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Lord Shutt
Chair, Lords Select Committee
on Electoral Registration and Administration
Act 2013
House of Lords
London
SW1A 0AA

Our reference: MC2020/13487

7 October 2020

Dear Lord Shutt,

Thank you for your report of 8 July titled *An electoral system fit for today? More to be done*. I read your recommendations with interest and attach the Government's response.

The Government welcomes the Committee's findings and the attached response sets out our approach to each of the recommendations.

Our response outlines actions taken over recent years to modernise and improve the registration system, such as Canvass Reform and the introduction of online registration. It also sets out our current priorities, such as measures to mitigate the impacts of large registration volumes on administrators, as well as recommendations which we will consider taking forward to continue to enhance the registration system such as better use of data. Other recommendations fall within the responsibilities of the Electoral Commission and/or the Scottish and Welsh Governments. Therefore, it will be for those bodies to consider how they wish to respond to the Committee.

In relation to the report's recommendations on issues relating to the administration and conduct of elections, and the integrity of the electoral process, our response explains that election timetables and statutory deadlines are regularly considered as part of considering policy and process development for electoral registration and the conduct of electoral events. The response also sets out our planned approach to strengthening the integrity of elections, including how we intend to implement the requirement for voters to show ID in polling stations, and planned measures to ensure that postal and proxy voting is secure.

Yours ever

Chloe Smith MP
Minister of State for the Constitution and Devolution

**Government response to the Lords Electoral Registration and
Administration Act 2013 Committee report recommendations
16 September 2020**

#	<i>Recommendation in Bold</i>
1	<p>When the Government undertakes future reforms to electoral registration and administration, it must ensure that administrators are properly resourced to implement them and that timescales are appropriate. Without this, the quality of registers may decline and there will be a risk to effective administration in future. (Paragraph 47)</p>
	<p>The Government agrees that effectively delivered reforms must be properly planned and resourced and is confident that all major recent reforms have been.</p> <p>The Government's 'new burdens doctrine' requires all Government departments to justify why new duties should be placed on local authorities, as well as how much these policies will cost and where the money will come from to pay for them. Consistent with this, for Individual Electoral Registration (IER) the Government committed to fully funding the additional costs for EROs of the new system when compared to the registration system it replaced.</p> <p>The Cabinet Office has provided funding through two mechanisms: an initial allocation early in the financial year based on costs predicted by Cabinet Office modelling, and a 'Justification-Led Bid' (JLB) funding mechanism towards the end of the financial year through which EROs place bids for additional funding, where they can provide evidence that their initial allocation funding have not met their needs. The JLB process has provided EROs with an additional £7.8 million of funding in the years 2015/6-2019/20. To date Cabinet Office has provided Local Authorities over £100 million for costs associated with IER.</p> <p>The Government has also gone further. For example, the Cabinet Office directly funded the commercial providers of Electoral Management Software systems to develop their systems, so that these costs would not need to be recouped by the providers through their contracts with individual EROs and their authorities. The same approach was taken for the reform of the annual canvass.</p> <p>Similarly, at recent national elections, the Government has recognised that unscheduled polls and those held at particular times of the year can incur additional costs and has agreed to consider relevant payments (e.g. for other venues for polling stations where the usual ones were already booked for seasonal events).</p>

<p>2</p>	<p>As part of an overall simplification of processes for both voters and Electoral Registration Officers, the Government should urgently explore the options for introducing an online registration checking tool, drawing on international good practice. In doing so, it should consider all options for making such a tool successful, including the possibility of centralising or coordinating registration information to make it more accessible and usable for this purpose. (Paragraph 72)</p>
	<p>The Government is sympathetic to the potential benefits of a nation-wide registration checking tool, so the intention is to look at the feasibility and desirability of introducing one in more detail. We last did this after the 2017 General Election and discovered that before such a tool could be introduced, there are issues – surrounding security, cost and implementation; and doubts around the level of benefit citizens would derive from one – that would have to be analysed. While some of those issues have subsided since 2017, others remain and require scrutiny before we could consider progressing with implementation. At the moment, however, the Government is prioritising other interventions to modernise our country’s electoral registration system that we believe will be of more immediate use to citizens and EROs. This includes considering how our digital products can be enhanced, with a view to ensuring the resilience of the polls in May 2021, where COVID-19 may still be a live issue. Moreover, as part of Cabinet Office’s Event-led Registration Volumes Project, the Government will consider a variety of interventions designed to reduce the impact of high volumes of applications to register on EROs’ workloads, which will include those designed to dissuade those who are already correctly registered from making a fresh application. The Government believes that taking this strategic approach of short term interventions to meet urgent elector / electoral administrator needs, whilst scoping longer term interventions, is the right one to effectively manage the challenges our country’s electoral registration and electoral systems face.</p>
<p>3</p>	<p>Government should also—by the next UK Parliamentary election at the latest—devise and introduce a scheme of financial support or compensation for the cost to local authorities of processing election related registration activity. This should enable Local Authorities to recover registration costs where they can be demonstrated to be the direct result of an election taking place. (Paragraph 73)</p>
	<p>Statute provides that it is the responsibility of each local authority to supply the resources necessary for the Electoral Registration Officer they appoint to fulfil their duties. The Government has no current plans to change this.</p> <p>However, the Government recognises that changing elector behaviour means that there has been a dramatic increase in the volumes of registration applications in the run up to major polls in recent years. While this means that the registers used for elections are now probably more complete than ever before, which is to be welcomed, this undoubtedly places additional burdens on electoral administrators at what is already a very busy time for them.</p> <p>To support EROs and their authorities in adjusting to this position, the Cabinet Office</p>

