



The Association of Electoral Administrators

Policy Positions

Updated: 16 September 2019

Adopted by the AEA Board: 25 September 2019

The Association of Electoral Administrators



Our position in relation to numerous policies is outlined in this document, broken down into three sections:

- Elections
- Electoral Registration
- Other issues

Key messages and policy statements

Question	AEA policy position
1. Elections	
Should voting be a legal obligation?	<p>This is a matter for the UK Parliament and devolved administrations to determine.</p> <p>There are many advantages and disadvantages identified by organisations such as those referenced below. If the UK Government were to introduce compulsory voting, we would expect consideration to be given to issues raised in reports such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Electoral Commission – Compulsory Voting Around the World ▪ House of Commons Briefing Paper – Compulsory Voting ▪ IDEA – Compulsory Voting ▪ Political Studies Association – Beyond Turnout: The Consequences of Compulsory Voting
Should voters be able to cast their vote online?	<p>We believe that using IT for voting should be considered, but only utilised when the system(s) can be shown to deliver safe and secure results, deliver improvements on current paper-based systems, be cost-effective and enhance public confidence and accessibility.</p> <p>There are many advantages and disadvantages identified by organisations such as those referenced below. If the UK Government were to introduce voting online, we would expect consideration to be given to the following types of reports, to experiences from other countries and from</p>

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	<p>conducting further UK pilots to build on those carried out in 2007:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Dr N Ben Fairweather & Professor Simon Rogerson Centre for Computing and Social Responsibility School of Computing De Montfort University, Leicester – Implementation of e-voting in the UK – technical issues ▪ House of Commons: Speaker's Commission on Digital Democracy: meeting on electronic voting ▪ IDEA – Introducing Electronic Voting – essential considerations ▪ Electoral Commission <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Official report on the electoral pilot at Swindon elections - Official report on electronic voting and counting pilot at South Bucks elections ▪ Electoral Reform Society
<p>Should votes be counted electronically?</p>	<p>We believe that using IT to count votes should be considered, but only utilised when the system(s) can be shown to deliver safe and secure results, improvements on current paper-based systems, be cost-effective and has public confidence.</p> <p>There are many advantages and disadvantages identified by organisations such as those referenced below. If the UK Government were to introduce electronic counting, we would expect them to consider the following types of reports as well as recent experiences of electronic counting in London and Scotland:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Electoral Commission <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The May 2016 Mayor of London and London Assembly elections – Report on the administration of the Greater London Authority elections held on 5 May 2016 - Electronic counting May 2007 electoral pilot schemes

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Official report on electronic counting pilot at Stratford and Warwick elections - Official report on electronic counting pilot at Dover elections - Official report on electronic voting and counting pilot at South Bucks elections ▪ Counting the Vote Report of the London Assembly’s Elections Review Committee – Elections Review Committee December 2007
<p>Should all-postal ballots be permitted?</p>	<p>We understand the positive and negative implications of all-postal ballots and are neither supportive of the principle or against it.</p> <p>We support the principles of full and proper evaluation to enhance public confidence and accessibility in electoral systems to ensure, in the event of this approach being taken, that all-postal ballots are deliverable and do not add unnecessary bureaucracy, cost and risk.</p> <p>There are many advantages and disadvantages identified by organisations such as those referenced below. If the UK Government were to introduce all-postal ballots, we would expect them to consider the following types of reports, including the experiences of the 2017 pilots in Tower Hamlets and Slough pilots as well as conducting further pilots:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ House of Commons Library Briefing Paper – Postal Voting ▪ House of Commons Library – All Postal Voting ▪ House of Commons ODPM: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions Committee – Postal Voting ▪ Cabinet Office – Electoral Integrity Project - Local Elections 2018 – Evaluation ▪ Democratic Audit UK – Postal Voting and Electoral Fraud ▪ Electoral Commission <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - May 2018 voter identification pilot schemes

