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August 2019 About the elections On 7 May 2015 elections were held for the 650 members
of the United Kingdom Parliament and for local councillors in all 36 metropolitan
boroughs, 194 district authorities and 49 unitary authorities in England. There were
also elections for Mayors in six local authorities, a council tax referendum in
Bedfordshire, and neighbourhood planning referendums in Central Milton Keynes, Malpas
& Overton (Cheshire West & Chester) and Wirksworth (Derbyshire Dales). It was also
the first time that parish council elections were combined with a UK Parliamentary
general election. In almost 280 local authority areas in England, the poll for the UK
Parliamentary election was combined with other polls. Of these, 239 local authorities
held three or more types of election (including UKPGE, local election, parish council
election, referendum or mayoral election) with one authority (Bedford) holding five
polls on 7 May. There were no large-scale combined polls in Northern Ireland,
Scotland, or Wales, although some local government ward by-elections were held.
Registration and turnout A total of 46.4 million people were registered to vote in
the UK Parliamentary elections on 7 May 2015. Some 30.8 million votes were included
in the count, representing an overall turnout of 66.4%. Across the four countries of
the UK, turnout ranged from 58.4% in Northern Ireland, to 71.1% in Scotland. The
electorate for local government elections in England was 31.5 million and
approximately 20 million votes were cast. Consistent with previous elections, turnout
among postal voters at the UK Parliamentary elections was higher than among those who
voted at polling stations: 86.0% of people who were sent a postal ballot pack voted,
compared with 63.5% of those who were entitled to vote at a polling station. Postal
votes were issued to around 7.6 million electors and 6.2 million postal votes were
included in the count. Across England, Scotland and Wales, the proportion of electors
who chose to vote by post was 16.9%. In comparison, 1.4% of the electorate were
issued with a postal vote in Northern Ireland, where postal voting is not available
on demand. Approximately 150,000 electors had appointed a proxy to vote on their
behalf, representing 0.33% of the total electorate. In the final days before the
close of polls, a further 8,500 electors appointed emergency proxies, across England,
Scotland and Wales. Voters' experiences and views Overall the polls on 7 May 2015
were well-run and evidence from our research with voters shows that they had a
positive view of the electoral process. Registering to vote Eighty-five per cent of
those surveyed said that they were satisfied with the procedure for registering to
vote, with 62% saying 'very satisfied'. Just 5% per cent were dissatisfied (3% 'very
dissatisfied'). Almost four in five respondents in Great Britain (79%) knew that it
was possible to apply to register to vote online, and those aged 18-54 were more
likely to say so. Information about the elections Almost nine in ten respondents
(88%) said they knew a great deal or a fair amount about the UK Parliamentary general
election (UKPGE). Forty-five per cent of respondents said the same about the local
elections in their area. Ninety per cent of respondents said that information on how
to cast their vote at the UKPGE was very or fairly easy to access, although 3% said
it was 'Fairly/very difficult'. Over four-fifths of people (84%) said the same of the
local elections in England, although 7% said it was difficult to access. Voting in
polling stations Nearly all (94%) of those respondents who voted in person at a

polling station reported that they were very or fairly satisfied with the voting process with 72% being 'very satisfied'. People with disabilities were more likely to be dissatisfied with the process of voting at their polling station (5%) than those with no disability (2%). The majority of polling station voters (54%) found the support provided by polling station staff useful, although 4% said it was not useful. Voting by post Nearly all (97%) of those respondents who voted by post, reported that they were satisfied with voting in this way. More than nine in ten (92%) respondents who voted by post said it was easy to complete and return the postal ballot, with 5% saying it was difficult. A similar proportion of respondents (91%) found the written instructions on how to vote and return the ballot useful, although 2% said they were not useful. Confidence in the administration and regulation of the elections Nine in ten people (91%) reported that they were either very or fairly confident the elections were well-run on 7 May, although 7% of respondents said 'Not very confident/not confident at all'. People who voted were more likely to be confident that the May 2015 elections were well-run (93%) than those who did not vote (68%). Almost two-fifths (39%) of respondents did not agree that the funding and spending of political parties and candidates at elections is open and transparent although a third of respondents (33%) agree (22% said 'Neither' and 6% said they did not know). Respondents were considerably more confident that the authorities would take appropriate actions if the rules are broken: 63% agreed with the statement, with 36% agreeing strongly (although 22% disagreed). Forty-five percent of respondents thought that hardly any or no electoral fraud took place at the May 2015 polls, although just over one-third (35%) of people said that they thought electoral fraud took place (with 29% saying it happened 'a little' and 6% saying 'a lot').