	<p>has launched a project to identify and put in place ahead of the next UK Parliamentary election, measures to minimise or mitigate the impacts on electoral administrators. This includes looking at ways to reduce the number of unnecessary duplicate applications from those already correctly registered.</p>
<p>4</p>	<p>The Government must ensure that it treats improving accuracy and completeness as a major priority in future reforms to electoral registration and administration. In doing so, we strongly recommend that they refer to international best practice. This should focus both on improving overall rates of completeness and accuracy, and on doing more to narrow the gap among groups that are more likely to be under-registered or inaccurately registered, such as young people and home movers. (Paragraph 92)</p> <p>The Government believes that registering to vote and voting is a civic duty and encourages all eligible citizens to do so.</p> <p>The responsibility for maintaining complete and accurate electoral registers rests with Electoral Registration Officers. Government’s role is to provide EROs with the tools they need to meet this responsibility and to identify and remove barriers to registration which some electors may experience. The Government works to ensure that all those who are eligible to register to vote and wish to, should be able to do so quickly and securely.</p> <p>Among the many steps taken by Government in recent years are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● the introduction of online registration ● convening an Accessibility of Elections Working Group with which meets regularly to consider measures to improve access for those with a disability ● amending legislation to make it easier for EROs in lower tier local authorities in two-tier local authority areas to access data held by the higher tier authority ● amending the anonymous registration scheme to make it easier for those escaping domestic abuse to provide the evidence they need that their safety would be put at risk were their name and address details to be published in the electoral register ● developing with partners and making freely available on GOV.UK a collection of resources to promote democratic engagement and voter registration focussing on young people, frequent movers, the homeless, those with a disability and ethnic minorities ● placing an explicit duty on Higher Education providers in England to share data with EROs, when asked to do so, and to promote electoral registration to their students
<p>5</p>	<p>We are concerned that the use of inaccurate and incomplete registers may have meant previous reviews of Parliamentary boundaries were unfair to voters. As the Government seeks to pass new legislation for future boundary reviews, they must ensure that registers used for future reviews are accurate and complete, writing this commitment into the legislation if necessary. We welcome the Government’s commitment to use March 2020 registers for the next boundary review, as these are likely to be significantly more accurate and complete than the December 2020 register which was originally proposed to be used. (Paragraph 93)</p>

	<p>The Government agrees that electorate data used in boundary reviews should be as accurate and complete as possible. The Government brought forward an amendment to the Parliamentary Constituencies Bill in its Commons Stages that provides for the Boundary Commissions to use the number of electors on the register as at 2 March 2020, rather than from the revised register usually published by 1 December 2020, for the next boundary review. This is in order to address the risks presented by Covid-19 in relation to that review and to ensure that the important work to be carried out under the Parliamentary Constituencies Bill will be able to commence on time, using the most up-to-date and accurate data available.</p> <p>EROs are statutorily responsible for maintaining the completeness and accuracy of their electoral register. This is a cornerstone of the electoral registration system and the Government has no plans to make any changes in that regard. The electoral register is updated throughout the year and the annual canvass provides a comprehensive audit of the electoral register each year. It represents the most consistently up-to-date picture of how many UK electors there are and where they live. After the 2023 Boundary Review, we will therefore revert to the current approach of using the registers from the most recent annual canvass of electors as at the start of the review (the December registers) to ensure that the Boundary Commissions are able to use officially published data which is up to date, transparent and readily available.</p>
<p>6</p>	<p>The introduction of individual registration under the Act added to the administrative and financial burdens faced by EROs. In this report we urge a range of steps to modernise the registration system which we believe would help to reduce the heavy financial and resources burden faced by EROs. Notwithstanding that, we urge the Government to undertake a thorough review of existing funding provisions and arrangements for both electoral registration and delivery of elections. The review must ensure adequate funding is provided and should include consultation with a wide range of stakeholders, particularly with Local Authorities and EROs. (Paragraph 113)</p> <p>As set out in the response to recommendation 1, as required by the new burdens doctrine, the Government has provided significant funding to cover the additional costs to EROs of operating the IER system. Notwithstanding this, as set out in the response to recommendation 3, statute provides that local authorities meet the costs of electoral registration and the Government is not minded to change these arrangements at this time. Reforming the annual canvass has helped to reduce the administrative burden on EROs and the financial burden on taxpayers whilst continuing to maintain the completeness and accuracy of the registers and improving the citizen experience.</p> <p>The Government intends to undertake a review of the funding arrangements for the delivery of elections and has been seeking a suitable opportunity between major</p>

