

Written evidence from Age UK¹ (TEB 05)

Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee The Elections Bill inquiry

1. About Age UK

Age UK is a national charity that works with a network of partners, including Age Scotland, Age Cymru, Age NI and local Age UKs across England, to help everyone make the most of later life, whatever their circumstances. In the UK, the charity helps more than seven million older people each year by providing advice and support. It also researches and campaigns on the issues that matter most to older people. Its work focuses on ensuring that older people have enough money; enjoy life and feel well; receive high-quality health and care; are comfortable, safe and secure at home; and feel valued and able to participate.

2. Summary

In response to the Committee's call for evidence on the Elections Bill, Age UK is presenting information about older people's experiences of in person voting. We welcome the Elections Bill's extension of support for people with disabilities who need help to vote in person but we have significant concerns about the impact of the introduction of photo ID for in person voting. This is where we have focused our evidence.

- The Elections Bill has been introduced to Parliament. The Bill includes proposals to introduce compulsory individual Voter ID at polling stations. This has the potential to act as an additional obstacle to already existing impediments for older people who wish to vote. Age UK believes this element of the Bill should be removed.
- While electoral fraud is an important issue that must be combatted, there is no significant evidence that personation fraud is a significant risk to voting integrity. The proposal is a sledge hammer to crack a nut. Any scheme put in place to address electoral fraud should not disenfranchise people who are less likely to hold recognised forms of ID, including older people.
- Older people are more likely to face hurdles when voting, including barriers to accessing transport and limited mobility which make getting to a polling station a lot harder. The Elections Bill makes welcome changes to the assistance that voters can receive in polling stations if they require it, as a result of disability. But, the proposed addition of compulsory photo ID will add to barriers to in person voting.
- If photo ID proposals are carried unamended in the Elections Bill then mitigating measures such as the provision of free photo ID to people who lack these documents should be made as accessible as possible. Additional provision of free photo ID for elections will be costly and complex for local Returning Officers to administer and must be supported by central guidance and funding.

¹ Age UK is a charitable company limited by guarantee and registered in England (registered charity number 1128267 and registered company number 6825798).

Ownership of photo ID by older people

3.1 We know that older people often face issues when they are asked to prove their identity. Age UK has found that being asked for frequently held forms of ID, such as passports, is more difficult for older people who are less likely to have one. Research commissioned by the Cabinet Office² suggests that 2% of people aged over 70, equivalent to approximately 180,000 older people living in Great Britain, do not hold any of the forms of identification that the Bill proposes would be accepted when voting. The research also suggests that having to present photographic identification at the polling station would make voting difficult for 6% of people aged over 70, equivalent to more than half a million older people living in Great Britain, and would make 4% of people aged over 70, or around 360,000 older people, less likely to vote.

3.2 These figures are likely to be underestimates of the true numbers of older people likely to be affected, as the Cabinet Office funded research did not include a representative sample of older people in Great Britain. Older people living in care homes – who already face significant barriers to voting – have been excluded from the survey. Further, the survey had a low response rate of 31%. Survey non-response is more common among people who are in poor health or socioeconomically disadvantaged, both of which are linked to a higher likelihood of not having identification and to greater existing barriers to voting.

3.3 It is not possible to tell, from the Cabinet Office’s research, what the intersectional impacts of the policy change would be on older people who are disabled, who are from different ethnic minority groups or who are women, as the research does not address these questions.

3.4 Data from the 2011 census shows that the number of people reporting that they do not have a passport increases with age. 52% of people aged 85 and over reported not having a passport. Similarly, the percentage of people that report owning a driver’s licence also decreases with age: 38% of those over 70 do not own a driving licence. The recent Cabinet Office funded research also finds increasing proportions of people without a passport and without a photocard driving licence in older age groups. Many older people may not have a utility bill in their name, particularly if they live in a care home or if a relative looks after their bills.

