



Government response to the Levelling Up,
Housing and Communities Select Committee
Report on Electoral Registration

Presented to Parliament by the Secretary of State for Levelling
Up, Housing and Communities by Command of His Majesty

May 2024

CP 1090



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ISBN 978-1-5286-4964-3
E03135678 5/24

Printed on paper containing 40% recycled fibre content minimum

Printed in the UK by HH Associates Ltd on behalf of the Controller of His Majesty's Stationery Office.

Introduction

The Government welcomes the Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee's report on electoral registration, following their inquiry into the changes related to voter registration arising from The Elections Act 2022 and the impact of these legislative changes on Electoral Registration Officers. We are grateful to the Committee and all those that provided evidence to it.

As context to the Government's response to the recommendations, we note the clearly defined roles of the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and the Electoral Commission. The Government is responsible for developing electoral registration policy, the legislative framework and a range of digital systems which support Electoral Registration Officers in the creation and maintenance of complete and accurate registers. The Government works closely with the Electoral Commission, the independent regulatory body, whose responsibilities include giving guidance and support to Electoral Registration Officers and Returning Officers in undertaking electoral registration and conducting elections and recall petitions effectively and in accordance with the law.

As noted in our evidence to the Committee, the Government remains of the view that registering to vote is a civic duty, and every eligible elector who wants to participate should be on the electoral register. The introduction of online registration in 2014 for the first time, using the Register to Vote service, made registering to vote easier and more convenient than ever before and means individuals can apply to register to vote at a time convenient to them. The principle underpinning Individual Electoral Registration is that individuals are responsible for their own registration, and we do not intend to introduce electoral reforms which would undermine that underlying principle. One of the Government's policy priorities is ensuring our democracy is secure, fair, modern and transparent. We place citizens' participation at the heart of our democracy, trusting their choices and maintaining their confidence in our elections. We also believe it is part of the 'cementing' of the relationship between individuals and the state. Indeed, in March 2020 there were 47.6 million entries on the Parliamentary registers in the UK. This is the highest number ever recorded, and demonstrates that the introduction of individual electoral registration continues to deliver high levels of accurate registration.

Electoral registration is arguably increasingly event-led, with the calling of a General Election, prompting millions of citizens to check their registration and apply to register. For instance, 3.85 million people applied to register to vote ahead of the 2019 General Election. We recognise that event-led registration can create additional issues for administrators, but it is evidence that citizens can participate successfully. While we would all like to see more people registered correctly to vote, the Government continues to be of the view that there are not any material barriers making it difficult to register. There are several different channels by which to register - online, using the paper form, or by phone or in person in areas where the Electoral Registration Officer offers this.

As noted in our evidence to the Committee, the Electoral Commission reported recently on the accuracy and completeness of the electoral register in 2023. The Electoral Commission publishes these studies periodically, typically on a three-year cycle. These reports, as well as using original research by the Commission, also draw upon data from government sources including the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and National Records of Scotland (NRS). We note that in Great Britain, the levels of both accuracy and completeness have remained largely stable over time. It is not the case that there are increasing numbers of eligible individuals who are not registered to vote.

Alongside work on electoral registration, the Government has brought forward considerable changes to improve integrity in modernising the identification of voters at polling stations to require photographic identification and expand and improve access for disabled people, ensuring that legislation and guidance takes account of a wide range of disabilities and providing for greater options for support of disabled voters. This has been done against a backdrop of also facilitating modern, digital, and secure application processes to make it easier for people, who want to apply for absent votes, to have choice of online as well as the traditional paper route.

The structure of this paper corresponds to the recommendations in the Committee's report. Text taken from the Select Committee report is highlighted in italics. This response, on behalf of the whole of government, responds to the recommendations directed at Government by the Committee.

Responses to Recommendations

Recommendation - The availability of the open register raises concerns about hostile actors attempting to distort our democracy. However, we recognise that credit checking agencies utilise the register to confirm the address of individuals. Without such access individuals may be denied credit or other services. We therefore recommend a review on which types of companies can purchase the open register with an individual's consent. (Paragraph 43)

Government response:

The Government has no plans to review which types of organisations can purchase the open register. The Government remains of the view that there are significant wider social and economic benefits to the retention of the open register, including its use by charities and voluntary agencies to help with fundraising, by local councils when identifying and contacting residents, and by organisations tracing and identifying the beneficiaries of wills, pensions and insurance policies. Many businesses also make use of the open register to check the details of people who apply for their services. Given these benefits, the Government will ensure that the open register remains accessible. However, while there are no restrictions in electoral law as to who can purchase the open register, or for which purposes, those who do purchase it must still comply with the relevant data protection legislation.