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Report on all-postal voting pilot scheme: Hesketh ward, Eden, Cumbria - Report on all-postal voting pilot scheme: Porthleven ward, Kerrier, Cornwall
<p>Should convicted prisoners be entitled to vote?</p>	<p>It is a matter for the UK Parliament and devolved administrations to determine if the franchise should be extended to include prisoners. AEA members will administer the process according to the legislation in force.</p> <p>However, if this change were to be introduced, consideration to the administration of votes in a safe, secure and secret manner would be key.</p>
<p>Should the voting age be reduced?</p>	<p>It is a matter for the UK Parliament and devolved administrations to determine any change to the existing franchise. AEA members will administer the process according to the legislation in force.</p> <p>However, devolution in Scotland and proposed changes in Wales will clearly have an impact and we have concerns regarding inconsistencies across the UK. We believe the UK Government should take a more holistic approach to democratic processes to prevent the voting system from becoming more complex to understand and administer.</p> <p>There are many advantages and disadvantages identified by organisations such as those referenced below. If the UK Government were to reduce the voting age, we would expect them to consider the types of issues referenced in the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Electoral Commission – Scottish Elections (Reduction of Voting Age) Bill ▪ Scottish Government – Scottish Elections (Reduction of Voting Age) Bill ▪ Young Citizens – Lowering the voting age to 16 ▪ Political Studies Association – Beyond the Youth Citizenship Commission: Young People and Politics

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<p>What is the AEA’s position on electors being able to vote more than once at local government elections?</p>	<p>It is a matter for the UK Parliament and devolved administrations to determine franchises and voting entitlement. However, we support the principles of full and proper evaluation to enhance public confidence and accessibility in electoral systems. Any change should be deliverable and not add unnecessary bureaucracy, cost or risk.</p> <p>The UK voting system is largely based on trust. With individuals able to register more than once where they can demonstrate residence, there is a risk of electors voting more than once when not entitled to. In our 2017 post-election report, we recommended that legislation should be amended to clearly identify what constitutes a valid second registration.</p> <p>We also believe that the administrative burden of any changes to ensure that electors could not vote more than once would need extensive consideration.</p>
<p>Does the AEA think that elections are secure from fraud?</p>	<p>The UK voting system is largely based on trust so is potentially vulnerable to electoral fraud. It is widely recognised that there is no evidence of widespread issues, and that any form of electoral fraud is unacceptable. We and our members are aware of potential weaknesses in current systems that could make fraud possible.</p> <p>We broadly welcomed the findings of the Rt Hon Lord Eric Pickles Electoral Fraud Review in 2015 and the recommendations in his report “Securing the ballot: review into electoral fraud”. We will continue to work closely with key stakeholders in implementing the report’s recommendations and addressing issues of perceived systemic weaknesses.</p>
<p>Should electors be required to show ID in polling stations?</p>	<p>We understand the positive and negative implications of Voter ID at polling stations and are neither supportive of the principle or against it.</p> <p>We have welcomed Voter ID pilots, to enable full and proper evaluation of proposed systems. We remain concerned that further consideration needs to be given to ensure that any change is</p>

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	<p>deliverable, does not add unnecessarily to bureaucracy, costs and risk, lead to the disenfranchisement of certain groups, and does not negatively impact those who wish to vote.</p> <p>If the UK Government introduces Voter ID there must be sufficient lead-in time for legislation, administrative planning, delivery and voter education. This will be essential for a smooth transition.</p> <p>We would also advise caution about the timing of any change, to ensure that any new system is robust enough to withstand the demands of a high turnout poll.</p>
<p>Should there be a national ID card which could be used as ID to vote?</p>	<p>Should the UK Government determine that photographic ID is necessary in order to vote, a national ID card would offer obvious benefits to electoral processes.</p> <p>We appreciate the cost of such an implementation and believe that local authorities could provide an alternative option, e.g. a locally produced ID. Any national or local ID card scheme would require sufficient lead-in time for legislation, administrative planning and delivery; this would be essential for a smooth transition. Any such scheme would also need to be fully funded.</p>
<p>Should all citizens, regardless of nationality, be entitled to vote in the UK?</p>	<p>It is a matter for the UK Parliament and devolved administrations to determine the franchise. AEA members will administer the process according to the legislation in force.</p> <p>However, exiting the EU, devolution and proposed changes in devolved nations around residency-based registration will clearly be a factor. We have concerns regarding inconsistency across the UK and voter confusion at combined polls.</p> <p>We believe that the UK Government needs to take a more holistic approach to democratic processes to avoid introducing additional risks and further fracturing the voting system.</p>

