

16 October 2012

## **Electoral fraud in the UK: review of vulnerabilities and call for evidence**

I am writing to let you know about a review which the Electoral Commission is currently undertaking of electoral fraud, focusing on potential vulnerabilities in the electoral system. I would welcome any contribution you are able to make to the review by sharing your views with us at this early stage.

Our review will focus on the integrity of electoral administration processes in the UK, as well as the role and effectiveness of different stakeholders involved in supporting the delivery of elections. I should stress, however, that it will not include coverage of issues relating to the financing and regulation of political parties, organisations and individuals engaged in campaigning.

### **Why we are doing this review**

Electoral fraud is an issue of great concern to us. It has the potential to affect individual poll results as well as to undermine trust and confidence in our democracy, and we must do everything we can to prevent it.

The Commission works closely with police forces, prosecutors, Returning Officers and Electoral Registration Officers and political parties to ensure that they understand and deliver their own responsibilities in preventing and detecting electoral fraud. We are currently monitoring activity in advance of the November 2012 Police and Crime Commissioner elections in England and Wales, and have provided detailed guidance, training and support to minimise the risks of fraud taking place. We are particularly focussing on procedures for monitoring the issuing and processing of returned postal votes, and on training for polling staff to prevent personation. We will also be developing a strengthened code of conduct for campaigners for future elections. At the same time we will be making clear that anyone who has evidence of electoral fraud – including politicians, candidates and members of the public – should go straight to the police so it can be investigated properly.

Despite this work, and the introduction of a number of legislative changes to strengthen the integrity of electoral processes during the past decade, people are still worried that electoral fraud can take place. Alongside concerns raised by candidates and elected representatives in recent years, voters themselves are also concerned: our public opinion research has found consistently that around one in three people believe electoral fraud to be a 'fairly' or 'very' big problem. Our 2012 post-poll survey found that one-third of people (33%) said that

fraud took place at the polls on 3 May, with 29% saying it happened 'a little' and 5% saying 'a lot'.

The Electoral Commission has for some time identified the vulnerabilities of an electoral system which is largely built on trust. We are pleased the government now plans to introduce new laws to tighten up electoral registration which we have been calling for since 2003.

But this change on its own may not be enough. Although proven cases of electoral fraud are relatively rare in the UK it seems unlikely that the issues we have raised with successive governments, and the concerns of the public, politicians and candidates will diminish in the immediate future. We have therefore commenced this wide-ranging review to ensure that our electoral processes are as robust as they can be, continuing to support participation while at the same time retaining public confidence and trust in election results.

### **Why it is important to hear your evidence and views**

This first stage of our review is focused on gathering evidence and views about electoral fraud from as wide a range of sources as possible. We want to ensure that our review is based on a robust and comprehensive evidence base, and we need to hear from anyone who has concerns about electoral fraud or who has experienced it themselves. We are therefore contacting a range of stakeholders, including elected representatives, political parties, professionals working in the elections field, the police and prosecuting authorities, academics, voluntary organisations and think tanks to invite contributions.

We would welcome your contribution in two key areas:

- 1. Firstly, what concerns do you have, if any, about vulnerabilities within the current electoral process (in relation to, for example, electoral registration, absent voting, voting in polling stations, count, staff responsible for elections)?**
- 2. Secondly, what evidence do you have – either first-hand or indirect – about the extent and nature of electoral fraud which may have taken place in the UK?**

This will not be the only opportunity for you to contribute to this review. Evidence that we receive during this stage will be considered alongside evidence from research with voters on their concerns about the system and data from police records about allegations of fraud. We will publish this evidence base by March 2013, alongside an issues paper seeking views on a more detailed series of questions.

We aim to publish our final conclusions and any recommendations for change by autumn 2013, in time for any legislation to be introduced before the end of the current Parliament.

**How to submit your evidence and views**

To contribute to the review please get in touch with Stephanie McMeeken on 020 7271 0628 or [smcmeeken@electoralcommission.org.uk](mailto:smcmeeken@electoralcommission.org.uk) to arrange a meeting.

Alternatively, if you would prefer to respond to the review in writing, please submit your response by post or email **by Monday 17 December** to:

Mark Williams  
Electoral Policy Manager  
The Electoral Commission  
3 Bunhill Row  
London EC1Y 8YZ  
[mwilliams@electoralcommission.org.uk](mailto:mwilliams@electoralcommission.org.uk)

I hope that you will be able to find the time to share your experience and evidence with us as we take forward this important work.

Yours sincerely



**Jenny Watson**  
**Chair**

Approved by the Chair and electronically signed in her absence