Minister writes to UK Government about effects of voter ID

The Minister for Parliamentary Business, Jamie Hepburn, has written to Rushanara Ali MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Housing, Communities and Local Government), asking for the voter ID requirements to be scrapped.

Mr Hepburn has pointed out that there is evidence from the Electoral Commission that the new requirements for ID resulted in some voters being unable to cast their vote. It also kept potential voters away from the ballot box in the recent general election. He fears that misunderstanding about this could have a similar impact in Scotland.

Jamie Hepburn Minister for Parliamentary Business

THE LETTER READS:

"I understand that following a reshuffle of Ministerial responsibilities within your department you have assumed the lead on elections from Alex Norris MP. I recently had a very constructive meeting with Mr Norris, in which we discussed a range of elections topics, and I look forward to meeting you soon, and to working together on areas of shared interest to voters across the United Kingdom.

One matter that Mr Norris and I agreed on is to reconvene as soon as possible the Inter-Ministerial Group on Elections and Registration, which provides a particularly useful forum to discuss issues of common interest across the four nations. I look forward to meeting you at that, and to discussions with Ministerial colleagues from across all Governments.

In the meantime, I note that MPs will vote next Wednesday 13 November on changes the UK Government has brought forward to

expand the list of IDs which can be used at UK Parliamentary elections to include the Scottish National Entitlement Card and the HM Forces Identity Card. While these additions are welcome, I continue to be concerned about the impact that the previous UK Government's introduction of Voter ID has had on voters at UK General Elections.

The Electoral Commission's recent report on voter ID at the 2024 General Election raised several issues of concern. Of particular note is the finding that 4% of people who said they did not vote at the election stated their decision was related to the voter ID requirement. This confirms the view expressed by the Scottish Government, and others at the time of the changes, that it did indeed discourage some people from voting. The Commission also noted that of the people who tried to vote at a polling station, 0.08% were not able to because of the ID requirement. Although these numbers are small, anyone losing a vote is of concern, and furthermore no one knows how many did not vote due to not having relevant ID, or not knowing if they did. Tellingly, turnout on 4th July was 59.8%; down from 67.3% in 2019.

You will be aware that the Scottish Government has not introduced voter ID for Scottish Parliament and local government elections. We remain strongly opposed to it and concerned about its impact on democracy by creating an unnecessary barrier to voting and disenfranchising some of our citizens. Furthermore, we are left with a concern that if voters in the Scottish Parliament election in May 2026 have the impression that voter ID is required for that election (even though it is not), they may be discouraged from voting. I have raised that concern directly with the Electoral Commission and I hope they will be able to mitigate it to some extent with their public awareness campaigns in the run up to the 2026 election.

Of course, the best way of mitigating that particular concern and more fundamentally of removing those barriers to

participation in the democratic process is for the Voter ID requirements to be scrapped. I hope this is something you might consider proposing as a policy change to your colleagues in the UK Government.

I look forward to discussing this and other matters when we meet."