

Written evidence from Silver Voices¹ (TEB 02)

Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee The Elections Bill inquiry

EVIDENCE ON VOTER ID PROPOSALS IN ELECTIONS BILL

Silver Voices is a UK-wide membership organisation for the over 60s, campaigning on age discrimination, pensions and benefits, health and social care and many other issues of concern to older people. We are growing fast, with 3800 current members, organised around our website www.silvervoices.co.uk.

We are most concerned about the Voter ID proposals in the Bill. The measures would make the voting process more complicated and would adversely affect older people, as well many other minority and deprived groups.

In research commissioned by the Cabinet Office, it is admitted that younger people are more likely to hold a form of photo ID. It is stated that one in ten people aged over 85 do not hold photo ID that is “recognisable”; and these people would have to go through the process of obtaining a photo voting card from their local authority in advance of any election. People arriving at polling stations without recognisable photo ID, even if they had other proof of residence such as council tax bills, would be turned away. As there are 1.5 million people over 85 in the UK, this represents voting disincentives for about 150,000 people, some of whom would have fought for democracy in the Second World War. Across the total population, official figures indicate that 3.5 million voters do not have photo ID.

Silver Voices has been consulted by the Cabinet Office at different times over the last year when we have made our opposition clear. In particular, we have highlighted the limited pilots that have taken place to test the policy in practice. Limited trials took place during the 2018 and 2019 English local elections, but only in Woking was photo ID of the type envisaged in the Bill trialled! Woking is representative only of Woking. No pilots took place during the 2019 General Election, nor in Scotland or Wales.

As well as the human rights implications, these measures are costly and will take up considerable parliamentary time. It is estimated that the additional costs will amount to £20 million per election. Also, local authorities will be forced to foot the bill for issuing hundreds of thousands of photo voting cards and be required to police these controversial measures at polling stations.

There is scant evidence of voting fraud in the UK, and we know of no cases of voter fraud at the polls involving senior citizens. These measures are therefore totally unnecessary, are a waste of public money, and will only serve to depress voter turnout, to the detriment of democracy.

¹ Submitted by Dennis Reed, Director, Silver Voices

August 2021