



ASSOCIATION OF ELECTORAL ADMINISTRATORS NEWS RELEASE

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December election exposes fragility of UK electoral system

Holding an unscheduled general election two weeks before Christmas created confusion for voters and intensified pressure on stretched election teams. That's the message from a new post-election statement published today by the Association of Electoral Administrators (AEA).

The 2019 UK Parliamentary General Election – delivered on time for Christmas calls for electoral reform and dubs the electoral system 'fragile'.

The statement also reports that a year of unexpected polls left some councils unable to consistently meet electors' expectations.

A condensed general election timetable clashed with the annual voter registration canvass of every household in Great Britain. This created unique challenges, including:

Some people mistakenly assuming they were registered to vote, not understanding that the annual canvass enquiry form is for information-gathering only and that they also had to complete and return the subsequent 'Invitation to Register' form sent out to them.

Deadlines for voter registration and postal vote applications falling on the same day, but at different times. Electors must be registered before an absent vote application is made. Anyone who applied for a postal vote by the 5pm deadline on 26 November, but did not register to vote until after 5pm, could not vote by post.

High levels of online registration applications made by electors who were already registered to vote, creating unnecessary work for administrators.

A significant increase in enquiries from EU nationals assuming they could vote on 12 December. Only people from Cyprus, Malta and the Republic of Ireland living in the UK can vote in a Parliamentary general election.

The statement and its recommendations have been referred to the Minister for the Constitution, Chloe Smith MP, the Cabinet Office and the Electoral Commission.

Peter Stanyon, AEA chief executive, said: “This highly scrutinised last-minute election was, overall, delivered successfully and professionally. However, it is clearer than ever that our electoral system must change to deliver the service voters expect and deserve. Any legislative shifts must also reduce the bureaucratic burden on electoral administrators, who are already stretched to breaking point.”

Robert Curtis, AEA chairman, commented: “It is important we acknowledge that electoral administrators delivered the general election in December - the third in five years - in a matter of weeks. They should be applauded given the constraints of the current system and the short timetable they were set. Lessons must be learned. We continue to call for reform, working closely with government, the Electoral Commission and the wider electoral community to make it happen.”