

RESTORING TRUST IN OUR DEMOCRACY: OUR STRATEGY FOR MODERN AND SECURE ELECTIONS

Ministerial Foreword

Our democracy is central to who we are as a country. We can take pride in its evolution and how it has and continues to inspire. As a government, we have a responsibility to protect and strengthen it.

The right to participate in our democracy is a defining aspect of our national identity and should not be taken for granted. Over the centuries, stretching back to the Magna Carta, men and women have struggled long and hard for the right to vote. We remember the efforts of the Chartists, the Suffragettes and others in their fight to advance and widen participation in our democracy.

In each generation there must be a national conversation about how to protect our democratic system and culture, so that we build on our advances and bequeath a democracy more robust and relevant to the next generation. We must build upon the foundations laid by those who came before us, and continue to strengthen, modernise and improve our democracy, leaving it in a better place than we found it.

The world is changing but our political system has not kept pace. If harnessed correctly, new technologies have the power to strengthen and simplify our democracy, so voters feel confident and connected. Yet at the same time we must contend with hostile actors who seek new ways to disrupt our way of life, and candidates being put off standing by intimidation and violence. Declining trust in our institutions and democracy itself has become critical, but it is the responsibility of government to turn this around and renew our democracy, just as generations have done before us.

This strategy aims to usher in a new chapter in our democracy, reflecting our principles, and restoring faith in our politics. In doing so, we have set ourselves urgent new tasks: futureproofing our democracy, securing our elections and upholding our values, and protecting our elections against interference. Our aim is bold but simple; to reclaim Britain's democracy as an aspiration for the rest of the world.

To do this we will bring forward a Bill during this Parliament. This landmark legislation is the boldest and most ambitious change to our democracy for decades. It includes expanding the democratic rights of young people and working towards a system of automated voter

registration; bringing forward new safeguards on digital campaigning and paving the way for digital voter identification; rebuilding our firewall against foreign interference and protecting those who put their name forward to stand in elections against harassment and intimidation; and holding our elected officials to higher standards than ever before.

It is testament to the ongoing hard work and dedication of Returning Officers, Electoral Registration Officers and their teams that our elections have been delivered securely and successfully, but we cannot take this for granted. The strength of our democracy is determined by how much of the country participates, and the faith they have in the results. With these values in mind, we will make our democracy fit for the future.

The Rt Hon Angela Rayner MP

Rushanara Ali MP

**Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of
State for Housing, Communities and Local
Government**

Minister for Homelessness and Democracy

Introduction

1. This Government is committed to restoring trust in our political system, by strengthening our democracy and encouraging full participation by legitimate voters in our elections. A key part of democracy is making sure everyone has a voice. But declining turnout and low voter registration numbers show that many have lost confidence that they are being listened to. Evolving security risks, ever-increasing levels of intimidation and harassment, and concerns around foreign interference in our elections all contribute to this generational challenge. We must act now to tackle these threats to our democracy.
2. This Strategy sets out the actions the Government will take to simplify, protect and promote our democracy. We will make important changes to our electoral franchise, registration processes, political finance framework, campaigning rules and voting processes. We will take action to address the threat posed by harassment, abuse and intimidation. These changes will help to keep our elections secure, build public trust and encourage more people to engage and participate.
3. The Government is committed to delivering for people across the United Kingdom, working across the breadth and depth of government to ensure every part of the country is heard, whilst respecting the history and differences in the systems for Great Britain and Northern Ireland.
4. Collaboration with the devolved governments is central to the Government's commitment to make the devolution settlements in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland work effectively to deliver on people's priorities, and more broadly to the Government's approach to rebuilding the country. The Scottish and Welsh Governments are responsible for their own local elections and elections to the

Scottish Parliament and Senedd Cymru respectively. The UK Government holds responsibility for elections to the UK Parliament, local council and Mayoral elections in England, Police and Crime Commissioner elections in England and Wales, elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly and local council elections in Northern Ireland. We will work closely with our partners in the Scottish and Welsh Governments to identify where differences exist or may arise as a result of devolution. Where we jointly believe it makes sense, we will aim to align the rules and processes for elections reserved to the UK Government with devolved elections in Scotland and Wales.

5. Our aim is to deliver these commitments during the lifetime of this Parliament through a programme of electoral reform. To implement these changes, we will work closely with our partners in local and devolved government, with the electoral sector, with education and civil society, and with citizens themselves to ensure impacts are thoroughly considered and changes are successfully delivered.

Chapter 1: Futureproofing our democracy

6. The world is ever changing, and we must take action to ensure our democracy evolves with it. Much of our electoral legislation dates back decades, if not hundreds of years; laws, systems and processes are outdated and, in places, inadequate. To futureproof our democracy, we need to take action to provide our elections with the security and resilience they need, to engage young people in our democracy and set them on course for a lifetime of participation, and to ensure every legitimate elector can take part.
7. Everyone who is entitled to vote should be able, supported and encouraged to do so. However, the Electoral Commission estimates that as many as 7-8 million otherwise eligible citizens are either incorrectly registered or not registered at all.¹ Addressing this registration gap must be a priority in order to increase participation in our elections.
8. Our ambition is to transform our registration practices, harnessing data and moving towards an automated system so voters can easily and simply be registered to vote. This requires a multifaceted approach through both immediate improvements in data sharing and integration of digital services, and, for the longer-term, testing innovative approaches before permanently implementing those changes that prove successful.
9. Taking this approach set out in this Strategy to improving voter registration will protect the existing registers, voter data and processes which are integral to the democratic process whilst setting our course for transformation. Our approach will harness existing data across Government to support improvements now and we will work at pace to explore, test and implement new methods of automated voter registration in

¹ [2023 report: Electoral registers in the UK | Electoral Commission](#): the research estimated a range of around 7-8 million people not correctly registered on the local government registers in December 2022.

the future. Ultimately, we will find the best ways of ensuring all eligible citizens have the opportunity to be registered in the easiest way possible for them.

Votes at 16

10. 16- and 17-year-olds across the UK are engaged and focused on the key issues affecting our country both domestically and internationally. 16- and 17-year-olds can work, pay tax, serve in the military, and contribute in so many ways to our society. It is right and fair that they should be able to vote. As promised in the manifesto on which this government was elected, **the Government will legislate to lower the age at which you can vote in all UK elections to 16.**
11. By engaging voters early, when they are young, and allowing them to have a say in shaping their future, we will build the foundations for their lifelong participation in our electoral processes. Votes at 16 is critical to engaging young people in our democracy, empowering them to participate in society and affecting real change both locally and nationally.
12. 16- and 17-year-olds will have the same rights, once registered, as any other voter. Similarly to Scotland, and with the right safeguards in place, we will also enable registration from age 14; this will help young people to be fully registered as soon as they reach voting age and ensure they have the opportunity to vote even if an election falls on or shortly after their 16th birthday. The minimum age to stand as a candidate will remain at 18 years, mirroring the approach taken by the Governments of Scotland and Wales and ensuring consistent approaches to both voting and candidacy across the whole UK.
13. **We will also put in place measures to enable children looked after by local authorities to register to vote in a way that reflects their specific circumstances, and to ensure they are supported by local authorities to do so,** supporting looked after children to participate in our democracy.
14. We are looking carefully at how young people can be supported to verify their identity when registering to vote, particularly for those younger than 16 who will not yet have received their National Insurance Number. **In Northern Ireland, where the Chief Electoral Officer already has access to National Insurance data, we will be providing them with the power to add a National Insurance number to an elector's record.** This will mean that in Northern Ireland, where a National Insurance number forms part of an elector's record, young people registering before they have a National Insurance number will have a complete electoral record by the time they are eligible to vote, without being asked to complete a further application.
15. We will install appropriate safeguards to protect the data of people under the age of 16 by working with the Information Commissioner's Office. Nobody under 16 will appear on the open register and they will be excluded from the current requirements for house-to-house visits as part of the annual canvass carried out by Electoral Registration Officers. Those aged 16 and over and registered to vote will have the

same rights and responsibilities as other electors and will be treated the same; their data will be available in the same way as other people on the full register, and they will continue to be liable to the same penalties as others for electoral and registration offences.

