Department for Levelling Up,
Housing & Communities

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13 March 2024

Lord Gardiner of Kimble
Senior Deputy Speaker &
Chair of the Liaison Committee
House of Lords
London
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Dear John

Thank you for your letter of 16 January 2024, requesting a written update on the status of the 33 recommendations of the Select Committee on the Electoral Registration Act 2013, included in their report, *An electoral system fit for today? More to be done* (2020).

The Government considered thoroughly the Select Committee's findings in 2020, and we welcome this further scrutiny of the electoral system. The attached response, sets out our approach to each of the 33 recommendations, followed by a response to the 13 issues of interest raised in your letter.

Our response references earlier actions taken by the Government to modernise and improve the registration system, introduction of online registration in 2014 and more recently Canvass Reform. Our response also outlines actions taken since the passage of The Elections Act (2022). The Government has been clear on its aim to deliver all the measures from the Elections Act, during the lifetime of this Parliament to maintain integrity in our electoral system. Measures now in force include the use of voter ID at polling stations, new digital services to apply for an absent vote, and the removal of the 15-year limit on voting rights for British citizens living overseas. These are alongside electoral reforms to improve the accessibility of elections, and prevent undue influence.

As further context to our response, the priority of the Government has always been to implement these policies properly. It is important that, wherever possible, there is sufficient time for both electors and the electoral sector to understand and implement the new requirements, before consideration of further electoral reform. In the lead up to the scheduled polls in May, and ahead of the next UK Parliamentary General Election, the Government will continue to work closely with the Electoral Commission and elections teams across all local authorities to understand when and where additional support may be needed.

Thank you for writing on this important matter.

Yours ever,

SIMON HOARE MP
Minister for Local Government

The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities update to the House of Lords Liaison Committee, March 2024

NB: for ease of reference, we have numbered the original recommendations 1-33 in the report, 'An electoral system fit for today? More to be done'. The additional questions from the House of Lords Liaison Committee follow on below, under letters A-M.

An update on recommendations (1-33)	
1	**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)**
	Funding As was the case with the introduction of Individual Electoral Registration, and canvass reform, and in line with the New Burdens Doctrine, funding is being provided to local authorities to cover the costs arising as a result of the implementation of electoral reforms brought about by the Elections Act. The Government is committed to ensuring that these important changes are delivered in a careful and thoughtful way. Our priority, as noted in our 2020 response to the Committee remains ensuring that local authorities have the necessary resources to continue to deliver our elections robustly and securely as they implement these new measures. As we noted in 2020, in order to ensure local government is provided with appropriate funding at the correct time to implement successfully the changes, the department engaged closely with local authorities and sector representatives in the development of the New Burdens funding model. Allocations were subject to detailed considerations of the varied picture across local authorities and for transparency, the funding methodologies for the implementation of the different reforms are published on GOV.UK.[1] The Government appreciates that the implementation of the Elections Act 2022 represents an extensive programme of modernisation which brings multiple reforms and new activities for the electoral sector, in addition to 'business-as-usual' activities and implementing additional reforms such as changes to Parliamentary constituency boundaries. Therefore, along with a sequenced approach to implementation, intended to ensure the sector can absorb these changes, and ongoing support for the sector, the government is taking a pragmatic approach to funding. New burdens funding is being provided through a hybrid approach comprising of up-front grant payments and justification-led bids. Grants enable a proportion of the funding allocation to be distributed early in the financial year, via a single, un-ringfenced grant payment. Local authorities received grant payments in November 2022, April 2023 and August 2023, with the next grant due to be paid in April 2024. The government has provided cost line level details which outlines what the funding is intended to cover, ensuring transparency for local authorities and allowing them to plan.

[1] www.gov.uk/government/publications/elections-act-new-burdens-funding-methodology-voter-identification-and-accessibility

	In addition to the New Burdens grant payments, further funding can be claimed by local authorities if needed. The justification-led bid process releases additional funds to local authorities later in the year, retrospectively on the basis of evidenced spend. Guidance on what this additional funding can cover and the process for claiming it has been circulated to local authorities and the Electoral Integrity Programme has had ongoing conversations with local authorities on their funding requirements, ensuring they are supported to deliver the changes. **Timescales** The Government has been clear throughout on its aim to deliver all the measures within the Elections Act during the lifetime of this Parliament. The priority has always been to implement these policies properly and with sufficient time for both electors and the electoral sector to understand and implement the new requirements. As noted above, however, the Government does appreciate the multiple reforms being introduced and that these are being delivered by the electoral sector alongside their 'business-as-usual' activities. The Government has worked closely with the electoral sector on the planning for delivery of the Act and has and will continue to provide support to local authorities as the different changes roll out. 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 has well established close ties to elections teams within local authorities, and are advised by an expert panel, a grouping of representative bodies, on policy details and implementation plans. This group – comprising of regional leads, and key representative organisations – is key in aiding the Government to identify risks and mitigations and has been heavily involved in testing of the digital services prior to launch. The Programme has additionally established a GB-wide Business Change Network which facilitates a two-way conversation with the sector, allowing the Government to effectively communicate information out while also gathering feedback on opportunities, concerns, risks and mitigations and communicating these back to the Programme. In the lead up to the scheduled polls in May, and ahead of the next UK Parliamentary General Election, the government will continue to work closely with elections teams across all local authorities to understand when and where additional support may be needed.
2	**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)**
	Making information about registration status available online on a national basis would be a significant undertaking and the Government has no current plans to introduce such a system. In the UK we currently have 331 separate registers, (as of February

	2024) compiled and held locally by Electoral Registration Officers – there is no single, national register. Registers are locally held and regularly updated. Furthermore, while theoretically feasible, building a central registration look-up tool would require major changes to existing digital services, which would be costly and time consuming, and would bring with it considerable technical and digital challenges. The risks are considerable, and the Government does not intend to pursue the option at present. The Government has prioritised the development of other digital services including the introduction of the online absent vote application services. Beyond cyber security concerns, such a service could be used maliciously to gather personal information which would enable identity theft or even election fraud. The service could also be used to locate or target vulnerable members of our society putting them at risk of stalking or coercive control. The Government remains aware that interest in an online registration tool often stems from the burden that unnecessary duplicate applications, from those who are already correctly registered at their current address, creates for administrators, particularly in the run up to a poll, which is already a very busy time. In 2020, we noted that the Government would take a strategic approach and consider a variety of interventions to dissuade those who are already correctly registered from making a fresh application. The Government has since taken several steps, to tackle this issue, which have had a positive effect. We have revised the messaging on the Register to Vote service to make clear that you do not need to register for each poll or each year and that, if you received a poll card or postal ballot pack for the last election, and have not moved home, changed nationality or changed your name since that poll, you can be certain that you are already correctly registered. Messaging is actively managed in the run up to a major poll, as it will be ahead of the May 2024 elections and the next General Election. In addition to public messaging about when to register, the Register to Vote Service alerts individuals if we suspect that they are about to submit an application which is identical to one made within the previous 14 days. This provides electors with an opportunity to decide whether to resubmit their application or not, thus reducing the volume of applications Electoral Registration Officers receive. Data available from the Register to Vote service tells us that of between 5 November 2022 and 4 December 2023, approximately 80% of people who received a duplicate alert decided not to continue with a subsequent application. We note that there are actions Electoral Registration Officers can themselves take to manage down the number of duplicate applications by adopting stronger customer relationship management techniques – for example they could more routinely issue emails or texts confirming that they have received an application and when the applicant can expect to hear more. It would also be open to Electoral Registration Officers to consider local registration checker services, using personal data held by some locally, although this could lead to a lack of standardisation in how the services are designed, which in turn may make it difficult to ensure appropriate cyber security.
3	**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 <u>recover registration costs</u>**