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<p>Should voting at places other than traditional polling stations be permitted?</p>	<p>We believe that polling places should be accessible, suitable for all eligible electors and be appropriate for them to cast their votes in secret. It must be noted that whilst legislation provides for publicly funded premises, including local authority schools, to be made available free of charge to Returning Officers, custodians are often reluctant to do so – for a variety of legitimate reasons.</p> <p>The key priority is to ensure that electors who have specific access requirements can vote unaided, which may mean that current polling stations are not suitable.</p>
<p>Should voting take place at weekends?</p>	<p>Our general view is that polling day should remain a weekday. We have no strong view of the need for polling to take place on a Thursday. We consider that significant challenges associated with weekend voting include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Resources – increased costs for staff and venue hire; ▪ Polling station venues – availability; ▪ Security – increased costs; ▪ Administration of elections – availability of sufficient polling station and count staff, ICT access, and count venues. <p>As an alternative to weekend voting, some democracies make polling day a national public holiday.</p> <p>We support full and proper evaluation to enhance public confidence and accessibility in our electoral system. In the event of change it must be deliverable and not add unnecessarily to bureaucracy, costs and risk.</p>
<p>Should voters who have specific needs be able to vote at any polling station in the constituency/local government area?</p>	<p>We believe that all electors should be able to cast their votes as easily as possible, securely and independently. However, we also recognise the challenges electoral administrators face in meeting the needs of all electors. We will continue to work with key stakeholders in addressing such issues.</p>

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	<p>Should the UK Government introduce changes to allow facilities for voters who have specific needs to vote at any polling station in the constituency/local government area, there would be significant legal and administrative challenges to ensure the ballot is safe, secure and not open to fraud.</p>
<p>Is the current registration, election and voting process deeply rooted in the 19th century and based on out-of-date assumptions and lifestyles?</p>	<p>Yes.</p> <p>Electoral administrators are increasingly aware of the public’s frustrations with what is often viewed as an outdated and bureaucratic system.</p> <p>The introduction of Individual Electoral Registration in 2014 allowed potential electors to apply to register online and has been a great success, but many other processes remain paper based, often with good reason.</p> <p>We have welcomed the Government’s commitment to review elements of the electoral process but believe the time has come for them to take a comprehensive review of all registration and election processes.</p> <p>In our 2019 statement to the Minister we made the following recommendation:</p> <p>2019-12: We urge the UK Government to facilitate a wider understanding of the pressures being faced both by electoral administrators and the wider electoral community, ensuring that all stakeholders understand that those tasked with administering successful elections do not have limitless capacity.</p>
<p>Why are pencils and not pens used in polling booths for voters to cast their vote?</p>	<p>The use of a pen or pencil to complete a ballot paper is not specified in legislation. In the UK, pencils are traditionally used to mark ballot papers and are made available in polling stations for voters to use.</p> <p>Pencils are used for both historic and practical reasons. Ink pens may dry out or spill; ink may cause some transfer of the mark the voter has made when they fold the ballot paper, potentially leading to their vote being rejected if, for example,</p>

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	<p>it looks like they have voted for more candidates than they are entitled to.</p> <p>There is nothing to stop a voter from using a pen to mark their vote. There is no legal requirement for ballot papers to be marked with a pencil.</p>
<p>Does the complexity of the current system support the effective delivery of electoral services to voters?</p>	<p>No. There are currently over 75 separate pieces of legislation relevant to elections. This makes the administration of electoral processes inefficient and introduces significant risk.</p> <p>We believe that the point where consolidating legislation to solve the problems inherent in the electoral process has passed. We need 'root and branch' reform and rewritten legislation.</p> <p>We welcomed the Law Commission's work towards simplifying electoral legislation across the UK in a single Electoral Administration Act.</p> <p>We consider effecting the Law Commission's recommendations a priority policy matter.</p> <p>We are disappointed to learn from the Cabinet Office that there is unlikely to be a single Electoral Administration Act in the near future. Work had started, with the Law Commission drafting legislation on behalf of the Cabinet Office, but progress has been slower than anticipated. The Law Commission and the Cabinet Office are continuing to look at ways to implement legislative change.</p> <p>We have recommended on a number of occasions, most recently in our 2019 statement, that:</p> <p>2019-6: The UK Government should consider and progress the Law Commission recommendations as a matter of urgency including addressing the issues raised in our response to the inquiry by the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee.</p> <p>In the meantime, we will continue to press for changes in secondary legislation to address current areas of concern.</p>

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What is the AEA's view on funding for elections/electoral registration?