16. Legislating to lower the voting age is just the start of successfully engaging young people in our democracy. **We will be working with our partners – including local and devolved governments, the Electoral Commission, electoral administrators, schools and colleges, charities and youth groups, and more - to help prepare for this new chapter in our country’s democratic evolution.** Alongside the Electoral Commission, we will be working with stakeholders and the Department of Education in Northern Ireland to help ensure a coordinated approach to education and engagement in Northern Ireland.
17. The changes we are making, empowering young people to register from age 14 and to vote from age 16, **will allow strong links to be made between theory and action, supporting effective and relevant democratic education in schools. Practical steps will be taken to help the education sector to support the implementation of votes at 16** and we will consider the outcome of the independent Curriculum and Assessment Review, which will report later this year.
18. Beyond education, engaging young people in decision-making is at the core of the government’s Youth Strategy. The National Youth Strategy has been co-designed with young people and recognises the value of empowering young people to shape the communities and societies they are part of. **Youth and civil society groups stand ready to work with Government to build awareness and engage with young people to ensure success of votes at 16.**
19. It is important that we guard newly enfranchised young people against the potential effects of online mis- and disinformation. Implementation of the Online Safety Act 2023 (OSA) is ongoing, in collaboration with Ofcom, and duties are already in place on social media platforms and search engines to take action against illegal mis- and disinformation on their services. The OSA’s Protection of Children Codes and risk assessment guidance will become enforceable over the summer meaning that services such as social media and search engines will be required to take appropriate action to keep children safe online. Further duties will come into force over the coming years to bring an enhanced level of safety, transparency and accountability to online services.

Creating a system of automated registration

20. Over the coming years, **we will work to create an automated registration system.** Automated approaches to registration, some of which are already in use in other countries, are where an application from a citizen to register is not necessarily needed and instead eligible citizens can be directly added to the electoral register. The Welsh

Government are currently piloting a number of potential approaches to automated registration for local council elections in Wales and elections to Senedd Cymru.

21. To support this transformation in registration practices, **we will actively test methods of automated registration**. Harnessing automation for voter registration will help us remove a key barrier to eligible citizens participating in our democracy.
22. As part of this work, we will look to build in essential safeguards so that anyone being registered in this way in the future is made aware of their registration status and can opt-out should they wish to. This will avoid any unintended consequences which may result from a more direct form of registration, such as risks around anonymous electors or undermining public trust in the registration system.
23. To ensure there is no unnecessary delay between finding successful solutions and implementing them, **we will also legislate to ensure permanent changes can be brought in swiftly without the need for further primary legislation where we are confident that they will have a positive impact on registration levels**.
24. As we move towards automated registration, we will also make changes to the rules around the inclusion of electors on the open register. **We will remove the presumption that citizens will be added to the open register unless they opt out. Instead, they will not be added, unless they actively opt in.**

Effective and safe sharing of data to improve registration

25. Electoral administrators in England often struggle to gain access to data held locally that would help them in their duty to maintain complete and accurate registers. Often this is due to a lack of clarity or differing interpretations of the powers, responsibilities and risks - under both electoral law and wider data protection law – regarding Electoral Registration Officers’ access to and use of locally held data.
26. As we work to create a system of automated registration, we believe it is sensible to clarify those rights and responsibilities in order to support current electoral registration processes: **we will act to strengthen data provisions in law where it is necessary to do so, and will use non-legislative approaches to support Electoral Registration Officers and local authorities to facilitate the effective use of data at a local level**. These straightforward changes will enable Electoral Registration Officers to access and use data held within their own local authority that would be helpful to them in their registration duties.
27. In addition, there are levers and powers which Electoral Registration Officers already have which could be better used to push registration with certain cohorts who may struggle to stay registered. For example, some universities use the enrolment process to support students to register to vote;² this can be done at the start of each academic year, therefore capturing any students who might have changed address. **We will**

² [DfE external document template](#)

work with Electoral Registration Officers and other relevant parties to promote more widespread use of innovative methods to support registration.

Better join-up across government services

28. As well as data held locally, central government and its agencies also handles data on citizens which could be used to support registration. As set out in the Government's blueprint for a modern digital government,³ technology presents us with ever-expanding possibilities to improve the way that government delivers for the public. We must act to better link services up, meet public expectations for government digital services, and grasp every opportunity to drive greater value for money for the taxpayer. For registration, we must enable better use of data and services so that eligible citizens can be supported, invited and reminded to apply to register when they interact with other services run by government.
29. There are a number of approaches that could be taken in this space. There are opportunities to invite or encourage citizens to register or to update their details when they are already interacting with the Government by creating links between the Register to Vote service and other public sector services. Docking the Register to Vote service into other digital services more seamlessly and reducing the need for new data entry where a citizen has already shared information is a further approach which we believe may help achieve higher registration rates.
30. **We will test these more digitally enabled and convenient approaches to registration to understand which interventions or further changes to the law would be the most effective and offer the best value for money.** The Department for Work and Pensions, Department for Transport, Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency, HM Revenue and Customs, the Home Office and the Department for Education are working in collaboration with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to identify data-enabled opportunities to support the overall objective of improving registration.
31. In parallel to this work, **we will embrace the opportunities afforded by the Government's digital agenda, harnessing the power of technology to streamline services and better serve end users. We will therefore explore integrating the Register to Vote digital service with GOV.UK One Login and the GOV.UK app, which supports citizens to access a range of Government services more easily and which could streamline the route to registration for many individuals.**

Removing the requirement for additional supporting evidence in Northern Ireland

32. For historic reasons, all applications to register to vote in Northern Ireland made in the period immediately preceding an election must be supported by additional, documentary evidence. Where the Chief Electoral Officer concludes, on the basis of

³ [A blueprint for modern digital government \(HTML\) - GOV.UK](#)

the rigorous data checks that would be conducted at any other time, the application is valid, it is unnecessary to require additional documentation even though this is set out in law. It is likely that younger people especially will have more difficulty in providing the documentation required which is an unnecessary barrier to their registration. **We will therefore be removing the requirement for additional supporting evidence to register to vote in Northern Ireland** so that registration at all times is subject to the same tests and this hurdle to registration is removed.

Northern Ireland Canvass

33. The way the electoral canvass is run in Northern Ireland is unlike that in the rest of the UK and over time has become less efficient at ensuring the accuracy and completeness of the register. **The Northern Ireland Office has committed to updating the canvass in Northern Ireland to enable the Chief Electoral Officer to make best use of the high-quality data from local and central government sources to which they already have access, to ensure that eligible voters are not removed from the register unnecessarily and to focus canvass efforts on unregistered groups.**

Democratic engagement

34. We must also recognise that registration is not the end of the story. There is far more we can and must do to connect with the millions who are eligible and who may or may not be registered but who choose not to take part in the democratic process.
35. Evidence tells us that electors' attitudes and motivation are arguably more important than process issues in stopping them registering and voting.⁴ Whilst delivering on our pledge to be a government of public service and restoring the public's trust in politics as a force for good will help to rebuild confidence and encourage participation in our elections, we are also committed to going further and taking a proactive approach to engaging citizens in our democracy.
36. **The Government will therefore also be carrying out wider work, engaging across society, with local authorities, the Electoral Commission and civil society organisations, and with academics and think tanks to understand the barriers to registration and to participation. As part of this work, we will be considering potential solutions to support more people across the whole electorate to participate in our democratic processes, to register, and, ultimately, to vote.**

Improving voter ID

37. This government was elected on a manifesto that promised to improve voter registration and address the inconsistencies in the voter ID rules that prevent legitimate voters from participating. There is no doubt that significant improvements

⁴ [Attitudes to voter registration research report | Electoral Commission](#): Electoral Commission research indicates the primary barrier to registering to vote is motivational, with a lack of interest in voting a recurrent theme.

are needed to futureproof the system and remove barriers to participation. These must be balanced to ensure legitimate electors are able to vote at the polling station, should they wish to, whilst also maintaining proportional safeguards against personation.

