

Parliamentary Briefing

Elections Bill, Second Reading, House of Commons

September 2021

Summary

The Elections Bill includes proposals to introduce compulsory Voter ID at polling stations. Age UK believes that this has the potential to act as an additional obstacle to existing impediments for older people who wish to vote.

Age UK disagrees with proposals to introduce compulsory Voter ID at polling stations in the Elections Bill

At Age UK, we understand the importance of electoral fraud, which must be combatted. However, any scheme put in place to address electoral fraud should not disenfranchise people who are less likely to hold recognised forms of ID, including older people.

Older people are already more likely to face hurdles when voting, including:

- Barriers to accessing transport
- Limited mobility may make getting to a polling station harder

Age UK welcomes the changes the Elections Bill makes to the assistance that voters receive in polling stations if they require it. However, we believe the addition of compulsory photo ID will add barriers to in-person voting.

If proposals in the Elections Bill surrounding the implementation of photo ID go forward unamended, mitigating measures, such as the provision of free photo ID, should be made as accessible as possible. Additional provision of free photo ID for elections will be costly and complex for local Returning Officers to administer and must be supported by central guidance and funding.

Ownership of photo ID by older people

We know that older people face issues when they are asked to prove their identity. Age UK has found that being asked for frequently held forms of ID, such as passports, is more difficult for older people who are less likely to have one.

Research commissioned by the Cabinet Office¹ suggests:

- 2% of people aged over 70, equivalent to 180,000 older people in Great Britain do not hold any of the forms of identification that the Bill proposes would be accepted when voting
- Having to present photographic identification at the polling station would 'make voting difficult' for 6% of people over 70 or around half a million people living in Great Britain
- 4% of people aged over 70, equivalent to 360,000 people less likely to vote

These figures are likely to be underestimated as the Cabinet Office's funded research did not include a representative sample of older people in Great Britain. We are also unable to identify the

¹ IFF Research 'Photographic ID Research', March 2021, accessed:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/voter-identification-photographic-id-ownership-in-great-britain>

intersectional impact of this policy change on older people who are disabled, who are from different ethnic minority backgrounds or women.

Personation fraud

The Electoral Commission's record of instances of personation fraud in their annual reports on electoral fraud shows one case of unsuccessful attempted personation fraud in the past 4 years.

Increasing confidence in the integrity of the electoral system is important but with no evidence that personation fraud in the UK is widespread and evidence that in small pilots, over a hundred people were unable or unwilling to return to a polling station to present valid photo ID, it feels that the introduction of this security measure is disproportionate to the threat of personation fraud.

Age UK believes that the proposals in the Elections Bill represent a sledgehammer to crack a nut.

Existing barriers to in-person voting for older people

The British Election Study found that across the previous three General Elections, the likelihood of voting increased with age with turnout amongst over 75s in 2019 around 80%. Despite the high level of motivation to vote, we know that in-person voting is already difficult for some older people.

Existing barriers to in-person voting include:

- More than half of over 75s are disabled so experience the same difficulties with physical access, neurological impairment and sensory deprivation barriers that other disabled voters face.
- Over half of over 75s have not used the internet in the past 3 months so registering online, being made aware of changes to voting arrangements and access to information from their council or political parties will be difficult.
- 1 in 6 of over 80-year-olds have dementia and that can lead to presumptions being made on their behalf by family members or professional carers that they should not register to vote even when on the day, they may have the capacity to exercise their vote.
- Those living in care homes may struggle to register to vote without support from the care home manager, and they will not have access to individual utility bills and other such evidence of their residence if this is required as a form of identification.
- Older people are likely to face barriers to accessing transport and limited mobility which make getting to a polling station much harder.
- Older people often provide care to spouses and other family members which can make leaving the house, even for short periods, difficult to arrange.

Mitigation against disenfranchisement

If the proposals to require photo ID are implemented, the Government need to put in place safeguarding measures to ensure no individual is disenfranchised by circumstances where they do not have the required documentation or cannot travel to an electoral office to confirm their identity.

Should the Bill proceed without any amendments to mandate photo ID at elections, we believe the Government should implement:

- **A non-digital form of free elections ID should be made available alongside a digital offering. We would not recommend electors to have to scan or download personal information onto a local government portal or website, as this would be an additional barrier to accessing a photo ID.**
- **Polling station staff to be briefed on the full list of acceptable photo ID including accepting expired Government-issued travel passes from different areas of the country.**
- **Local authority election staff should reach out to electors to support them in securing forms of this form identification**

We believe attempts to identify and reach the groups affected by the need to produce photo ID are likely to be complex and costly. Older people will be among the groups most affected by this change and are unlikely to be online and may be harder to reach with public messaging either on transport or in a community setting.

Age UK wants to see assurances that any additional costs of effectively reaching those who do not possess photo ID should fall to central Government as opposed to passing this cost onto local authorities.

Get in touch with us

We would be delighted if you were able to raise any of these points at the Bill's Second Reading. For more information please contact Roshni Mistry, Senior Public Affairs Officer at roshni.mistry@ageuk.org.uk.