

The Association of Electoral Administrators



Rt Hon Andrew Stephenson MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of
State
Department for Levelling Up,
Housing and Communities

Peter Stanyon

Chief Executive
c/o PO Box 201, South Eastern, Liverpool,
L16 5HH

Telephone: 01442 211075

Mobile: 07855 589825

Email: peter.stanyon@aea-elections.co.uk

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Dear Minister,

Congratulations on your recent appointment as Parliamentary Under Secretary of State with responsibility for electoral matters.

I am writing to reiterate points we have previously made about the implementation of the Elections Act 2022.

In my letters to the then Secretary of State following the May 2022 polls and [of 11 July 2022](#), I stressed that for a 'no-fail' service like elections, projected Elections Act implementation timelines were optimistic at best, undeliverable at worst.

It was reassuring the sensible decision was taken to defer implementation of absent voting changes until after May 2023. However, the electoral community remains deeply concerned about tight timescales for introducing Voter ID in May 2023. We also remain concerned about the development and successful delivery of the other elements of the Act.

Voter ID

You will be aware we hosted an Elections Act 2022 event on behalf of your Department on 19 September. Over 700 delegates from across the UK, the vast majority of whom directly deliver the electoral process, made it clear they are still not confident Voter ID can be delivered as currently planned, to the quality voters deserve.

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With more detail now becoming publicly available, I must highlight the following specific issues:

- The Voter ID statutory instrument (SI) is due to be laid on 6 November 2022, just six months before May's scheduled polls. It is expected to come into effect by mid-January 2023, less than four months before. The Gould Principle recommends electoral legislation should not be introduced within the six months before a scheduled poll. This late provision of detailed legislative processes is likely to introduce significant risk to safe election delivery in areas with scheduled May 2023 polls.
- We are advised Electoral Commission guidance cannot be finalised and issued until the SI comes into effect. The Commission has already stated the level of detail they can provide has been affected by the lateness of the legislation. This will have a knock-on effect for poll preparations and on polling station staff training. It is likely to introduce inconsistency of approach across the May elections as the electoral community attempts to understand and implement the necessary changes to tried and tested processes.
- The work undertaken to develop and build the online Voter Authority Certificate application portal has been extensive. Producing Certificates centrally will reduce one area of burden on Electoral Registration Officers (ERO), which we welcome. However, we are concerned about the administrative burden on EROs to manually check each individual application to verify photographs. We would also underline the need for clarity on the issue and format of temporary certificates at the earliest opportunity. We are similarly concerned about the annual renewal burden anonymous voters will face.
- Local authorities will of course amplify the planned national public communications campaign from the Electoral Commission. However, we consider the decision not to provide local communications funding, particularly for areas running scheduled polls in 2023, to be a short-sighted and unhelpful decision. It would be of enormous benefit to voters as well as those delivering the elections if direct communications were provided for.

As the first areas to implement Voter ID, and with local knowledge of hard to reach groups, we would like to see additional funding made available for effective local targeting. This is [backed up by evaluation of the 2019 pilot schemes](#) which found the majority of

electors cited official local sources of information as the main way they became aware of the need to bring ID to vote.

- While we welcome funding for extra Poll Clerks in the early years of the new system, we would call for amounts available to reflect increased training and responsibilities. This should continue into Maximum Recoverable Amounts for future UK Parliamentary General and By-Elections. As referenced in the latest Electoral Commission post-polls reports, there is also concern amongst electoral administrators that recruitment has already become more difficult since the pandemic, and that Voter ID (and the other measures to come) is likely to reduce numbers further as complexity and responsibility rises.

Should there be any slip in the already tight timelines to introduce Voter ID, I continue to stress that through no fault of their own, EROs, ROs and electoral professionals will struggle to deliver the trusted elections expected of them. Voters will ultimately be the ones who suffer.

With ROs individually and directly liable for the outcome of elections, a huge amount is being asked of them professionally and personally. Should there be any additional timetable delays for whatever reason, the sector will have no choice but to recommend postponement.

Additional concerns

We are hopeful reviewed timetables for new postal vote handling requirements and online absent vote applications will result in a more robust approach.

Remaining areas of the Elections Act, including the overseas electors' franchise, and candidacy and voting rights of EU citizens, must not be neglected while higher profile elements are implemented.

These areas of the Elections Act will bring amounts of work that can only be estimated, but which are certain to affect some local authorities more than others. Work to understand and mitigate impacts for everyone involved must continue apace.

This is a particular issue as, with the new Prime Minister referring to a 2024 general election, a huge amount of new procedure is due to be introduced alongside new UK Parliamentary Constituency boundaries.

Going forward

We remain fully committed to assisting with the development and successful delivery of all changes that have been and are to be legislated for. We are on hand to ensure the electoral system can be adapted to include changes made by the Act, and safely delivered alongside other increasing challenges faced by EROs, ROs and electoral professionals.

To that end, we are grateful for the continuing open and professional manner in which we are able to engage with your officials.

I would welcome a meeting with you soon to discuss these matters and the current state of the sector.

Yours sincerely,



Peter Stanyon
Chief Executive

cc Simon Clarke, Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing, Communities & Local Government

Lisa Nandy MP, Shadow Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing, Communities & Local Government

Mick Antoniw MS, Counsel General and Minister for the Constitution

George Adam MSP, Minister for Parliamentary Business