

## Briefing on electoral fraud vulnerabilities at polling stations

### Background

Our review of electoral fraud in the UK, which reported in January 2014, concluded that polling station voting in Great Britain remains vulnerable to personation fraud. There are currently few checks available at polling stations to prevent someone claiming to be an elector and voting in their name. We are concerned that polling station voting could become more vulnerable to fraud now that the electoral registration system has been tightened up.

We therefore recommended that there should be a requirement for electors across Great Britain to present an acceptable form of identification prior to being issued with a ballot paper and voting at the polling station. Similar requirements are already in place in Northern Ireland and several other comparable democracies. This measure would almost entirely remove the opportunity for personation at polling stations. We recommended that a proof of identity scheme should be in place to be used by no later than for the 2019 European Parliamentary and English local government elections.

We said that we would undertake further consultation and analysis to identify a proportionate and accessible scheme for verifying identity at polling stations in Great Britain, using as our starting point the Northern Ireland model. Voters in Northern Ireland have been required to present photographic ID before they can be issued with their ballot paper at polling stations for elections since 2003.

This briefing summarises the additional work we have undertaken in this area, including how a scheme could be implemented and what we think it would cost. Further information can be found in our report [\*Delivering and costing a proof of identity scheme for polling station voters in Great Britain\*](#).

### The Northern Ireland system

#### **Verifying the identity of voters at polling stations in Northern Ireland**

Voters at polling stations in Northern Ireland are required to produce one of the following photographic documents to confirm their identity:

- A UK, Irish or EEA driving licence (photographic part) (provisional accepted).

- A UK, Irish or EU passport (EU passports are not accepted at UK Parliamentary elections).
- A specified public transport pass.
- An Electoral Identity Card issued by the Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland.

The document does not need to be current, but the Presiding Officer must be satisfied that the photograph is of a good enough likeness before issuing a ballot paper.

This scheme replaced a previous non-photographic scheme for verifying the identity of voters at polling stations in Northern Ireland which was in place between 1985 and 2002, in response to concerns that the original scheme was not secure enough and open to abuse.

## Balancing security, accessibility and data protection

Introducing a new requirement for voters at polling stations in Great Britain to provide proof of their identity will change the current balance between the accessibility and the security of the voting process. We have carefully considered the impact of this change on electors, including particular groups of electors who could be more significantly affected than others.

Any scheme for verifying the identity of voters at polling stations in Great Britain must be secure enough to enhance confidence in the integrity of the voting process by minimising the risk of personation. We think this means that the scheme should be based on existing forms of secure photographic proof of identity, including passports and photographic driving licences, for example.

Evidence from national statistical data shows that some groups of electors are less likely than others to hold the types of documents (passports or photographic driving licences) which might be used to prove their identity. These include:

- Young people
- People from certain Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities
- Women
- Older people

Any scheme for verifying the identity of voters at polling stations in Great Britain should also include the option for electors to use a document issued specifically for the purpose of voting. We've called this a Voter Card. Electors should not be charged for obtaining a Voter Card.

We recognise concerns about privacy and the protection of personal data, which is provided either when electors apply for a Voter Card or when voters show proof of their identity in the polling station. Any information submitted as part of an application for a Voter Card should only be used for the purpose of confirming that person's

identity and entitlement to be issued with a card. Data should not be retained after the application has been processed.

While Presiding Officers in polling stations should not record details of which form of photo ID has been provided against each individual elector, we do think that there would be merit (particularly during the initial implementation phase) in Presiding Officers monitoring which proportion of electors use which forms of photo ID, as well as the proportion of electors who are unable to produce any photo ID, in order to help assess the impact of a proof of identity scheme.

## Our proposed scheme

### **A proof of identity scheme for voters at polling stations in Great Britain**

Voters at polling stations in Great Britain should be required to produce one of the following photographic documents to confirm their identity before being issued with a ballot paper:

- A UK, Irish or EEA driving licence (provisional accepted).
- A UK, Irish or EU passport (EU passports would not be accepted at UK Parliamentary elections).
- A passport issued by a Commonwealth member state, subject to the issuing process meeting recognised security standards.
- A Voter Card issued free of charge to any elector.
- Other specified photographic identification documents which require an adequate level of identity verification, including: Proof of Age Standards Scheme (PASS) card; military identification card; police identification card; firearms license; some photographic public transport passes, including the Freedom Pass and Oyster Photocard for example.

Other forms of acceptable identification could be added to the scheme in future.

The identification document would not need to be current, but the Presiding Officer must be satisfied that the photograph is of a good enough likeness before issuing a ballot paper.

As part of our work, we collected data from a range of sources to estimate the number of electors who likely already hold at least one of the acceptable forms of ID we have identified and the numbers who likely do not.

Our research showed that the vast majority of people would not need a Voter Card, as they will already possess another acceptable form of photographic identification, such as a passport or driving licence. We estimate that approximately 3.5m electors (approximately 7.5% of the electorate) in Great Britain would need to apply for a Voter Card.

## Implementing a Voter Card scheme

Implementing a new requirement for voters at polling stations in Great Britain to provide proof of their identity will mean changes to polling station procedures. It will

also need to be supported by public awareness activity to make sure that voters understand what they need to do to be able to vote.

Evidence from Northern Ireland suggests that the financial impact of a new requirement on polling station procedures will be minimal, although polling station officials will require training and additional guidance.

Significant public awareness activity would be needed to support the implementation of the new requirement, including multi-media campaigns at staggered intervals in the lead up to the first election at which the new requirement would apply. Non-paid for partnership work would also be key to contacting the hard-to-reach groups.

The most significant financial and administrative change would be the introduction of new processes for electors to apply for and be issued with a Voter Card. We recommend that people should be able to apply for a Voter Card online, but also in person and by post. Developing an online application service would significantly increase the convenience and accessibility of obtaining a Voter Card.

Implementing a Voter Card scheme in Great Britain presents challenges, not least because electoral administration is decentralised. We considered a range of implementation options including:

- An option based on the current electoral administration infrastructure, with 380 individual Electoral Registration Officers being wholly responsible for administering the scheme, including processing applications, and printing and distributing Voter Cards.
- Options involving the national, regional and outsourced production and distribution of Voter Cards, with individual EROs only retaining control over the application process.
- A “stand-alone” option that would see a “non-electoral” organisation assuming responsibility for implementing and running all aspects of the Voter Card scheme

Financial modelling undertaken on behalf of the Commission suggests that an option in which responsibility for printing and distributing Voter Cards is outsourced by EROs to a single national supplier would be one of the most cost-effective options. A more cost effective solution, however, would involve a “stand-alone” organisation being set up specifically to manage all aspects of a Voter Card scheme.

## Indicative costs

Implementing a Voter Card scheme across Great Britain would cost between £1.8m and £10.8m per annum, depending on the method of implementation.

Our recommended options would cost between £1.8m and £2.9m per annum for the “stand-alone” option, and between £2.4m and £6.4m per annum for the option involving outsourced production and distribution of Voter Cards.