

#### **Alex Norris MP**

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# Dear colleague,

We are now three months on from your delivery of the UK Parliamentary General Election, and I hope that you have all had the opportunity for a well-deserved break following the immense amount of time and effort which I know you and your teams put into delivery of that poll. On behalf of myself and my Parliamentary colleagues, I want to say a huge thank you – not only for this election, but for your ongoing dedication to the safe and secure delivery of all elections.

This Government was elected on a manifesto commitment to encourage participation in our democracy and ensure all legitimate voters have the ability to vote in our elections. As the minister with responsibility for elections, I want to impress upon you just how important that commitment is to me and how proud I am to be in a position to work with dedicated public servants such as yourselves on these important matters. We are custodians of a democracy that has endured for hundreds of years and I mean it sincerely when I say we want to do this properly, and to work with you in the electoral sector to successfully deliver these promises.

#### Voter ID reform

Today marks the first significant step in delivery of a key manifesto commitment, as we lay the statutory instrument required to add the HM Armed Forces Veteran Card to the list of photographic identifications accepted in polling stations as voter ID.

Including the Veteran Card alongside the already accepted Ministry of Defence identification card (the MOD90 card) in the list, will bring parity between veterans and serving armed services personnel with the ID they can use in polling stations. We recognise that the Veteran Card is a powerful symbol of veterans' service and its addition to the list will support this important community, estimated to number around two million people, in engaging in the elections process and in exercising their democratic rights.

This is unlikely to be the only improvement we will be making to the voter ID rules. We will be led by the evidence on what is required to ensure the rules do not prevent legitimate voters from voting. Work is already underway to review the list of accepted IDs and on a wider evaluation of the impact of the policy on citizens during the General Election. The findings and recommendations of the Electoral Commission, as detailed in their interim report published on 10 September, are an important part of that review and we will also

take on board any further recommendations in their full report on the 2024 elections expected later this year. We will be publishing the report from our independent evaluation next year. Further changes beyond the addition of the Veteran Card will therefore take time, and I would like to assure you that the impact on polling station staff of changes to the list or to the policy will form part of our considerations, alongside the overarching aim to ensure accessibility of the voter ID rules.

## Progress on manifesto commitments to improve participation in elections

The Government has made clear we will be giving 16- and 17-year-olds the right to vote in all UK elections. We want to increase the participation of young people in our vibrant democracy and give them the ability to have their say on the issues that affect them and their future. We know this represents a significant change to the franchise for reserved elections and we are determined to do this right. We will work closely with a wide range of stakeholders to ensure we have a complete understanding of how best to achieve this goal, and the experience of our colleagues in Scotland and Wales, where 16- and 17-year-olds already have the right to vote in devolved elections, will be invaluable as we develop the necessary policy and processes. We are not expecting to introduce the legislation required to make this change immediately, but we do intend to have this in place to allow 16- and 17-year-olds to vote in the next UK Parliamentary General Election.

It is not just young people who we want to engage in our democracy, however. While Electoral Commission reports show consistency in the accuracy and completeness of electoral registers over recent years, we know there remains a significant number of people — approximately 8 million across the UK according to recent Electoral Commission estimates - either incorrectly registered to vote, or missing from the register entirely.

The Government is therefore committed to taking action to improve rates of electoral registration, and we are exploring a wide range of options to deliver on this commitment, including through the use of data and online services to help EROs increase registration levels.

Any potential changes will need to be based on robust evidence and user research, and we will be looking to engage with you all on possible options and to test different approaches.

## Review of electoral registration and conduct

As we embark on this new and exciting programme of electoral reform, I want to take a step back to reflect on the sheer volume of change this sector has absorbed over the past decade. We do understand that piling change upon change into an already busy and complex sector introduces ever increasing risks to the delivery of our elections.

The Government is committed to supporting Returning Officers, Electoral Registration Officers and their teams in their delivery of our democracy. We have heard the consistent message from you all that electoral law is outdated, difficult to work with and in many

ways not fit for purpose. We are conscious that, while elections continue to be delivered effectively, that delivery is not without risk and comes at a personal and professional cost to elections teams. We understand that, in order to most effectively make changes to improve participation, first we must make sure the foundations upon which our elections are based are solid.

The Government therefore will, alongside the work to deliver manifesto commitments, look to identify and address the biggest challenges and pain-points in the current system for electoral registration and conduct. By prioritising the biggest issues, we will be able to get the system onto a secure footing once more.

We will do this in partnership with you, using the large body of evidence that already exists and your reflections on the reality of delivery of recent polls. Through this approach, we will ensure we prioritise the right issues and identify practical and deliverable solutions that work.

### Working with the electoral sector

Finally, I would like to reiterate my thanks and admiration for the work you do upholding the integrity of our democratic process. Your expertise and dedication are vital to delivering fair and transparent elections. Throughout all this work, we want to ensure we are working closely with you to understand the realities of the challenges you face and the changes we are looking to make. I look forward to meeting and hearing from many more of you in the months and years ahead. Together, we will continue to strengthen our electoral system and ensure that every eligible voter has the opportunity to participate in our democracy with confidence.

Yours sincerely,

**ALEX NORRIS MP** 

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Democracy and Local Growth