Personation fraud

4.1 The Electoral Commission’s records of instances of personation fraud in their annual reports on electoral fraud show that there are very few recorded instances: one case of unsuccessful attempted personation fraud, resulting in a caution, in the past 4 years. In the Commission’s report on the May 2019 Voter Identification Pilots, they said, “Government and Parliament should consider what level of security is proportionate to the risk of personation fraud in polling stations.”³

² IFF Research ‘Photographic ID Research’, March 2021, accessed:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/voter-identification-photographic-id-ownership-in-great-britain>

³ Electoral Commission, 2019, accessed: <https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/who-we-are-and-what-we-do/our-views-and-research/our-research/voter-identification-pilots/may-2019-voter-identification-pilot->

4.2 No demographic data could be collected about who was refused access to in person voting in the May 2019 pilot sites. The Electoral Commission's evidence shows that across the 2 pilot sites that required photo ID to be shown at polling stations, 371 voters were turned away because they did not present an acceptable form of ID and 123 of those turned away did not return to vote.

4.3 Increasing confidence in the integrity of the electoral system is important but with no evidence that personation fraud in the UK is widespread and evidence that in small pilots, over a hundred people were unable or unwilling to return to a polling station to present valid photo ID, it feels that the introduction of this security measure is disproportionate to the threat of personation fraud. Age UK believes the proposal represents a sledge hammer to crack a nut.

Existing barriers to in person voting for older people

5.1 Voting in person is a valuable way for older people to exercise their democratic rights and older people are very highly motivated to vote. The British Election Study has found that across the previous three General Elections the likelihood of voting increased with age with turnout amongst over 75s in 2019 reaching around 80% (final precise statistics are yet to be verified <https://www.britishelectionstudy.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/turnoutBayesPlot-1.png>).

5.2 Postal voting is a welcome alternative option to in person voting for many older people. In the 2019 General Election 18% of GB electors had a postal ballot issued.⁴ Postal voting allows some people who experience barriers to in person voting to participate in the election. But we know that for others, voting in person is a treasured democratic right even when it is difficult to achieve.

5.3 In person voting is already difficult for some older people:

- More than half of over 75s are disabled so experience the same difficulties with physical access, neurological and sensory impairment that other disabled voters face.
- Over half of over 75s have not used the internet in the past 3 months so registering online, being made aware of changes to voting arrangements and access to information from their council or political parties will be difficult.
- 1 in 6 of over 80 year olds have dementia and that can lead to presumptions being made on their behalf by family members or professional carers that they should not register to vote even when on the day, they may have the capacity to exercise their vote.
- Those living in care homes may struggle to register to vote without support from the care home manager, and they will not have access to individual utility bills and other such evidence of their residence if this is required as a form of identification.
- Older people are likely to face barriers to accessing transport and limited mobility which make getting to a polling station much harder.
- Older people often provide care to spouses and other family members which can make leaving the house, even for short periods, difficult to arrange.

[schemes/our-findings](#)

⁴ 'Electoral Data: 2019 UK Parliament General Election', Electoral Commission, 2020, accessed: <https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-05/UKPGE%202019-%20Electoral%20Data-Website.xlsx>

5.3 Many older people already face barriers to in person voting. Adding to these difficulties by requiring them to find and present the correct forms of photo ID will only exacerbate the problem. In response, some people may simply decide not to participate.

Mitigation against disenfranchisement

6.1 If the proposals to require photo ID for in person voting are enacted, the Government should put in place safeguarding measures to ensure that no individual is disenfranchised in circumstances that they do not have the required documentation and cannot travel to an electoral office to confirm their identity.

6.2 Mitigating measures should include:

- A non-digital form of free elections ID alongside any digital offering. Electors should not have to scan or download personal information onto a local government portal or website – this would be an additional barrier to accessing free photo ID.
- Polling station staff being briefed on the full list of acceptable photo ID including on accepting expired Government issued travel passes from different areas of the country.
- Clear communication to voters ahead of elections on what ID will be required when voting: This could be done by printing information on polling cards, through notices issued alongside polling cards, posters being placed in prominent areas, and by contacting targeted groups where there are likely to be harder to reach voters, such as care home residents and caregivers, informing them that they will need to bring a particular form of ID in advance.
- Local authority election staff should proactively reach out to electors to offer a free form of election ID and travel to them to support them in securing this form of identification.

6.3 Attempts to identify and reach the groups affected by the need to produce photo ID are likely to be complex and costly, since older people who are most affected are unlikely to be online and may be less likely to be outside of their own residence. The additional costs of effectively reaching those who don't possess photo ID should be borne by central Government rather than passing these additional costs to local authorities.

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