Funding for electoral services and specific elections and referendums is confused. There is central funding in the form of 'fees and charges' for UK-wide elections on an election-by-election basis. In addition, there is central funding for any additional registration costs incurred as a result of introducing Individual Electoral Registration (IER).

We have significant concerns about funding and have called on numerous occasions, most recently in our [2019 statement](#), for:

2019-9: A comprehensive review of the fees and charges structure is urgently needed to ensure sufficient funding is provided and to reduce the perceived bureaucracy when claims need to be settled.

2019-10: Maximum Recoverable Amounts, advances and guidance should be made available prior to the Notice of Election/Referendum being published before any national poll, whether scheduled or unscheduled.

2019-11: We urge the UK Government to introduce a mechanism where the full costs of registration should be reimbursed to the relevant local authority where it can be demonstrated that those costs were incurred because of a national electoral event.

In our [2017 report](#) and [2018 Ministerial letter](#), we highlighted that a full and thorough review of electoral services funding should be undertaken as a matter of urgency, to ensure that:

- *All costs properly incurred in the administration of elections, including electoral registration costs directly attributable to the election, are reimbursed to Returning Officers and their employing local authorities; and*
- *All costs properly incurred in delivering electoral registration are automatically*

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	<p><i>provided to local authorities without the need to revert to the justification led bidding process.</i></p> <p>Future registration funding is currently unclear and there are numerous issues around funding of national elections and referendums. We will continue to work with Government on these issues and hope that future funding arrangements will benefit from these discussions.</p>
<p>Who decides on the location of polling stations and what changes to the process would the AEA like to see?</p>	<p>Legislation currently requires local authorities to review UK Parliamentary polling districts and polling places every five years. However, Returning Officers are responsible for the provision of polling stations and their staffing and equipment under relevant election rules.</p> <p>We believe that the selection of polling places should be the responsibility of Returning Officers, who act independently, rather than local authorities. This would put the interest of voters at the centre of the issue and give Returning Officers more flexibility to insist on providing accessible polling stations.</p>



2. Electoral Registration	
<p>Should registering to vote be a legal obligation?</p>	<p>This is a matter for the UK Parliament and devolved administrations to determine. To help our members deliver a safe and secure electoral system, we believe that registering to vote should be a legal obligation, with simpler forms of enforcement available to EROs.</p> <p>Current legislation requires voters to provide accurate information to EROs, which effectively means that if qualified and resident, individuals are required to register to vote.</p> <p>Legislation also makes provision for civil penalties in the case of failing to complete an invitation to register and prosecution through the courts for failure to respond to a Household Enquiry Form. However, very few EROs take enforcement action due to the complex and costly legislative process which has to be funded by the local authority.</p>
<p>Should students/people with second homes be allowed to continue to register at two addresses?</p>	<p>The UK voting system is largely based on trust. With individuals able to register more than once where they can demonstrate residence, there is a risk of electors voting more than once when they are not entitled to. If the system were to change, one option would be for electors eligible to register at more than one address to indicate which address they wish to use their vote at as part of their initial application. This would be kept on record and votes issued accordingly at appropriate elections.</p> <p>We would also highlight the huge resource required to invite students to register with no clear option for them to indicate that they do not wish to register at their term-time address. We believe it should be clearer to students, and to other voters with two eligible addresses, that they have a choice about whether to register at a second address.</p> <p>It is a matter for the UK Parliament and devolved administrations to determine how the electoral system should be administered. However, we have previously recommended that legislation should clearly identify what constitutes a valid second registration.</p>