	<p>electoral events to do so.</p>
<p>7</p>	<p>The Government should undertake to modernise the registration system further, including piloting automatic registration for attainers; introducing assisted registration to prompt eligible voters to register when accessing other public services; improving access for Electoral Registration Officers to local data sources; and developing a transparent policy on privacy and data security to underpin these measures. (Paragraph 133)</p> <p>The Government has no plans to introduce automatic registration, as it contradicts the principle which underpins individual electoral registration, that individuals are responsible for registering and that this should be done at a time and place of their choosing. Automatic voter registration could lead to less accurate electoral registers, especially if people have moved recently. Computers would add people to electoral rolls who did not live there, due to out of date entries held on other databases. It may also add people who had a residence but were not eligible to vote (e.g. certain second home owners, unqualified Commonwealth voters). The UK's system of individual electoral registration was introduced to prevent electoral fraud. Automatic registration could lead to unsolicited poll cards being sent to households, especially in areas with high turnover (student accommodation, private rented accommodation), opening the door to greater personation, postal and proxy vote fraud. Successfully introducing a system of automatic registration would likely require a single, national electoral register and/or rely on the introduction of a national database. The Government is opposed to the creation of a new database, containing personal identifiers, which has a national coverage, since this would have significant security, privacy and cost implication and the Coalition Government scrapped plans for a National ID register in 2010.</p> <p>In addition, treating attainers differently would lead to a lack of equity within the electoral registration system and transferring responsibility for registering people to vote onto the Government would constitute a fundamental shift in how the registration system currently works.</p> <p>Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) already have strong legislative backing to request access to data under regulation 23 of the Representation of the People (England and Wales) Regulations 2001, regulation 23 of the Representation of the People (Scotland) Regulations 2001 and regulation 24 of the Representation of the People (Northern Ireland) Regulations 2008. As part of the recent reforms to the annual canvass, the Government has provided training resources to EROs on accessing local data resources. Similarly, the Electoral Commission has also provided guidance to EROs on how best to access such sources. The Government continues to consider how our country's electoral registration system can be made more responsive to the needs of electors – and administrators – and is currently considering a package of measures to support delivery of the May 2021 polls.</p>
<p>8</p>	<p>Notwithstanding any potential backlash from those currently making use of it, Government should consider abolishing the open register; its compilation serves no public good, it presents a privacy risk and the proceeds from its sale yield an insignificant amount of money for Local Authorities. (Paragraph 134)</p>

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	<p>The Government considered the future of the open register ahead of the introduction of IER and concluded it should be retained. Ministers saw no convincing evidence that the existence of the open register, or its use by commercial and other organisations, acts as a disincentive to register to vote, while recognising the wider social and economic benefits it can provide.</p> <p>Information about what the open register is, how it may be used and by whom is much clearer than previously. Anyone concerned about their details appearing in the open register can opt out when they apply to be registered or at any point thereafter, simply by telling their ERO or doing so online.</p> <p>The fee structure for providing copies of the open register is purely intended to recoup the costs to administrators of supplying the register. This is consistent with HM Treasury guidance on <i>Managing Public Money</i>.</p>
9	<p>We would like to see a significant uplift in registration rates among under-registered groups. We call on the Government to publish targets for improving registration rates among these groups and to report annually to Parliament on the progress of meeting those targets. The Government must also work closely with the Electoral Commission, Electoral Registration Officers, local communities and third sector organisations to improve civic education and effective, long-term engagement as part of their efforts to reach those targets. (Paragraph 175)</p> <p>As noted elsewhere in this response, the Government believes that registering to vote and voting is a civic duty and encourages all eligible citizens to do so. The Government works to ensure that all those who are eligible to register to vote, and wish to, should be able to do so quickly and securely.</p> <p>The Government setting specific targets for improving registration rates among under-registered groups would be inappropriate, as it would undermine the statutory responsibility EROs have to maintain complete and accurate local electoral registers. Regardless, there would also likely be a number of important challenges in setting targets which are meaningful and deliverable on the ground, not least because the distribution of under-registered groups will vary considerably from one local authority area to another.</p> <p>Reporting on progress on an annual basis would also pose significant challenges. The Electoral Commission periodically assesses the completeness and accuracy of the registers in Great Britain and Northern Ireland, but doing so annually would be a major and costly undertaking. As part of the reforms made to the system of the annual canvass, the Cabinet Office supported the funding of a set of performance related metrics integrated within their electoral management systems as part of a 'Better Metrics' project. It is expected that these metrics will empower EROs to better track and report on their performance.</p>
10	<p>The best place to promote registration is in schools. EROs must be given greater guidance, funding and support to enable them to reach students while they are still in school. (Paragraph 176)</p>