38. Evidence consistently shows that at least 2% of people in Great Britain do not hold a form of ID on the current list.⁵ Certain groups of people are less likely to have accepted forms of photo ID⁶ and so are disproportionately impacted by the policy. In addition, around 4% of non-voters at the 2024 General Election cited voter ID as a factor in their not turning out to vote.⁷ The needs of future, younger voters and the increasing use of digital documentation must also be considered.

Expanding IDs accepted at the polling station

39. **We have already taken the first step in widening the list of documents accepted as voter ID at polling stations in Great Britain, having passed legislation which allows the use of the HM Armed Forces Veteran Card as voter ID.** This closes a clear gap in the list and brings parity between our veterans and actively serving armed forces personnel who were already able to use their Armed Forces Identity Cards.
40. **We will now go further to ensure the accessibility of the voter ID policy by amending legislation to permit the use of UK-issued bank cards as an accepted form of voter ID in Great Britain, providing the bank card displays the elector's name.** This will legitimise the policy and allow more choice and flexibility for voters.
41. There is longstanding precedent of the use of bank cards as identification and our desk-based research has shown that 96.37% - 99.76% of those aged 14 and over in the United Kingdom have a bank account,⁸ with the majority also likely therefore to have a bank card. This change is expected to allow a far greater proportion of legitimate electors to easily meet the voter identification requirements.
42. The photographic voter ID system used in Northern Ireland has been in place since 2003 and the Electoral Commission have confirmed it is well understood and trusted. **We will be separately considering what measures may be needed to update the system to ensure 16- and 17-year-olds are able to vote at polling stations in Northern Ireland, and will also legislate to allow the use of the Veteran Card.**
43. The Electoral ID card in Northern Ireland has, over time, become used almost as a de facto national ID card. The increase in demand from people wishing to use the card other than for electoral purposes, has placed increasing and undue strain on the electoral service provider, the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland. To address this

⁵ [Mini wave data tables January 2025 .xlsx](#):

⁶ [Evaluation of Electoral Integrity Programme: public opinion research wave 3 - GOV.UK](#)

⁷ [Voter ID at the 2024 UK general election | Electoral Commission](#): 4% of people who said they did not vote at the general election gave an unprompted reason related to the ID rules. [Evaluation of Electoral Integrity Programme: public opinion research wave 3 - GOV.UK](#) 3% of non-voters cited photographic ID issues as a reason for not voting.

⁸ The World Bank, [Global Financial Inclusion | DataBank](#)

unnecessary burden on the electoral administrator **we will be removing the day of birth from the Electoral ID card, leaving only the month and year of birth.** This information will be sufficient to provide the necessary identification for electoral purposes but should limit the demand for use as a more general proof of ID.

Facilitating digital voter ID

44. The use of digital documents is rapidly becoming more widespread and popular. The Government is committed to modernising and improving ways for people to interact with government digitally and recognises the great value and convenience that the use of digital IDs can bring to the public particularly through simplified access and use. As announced in January, the GOV.UK wallet will give users the choice to securely store government-issued documents on their phone, supporting the government's aim to encourage and support their uptake. The Ministry of Defence will shortly be launching the digital Veteran Card, and the Department for Transport anticipate launching the digital Driving Licence later this year. Both will be available via GOV.UK wallet.
45. The voter ID legislation currently stipulates that ID accepted at the polling station must be an original document – it does not specify that it must be a physical document. As documents already on the accepted list become available in digital form, these too will therefore be accepted at the polling station. We recognise, however, that polling station staff must be able to quickly and easily satisfy themselves that they are looking at an original document, and so **we will clarify that digital IDs accepted at the polling station must be verifiable via a visual check.**
46. **The Government will also enable Electoral Registration Officers to issue a digital Voter Authority Certificate,** allowing them to meet the clear expectations of an increasingly digitally minded electorate, as well as offering benefits such as faster delivery and reduced printing costs. The existing paper Voter Authority Certificate will remain an option for those who want it, with electors still able to apply either online via GOV.UK or by a paper form.
47. Overall, the improvements to voter ID set out in this Strategy make it easier and more convenient for legitimate electors to prove their identity and engage in the democratic process while maintaining a proportionate and appropriate security check at the polling station.

Fixing the foundations: securing the delivery of elections

48. As we look to the future of democracy and to increasing participation in our elections, we must all be mindful of the foundations upon which it is built. The Government has inherited a local government in crisis, and we are committed to resetting the relationship with our partners in local authorities. This crisis is compounding the risks brought to the delivery of elections by outdated electoral law and by supply chains which are fragile and coming under increasing strain.

49. Against this backdrop, the Government recognises the scale of the challenges faced by the electoral sector in the delivery of elections, the hard work that goes into delivering high profile, short notice events such as a General Election, and the need to consider the increasing risks to and resilience of the country's electoral delivery infrastructure.
50. With this in mind, the Government has undertaken a strategic review of electoral registration and conduct processes, considering the key stages in and resilience of election delivery and electoral registration and aiming to reduce the major risks, alleviate strain on local authority electoral services, and enhance the voter experience. Working in partnership with the Electoral Commission, electoral practitioners and key local authority representatives, including the Association of Electoral Administrators and the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers has allowed us to identify the biggest challenges in the current system and identify practical and pragmatic solutions to address them.
51. **A full list of the outcomes of the review and the changes which the Government proposes to make as a result are set out in the Annex to this Strategy**, and some are drawn out in more detail below. Collectively these technical changes represent a significant improvement in processes and will make the running of our elections more efficient, effective and resilient.
52. As the world continues to evolve around us, we must continue to ensure our democratic processes keep pace with technology and with the way in which people live their lives. The way we vote in a polling station has changed little since the Ballot Act 1872. **We will therefore explore how to modernise the way polling stations operate, to make it more efficient and more convenient, meeting elector expectations of modern public services and facilitating efficient public services. We plan to learn from international and innovative approaches to flexible voting, boosting democratic engagement, and modernising public services.**

Adjusting deadlines and processes to improve resilience

53. One of the biggest challenges identified throughout the review is the time available to administrators to undertake all the activities required to deliver a poll. This is particularly the case as regards a General Election, where the unscheduled nature of that election, its scale, complexity and associated significant spike in registration activity, compound to exacerbate underlying issues.
54. The electoral timetable was extended in 2011 from 17 to 25 working days to support postal voting, particularly for overseas electors, and the Government does not intend at this time to further increase the timetable. However, a number of deadlines within the timetable will be adjusted in order to alleviate some of the strain and provide more resilience to the system.
55. **We are proposing to clarify the deadline to register to vote in legislation and set it at 5pm, 12 working days before a poll**, bringing the deadline in line with other election

application deadlines, which are already set at 5pm. This provides consistency for citizens and allows any queries or issues with a registration application to be addressed within the working day. This is important for electors and for effective administration at a pivotal point in the electoral timetable.

56. **The hours during which Returning Officers can accept nominations for candidates wishing to stand in an election will be adjusted and the final deadline moved earlier in time.** This will allow increased time overall for political parties and prospective candidates to submit their nominations, but ensure the nominations process is completed quicker, increasing the capacity in the timeline to support postal voters receiving their ballots.
57. Fixing the foundations upon which our democratic processes operate will ensure, as we work to restore public trust in our politics and encourage and support more people to participate in our democracy, that the system works for everyone involved: from the practitioners who deliver our elections, to the candidates standing to earn the public's trust, to voters who make a choice about who they wish to represent them on the local, national and global stage.