	where they can be demonstrated to be the direct result of an election taking place. (Paragraph 73)
	Our position on this issue has not changed. Electoral registration is a function of the local authorities, as set out in legislation. Overall funding for Electoral Registration Officers to fulfil their duties is part of the wider funding of local authorities given through the local government finance settlement, details of which are published annually on GOV.UK, and from revenue the authorities themselves generate and receive. Since the introduction of the online Register to Vote service in 2014, the Government has made significant investment in digital services to make it easier and quicker for applicants to apply and reduce the administrative burden on Electoral Registration Officers. The Government continues to invest in such services and consider how best to support the sector in the future.
4	**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)**
	The Electoral Commission has most recently reported on the accuracy and completeness of the electoral register in 2023. These reports, as well as using original research by the Commission, also draw upon data from government sources including the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and National Records of Scotland (NRS). We note that in Great Britain, both accuracy and completeness are largely stable. The annual canvass process was reformed via legislation introduced in 2019 by the UK, Scottish and Welsh governments with the aim to reduce the burden on Electoral Registration Officers while maintaining levels of accuracy and completeness. The first reformed canvass was carried out in 2020. There is no evidence of any significant negative impact on either measure as a result of canvass reform but there has also been no significant improvement, with a 3% increase in completeness, and 1% fall in accuracy overall for GB. The 2021 canvas in Northern Ireland has seen completeness and accuracy rise by 10% and 6% respectively. We note that the Government is responsible for both the legislative framework and a range of digital systems which support Electoral Registration Officers in the creation and maintenance of complete and accurate registers. While we would all like to see more people correctly registered to vote, the Government continues to be of the view that there are not any material barriers making it difficult to register. There are several different channels by which to register - online, using the paper form, or by phone or in person where the Electoral Registration Officer offers this. Local Electoral Registration Officers know their local populations best and are experts in electoral registration processes. It therefore remains the Government's view that Electoral Registration Officers are best placed to consider how to engage most effectively with those groups of people who are known to be under registered within their communities. Electoral Registration Officers continue to be

	supported in achieving their responsibilities by Electoral Commission guidance, which is detailed and comprehensive, covering a wide range of circumstances which reflects the diversity of people living in Britain and the resulting actions or decisions and Electoral Registration Officer may need to take. The guidance ensures a consistent approach by staff across geographical areas. Electoral Registration Officers have access to data to support them in their responsibility to maintain complete and accurate registers. Electoral Registration Officers use national records held by departments such as The Department for Work and Pensions to check applicant information during the register to vote determination process. The Register to Vote service has a successful match percentage of 91.6% since the service began in 2014. The Voter Authority Certificate service has a successful match percentage of 92.9% since the service began in 2023. In addition, Electoral Registration Officers have the ability to use locally held data within their councils, such as education or council tax records. The Government has no plans make changes to the existing data-sharing arrangements. We acknowledge the interest of the Committee and original report in international comparisons on the issue of under-registration of younger people. We note that young people are entitled to register to vote before they reach voting age, where they are added to the electoral register as an attainer. By doing so, attainers ensure that they are able to participate in polls as soon as they reach voting age. This practice aligns with two key principles of electoral registration in Britain. The first is that individuals should be responsible for their own registration, as has been the case since the introduction of Individual Electoral Registration in 2014. The second is that no one should be registered without their knowledge. It is imperative that we take decisions based on what is right for our democracy, our unique constitutional system, and our fellow British citizens. We would also update the Committee that the annual canvass conducted by Electoral Registration Officers is not the only tool available for making attainers aware of their eligibility to apply to register to vote. For example, since September 2021, HMRC have included signposting to voter registration in the National Insurance Number notification letter they send to young people when they reach 15 years and 9 months.
5	**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)**
	The Government's view on the importance of the completeness and accuracy of registers, and the role of Electoral Registration Officers as experts in electoral registration processes, with local knowledge is set out above in our response to recommendation four.

	Parliament agreed in the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 2020 that the recent boundary review that reported in June 2023 should be based on the number of registered electors as at 2 March 2020, rather than as at 1 December 2020, to address the risks presented by the Covid-19 pandemic in relation to that review. It is reassuring that the Committee has welcomed this approach. Boundary reviews now take place every eight years and future reviews will revert to being based on the registers from the most recent annual canvass of electors as at the start of the review. This means that the next review, which will be required to report by October 2031, will be based on the registers as at 1 December 2028.
6	**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)**
	The Government notes our priority, as outlined in the response above to recommendation one, remains to ensure local authorities have the necessary resources to continue to deliver our elections robustly and securely as they implement new measures under the Electoral Integrity Programme. As detailed above, in addition to the New Burdens grant payments, further funding can be claimed by local authorities if needed through the justification-led bid process. More recently, we have undertaken a major review of the Returning Officers' funding to deliver further improvements to the existing processes and revise the funding guidance available to the sector. This work has delivered a new digital system for the submission of Returning Officer expenses; a more detailed and comprehensive guidance for the sector; and the introduction of pay bands for election roles to ensure consistency in the rates of pay to staff involved in the delivery of elections. We have worked closely with the sector on these changes - including electoral administrators, Returning Officers, the Association of Electoral Administrators, Electoral Management Board for Scotland and the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives. Aside from funding, the Government has been and will continue to work carefully and 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 and the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives, and the Electoral Commission. As discussed above, we have well established close ties to elections teams within local authorities, and are advised by an expert panel, a grouping of representative bodies, on policy details and implementation plans. This group – comprising of regional leads, and key representative organisations – is key in aiding the Government to identify risks and mitigations. The Programme has additionally established a GB-wide Business Change Network which facilitates a two-way conversation with the sector, allowing the government to

