



Kemi Badenoch MP
Minister of State
Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities

13 October 2021

Open letter from electoral suppliers across the UK

Dear Minister,

We the undersigned are writing to join the voices of concern across the electoral community about proposals from some MPs to reduce the UK Parliamentary general election timetable down from 25 days back to 17 working days.

We note the AEA and SOLACE outlined in their recent letter that any reduction in the timetable would substantially increase the likelihood of voter disenfranchisement, would disadvantage candidates and campaigners, and could potentially lead to polls failing.

All Electoral Registration Officers, Returning Officers and electoral administrators rely on Electoral Management Software (EMS) to run registration and polls. Those of us who are EMS suppliers are already preparing for significant changes included in the Elections Bill, alongside working hard to cater for upcoming parliamentary boundary alterations and diverging practice in the devolved nations.

Every change to an EMS must be carefully introduced and thoroughly tested. The high volume of change and overlapping primary and secondary legislation in recent years is increasing the challenges we and administrators face as poll types increase and differences compound. The potential for a snap UK general election run on a shorter timescale would present an extensive reconfiguration task. Such a task could not be rushed through.

From a print supplier perspective, the volume of paper, envelopes and working hours required to print and deliver approximately 48 million poll cards, over 8 million postal votes and more than 50 million ballot papers would make a 17-working day timetable extremely challenging.

These issues would also have a knock-on effect on candidates and campaigners looking to have leaflets and other material designed and

printed. Such orders would have to take secondary priority to legislatively required polling stationery, which could disadvantage electors and candidates alike.

The potential for current widespread material supply and haulage problems to continue for a longer period must also be flagged. As well as printing and distribution, this also has the potential to affect those companies manufacturing and supplying polling station sundries and equipment such as polling booths and ballot boxes.

Delivering millions of poll cards, postal votes and campaign materials in a shorter timetable would also add considerable pressure to our postal system. This would be particularly acute if a short notice election were called during the pre-Christmas period as in 2019, or during summer months.

Short timescales for delivery would also pose issues for overseas electors opting for postal votes. They would have to rely on two countries' postal services to deliver and return their ballot packs in a shorter period than currently, despite postal voting for overseas voters already being at a pinch-point.

We do not make these points because we want to maintain the status quo; we make them because we are hugely concerned that any move to reduce the existing timetable will be to the detriment of electors and candidates everywhere.

As a sector, we want elections to continue to run successfully for everyone involved. A shorter timetable is not the way to achieve this.

Yours sincerely,

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Civica Election Services

FDM plc

Idox

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