AEA Conference 2022 - delegate questions to DLUHC

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **QUESTION / COMMENT** | **ANSWER** |
| Will the provision for polling agents be repealed? | We consider it is appropriate that candidates may appoint polling agents, if they wish to do so. The presence of polling agents in polling stations can serve a useful purpose in upholding the integrity of the electoral process. There are no plans to change the current provisions on polling agents. |
| What is the rationale around having AV apps  re-verified for people who have registered the day before - especially when all of this is happening at  -11 and -12? | Consideration is being given to the identity verification process for a person who has registered to vote and applied for an absent vote arrangement at the same time, or within a close period of time. This is part of the ongoing work to further develop this policy.  The user experience will be designed to be as streamlined as possible and further engagement with stakeholders will take place on this issue.  As is the norm for election and registration matters, the detail of how these provisions will be implemented in practice will be set out in supporting secondary legislation in due course. |
| Will voter ID cards be linked to an address (so someone moving house needs a new card), or people end up with multiple cards? | The information on the Voter Card will be kept to a minimum – it will show the elector’s name and photograph, the local authority that issued the card, and a card number. This is the essential information required for the voting process, and in taking this approach we have deliberately sought to ensure inclusivity (though more information, such as the elector’s address and date of birth, will necessarily be required to apply for and receive a card).  Electors will not need to request a new card if they move house or move local authority - Voter Cards will be usable across all of Great Britain in polls where identification is required – not just in the area of the local authority that issues them. |
| Is there any expectation that voter ID cards will lead to a national ID scheme that goes beyond voting (if centralised and/or used for non-vote purposes)? | The government has always been clear that this policy will **not** introduce a national identity card by the back door; the Voter Card is solely for the purpose of supporting the democratic process.  The elector’s date of birth has been intentionally excluded from the Voter Card for Great Britain. The government also does not intend for this card to be used for demonstrating proof of age. |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Have you thought about the impact on the environment by creating more plastic items? I.e. App on the phone to have a digital elector ID card like a railcard? | Our research shows that the vast majority of electors already hold one of the acceptable forms of identification listed in the Elections Bill and the Voter Card will be available for the small number of electors who do not.  We currently do not have plans to issue a digital Voter Card. |
| It sounds like there is a lot of work not yet done or decided for voter ID. Will this be in place for May 2023 polls? | As set out in the Written Ministerial Statement on 6 January, it is the government’s expectation that voter identification will be in place in Great Britain in time for polls taking place in spring 2023, with the Voter Card system in operation in good time ahead of this.  As is the norm for election and registration matters, the detail of how these provisions will be implemented in practice will be set out in supporting secondary legislation in due course, and the split between primary and secondary legislation is consistent with the approach taken in current electoral law. Work is ongoing to develop and make the relevant secondary legislation. |
| Within Voter ID, will there be an ability to request a voter ID card at the point of registering to vote if they have no other suitable ID? | Electors will be able to submit an application for a Voter Card at the same time as they submit an application to register to vote – they will not need to wait to have their registration confirmed first. |
| Prob bit early in the process, but something that needs considering: Late online PV apps - when would they verify? As print data goes straight after 5pm @ -11. | The Elections Bill provides that identity verification checks can take place before an application is submitted, as part of both the online IER and absent vote application processes. This will allow identity verification checks against DWP data to take place in real time, as opposed to taking place in batches overnight, as is currently the case. This will make the identity verification at the point of application process more efficient.  We are alert to concerns about the impact of these processes in the run up to a poll and we will work with stakeholders in the elections sector to develop the detail of the identity verification for absent votes, including a workable exceptions process. The issue of verifying late online absent vote applications will be considered as part of this process. The government is determined to provide a fully accessible service which is as efficient and streamlined as possible. |
| What thoughts have been given to the "digitally excluded" - more likely not to be able to apply online for ID? | The government is determined to ensure that the application process is as accessible as possible.  For this reason, electors will have a range of options to choose from when applying for a GB |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | Voter Card – online, by post or in person:  We intend to ensure that online applications are as accessible as possible for voters. As such we will be consulting with a wide range of stakeholders when testing the application process, including the government chaired Accessibility of Elections Working Group, which includes representation from a number of disability charities and civil society organisations. The service will be designed in line with Web Content Accessibility Standards.  Electors will be able to make their application by post. Application forms will be available online to download and print (including on GOV.UK), but electors will also be able to request that EROs post an application form to them.  Electors will be able to apply for a Voter Card in person, though local authorities will be allowed to determine their own approach to this locally. For example, they may choose to use local government offices.  Electors will be able to submit an application for a Voter Card at the same time as they submit an application to register to vote – they will not need to wait to have their registration confirmed first. |
| How will you prevent electors receiving a digital Voter ID assuming they are now registered for life? | We currently do not have plans to issue a digital Voter Card. |
