

Press release: Voter ID pilot to launch in local elections

Voters in five local authorities will need to show ID before they can vote next May in a move to tackle electoral fraud, the Minister for the Constitution Chris Skidmore will announce today (Saturday, 16 September).

The move comes after reports of alleged electoral fraud through voter impersonation more than doubled between 2014 and 2016, according to figures from the Electoral Commission.

Any reports of fraud undermine democracy and weaken the United Kingdom's strong tradition of holding free and fair elections.

In the May 2018 local elections Woking, Gosport, Bromley, Watford and Slough have volunteered to take part in a trial, which will require voters to produce ID before being issued with a ballot paper.

In addition, Tower Hamlets will also run a separate postal voting pilot, looking at the security of postal votes and providing additional guidance in postal vote packs.

The form of identification to be used will be set by the councils, but the pilot will involve trialling both photo ID and non-photo ID to see what is most effective and efficient.

Next year's trial is likely to be the first in a series of pilots to allow the Electoral Commission and Cabinet Office to evaluate the impact of asking for ID before a decision is taken on whether or not to roll it out nationally.

Minister for the Constitution, Chris Skidmore said:

For people to have confidence in our democratic processes we need to ensure that our elections are safeguarded against any threat or perception of electoral fraud.

The current situation of people simply pointing out their name without having to prove who they are feels out of date when considering other safeguards to protect people's identity. It is harder to take out a library book or collect a parcel at a post office than it is to vote in someone's name.

I am very hopeful that by taking a careful evidence-based approach in these pilots we will be able to roll out ID in polling stations at future elections.

Many countries around the world have already made it a requirement to prove

identity at a polling station

And it is already a requirement in Northern Ireland, where ID has been requested since 1985. There have been no reports of voter impersonation since 2003.

Voter ID was raised in a report on voting fraud by Sir Eric Pickles, published in August last year.

The Electoral Commission has called for it for its introduction and the international election watchdog the Organisation for Security and Co-operation has said it should be "seriously considered".

Claire Bassett, Chief Executive of the Electoral Commission, said:

We welcome the Minister's announcement today as a positive first step towards implementing our 2014 recommendation that an accessible, proportionate voter identification scheme should be introduced in Great Britain.

Voters in Northern Ireland have been required to show photographic proof of identity since 2003, and we have the opportunity to learn from that experience. The Electoral Commission is responsible for carrying out an independent, statutory evaluation of the pilot schemes and we will publish our findings following the May elections, in the summer of 2018.