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	<p>The Government used a power in the Higher Education and Research Act 2017 to publish Ministerial Guidance which, for the first time, made cooperating with ERO requests for data and promoting electoral registration amongst student populations a requirement on Higher Education providers in England, if they are to be registered with the regulator – the Office for Students.</p> <p>The Office for Students published their guidance – based on the Ministerial Guidance – in September 2018. This approach allows Higher Education providers and EROs to collaborate innovatively, working in a way that suits their needs locally. The Government has no plans to extend the approach it has taken to the Higher Education sector to schools; however, we remain supportive of the engagement that already exists between EROs and schools in their local areas. Indeed, the Government would encourage EROs to double down on their already impressive efforts and continue to use schools to reach out to those pupils who will be of voting age within the next couple of years. Such efforts do not just benefit young people, they also help mitigate high registration volumes received in the period immediately before a major poll and, therefore, are a valuable activity for EROs.</p>
11	<p>We also recommend that all further and higher education providers be required to introduce a system of assisted registration at the point of enrolment along the lines of the University of Sheffield model, including registration of apprentices. (Paragraph 177)</p>
	<p><i>Answered in 10</i></p>
12	<p>The invitation to register process is cumbersome for administrators and confusing for voters. Simplifying this process should be prioritised as part of annual canvass reform. (Paragraph 195)</p>
	<p>The introduction of IER has effectively introduced a two-stage process for unregistered electors who are identified by the annual canvass of all residential properties in Great Britain. Citizens identified as unregistered by the annual canvass are then separately invited to fill in an individual application to be added to the register.</p> <p>Any transition away from this two-stage process, would inevitably mean EROs would have to automatically add electors named on a canvass form to the register, possibly without their knowledge. The Government is not considering introducing this form of automatic registration, as it goes against the underlying principle of IER – of individuals taking ownership of registering to vote. Moreover, requiring electors to submit an application to register is important from a fraud perspective, as applications have to include personal identifiers – such as NINos – which can be checked against government records.</p> <p>As part of the reforms made to the annual canvass, after confirmation of their identity and address against the National Data Matching service, the majority of electors should not have to fill in or respond to any canvass communications, making the process less cumbersome for administrators and less confusing for voters.</p>

13	<p>We note the Government’s preference to maintain registration as voluntary. However, we are concerned about the variation across Local Authorities in the extent that fines or threats of fines are deployed, and would urge the Government to provide greater guidance in this regard. (Paragraph 196)</p> <p>EROs have a statutory duty to maintain a register for their own local area. There are criminal penalties for knowingly providing false information to an ERO or in some circumstances for failing to provide an ERO with information when requested to do so. A civil penalty is also available if an individual fails to complete and return an Invitation to Register when requested to do so. These penalties are intended to help ensure the accuracy of the electoral register and to encourage completeness. But they are only one such tool.</p> <p>The Government believes that EROs know their areas best and should have the tools they need to fulfil their statutory duties, but also the discretion to use these tools as they consider best. The Government does not intend to provide guidance on this matter and in any event does not currently have the power to issue guidance to which EROs must have regard.</p> <p>The Electoral Commission is responsible for issuing guidance to EROs in the performance of their duties. It also has the power to monitor ERO’s performance against published standards. The Commission then works with EROs who are assessed as not meeting the requisite standards to improve their future performance.</p>
14	<p>We would expect that modernisation of the registration system as recommended in Chapter 2 would go some way to obviating the need to pursue measures such as fines. However, we note that fines can be a useful tool for EROs who have a legal duty to compile complete and accurate registers. The Government should look again at the fines regime and consider new regulations to increase the fine for failure to respond to an ITR. At £80 it appears to be insufficient as a deterrent and not worth the cost of enforcement. (Paragraph 197)</p> <p>The Government has no current plans to amend the existing regime for levying civil penalties against those who fail to make an application to register, including increasing the level it is set at. When introduced in 2013, it was considered akin to a lesser civil offence, such as a parking fine. If the penalty is not paid on time, a daily rate of interest is applied, equivalent to 8% per year from the date the penalty must be paid. It is for EROs to use all the tools at their disposal to encourage electors to make an application to register, with the civil penalty being used only as a last resort.</p>

<p>15</p>	<p>We are in favour of greater data sharing and see scope to extend it beyond what is currently being proposed. Greater data sharing must happen in parallel with capacity building efforts at the local level, including the development of robust systems to ensure that it takes place in an effective and efficient manner. There must also be training and support so that all Local Authorities are able to take full advantage of the changes. Greater data sharing must also be accompanied by a transparent policy on privacy and data protection. (Paragraph 217)</p>
	<p>The Government agrees that broader and better use of data sharing can support effective electoral registration. Cabinet Office has undertaken a wide range of data sharing, data handling, and capacity building activity in conjunction with Local Authorities. Activity includes officials' ongoing work with wider public and private sector partners, such as the commercial providers of council tax administration software and student accommodation providers, to improve Local Authorities' access to datasets across Great Britain.</p> <p>Cabinet Office has also worked with Local Authorities themselves to support them in accessing, and effectively using, area-specific datasets held within their own Local Authority. This has included creating communications and tools that help EROs to explain the legal powers that enable them to use local datasets and that outline the benefits of increased data sharing within their organisations. In addition, Cabinet Office has conducted eleven regional training sessions for all EROs' teams in Great Britain which included upskilling the attendees in accessing and appropriate utilisation of datasets as well as the importance of transparency and compliance with GDPR and DPA regulations.</p> <p>Through a working group with volunteer electoral administrators with experience in good practice, Cabinet Office is regularly seeking new ideas to improve data matching skills within the sector and is currently exploring the possibility of further training for Local Authorities to further increase their data handling skills.</p>
<p>16</p>	<p>Government must urgently review statutory deadlines within election timetables, including deadlines for registration and for postal voting applications. This review should consider whether they allow sufficient time for administrators to fulfil their duties and for all voters to exercise their franchise, with a view to bringing them forward if this is found not to be the case. (Paragraph 232)</p>
	<p>Election timetables and statutory deadlines are regularly considered as part of considering policy and process development for electoral registration and the conduct of electoral events.</p> <p>The current deadlines allow for eligible people to be able to apply to register and for a postal vote and to receive them and return them in time to be included in the count.</p>

