to tell.

Q58 **Lord Wills:** A whole range of problems are associated with fraud, which covers many different offences. At the time, the Government took the view that the main priority was to deal with the problems of registration. Going back seven or eight years, is that your view? When dealing with fraud, was the problem of registration the main priority?

Andrew Tiffin: My perception is that it was at the time that the Act came in, and of course the method for registering was very vulnerable. It was about putting a name—any name—on a piece of paper and someone signing it. That could be anyone's signature. You were then put on the register and you were a voter. I think we forget how vulnerable the system was. It meant that we did not know that those people were not real or we could not identify them, so there were no checks. There were strong merits in making the change and bringing in an identifier.

Clare Oakley: I do not remember huge levels of fraud under the old system but, as Andrew has said, back then it was easy for people to register. The law actually said that we should take the application at face value. Especially when it was busy in the run-up to an election, you took the forms at face value and put people on to the register. Now the system is automated and there are more checks. That will have reduced the number of people who want to commit fraud.

Lord Wills: A whole range of problems are associated with our system of

registration, completeness being an important one. Where would you place fraud as a problem? Was it the most important problem when the Act was brought in? What was the second most important, or did it come quite a way down the list of priorities among the things that you wanted the system to deal with?

Andrew Tiffin: Fraud makes the system look vulnerable and affects the democratic process. It affects and influences how people perceive its integrity. While I cannot speak for everyone, electoral administrators want to see efforts that reduce fraud more than we want to see efforts to tackle completeness. Ultimately, completeness is about making the system easy enough to use so that everyone who chooses to register can be registered. We are probably more concerned about the things that bring the system into disrepute than instances where people are perhaps deliberately avoiding trying to register, because in the end that is what they want to do.

Lord Wills: What about the people who do not register because they are unaware of the system or are in other ways excluded? They are not choosing not to register.

Andrew Tiffin: We have looked at the methods. Everyone in the electoral community, at the Electoral Commission, or involved in producing advertising material and so on is keen to make the system easier. We should say at the outset how easy it is to use and how easy it is now to register electronically. I think that fewer people are genuinely unaware that they need to register or are unable to register. My perception, particularly in my area, is that that is not an issue.

Q59 **Baroness Suttie:** You have touched already on the annual canvass. Could you all say a little more about the key problems in relation to that canvass? What changes would you like to see the Government consider as part of the reforms?

Andrew Tiffin: Yes, we have touched on this. The reforms that the Government want to make address the fact that we have a very paper-intensive system. One of the key changes they want to make is that, where we can match electronically the residents who are in a property, we need only to write a notification letter to tell them that they are registered and that we have rolled them over, as it were, for another year.

That will be a clear benefit, because again we go back to the fact that people do not understand how, if they are paying their council tax and we can remember that they are doing so, why on earth we are asking them to roll their details forward from one year to the next? People just do not get that in this day and age, given all the information that is carried forward from one year to the next. The requirement to get from each household a confirmation of the rollover is probably one of the biggest issues that we have with the canvass as a structure, so changes made to it will be beneficial.

Our concern, and we will want to make sure that it is addressed, is that our perception is that the people who respond quickly to the canvass at the moment and do so by electronic methods will probably be those who are living in stable households and have received a notification letter. So in fact that will not save us much because the cost of someone responding via an 0800 number or a text message is pennies for us. The challenging electors are those who move frequently and will probably not be matched by an electronic method, along with all those who do not respond. The core cost of chasing them is still going to arise, and that is a concern.

Clare Oakley: I still think there is an issue with having two forms: the household inquiry form and the invitation to register. Someone moving into a property at the moment will find on their doorstep a household inquiry form. It explains that they can go on to the portal and register directly, but because they have been sent a form they will feel obliged to fill it in with their new names. The form comes to us, we process it and then we send them an invitation to register; we will send it via email if we have an email address. It says that you need to register or that we will send it in the post if you do not have an email address.