| Due to the tight implementation of the bill would it be prudent to encompass information being produced on the new changes during the canvass 2022 to electors. | There will be an extensive communications campaign, provided by the Electoral Commission, to inform the electorate of the new rules. All communications channels will be considered when planning this.  From autumn 2022, the EC is planning to work closely with civil society groups and other stakeholders to raise awareness of the new voter identification requirements, especially those who might need further assistance in obtaining accepted identification. The EC will also produce resources which local authorities can use themselves to raise awareness. From early 2023, the EC will run a mass media campaign for all voters so they understand the change in requirements and will understand where and how they can get a Voter Card if needed. |
| Will funding start to come through soon, so that we | As was the case with the introduction of Individual Electoral Registration, new burdens funding |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| can assign this workstream to a dedicated person / team. Engaging with us is brilliant, but time consuming | will be provided to cover the additional costs as a result of the changes.  The Government is committed to ensuring that these important changes are delivered in a careful and thoughtful way. Our priority remains ensuring local authorities have the necessary resources to continue to deliver our elections robustly and securely as they implement these new measures.  More information will be available in due course. |
| How will the photo uploaded be verified it is that person against the elector details for the voter card system | When applying for a Voter Card, an elector will need to provide evidence identifying themselves - this will ensure that we can trust they have uploaded the correct photo.  It will continue to be an offence to provide false information to an electoral registration officer, and the electoral registration officer will have the power to share details of applications and cards issued with the Police - we believe this will provide a strong deterrent to anyone considering making a fraudulent application. |
| If the legislation has gone through secondary legislation are we too far down the line for consultation with staff to make observations and possible amendments? | Secondary legislation is currently being developed in parallel with the primary legislation (the Elections Bill) progressing through the Parliamentary stages. Engagement with the elections sector and other stakeholders is ongoing during the development of the secondary legislation. |
| Will there be examples of what devices/equipment are recommended for use in polling stations as a result of the Election Bill's changes to accessibility? | Electoral Commission guidance will be produced to aid Returning Officers in providing reasonable support for enabling diasbled people to vote in polling stations. The new approach will allow support to be better tailored to the needs of disabled voters, and provides the flexibility for it to be more easily developed and improved where appropriate. This includes the flexibility to change or add to guidance, and also means there is not an unachievable duty on ROs if a specific product is not available for any reason.  The Commission’s guidance will recommend a range of support that should be made available to voters with disabilities, and this will be developed in conjunction with organisations representing disabled voters and those from the electoral sector. |
| With the on line absent vote application how will the signature be captured. Other details will be | Absent vote applicants using the online service will continue to be required to supply their personal identifiers (date of birth and a handwritten signature) as part of a postal vote application, |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| verified but PVS needs signature for comparison. | to be matched against the personal identifiers they submit on their postal vote statement which accompanies the ballot paper, to vote. Users will be asked to take a picture of their signature and upload it to the online service. EROs will retain the signature (and date of birth) so that it can be used to verify completed postal voting statements that are returned with postal vote ballots.  The process of uploading an image of a handwritten signature has already been tested with a range of users and it has proven to be an accessible and efficient way to roll out the online service. However, should a user be unable to upload a picture of their signature or otherwise complete their application, they will have the option to download their application form as is, to print it, add their signature and return it to their local ERO. |
| Funding is to be available Voter ID work - we seem to have lost IER funding - even though we are having to fund are you really going to fund this? | Central Government will cover the costs of voter cards for local authorities. |
| What is the Minister's position on online voting? | At present, online voting is not seen by many to be suitably rigorous and secure, and is vulnerable to cyber attack or fraud. The Government therefore has no plans to introduce online voting. |
| Why is it more appropriate for a British citizen who has lived abroad for 50 years to be able to vote, compared to a Spanish person living here for 50 years? | Citizenship restrictions are commonplace for participation in elections in most democracies, as well as across the EU. As we have a bilateral voting and candidacy rights agreement with Spain, Spanish Citizens legally resident in the UK will continue to be able to vote in local elections in England and NI in the same way they do now.  EU citizens have never been able to vote in UK Parliamentary elections. The right to choose the next UK Government is restricted to British citizens and those with the closest historic links to our country, and the Government has no plans to review this. |
