

Edinburgh's returning officer backs calls for review of the UK's postal voting system

Edinburgh's returning officer has backed calls for a review of the UK's postal voting system after delays in the distribution of ballots meant some were unable to vote in last week's election.

Paul Lawrence said the process of printing and posting out ballots "needs to be looked at" to ensure the system can cope when elections are called at short notice.

However he claimed Edinburgh Council ["did more than anybody else in the country in Scotland"](#) to ensure people were able to exercise their democratic right after it emerged some had still not received their voting packs with less than a week to go until the polls opened.

Among those affected was Flora Kelsey from Corstorphine, who told the Local Democracy Reporting Service she had been rendered unable to vote in what she said was likely to be the last election of her lifetime.

The 98-year-old attempted to vote at her local polling place but was turned away as emergency proxy votes are not available to those registered for a postal vote.

And she said due to her age she was unable to make it into the [City Chambers](#) where the council had established an emergency

facility where anyone impacted could have their voting pack re-issued and cast ballots.

Mr Lawrence, the council's newly-appointed chief executive, said while Ms Kelsey's situation was "regrettable" the authority's emergency actions had "provided replacement packs to hundreds of residents".

He told the LDRS: "The honest thing I can say is I think we've done absolutely everything we can in Edinburgh to give everyone the chance to exercise their democratic right to vote, we did more than anybody else in the country in Scotland when we realised that the school holidays were upon us, that a number of people – particularly people that had registered after the election had been called – that it was going to be tight.

"We opened a facility when nobody else did, so I think we've done absolutely everything we could."

He said there was "some kind of examination needed," adding he agreed with the Electoral Management Board for Scotland (EMB) which last week backed a "major review of capacity and systems after the election".



Mr Lawrence said: “The system, particularly of print and distribution – and that’s not a criticism of either printers or the Royal Mail who I think did a good job in the circumstances – needs to be looked at to try and make sure that where there are relatively short call elections that the system can cope. Like any other system, it needs to have enough resilience to cope with anything you can throw at it.”

In Edinburgh there was a 40 per cent increase in the number of postal votes issued this year compared to the 2019 election, the council said.

First Minister John Swinney said the delays “led to people in Scotland who did everything they were meant to do in order to secure their right to vote in this General Election not being able to exercise that right”.

These included people “who had already-arranged holidays that they had to leave for before the delayed postal votes arrived, and people for whom the alternatives, including organising a

replacement postal pack from their local authority, were unsuitable or unavailable,” Mr Swinney said.

He recognised returning officers had done “everything they can to try to get postal votes into the hands of those that need them, including setting up emergency facilities,” but added these were “not suitable for everyone”.

The question Mr Lawrence said the local authority had to ask itself was whether it had done “everything we can to enable people to exercise their democratic right to vote”.

He said: “I think here in Edinburgh I can look anyone in the face and say we’ve worked hard early to make sure that’s possible. We spotted where there could be a problem and acted as soon as we possibly could.”

By Donald Turvill, Local Democracy Reporter

Mr Lawrence spoke to The Edinburgh Reporter at the count to explain his role and how the postal votes had been dealt with:



Paul Lawrence CEO of The City of Edinburgh Council and Chief
Returning Officer PHOTO The Edinburgh Reporter