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<p>Should the 15-year rule for overseas electors be removed?</p>	<p>It is a matter for the UK Parliament to determine the franchise for UK Parliamentary elections. AEA members will administer the process according to the legislation in force.</p> <p>However, if the Government introduced this change in line with current rules, the administration of the system would effectively be unworkable due to limitations of records held by EROs. The administration of overseas elector applications needs to be carefully considered when drafting any new legislation, with sufficient lead-in time allowed for the introduction of any changes.</p> <p>We would also urge that more thought is given to educating overseas electors about different ways to cast their ballot. A reliance on postal votes can lead to overseas electors being disenfranchised as a result of receiving ballot papers too late to return to be counted. In our 2019 statement to the Minister we made the following recommendation:</p> <p>2019-5: We strongly urge the UK Government to consider the way in which overseas electors can cast their votes.</p>
<p>Should there be automatic registration via national data sources as people move address i.e. public utilities data?</p>	<p>Automatic registration, whereby eligible citizens who interact with government agencies are registered to vote without making an application, is a matter for UK Parliament and the devolved administrations to determine.</p> <p>As a general point, we believe that EROs should have full access to any official records that will help them maintain a complete and accurate electoral register. Full and proper evaluation would be required to ensure public confidence. Any proposed changes would need to be deliverable and avoid any unnecessary bureaucracy, cost and risk.</p> <p>A 2016 UK Parliament debate on the topic outlined the advantages and disadvantages, also identified by organisations such as those referenced below. If the UK Government and/or the devolved administrations were to introduce automatic registration, we would expect them to consider the following types of reports:</p>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Getting the 'missing millions' on to the electoral register: A vision for voter registration reform in the UK, Bite the Ballot and Dr Toby James, Clear View Research, April 2016 ▪ It's time to talk about automatic voter registration, Electoral Reform Society, Josiah Mortimer, 7 June 2016
<p>Should there be a single electronic register for the UK?</p>	<p>It is a matter for the UK Parliament and devolved administration to determine whether a national electoral register would be appropriate but if it were, there would be obvious and clear benefits to electoral processes.</p> <p>A House of Commons library summary states: "A centralised registration system, including software and administration, is likely to be difficult and costly to develop. Central registration was attempted some years ago, the CORE system, but this was abandoned. The Labour Government had attempted to create a locally compiled but centrally held electoral registration database in 2005, but the project was abandoned by the Coalition Government in 2011. The provisions relating to CORE in the Electoral Administration Act 2006 and Political Parties and Elections Act 2009 were repealed by the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013.</p> <p><i>There have been concerns about personal data being collected centrally; the ONS conducted some research into public attitudes towards providing population statistics and the use of administrative data in 2014. It found that people generally did not object to data being held by other government departments being shared but there were objections about privacy and security."</i></p> <p>We would expect for there to be a comprehensive study of the mechanics of creating a single register for the UK before any decision is made.</p>

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<p>Should the full electoral register be available for sale to Credit Agencies and other statutory bodies?</p>	<p>We believe that current regulations governing access and supply of the electoral register are flawed and should be reviewed, including being clear about exactly what the electoral register is for. We are not opposed to licensed organisations accessing such data for credit and security checks, but we do not agree with those organisations then being permitted to use that information, compiled at public cost, for commercial purposes. We firmly maintain that the edited register should be abolished, and no elector details should be available for sale to third parties.</p>
<p>Should there be two versions of the register – full and edited?</p>	<p>We believe that the electoral register should be compiled for electoral and other limited purposes only (i.e. credit and security checks). We do not support the sale of personal data. Access to the electoral register should be strictly prescribed and controlled, and the edited register dispensed with.</p>