	effectively communicate information out while also gathering feedback on opportunities, concerns, risks and mitigations and communicating these back to the Programme. The Government is working closely with elections teams across all local authorities to understand when and where additional support may be needed in the lead up to the polls in May, and ahead of the next General Election. For example, we are exploring what additional support the Government could or should provide to local authorities with regards external resource for processing Voter Authority Certificate applications.
7	**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 113)**
	The Government's position has not changed, that registering to vote (and voting) is a civic duty, and every eligible elector who wants to participate should be on the electoral register. We remain of the view, however, that it should be up to each individual to decide whether to engage with the democratic process or not. The introduction of online registration in 2014 for the first time, using Register to Vote, made registering to vote easier and more convenient than ever before. In March 2020 there were 47.6 million entries on the Parliamentary registers in the UK, the highest number ever recorded. It remains that case that online registration means individuals can apply to register to vote at a time convenient to them. The principle underpinning Individual Electoral Registration is that individuals are responsible for their own registration. Many common suggestions regarding innovation in registration would most likely require a centralised electoral register. We do not have such a system in Great Britain, though there is one register for Northern Ireland. As discussed in detail in our response to recommendation two above, a centralised registration system would be a significant change and Government does not intend to pursue the option at present. Electoral Registration Officers are responsible for maintaining the completeness and accuracy of their local electoral registers. The introduction of automatic registration would be at odds with this and would likely lead to this responsibility, at least in part, being transferred to the Central Government. This is not a change the Government supports. If central government was responsible for maintaining the electoral register there would inevitably be suspicions that it was influencing the system to the political advantage of the Government of the day, undermining faith in our elections system and democracy. With registration undertaken at the local level, by Electoral Registration Officers who really know their local areas and are locally accountable, these pitfalls are avoided. The Government understands that the Welsh Government is planning to trial automatic registration for devolved elections and will be paying close attention to any unintended or negative effects on registration for reserved elections. We have outlined above in our response to recommendation four, how Electoral Registration Officers have the tools to address the issues of under-registration amongst particular groups, and the opportunities Electoral Registration Officers have

	to use data, from national records, and local data sources to support them in their responsibility to maintain complete and accurate registers. The Government continues to be of the view that broader and better use of existing data sharing can support effective electoral registration. For example, the Government introduced the reformed annual canvass process in 2019, with the first reformed process taking place in 2020, introducing the use of Government data to help Electoral Registration Officers better target their resources. Under the reformed annual canvass, all Electoral Registration Officers upload their registers to the IERDS at the start of the canvass period. The entries on the register are then matched against DWP data and the results shared with Electoral Registration Officers. Where the registers fully match the data held by DWP for residents at a property, the Electoral Registration Officer can be confident that there has been no change at the property in the year and can follow a light touch canvassing model. Where there are discrepancies between the registers and DWP data, the Electoral Registration Officer knows they need to follow more robust canvassing methods. Whereas the previous canvass process used a one size fits all approach, the new method aims to be more flexible and less prescriptive, taking better account of differences within and between registration areas. The new process is data-driven and provides a wider range of options to enable Electoral Registration Officers to work in a way that meets the needs of their communities.
8	**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)**
	The electoral register has always been a public document. The Government remains of the view that there are significant wider social and economic benefits to the retention of the open register, including its use by charities and voluntary agencies to help with fundraising, by local councils when identifying and contacting residents, and by organisations tracing and identifying the beneficiaries of wills, pensions and insurance policies. Many businesses also make use of the open register to check the details of people who apply for their services. The open register omits all electors who have requested that their details be removed from this version. Any elector who is concerned to protect their privacy has thus been able, since 2002, to opt out of the open version of the register.
9	**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)**
	We have to continue to finesse a system making it simple to register for all those who qualify. This approach obviates the need for targets.

10	**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)**
	The Government remains committed to encouraging democratic engagement amongst all electors, including young people, and we want to build upon recent record levels of individuals registering to vote in elections and referendums. The Government recognises how important it is that young peoples' voices and opinions are heard and for them to be able to participate in the democratic process of our country. As noted in our response to recommendation four, since September 2021, HMRC have included signposting to voter registration in the National Insurance Number notification letter they send to young people when they reach 15 years and 9 months. Young people are also made aware of their eligibility to register through the annual canvas process, administered by Electoral Registration Officers in their local area. The UK Government continues to support the British Youth Council which aims to offer young people aged 11 and over the chance to articulate their views and passions to the Government and public. Citizenship education, which has been part of the National Curriculum in England since 2002, includes teaching on democracy, government and how laws are made and upheld. It aims to equip pupils to explore political and social issues critically, to weigh evidence, to debate, and to make reasoned arguments. It should also prepare them to take their place in society as responsible citizens. It remains the case that the Electoral Commission has statutory responsibility to support Electoral Registration Officers, with clear guidance and publishes a range of democratic engagement resources for Electoral Registration Officers, charities and other organisations to use to raise awareness about democracy, from voter registration to voting options.
11	**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)**
	As noted in our response to recommendation 7 above, the Government believes that registering to vote (and voting) is a civic duty, and every eligible elector who wants to participate should be on the electoral register. However, it should be up to each individual to decide whether to engage with the democratic process or not. Assisted registration, is not compatible with the principle underpinning Individual Electoral Registration; that individuals are responsible for their own registration. As noted in our response in 2020, existing legislation and guidance issued by the Office for Students, the independent regulator of higher education in England, encourages higher education providers to promote electoral registration among their student populations. Students can register either at their home address, their term-time address, or both. There are several different channels by which eligible applicants including those in education can register - online, using the paper form, or by phone or in person where the Electoral Registration Officer offers this. The Government remains of the view that assisted registration is not the correct approach. Electoral Registration Officers have statutory responsibility to maintain complete and accurate registers for their local area, including those eligible to vote who are also

	attending further and higher education. This duty falls to Electoral Registration Officers because registers are compiled and managed at a local level. Local Electoral Registration Officers know their local populations best and are experts in electoral registration processes. They are supported in achieving their responsibilities by Electoral Commission guidance, which is detailed and comprehensive, covering a wide range of circumstances. The guidance ensures a consistent approach by staff across geographical areas.
12	**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)**
	Our previous stance on this issue has not changed. As outlined in our 2020 response, the introduction of Individual Electoral Registration 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. Any transition away from this two-stage process, would inevitably mean Electoral Registration Officers 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 we continue to be of the view that it goes against the underlying principle of Individual Electoral Registration – of individuals taking ownership of registering to vote. Moreover, requiring electors to submit an application to register remains important from a fraud perspective, as applications have to include personal identifiers – such as National Insurance Numbers – which can be checked against government records. As we previously noted to the Committee, following the annual canvass reforms, after confirmation of their identity and address against the National Data Matching service, the majority of electors should now not have to fill in or respond to any canvass communications, which has made the process less cumbersome for administrators and less confusing for voters.
13	**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)**
	As per our earlier response to the committee, Electoral Registration Officers have a statutory duty to maintain a register for their own local area. There are criminal penalties for knowingly providing false information to an Electoral Registration Officer or in some circumstances for failing to provide an Electoral Registration Officer 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. The Government remains of the belief that Electoral Registration Officers 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 Electoral Registration Officers must have regard – that is a statutory duty for the Electoral Commission.
14	**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)**
	The Government's position has not changed, and the Government has no plans to amend the existing regime for levying civil penalties against those who fail to make an application to register when invited to, including increasing the level it is set at. 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 Electoral Registration Officers 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.
15	**The annual canvass as currently constituted is expensive, administratively burdensome and out of step with modern life. Annual canvass reform makes good sense; we welcome the Government's proposals for reform and the Statement of Policy produced by the UK, Scottish and Welsh Governments in September 2019. We hope that it is implemented successfully. (Paragraph 216)**
	We welcome the Committee's support for the Government's annual canvas reform proposals which were introduced from 2019 and implemented successfully for the first time in 2020. The Government is conducting an evaluation of the effectiveness of the reformed annual canvass process, which first took place in 2020. To date, two reports have been published with a third and final report expected to be published in spring 2024.[2] This report will include findings from the in-house research we are conducting this year on the 2022 canvass and will synthesise the findings from all three years of the evaluation.
16	**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)**

