

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

02 May 2023

Dear Clive

Thank you for your letter dated 28 April responding further on the issue of data collection at polling stations in the upcoming local elections.

How can the Electoral Commission be confident in their assessment of the roll-out of voter ID, if an accurate number of people turned away will not be known?

Data collected at polling stations will be a significant part of the evidence needed to understand the impact of the policy – including the specific reasons why people have not been given a ballot paper, where this is the case. We will also aim to make an assessment of the impact of greeters by collecting this data separately from polling stations with and without greeters. This may allow us to take a view on the impact of greeters on the data captured at the desk.

However, it would not be possible to accurately quantify the wider impact of the policy from a single source of data: greeters are only one factor which may deter an elector on polling day from getting to the polling station itself.

Our post-election public opinion survey is an effective method for assessing this wider impact. For example, in our evaluation of the UK Government's 2019 pilots the data collected from polling stations indicated that, across the different pilot areas, between 0.03-0.7% of those who tried to vote in a polling station were unable to do so. Our public opinion survey following the pilots suggested a larger impact, with 2% of those who did not vote telling us it was related to the ID requirement (either because they didn't have the right ID or disagreed with the requirement).

What involvement did the Electoral Commission have in the Government's drafting of the statutory instrument? Did the Electoral Commission raise concern about the impact of the statutory instrument on accurate data collecting?

The UK Government consulted the Commission on the drafting of the SI. We provided feedback on the detailed data categories to be collected at polling stations (including the reasons for not issuing ballot papers) as well as the best approach to maximising the

accuracy of the data recorded (for example by using elector numbers to track affected voters).

What assessment has the Electoral Commission given to how the practical challenges relating to how meeter-greeters collect data could be mitigated?

There are two challenges with asking a greeter to collect this data – the accuracy of the data captured and the ability to track returning voters.

The member of staff (who may change at times during the day) could only realistically keep an informal tally of voters who do not go into the polling station. This could be accurately collected if each interaction was straightforward (a greeter asks if a voter has ID and when they do not they turn around and leave). But the actual experience will be more complicated. For example, voters could turn around before or after they have spoken to the greeter and there will also be people present who are accompanying voters but are not themselves registered electors at that polling station. Collecting data in this way would be inherently unreliable.

Tracking voters who chose to return, having been turned away earlier, would also be extremely difficult for greeters – they would be reliant on recognising returning voters.

How will the Electoral Commission ensure that opinion polling will sufficiently reflect the number of individuals, and their experience, being turned away due to lack of appropriate ID?

The importance of our opinion polling will be in providing evidence on the fullest impact of the ID requirement by asking a representative sample of the eligible electorate about their experiences. Crucially, this will include those who voted, or tried to vote, as well as people who did not vote.

However, the findings from the public opinion research will only be considered alongside all the other data and feedback we collect, as one source of evidence. Our aim is to use all these evidence sources (including feedback from civil society groups, Returning Officers, candidates, the police and electoral observers) to reach a rounded assessment of the effect of voter ID at the May 2023 elections.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'J.J.P.', with a stylized flourish at the end.

John Pullinger
Chair