

# **Elections Bill**

## **Second Reading Briefing (Lords)**

February 2022

## Summary

Age UK does not welcome the Election Bill's introduction of photo ID for in person voting, we have significant concerns regarding the impact this will have on older people.

Older people are more likely to face hurdles when voting, including barriers to accessing transport and limited mobility which make getting to a polling station a lot harder. The proposed addition of compulsory photo ID will add to barriers to in-person voting.

If photo ID proposals are carried unamended, mitigating measures such as the provision of free photo ID to people who lack these documents 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.

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 one 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 the proposal represents a sledgehammer to crack a nut. 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.

***Age UK opposes Clause 1 of the Elections Bill, 'Voter Identification'. We would like to see Peers vote to remove Clause 1 of the Bill.***

## Ownership of photo ID

Older people often face issues when they are asked to prove their identity. We have found that being asked for frequently held forms of ID like passports is more difficult for older people who are less likely to have one. Research commissioned by the Cabinet Office in March 2021 found:

- **2% of people aged over 70, (equivalent to approximately 180,000) living in Great Britain do not hold any of the forms of identification 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 aged over 70, (equivalent to more than half a million people) living in Great Britain**
- **4% of people aged over 70, (equivalent to around 360,000 people) living in Great Britain would be less likely to vote**

These figures are likely to be underestimates of the true number of older people likely to be affected. Older people living in care homes were excluded from the survey. The survey also had a very low response rate of 31%. Survey non-response is more common among people who are in poor health or socioeconomically disadvantaged, both of which are linked to a higher likelihood of not having identification and to greater existing barriers to voting.

Data from the 2011 census shows that the number of people reporting that they do not have a passport increase with age. **52% of people aged 85 and over reported not having a passport.**

**Similarly, the percentage of people that report owning a driver's licence also decreases with age: 38% of those over 70 do not own a driving licence.**

## **Accepted forms of photo ID**

Given the challenges listed above, Age UK welcomes the Government's recent proposal to include Blue Badges and Freedom Passes in the list of accepted photo identification. However, we are concerned that the Elections Bill contains a provision that this list can be amended at any time. If alternative forms of photo ID are removed from the list, this will disproportionately affect older voters, particularly those with non-standard forms of photo ID who may find that they no longer have the right form of ID to be able to vote.

## **Voter Card**

For individuals that do not hold one of the accepted forms of photo ID, the Government is proposing to introduce a Voter Card. This would be a form of photographic ID that would be available to everyone at no cost. While we welcome the provision of an alternative form of photo ID for those who do not hold an accepted form of ID, the Government must ensure that everyone who needs a Voter Card is aware of how to get one and can do so easily. Current plans to allow people to apply online, via post, or in person may present challenges for some older people, particularly those who live in care homes, or those who have mobility issues or difficulties with communication. For example, a digital option is unlikely to be accessible to large numbers of older people - over 40% of people aged 75+ have never used the internet or have not done so within the last three months. While applying by post will be a valuable alternative for some, care home residents or those with disabilities may find it difficult to travel to have a passport photo taken or gain access to evidence of residence, such as utility bills. To ensure the Voter Card reaches everyone who needs it, local authority staff should proactively reach out to voters and travel to them to support them in applying for the Voter Card where this is necessary.

Under current proposals, the Voter Card would need to be updated every 10 years. This is not the case with other forms of photo ID (expired passports and driving licenses will be accepted for example). Given that voters who need to apply for a Voter Card are more likely to face barriers to voting in person, the need to re-apply for a Voter Card is likely to create a further layer of difficulty for this group of older voters.

The cost of implementing a Voter Card scheme is likely to be high. Funds must be made available to ensure that the scheme is accessible to all who wish to vote.

## **Existing barriers to in-person voting for older people**

Voting in person is a valuable way for older people to exercise their democratic rights and older people are very highly motivated to vote. Many older people already face barriers to in-person voting. Adding to these difficulties by requiring them to find and present the correct forms of photo ID will only exacerbate the problem. In response, some people may simply decide not to participate.

In-person voting is already difficult for some older people:

- **More than half of over 75s are disabled so experience the same difficulties with physical access, neurological and sensory impairment that other disabled voters face.**

- **Over 40% over 75s have never used the internet or have not done so 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 over 80-year-olds have dementia and that can lead to presumptions being made on their behalf by their 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 for in-person voting are enacted, the Government should put in place safeguarding measures to ensure that no individual is disenfranchised in circumstances that they do not have the required documentation and cannot travel to an electoral office to confirm their identity.

Mitigating measures should include:

- **A non-digital form of free elections ID alongside any digital offering. Electors should not have to scan or download personal information onto a local government portal or website – this would be an additional barrier to accessing free photo ID.**
- **Polling station staff being briefed on the full list of acceptable photo IDs including on accepting expired Government-issued travel passes from different areas of the country.**
- **Clear communication to voters ahead of elections on what ID will be required when voting: This could be done by printing information on polling cards, through notices issued alongside polling cards, posters being placed in prominent areas, and by contacting targeted groups where there are likely to be harder to reach voters, such as care home residents and unpaid carers, informing them that they will need to bring a particular form of ID in advance.**
- **Local authority election staff should proactively reach out to electors to offer a free form of election ID and travel to them to support them in securing this form of identification.**

## **Get in touch**

For more information or to discuss the Bill in more detail, please contact Roshni Mistry, Senior Public Affairs Officer at [roshni.mistry@ageuk.org.uk](mailto:roshni.mistry@ageuk.org.uk)