The open register omits all electors who have requested that their details be removed from this version. Any elector who is concerned to protect their privacy has thus been able, since 2002, to opt out of the open version of the register. This remains an important element of the process.

Recommendation - Public bodies such as DVLA or HM Passport Office should prompt individuals to register or update their details on the electoral register when they are using public services, such as driving licence applications or passport renewals. In addition, we recommend that signposting voter registration when national insurance numbers are issued to citizens who reach sixteen years of age would be a way of ensuring that more young people are entered on the electoral register. We expect the DWP, DVLA and HM Passport Office to write to us within three months of this Report being published to set out their plan for implementing these recommendations. (Paragraph 48)

Government response:

As noted in our oral evidence to the Committee, since September 2021, HMRC have included signposting to voter registration in the National Insurance Number (NINO) notification letter they send to young people when they reach 15 years and 9 months. Young people are also made aware of their eligibility to register through the annual canvass process, administered by Electoral Registration Officers in their local area.

The Government remains interested in exploring other opportunities within public services to signpost eligible individuals to register to vote. However, the value of signposting eligible electors to register to vote, through public services, must be balanced against the risk of driving unnecessary duplicate applications. Triggering fresh applications from those already correctly registered would be of no benefit to the citizen and would create additional burdens for electoral administrators within local authorities.

Recommendation - We therefore recommend that legislation be brought forward by the Government to enable the sharing of data held by DVLA, DWP, and HM Passport Office with EROs and to enable EROs to use that data fully. A review should be held to consider if the registration with DVLA, HM Passport Office and DWP should require electoral registration. This review should take into account those with transient lifestyles and the speed and effectiveness of the electoral registration process. (Paragraph 57)

Government response:

The Government believes that broader and better use of existing data sharing can support effective electoral registration, but the Government also remains of the view that individuals should be responsible for their own registration. The Government notes that the Committee's recommendation that a review should be held to consider if registration with public services 'should require electoral registration'. The Government has no intention of making electoral registration effectively compulsory for anyone who wants or needs a driving license, passport or benefits, and therefore has no plans to conduct a review. Registering to vote, like voting itself, should be a choice. While the Government encourages everyone to do so, we do not believe it should be compulsory.

Electoral Registration Officers already have several opportunities to use data to support them in their responsibility to maintain complete and accurate registers. Electoral Registration Officers use national records held by DWP to check applicant information during the register to vote determination process. We are pleased to report that the Register to Vote service has a successful match percentage of 91.6% since the service began, and The Voter Authority Certificate service has a successful match percentage of 92.9% since the service began. In addition, Electoral Registration Officers continue to have the ability to use locally held data within their councils, such as education or council tax records.

The Committee has mentioned specifically those with transient lifestyles. We note that every residential property is contacted annually, under the Annual Canvass process by their local

Electoral Registration Officers, to maintain complete and accurate registers. The reform of the Annual Canvass in 2019, introduced the use of Government data to help Electoral Registration Officers better target their resources and allow Electoral Registration Officers to focus their efforts on hard-to-reach groups. We believe that Electoral Registration Officers, with local knowledge, know their areas, and demographics best. Alongside national data matching with DWP, they have the flexibility in legislation use specific arrangements including methods of communication for properties of higher turnover such as Houses of Multiple Occupation, student accommodation including halls of residences, and hostels. This can include visits to the property if needed.

We note that Electoral Registration Officers in areas with higher levels of population change can and do send additional Household notification letters and in addition, published Electoral Commission guidance notes that Electoral Registration Officers can choose to liaise directly with university accommodation officers and managers/landlords of HMOs to maximise the effectiveness of their communications.

As the Government has noted in the introduction, while we would all like to see more people correctly registered to vote, the Government continues to be of the view that there are not any material barriers making it difficult to register. There are several different channels by which to register - online, using the paper form, or by phone or in person in areas where the Electoral Registration Officer offers this.

The Government has no current plans to make additional changes to existing data sharing agreements.