[2] https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/61712463d3bf7f56080b1b83/Evaluation_of_the_Modern_Electoral_Registration_Programme_2021_Report.pdf and www.gov.uk/government/publications/evaluation-of-the-modern-electoral-registration-programme-2022-report

	As noted in our response to recommendation four, Electoral Registration Officers have several opportunities to use data to support them in their responsibility to maintain complete and accurate registers. Electoral Registration Officers use national records held by departments such as DWP to check applicant information during the register to vote determination process. The Register to Vote service has a successful match percentage of 91.6% since the service began. The Voter Authority Certificate service has a successful match percentage of 92.9% since the service began. In addition, Electoral Registration Officers have the ability to use locally held data within their councils, such as education or council tax records. The Government has no plans to make changes to the existing data sharing agreements. As noted in response to recommendation seven, the government also reformed the annual canvass process to enable more effective use of Government data to support Electoral Registration Officers.
17	**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)**
	We remain of the view that the current deadlines allow for eligible people to apply to register to vote and for a postal vote and to receive them and return them in time to be included in the count. The Government's approach is therefore to maintain the existing deadlines for activities, including registration and absent voting, within the overall electoral timetable. We have made improvements to the process for applying for an absent vote. Under the Elections Act 2022, it is now possible for electors to apply for a postal vote online through the new digital absent vote application service. The online service gives electors the opportunity to submit an absent vote application in the same browser session as their registration application. This makes it quicker and easier for an elector to have an arrangement in place ahead of an election. The new system also eases the burden on electoral administrators by reducing the number of paper applications that need to be processed, as more electors choose to apply online through the digital system.
18	**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)**
	The Government continues to recognise that the combination of polls can add some complexity to the administration of elections though we continue to believe that it supports voter engagement by avoiding the need for electors to visit the same polling station more than once on the same day or within a short period. Combination of polls also generates cost savings in the running of elections. The Government will continue to work with administrators, the Electoral Commission and other organisations to ensure effective preparation and delivery of polls.

19	**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)**
	The position of the Government on this issue has not changed. The Government welcomed the Law Commissions' Electoral Law report, published in March 2020. The Government agrees that simplifying and consolidating electoral law would be desirable. Electoral law is vast and complex, partly because of the various pieces of legislation and amendments that have been made over the years, but also because it needs to cover such a wide range of activities, to a high degree of detail. However, this would be a very large undertaking requiring significant preparation and Parliamentary time to achieve. The Government remains committed to ensuring that our electoral law is fit for purpose, now and into the future. We also acknowledge that the process of consolidating electoral law will be a long-term project that will take significant consideration and policy development and is not something to rush. The Elections Act 2022 delivered the Government's manifesto commitment to protect the integrity of our democracy. The Act addressed more immediate challenges. Our priority is to implement these changes to ensure that our elections remain secure, fair, transparent and up to date.
20	**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)**
	The Elections Act 2022 removed the 15-year limit on expatriates' right to vote in UK Parliamentary elections and enfranchise all British citizens overseas who were previously registered or resident in the UK. Under the changes, we have introduced a three-year fixed point renewal process which will enable overseas electors to remain registered for longer, with an absent vote arrangement in place. This means that if a registered elector maintains their registration, when a Parliamentary election is called, the elector's absent vote can be issued without delay. The Elections Act 2022 and secondary legislation flowing from it have also made improvements to the process of absent voting, including enabling electors to apply for an absent vote online via new digital services. We will continue to encourage overseas electors to consider their circumstances when setting up their absent vote arrangement. The Electoral Commission has advised in the past that registration officers should advise overseas electors to consider voting by proxy, where it may not be realistic for their postal ballot pack to be dispatched, completed and returned before the close of a poll.
21	**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)
	The Government's position on this issue has not changed. The Electoral Commission publishes clear guidance to Electoral Registration Officers on how to manage the risk of electoral fraud, including mechanisms to assess the risk of electoral fraud, and guidance on how to report allegations of electoral fraud. The guidance is clear that responsibility for assessing the risk of fraud or malpractice will sit – as it does with any local authority service – with local authority Chief Executives along with the Electoral Registration Officers and Returning Officers in respect of elections. Where there are allegations of fraud, the police are responsible for investigation, until following consultation with the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) or, in Scotland, with the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS), they are either satisfied that no further action is necessary or appropriate, or they forward the case file to the CPS or COPFS for prosecution. More centralised interventions by government will always be a last resort.
22	**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)**
	As noted in our 2020 response, the Government takes the security of the Register to Vote application process very seriously. Across government, substantial work is being undertaken to allow people to access government services more quickly and simply, and enable people to easily and securely verify their identity. Officials in the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities are engaging in this issue to consider how identity verification can be adjusted in the Register to Vote service, to better meet needs of users and improve the security of the process. The Government maintains the view that creating an exhaustive statutory definition of 'residence' could inadvertently disenfranchise some groups or individuals. Section 5 of the Representation of the People Act 1983 lays down general principles regarding residence for electoral purposes which a registration officer must consider and apply when deciding whether a person is resident at a particular address for those purposes and the issue of 'residency' must be applied within these boundaries. The risk in attempting to create an exhaustive definition of 'residency' is that certain groups may either be inadvertently disenfranchised, or inadvertently enfranchised. For this reason, linking the definition to physical residence would be problematic. For instance, an elector may not be physically resident as they are working in a different location; or they may be studying (students can register in two constituencies); or may be in hospital for a long period of time. Any definition would wish to capture these people but may end up disenfranchising them. In trying to create a definition that covers all possible situations, it could end up providing no

	real clarity at all and causing more confusion than benefit. While there are no current plans to introduce further identity requirements for applicants when applying close to any registration deadline, the Government is always looking for ways to improve the experience of registering to vote, both for applicants and administrators.
23	**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)**
	The Government continues to recognise that postal voting is well established and popular with many voters who find it a convenient way to vote and would not otherwise be able to vote at elections, for example, a person with caring responsibilities. There are already measures in place designed to enhance the security of the postal voting process, including the use of personal identifiers. We have no plans to restrict the availability of postal voting. Under the Elections Act 2022, we have introduced measures that will improve further the integrity of voting that takes place remotely. These are: • Introduction of identity checks for absent vote applications. Applicants now need to provide their national insurance number when applying to vote by post or proxy (as they already do when applying to register to vote). • Limit the length of time any elector – overseas or domestic – may hold a postal vote to a maximum of three years, with a fresh application required if the elector wishes to continue to vote by this method. • A ban on political campaigners from handling postal voting documents issued to another person, in order to prevent the “harvesting” of postal votes. (Family members and designated carers are exempt from this restriction). Breach of this provision will be an offence (takes effect 2 May 2024). • A person will be able to hand in at a polling station or to the Returning Officer via the council office their own postal vote and those for 5 other persons. Votes that are not handed in in accordance with the requirements will be rejected (takes effect 2 May 2024). • Extending the secrecy provisions that apply to voting in polling stations to postal voting (takes effect 2 May 2024).
24	**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)**
	We continue to believe that the availability of the emergency proxy is important in facilitating participation in the electoral process.

	Under the Elections Act 2022 and associated secondary legislation, we have extended the facility so that an elector may apply for an emergency proxy on grounds relating to voter identification after the deadline for applying for a Voter Authority Certificate or Anonymous Elector's Document (i.e. 5pm on the 6th working day before the date of poll) and up until 5pm on polling day. We consider it to be appropriate to make these changes which will cover, for example, where an elector's photographic identification, Voter Authority Certificate or an Anonymous Elector's Document is lost or so damaged that it is no longer useable, after the deadline for making an application for a Voter Authority Certificate or Anonymous Elector's Document has passed. The Elections Act 2022 includes a range of measures to strengthen the security of absent voting. With regard to proxy voting, the Act limits the number of electors for whom an individual may act as a proxy to four, of which no more than two can be 'domestic' electors. In practice, this means that an individual may act as a proxy for up to four overseas electors. The proxy voting measure will reduce the opportunity for an individual to act as a proxy for many electors over whom they may have inappropriate influence. With regard to the current provisions that allow an elector to seek a waiver from the requirement to provide a signature due to a disability or inability to read or write, we consider it appropriate to continue with them and that Electoral Registration Officers have the appropriate powers to make inquiries about the veracity of waiver applications where this is thought to be necessary. As set out above, we have introduced a range of measures under the Elections Act 2022 to strengthen the security of postal voting. No further changes are planned at this time to absent voting arrangements though we will keep these matters under consideration.
25	**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)**
	We consider that the availability of postal voting enables persons, who need or wish to complete their ballot paper in advance of polling day, to participate in the poll. We have made improvements to the process for applying for a postal vote and it is now possible to apply for a postal vote online. When advance voting was previously piloted, the Electoral Commission's evaluation concluded that few people used it, and overall turnout was not enhanced as a result. The Government therefore maintains the view that there is not a strong case to consider advance voting at the present time.
26	**The Government should urgently pursue reforms to the investigation procedures for electoral fraud allegations and their treatment in the justice system. These may include:** • **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)**
	As we indicated in the earlier response to the Committee, the first of these recommendations, 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. The Government's immediate priority has been the implementation of manifesto commitments which will enhance the integrity of our electoral system. This has been taken forward through the Elections Act 2022 and associated secondary legislation. • **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)** There are no current plans to give discretion to vary the disqualification periods from standing for elections. The framework of electoral sanctions for corrupt and illegal practices are set out in the Representation of the People Act 1983. This includes a fixed five-year disqualification period arising from a corrupt practice and a fixed three-year period arising from an illegal practice. Furthermore, under the Representation of the People Act 1983, a person who is found guilty of a corrupt practice is liable for up to two years in prison depending on the offence (or up to four or seven years in prison if section 16 of the National Security Act 2023 applies in relation to the corrupt practice) or a fine, or both. A person who is found guilty of an illegal practice is liable for a fine. Standing for an elected office is an important aspect of our democracy. It is necessary that restrictions on this fundamental right are considered carefully and are proportionate to existing legal sanctions. The fixed disqualification periods arising from corrupt and illegal practices are designed to strike the right balance between providing a sufficient deterrent while remaining proportionate. The Government remains committed to protecting the integrity of our democracy and continues to keep campaigning rules under review. For example, the Government via the Elections Act 2022 and the Ballot Secrecy Act 2023, revised the offence of undue influence to better protect electors from acts of intimidation, such as around polling stations, as well as strengthening ballot secrecy protections for those who vote in person and by post.

	This is part of a wider package of work to tackle undue influence of voters and intimidation in public life. The new electoral sanction introduced by the Elections Act 2022 will mean that those who try to damage political participation through intimidation of candidates and elected office holders will not be allowed to participate in the very process they tried to undermine. • **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)** We will give consideration to the Committee's proposals on petitions and hearings and, as noted in the response to Lord Pickles report on electoral fraud,[1] will consider them in conjunction with the recommendations of the Law Commissions and, where appropriate, take them forward when time allows.
27	**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)**
	As noted in our 2020 response, the voter identification policy only applies when an individual wishes to vote in person at a polling station – it is not required when registering to vote, and so will have no impact on the completeness and accuracy of the registers. With regards to implementing the policy fairly – we are pleased that, at the May 2023 local elections, 99.75% of voters in polling station were able to successfully cast their vote under the new rules. A broad range of identification documents are accepted as part of the policy (a greater number of options than is permitted in Northern Ireland), and polling stations will accept expired documents where the photograph remains a good likeness. Our research shows that 96% of people already own an accepted form of photographic identification. For the small number that do not, we have also created the Voter Authority Certificate – this is an accepted form of identification that is available from Local Authorities free of charge, and will ensure that all eligible electors will continue to have the opportunity to vote. We will continue to work with the Electoral Commission, local authorities, political parties and other partners in order to promote awareness of the new rules and requirements, and the availability of the new Voter Authority Certificate.
28	**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)**

	As noted in our 2020 response, when developing the voter identification policy, we considered a range of examples of how the policy is implemented in other countries. However, the main source of experience and lessons learned was from within the UK - Northern Ireland has had a similar voter identification policy in place since 2003. In addition, prior to the passage of the Elections Act 2022, pilot voter identification schemes were run in England in 2018 and 2019.
29	**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)**
	The voter identification policy was first implemented at local elections in May 2023. The commencement regulations which commenced the voter identification requirements in the Elections Act 2022 made provision that those requirements would not be apply to UK Parliamentary General Elections until conducted before October 2023 for the reasons suggested by the Committee.
30	**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)**
	Regarding raising public awareness, in line with its statutory duty to raise public awareness of all elements of the democratic process, including changes made to it, to ensure voters can participate, the Electoral Commission ran a fully integrated voter identification communications campaign ahead of the scheduled polls in May 2023, alongside its established Register to Vote campaign. The Commission conducted research to assess the cut through of their 2023 voter identification communications campaign which demonstrated the success of the awareness raising activity. This research showed increasing public awareness of voter identification since launch in December 2022 – when it sat at 22% - to 87% of the public being aware of the need to bring ID by the end of April 2023. In May, immediately following the polls, the awareness of the voter ID requirement was at 92%. The Commission will continue to conduct public awareness campaigns ahead of each set of relevant polls – the latest was launched in January this year of the scheduled polls in May 2024 and there will be further work ahead of the next UK Parliamentary general election. The Government will support the Electoral Commission campaign through amplification of messages via Government communications and engagement channels where value can be added.