| What identity checks/documents will be required in applications for absent votes? | The new identity verification process for absent vote applications in GB will apply to paper applications as well as applications made online.  The information an elector will need to provide will likely be very similar to the requirements for registration applications, whereby an applicant provides their National Insurance number which is |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | matched against Department of Work and Pensions (DWP).There will also be an ‘exceptions’ process for electors to follow if they are unable to provide a National Insurance number or cannot be verified through such data matching. EROs will have the power to request further information, including (if necessary) requesting an identity attestation from another registered elector.  The exceptions process will likely be similar to the exceptions process for registration applications, which involves the ERO requesting documentary evidence from the applicant in order to verify their identity. The applicant may be required to submit copies of one or more documents, depending on availability, such as a passport, photocard driving licence, birth certificate, or marriage or civil partnership certificate.  The government is determined to provide a fully accessible service which is as efficient and streamlined as possible.  Users of the online application service will need to complete the application form, by providing the required information, including a new identity verification requirement as described further below.  In addition to having their identity verified, applicants will continue to be required to supply their personal identifiers (date of birth and a handwritten signature) as part of a postal vote application, to be matched against the personal identifiers they submit on their postal vote statement which accompanies the ballot paper, to vote. |
| How will overseas electors be prevented fraudulently voting where they lived eg 40 years ago and not where they actually last lived in UK (often less marginal) | Overseas electors will continue to be entitled to register in respect of only one UK address. They will only be entitled to apply to register at the last address at which they were registered, or, if they were never registered, at the last address at which they were resident. The applicant’s connection to that address must be demonstrated to the ERO’s satisfaction.  If an applicant provides a different address, then they will be providing false information and may have committed an offence. As part of their application, a person must declare that they are applying at the address in respect of which they are eligible. Any ERO who suspects fraud will have the power to ask for further information.  We can be confident that a registration officer will not register the applicant without the |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | appropriate evidence connecting an applicant to an address. |
| Will there be funding for COVID issues this year - eg cleaners, additional staff, screens for counts (London boros didn't need to buy last year?) | The next financial year will see a significant increase in core spending power for local authorities through the Spending Review and Local Government Financial Settlement. This increase includes consideration of covid pressures, such as the need to comply with any remaining regulations and guidance in service delivery. As such, additional funding for covid-related measures forms part of the overall financial settlement.  We appreciate that ESMs and ROs take the safety of their staff and voters very seriously. While elections teams will need to consider current government guidance in relation to any COVID-19 measures that may be required in their particular area and plan accordingly, Government regulations and guidance on covid are considerably different to last year (reflecting the changes in the wider public health situation). Some specific challenges of last year, such as loss of venues due to the establishment of the vaccine rollout, have also fallen away.  However, we are looking to enable ROs to access some PPE that is available, masks and sanitiser, and will update on this as soon as possible |
| With regards protection against fraud - how does this stop someone register as a British citizen when they are not. | Overseas electors will be required to state in their declaration that they are a British citizen. It is an offence to provide false information to an electoral registration officer. Offences are clearly stated on application forms and on the register to vote website.  We can be confident that EROs who suspect fraud, for whatever reason, will ask applicants for further information and will not register the individual if they are not satisfied.  Where appropriate, an ERO may ask an applicant if they have a British passport which describes their national status as ‘British citizen’, the number, date and place of issue of that passport (Regulation 18(5) of the Representation of the People (England and Wales) Regulations 2001). |
| Is there a concern of online postal vote application not containing a signature that can be repeated on a postal vote statement? | *Answered above.* |
| Are all software providers involved in the programme as there will be lots of changes to | Commercial engagement has commenced with EMS suppliers on the coming changes. Further engagement will continue to take place as work progresses. |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| systems |  |
| How will signatures be collected on an online absent vote application system? | *Answered above.* |
| If you look at postal proxies it may be easier for the elector, but it is a longer process for an administrator because of the extra checking involved. | This question is unclear and so DLUHC have been unable to answer. If it is clarified and resubmitted we would be happy to provide an answer. |
| Within the Minst statement there was a link for costs and item 5 change of poll cards A4 enveloped- This has not been treated as a big change - whats the plan? | With the introduction of the new voter identification rules in GB, the new requirements will need to be explained to electors on the poll card - for example listing the forms of identification that will be accepted at the polling station. This will be too much information to fit onto the existing A5 poll card, and so alternatives have been considered including the introduction of larger, A4 sized poll cards. Further information on this will be available in due course. |
| Regarding temporary postal votes or to away address -made election only? | This question is unclear and so DLUHC have been unable to answer. If it is clarified and resubmitted we would be happy to provide an answer. |
| For online postal vote applications - will the elector still need to provide a signature? | *Answered above.* |
| If voters have to provide ID before they vote, shouldn't candidates need to provide ID before they stand for election? | This is not being considered as part of the Elections Bill. |
| who will issue voter id cards? will it be EROs or central? | The Elections Bill makes provision for an “Electoral Identity Document” to be provided free of charge, to ensure that all electors have access to an accepted form of identification - this will be a free Voter Card, issued by the ERO.  The digital team within the Electoral Integrity Programme has conducted a discovery project over recent months to explore the most appropriate system for applications for Voter Cards, and for their processing and delivery. We have worked closely with administrators to understand your |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | needs of such a service.  We are investing in creating an efficient, accessible service which will, similar to the IER digital service, harness technology to make the process as effective as possible for both electors and for electoral teams. DLUHC is responsible for delivering part of this Voter Card service - specifically an elector-facing online application process, and an ERO facing administrative application for processing applications. The full outcomes of the digital discovery project will be available shortly. |