Recommendation - We acknowledge the Government's concerns about automatic registration, but we do not believe they are insurmountable because other countries of the world have managed to overcome them. We therefore recommend that the Government adopt a strategy to move towards an opt in automated voter registration system over the next few years, while monitoring the pilot in Wales. The Electoral Commission should write to us in 4 weeks with a detailed plan including milestones and dates for moving towards implementing automated voter registration with a clear outline of how people can protect their data privacy. (Paragraph 66)

Government response:

As highlighted above, the Government's position has not changed, that registering to vote is a civic duty, and every eligible elector who wants to participate should be on the electoral register. We remain of the view, however, that it should be up to each individual to decide whether to engage with the democratic process or not. As highlighted in our introduction to this response, the introduction of online registration in 2014 for the first time, using Register to Vote, made registering to vote easier and more convenient than ever before. For instance, in March 2020 there were 47.6 million entries on the Parliamentary registers in the UK, the highest number ever recorded. It remains the case that online registration means individuals can apply to register to vote at a time convenient to them. The principle underpinning Individual Electoral Registration is that individuals are responsible for their own registration.

As the Government has stated previously to Parliament, many common suggestions regarding innovation in registration would most likely require a centralised electoral register and the

Government has no current plans to introduce such a system. Previous attempts to do so have proven challenging and ultimately have been unsuccessful. The Co-ordinated Online Record of Electors (CORE) programme was terminated in 2011 as the costs of building and running the database were disproportionate to its potential benefits. In the UK, as of February 2024, we currently have 331 separate registers, compiled and held locally by Electoral Registration Officers – there is no single, national register. Registers are held locally and updated regularly, and we believe this is a core strength of the current system.

Electoral Registration Officers are responsible for maintaining the completeness and accuracy of their local electoral registers. The introduction of automatic registration would be at odds with this and would likely lead to this responsibility, at least in part, being transferred to Central Government. This is not a change the Government supports. If Central Government was responsible for maintaining the electoral register there would inevitably be suspicions that it was influencing the system to the political advantage of the Government of the day, undermining faith in our elections system and democracy. With registration undertaken at the local level, by Electoral Registration Officers who really know their local areas and are accountable locally, these pitfalls are avoided. The Government understands that the Welsh Government is planning to trial automatic registration for devolved elections and will be paying close attention to any unintended or negative effects on registration for reserved elections. We believe that having multiple registers aids security in data protection terms.

Recommendation - The Government should introduce measures to support educational establishments including schools to better educate young people about the importance of voting and to encourage them to register to vote, as is the case in Canada. (Paragraph 73)

Government response:

Attainers

We recognise the interest of the Committee in the registration of attainers (those who are under the voting age, and therefore cannot yet vote).

Reforms over the last decade have meant that it is now easier and more convenient for young people to register to vote as they reach voting age. We are of the view that the success of Individual Electoral Registration since 2014, has given eligible electors (including those just reaching voting age) the right to take ownership of their registration and to choose when they want to make an application to register. The introduction of the Register to Vote website in 2014, made registering to vote easier and more convenient than ever before, with an application taking as little as 5 minutes to complete. Since this change, the levels of both overall accuracy and completeness of the electoral register in Great Britain have remained largely stable.

The role of the Electoral Commission and Electoral Registration Officers

The Electoral Commission has statutory responsibility to support Electoral Registration Officers, with clear guidance, and publishes a range of democratic engagement resources for Electoral Registration Officers, charities and other organisations to use to raise awareness about democracy, from voter registration to voting options, amongst all voter groups including young people. The responsibility for promoting voter registration sits with the Electoral Commission and Electoral Registration Officers.

Higher Education

In terms of higher education institutions specifically, existing legislation and guidance issued by the Office for Students, the independent regulator of higher education in England, requires higher education providers to promote electoral registration among their student populations, this is known as the 'Student Electoral Registration Condition'. Students can register either at their home address, their term-time address, or both. As for other groups of electors, there are several different channels by which eligible applicants including those in education can register - online, using the paper form, by phone or in person where the Electoral Registration Officer offers this.

The Cabinet Office commissioned IFF research to undertake an evaluation of the Student Electoral Registration Condition, which sought to understand how the Condition is being interpreted and implemented within the sector, and its effectiveness to date. The evaluation (Student Electoral Registration Condition Evaluation) was published on GOV.UK in April 2021¹. The Government has no current plans to extend the legal requirement to promote voter registration to additional education and training routes.

Citizenship Education

All schools must offer a broad and balanced curriculum, which promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils at the school, and prepares pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life. Furthermore, we expect all schools and further education institutions to promote the fundamental British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of those of different faiths and beliefs. Citizenship education is an effective way of doing this and we expect teachers to reinforce these values as well as to support pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development (SMSC).

