



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

4th August 2022

New Confront,

RE: THE ELECTIONS ACT

Thank you for your recent correspondence in respect of the Elections Act. I have read your comments on this issue with interest.

A secure electoral system is a vital component of a healthy democracy. The Elections Act updates elections law and delivers on manifesto commitments to protect our democracy and ensure that it remains secure, transparent and fair. It includes provisions on overseas electors, the voting rights of EU citizens, the accessibility of polls, identification to vote at polling stations and digital imprints, as well as provisions aimed at tackling postal vote fraud, undue influence and intimidation at elections.

The Elections Act, more broadly, responds to recommendations in Lord Pickles' report into election fraud published in 2016 and builds upon long-term objectives set out in the Government's wider 'Defending Democracy Programme'. The changes it introduces alongside measures in the Online Safety Bill will protect our democracy from new and evolving threats and underpin the systems which support it.

Identification to vote has been backed by the Electoral Commission and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, which state that its absence is a security risk.

In Northern Ireland voters have been required to produce personal identification before voting in polling stations since 1985, with photographic identification being required since 2003 when introduced by the last Labour Government. Ministers at the time noted that "the Government have no intention of taking away people's democratic right to vote. If we believed that thousands of voters would not be able to vote because of this measure, we would not be introducing it at this time." I should add that the Electoral Commission's '2021 Public Opinion' tracker recorded that not a single Northern Ireland respondent reported: "I don't have any identification/I would not be able to vote".

The Electoral Commission has also commented that "since the introduction of photo ID in Northern Ireland there have been no reported cases of personation. Voters' confidence that elections are well-run in Northern Ireland is consistently higher than in Great Britain, and there are virtually no allegations of electoral fraud at polling stations."



Anyone without identification will be able to apply for a new free one – meaning that no voter will be disenfranchised. I believe that a secure electoral system is a vital component of a healthy democracy, and the public must have confidence that our elections are secure and fit for the 21st Century.

The Elections Act will improve the accountability of the Electoral Commission by making provision for a 'Strategy and Policy Statement' to be introduced. I fully support this measure, as I believe that making the Electoral Commission more accountable will strengthen the integrity of the electoral process and help prevent fraud.

The statement will set out guidance and principles which the Commission would have to consider when carrying out its functions. It is commonplace for the Government to set a broad policy framework, as approved by Parliament, by which independent regulators should work. This is already the case for Ofcom and Ofgem, for example. The statement will undergo consultation and will need to be approved by Parliament. It will also be reviewed regularly.

I do not agree with the view that these reforms will compromise the independence of the Electoral Commission. While the Commission will be required to have regard to the 'Strategy and Policy Statement', this does not give the Government new powers to direct the Electoral Commission's decision-making. The Commission will continue to be governed by the Commissioners and will remain operationally independent of the government of the day. The introduction of the statement would not in any way affect the ability of the Commission to undertake investigative, operational, or enforcement activity as it sees fit, but it will ensure greater accountability to Parliament on how the Electoral Commission discharges its wider functions. The Government has introduced measures to prohibit the statement from including reference to specific investigatory or enforcement activity to provide further reassurance on the Commission's operational independence.

Once again, thank you for having taken the time to contact me and if I can ever be of any further assistance to you then please do not hesitate to contact me again.

With best wishes,

**TOM PURSGLOVE MP
MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT
CORBY & EAST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE**