

New guidance to improve the accountability of the Electoral Commission published

- Electoral Commission to be made more accountable to Parliament
- Move comes in response to Pickles review into electoral fraud
- Consultation on the draft guidance opens today

Today (22 August 2022) the Department for Levelling Up has opened the [consultation on new guidance](#) to improve the accountability of the Electoral Commission to UK Parliament. This guidance addresses the concern raised in Lord Eric Pickles' independent review into electoral fraud, that the current system of oversight of the Electoral Commission is not fit for purpose.

The report also highlighted cases such as Tower Hamlets – in which the 2014 Mayoral election was declared void by corrupt and illegal practices – as evidence of vulnerabilities in our system which must be addressed.

The Elections Act 2022 delivers the government's manifesto commitment to protect the integrity of our democracy. As part of the Act, new guidance for the regulator will be introduced subject to the approval of the UK Parliament.

The draft guidance in the Statement states that the Electoral Commission should support Returning Officers in ensuring the secrecy of the ballot inside polling stations. This addresses cross-party concerns about the practice of so-called "family voting" or "community voting" in some areas of the country, where it is alleged that some voters are being pressured by their spouses or partners over who to vote for inside polling booths.

In May 2022, the independent organisation, Democracy Volunteers, asserted they had identified 5% of all voters they observed in Tower Hamlets elections were either causing, or were affected by, "family voting" and over 85% of those being affected by "family voting" were women, predominantly from Asian backgrounds.

Levelling Up Secretary, Greg Clark, said:

The public rightly expects efficient and independent regulation of the electoral system. The Pickles Report was clear that the Electoral Commission needed to change.

This is why we are improving the accountability of the Electoral Commission by giving Parliament greater visibility and scrutiny of the Commission's work.

This guidance is a necessary step to increase the accountability of

the Electoral Commission to UK Parliament whilst respecting its operational independence.

It is completely unacceptable for anyone's vote to be influenced or pressured inside a polling station. Protecting the secrecy of the ballot is of the utmost importance to the health of our democracy.

The government in its 2019 manifesto committed to protecting the integrity of our democracy. The new draft guidance therefore requires the Commission to have regard to matters such as tackling voter fraud, supporting Returning Officers in ensuring the secrecy of the ballot inside polling stations, and supporting participation by informing the public about the franchise and electoral registration, when carrying out its relevant regulatory functions.

The draft guidance also reflects the Pickles Report's finding that the Commission needed to refocus on its core functions.

The consultation – closing on 5 December 2022 – will provide the statutory consultees with the opportunity to share their views on the draft guidance. Under the Elections Act, those consultees are the Commission itself, the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission and the Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee.

What happens next?

The government will consider all responses to the consultation and make any necessary changes before submitting the draft guidance to Parliament for scrutiny. Parliamentarians will have an opportunity to share their views on the draft before deciding whether to approve or reject the draft guidance in full.

Further information

The Elections Act 2022 makes provisions for a Strategy and Policy Statement that will contain guidance and principles for the Electoral Commission to have regard to in the discharge of its functions

See the [draft guidance](#).

The government will also engage the Parliamentary Parties Panel and other relevant stakeholders on the draft guidance.