When it comes to election day—we have had this every year for the last four years—a lot of people will say, “But I have registered, because I returned the form”. The system shows that, yes, they returned the housing inquiry form but have ignored every reminder with an invitation to register and ignored the personal canvasser knocking on the door saying, “You need to register”, because they feel that they have registered. The two-form system does not work, because it confuses the elector.

Lord Campbell-Savours: Do you think that your very strong arguments have been listened to by those who are now redesigning the system?

Clare Oakley: Yes, because I have been to meetings regarding the canvass reform and I keep saying the same thing.

Lord Campbell-Savours: Where do you think we are now? Are you expecting the Government’s position to change?

Clare Oakley: Having been the pilot authority for the changes—in fact, we were a pilot authority very like the canvass reform—yes, we were listened to to a certain extent. However, we are still talking about the percentage of people who need to be contacted—essentially those who move around a lot and are not registered. We are still talking about a two-form process.

Lord Campbell-Savours: If we were to flag up in our final report the key change, which one would you want to see being made to the system? Would it be this one?

Clare Oakley: Personally, I would like that one—a single form.

Lord Campbell-Savours: Is that the opinion of all the witnesses: a

single form for all of the business is the key reform? That should really be the headline of our report.

Clare Oakley: I cannot say that.

The Chairman: Do you want to put your question, or do you think that it has been covered?

Q60 **Lord Campbell-Savours:** Which administrative changes brought in by the Act have had the biggest impact on your ability to deliver elections?

Clare Oakley: There are quite a few that were just slight tweaks and changes which most people probably did not notice. As an administrator, the changes to the parliamentary timetable were key because we went from 17 days to 25 days. However, we would say that that is not long enough for the simple reason that 25 days still do not allow us enough time after the close of nominations to get postal vote ballot papers out to overseas electors. However, if the franchise for overseas electors is extended, we will have an even bigger problem.

The complaint I get at every parliamentary election—we had it in May—was on the number of overseas postal ballot packs that did not arrive in time for overseas electors. We advise them to have a proxy, regardless of where they live, but a lot of them say, “I don’t know anybody where I used to live”. Some of them have been out there for 14 or 15 years, so they do not know anyone back in the UK who could do it before the time limit. It can arrive the day before or the day after. Once it has left the UK and Royal Mail it is out of our hands, so if we could extend it slightly that would help with overseas electors. I know that there is always a big push on that.

The addition of interim elections to the election timetable increases the amount of workload that we have because we have got to fit in three publications, and it is not as simple as just pressing a button from an administrator’s point of view. There is a lot of chasing of people and reminding them if they need to produce documentary evidence. They may also want postal votes and things like that. It adds quite a lot. It takes one person out from doing other things in the office just to publish those interim registers. Then you have to get them out to the candidates and the political parties because they all want the updates. It just adds more work.

The only other one I like is that if there is a queue at a polling station, I instruct my presiding officers: “When it is 9:58, stand by the door and shout at people to run if they are arriving”. If they get in, you close the doors, whereas before you used to have the ballot paper physically in your hand. Now, as long as they are in the building they can still vote. We have never actually had queues, but I still train them that that is what they should do.

Lord Campbell-Savours: Have you seen the report by the Association of Electoral Administrators from September 2017, called *It’s Time for Urgent and Positive Government Action*, and the selected feedback from

your AEA members who are your colleagues? Have you read it?

Andrew Tiffin: Yes.

Clare Oakley: Yes, when it came out

Lord Campbell-Savours: I will briefly read one of the comments: "To sum it up in a simple sentence—it was horrific". This was their experience. "Somehow, I and my small team have managed to deliver nothing short of a miracle. I'm not a glass half empty kind of person—I'm very happy go lucky but this has just taken everything I had to give and more. I feel like I just need to take some time to digest what we have been through and then decide whether this is still a career that I want to do".

We have read a lot of comments like that from different authorities and from individuals. What is morale like in each of your authorities, briefly—my question was long—when it comes to this because of pressure?