31	**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)**
	The Government was clear that voter identification must not prevent anyone who is eligible to vote from having the opportunity to do so. Government research shows that 96% of electors own one of the broad list of accepted photographic identification documents. Electors are now able to apply for the Voter Authority Certificate which has replaced the local elector card used during the voter identification pilots. The Voter Authority Certificate is available, free of charge. Guidance and support on applying for a Voter Authority Certificate, as well as the Certificate itself, is available in accessible formats such as easy read, large print and braille. Awareness of the availability of the Voter Authority Certificate – and how to apply for one – is key in ensuring accessibility of elections for all and we will continue to work with the Electoral Commission, local authorities, political parties and other partners to raise awareness of requirements ahead of polls, including the availability of and deadline to apply for a Voter Authority Certificate. The Government worked closely with charities and civil society organisations in the development of plans for the implementation of these changes. The costs to local authorities of meeting the additional responsibilities demanded of them by the Elections Act have been met by central government as per the New Burdens doctrine. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the Central Government to cover the costs of Voter Authority Certificates for local Authorities.
32	**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)**
	The Electoral Commission has a statutory duty to collect data and publish reports on elections in the UK. In 2023 they published a report on how the May 2023 elections in England were run, how voters and campaigners found taking part, and what lessons can be learned for the future. The report contained detailed demographic data and listed a series of recommendations arising from the data and the lessons learned from these elections. On 30 November, the Government published its first report of the evaluation of the impact and implementation of voter identification on GOV.UK providing further evidence of successful delivery.[3]

[3] www.gov.uk/government/publications/government-response-to-the-electoral-commissions-report-on-the-may-2023-local-elections

	In parallel to the evaluation report, the Government's response to the Electoral Commission's report on the May 2023 local elections was also published on 30 November. The Government welcomes the views of the Commission and has considered its recommendations carefully.
33	**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)**
	Officials worked with stakeholders and the electoral sector over many months to identify the most appropriate deadline for when electors can apply for a Voter Authority Certificate. It is right that there is a deadline for applying so as to enable Electoral Registration Officers to process requests ahead of elections and to allow enough time to ensure certificates can arrive with voters by polling day. As noted in our 2020 response, the Government remains determined to make sure all eligible electors continue to be able to vote, and when developing the regulations, we were committed to making the deadline as close to polling day as possible to maximise accessibility. However, the Government is also mindful of the impacts on electoral administrators during this busy period in the lead up to elections, as well as other pressures or emergencies that could apply to deadlines. The deadline of six working days ahead of a poll continues to provide accessibility for electors whilst ensuring local authorities can process applications and certificates can be printed and delivered to electors in time for polling day. The Government has no plans to change this deadline at present. The Electoral Commission's 2024 communications campaign launched in January to raise awareness of both the voter identification changes and the Voter Authority Certificate. The Commission are already undertaking a programme of engagement with partners including charities and civil society organisations to raise awareness amongst specific groups about the changes and to support them with applying for a Voter Authority Certificate should they need one. The Government will support this activity using government communications channels and levers, including: • Banners and messaging on GOV.UK information and transaction pages; • Encouraging promotion of messages through posters and information in places such as job centres, doctors' or dentists' surgery waiting rooms, local council offices, etc; • Use of government forums such as the Accessibility of Elections Working Group to discuss with disability groups ideas around best practice and novel approaches to raising awareness; and • Amplification of EC messaging through government media channels including social media. • Information on accepted forms of identification and how to apply for a Voter Authority Certificate is included on all poll cards sent to all electors ahead of a poll.

A response to the additional questions (A-M)	
A	**What progress has the Government made towards reducing the workload of EROs, and simplifying the process of online registration for both voters and EROs? What further consideration has the Government given to introducing an online registration checking tool?**
	The Government's immediate priority has been the implementation of manifesto commitments which will enhance the integrity of our electoral system. This has been taken forward through the Elections Act 2022 and associated secondary legislation. Throughout the development and implementation of the Elections Act 2022, we have worked, and will continue to work, closely with the Electoral Commission, the Association of Electoral Administrators, and representatives of the electoral sector. The Government is committed to supporting the sector to implement all the changes arising from the Elections Act, and we have put in place a number of measures to assist Electoral Registration Officers and their teams with their responsibilities. As detailed, above, in our response to recommendation two, making information about registration status available online on a national basis would be a significant undertaking and the Government has no current plans to introduce such a system. As also set out at recommendation two, the Government has also taken a number of steps to address the issue of duplicate applications.
B	**Can the Government detail any recent assessment it has made of the accuracy of the current electoral register? What recent estimate has it made of the numbers of people who are not correctly registered? What consideration has been made of international best practice as part of efforts to ensure the accuracy and completeness of the Individual Electoral Registration system? Is it confident EROs have the tools they need to maintain complete and accurate registers?**
	As outlined above in our response to recommendation four, the Government welcomes the periodic reports by the Electoral Commission on the accuracy and completeness of the electoral register. As noted above, the Electoral Commission last reported on this issue in 2023. These reports, as well as using original research by the Commission, also draw upon data from government sources including the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and National Records of Scotland (NRS). In Great Britain, both accuracy and completeness are largely stable. The reformed annual canvass process was introduced in 2019 by the UK, Scottish and Welsh governments with the aim to reduce the burden on Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) while maintaining levels of accuracy and completeness, with the first canvass under the new process carried out in 2020. There is no evidence of any significant negative impact on either measure as a result of canvass reform but there has also been no significant improvement. 3% increase in completeness, and 1% fall in accuracy overall for GB. The 2021 canvas in Northern Ireland has seen completeness and accuracy rise by 10% and 6% respectively. As detailed above, we remain confident that Electoral Registration Officers, supported by clear Electoral Commission guidance, have a range of tools available to support them in their statutory responsibility to maintain complete and accurate registers. The Government is responsible for both the legislative framework and a range of digital