	<p>Providing simplicity and certainty of deadline dates supports clear central and local messaging about what eligible people need to do to take part in the electoral process. Having a range of deadlines for people in different circumstances would make such messaging complex and potentially lead to confusion.</p> <p>We are working to develop ways of ensuring that people applying to register and for an absent vote are aware of the requirements and issues they need to consider (e.g. applying towards the deadline for a postal vote if they live somewhere abroad with an unreliable postal service) so they can make informed decisions.</p> <p>We are also looking at the policy and processes for overseas electors in a comprehensive fashion in order to bring forward proposals to better support overseas electors to vote.</p>
<p>17</p>	<p>In considering future reforms to electoral administration, the Government should review the administrative impact of holding concurrent polls and consider if measures are necessary to ease the administrative burdens involved. (Paragraph 236)</p> <p>This is an area that is considered as part of any policy development and process change for the conduct of electoral events and we engage with electoral administrators and the Electoral Commission on such potential changes.</p> <p>Elections scheduled for each year are generally held on the first Thursday of May, and if there are multiple elections scheduled to take place in the same area then the polls for these will be combined. That ensures that there is a clear process for electors and avoids any need for more than one visit to a polling station (or even more than one) on the same day or within a short period. This can support more effective engagement and also generates cost savings for the public purse at both local and national levels.</p> <p>We recognise that combination of polls can add some complexity for electoral administrators but it would create a greater administrative burden (and cost) to not combine polls, as administrators would need to run the entire election process multiple times.</p> <p>There would also be an additional burden for other services with staff needed from elsewhere in councils more frequently and on use of schools as polling stations.</p>
<p>18</p>	<p>We note the report of the Law Commissions on wider reform and streamlining of electoral law. We share the perspective of the Law Commissions on the need for overall reform, and urge the Government to adopt its proposals at the earliest opportunity, using an expedited process if possible. (Paragraph 251)</p>

	<p>The Government has welcomed the Law Commissions' <i>Electoral Law</i> report. The Government will consider the issues raised in the Law Commissions' report in conjunction with its wider programme of electoral integrity reforms, and will respond fully in due course. However, any process on consolidation will inevitably be a longer-term project, as with the implementation of most Law Commission consolidation programmes. Whilst the Government agrees that the clarification of electoral law would certainly be beneficial, we are aware of more immediate challenges outside of the structure of electoral legislation, including operations, resilience, fraud and confidence. Our priority is to ensure our elections are secure and updated for the age, maintaining confidence and the integrity of people's choices.</p> <p>The Government's immediate priority will be the implementation of manifesto commitments. Electoral law is complex but understood by those who administer elections and referendums. It is robust and we can, as we have in the past, rely on it and our electoral administrators to underpin free and fair elections and have confidence in their results. Some of the Law Commissions' proposals involve substantive changes to policy, rather than just law consolidation – and any such substantive change would need to be carefully considered, and the views of other interested parties taken into account.</p>
<p>19</p>	<p>As it develops its proposals for extending the overseas voter franchise, Government should work with the Electoral Commission and electoral administrators to consider a range of options for reducing the risk of disenfranchisement for overseas voters. These might include amending registration or postal vote application deadlines, considering provision for early voting from remote locations, requirements to specify absent voting arrangements when making overseas registration applications, and stronger encouragement of proxy voting. (Paragraph 263)</p>
	<p>The Government is committed to scrapping the arbitrary rule that prevents British citizens who have lived abroad for more than 15 years from participating in UK parliamentary elections, and to making it easier for expats to vote.</p> <p>We are considering the appropriate legislative vehicle to deliver these changes, which are manifesto commitments, and we will make an announcement on our intentions in due course.</p> <p>We will, of course, work closely with the electoral administration community and relevant stakeholders moving forward, including on technical aspects of the policy's implementation, including the issue and return of postal ballot packs at elections. The implementation of changes to the voting rights of overseas electors, as with all measures making changes to electoral administration, will be subject to robust governance and assurance by key delivery partners and stakeholders.</p>