Improvements for voting by post

58. This Government is determined to support Returning Officers in ensuring all legitimate voters are able and supported to cast their vote. Whether they opt to do so in person at the polling station or via postal or proxy vote, any instance of eligible people being unable to vote is unacceptable.
59. Over the last 25 years, postal voting has steadily increased in popularity and usage and the vast majority of people who have voted by post in recent elections have been satisfied with the method.⁹ However, the postal voting system, which relies on specialist printers to print postal ballot packs, and Royal Mail to deliver and return them, is, particularly in Great Britain, under increasing strain. This is putting increasing pressure on local authority election teams, and at the General Election in July 2024 a number of people expecting to vote by post were unable to complete and return their postal ballots ahead of polling day.¹⁰

⁹ [Report on the 2024 UK Parliamentary general election and the May 2024 elections | Electoral Commission](#): 89% of postal voters reported satisfaction with the process of voting at the 2024 UK Parliamentary general election (95% in Northern Ireland, 91% in Wales, 89% in England and 85% in Scotland).

¹⁰ [Report on the 2024 UK Parliamentary general election and the May 2024 elections | Electoral Commission](#)

[Evaluation of Electoral Integrity Programme: public opinion research wave 3 - GOV.UK](#) - Overall, 8% of non-voters mentioned they did not vote because of an issue related to their postal vote (such as missing the deadline to apply, forms arriving late and forgetting to send their postal vote) – with this figure rising to 13% in Scotland and Wales.

60. Due to the nature of the electoral timetable and the deadlines within it, postal ballots have to be printed and dispatched very close to polling day. If there are any delays or issues with any step of this process, the current rules can result in there being too little time for an elector to receive and return their postal ballot or to take action to change their voting method. **We are therefore proposing a change to the deadline in Great Britain to apply for a postal vote, moving it from 11 to 14 working days before a poll,** thereby providing more time between the application deadline and polling day. This will align with the existing deadline in Northern Ireland. The increased time provides the system with more flexibility and ultimately better serves voters through an improved likelihood of their receiving and being able to return their ballot ahead of polling day. **Other technical changes will be made to the system to clarify deadlines and processes for administrators and to provide clear options for electors whose postal vote is no longer viable, enabling earlier reissuing of a ballot or allowing them to more easily switch to an alternative method of voting should that be appropriate.**
61. Taken together, these changes will address some of the issues experienced by some postal voters at the 2024 General Election and will help build more resilience into the postal voting system. The Government remains clear, however, that more needs to be done and so will continue to consider further steps that may be taken to strengthen the postal voting system over the longer term.

Dual-registration of political parties in limited circumstances

62. It is important for public debate that a broad range of campaigners are able to take part, allowing voters to hear a variety of voices and views. Third-party campaigners are therefore vital in contributing to a healthy democracy.
63. While the rules preventing registration as both a political party and a third-party at the same time help to level the playing field in political campaigning, the ban on dual registration introduced by the Elections Act 2022 meant legitimate smaller parties were excluded from participating fully, effectively barring these parties from our democracy. We do not think this is right. We will therefore take action to correct this issue in limited circumstances. **We will allow dual registration for parties who have formal electoral agreements in place.** This will ensure a balance between allowing legitimate campaigning, while still preventing parties from gaming the system.

Chapter 2: Upholding our values

64. Democracy is fundamental to who we are as a country. Our systems and institutions are internationally renowned and are emulated across the globe. But this is not a settled fact of life. We see democracies around the world backsliding. We have seen how people can lose faith in democracy and how the right to vote can be undermined and even removed under repressive regimes.

65. Our own democracy is being threatened by misinformation, foreign donations, and unacceptable intimidation. We must act now to secure our democracy, to protect it from interference from malign actors, and to ensure the safety of all those participating. By acting to uphold the values which underpin our elections we will further strengthen our democracy and be better placed to encourage full participation from eligible voters.
66. Thoughtful and respectful debate underpins our politics. We come from a multitude of diverse backgrounds and viewpoints, and values are often sincerely held and passionately argued, but where healthy argument spills over into harassment, intimidation and abuse it is simply unacceptable.
67. In recent years, we have witnessed abhorrent behaviours directed at candidates, campaigners and electoral staff, with unacceptable violence, abuse and intimidation linked to the political debate. This behaviour is becoming more widespread, with recent research from the Electoral Commission showing a significant number of candidates in the 2024 elections – 43% of responding candidates in England at the May 2024 local elections; 55% of responding candidates at the 2024 General Election - experienced some kind of abuse or intimidation.¹¹ The recent First Report of the Speaker’s Conference¹² on these issues has drawn similar conclusions and we are grateful to the Speaker and the rest of the committee for their report and the thorough analysis within it. A survey carried out by the Speaker’s Conference on the security of MPs, candidates and elections also found that 52% of MPs felt unsafe and 49% experienced anxiety or depression due to threats.¹³ One-third of MPs considered not seeking re-election, and one in six contemplated resignation from public office due to these threats. Abuse disproportionately targeted women and minority ethnic MPs, with such abuse often being sexually or racially charged.
68. Intimidation and harassment of voters, electoral staff, candidates and campaigners – both online and in person – is totally unacceptable and has a profoundly detrimental impact on our democracy. We take these risks and threats to our democracy seriously and whilst there are already a range of protective measures and deterrents in place, it is clear that more action must be taken to protect voters, candidates, and election staff from intimidation, threats and violence. This must be carefully balanced against the protection of freedom of speech.

The Defending Democracy Taskforce

69. We are taking action to boost our understanding of the changing nature and scale of harassment and intimidation and the underlying reasons why people engage in these behaviours - the trends, motivations and drivers that cause people to harass and

¹¹ <https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/research-reports-and-data/our-reports-and-data-past-elections-and-referendums/report-2024-uk-parliamentary-general-election-and-may-2024-elections#barriers-voting>

¹² [Speaker’s Conference on the security of candidates, MPs and elections](#)

¹³ [Speaker’s Conference on the security of MPs, candidates and elections](#)

intimidate those participating in public life – in order to build resilience for future democratic events. The Defending Democracy Taskforce, chaired by the Security Minister, has a mandate from the Prime Minister to coordinate and drive forward a cross-government response to the full range of threats to our democracy and to further protect those participating in our political processes.

70. The Taskforce is working with a wide range of public sector organisations, including the Home Office, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, the Ministry of Justice, the Crown Prosecution Service, the Parliamentary Liaison Team, and the Electoral Commission, to actively review levers for preventing harassment and intimidation. This includes identifying whether there are vulnerabilities and legislative gaps in the powers the police have, considering whether electoral law is sufficient to protect our national security, and finding ways to support the consistency of police response across the UK to these issues.
71. **The Taskforce will build upon the support already available for candidates standing in UK elections and drive forward the Government’s response to the full range of threats faced by those participating in our democracy** – whether they are an elected representative, candidate, or campaigner; and whether this takes place during or outside of an election campaign.

Changes to electoral law as part of the wider programme of work on harassment and intimidation

72. Participation must be safer – and feel safer – for everyone. We will therefore introduce a range of measures, both legislative and non-legislative, to deliver additional safeguards and protections.

Extension of the disqualification order to include offences against electoral staff

73. Under current electoral law, those convicted of specified offences involving the intimidation or abuse of candidates, campaigners or elected office holders may also receive a five-year ban from standing for, or holding, elected office.¹⁴ This disqualification order is in addition to any sentence they receive for the underlying criminal offence. It acts as a deterrent by preventing those who would seek to damage our democracy from taking an active role in the very process they sought to undermine.
74. The introduction of the disqualification order was a step in the right direction. However, currently, it applies only where the offender was motivated by hostility towards candidates, future candidates, substitutes or nominees (in Northern Ireland), campaigners and elected officials. Electoral staff are not currently protected under its scope, and this lack of deterrent is a clear gap in the current protections.

¹⁴ [Elections Act 2022](#)

75. **The Government will go further, extending the disqualification order to also include offences against electoral staff**, enhancing its reach and ensuring that those involved in the administration and delivery of elections also benefit from its protection.

Statutory aggravating factor for intimidation

76. Whilst the disqualification order is a crucial part of tackling intimidation and harassment, as a lone deterrent it does nothing to prevent those who have no interest in standing as a candidate from intimidating or harassing candidates, campaigners or electoral staff.
77. **We will therefore act to empower courts, when passing sentences for intimidatory offences motivated by hostility towards candidates, campaigners, elected representatives, or electoral staff, to treat that hostility as an aggravating factor.** Empowering courts to increase sentences for offences where such hostility is present will underline the severity of the offence and give greater protection to those involved in upholding and participating in democratic processes.

