

[REDACTED]

From: FOI
Sent: 10 May 2023 13:31
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: FOI 035-23 - Response
Attachments: Pullinger J-to-Rt Hon Tom Tugendhat MP - National Security Bill_Redacted.pdf; Pullinger J-to-Tugendhat T - 01-11-22_Redacted.pdf; RowleyL-to-PullingerJ-2022-12-08 - IMPLEMENTATION OF VOTER ID_Redacted.pdf; Pullinger J-to-Baroness Scott - appointment letter 130323_Redacted.pdf

Dear [REDACTED],

Our Ref: FOI 035-23

Thank you for your request under the Freedom of Information Act dated 12 April 2023. You wrote: ***This is a request under Freedom of Information legislation. Could you please provide me with all correspondence between the Chair of the Commission and any government ministers or Secretaries of State between November 2022 and the date this request was received? Could you please provide me with all correspondence between the Chair of the Commission and the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities between November 2022 and the date this request was received? I am happy for you to confine the search to electronic-only sources.***

The Commission aims to respond to requests for information promptly and has done so within the statutory timeframe of twenty working days.

Your request is shown below followed by our response.

We hold the information you have requested. Please find enclosed four letters between the Chair of the Commission and government ministers.

Information is exempt under section 40(2) of the FOIA where release of the information would breach one of the data protection principles in the GDPR. One of the principles states that personal data must be processed fairly and lawfully. Disclosure of this information would breach the first data protection principle, which states the information must be processed fairly and lawfully. Any personal data that is not already in the public domain has been redacted. We have redacted signatures.

Under this provision, we have also redacted the names/job titles of Commission staff that are not, or have not been part of, our Senior Leadership Group. This is because those members of staff have a reasonable expectation that their personal details will not be made public.

The Commission strives to be an open, transparent authority and I trust that this information satisfies your request. If you are not satisfied with this response, please note that the Commission operates a review procedure, details of which can be found on the Commission website at:

<https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/freedom-information/make-a-freedom-information-request>.

Please also note that if you have exhausted all internal Commission review procedures and you are still not satisfied you have the right to appeal to the Information Commissioner. Details of this procedure can be found on the ICO website: <https://ico.org.uk>.

Yours sincerely

Information Team

FOI@electoralcommission.org.uk

The Electoral Commission

electoralcommission.org.uk

Rt Hon Tom Tugendhat MBE MP
Minister for Security
Home Office
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

23 February 2023

Dear Minister

Protecting democracy from foreign interference

I am writing to follow up my letter to you of 1 November 2022 on the National Security Bill and the UK Government's proposals for a Foreign Influence Registration Scheme, to which I have not yet received a response.

As I highlighted in my letter of 1 November, the Electoral Commission has identified the need to reform existing law to improve security in relation to elections. These changes could usefully be reflected in the National Security Bill, before Parliament completes its consideration. They would introduce stronger controls on donations to political parties and campaigners to address the risk of foreign interference in UK political campaigns. These reforms have also been supported by others, including the Committee on Standards in Public Life and the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee.

Since writing, I note the Government has rejected amendments to the Bill, tabled during House of Lords Committee stages, to introduce new duties on political parties to make additional checks on donations by overseas voters.

The principles of due diligence and risk assessments when accepting funds are common in many industries. We have recommended stronger controls on donations, to ensure parties and campaigners can only accept donations from companies that have made enough money in the UK to fund their donation; and also strengthening checks on the origin of funding for donations, by introducing enhanced due diligence and risk assessment requirements. These will not only give voters confidence in the integrity of finance, but also protect political parties themselves.

I therefore urge the Government to reconsider its position, and would welcome the opportunity to discuss this in further detail. I am copying this letter to Mr Speaker, the Chair of the Committee on Standards in Public Life and the Chair of the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee

Yours sincerely,



John Pullinger
Chair

The Rt Hon Tom Tugendhat MBE MP
Minister for Security
Home Office
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF
By email

1 November 2022

Dear Minister

Protecting elections from foreign interference

I am writing regarding the proposal to introduce a Foreign Influence Registration Scheme, through amendments to the National Security Bill currently before Parliament.

The Government's stated objective for this legislation is to strengthen the resilience of the United Kingdom's political system against foreign influence. The Electoral Commission has undertaken work in this area and has also identified the need for stronger controls on donations to political parties and campaigners to address the risk of foreign interference in UK political campaigns.

We have recommended that existing controls on donations should be strengthened so that parties and campaigners can only accept donations from companies that have made enough money in the UK to fund the amount of their donation. Currently, a company can donate to a UK political party or campaigner if it is registered at Companies House and 'carrying on business' in the UK. There is no requirement for the company to show that it has made enough money in the UK to give or lend to campaigners.

We have also recommended strengthening the controls for political parties and campaigners accepting donations more generally, so that they can be confident they know the origins of their funding. Although parties and campaigners are already required to check that a donation is from a permissible source, we have recommended that they should be required to take additional steps to ensure they know where the money has come from. Enhanced due diligence and risk assessment requirements for parties could be introduced in a way that recognises the need for proportionality, with different requirements depending on the size of a regulated entity's financial infrastructure, or the size of a donation. This would help campaigners to identify foreign money before donations are accepted.

I hope this is a helpful overview of our key recommendations in this area which could be usefully reflected in forthcoming legislation. These reforms have also been supported by other organisations, including the Committee on Standards in Public Life (in its 2021 report on [Regulating Election Finance](#)) and the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee (in its recent report on the [Work of the Electoral Commission](#)).