Citizenship education has been a compulsory subject in maintained secondary schools since 2002. It is currently part of the National Curriculum at key stages 3 and 4 and schools can choose to teach it at key stages 1 and 2 if they wish to do so. Academies and free schools have greater freedom and autonomy in how they operate for areas such as the curriculum, but they are expected to teach a curriculum that is comparable in breadth and ambition to the National Curriculum, and many choose to teach the full National Curriculum to achieve this. Ofsted will inspect this just as it would in a maintained school.

The [programmes of study](#) set out the core knowledge, skills and values required to prepare pupils to play a full and active part in society. This includes teaching pupils how to explore political and social issues critically, to weigh evidence, to debate, and to make reasoned arguments.

As part of Citizenship, pupils will learn about Parliament, the importance of voting and elections, the role of police, courts and justice, free press, human rights and international law and the governments of other countries, both democratic and non-democratic. They are also taught about the actions citizens can take in democratic and electoral processes to influence decisions locally, nationally and beyond.

As with all curriculum subjects, it is for schools to make their own decisions about how to teach the curriculum in a way that best meets the needs of their pupils. This allows teachers to use their professional expertise and understanding of their pupils to develop the right approach for their

¹ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/60f942e58fa8f5042bb97a3a/10174_-_SERC_Evaluation_-_Report_v6.00.pdf

particular school. Schools can also help pupils to set up their own networks or clubs to focus on political issues, where they are deemed appropriate.

Civic engagement as part of citizenship curriculum

Pupils should be taught about the diverse national, regional, religious and ethnic identities in the United Kingdom and the need for mutual respect and understanding to prepare them to take their place in society as responsible citizens. In addition, they should be taught about different ways in which a citizen can contribute to the improvement of their community, this includes the opportunity to participate actively in community volunteering. The citizenship curriculum provides an important platform for discussions about global issues, such as conflict situations, and their potential impact on human rights.

Fundamental British Values

Since 2014, every school has been required to promote actively the fundamental British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance for those of different faiths and beliefs.

Promotion of these values plays an important role in preparing our children and young people for life in a modern and diverse Britain. It is important to articulate British Values as being core and fundamental to life in Britain. They are not uniquely British, but they are the things we value in Britain. Schools should reinforce important shared principles that underpin our society, whether that be upholding democratic rights or more generally promoting respect and tolerance.

Schools should ensure that political expression by pupils is done sensitively and that all views are respected, avoiding disruption and feelings of intimidation and/or the targeting of other pupils and staff. Ofsted inspects how well schools promote these values. The guidance can be found here: [Promoting fundamental British values through SMSC - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/promoting-fundamental-british-values-through-sm-sc).

We continue to provide free resources for teachers and school leaders to support them with this via our [Educate Against Hate](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/educate-against-hate) website. This website provides teachers, school leaders and parents with the information, guidance and support they need to challenge radical views including racist and discriminatory beliefs.

The Department for Education does not specify how schools should teach the curriculum. We trust schools to use their professional judgement and understanding of their pupils to develop the right teaching approach for their particular setting, drawing on the expertise and support of subject associations and other organisations.

The UK Youth Parliament

Following the announcement by The British Youth Council of their closure, The Government is committed to the UK Youth Parliament and to ensuring that it continues to both represent and amplify the voices of young people. We have been working with the British Youth Council and are in consultation with UK Youth Parliament delivery partners from English regions and the devolved administrations, to understand the implications of the British Youth Council's closure and options for securing the delivery of the UK Youth Parliament programme and Youth Select Committees going forward.

This work is led by the Department for Digital Culture, Media and Sport, whose immediate priority is to ensure that planned activities for the financial year 2024/2025 can go ahead. DCMS has been working at pace to identify a suitable organisation which can hold overall grant management responsibility for the UK Youth Parliament in 2024/2025. In parallel, DCMS will be engaging with young people and key stakeholders to plan for the longer-term future of the programme.

National Citizen Service

The National Citizen Service (NCS) Trust is an Arm's Length Body of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. NCS Trust's key focus is the delivery of the National Citizen Service (NCS) programme, a flagship youth programme for 16-17 year olds in England. NCS seeks to deliver a number of important outcomes for young people - among them instilling a belief that they can have an impact on the world around them. This encompasses social action and civic participation. Social action is a core objective of the NCS offer and there is evidence that service learning on NCS (social action) has positive impacts on democratic participation.² Moreover, all of NCS's away from home experiences use resources from [Democracy Classroom](#) and include sessions on democracy, elected representatives and parliament vs government. 'Parliament UK' also delivers some of these sessions, focusing on group debate on topical issues.

