

Clive Betts MP
Chair
Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

20 September 2022

Dear Mr Betts,

Report on the administration of the May 2022 elections

I am pleased to provide you with an advance copy of the Electoral Commission's reports on the administration of the elections held in England and Northern Ireland in May, ahead of publication tomorrow.

Our research found that the majority of people were satisfied with the process of registering to vote and voting, and said they were confident that the elections were well-run (73% in England, 82% in Northern Ireland). Turnout was broadly consistent with previous elections, although it remains low overall.

Although confidence in elections remains high, the capacity and resilience of electoral administrators remains a concern. The pattern of elections in May was less complex than in 2021, with electoral administrators facing fewer combinations of elections and unscheduled elections. However, many elections teams still reported struggling to recruit staff and find suitable polling station and count venues.

Implementation of the new measures from the Elections Act, some of which are due to come into effect from next year's elections, will also have an impact on the resilience and capacity of electoral administration teams. We are committed to supporting the effective implementation of voter ID and other provisions in the Act, but it remains vital that they are delivered in a way which ensures accessibility, security and workability. Electoral administrators need clear and accurate information about how and when changes in the Elections Act are going to be implemented, as well as the necessary funding, to continue to deliver well-run elections.

Our report also found that while campaigners felt able to get their views across to voters, a notable proportion said they experienced some form of abuse or intimidation. Robust debate is an essential feature of election campaigns, but this must not lead to threats, abuse or intimidation that discourage candidates from standing for election or campaigning. We are ready to work with the UK's governments and the wider electoral community to make sure we understand what is driving candidate abuse and intimidation, and to ensure this issue is addressed as a matter of urgency.

Our report makes further recommendations to the UK Government to address issues raised at these elections:

- **The UK Government should review the subscriber requirements for nominating candidates to ensure they are proportionate for different elected offices.** This would help to ensure candidates do not face unnecessary barriers to standing for election, giving voters a more diverse range of views to choose from. We are aware the Government intends to introduce legislation to reduce subscriber requirements for English local elections ahead of the next scheduled elections in May 2023.
- **The UK Government should review the operation of the Digital Registration Number in Northern Ireland.** This is to ensure it does not prevent people from accessing their vote. Our report highlights that a large number of postal and proxy applications were rejected due to a missing DRN.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss this research, and our recommendations, in further detail at a future meeting.

I also enclose for your interest our reports on the elections in Wales and Scotland.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ailsa Irvine', with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Ailsa Irvine
Director of Electoral Administration and Guidance