Should you have questions or wish to arrange a meeting, your office can do so with our [REDACTED], [REDACTED], at [REDACTED].

Yours sincerely,

[REDACTED]

John Pullinger
Chair



Department for Levelling Up,
Housing & Communities

John Pullinger CB
Chair
Electoral Commission
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Lee Rowley MP
*Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Local
Government and Building Safety*

**Department for Levelling Up, Housing and
Communities**

Fry Building
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

Your reference:
Our reference:

8 December 2022

Dear John,

Thank you for taking the time to meet last week and outline your thoughts about the implementation of the Government's voter identification policy. The Commission plays an essential role in supporting the delivery of changes introduced by the Elections Act 2022. As the Minister with responsibilities for elections, I am keen to develop and maintain a close working relationship with the Commission to ensure we provide the electoral community with the support it needs to adapt to those changes. I am grateful for your confirmation last week that you are keen to work with the Department and others to ensure these important changes are implemented successfully.

During the meeting, you helpfully set out your current concerns about the timeline for the implementation of voter identification:

1. Delivery of Voter Authority Certificates;
2. Awareness-raising amongst voters regarding the new identification requirements; and
3. Polling staff training and recruitment.

Following our very useful discussion about those risks, I wanted to set out the next steps and agreed actions. We will need to maintain a strong focus on delivery if we are to achieve a successful outcome ahead of polling day.

Regarding the delivery of Voter Authority Certificates, officials set out during our meeting that the digital service for both electors applying for, and Electoral Registration Officers processing, Voter Authority Certificates is now in its late stages of development and that testing so far has produced encouraging results in terms of applicants proceeding through the process as expected and the feedback we have had on the service. We remain on track to launch the live service on 16 January and will begin the process of connecting local authorities to the application processing service on 9 December. This will allow us to iron out any short-term issues with connections, which are very common at that stage, and also allow authorities to access the environment ahead of go-live. The digital platform is the Government's primary delivery responsibility and one that we will therefore continue to prioritise.

Paired with the Commission's communication campaign, this will enable voters who need them to apply for their Voter Authority Certificates ahead of the May 23 election and give local authorities sufficient time to issue them. Officials will work with yours to ensure that you are able to direct voters towards the platform as part of your communication campaign.

Turning to the need to raise awareness among voters about the new identification requirements, I was very interested to hear more detail on the national advertising campaigns aimed at alerting voters to the change in the weeks and months leading to the polls. This will be paramount in getting voters ready. As you rightly pointed out, local authorities will also have a key role to play in not only issuing Certificates to voters, but also raising awareness among their local communities. To support them in doing this, as mentioned at the meeting, £4.75million of funding (amounting to approximately 16p per elector) has now been distributed to local authorities holding polls this year as part of new burdens funding, for local communications. This replicates the success of the local communication approach from the voter identification pilots and will allow authorities to make most effective use of the resources provided by the Commission's advertising campaign. We agreed that we would meet local authority teams and representatives in the new year to understand their views on communications more fully, and I agreed to facilitate a roundtable with the AEA, SOLACE, the Commission and my Department. Officials will be in touch with yours to discuss dates for this meeting.

Finally, we discussed polling staff readiness and local authorities' concerns about recruitment. Whilst we both agreed that it was too soon to establish with certainty where the pinch points may be for recruitment of polling staff at the next election, you rightly pointed out the increasing difficulty (partly driven by the pandemic) in recent years faced by local authorities to meet their staffing needs. You committed to keep me informed about the results of your upcoming survey in January and I agreed that officials would also liaise with the AEA and SOLACE in the new year about early recruitment trends. I am keen that we meet again in early February to discuss the latest trends and any actions to take as a result. To support polling staff readiness, officials will continue to work with yours to ensure that the Commission is able to produce guidance for polling staff regarding voter identification and give them confidence in delivering the next elections. Officials will continue to work with yours to deliver these action points in the coming weeks and months.

Thank you for your continued support and constructive engagement with the Government on the delivery of this important priority to protect the integrity of our elections.

Yours sincerely,



LEE ROWLEY MP

The Electoral Commission

Baroness Scott of Bybrook
Parliamentary-under-Secretary of State
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21 March 2023

Dear Minister

Congratulations on taking on ministerial responsibility for the elections brief. The team at the Commission and I look forward to working with you.

We are currently focused on ensuring that voters, campaigners, and electoral administrators are ready for the local elections in England on 4 May, which will see key measures from the Elections Act in place for the first time. Our guidance for administrators, parties, campaigners and candidates works to ensure full understanding of the rules in place for the polls; and our public awareness campaign on the voter ID requirement is well underway to support voter confidence in the new requirement.

Beyond the May elections, our work to implement other Elections Act provisions is continuing. We are preparing a Code of Practice on the laws relating to non-party campaigner spending, including what qualifies as expenses, reporting controlled expenditure and joint campaigning. We would welcome a meeting with you to discuss this. We are also working with officials to prepare for other changes, focused on managing concerns about delivery timelines and the impact this may have on the implementation of the provisions, and on the sector.

Beyond the Elections Act, the Commission plays an important role to ensure the delivery of free and fair elections and continued public confidence in our democratic process. Working with your team, your counterparts in the Scottish and Welsh governments, and others across the electoral community, we constantly strive to improve the electoral system for the benefit of voters, campaigners and electoral administrators.

I would welcome a meeting with you at your earliest convenience to discuss our work on the upcoming elections, the implementation of the Elections Act, as well as our wider work to support the electoral system. To arrange, your office can contact [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] on [REDACTED].

Yours sincerely,



John Pullinger
Chair