<p>20</p>	<p>Government must target resources and, where appropriate, provide additional financial support to Local Authorities who may have suspicions or experience of fraud and malpractice occurring in their areas, to ensure they have the means to tackle fraud risk properly. (Paragraph 281)</p> <p>Instances of proven electoral fraud are low but any level of electoral fraud is unacceptable. It is important that there is no complacency in relation to protecting the electoral system and where potential avenues for fraud exist, such as for personation in polling stations, it is important to address the potential for such fraud.</p> <p>Whilst there is a positive history of addressing fraud where it has been identified, preventing it happening in the first instance should be the priority. Hence we are bringing forward measures to update the processes for checking of the identity of people voting in polling stations with the introduction of voter ID and to further strengthen the postal and proxy vote processes.</p> <p>Additionally, in recent years the Government has undertaken a number of initiatives which have provided additional resource and support for local authorities in areas where fraud is a significant concern.</p> <p>Dedicated funding has been made available for specific projects (e.g. production of educational videos on postal votes, public advertising and reviews of databases to identify registration and financial fraud linkages) and to support additional activity by Returning Officers at election time in particular areas. Additionally, the Government has worked with the Electoral Commission to fund and develop dedicated activity by Crimestoppers at recent national polls.</p> <p>We will continue to work with local authorities, elections teams and bodies such as the National Police Chiefs Council (which works with the Electoral Commission, to ensure a network of trained and knowledgeable officers who engage in the investigation and prosecution electoral fraud), to offer support to address any issues of fraud.</p>
<p>21</p>	<p>The Government should introduce further reforms to strengthen verification procedures for electoral registration. These might include providing statutory guidance to administrators on the verification of addresses; introducing a firmer legal definition of residence for the purpose of voter eligibility; mechanisms for administrators to undertake cross-register checks for duplicate registrations or for ineligibility to vote in particular locations; and a requirement for additional forms of identification where registrations are made close to the deadline when administrators have no time to conduct manual verification checks. (Paragraph 294)</p> <p>The Government is focused on bringing forward an ambitious programme of work to enhance electoral integrity and we will consider the various suggestions raised by the Committee. We are also aware of the Law Commissions' recent recommendation with respect to the law on residency and we will carefully consider how this recommendation could be addressed. We are also considering what further improvements might be made - to the benefit of both citizens and administrators - with regard to identity and other checks, particularly the processes in place where an</p>

	<p>applicant does not provide a National Insurance Number, or the number provided does not match with DWP records.</p> <p>In relation to a duplicate registration cross-register checker, we note that electors registering to vote at more than one address at which they are resident is lawful. Groups such as students, many of whom will have a different home and a term-time address, can choose to register at both. They are entitled to vote in local government electors in both places. It is not clear that a multiple registration checking tool would be able to differentiate between those who are legitimately registered at two or more addresses and those who have done so fraudulently.</p>
22	<p>During the coronavirus pandemic there is likely to be a legitimate increase in demand for postal voting. Once this period is over, the Government must review the free availability of postal voting on demand, having in mind both accessibility of voting and ensuring security of the ballot. (Paragraph 308)</p> <p>Postal voting enables many people to cast their vote who may otherwise not be able to vote. Many other voters find it a convenient way to cast their vote that fits in with busy lifestyles for people who work or have caring commitments. It is recognised that there may be an increase in demand for postal voting due to the coronavirus pandemic. The Government is considering this and other potential impacts of coronavirus on our electoral processes and systems to ensure they remain resilient.</p> <p>There are already measures in place designed to enhance the security of postal voting, such as postal vote identifiers. That said we continue to look at ways to develop the process to ensure postal voting is secure.</p> <p>We plan to introduce a number of measures in relation to postal voting that implement recommendations made in the review of electoral fraud undertaken by Sir Eric (now Lord) Pickles. We intend to prohibit party campaigners from handling postal votes. Our intention is for the provisions to be backed up by a new offence; this will make a significant contribution to enhancing the security of postal voting. We also intend to apply a limit to the number of postal ballots that any one individual can hand in at a polling station, and establish a requirement on those registered for a postal vote to re-apply every three years (currently registration can last indefinitely).</p>
23	<p>The Government should review the protocols and procedures around emergency proxy voting, which has increased at recent elections, placing additional pressure on administrators. This might include clearer guidance on the eligibility criteria for an emergency proxy vote, and consideration of how the registration status of individuals appointed as proxies should be verified by Electoral Registration Officers. There should also be a review of identification requirement waivers for postal vote applications. (Paragraph 309)</p> <p>The policy and processes for proxy voting are, in particular, being reviewed in light of the coronavirus pandemic to identify if any changes are needed to better support electors affected by the virus.</p>

	<p>Alongside that work we are also looking at how the application processes for remote votes (proxy and postal votes) may be enhanced for the benefit of electors, including looking at the possibility of online applications.</p>
24	<p>Advance voting may be an attractive alternative to postal voting for some voters, and is more secure. The Government and the Electoral Commission should therefore revisit the case for advance voting in UK elections. A new round of pilots and voter surveys may be appropriate. (Paragraph 311)</p> <p>Whilst advance (also called ‘early’) in-person voting is not available in the UK, postal voting is itself a form of advance voting which is ready available to any elector who needs or wishes to complete their vote ahead of polling day.</p> <p>A series of pilot schemes were run by local authorities in the 2000s and the Electoral Commission’s evaluation at the time concluded that, where advance voting was offered, few people used it and overall turnout was not enhanced as a result. The Government does not believe there is a strong case to consider advance in-person voting at this time.</p>
25	<p>The Government should urgently pursue reforms to the investigation procedures for electoral fraud allegations and their treatment in the justice system. These may include: (Paragraph 329)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The designation of an individual or organisation mandated to monitor and investigate fraud as their principal responsibility. (Paragraph 329) ● Bringing the election petition and court system into the 21st century, including pursuing cases in the standing court system where appropriate. (Paragraph 329) ● Giving discretion to vary the period of disqualification from standing for election for those found to have committed electoral fraud or malpractice, including life bans where appropriate. (Paragraph 329) ● Reforms to the prosecution process to enable state responsibility for bringing cases where appropriate, without requiring the standard of evidence for a criminal prosecution. (Paragraph 329) ● Public funding to cover election petition costs where these cannot be recovered from individuals found to have committed fraud or malpractice, so that petitioners are not liable for significant personal costs when they bring successful cases, and shortage of funds does not act as an obstacle to bringing cases. (Paragraph 329) <p>This recommendation, and the proposed measures, would potentially involve significant changes to the current processes for investigating and prosecuting electoral fraud and will need to be carefully considered.</p> <p>The review of electoral fraud by Sir (now Lord) Eric Pickles made recommendations in relation to issues raised by the Committee, for example, the election petition process. The Government in its response to the Pickles review acknowledged them and the need to look at this area. The Law Commissions have also made recommendations on this area in their <i>Electoral Law</i> report published earlier this year.</p>