Removal of the requirement for candidates' home addresses to be published

78. Under current legislation, election agents' addresses are published in the Notice of Election Agents.¹⁵ Unless candidates acting as their own election agents have an office address, it is their home address which is published, even when the candidate has chosen to otherwise withhold it. This clearly puts candidates and their families at risk of violence and intimidation in their own homes.
79. **We will remove the requirement for candidate's addresses to be published in the Notice of Elections Agents in these circumstances**, putting beyond doubt that this personal information does not need to be made public and protecting the security of those participating in public life. We will also ensure that all election agents have the opportunity to provide a correspondence address, to avoid publication of their home addresses. This will bring our legislation in line with that of the Scottish and Welsh Governments.
80. We must also ensure that the homes of members of both Houses, other elected office holders and candidates are better protected. Despite the current range of powers available to the police to tackle harassment and intimidation, there have been protests outside the homes of fellow MPs and other elected representatives that have either escalated into incidents of harassment and intimidation, or been pre-planned in that vein. While the police have powers to disperse the majority of these protests, the Defending Democracy Taskforce is aware of reports of some incidents being managed ineffectively. The apparent inconsistency of approach is something the Home Office is working with the police to understand further. **The Security Minister**

¹⁵ [Representation of the People Act 1983](#)

– as part of the broader Harassment and Intimidation Review – is actively reviewing the strength of the legislation in the context of protecting MPs in their private homes.

Candidate identification

81. As part of addressing issues with the unacceptable behaviour we have seen in recent years and, as highlighted by the Speaker's Conference,¹⁶ with people standing for election for the purpose of being disruptive or as sham candidates, **we will bring forward measures requiring candidates to sign a very clear declaration along with their nomination.** This will set out the requirement for truth in nomination forms and the penalties for lying. We will further reinforce that by **requiring evidence of identity for people standing to be elected.** If we are asking electors to identify themselves, we think it is perfectly reasonable to ask candidates to do the same.

Improving guidance and codes of conduct

82. In order for legislation to be effective in tackling intimidation and harassment, all parties need to be clear what their roles are, what protections are available, what the thresholds are for police intervention, and what the processes are for accessing police support. **We will develop clearer guidance on the application of election, online safety and public order legislation, to be shared with the police, Returning Officers and candidates to ensure a more common understanding.** The Defending Democracy Taskforce is undertaking this work, supported through the cross-departmental Joint Election Security and Preparedness Unit, which coordinates election security and preparedness activity within government and externally.

83. Leaders across the political spectrum must also be clear that there is no tolerance for intimidation and harassment in our democracy. This is a non-political issue which affects everyone and in which political leaders must be united in understanding the need to act. To ensure political debate is honest, transparent and remains civil and safe for all, campaigners must be accountable for their conduct. We welcome the Speaker's Conference's recommendation to establish a code of conduct for campaigning. **We will work with the Speaker and the Electoral Commission to consult with political parties to develop a code which is fit for purpose, ensuring that it meets the needs of the broad range of candidates from across the political spectrum.** This will have a positive impact on the level of trust the public has in political parties, candidates, and campaigners, with more confidence that campaigns are being conducted with honesty and integrity and are not intentionally attempting to mislead the public.

Ensuring safety at polling stations and count venues

¹⁶ [Speaker's Conference \(2024\) - Publications - Committees - UK Parliament](#)

84. Ensuring the safety of those participating in the voting process – whether they are voters, elections staff, candidates or campaigners – is paramount to protecting the integrity of our elections and to maintaining trust in our democracy. No one entering a polling station or count venue should be subject to abuse or intimidation. **We will work with our partners across central and local government and with the Electoral Commission to provide updated guidance for the police and Returning Officers which ensures the security and safety of all those participating.**
85. Current practice in Northern Ireland requires poll clerks to shout out the name and number of everyone to whom they deliver a ballot paper, so that political party representatives sitting within the polling station (polling agents) can note down who has voted. The measure was originally intended to help prevent fraud in polling stations but the requirement to produce photographic ID in polling stations means this precaution is now unnecessary. This provision was originally UK-wide but was removed for Great Britain by the Elections Act 2022. It is both outdated and can be seen by some voters as both unwelcome and intimidatory, so **we will be bringing Northern Ireland into line with the rest of the UK by removing the requirement to call out names in polling stations.**

Supporting anonymous electors

86. Victims of domestic violence and others who could be put at risk if named publicly have the option to be registered anonymously. This option is vitally important in keeping people safe whilst also ensuring they are able to participate in our elections. The current requirement to reapply every year to remain anonymous places an unnecessary burden on these people, and so **we will amend the anonymous registration rules to extend the length of the anonymity period, meaning they no longer have to reapply annually.**

Working together to tackle harassment and intimidation

87. Harassment and intimidation is a complex issue which requires a comprehensive response from all parts of government, the Electoral Commission and society at large. It is important that any Government intervention strikes the right balance between protecting freedom of speech in political debate and ensuring that no one is discouraged from participating in our democracy for fear of retaliation. We value the work done by the Speaker's Conference to bring attention to and investigate this important issue. **We will carefully consider the recommendations made by the Speaker's Conference in their first report and will continue to engage with them as they move into the second phase of their work.** We will continue to work closely across Government departments and with the Electoral Commission to bring about these interventions and ensure that the UK continues to be a thriving and diverse democracy.

Chapter 3: Protecting our elections against interference

88. The world is changing, and we must respond. Our hard-won democracy is increasingly threatened by dirty money and digital threats, yet our firewall to protect against their interference has not kept pace. The UK's existing political finance framework is no longer enough, and for too long, successive governments have failed to respond when the National Crime Agency, Electoral Commission, and Committee on Standards in Public Life have all raised the alarm. To keep hostile actors at bay and show a united front with our allies, we will bring forward new safeguards so that people can have full faith that the money entering our politics is legitimate, and strengthen the powers of the regulator to clamp down on those who seek to evade the rules.
89. Voters must also be confident that they know who is behind the political campaigning material they see – both online and in print – in order to support them making informed decisions. A robust imprint regime ensures transparency, and as the nature of campaigning evolves, both digitally and through traditional media, we must review and strengthen the existing rules to close gaps and ensure continued public confidence in our systems. We will address gaps in the current imprint regime to protect the system and ensure fair play, facilitating appropriate scrutiny of political messaging whilst avoiding placing undue burdens on campaigners.
90. The Electoral Commission has a pivotal role to play. This Government is committed to the Commission's independence and determined to work in partnership with it to protect the integrity of our elections.

Strengthening the rules around political donations

91. The proposals detailed below will make changes to the electoral law framework which governs political donations. This will apply to all types of donations via any financial transaction, including cryptocurrency.

Know-Your-Donor

92. A crucial part of strengthening the safeguards against impermissible donations is to modernise how political parties and other recipients of political donations undertake checks on the donations they receive. This is not about limiting or discouraging donations to campaigners – it is after all crucial to our democracy that they remain able to fund themselves. It is equally important that voters are able to donate to parties and candidates in order to enable a vibrant democracy where functioning political parties develop policies and are able to effectively scrutinise each other and the government on behalf of voters. Instead, these checks are about equipping recipients of donations with the right tools to detect and manage the risks of foreign interference.

93. Under new legislation, **recipients of donations will be required to consider the risk of those donations being illegitimate, such as considering sources of funding where the risk of foreign interference may be higher.** Those who receive political donations over a certain threshold will need to assess the level of risk before accepting a donation and must keep records of their risk assessments for future inspection.
94. **The Electoral Commission will have a duty to provide guidance setting out how those who receive political donations should conduct risk assessments and what steps they can take to protect themselves through enhanced due diligence.**
95. The goal is to encourage a new “Know-Your-Donor” culture, helping both organisations and individuals to protect themselves from foreign interference and making it harder for malign actors to subvert the rules and interfere in our democratic processes.

