

Electoral fraud

Overview

On 27 December 2016, the UK Government published its response to Sir Eric Pickles' review of electoral fraud. We welcomed the full and considered response from the Government and the announcement of its intention to pilot measures to increase security at polling stations. This briefing provides key information on:

- How a photographic proof of voter ID scheme could work in practice
- Our existing work to prevent and detect electoral fraud in the UK

We published [our response to Sir Eric's review](#) in October 2016, setting out how the Electoral Commission intends to implement the relevant recommendations.

Voter identification at polling stations – our view

In its response to Sir Eric Pickles' review, the UK Government has indicated that it intends to explore a range of options for the types of identification that voters could be asked to produce at polling stations, through a number of pilot schemes.

In January 2014, following our own [review of electoral fraud vulnerabilities](#), we recommended that electors should be required to show photographic proof of their identity before they can be issued with a ballot paper at polling stations for elections and referendums in Great Britain. This is already a requirement in Northern Ireland, as well as other comparable countries such as Canada.

In December 2015 we published [a further report setting out in more detail how such a scheme could work in practice](#). We recommended a proof of identify scheme for voters at polling stations which is based on the approach which has been used successfully in Northern Ireland since 2003, where:

- Voters are required to show a specified form of existing photographic ID and;
- Voters who do not hold one of the specified forms of ID can be issued with a free 'Electoral Identity Card' which they can use to prove their identity.

Our view is that this would be the most effective and proportionate way to address the current vulnerability of polling station voting in Great Britain to the risk of personation. Our research found that 1% of people who did not vote in the 2016 Northern Ireland Assembly elections said it was because they had no identification.

Documents which do not provide photographic proof of identity, such as utility bills, do not provide the same level of security, and could still enable personation to be committed relatively easily. We would therefore have concerns about any final

approach resulting from this pilot process which did not require voters to show a photographic proof of identity.

The Commission is disappointed that provision for electors to obtain an alternative form of identification – specifically for the purpose of voting if they do not have access to any other specified form of identification – has been ruled out at this early stage. Our research has identified and acknowledged concerns that any requirement for electors to show photographic proof of their identity at polling stations could discourage and potentially deter some people if they do not have easy access to a qualifying form of ID.

For these reasons, we continue to recommend that the approach currently used in Northern Ireland to verify the identity of voters in polling stations should provide the basis for a geographically consistent scheme across Great Britain.

Next steps

We look forward to working with the UK Government to explore the practical implications of the various options set out in its response. We will assess the proposed pilot schemes carefully, particularly to ensure that there is a realistic prospect of achieving robust evaluation findings which would be needed to inform any future legislation required for the implementation of a scheme across GB.

Our existing work to help tackle electoral fraud

We provide guidance, training and practical advice for [Returning Officers](#) and [police forces](#) to ensure that robust plans are in place to prevent and detect electoral fraud ahead of elections and referendums in the UK. We are currently monitoring and providing support and challenge in areas where there are elections taking place on Thursday 4 May 2017 in England, Scotland and Wales. Our monitoring and support is particularly focused in areas where a higher risk of allegations of electoral fraud has been identified, and where Returning Officers and police forces need to put in place stronger measures to tackle electoral fraud.

We are the only organisation which collects, analyses and publishes [data on cases of alleged electoral fraud](#) from all police forces across the UK. We use this information to monitor trends and to help identify areas that may be at higher risk of allegations of fraud at future elections.

We work in partnership with Crimestoppers, the national anonymous crime reporting charity to run [targeted public awareness campaigns](#) ahead of elections, focussed in areas where a higher risk of allegations of electoral fraud has been identified, to ensure voters know how to identify electoral fraud and report allegations anonymously, either by phone or online.

For further information, particularly for MPs who wish to contribute to the Second Reading of the Representation of the People (Voter Proof of Identity) Bill scheduled to take place on Friday 20 January, please contact Megan Phillips in the Public Affairs team on 020 7271 0714 or mphillips@electoralcommission.org.uk.