Andrew Tiffin: That report probably came out following the 2017 general election—

Lord Campbell-Savours: It did.

Andrew Tiffin: —so there was a phenomenal amount of pressure placed on staff. Morale remains good in our office—I would say that, I suppose—but there are fears. My clerical staff are fearful of a general election, because running a general election in the canvas, when we have other electoral events, will put significant burdens on them personally. That has an effect on them, which is seen among my colleagues in that report and in the number of vacancies being carried for people in my position—electoral service managers—in authorities up and down the country. It is a job that is difficult to recruit to in local authorities.

Lord Campbell-Savours: Is it the same in Camden?

Clare Oakley: Our morale is good. By the end of the UK parliamentary I think we were all a little tired, to make an understatement, but we have chosen this as a career. We have pride in what we do and in delivering an accurate and successful election. I know that my staff will work whatever hours or days of the week it takes to do that, not only because of our own standing but so as not to let Camden down.

Lord Campbell-Savours: And in Pembrokeshire?

Glynn Morgan: Morale in the office is good. That is very much down to the individuals there, to be honest. The main problem that we face is not so much in a timetabled poll on the normal cycle of elections. It is, for instance, when you get a snap parliamentary election—as in 2017 and potentially now as well—or the late calling of a European parliamentary election. You are electoral purgatory, if you like, because you do not know what on earth is going to happen. The staff's commitment is exceptional.

Lord Campbell-Savours: One final little question, then. I am not playing politics here, I am just asking out of interest, because you are the people who have to implement it. If an election was called for 16 October, would all your authorities manage with the resources that you have? Would you lose people and how would you manage? You have six weeks—no, more than six actually, it is eight.

Glynn Morgan: We would deliver it.

Clare Oakley: Yes.

Lord Campbell-Savours: You would deliver it.

Andrew Tiffin: I think the electors would find this a challenging election to get through because—

Lord Campbell-Savours: I am talking about your people in your office.

Andrew Tiffin: Yes, but the fact that it is in the middle of a canvas will produce issues, as we have touched on, where people think they are registered and are not. An election this time round, in comparison to the EU election or the 2017 parliamentary one, will be less smooth for staff and for voters because there will be more people who think they are registered and will not be.

Glynn Morgan: The challenge is also with suppliers; for polling stations, there are sundries, equipment, et cetera. There is only one major supplier providing those materials. Are they, for instance, up to getting that equipment out to us in time?

The Chairman: I wonder if we can move to a concluding question from Lord Hayward. Do not forget that there is this issue about late registration.

Q61 **Lord Hayward:** Yes. My question is associated with question 9. What further changes should be a priority to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of electoral administration, and to aid administrators in doing their jobs?

May I add a supplementary, which is implicit in that? It is the question of the timing of late registration. Does this cause you particular problems, and if late registration were cut off a few days earlier would that have a significant effect? You have touched on the question of late responses on proxies and other things. Would that adjustment therefore be markedly beneficial, slightly beneficial or have no benefit at all?

Glynn Morgan: The sort of future change that we need to look at is quite fundamental. That is in changes to legislation. The Law Commission report needs to get back on to the political agenda. It has been put on the backburner again because of Brexit, which is unfortunate. At present, we have to work to something like 25 different statutes, supported by myriad secondary legislation, all bolted on to previous secondary legislation or statutes. It makes the process even more complex, and because of that there is more of that risk of people making mistakes.

The fundamental change is, "Listen to the Law Commission and try to get it consolidated in virtually one Act", so that it would deal with every kind of election going. Yes, there are different tweaks in the consent for Scotland or Wales with their devolved institutions, but that process should be exactly the same, irrespective of which poll it is. Resources have to be renewed financially, as do staff. We touched on that just now. A lot of the legislation is so antiquated and it needs to be brought up into the 21st century as well.

Going on to your supplementary question, if the registration deadline was moved forward it would just give us a bit more breathing space to prepare the registers et cetera.

The Chairman: I think we are there. Thank you very much for coming. It has been very helpful. Thank you.