



Lord True CBE
Minister of State
Cabinet Office 70 Whitehall London SW1A 2AS

Lord Evans of Weardale KCB DL
Chair, Committee on Standards in Public Life
1 Horse Guards Road
London
SW1A 2HQ
sent via email public@public-standards.gov.uk

25 April 2022

Dear Lord Evans,

Thank you for your letter of 21 April 2022, regarding the measures set out in the Elections Bill, in regards to the Electoral Commission. As the Bill Minister in the House of Lords where this Bill is now being considered, I am responding on behalf of the Secretary of State, to whom this correspondence is also copied.

In bringing forward the Elections Bill, the Government seeks to implement key manifesto commitments to ensure our democracy is secure, fair, modern, and transparent. In 2016, (then Sir, now Lord) Eric Pickles produced the comprehensive report '*Securing the Ballot*' for the government on election fraud. This followed the 2015 election court judgement on election corruption in Tower Hamlets. Combined with previous election court rulings, this exposed the vulnerability of Britain's electoral system. Such weaknesses have not been fully addressed to date and one of the conclusions of the report was that the current system of oversight of the Electoral Commission is not effective.

The public rightly expects efficient and independent regulation of the electoral system and it is vital we have an independent regulator that commands trust across the political spectrum. In light of this, we must reflect on the current structures charged with the important responsibility of holding the Commission to account, and where there is a need for change, be prepared to make it. The provisions of the Bill providing for a Strategy and Policy Statement are necessary and represent a proportionate approach to reforming the accountability of the Electoral Commission to the UK Parliament. The Statement will provide the Commission with a clear articulation of principles and policy priorities, approved by Parliament, to have regard to when going about its work.

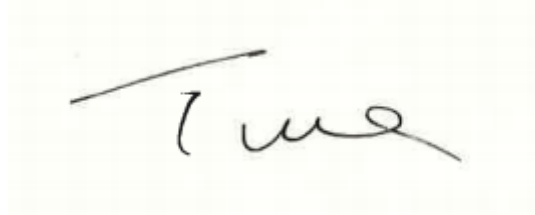
I disagree with the concerns in your letter about the risk to the independence of the Electoral Commission. As a result of the provisions in the Bill, the Commission will be required to *have regard* to the Strategy and Policy Statement. To be clear, the new duty to have regard to the Statement will not replace the Commission's other statutory duties or give the government

new powers to direct the Electoral Commission's decision-making. The Commission will remain operationally independent and governed by the Commissioners.

The approval of both Houses of Parliament will be required before any new or revised Statement (except for typographical or clerical errors) can be designated. The UK Parliament will therefore be able to reject in full any draft Statement it disagrees with. Further, the Commission will remain accountable to the UK Parliament through the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission. The Statement will provide the UK Parliament an opportunity for greater visibility and scrutiny of the Commission's work. This will be done by expanding the functions of the Committee to give it the power to examine the Commission's compliance with the duty to have regard to the Statement.

Thank you for writing and I hope this letter offers reassurance to your concerns and those of your Committee. I will be publishing this letter on gov.uk.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink on a light-colored background. The signature is written in a cursive style and appears to read 'True'. There is a long horizontal line above the first part of the signature.

Lord True CBE