Over the coming months, NCS is upweighting its focus on civic participation through a variety of additional activities:

- **Our Generation Our Vote.** This is a cross-sector political literacy education programme, culminating in an election specifically for young people under 18, across England and Wales. NCS has co-funded polling of young people around their views on key issues and will support its network to engage with the resources and the election.
- **Give an X.** NCS is supporting the 'Give an X' campaign, a collaboration of My Life My Say and creative agency Shape History. This is a youth-led, non-partisan youth voter registration initiative designed to get every single eligible young person registered to vote and into polling booths for the next election.

Recommendation - Electoral Registration Officers should also assist adult social care providers to ensure that people in receipt of care are still on the electoral register and to help them to access postal or proxy votes so that they can continue to play their part as active citizens. (Paragraph 74)

Government response:

Electoral Registration Officers already have a legislative duty, to maintain complete and accurate registers in their local area, and support those eligible to register to vote, to register, and participate in the voting process.

The Electoral Commission has published guidance and good practice to care home providers, on supporting those in their care to register, including information about the voter registration system in England to ensure that care home residents are registered to vote in the same way as any other

² <https://wearencs.com/sites/default/files/2021-12/NCS-and-Democratic-Engagement-summary-report.pdf>

eligible residents in a registration area. The guidance is based on the fundamental principle that every individual who is eligible should be registered to vote irrespective of any illness or disability they may have, and details support that can be provided by Electoral Registration Officers, and care home providers to support individuals with both registering to vote, and the process of voting.

Electoral Registration Officers are required through the annual canvass process to contact all residential addresses in their area, including care homes, to establish if the information they currently hold on the electoral register is complete and accurate. Every residential care home must have a responsible person for the property who may lawfully disclose information to the Electoral Registration Officer in respect of who is residing at a property and is eligible to be registered. Following the completion of the annual canvass process, Electoral Registration Officers may start the Invitation to Register (ITR) process for individuals whose names have been provided, and are not on the electoral register, or the deletions process for electors who no longer appear to be resident. Electoral Commission guidance encourages Electoral Registration Officers to make regular contact with responsible persons outside of the annual canvass.

We note the Committee's interest specifically in absent voting arrangements for those in receipt of adult social care. We have recently made improvements to the process for applying for an absent vote for all electors. Under the Elections Act 2022, it is now possible for electors to apply for a postal or proxy vote online through the new digital absent vote application service. The online service gives electors the opportunity to submit an absent vote application in the same browser session as their registration application. This makes it quicker and easier for an elector to have an arrangement in place ahead of an election. Electors also remain able to apply via paper form for an absent vote arrangement, if preferred.

Recommendation - We recommend that the government work with these specific groups, such as disabled voters and those with learning disabilities, about the voter ID requirement ahead of the next general election. (Paragraph 92)

Government response:

The Electoral Commission has a statutory duty to raise public awareness of all elements of the democratic process, including changes made to it such as the introduction of voter identification in Great Britain, to ensure all electors can participate fully in elections. The Electoral Commission works closely with charities and organisations representing people with disabilities and with the elections sector to support people with disabilities to take part in the democratic process. In order to ensure that everyone can register to vote and have a good experience of voting they provide accessible information for eligible electors on registering to vote and voting, and this includes easy read guides.

We note that The Equality Act 2010 (Section 149) requires public authorities and those exercising public functions including Electoral Registration Officers to comply with the Public Sector Equality Duty to have due regard to the need to advance equality of opportunity by encouraging participation in public life, which would include voting. The Election Commission has published guidance for Electoral Registration Officers and Returning Officers about the Duty, and actions that can be taken locally to raise awareness about the voting process and to support available to voters with disabilities. The Electoral Commission's published guidance includes information for electoral officials on working with relevant partners, and disability organisations, as well as how to

promote, communicate with and support voters with disabilities in the voting process. They also provide guidance for Returning Officers to use to make their polling stations more accessible.

Officials at The Department for Levelling Up, Housing, and Communities work closely with the Electoral Commission, offering significant leadership and ensuring they have early sight of any proposed changes. Officials also work with various representative groups to promote engagement with the democratic process, and, to that end, the Accessibility of Elections Working Group (AEWG) meets quarterly and comprises official level representatives of the UK's governments, electoral sector workers and representative groups such as Mencap, Mind, RNIB, Re-think, NHS Trust's Mental Health leads and others. The group discusses issues and developments and has worked to support delivery of the Elections Act changes, including Voter ID and promote awareness of support available to people with disabilities to participate in the voting process. The group acts as a means for both issues to be raised with government and for promulgation of change when being brought forward and when enacted. Separately to the Working Group, DLUHC officials work closely with our counterparts in the Scottish and Welsh Governments, meeting regularly to discuss current workstreams.

