

Electoral Reform Society

The News Building 3 London Bridge Street London SE1 8HP

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,

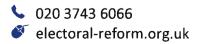
We are writing to express our collective concerns for the Government plans to pilot identification in polling stations at the local government elections in May.

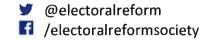
The Government's commitment to building a safe and secure democracy is commendable. Electoral fraud is a serious crime and has the potential to undermine public confidence in elections, even if conducted on a small scale.

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 Jabeer Butt, Acting Chief Executive Stonewall **Race Equality Foundation** Corey Stoughton, Advocacy Director James Cathcart, Founder Liberty Young Voices Heard Balbir Chatrik, Director of Policy and Areeq Chowdhury, Chief Executive Communications WebRoots Democracy Centrepoint Dr Edie Friedman, Executive Director Caroline Abrahams, Charity Director The Jewish Council for Racial Equality Age UK Andrew Brown, interim Chief Executive Dr Shazad Amin, Chief Executive Croydon BME Forum **MEND** Peter Corbett, Chief Executive Lt. Colonel David Kelly, Secretary for **Thomas Pocklington Trust** Communications The Salvation Army Tom Franklin, Chief Executive Young Citizens (formerly Citizenship Fizza Qureshi, Director Foundation) Migrants' Rights Network Tim Cooper, Chief Executive Alexandra Runswick, Director **United Response Unlock Democracy** Matt Gillow, Founder **TalkPolitics** Matteo Bergamini, Founder and Director Shout Out UK Andy Gregg, Chief Executive Tim Hughes, Director Race On The Agenda Involve Suresh Grover, Director Jo Hobbs, Chief Executive The Monitoring Group **British Youth Council** Professor Matt Henn, Chair of Social Professor Pippa Norris, Director Research

Nottingham Trent University

Electoral Integrity Project

Harvard's Kennedy School of Government

Dr Omar Khan, Director Runnymede

Paul Martin OBE, Chief Executive LGBT Foundation

Zoe Matthews, Co-Director Sarah Mann, Co-Director Friends, Families and Travellers

John Mayford, Chief Executive
Olmec

Janet Morrison, Chief Executive Independent Age

Kunle Olulode, Director Voice4Change England

Dr Tom Pey, Chief Executive Royal Society for Blind Children

Dr Sarah Pickard, Senior Lecturer Université Sorbonne Nouvelle Sham Qayyum, Director Council of Somali Organisations

Dennis Reed, Director Silver Voices

Dr James Sloam

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Professor Jon Tonge, President British Politics Group, University of Liverpool

Joy Warmington, Chief Executive Brap