New controls on company donations

96. The current framework permits political donations from companies and limited-liability partnerships who are incorporated in the UK and carrying on business in the UK and permits donations from Irish-registered companies and limited-liability partnerships to Northern Ireland political parties if they have an office in Ireland or Northern Ireland. However, these controls, and particularly what is meant by “carrying on business”, has been shown to be a low bar in practice. A new company could be registered today, owned by anyone and funded from anywhere and, without even a single day of trade, it could still meet this test. These companies are commonly called ‘shell companies’. This is an unacceptably low threshold and a vulnerability in our system highlighted by many independent experts, including the Electoral Commission, the Committee on Standards in Public Life and the National Crime Agency.
97. **We will therefore be bringing forward measures to ensure that in future, ‘shell companies’ will not be permitted to make political donations to UK political parties.** To achieve this, we will require companies to have made sufficient UK (or Ireland) generated income in order to donate. This check will close loopholes to prevent foreign interference by ensuring that only companies carrying out genuine commercial activity in the UK or Ireland can donate to political parties. **We will also work with stakeholders including the Electoral Commission to further develop a ‘UK-connection’ test** to be introduced in coming legislation, including conditions to strengthen the safeguards against foreign interference, whilst ensuring they remain proportionate.

Donations from unincorporated associations

98. Unincorporated associations make up on average around 5% of the political donations made to political parties. However, due to the donation threshold of £37,270 per year currently in place, below which they do not need to disclose the source of their

funding, they are a potential route for foreign or otherwise illegitimate money to enter electoral campaigns and are therefore a point of vulnerability.

99. In order to close this loophole and increase transparency around the source of funding of unincorporated associations who make political contributions, **we intend to significantly reduce the existing transparency thresholds for donations made by and gifts received by unincorporated associations to £11,180 and £2,230 respectively** (in line with other reporting thresholds). To close further loopholes in the rules, **we will be extending these transparency requirements to unincorporated associations that make contributions to candidates**, as these contributions are not currently captured by the existing transparency rules and so do not currently count towards the threshold. In addition, **we will require unincorporated associations to nominate a responsible person to be named on the public register**, thereby providing the public with information on who is behind an organisation.
100. To further tighten the regime and make it more difficult for malign actors to funnel illegitimate foreign money into unincorporated associations, and then onto parties or other campaigners, **we will require unincorporated associations to undertake checks on donations with a value of over £500**, similar to the checks on donations undertaken by political parties. With these improvements in place, it will no longer be possible for unincorporated associations to make significant campaign contributions without appropriate checks and without the source of funding being known.
101. Together, these changes to our political finance framework strike the right balance between safeguarding against foreign interference whilst ensuring legitimate donors can continue to fund electoral campaigns. This will ensure political parties and other campaigners remain able to raise sufficient funds to communicate their views to the electorate whilst protecting our democracy better against those who seek to covertly undermine it.

Donors to declare connected sources of funding

102. To help enforcement agencies take action against facilitators of illegal donations, **the Government will commence section 54A of Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000, which requires those making political donations of over £7,500 to declare if they have received (or expect to receive) money or any other benefit worth more than £7,500 from another individual or entity in connection with their donation**. Political parties cannot accept a donation above this threshold if they have not been provided with the declaration, and they must return or forfeit the donation in those cases. The declaration requirement was introduced into law in 2009, but it was never brought into force. It is designed to reveal whether a person making a donation is the true donor or is acting on behalf of someone else. If the person states that they have received money or a benefit in connection with the making of the donation, but they are nonetheless the true donor, they must state why they believe this. Any false declaration would be a criminal offence. We will make any necessary

changes to update the existing legal provision to ensure it is effective and works as part of the wider reform package.

Strengthening enforcement of the political finance rules

Extending the role of the Electoral Commission to enforce candidate, local third-party and recall petition campaigner political finance offences

103. Robust regulation and enforcement of the political finance rules is crucial in ensuring their integrity and combatting the threat of foreign interference. The role of the Electoral Commission as regulator is invaluable, but they are working within a framework which is uneven, fragmented and lacks a proportionate and effective deterrent for offences.
104. Since 2010, the Electoral Commission has been able to impose civil sanctions for certain offences committed by parties, third-party campaigners, and permitted participants in referendums.¹⁷ In contrast, offences committed by candidates, local third-party campaigners and recall petition campaigners can currently only be investigated by the police and referred for criminal prosecution,¹⁸ and criminal prosecution is often considered to be disproportionate to the offence and not in the public interest. This means that candidate and local third-party campaigner offences often go unpunished, creating an enforcement gap. The current rules also create a fear of criminal prosecution for candidates, agents and recall petition campaigners who could potentially face police investigation for relatively minor breaches of the law.
105. **We will act to close this enforcement gap by extending the Electoral Commission's existing enforcement role to also include candidate, local third-party campaigner and recall petition campaigner political finance offences.** Criminal prosecution will still be available for the most serious offences involving intentional or reckless evasion of the rules. This action will ensure the Commission can bring their considerable expertise and experience to tackling this issue whilst also providing greater consistency and proportionality to enforcement across the political finance framework.

Re-classifying administrative offences

106. Under the current enforcement framework, all political finance offences – regardless of their severity – must be assessed as potential criminal offences even when they amount to administrative breaches, such as the late submission of reports. Whilst criminal investigation and prosecution for such offences is rare, there are longstanding concerns that the criminalisation of administrative offences can deter participation in campaigning, especially as many people give their time voluntarily.

¹⁷ [Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000](#)

¹⁸ [Representation of the People Act 1983, Recall of MPs Act 2015](#)

107. To address this, **we will recategorise administrative offences across the political finance framework to make them punishable in most cases through civil sanctions.** This will provide much-needed clarity: by confirming that it is the Electoral Commission who are primarily responsible for enforcing such offences, police resources can therefore be directed toward tackling more serious criminal offences and clamping down on foreign money entering politics. In addition, by removing the threat of criminal prosecution for minor infractions, these changes will encourage participation by individuals and organisations wishing to campaign while ensuring more proportionate enforcement of rules.

Increasing the Electoral Commission's maximum fining power

108. A robust and proportionate enforcement regime is essential to upholding trust in our democracy. The maximum fine that the Electoral Commission can currently impose for breaches of the political finance framework is £20,000 per offence – less than 0.5% of what many political parties (including the Conservative Party, Liberal Democrats, Labour & Co-Op Party and Reform UK) spent at the 2019 UK Parliamentary General Election.

109. The scale of financial activity is clear: in 2023 and 2024 alone, political parties across the UK received a total of almost £94 million and almost £98 million respectively in donations.¹⁹ Against this backdrop, a fine of £20,000, for some parties, is insufficient to act as a meaningful deterrent for serious breaches of the rules, with some describing it as 'the cost of doing business.'²⁰

110. **That is why the Government is acting on long-standing recommendations from the Electoral Commission, parliamentary select committees and the Committee on Standards in Public Life and increasing the Electoral Commission's maximum fine.** In doing so, we are mindful of ensuring there are guardrails and safeguards incorporated to protect against the risk of large fines placing a disproportionate burden on smaller parties with fewer resources. This is particularly important in Northern Ireland where some significant political parties have very low annual incomes and there is therefore a risk of large fines undermining the political balance. We will therefore be adopting a model whereby **the maximum fine that the Electoral Commission may impose on a political party will be an amount of up to £500,000 with safeguards in place to ensure fines are proportionate for political parties which are less well resourced.** Measures will be incorporated to mitigate the risk of political parties gaming the system. This will ensure we balance the need for financial penalties for serious evasion of the rules

¹⁹ [Political parties accept over £93m in donations in 2023 | Electoral Commission](#) - Total donations accepted during 2023 was £93,829,235.

[Political parties accept almost £100m in donations in 2024 | Electoral Commission](#) - Total donations accepted during 2024 was £97,753,541.