	<p>We continue to consider those recommendations in parallel, and as part of this will consider the issues raised by the Committee, and will take that work forward when time allows. As indicated earlier in this response, the Government's immediate priority is the implementation of manifesto commitments which will enhance the integrity of our electoral system.</p> <p>The National Police Chiefs Council, working with the Electoral Commission, the CPS and others, takes a lead role in monitoring and managing a network of specifically appointed officers in each force who consider and investigate electoral allegations and offences. We will work with those organisations to identify if and how any improvements in the processes for investigation of electoral fraud and prosecution of offences can be achieved.</p>
<p>26</p>	<p>However, given that voter ID is likely to proceed the Government must ensure that its implementation does not compromise the completeness and accuracy of the registers and that the policy is implemented fairly. (Paragraph 338)</p> <p>The current ID checking process or that requiring identification to vote in a polling station will not affect the separate process of voter registration; it would only be a requirement for those who are already registered, and who choose to vote in person at a polling station.</p> <p>We are committed to understanding the needs of all voters, and we will continue to work closely with key electoral stakeholders and local authorities to support their work and ensure all of their voters are aware of the voter ID requirement prior to national implementation and their needs are met.</p> <p>There is no evidence to suggest voter ID will compromise the completeness and accuracy of the electoral registers and we will take care to address any related issues during our work with the Electoral Commission and local authorities to plan and implement voter ID.</p>
<p>27</p>	<p>We urge the Government to engage proactively with other countries that have successfully introduced voter ID so that they can learn lessons from their experiences. This engagement should focus on ensuring that voter ID requirements do not lead to lower voter turnout at elections, and that everyone who is eligible to vote is able to do so. (Paragraph 358)</p> <p>Voter ID has applied to elections in Northern Ireland since 1985, with photo ID being required since 2003. Both the pilots and the Northern Irish experience demonstrate that the requirement to provide ID before voting does not have a negative effect on election turnout or participation.</p> <p>Other democracies across the world such as Canada, the Netherlands, France and Germany also require voter ID and utilise this with ease.</p>

	<p>We have successfully conducted 15 local authority voter ID pilots, and engaged with the electoral community and civil society groups. Both the 2018 and 2019 pilots helped to demonstrate what works best for voters and the evaluations provided the government with valuable insight to inform the implementation of this national policy. We will continue to observe and learn from the successful implementation of voter ID requirements internationally, and continue conversations with our counterparts in these countries as we prepare for national roll out.</p>
28	<p>It is neither sensible nor desirable to roll out voter ID for the first time at a general election when turnout is significantly higher than at local elections. We strongly recommend that the first roll-out of voter ID requirements should be at local elections and that a thorough evaluation be carried out so that any necessary adjustments can be made before voter ID is used at a general election. (Paragraph 359)</p> <p>Voter ID has been tested thoroughly at local elections in 2018 and 2019 and evaluated on both occasions by the independent Electoral Commission. Both the Electoral Commission and the Cabinet Office evaluations show that the voter ID pilots were a success and the overwhelming majority of electors cast their vote without a problem.</p> <p>The Cabinet Office and Electoral Commission will continue to build on the solid evidence from the pilots and evaluations, and continue to work with local authorities to develop and provide the support needed by Returning Officers to ensure the successful implementation nationally of voter ID.</p> <p>Every poll is important, and we will support Returning Officers to deliver each poll successfully for their citizens. The voter ID pilots demonstrated our ability to collaborate very successfully with local authorities and support them to deliver voter ID that worked for voters. We will continue to work closely with all local authorities to understand their needs and the needs of voters.</p>
29	<p>We are concerned about the lack of detail around staffing, cost and funding arrangements for introducing voter ID, and plans for raising public awareness. It is imperative that Local Authorities are not put under any further strain at election time than is currently the case. The Government must publish these details before any legislation for voter ID is introduced to Parliament and ensure that any roll-out allows time for devolved administrations and Local Authorities to prepare fully. (Paragraph 360)</p> <p>We are currently using the knowledge gained from the voter ID pilots to prepare for national implementation of photographic ID at local and national elections. That work</p>

