

Baroness Scott of Bybrook
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

By email: mhclgcorrespondence@communities.gov.uk

Your reference: 27590480

6th July 2023

Dear Baroness Scott,

Thank you for your recent letter responding to Best for Britain's supporters' concerns about the implementation of new voter identification requirements at elections in Great Britain.

Participation in the political process is vital to our democracy, and not only at elections, so I have shared your letter with our supporters and I know they will be grateful that their concerns have been received.

On behalf of Best for Britain and our supporters I would like to take this opportunity to respond to points you have raised in your letter and to urge the UK Government to take action as swiftly as possible.

The experiences of our supporters at the Local Elections in May this year and the evidence supplied in the Electoral Commission's Interim Report appear to vindicate the warnings to the Government during the passage of the Elections Act 2022 that mandatory voter ID in Great Britain could disenfranchise thousands, or potentially millions, of voters who do not currently have any of the accepted forms of photo ID.

The Electoral Commission found that 14,000 people were turned away from polling stations and did not return to cast their vote because they did not have acceptable ID. If this rate of disenfranchisement had occurred at the 2019 UK General Election, it would have been more

than 80,000 voters turned away – more than the total number of voters in a Parliamentary constituency – and the Electoral Commission believes their number is an underestimate as it does not include those who turned away before being registered by the poll clerk or those who simply stayed away from the polls because they did not have the right ID.

There has never been a compelling case for photographic voter ID in Great Britain. The UK Government has argued that photographic voter ID is necessary to address voter fraud and impersonation and your letter raised concerns about the security of the polls. The reality is that impersonation and voter fraud in the UK are so rare that one is more likely to win the lottery, and roughly 47 times more likely to be struck by lightning and mandatory voter ID has created a new and unnecessary barrier to the accessibility of voting.

You mentioned three European countries as examples of democracies that require voters to show photo ID before casting their votes. Each of those countries – Austria, France and Germany – have long-standing national identity card schemes and in France and Germany it is mandatory for adults to hold them. The UK does not have such a scheme and it is not mandatory for UK citizens to hold or carry identity documents. The Electoral Commission's report noted that use of the new Voter Identity Certificates (VIC) at the May elections was "low compared with estimates of the number of voters who might not have any other accepted ID".

No voter should have their right to vote taken away and Best for Britain believes that accessibility and the removal of barriers to voting should be the core principle of electoral law and administration.

We welcome your commitment to consider updates to the list of accepted ID, and urge the UK Government to expand the list to include the forms of ID listed in an amendment to the Elections Bill by Lord Willetts, Lord Woolley of Woodford, Baroness Lister of Burtersett and the Lord Bishop of Coventry¹:

- a. a driving licence;*
- b. a birth certificate;*
- c. a marriage or civil partnership certificate;*
- d. an adoption certificate;*
- e. the record of a decision on bail made in respect of the voter in accordance with section 5(1) of the Bail Act 1976;*
- f. a bank or building society cheque book;*
- g. a mortgage statement dated within 3 months of the date of the poll;*

¹ <https://bills.parliament.uk/publications/46147/documents/1732>

- h. a bank or building society statement dated within 3 months of the date of the poll;*
- i. a credit card statement dated within 3 months of the date of the poll;*
- j. a council tax demand letter or statement dated within 12 months of the date of the poll;*
- k. a P45 or P60 form dated within 12 months of the date of the poll;*
- l. a standard acknowledgement letter (SAL) issued by the Home Office for asylum seekers;*
- m. a trade union membership card;*
- n. a library card;*
- o. a pre-payment meter card;*
- p. a National Insurance card;*
- q. a workplace ID card;*
- r. a student ID card;*
- s. an 18+ student Oyster photocard;*
- t. a National Rail Railcard;*
- u. a Young Scot National Entitlement Card;*

The Association of Electoral Administrators has raised concerns², repeatedly, that the UK Government's implementation of new rules was rushed and gave Returning Officers and Electoral Registration Officers limited time to prepare. With the list of accepted identity documents being published as late as November 2022 the Government allowed electoral administrators only a short time to implement the new rules and an even shorter time for voters to be educated about the accepted forms of ID and the availability of the VIC.

A UK General Election is expected to take place during 2024 and electoral administrators will be required to run elections across the country which not only implement voter ID, but also implement new constituency boundaries, implement new overseas voter registration rules which will vastly increase the number of overseas voters and implement new postal and proxy voting procedures and new requirements for accessibility in polling stations. Much of the UK did not have elections in May this year so voters (and electoral administrators) in those areas will be experiencing the new rules for the first time. And this General Election will involve a much higher turnout than local elections and will likely be a truly snap election, with just 25 working days notice.

We additionally urge the UK Government to act swiftly to introduce and publish the secondary legislation required to expand the list of accepted forms of ID, as soon as its evaluation is complete.

²<https://www.aea-elections.co.uk/policy-reporting/statements-communications/news-release-on-letter-to-secretary-of-state-about-the-elections-act-2022-voter-id/>

Should a snap election be held in May 2024, or earlier, and the updated list of accepted ID is published alongside the Department's evaluation in November, electoral administrators will be in the same position of rushed implementation as they were ahead of the May 2023 elections and the time available to educate voters will be short. Any delay would increase the risk of problems on polling day and higher rates of voters being disenfranchised.

Thank you for engaging with our supporters on this matter; the accessibility of the polls and the ability of every eligible person to easily and confidently exercise their rights to vote are of vital importance to the British values of democracy and fairness. I hope you will keep Best for Britain and our supporters informed as to the Government's position, and we would be more than happy to meet with you and take part in discussion or consultation on changes to electoral rules.

Yours sincerely,

C. Mitchell

Cary Mitchell

Director of Operations