



Department for Levelling Up,
Housing & Communities

Simon Hoare MP
Minister for Local Government
2 Marsham Street
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Your reference:
Our reference:

Baroness Drake
Lords Constitution Committee

Dear Lady Drake

14th December 2023

I would like to thank the Committee again for the interest shown in the voter identification policy and in evaluating the impacts of its implementation. As I committed during the evidence session last week, I have below provided answers to the questions which we were unable to cover during the session due to time constraints. I have also provided that additional information on the funding methodology requested by the Committee.

Earlier this week, I met with the Chair of the Electoral Commission and had a useful conversation on communications campaigns in the lead up to the next set of polls. I will undertake to update the Committee in the new year on the Government's actions to support awareness raising. I also committed during the session to follow up regarding the Government's ongoing work with the sector to explore solutions to the issues experienced around staffing the polls. These conversations will continue in the lead up to the May polls and the next General Election, and I will provide the Committee with an update on progress in due course.

What support does the Government intend to provide to electoral administrators and suppliers to implement Elections Act 2022 'tranche 2' measures at the May 2024 local elections and the upcoming general election?

The government is already providing support to local authorities for the implementation of the remainder of the Elections Act measures.

An initial allocation of £4.6m of grant funding was provided to all local authorities in August 2023 to support the implementation of the postal and proxy voting revisions, online absent vote applications, overseas electors franchise change and the staff training for all of these measures, with further grant funding being provided in April 2024 ahead of the May 2024 elections. This funding is unringfenced and can be used at the discretion of local authorities.

In recognition of the fact that new policies always involve an element of settling, and the need to manage that properly rather than transferring risk to councils, the Government will also be providing further funding on a retrospective basis via a justification-led bid process where it is necessary. We will, as ever, learn from this process and any necessary adjustments can then be made to future grant payments.

As always, the Consolidated Fund will provide the entirety of the Returning Officer's costs for the delivery of the General Election and the Police and Crime Commissioner elections and will cover all costs necessary for the effective and efficient running of the polls.

Aside from funding, the Government has been, and will continue to work closely with the electoral sector on planning to deliver these changes. This includes close working with key sector representative groups including the Association of Electoral Administrators, the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives, and the Electoral Commission.

The Electoral Integrity Programme – responsible for the implementation of the Elections Act 2022 - has well established, close ties to elections teams within local authorities and is advised by an Expert Panel of industry experts and regional elections leads on policy details, processes and implementation plans. This group is key in aiding the Government to identify risks and mitigations and has been heavily involved in discussions on policy and implementation planning since the Programme's inception. Members of this Expert Panel have also been a vital part of the testing the ERO-facing component of each of the digital services prior to their launch – first with the Voter Authority Certificate application service, and then with the Online Absent Vote Application service. More recently, EROs from the Panel have been involved in testing the digital service which will support the changes for overseas electors. Feedback in real time from real users has proved invaluable in shaping the functionality of the services and continues to inform ongoing development and plans for improvement of the service.

The Programme has additionally established a GB-wide Business Change Network which facilitates a two-way conversation with the sector, allowing the government to communicate effectively while also gathering feedback on opportunities, concerns, risks and mitigations and communicating these back to the Programme.

As we approach the coming 'into force' dates for each measure, engagement increases to ensure the sector receives the information they require and has the opportunity to raise questions and receive quick answers and support where needed. On a very practical level, this includes: support for the launch of new digital processes, such as providing demonstrations of the new digital services and helpdesk support for technical issues; officials hosting virtual drop-in sessions allowing any administrator to speak directly to policy, digital, funding or business change colleagues; individual meetings with each local authority; and GB-wide readiness surveys to monitor the implementation picture across the country and identify if and where additional support may be needed.

Will electoral administrators in Scotland, Wales and areas of England that have not yet experienced voter ID receive additional support?