	systems which support Electoral Registration Officers in the creation and maintenance of complete and accurate registers. While we would all like to see more people correctly registered to vote, the Government does not believe that there are material barriers making it difficult to register. There are several different channels by which to register - online, using the paper form, or by phone or in person where the Electoral Registration Officer offers this. Electoral Registration Officers are best placed to consider how to most effectively with those groups of people who are known to be under registered within their communities. The Government understands the importance of being aware of good practice in electoral registration internationally. Officials monitor developments in countries across the world that may be of interest in the UK context. It is however imperative that we take decisions based on what is right for our democracy, our unique constitutional system, and our fellow British citizens.
C	**How is the Government tackling the effects of digital exclusion on voter registration?**
	As noted in our response to recommendation seven, the introduction of the Register to Vote online registration service in 2014, made registering to vote easier and more convenient than ever before. In March 2020 there were 47.6 million entries on the Parliamentary registers in the UK, the highest number ever recorded. Online registration means individuals can apply to register to vote at a time convenient to them. New digital services such as the online absent vote application service, do not replace paper-based processes. Paper application routes exist for applicants applying to register to vote or applying for an absent vote or Voter Authority Certificate, for example. Furthermore, while Electoral Registration Officers can correspond with registered electors electronically, this will only occur if individuals have given permission to be contacted electronically. If an elector prefers to be communicated with via post, they will receive paper communications. While there are instances in which Electoral Registration Officers can also choose to use e-communications while undertaking the Annual Canvass, this is only in specific circumstances, and these do not replace paper communications or household visits.
D	**What recent assessment has the Government made of the accessibility of its communications around electoral registration? What recent steps has it taken to ensure that people with disabilities (including mental health conditions) are informed about voting in accessible formats?**
	The Electoral Commission has a statutory duty to raise public awareness of all elements of the democratic process, including changes made to it, to ensure all voters can fully participate in elections. The Electoral Commission works closely with organisations representing people with disabilities and the elections sector, to support people with disabilities to take part in the democratic process. In order to ensure that everyone can register to vote and have a good experience of voting they provide accessible information on registering

	to vote and voting and this includes easy read guides. They also provide guidance for returning officers to use to make their polling stations more accessible. Officials at The Department for Levelling Up, Housing, and Communities work closely with the Electoral Commission to assist them in this work and to ensure they have early sight of any proposed changes. Officials also work with various representative groups to promote engagement with the democratic process, and, to that end, the Accessibility of Elections Working Group (AEWG) meets quarterly and comprises official level representatives of the UK's governments, electoral sector workers and representative groups such as Mencap, Mind, RNIB, Re-think, NHS Trust's Mental Health leads and others. The group discusses issues and developments and has worked to support delivery of the Elections Act changes and promote awareness of support available to people with disabilities to register and vote. The group acts as a means for both issues to be raised with government and for promulgation of change when being brought forward and when enacted. When developing online services, including Register to Vote and the new services to apply for a Voter Authority Certificate, postal or proxy vote, the Government always aims to undertake testing with users with a wide range of disabilities, as well as users with lower levels of digital skills, confidence and internet access.
E	**What recent discussions has the Government had on promoting voter registration in schools? What mechanisms are in place to monitor the effectiveness of promoting electoral registration to young people attending HE institutions (HEIs)? What steps is it taking to promote voter registration to those not attending HEIs? What consideration has the Government given to extending the legal requirement to promote voter registration to other education destinations such as technical and vocational routes such as apprenticeships?**
	As discussed above in our response to recommendation ten, The Electoral Commission has statutory responsibility to support Electoral Registration Officers, with clear guidance, and publishes a range of democratic engagement resources for Electoral Registration Officers, charities and other organisations to use to raise awareness about democracy, from voter registration to voting options, amongst all voter groups including young people. The responsibility for promoting voter registration sits with The Electoral Commission and Electoral Registration Officers. As noted in our response to the Committee in 2020, in terms of higher education institutions specifically, existing legislation and guidance issued by the Office for Students, the independent regulator of higher education in England, requires higher education providers to promote electoral registration among their student populations. Students can register either at their home address, their term-time address, or both. As for other groups of electors, there are several different channels by which eligible applicants including those in education can register - online, using the paper form, by phone or in person where the Electoral Registration Officer offers this. The Cabinet Office commissioned IFF research to undertake an evaluation of the condition, which sought to understand how the Condition is being interpreted and

	implemented within the sector, and its effectiveness to date. The evaluation (*Student Electoral Registration Condition Evaluation*) was published on gov.uk in April 2021.[4] The Government has no plans to extend the legal requirement to promote voter registration to additional education and training routes.
F	**What analysis has the Government made of the benefits of making electoral data more open to local authorities and EROs to notify people to check they have changed their emails whenever they have interacted with local government?**
	As noted in our response to recommendation four, Electoral Registration Officers have several opportunities to use data to support them in their responsibility to maintain complete and accurate registers. Electoral Registration Officers use national records held by departments such as DWP to check applicant information during the register to vote determination process. The Register to Vote service has a successful match percentage of 91.6% since the service began. The Voter Authority Certificate service has a successful match percentage of 92.9% since the service began. In addition, the Electoral Commission has produced best practice for Electoral Registration Officers on making effective use of available data held locally, to help them meet their statutory duty to maintain the electoral register. The best practice highlights that Electoral Registration Officers, depending on the arrangement of the local authority, can benefit from utilising the full range of data collected across a council, including for example council tax and education records. The Government has no plans make changes to the existing data-sharing arrangements. However, as set out in response to recommendation seven above, the reformed annual canvass introduced the use of Government data to help Electoral Registration Officers better target their resources and to manage the canvass process.
G	**Following the trial of Voter ID in England on 4 May, what assessment has the Government made of the effectiveness of Voter ID at meeting its objectives, and the mitigation of any issues?**
	Voter identification was first implemented ahead of the local elections in May 2023. This was not a trial or a pilot but implementation of the new regulations. The Government is pleased with how initial implementation went in Great Britain, with data gathered in polling stations showing that 99.75% of voters were able to cast their vote successfully under the new measures. On 30 November, the Government published the first report of the evaluation of the impact and implementation of voter identification, providing further evidence of successful delivery. In parallel to the evaluation report, the Government's response to the Electoral Commission's report on the May 2023 local elections was also published on 30 November. The Government welcomes the views of the Commission and has considered its recommendations carefully.

[4] https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/60f942e58fa8f5042bb97a3a/10174_-_SERC_Evaluation_-_Report_v6.00.pdf

	The Government has been clear that it is essential we understand fully how implementation of voter identification has operated in practice, what has gone well, and where there are any areas for improvement in the future. The independent evaluation by IFF Research has used data gathered at polling stations, supplemented by results from public opinion surveys conducted by Ipsos, the Electoral Commission's data and report on the May elections, surveys with the electoral sector and qualitative research with the electoral sector and electors to provide a full picture of the impact and implementation of the voter identification and accessibility measures. Implementing the Elections Act requires close partnership working between the Government, the Commission, the electoral sector, and their representative bodies. We look forward to continuing close engagement with all our partners as we implement the remaining measures from the Act and take forward any necessary adjustments in response to this evaluation. The Government will, as we committed to doing in the legislation, be conducting further evaluation of the implementation of voter identification at the next two UK Parliamentary elections.
H	**Will the Government share its plans to mitigate the impacts on turnout caused by the introduction of Voter ID ahead of the next general election?**
	Turnout can vary significantly from poll to poll due to a wide range of factors - electors' interest, the strength of candidates, prospective marginality of the result, even the weather. This means that it is not possible to attribute any change in turnout to any individual factor between two elections. This was a point that was noted by the Electoral Commission during their review of the 2019 voter identification pilots, where they said "...it is not possible to draw a clear connection between the pilot scheme and any changes in turnout. Limited data is available and where it is available, the pattern is not consistent. We also know that turnout is volatile and dependent on several factors." That said, we would note that overall turnout at the May 2023 elections was 32% - this is comparable to the last similar set of elections in 2019, when it was 32.5%. As was remarked on at the time by commentators, notwithstanding the difficulty of identifying causation, it seems unlikely that voter identification had a particularly notable effect. Both Professor Sir John Curtice, and David Cowling [research fellow at King's College London] have publicly expressed the view that the data so far does not suggest a large impact. What the Electoral Commission's and our own research shows is the many and varied reasons why electors may choose not to vote. The vast majority of voters in the polling station – 99.75% – were able to cast their vote successfully at the local elections in England in May. Furthermore, Ipsos' public opinion survey found at the English May local elections only 4% of non-voters cited voter identification as one reason for not voting; compared to the top two reasons given by electors for not voting being a lack of time (22%) and a lack of interest (17%). As discussed above, the Electoral Commission has the statutory responsibility for raising awareness and encouraging democratic participation. Their communications

