

Ms Chloe Smith MP
Minister for the Constitution
Cabinet Office
70 Whitehall
London SW1A 2AS

2 March 2018

RE: Voter ID pilots

Dear Ms Smith,

We are writing to express our collective concerns for the Government plans to pilot identification in polling stations at the local government elections in May.

The Government's commitment to building a safe and secure democracy is commendable. Electoral fraud is a serious crime and has the potential to undermine public confidence in elections, even if conducted on a small scale.

However, there is simply not enough evidence of voter fraud in the UK to justify these potentially damaging pilots, which threaten to disenfranchise members of some of the most vulnerable groups of society. In 2016 there were 44 allegations of impersonation – the type of fraud that voter ID is designed to tackle – out of nearly 64 million votes, reflecting just 1 case for every 1.5 million votes cast.

By comparison, the Electoral Commission has warned that 3.5 million people (7.5% of the electorate) in Great Britain do not have access to any form of photo ID. 11 million electors (24% of the electorate) do not have access to a passport or photographic driving licence.

As organisations who support and represent a diverse range of communities, we have serious concerns that these proposals present a significant barrier to democratic engagement and risk compromising a basic human right for some of the most marginalised groups in society. Decades of international studies show that restrictive identification requirements are particularly disadvantageous to certain voter groups who are less likely to possess approved ID for a variety of socio-economic and accessibility reasons. Voter ID reforms could therefore

affect young people, older people, disabled people, transgender and gender non-conforming people, BAME communities and the homeless.

We are aware that the Local Authorities participating in the pilots will be providing alternative options for people without the photographic identification to vote in the local elections in May. However, we believe the measures do not go far enough to alleviate the potential risk of disenfranchisement and deterrent to voting. We are also concerned that the Local Authorities involved have failed to carry out adequate equality impact assessments of the pilots on protected individuals in their areas. We would be grateful to learn what assurances you can give us in this regard.

We are also very concerned about the low levels of public awareness of the pilots and proposed reforms. We fear that many people will be unaware of changes to the voting process. To ensure that voters are not disenfranchised, it is vital that there is wide coverage of the new voting arrangements and that communications are accessible to everyone. Unfortunately there is little evidence to suggest that this has taken place in the various pilot areas even though the elections are now only two months away.

In December, the Cabinet Office published a five-year democratic engagement plan designed to increase participation in democracy. It is disappointing that these electoral pilots directly undermine this worthy objective.

We hope you listen to these concerns and urgently reconsider your decision to run the pilots as planned in the May local elections. We would be very happy to meet with you to discuss these issues in more detail and how our concerns may be mitigated.



Darren Hughes

Chief Executive, Electoral Reform Society

(Lead signatory – full list of signatories below)

Full list of signatories

Simon Woolley, Director
Operation Black Vote

Dominic Williamson, Executive Director
St Mungo's

Sally Harvey, Chief Executive
Royal National Institute of Blind People

Rob Young, Vice President
Society and Citizenship Zone, NUS

Ruth Hunt, Chief Executive
Stonewall

Corey Stoughton, Advocacy Director
Liberty

Balbir Chatrik, Director of Policy and
Communications
Centrepont

Caroline Abrahams, Charity Director
Age UK

Dr Shazad Amin, Chief Executive
MEND

Lt. Colonel David Kelly, Secretary for
Communications
The Salvation Army

Fizza Qureshi, Director
Migrants' Rights Network

Alexandra Runswick, Director
Unlock Democracy

Matteo Bergamini, Founder and Director
Shout Out UK

Tim Hughes, Director
Involve

Jo Hobbs, Chief Executive
British Youth Council

Professor Pippa Norris, Director
Electoral Integrity Project
Harvard's Kennedy School of Government

Jabeer Butt, Acting Chief Executive
Race Equality Foundation

James Cathcart, Founder
Young Voices Heard

Areeq Chowdhury, Chief Executive
WebRoots Democracy

Dr Edie Friedman, Executive Director
The Jewish Council for Racial Equality

Andrew Brown, interim Chief Executive
Croydon BME Forum

Peter Corbett, Chief Executive
Thomas Pocklington Trust

Tom Franklin, Chief Executive
Young Citizens (formerly Citizenship
Foundation)

Tim Cooper, Chief Executive
United Response

Matt Gillow, Founder
TalkPolitics

Andy Gregg, Chief Executive
Race On The Agenda

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