

**Response to the
Government's Consultation
on the White Paper and Draft
Legislation on Individual
Electoral Registration**

**Committee on
Standards in
Public Life**

October 2011

1. The Committee has had an active interest in issues around electoral registration since our 11th report¹ in January 2007. We support the introduction of individual registration as an important measure to tackle electoral fraud.
2. We do, however, have concerns about some of the proposals in the White Paper and the potential impact they may have on the goal of improving confidence in the electoral process.
3. We are disappointed that the White Paper indicates that individuals will not have to supply a personal signature when they apply to be registered. A signature may not add significant additional security (although it is a useful additional check for postal vote applications). But it does mean that an individual takes personal responsibility for the fact that the details supplied on the form are correct. Not having the requirement for a signature as an identifier could replicate the risk with the current household registration system that one individual can complete the forms on behalf of everyone else living at that address, sometimes without them being aware that they have been registered.
4. We recognise the desire that Government services should be as user-friendly as possible. But the right to vote is a cornerstone of our democracy. Because of the risk of fraudulent applications we believe that registration should be treated in a similar way as applications for a passport where it is not possible to complete the full application process by telephone or online. That should not, of course, prevent the integration of electoral registration with other secure official Government transactions as has been the case with applications for driving licences.
5. We accept the desirability of aligning Northern Ireland legislation on individual registration with the rest of the United Kingdom. But we are not convinced that the best way to do so would be to weaken the current requirements for registration in Northern Ireland, particularly as they have been shown to be effective in restoring public confidence in the electoral process. In our view it would be helpful if electoral registration officers in Great Britain had the same powers as the Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland to seek proof of identity and proof of address in problematic cases.
6. While not strictly a standards issue, we suggest that some attention be given to the potential interaction between the decisions about individual registration, the effects of that on the completeness of the register and the timing of the next review of electoral boundaries intended to be based on the electoral register in December 2015.
7. More generally, 10 years after the introduction of postal voting on demand we think it would be timely to review its effects on the incidence of electoral fraud and public confidence in the integrity of the democratic process and to look again at the powers available to electoral registration officers in the light of that.

¹ The Committee on Standards in Public Life Eleventh Report: Review of The Electoral Commission CM 7006

Published electronically by the Committee on Standards in Public Life

**The Committee on Standards in Public Life
35 Great Smith Street
London SW1P 3BQ**

Tel: 020 7276 2595

Fax: 020 7276 2585

Internet: www.public-standards.org.uk

Email: public@standards.x.gsi.gov.uk

September 2011