²⁰ Electoral Commission Report - [Digital campaigning – increasing transparency for voters \(2018\)](#)

to reflect the scale of modern political campaigning and provide a meaningful deterrent against serious violations, whilst also ensuring fines remain proportionate.

111. As an independent regulator, the Electoral Commission is responsible for ensuring it only takes enforcement action, including use of its investigatory powers and civil sanctions, where it is satisfied that doing so is necessary and proportionate. **The Commission will therefore be expected to update its enforcement policy to set out how the new maximum fine will be applied across the framework.**
112. The Electoral Commission's increased sanctioning powers and their extension to candidate and local third-party campaigner offences will remain subject to existing oversight and accountability mechanisms, and individuals and organisations, such as candidates and political parties, will retain their current rights to appeal fines. This will ensure appropriate safeguards are in place as well as maintaining fairness, transparency and accountability in the enforcement process.
113. The action we are taking to strengthen the enforcement of the political finance framework will mean significant new powers and responsibilities for the Electoral Commission as regulator. **In light of these new responsibilities, the Government intends to designate a new Strategy and Policy Statement for the Electoral Commission to reflect the Government's priorities for elections and the Commission's increased roles and responsibilities. .**

Strengthening the regulatory toolkit

114. Finally, **we will give the Electoral Commission an explicit statutory gateway to share information with certain regulators and enforcement authorities, provided that the disclosure is for the purpose of assisting the relevant body in carrying out its functions.** This will give the Electoral Commission the solid legal foundation it needs to share information dynamically with other regulators and enforcement authorities, nurturing an environment of collaboration on cross-cutting issues like data protection and digital campaigning.
115. **We will also transfer the responsibility for granting permission to parties, candidates and/or campaigners to pay late invoices from suppliers to the Electoral Commission, rather than the courts who have current responsibility.** This will reduce the administrative burdens on parties and campaigners as well as on the court system.
116. Taken together, these reforms to the role and powers of the Electoral Commission will address concerns about the proportionality of enforcement and the current enforcement gaps whilst providing a greater deterrent for more serious offences. In making these changes, we will continue to encourage participation in our democracy whilst ensuring the public can trust in the integrity of our elections.

Upholding integrity in digital campaigning

117. Political campaigning is key in equipping people with the tools and information they need to make informed decisions, and the digital imprint regime is designed to ensure

voters can see who is behind digital political material. The regime draws a distinction between political material which has been paid to be advertised, and other electronic ‘organic’ material. All digital campaigning material which is paid to be advertised requires an imprint regardless of who is promoting it, whereas organic material must only have an imprint if it is ‘election material’, ‘referendum material’ or ‘recall petition material’ and if it is published by or on behalf of a relevant entity, such as a registered party, registered third-party campaigner, candidate or elected office holder.

118. Under existing rules, therefore, unregistered third-party campaigners are not required to include imprints on organic digital campaigning material. These organisations – which include advocacy groups or campaigners that do not field candidates and spend below the £10,000 notification threshold – are not registered with the Electoral Commission and therefore not subject to the same transparency requirements. This creates a loophole and allows unregistered third-party campaigners to disseminate potentially influential content without disclosing its origin. This is particularly concerning when such material is designed to be shared virally, especially if the material is misleading, controversial or intended to manipulate public opinion without accountability.

119. To close this gap, **we will add unregistered third-party campaigners to the list of entities who are required to include a digital imprint on their organic digital campaigning material**, with the exclusion of individuals. This will ensure that the rules promote transparency and public trust, while protecting free expression and avoiding undue burdens on individuals simply expressing their political opinions online.

Strengthening transparency and streamlining enforcement of imprint rules

120. Under the current imprint regime, campaigners are required to include the name and address of the promoter of the material, as well as the name and address of any person on behalf of whom the material is being published (and who is not the promoter). In the case of printed material, the name and address of the printer must also be included. While these rules have improved transparency overall, there remain cases – both in digital and print formats, where campaigning material promoted by or on behalf of candidates has been designed to mislead. In some instances, material has been designed to mimic local newspapers or used branding designed to obscure a candidate’s true party affiliation. In such cases, the current rules have not always provided voters with sufficient clarity about who is behind the material or the purpose it serves.

121. To address this, **we will strengthen the imprint regime by requiring campaigning material promoted by or on behalf of certain political entities to include information about party affiliation** – or a statement of independence where applicable. This additional transparency will help voters better understand the origin and intent of the material they see, enabling them to make political choices with greater confidence.

122. At present, enforcement of the imprint rules is split between the police and the Electoral Commission depending on the purpose of the material. This division can create confusion for campaigners and enforcement authorities. Moreover, the prospect of criminal investigation and prosecution – even for minor infractions – can be disproportionate and discourage participation, particularly among volunteers and first-time candidates.
123. **We will therefore act to streamline the enforcement of the imprint regime, so that the Electoral Commission will take responsibility for enforcing all imprint offences in the first instance.** This will bring greater clarity, consistency and proportionality to enforcement. At the same time, criminal prosecution will remain an option for the most serious breaches – such as those involving deliberate attempts to evade the rules.
124. By strengthening the imprint rules, and placing enforcement on a clearer and more proportionate footing, we will strengthen the integrity of political campaigning and ensure voters can continue to make informed decisions in elections and referendums.

Chapter 4: Delivering our plans

125. Delivering on the commitments set out in this Strategy is paramount for protecting the integrity of our elections, strengthening public trust in our politics and in our democratic systems, and improving participation in our elections to ensure a wider range of voices are heard and people's view fairly represented.
126. To deliver these changes, we will bring forward an elections and democracy bill during this Parliament. The bill will deliver the Government's manifesto commitments and wider ambitions set out in this Strategy by putting in place the legislation required for these important reforms.
127. A subsequent programme of secondary legislation will set out the detail for implementation. Alongside this, the necessary digital services and solutions will be developed, tested and delivered to support both electoral administrators delivering and voters participating in this critical public service.
128. Building on the experience of recent changes to elections – in particular those introduced by the Elections Act 2022 and successfully delivered by elections teams across the UK in recent years – we will harness the lessons learned from implementing significant change into a busy and complex sector, and create a formal change programme to ensure these reforms are implemented in a controlled manner. This will use proven programme and project management governance arrangements and change delivery practices aligned with Managing Successful Programmes and Government project delivery best-practice guidance.
129. We will work closely with local authorities to provide ongoing and timely support to them and their elections teams on the rollout of our programme of electoral reform, in particular respecting the need to allow sufficient time for administrators and voters

alike to understand and absorb the changes before they come into effect at scheduled polls.

130. In addition, we will work closely with devolved governments, with the Electoral Commission, with political parties, with education and civil society, and with citizens themselves to ensure impacts are thoroughly considered and changes are successfully implemented.

Annex: Outcomes from the strategic review of electoral registration and conduct

Whilst UK elections continue to be delivered successfully and securely, that delivery is increasingly at risk. Over recent years, the elections sector has repeatedly expressed concern that managing elections and electoral registration is becoming more challenging. To address this, between October 2024 and April 2025 the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government conducted a strategic Review to identify ways to reduce the major risks in election delivery and electoral registration, alleviate strain on electoral services, and enhance the voter experience.

Through the Review, the Government, in partnership with the electoral sector, including local authority representatives, the Electoral Commission, the Association of Electoral Administrators, and the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers, has identified key risks and issues and recommended solutions to address them.

The Review looked at the key stages in delivering an election including nominations, postal and proxy voting, polling day and the count, as well as the overall electoral timetable. Additionally, the Review considered how to increase delivery resilience and streamline electoral registration processes. The Review's recommendations include proposals for legislative change in the short term, long-term initiatives, and suggestions for enhancing communications and digital services.

Electoral timetable

The Review recognised the challenges of election delivery within the current 25-day UK Parliamentary Election timetable.

Elections teams have been under increasing strain over recent years, particularly due to the increase in postal voting. To mitigate this risk, the Review recommended bringing several deadlines earlier in the timetable to reduce burden on administrators and strengthen nominations, registration and postal voting processes. The proposals will result in the following changes within the 25-day timetable:

1. The deadline for new registration applications will be moved from midnight to 5pm on the 12th working day before the poll.

