

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

15 September 2023

Dear Mr Betts,

Report on the accuracy and completeness of the electoral registers

I am pleased to enclose an advance copy of the Electoral Commission's report on the accuracy and completeness of the electoral registers, which we are publishing on Monday 18 September.

Our analysis shows that almost 8 million people across the United Kingdom are either incorrectly registered to vote or missing completely, meaning they don't have a voice in elections. If a UK general election was called now, around 14% of the eligible population would not be able to vote.

The research highlights that the current system of registration is not efficient or effective, and does not work well for voters or Electoral Registration Officers. Urgent reform is needed to ensure that all eligible voters are able to have their say.

The study of the 2022 registers found that:

- In Great Britain, the parliamentary register was 86% complete, and 89% accurate. The local government register was 86% complete and 88% accurate.
- In Northern Ireland, the parliamentary register was 84% complete, and 86% accurate; the local government register was 83% complete, and 86% accurate.

This means that millions of people across the UK are not correctly registered, so they may not be able to vote when elections take place, and they are not counted at all when constituency boundaries are set. Some specific groups of people are significantly less likely to be correctly registered, particularly young people, private renters, and those who have recently moved home.

Evidence from our research, carried out over more than a decade, shows that this is a longstanding problem. It is therefore unlikely that levels of accuracy and completeness –

and therefore the number of eligible people able to have their say at elections – will significantly improve without major changes to the electoral registration system.

The Commission is making recommendations to the UK's governments to enable the introduction of a more automated form of voter registration, built on better use of existing public data:

- The UK, Scottish and Welsh governments should pass legislation that creates clear legal gateways for government departments and public sector bodies to share data on potentially eligible individuals with Electoral Registration Officers. This is needed to enable EROs to register them to vote directly, or to send them targeted invitations to register.
- All three governments should require relevant departments and other public bodies to work with EROs to facilitate electoral registration using their data. A consistent approach between governments would ensure that changes are developed and delivered in a way which makes it as straightforward as possible for EROs and data source organisations, and ensures that voters are accurately included in the registers for all types of elections they are eligible to vote in.
- The UK Government should develop the existing Individual Electoral Registration (IER) digital service so that it can support secure and efficient data sharing between data source organisations and EROs and their electoral management software systems, to enable modern registration processes to be delivered.

In addition to improving the experience for voters, these changes would address the current burdens faced by electoral administrators, who currently have to use their limited resources and capacity at the most critical time ahead of major elections to manage high numbers of applications to register to vote.

The Commission would be pleased to meet to discuss our proposals for reform, should you find that helpful.

Yours sincerely,



Craig Westwood
Director of Communications, Policy and Research