| What impact on the 5 yearly signature PI refresh collection will the 3 year re-application have | Postal voters for reserved polls in GB will be able to hold a postal vote for a maximum of 3 years, and they will need to make a fresh application for a postal vote at least every 3 years if they wish to continue to vote by that method. As such, in future, there will be no provision for the 5 yearly signature refreshes for postal voters at reserved polls. |
| Once the Election bill has passed, what is the timetable for a single consolidated Electoral Act? | The government appreciates that electoral law is complex, but it is well understood by those who administer elections and referendums. It is robust and we can, as we have in the past, rely on it to underpin our free and fair elections and our confidence in their results.  The immediate priority of the government is the implementation of manifesto commitments, that has always been clear. That implementation work will continue beyond the Elections Bill becoming an Act. However, it is important to also be clear that the government remains committed to ensuring that our electoral law is fit for purpose, now and into the future.  Any process of consolidation will inevitably be a long-term project taking significant consideration and policy development. It is also something we would want to engage closely with you in the sector on. It is not something to rush at and potentially get wrong. |
| Funding for elements of the Elections Bill is being looked at - will this include the increase in EMS charges to LA's for systems to incorporate changes?. | As was the case with the introduction of Individual Electoral Registration, new burdens funding will be provided to cover the additional costs as a result of the changes. Further detail on this will be provided in due course. |
| Will other reasons be reviewed for emergency proxy. Attending Family funeral, called away to care for family at short notice are 2 we asked | The Government recognises that, in certain circumstances, electors may find themselves unable to get to their polling station. With this in mind, we have previously made provisions to extend the qualifying circumstances from to include those absent on the grounds of business or service. |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| about? | There was already provision for electors to apply for an emergency proxy in the event of a medical emergency. This move ensured that those absent at short notice for business or service reasons are eligible to apply for an emergency proxy vote in the days before the election. When considering this issue, the Government took the view that it was impossible for legislation to cover all possible circumstances which may prevent an elector from voting at short notice. The decision was therefore made to limit the provisions to the reasons which typically affected the greatest number of electors. In the light of this, the Government has no plans to extend the qualifying circumstances for appointing an emergency proxy at the present time. |
| if you're extending overseas elector declaration times to three years can we not do the same for anonymous electors? proving safety every year seems unnecessary | Anonymity must be balanced against the need to maintain the accuracy and integrity of the electoral register and respect the intentions of Parliament when the anonymous registration scheme was established - that an individual’s safety must currently be at risk.  Consequently, following consultation in 2017, the Government decided not to make changes to the duration of an anonymous registration, but committed to continue to investigate potential improvements in the area  These changes were implemented in 2018 and included:   * Broadening the professionals able to provide an attestation to include police inspectors, medical practitioners, nurses, midwives and refuge managers. * Expanding the list of court orders to include Domestic Violence Protection Orders and Female Genital Mutilation Protection Orders. |
| We bank online and most smart phones have facial recognition or finger print technology, when do you think we will be looking at secure online voting? | At present, online systems are not sufficiently secure and are vulnerable to cyber attack or fraud. The Government therefore has no plans to introduce online voting.  Furthermore, a fraudulent online vote could not be ‘undone’ as easily as, for example, a fraudulent bank transfer, where the bank is able to simply pay for a refund. This is a substantial issue that does not appear to have an obvious solution at present. |
| When is the government going to review the pay for polling staff? This hasn't happened for a decade or more and is certainly not attracting any | We are currently reviewing rates of pay as part of the funding review and intend to provide ROs with indicative rates to use for future elections. More information will be made available in due course. |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| new staff! |  |
| Isn't NI an argument for centralising registration (perhaps at county or regional levels) to achieve economy of scale and ease of administration | At this time the Government has no plans on implementing a centralised register in any other parts of the UK. Whilst we are happy with and take note of the successful implementation of such a system in Northern Ireland, a centralised registration system, including software and administration, is likely to be difficult and costly to develop. Such a significant change would require a programme of work and a piloted approach to testing it before being implemented. |
| Is there anything being discussed to improve resilience within the print services as the workload goes up but supplier availability has not? | The main stakeholder body for elections for administrators and governmental bodies - the Elections Advisory and Co-ordination Board which is co-chaired by DLUHC and the EC - has a sub-group specifically considering this issue.  We are working with electoral administrators and the EC on the issues here and to look at improving resilience, including more effective contractual and reporting provisions.  DLUHC officials are to convene a meeting of suppliers next month to talk through learning from previous polls and any issues they face ahead of 5 May 2022 and more generally. |