When developing online services, including Register to Vote and the new services to apply for a Voter Authority Certificate, postal or proxy vote, the Government always aims to undertake testing with users with a wide range of disabilities, as well as users with lower levels of digital skills, confidence and internet access.

Recommendation - We disagree with the Government's view of the adequacy of the list of accepted photo ID and believe that it should be widened to include other forms, such as police warrant cards, emergency services passes, and non-London travel passes. This is the case in Canada and has not proved a problem there. (Paragraph 93)

Government response:

We are pleased that 99.75% of voters were able to cast their vote successfully at the polls in May 2023, utilising the existing list of accepted photographic documents.

The broad range of 21 forms of photographic identification documents accepted in polling stations in Great Britain provides a greater number of options for electors than is the case in Northern Ireland where it is only 9. Expired documents where the photograph remains a good likeness to the elector are also accepted. Research shows that 96% of electors already own an accepted form of photographic identification. For the small number that do not, the Government specifically created the Voter Authority Certificate – this is an accepted form of identification that is available from local authorities free of charge, and which ensures that all eligible electors continue to have the opportunity to vote.

The Government reviewed the list of accepted identification as part of the wider evaluation of the impact and implementation of voter identification at the May 2023 local elections in England and concluded that at this time that there are no suitable additions to be made to this list. We remain committed to reviewing regularly the list, and if suitable additions are found in future we will legislate accordingly. For example, we have recently consulted on the option of adding the HM Armed Forces Veteran Card to the list, following its full launch in January 2024, with the intention for it to be added to the list of accepted documents.

We will continue to work with the Electoral Commission, local authorities, political parties and other partners in order to promote awareness of the new rules and requirements, and the availability of the new Voter Authority Certificate.

Recommendation - Central and local government and the Electoral Commission need to work together to raise awareness of the need for Voter Authority Certificates prior to the next general election, to ensure that those who do not have ID are not shut out of the electoral process. (Paragraph 94)

Government response:

The Government is clear that the introduction of voter identification must not prevent anyone who is eligible to vote from having the opportunity to do so. As noted above, Government research shows that 96% of electors already own one of the broad list of accepted photographic identification documents. All eligible electors are also able to apply for the Voter Authority Certificate, available to all electors free of charge to ensure accessibility of the policy. Guidance and support for electors applying for a Voter Authority Certificate is available in accessible formats such as easy read, large print and braille.

In line with its statutory responsibility, the Electoral Commission launched its 2024 voter identification communications campaign in January to raise awareness of both the voter identification requirement and the Voter Authority Certificate. As part of the awareness raising campaign, the Commission are undertaking a programme of engagement with partners including charities and civil society organisations to target awareness raising amongst specific groups about the changes and to support electors with applying for the free Voter Authority Certificate should they need one. The Commission will continue to conduct public awareness campaigns ahead of each set of relevant polls – including ahead of the next UK Parliamentary General Election, when it is called.

Local government has a key role to play in raising awareness amongst the local electorate, and the Electoral Commission has provided a range of assets and materials which can be used by local authorities in their local engagement and communications activities. This is supported by the £7.4 million additional funding provided by the Government to local authorities in 2023 to support local engagement on voter identification.

The Government supports the Commission's awareness raising activity using government communications channels and levers, including:

- banners and messaging on GOV.UK information and transaction pages;
- encouraging promotion of messages through posters and information in places such as job centres, doctors' or dentists' surgery waiting rooms, local council offices, etc;
- use of government forums such as the Accessibility of Elections Working Group to discuss with disability groups ideas around best practice and novel approaches to raising awareness; and
- amplification of Electoral Commission messaging through government media channels including social media.

Information on accepted forms of identification and how to apply for a Voter Authority Certificate is also included on all poll cards sent to all electors ahead of a poll.

Recommendation - The Government must do its best to observe the Gould principle and where possible apply it to the timetable for implementing the remaining changes stemming from the Elections Act 2022. (Paragraph 100)

Government response:

The Government has been clear throughout on its aim to deliver all the measures within the Elections Act during the lifetime of this Parliament. The Government is pleased to update the Committee that all measures within the Act have been implemented. As detailed, in our response to the next recommendation below, EU Voting and Candidacy Rights (EUVCR) came into force from 7 May 2024, ahead of the May 2025 local elections.