2. The deadline for applying for a postal vote in Great Britain will be moved from 5pm, 11 working days before the poll to 5pm, 14 working days before the poll.
3. The nominations delivery window will be extended from between 10am and 4pm to between 9am and 5pm at UK Parliamentary, Police and Crime Commissioner and Combined Authority Mayoral elections as well as local and Assembly elections in Northern Ireland.
4. The nominations deadline will be moved from 4pm to midday on the final day of nominations at all polls.

Postal and Proxy Voting

The Review recognised the increasing challenges to delivering postal voting. The current production methods for postal votes no longer align with public expectation and the risk of postal votes not being delivered in time to be returned and counted is increasing.

The Review recommended several changes to provide electors with more options if their postal vote does not arrive in time to be used. This includes allowing lost or spoilt postal votes to be replaced sooner and providing more flexibility for electors to cancel their postal vote and vote in person or appoint a proxy, if their postal vote is no longer a viable option. The Review also recommended updates to the laws governing postal and proxy voting to ensure they support good practice. Some of the changes will not apply in Northern Ireland where the rules are different.

In addition, the Review suggested improving communications about the delivery of postal votes to help electors make informed decisions about their vote. These changes aim to give more flexibility to electors and electoral administrators to effectively manage postal and proxy voting.

In summary, the proposals will result in the following changes being made to the postal voting system:

5. Allow Returning Officers in Great Britain to issue replacement postal votes from after the postal vote application deadline if they are satisfied that the original postal vote is lost or not received and will not arrive in time for the postal voter to cast their vote.
6. Allow a postal voter in Great Britain to cancel their postal vote and vote in person or appoint an emergency proxy after the postal vote application deadline on the basis that the Electoral Registration Officer is satisfied that their postal vote has not and will not arrive in time for them to cast their vote.
7. Establish a definitive postal vote determination deadline in legislation at 5pm on the 6th working day before the poll.
8. Update legislation to enable postal votes to be issued during the objections period.
9. Clarify provisions for cancellation of postal votes where an elector is removed from the register.

10. Clarify existing legislation for scenarios where an elector's registration or postal vote arrangement expires during the electoral timetable.
11. Consider options for more customised messaging to postal vote applicants.
12. Electoral Commission to review guidance on postal vote quality assurance checks.

Communications and Electoral Registration

The Review highlighted the strain on elections teams caused by event-led registration, especially at 'snap' elections. In particular, the volume of duplicate registration applications made in the lead up to polls was flagged as a key issue. The Review made a number of recommendations to help reduce the pressures caused by event-led registration.

In the short term, this includes enhancing communications to support electors and reduce queries for electoral administrators, as well as practical information about the election being shared digitally, for example via email. It also recommended updating centrally managed digital services to help reduce repeat applications and streamlining processes by allowing domestic electors to submit supporting evidence as part of the user journey.

In the long term, the Review recognised that more work needs to be done across the sector to reduce the burden of unnecessary duplicate applications. Whilst there are challenges in implementing technical solutions to these issues, they should be further explored, and communications to electors should continue to be improved. To support this, the Review has recommended a full review of the content of election documentation, commonly known as 'forms', including those sent by Returning Officers to electors in the lead up to polls, such as poll cards.

In summary, the proposals will result in the following changes being made to communications and electoral registration:

13. Encourage Returning Officers to send election information via email, with guidance from the Electoral Commission.
14. Extend the period of time during which an applicant receives automatic messaging on the Register to Vote online service when an exact duplicate application is identified (currently applies if an exact duplicate application is made within a 14-day period).
15. Explore switching Register to Vote from the current overnight batch matching of National Insurance numbers to real time matching using the Department for Work and Pensions' Citizens' API service, as used for online absent vote applications.
16. Continue work to reduce burden of duplicate applications.
17. Rationalise electoral conduct forms into dedicated secondary legislation.
18. Establish a project to review content of electoral conduct forms.

Improving Nominations

Participants of the Review felt that, although the nominations process works well, there are improvements that could be made. The Review noted the high profile, potentially spurious

nominations made at the 2024 General Election, but also that significant consideration should be given to the rules before any changes are made to ensure the right balance between the security and accessibility in the nominations process.

As such, the Review recommended further work to consider how to address potentially misleading nominations, and also a review of the nominations forms that candidates must complete, as part of the review of election documentation outlined above. Additionally, the Review recommended that legislation be brought forward to ensure nominations forms of elected persons are retained for the duration of their term of office.

In summary, the proposals will result in the following changes being made to the nominations process:

19. As part of the forms workstream, carry out work to simplify and rationalise nominations forms, including making clearer the penalty for lying to the Returning Officer.
20. Further consider the rules around sham/misleading nominations.
21. Undertake more work in the longer term to assess the viability of an online candidate information service at UK Parliamentary general elections (and possibly other elections).

Polling Day

The Review recognised the increasing challenges in recruiting polling station staff, and the increasingly complex framework within which those staff then have to deliver on polling day. Despite often doing the job less than once a year, polling station staff are crucial for the delivery of elections and are the face of elections for many people across the country. The Review therefore recommended further work across the sector to identify ways to recruit and support polling station staff, as well as further work to simplify and streamline polling station processes to support staff.

The Review also noted the increasing use of technology in polling stations, primarily to manage registers, and its potential benefits for supporting staff and streamlining processes. As such, the Review recommended further work to consider whether current legislation supports the use of this technology or whether changes to the legislation would be beneficial. Tied to this, it recommended further work to consider any security issues related to the use of technology.

In summary, the proposals will result in the following changes being made for polling day:

22. Carry out further work to review and risk assess the use of technology to manage registers in polling stations.
23. Consider whether legislative provisions are needed to enable the effective use of technology in polling stations in the future.

24. Carry out a review of responsibilities of polling station staff, with a view to simplifying and streamlining processes.
25. Government and stakeholders (Electoral Commission, Association of Electoral Administrators, Society of Local Authority Chief Executives) to consider how to incentivise people to work as polling station staff.

Supporting the Delivery of Elections

Elections are essential events working to strict legislative timelines and require the resources necessary for delivery. It is best practice that resources of the council, such as staff, are available to Returning Officers for the running of the poll, and the Review has recommended that legislation for this be made consistent at all reserved polls across Great Britain. Additionally, the Review recommended that legislation should mandate that the role of the Returning Officer in Great Britain is held by a sufficiently senior officer of the council. This will ensure they have the authority to utilise council resources and effectively engage with political parties, ensuring elections are conducted efficiently and fairly.

The Review acknowledged the strains on supply chains crucial for the delivery of elections, particularly for the print and delivery of postal votes. Whilst the Review's recommendations aim to mitigate many potential risks in this area, more work is required in the long term. The Review proposed a comprehensive assessment of electoral supply chains to identify ways to support the sector and help ensure the robustness of our electoral system.

In summary, proposals will result in the following changes being made to support the delivery of elections:

26. Take legislative power to require Electoral Registration Officers/Returning Officers to provide election information to Government and/or the Electoral Commission to support development of elector information services.
27. Amend existing legislation to mandate that the Returning Officer role in Great Britain be held by a significant senior official within the local authority, such as the Chief Executive or a member of the executive team (Director level).
28. Retain the existing legislative provisions for Returning Officer fees in Great Britain, but revise guidance on the calculation methodology, including a potential cap for those overseeing multiple constituencies.
29. Amend legislation to ensure consistency across Great Britain and different polls in the provisions governing the use of local authority staff by Returning Officers.
30. Carry out a review of electoral print and delivery supplier market.

Conclusion

Over six months, the Review examined various issues related to the delivery of elections and electoral registration. It set out a significant number of proposals aimed at reducing risk to the delivery of elections, streamlining processes and improving the system for voters.

The recommendations offer practical solutions for change, whether through legislative change now, ongoing digital development or further policy work and detailed consideration of issues for the future.