

# Bill to strengthen democracy to be debated in House of Commons

Minister of State for the Constitution and Devolution Chloe Smith, is expected to set out in the Commons the government's plans to update electoral law. Delivering on a UK-wide manifesto commitment, the Elections Bill will help safeguard our elections to ensure our democracy remains secure, fair, modern and transparent.

Minister of State for the Constitution and Devolution Chloe Smith said:

Voters must be confident, not only that their vote is theirs and theirs alone, but that their voices are heard and their vote matters.

The Elections Bill keeps our elections free and fair and will ensure democracy across the UK continues to thrive.

The measures set to be scrutinised by parliamentarians will protect the rights of electors to vote in secret and without fear. New laws will strengthen action against intimidation of voters, by improving and updating the offence of 'undue influence' in electoral law, to prevent people from being coerced into giving up control over their vote.

The Bill will also toughen sanctions for those convicted of intimidating political candidates, campaigners and elected representatives by barring perpetrators from running for elected office for a period of five years.

The UK is renowned for its democratic heritage, but it is essential that it is able to keep up with changes in society and technology so that it remains fit for the modern age.

In the UK, we are stewards of a fantastic democratic heritage, and as the world moves on, we must move with it, ensuring our democracy remains fit for the future.

Amid the growth in online political campaigning, the government will introduce a new digital imprints regime, requiring political campaign content promoted online by a party, candidate or campaigner to explicitly show who is behind it. This means voters know exactly who is informing their political views online.

The Elections Bill will also include measures to reduce the potential for someone to steal another person's vote by introducing sensible safeguards for postal and proxy voting. This will see party campaigners banned from handling postal votes, putting a stop to postal vote harvesting.

Minister Smith is expected to argue "electoral fraud, at any level and in any

context, is a threat to people's confidence in our elections, and to the very fabric of our democracy".

The Bill will introduce a requirement to show an approved form of photographic identification before voting at the polling station.

These sensible checks and balances have existed in Northern Ireland since 2003, helping to stop voter fraud without compromising the ability to vote, and should apply across the United Kingdom. For any eligible voter who does not have one of a broad range of accepted identification documents, a free, locally issued Voter Card will be available from their local authority.

The Government's wider Elections Bill will also:

- improve access to voting for electors with disabilities
- tackle electoral fraud by post and proxy
- increase transparency and accountability within our elections
- empower British citizens living overseas to participate in our democracy
- amend voting and candidacy rules for EU citizens following our departure from the EU

Robust discussion and freedom of expression has always been a crucial part of our democracy. Today MPs will have the opportunity to freely debate measures designed to protect these key principles.