The Government remains of the view that it is important that, wherever possible, there is ample time for both electors and the electoral sector to understand and implement the new requirements, before consideration of further electoral reform. In the lead up to the polls in May 2024, the Government worked closely with the Electoral Commission and elections teams across all local authorities, providing support where appropriate. Government will continue with this approach ahead of the next UK Parliamentary general election.

The Government does appreciate that multiple reforms have now been implemented flowing from the Elections Act 2022 to increase the integrity of our electoral system, and that these are being delivered by the electoral sector alongside their 'business-as-usual' activities. The Government worked closely with the electoral sector on the planning for delivery of the Act and has and will continue to provide support to local authorities. This includes close working with key sector representative groups including the Association of Electoral Administrators, the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and the Electoral Commission.

Recommendation - We note with concern that the Association of Election Administrators has said that there is still insufficient practical detail to prepare for these changes. Secondary legislation needs to be brought forward immediately to ensure that Electoral Registration Officers can plan ahead and reduce the risk of people not being able to vote. (Paragraph 101)

Government response:

In reference to Paragraph 12 of the Committee's report, we note that secondary legislation has been delivered successfully for all provisions of the Elections Act 2022, including changes related to the UK Parliamentary franchise and voting process. The Overseas Electors measures, including removal of the arbitrary 15-year limit on voting rights for British citizens living overseas, commenced from 16 January 2024. The provisions of The Elections Act related to the new online absent vote application service, the new identity requirements for absent vote applications, and the requirement to reapply for a postal vote at least every 3 years came into force on 31 October 2023. The new limit on the number of proxies a person may hold came into force on 31 October 2023, and the associated new proxy voting offence came into force on 31 January 2024. The postal vote handling and secrecy measures came into force for polls from 2 May 2024.

Furthermore, again in reference to Paragraph 12, the Government notes that the Elections Act 2022 will change the eligibility of some EU citizens to vote in local elections in England and Northern Ireland, and PCC elections in England and Wales. Secondary legislation has already been delivered, and the measures commenced from 7 May 2024, in time for the May 2025 local elections. The measures have no impact on a forthcoming General Election, as EU citizens are not, and have never been, included in the UK Parliamentary franchise.

The priority of the Government has always been to implement policies flowing from the Elections Act properly, whilst ensuring that everyone who has the right to vote continues to be able to do so, and that the electoral sector is prepared sufficiently and resourced to administer both electoral registrations and elections themselves. That is why the Government has taken a sequenced approach to the implementation of the Elections Act. All required secondary legislation is now in place.

The Government has well established close ties to elections teams within local authorities and is advised by an Expert Panel on policy details and implementation plans. This Expert Panel, comprising of regional elections leads, and key representative electoral organisations, is key in aiding the Government to identify risks and mitigations where implementation of the measures is concerned. The Programme has established additionally a GB-wide Business Change Network which facilitates a two-way conversation with the sector, allowing the government to effectively communicate information out while also gathering feedback from the sector on opportunities, concerns, risks and mitigations.

The Government appreciates that implementation of the Elections Act represents an extensive programme of modernisation which brings multiple reforms and new activities for the electoral sector, in addition to 'business-as-usual' activities and implementing additional reforms, such as changes to Parliamentary constituency boundaries. Therefore, along with a sequenced implementation approach, intended to ensure the sector can absorb these changes incrementally and plan ahead where possible, the government is taking a pragmatic approach to funding. Further detail on the Government approach to new burdens funding is provided in a subsequent section.

The Government is committed to continuing to work closely with the Electoral Commission, the Association of Electoral Administrators, and elections teams across all local authorities to understand when and where additional support may be needed in the lead up to the polls this May, and ahead of the next General Election. For example, we are exploring what additional support the Government could provide to local authorities with regards external resource support for processing Voter Authority Certificate applications at election time. The Government also routinely engages with political parties through the Parliamentary Parties Panel, to ensure they are aware of any changes to electoral processes.

Recommendation - The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities must carry out a new burdens assessment of local authorities due to the increasing responsibilities and work arising from the Elections Act 2022. Should this assessment indicate a need for additional funding for implementing the remaining provisions of this Act, this funding should be provided as a matter of urgency. (Paragraph 114)

Government response:

The Government is pleased to confirm that, as was the case with the introduction of Individual Electoral Registration and Canvass Reform, and in line with the New Burdens Doctrine, a New Burdens Assessment was undertaken and funding is being provided to local authorities to cover the costs arising from the implementation of electoral reforms brought about by the Elections Act 2022. To date, payments have totalled over £40m. Further funding will be provided via the Justification Led Bid (JLB) process which is due to take place over the summer (May - June), and then provide a final grant payment ahead of the UK Parliamentary General Election (PGE). One final JLB window will take place after the UKPGE to ensure Local Authorities have sufficient opportunity to bid for further funding if required.