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3. Other issues	
<p>What is the AEA's view on the timing of the count at UK Parliamentary General Elections?</p>	<p>Where combined with another poll, the requirement to commence the counting of votes at a UK Parliamentary election within four hours of the close of poll should be removed.</p>
<p>Does the AEA support the Boundary Commission proposals to reduce the number of MPs which will increase the number of Parliamentary cross boundaries?</p>	<p>It is a matter for the UK Parliament to determine the UK parliamentary boundaries and required number of MPs.</p> <p>However, we have concerns about the administrative complexities which would result from the significant increase in the proposed number of cross boundary constituencies. We are also concerned that administrators will not have sufficient time to make arrangements for administering elections on new boundaries should an early UK Parliamentary general election take place.</p>
<p>Should ROs/EROs be permitted to trial reforms in different ways to better meet the needs of different communities, and should local authorities be able to choose their voting system?</p>	<p>This is a matter for the UK Parliament and devolved administrations to determine. Full and proper evaluation would be required to ensure public confidence in any proposed changes, which would need to be deliverable and avoid any unnecessary bureaucracy, cost and risk.</p> <p>We have concerns that any further inconsistency of approach between different elections, across the UK and neighbouring local authority areas, could lead to voter confusion and increased apathy. As detailed in our response to the Welsh Government White Paper Reforming Local Government Resilient and Renewed (April 2017) we have reservations about individual ROs and EROs adopting whichever approach they believe is best for their community/location.</p>
<p>Should Returning Officers be entitled to personal fees?</p>	<p>We believe that Returning Officers, who are independent of their employing local authorities, should be entitled to receive a personal fee at a rate that appropriately reflects the complexity and position of the role, the associated serious personal liabilities and additional workload.</p>

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<p>Is the current cycle of elections correct?</p>	<p>This is a matter for the UK Parliament and devolved administrations to determine but we can see some benefits to the cycle of all elections being reviewed. Electoral cycles vary depending on election type across four or five year terms. This creates significant combinations of polls in certain years. If all electoral cycles were changed to five years, this would in theory reduce the number of combined polls, unless an unscheduled UK Parliamentary general election was held.</p>
<p>What should the timescales be for introducing new legislation?</p>	<p>Unless there are exceptional and unavoidable circumstances, we believe that legislation should be in place six months prior to any election or referendum, and electoral registration canvass. For elections and referendums, the six months should run prior to the publication of the notice of election/referendum.</p>
<p>Does the AEA support the Law Commission recommendations to bring forward a single Electoral Administration Act?</p>	<p>We consider effecting the Law Commission's recommendations a priority policy matter.</p> <p>A single Electoral Administration Act should be brought forward to simplify electoral legislation.</p>

Summary of key electoral events and milestones: 2020 - 2024

Date	Event	Key issues / comments	Extent
31 January 2020	Date at which the next UK Parliamentary polling districts and polling places review must be completed by		UK
May 2020	Police and Crime Commission elections		E&W
	Local government elections including parish, some Mayoral and Combined Authority Mayoral elections		England
	London Assembly elections		London
	Mayor of London elections		London
July 2020	Canvass Reform		GB
May 2021	Scottish Parliamentary elections – 5-year cycle (Scottish Elections (Dates) Act 2016)		Scotland
	National Assembly for Wales elections – 5-year cycle (Wales Act 2014)		Wales
	Northern Ireland Assembly elections – 5-year cycle (Northern Ireland Miscellaneous Provisions Act 2014)		Northern Ireland
	Local government elections including County Council, some Mayoral and Combined Authority Mayoral elections		England

Date	Event	Key issues / comments	Extent
May 2022	UK Parliamentary general election (possibly based on new parliamentary boundaries subject to Parliamentary approval)	Possible introduction of Voter ID subject to legislation. Concerns of significant voter confusion if both Voter ID and new Parliamentary boundaries including new constituency/polling places for voters introduced at the same election for the first time	UK
	Local government elections including parish and some Mayoral and Combined Authority Mayoral elections		England
	Local government elections	5-year term from 2017 to avoid combination with Scottish Parliament	Scotland
	Local government elections, including community councils	5-year term from 2017 to avoid combination with NAW	Wales
May 2023	Local government elections, including parish and some Mayoral elections		England
	Local government elections		Northern Ireland

May 2024	Police and Crime Commission elections		E&W
	Local government elections including parish and some Mayoral and Combined Authority Mayoral elections		England
	London Assembly elections		London
	Mayor of London elections		London
May/June 2024	Possible European Parliamentary Election in the UK – subject to Brexit negotiations		Europe (excluding UK?)