

NEWS RELEASE

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Urgent improvements needed to electoral system warns Association of Electoral Administrators

With an unscheduled general election looming, the latest report from the professional body for electoral administrators highlights the fault lines in the UK's electoral system and calls for urgent reform to election law, funding and support.

The Electoral Landscape in 2019 from the Association of Electoral Administrators (AEA) reviews this year's scheduled local elections and unscheduled European Parliamentary elections, stating that: "There remains an unrealistic expectation that elections will always be delivered regardless of the landscape, timing, funding or the capacity of the professionals administering them."

The report outlines issues faced by the electoral community in delivering safe, secure and trusted elections, including:

- expectations of overseas postal voters versus the tight timescales for printing, posting and returning postal ballot packs – particularly in relation to unscheduled polls such as the European Parliamentary elections
- capacity pressures for electoral administrators running ongoing voter registration and scheduled polls against a backdrop of: unscheduled elections, expected changes to Parliamentary constituency boundaries, the proposed Overseas Electors Act and new legislation in both Wales and Scotland as a result of devolution
- worries that budgets calculated by government to fund elections, particularly short-notice polls, are insufficient and adding pressure on councils to cover shortfalls
- additional strain on council budgets due to delays in settling election accounts. Only 75% of funding for polls is made available in advance and as of 31 March 2019, 45% of constituency claims for the 2017 unexpected general election were still waiting to be settled

- the practical implications of moving the 2020 May bank holiday to the day after scheduled elections across the UK, with knock-on effects to staffing and running election counts.

Alongside legislative and practical recommendations, the report also calls for government departments to take a more joined-up approach to elections and to publicly acknowledge that electoral administrators are at the limits of their capacity.

Peter Stanyon, AEA chief executive, said: "These are unprecedented times in electoral administration, with yet another unscheduled nationwide poll being prepared for by stretched and often under-resourced teams. Electoral administrators always deliver but cracks are beginning to show. The need for urgent and positive action to support electoral delivery is more pressing than ever.

Rob Curtis, AEA chairman, said: "Our current system is no longer fit for purpose. This report's recommendations supplement over thirty still outstanding from our previous post-election reports, which is disappointing. That said, we will continue to work constructively with the UK Government, Electoral Commission, Law Commission on behalf of our members to press for positive electoral reform."

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