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Challenges facing the electoral system present a significant threat to future elections, according to a new report from the Electoral Commission. With a UK general election due in the next 16 months, the Commission is calling for urgent action to eliminate barriers for voters and to mitigate risks to the delivery of elections. The report on the May 2023 local elections in England identifies a number of challenges for voters, administrators and campaigners, which would be exacerbated at a general election. A significantly higher number of voters would be expected at a national poll, including those who do not tend to vote at local elections and are less likely to be familiar with recent changes. The research shows that some people found it harder to vote because of the new requirement to show photo ID at polling stations, including disabled people and the unemployed. Barriers stemmed from two overlapping issues: a lack of ownership of the appropriate ID, and of awareness of the need to bring it when voting. Low awareness of the availability of the free Voter Authority Certificate was also an issue. The Commission has made specific recommendations to the UK Government to improve accessibility at future polls. These include reviewing the list of accepted ID to identify if additional documents could be added, exploring whether the deadline for applying for the free ID can be pushed closer to polling day, and providing options on polling day for voters without accepted ID, such as another registered voter being able to 'vouch' for their identity. Craig Westwood, Director of Communications, Policy and Research, said: "Elections in the UK are well run, and voters have high levels of confidence, but challenges need to be addressed across the system if that is to continue, and if barriers experienced by some voters are to be lifted. "The new voter ID requirement has posed a barrier to some voters and is likely to have a larger impact at higher turnout polls. We have made recommendations to expand accessibility and support for voters, which should be introduced ahead of the next UK general election to ensure large numbers of people are not prevented from taking part." More work is also needed to increase awareness of the support available for disabled voters, as it remains low and would help more people to take part. The capacity and resilience of election teams also remains a significant concern in terms of delivering elections. Administrators' capacity is found to be already stretched, with struggles to recruit staff, and significant pressures created by delivering changes to the way elections are run. With further changes to be made ahead of future elections, sufficient time, capacity and functional resources are needed to support them to implement those changes. Craig Westwood added: "The capacity and resilience of electoral administrators was really stretched this year, and they were only able to make these elections work by exceptional efforts, commitment and support from authorities not holding polls. At the next UK general election, there will be even greater demand on staff and polling station venues, as well as more new legislative requirements and added complexity. To ensure administrators can continue to deliver well-run elections, the UK Government must ensure that dependencies and delivery risks are carefully managed for future changes. "We are ready to work with government and wider electoral community to tackle these issues and mitigate risks to well-run elections in future." The Commission has put forward recommendations for meeting these challenges, details of which are available in the report. A report on the local elections in Northern Ireland is also published today. Ends For more information contact the Electoral Commission press office on 020 7271 0704, out of office hours

07789 920 414 or [press@electoralcommission.org.uk](mailto:press@electoralcommission.org.uk) Notes to Editors Elections are scheduled to take place across all of England and Wales in May 2024, including in London and Birmingham where there were not elections in May 2023. A UK Parliamentary general election must also take place before the end of January 2025. For many people, these elections will be the first time they will have voted since the requirement to show voter ID was introduced. The Commission published an interim analysis on the implementation of voter ID in June. by: enabling the delivery of free and fair elections and referendums, focusing on the needs of electors and addressing the changing environment to ensure every vote remains secure and accessible regulating political finance – taking proactive steps to increase transparency, ensure compliance and pursue breaches using our expertise to make and advocate for changes to our democracy, aiming to improve fairness, transparency and efficiency The Commission was set up in 2000 and reports to the UK, Welsh and Scottish parliaments.