	<p>includes refining the cost of national roll out and identifying the ongoing cost of voter ID as part of business as usual for voters at subsequent elections.</p> <p>The exact costs will depend significantly on the detail of the scheme we pursue and what package we wrap around the national roll out of photographic voter ID to ensure its success, particularly for training and communications.</p> <p>The technical plans for its implementation are being developed and the anticipated costs of national rollout will be published in due course, alongside the planned primary legislation which we bring forward.</p> <p>Strong awareness raising campaigns and targeted communications were key to the success of the voter ID pilots. We will continue our work with the Electoral Commission, who will be responsible for national awareness raising, and other stakeholders to ensure the needs of all voters are understood and met.</p>
<p>30</p>	<p>The evidence so far indicates that there is unlikely to be great demand for local elector cards. However, local elector cards will be crucial to ensuring that voter ID does not deter or prevent any eligible elector from voting. In this case, the Government must clarify how local elector cards will be funded and how it will ensure that local elector cards are easily accessible for everyone who needs one. (Paragraph 361)</p> <p>In circumstances where an elector does not have one of the other acceptable forms of photographic ID, they will be able to apply, free of charge, for a local elector ID from their local authority, ensuring that everyone who is eligible to vote will have the opportunity to do so. The provision of local elector ID will be by exception rather than the norm.</p> <p>The requirement for photographic ID and the provision of LEID has been successfully tested by pilot local authorities at elections in 2018 and 2019. During both rounds of pilots, local authorities were able to provide LEID free of charge in advance of polling day, if electors did not hold the required ID, ensuring that everyone registered to vote had the opportunity to do so.</p> <p>As the Committee reports, the evidence from the pilots suggests that the level of demand for local elector ID will be relatively low. In the 2019 photographic ID pilots, only 100 people (out of a total of 34,800 votes cast) needed to rely on a Local Elector ID issued by their local authority. This represents 0.3% of total votes cast. As demonstrated during the voter ID pilots, strong awareness raising campaigns and targeted communications will help us to ensure that any voter without one of the forms of required ID will know how to apply for a local issued form of voter ID from their local authority. Funding for the additional cost of producing locally issued elector identity documents will be provided by the Government.</p>

<p>31</p>	<p>We are concerned about the potential impact voter ID could have on the participation rates of BAME groups, young people and students, disabled people and some older people. As discussed in chapter 2, registration and voting rates among these groups are already too low. Any further decline in participation rates among these groups would be an unacceptable outcome. However, we are encouraged that the experience of Northern Ireland indicates that voter ID need not result in lower turnout. To make sure this is the case, the Electoral Commission will need to monitor and report on the impact of voter ID on turnout, particularly on under-represented groups. (Paragraph 372)</p>
	<p>The evidence from the pilot evaluations indicates that no consistent demographic group was adversely affected by the voter ID models. Both our evaluations and the independent Electoral Commission’s evaluations of the 2018 and 2019 voter ID pilots show that they were a success and the overwhelming majority of people cast their vote without a problem. A great deal of work was done in these pilot areas to prepare electors.</p> <p>As the Committee reports, the experience of Northern Ireland demonstrates that the requirement to provide ID before voting does not have a negative effect on election turnout or participation. Other democracies across the world such as Canada, the Netherlands, France and Germany also require voter ID and utilise this with ease. Our ongoing commitment to our Public Sector Equality Duty is integral to the work we do. A priority for the Cabinet Office in developing the national model for voter ID has been to identify the most suitable forms of voter ID and the pilot schemes have underpinned our approach to that work. In circumstances where an elector does not have one of the other acceptable forms of photographic ID, they will be able to apply, free of charge, for a local elector ID from their local authority, ensuring that everyone who is eligible to vote will have the opportunity to do so.</p> <p>We are committed to understanding the needs of all voters and will continue to consult with a broad range of civil society groups, keeping accessibility and Public Sector Equality Duty compliance at the core of our planning so we can ensure that voter ID works for everyone. We will continue to work closely with key electoral stakeholders and local authorities to support their work and ensure all of their voters are aware of the voter ID requirement prior to national implementation and their needs are met. The Electoral Commission’s role in monitoring the impact of voter ID, is something that we are sure they will give proper consideration to.</p>
<p>33</p>	<p>The Government must take measures to mitigate the risk of a reduction in turnout including, for example, allowing for local elector cards to be issued on polling day for those with inadequate ID. The Government, working with Local Authorities, should also ensure that the introduction of mandatory ID is heavily publicised at local and national level and that there is appropriate outreach to groups who are less likely to engage in the democratic process and so who may be unaware of the requirement. (Paragraph 373)</p>

Both rounds of voter ID pilots demonstrate our ability to collaborate very successfully with local authorities and support them to deliver voter ID that worked for voters. The effectiveness of our collaborative working with the local authority pilots and our consultations with a broad range of charities and civil society organisations, enabled us to identify the needs of all voters and the most effective ways to communicate the identification requirements to them ahead of polling day.

During the pilots, strong awareness raising campaigns and targeted communications helped to ensure that any voter without one of the forms of required ID knew how to apply for a local issued form of voter ID from their local authority. Any elector who does not have an approved form of photographic ID will be able to apply, free of charge, for a local electoral ID from their local authority, ensuring that everyone who is eligible to vote will have the opportunity to do so. We continue working with local authorities (including the pilot authorities), the Electoral Commission, and key electoral stakeholders to develop a secure and accessible process for national implementation.

We will continue our work with the Electoral Commission, who will be responsible for national awareness raising, and other stakeholders to ensure the needs of all voters are understood and met. Our ongoing commitment to our Public Sector Equality Duty is integral to the work we do. The Government will undertake detailed analysis of the requirements of all voters - how people experience each element of the voting process from registration to voting (including, importantly, the process of applying for locally-issued electoral ID). This will be used to develop robust proposals for the practical roll-out of voter ID.