	campaign launched in January to raise awareness of both the voter identification changes and the Voter Authority Certificate. The Commission are also already undertaking a programme of engagement with partners including charities and civil society organisations to raise awareness amongst specific groups about the changes and to support them with applying for a Voter Authority Certificate should they need one. The Government will support this activity using government communications channels and levers, including: ▪ banners and messaging on GOV.UK information and transaction pages; ▪ encouraging promotion of messages through posters and information in places such as job centres, doctors' or dentists' surgery waiting rooms, local council offices, etc; ▪ use of government forums such as the Accessibility of Elections Working Group to discuss with disability groups ideas around best practice and novel approaches to raising awareness; and ▪ amplification of EC messaging through government media channels including social media. Information on accepted forms of identification and how to apply for a Voter Authority Certificate is included on all poll cards sent to all electors ahead of a poll.
I	**Will the Government share its analysis of the demographic groups who were unable to vote in its own trials and the 4 May Voter ID trial?**
	As set out in the response to recommendation 32, the Government published its first report of the evaluation of the impact and implementation of voter identification, providing further evidence of successful delivery on 30 November. In parallel to the evaluation report, the government's response to the Electoral Commission's report on the May 2023 local elections was also published on 30 November. The Government is pleased with the introduction of voter identification in Great Britain, with data gathered in polling stations showing that 99.75% of voters were able to cast their vote successfully under the new measures. As noted in the response to question G above, the government has been clear that it is essential we understand fully how implementation of voter identification has operated in practice, what has gone well, and where there are any areas for improvement in the future. This independent evaluation by IFF Research has used data gathered at polling stations, supplemented by results from public opinion surveys conducted by Ipsos, the Electoral Commission's data and report on the May elections, surveys with the electoral sector and qualitative research with the electoral sector and electors to provide a full picture of the impact and implementation of the voter identification and accessibility measures. Implementing the Elections Act requires close partnership working between the Government, the Commission, the electoral sector, and their representative bodies. We look forward to continuing close engagement with all our partners as we implement the remaining measures from the Act and take forward any necessary adjustments in response to this evaluation. The Government will, as we committed to doing in the legislation, be conducting further evaluation of the implementation of voter identification at the next two UK Parliamentary elections and will report in due course.

J	**Can the Government share its assessment of the funding provided for EROs compared with the expenditure made to fulfil their duties? Will it reconsider election delivery, including larger voting hubs, given the challenges faced by local EROs maintaining polling stations?**
	As outlined in the response to recommendation 29, the Government has provided and continues to provide New Burdens funding to local authorities to cover the additional costs arising from the recent changes. Officials have engaged closely with local authorities and sector representatives in the development of the New Burdens funding model. The funding methodology is published on GOV.UK. £25.5million has been paid so far and local authorities will be able to claim additional New Burdens funding retrospectively via a justification led bid process in order to facilitate them in carrying out new duties. A further £14.4million of New Burdens funding will be provided to local authorities in April 2024. Overall funding for Electoral Registration Officers to fulfil their duties is part of the wider funding provided to Local Authorities through the local government finance settlement, details of which is published annually on GOV.UK. Larger voting hubs, bigger polling places that contain more than one polling station, have been proposed as a way of reducing the number of polling places overall. The rationale is that it would make it easier to find polling place locations and take fewer people to staff them. However, the proposal raises a number of issues. For example, the hubs may be sited outside the relevant polling districts, a current legal requirement. Siting of polling places is for each local council to decide. The proposal would need considered consultation and significant legislative changes and is not being considered at this time.
K	**What recent representations has the Government received about modernising electoral law? How will it review, and what are its key factors in determining, the prioritisation given to this?**
	The Elections Act 2022 delivered the Government's manifesto commitment to protect the integrity of our democracy. The Act addressed more immediate challenges and as part of this work, the Government has recently brought forward significant changes to the process for delivering elections to both improve security and integrity. This includes for example the use of photographic identification in polling stations, laws – and digital systems - to limit handing of postal votes and to improve accessibility for the electorate as a whole (online postal vote and proxy vote applications) and for disabled electors in, particular, through broadening the range of disabilities Returning Officers need to pay attention to in providing support to electors and voters. Our priority now is to implement these changes to ensure that our elections remain secure, fair, transparent and up to date.
L	**Can the Government report back from its working group with volunteer electoral administrators with experience in good practice? What suggestions from this group have the Cabinet Office implemented?**
	The Electoral Integrity Programme created dedicated engagement forums, building on well-established close ties with elections teams, in order to support regular and detailed two-way communications between those developing policy, legislation and implementation plans, and the electoral sector.

	This included establishing an Expert Panel, a grouping of representative bodies, to advise specifically on policy details and implementation plans. This group comprises of regional leads from England, Scotland and Wales, and key representative organisations including the Association of Electoral Administrators (AEA), the Electoral Commission (EC), the Electoral Management Board for Scotland (EMB), the Scottish Assessors Association (SAA), and the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE). The Expert Panel is key in aiding the Government to identify opportunities, risks and mitigations, was consulted extensively in the development of the New Burdens funding methodologies, and has been heavily involved in testing of the digital services prior to launch. It has been invaluable throughout policy development and implementation, and we are grateful to those involved for volunteering and for dedicating their time and effort to the group. The Programme has additionally established a GB-wide Business Change Network which facilitates a two-way conversation with the sector, allowing the government to effectively communicate information out while also gathering feedback on opportunities, concerns, risks, and mitigations and communicating these back to the Programme.
M	**Can the Government update on its plans 'to look at the policy and processes of overseas electors to bring forward proposals to better support overseas electors to vote'? What proposals have been brought forwards? What legislative vehicle is most appropriate to meet these aims?**
	We continue to be committed to supporting overseas electors in the exercise of their voting rights. We refer the Committee to the update given to recommendation 20 in relation to the overseas voter franchise, and modernisation.