The Government is committed to ensuring that these important changes are delivered in a careful and thoughtful way. Our priority remains ensuring that local authorities have the necessary resources to continue to deliver our elections robustly and securely as they implement these new measures.

In order to ensure local government is provided with appropriate funding at the correct time to implement successfully the changes, the department engaged closely with local authorities and sector representatives in the development of the Elections Act New Burdens funding model. Allocations were subject to detailed considerations of the varied picture across local authorities and for transparency, the funding methodologies for the implementation of the different reforms are published on GOV.UK.³

As set out above, the Government appreciates that the implementation of the Elections Act represents an extensive programme of modernisation. Therefore, along with the sequenced approach to implementation, intended to ensure the sector can absorb these changes, and ongoing support for the sector, the Government is taking a pragmatic approach to funding. New burdens funding is being provided through a hybrid approach comprising of up-front grant payments and justification-led bids.

Grants enable a proportion of the funding allocation to be distributed early in the financial year, via a single, un-ringfenced grant payment. Local authorities received grant payments in November 2022, April 2023 and August 2023 and April 2024. The government has provided local authorities with a breakdown of cost details by measure of the Elections Act, which outlines what the funding is intended to cover, ensuring transparency for local authorities and allowing them to plan. In addition to the initial new burdens grant payments, further new burdens funding can be claimed by local authorities if needed via a justification-led bid process. This releases additional funds to local authorities later in the year, retrospectively on the basis of evidenced spend. Guidance on what this additional funding can cover and the process for claiming it has been circulated to local authorities and the Electoral Integrity Programme has had ongoing conversations with local authorities on their funding requirements, ensuring they are supported to deliver the changes.

Where polls are funded from the Consolidated Fund, allocations will be adjusted to take account of additional costs arising from Elections Act changes. Costs will be claimed through the usual claims process. This will be the case for the next General Election.

³ www.gov.uk/government/publications/elections-act-new-burdens-funding-methodology-voter-identification-and-accessibility

Aside from funding, the Government has been, and will continue to work carefully and closely with the electoral sector on planning to deliver these changes. This includes close working with key sector representative groups including the Association of Electoral Administrators and the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives, and the Electoral Commission.

Recommendation - We reiterate the strong recommendation of numerous committees in recent years, including the House of Commons Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee and the House of Lords Constitution Committee, that the Government bring forward a timeline to consolidate electoral law. The Government must now prioritise the time and resources needed to create critical improvements to electoral legislation. (Paragraph 123)

Government response:

The Government has focused on implementing the measures flowing from the Elections Act 2022, to deliver the Government's manifesto commitment to protect the integrity of our democracy, commitments on which the Government was elected. The Act addressed more immediate challenges, and our priority is to implement these changes to ensure that our elections remain secure, fair, transparent and up to date.

The Government notes the interest of the Committee in the consolidation of electoral law. The Government welcomed the Law Commissions' Electoral Law report, published in March 2020, where the benefits of consolidating electoral law were advocated. The Government has already enacted several of the recommendations of the Law Commission in the Elections Act 2022, including extending existing secrecy provisions that apply to voting in polling stations to postal voting. The Government also introduced the digital imprint regime, which came into force on 1 November 2023, and represents a substantial increase in the transparency of digital political advertising for members of the public. The regime requires those promoting digital campaigning material in scope of the rules (and any person on behalf of whom the material is being promoted) targeted at the UK electorate to include an imprint with their name and address, empowering voters to know who is promoting political material online and on whose behalf.

The Government agrees that simplifying and consolidating electoral law would be desirable. Electoral law is vast and complex, partly because of the various pieces of legislation and amendments that have been made over the years, but also because it needs to cover such a wide range of activities, to a high degree of detail. However, this would be a very large undertaking requiring significant preparation and Parliamentary time to achieve. Until that is possible, the Electoral Commission provides very comprehensive guidance to all those involved in elections, from political parties and candidates to Electoral Registration Officers and Returning Officers, to electors themselves.

The Government remains committed to ensuring that our electoral law is fit for purpose, now and into the future. We also acknowledge that the process of consolidating electoral law will be a long-term project that will take significant consideration and policy development and is not something to rush.