The government has been closely working with administrators across the whole of Great Britain – including in Scotland and Wales, and councils which have not yet implemented voter identification such as those in London – to support planning and preparations for the implementation of voter identification. We are also in regular contact with the Welsh and Scottish Governments at both the Ministerial and official level. My officials have worked collaboratively with those in the devolved administrations to establish a forum with administrators in Wales and Scotland specifically to discuss challenges arising in Wales and Scotland as a result of implementation of the Act, and to discuss and agree appropriate solutions. I am looking forward to my first meeting with my Ministerial counterparts in the Welsh and Scottish Governments at the Interministerial Group, which is due to meet soon.

All councils (and, where relevant, Valuation Joint Boards in Scotland) have received New Burdens funding to support the implementation of the changes irrespective of whether they held polls last May or not – and there will be further opportunity for local authorities to bid for additional funds, should they be needed, via a further justification-led process later next year.

In addition, the electoral community is very collaborative and committed to sharing experiences and best practices via their longstanding engagement structures, and many Electoral Services Managers who did not have polls in their area in May took the opportunity to observe or work in other areas which did have polls in order to learn from their experiences.

You have decided against making data collection on the impact of voter ID compulsory for local elections on the grounds it would increase the burden on local authorities. To what extent will your ongoing work with the Electoral Commission to refine the process of data collection overcome this issue?

The Government support the Electoral Commission's view – as set out in their report - that ongoing data collection at future polls would be beneficial: it is vital in allowing robust and reliable evaluation of the impact and delivery of the measures. However, when developing the legislation we engaged with the sector and listened to their concerns on the increased burden it places on polling station staff. We therefore take the position that it should remain at the discretion of the Returning Officer whether to collect this data, other than at the next two UK Parliamentary General Elections, where it will be mandatory. In this regard, we note that, in recent Parliamentary by-elections, many Returning Officers have chosen to continue to collect the data to assist their own understanding of how the policy has operated at this relatively early stage of implementation.

The Government is already working with the Electoral Commission to refine the process of data collection to ensure its clarity and efficiency for polling station staff and will seek feedback from the sector to ensure that improvements can be made for future elections.

Can accepted forms of ID in a digital format be used to vote? For example, a PASS endorsed form of digital ID has recently been launched: <https://www.conveniencestore.co.uk/your-business/uks-first-pass-approved-digital-id-card-is-set-to-be-trialled-in-c-stores/684214.article>

At present, only physical forms of identification as listed in the Elections Act are accepted in the polling station. Digital forms of identification are not an option that is accepted currently for a number of reasons – both those reasons of principle I set out to the Committee during our evidence session, as well as some practical considerations as detailed below.

First, mobile data signal in polling stations is variable, with some polling stations, particularly those in rural areas, having poor to no signal, meaning electors would potentially have difficulties or be unable to access their digital identification. There is also the risk of a digital form of identification having no backup if, for example, a server went down, meaning electors could be left unable to access their identification when needed.

There are also security concerns. Most digital IDs require some sort of technology to verify them – for example by displaying a barcode or QR code to be scanned. It would not be possible to deploy such technology in all polling stations, and the organisations that issue digital documents may be unwilling to share it with us in any case. As such, it would be fairly easy for an individual seeking to commit personation to create a convincing image and display it on their phone, and polling station staff would not be able to identify this as a fake. This could also add considerable delay in people receiving their ballot papers, leading to frustration.

Elections in the UK are run on paper and physical documentation on the day. Research shows that the vast majority of adults, 96%, already hold one of the accepted forms of identification and a physical Voter Authority Certificate or Anonymous Electors Document is available for the relatively small number of electors who do not.

Funding methodology

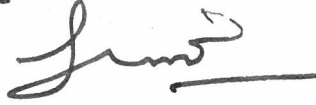
In the course of the evidence session, we offered to provide links to the full methodology for the costing of the May 23 local elections. The Government published the New Burdens Funding methodology note for Voter ID and Accessibility on GOV.UK in 2022. This note can be found [here](#). If the Committee requires further information on the impact of voter identification specifically, a full [Impact Assessment](#) was also published in 2022.

The Committee may also be interested to see the funding methodology for the remaining Elections Act measures. This was published this month on GOV.UK and is available [here](#).

I hope the Committee finds the information above useful.

I look forward to working with you
committee.

Yours ever,



SIMON HOARE MP

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Local Government