

Press release: New Electoral Laws proposed to combat intimidation in public life

In a speech today (6 February) to mark the centenary of women's suffrage, the Prime Minister reflected on the nature of public life and reiterated her concerns about the increasing intimidation and abuse of people taking part in elections.

The Prime Minister announced that the government will consult on a new offence in electoral law of intimidating parliamentary candidates and their campaigners. The current offence of electoral intimidation relates to undue influence on voters.

She set out plans to bring forward legislation to remove the requirement for candidates standing as councillors in local elections to have their addresses published on ballot papers, in time for local elections in May 2019.

Voters would still be informed whether or not the candidate lived locally, and candidates could still list a home address if they wished. This is in line with the approach already in place for UK parliamentary elections, in which candidates have not had to include their home addresses on ballot papers since May 2010.

The consultation on the offence of intimidation, and the change in the requirement on addresses, were both recommendations from the Committee on Standards in Public Life in its report published in December 2017, which had been commissioned by the Prime Minister.

The Committee found that intimidation of candidates poses a threat to the integrity of the democratic process.

The measures build on work already in train following the 2016 Pickles review on tightening up the definition of intimidation during elections.

Minister for the Constitution, Chloe Smith said:

Intimidation is completely unacceptable in any form – and there is a clear difference between legitimate scrutiny and conduct which is fuelled by hate and personal abuse.

We can't let intimidation of our candidates, campaigners, the public and those that serve us continue unchecked.

Our democracy is a tolerant and inclusive one. By avoiding giving out personal information that can be abused and legislating against intimidation of candidates and their campaigners we can make public life more accessible to all who want to participate.