Recommendations: Voter experience Recommendation 1: Registration information provided by broadcasters All broadcasters, particularly those with specific public purposes built into their remit, should continue to identify and take advantage of opportunities to include information about voter registration in their editorial coverage at elections. Recommendation 2: Providing an online registration status check The UK Government should develop an online service to allow people to check whether they are already correctly registered to vote before they submit a new application to register. Any such service would need to carefully manage and protect voters' personal information. Recommendation 3: Introducing online electoral registration in Northern Ireland Given the clear benefits for electors in England, Scotland and Wales, who can now apply to register to vote online, online registration should be introduced in Northern Ireland. The Chief Electoral Officer and Northern Ireland Office should publish a timetable setting out when this will happen. This will require legislative change in the UK Parliament as well as significant changes to the management of the electoral register by the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland. Recommendation 4: Improving the delivery of postal ballot packs to voters We will continue to encourage Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) and Returning Officers (ROs) to put plans in place to ensure that they make full use of provisions within the statutory election timetable to maximise the time available for electors to receive, complete and return their postal vote. We, along with the Electoral Advisory Board (EAB), have identified that the capacity of print suppliers to fulfil demand is a significant risk to the ability of individual ROs to produce and despatch postal votes in sufficient time. We will work with the EAB to consider ways to improve this area of election delivery and to minimise these risks. Recommendation 5: Improving access to the voting process for overseas electors We will work with the UK Government and Returning Officers to identify practical steps which could be taken to

improve access to the voting process for overseas electors at the next scheduled poll where they are entitled to vote, including: Ensuring that all Returning Officers include the correct postage on postal ballot packs for overseas electors, so that they can be delivered to voters and returned as quickly as possible before polling day, including increasing the funding provided by the UK Government to Returning Officers for this purpose. Explaining the practical implications of different voting methods (such as postal voting or appointing a proxy) for overseas electors, particularly if they are making an application during the last month before polling day, including on the www.gov.uk/register-to-vote website. We will work with the UK Government and Returning Officers to develop workable and effective proposals, which could be included in the proposed Votes for Life Bill if legislation is required, to make it easier for overseas electors to cast their votes in time to be counted at elections. We will also continue our work with the Electoral Advisory Board to consider how technology might be introduced into a wider range of election activity.

Recommendation 6: Extending the qualifying circumstances for appointing an emergency proxy We have previously recommended that the qualifying circumstances for appointing an emergency proxy should be extended, so that those who have unforeseen caring responsibilities or who have experienced the death of a close relative would also be eligible. This recommendation has not yet been taken forward by any government with legislative competence over elections within the UK; we continue to recommend that the UK Government and, for Scottish Parliament elections and local government elections, the Scottish Government, should consult on and bring forward secondary legislation to further extend the qualifying circumstances for appointing an emergency proxy to reflect the concerns highlighted by electors at the May 2015 polls. The UK and Scottish Governments should ensure that any changes to the legislation relating to proxy vote applications for the May 2016 polls are clear by 5 November 2015, six months before polling day.

Recommendations: Administration of the polls

Recommendation 7: Ensuring statutory Welsh and language election materials are treated equally We repeat our recommendation that the UK Government should work with relevant partners, including the Welsh Government, to re-examine its approach to the statutory provision of Welsh language forms, notices and ballot papers, and commits to providing the necessary statutory translation in good time before elections, consistent with the timing and approach taken to the provision of corresponding language resources.

Recommendation 8: Ensuring legislation is clear in good time before elections Governments with legislative competence over elections within the UK should manage the development and approval of legislation so that it is clear at least six months before it is required to be implemented or complied with by campaigners or electoral administrators. All governments should normally be able to plan to ensure that legislation for elections is clear at least six months before it is required to be implemented or complied with. While there may be unexpected developments or exceptional circumstances in which legislation is required later than this, it is not acceptable that poor planning has routinely resulted in late legislation in recent years. This is particularly disappointing when the date of polling day has been fixed some time in advance. If a government has not been able to make legislation clear at least six months before the date of a scheduled poll, it should table a formal statement in the relevant legislature, explaining why it has not, and setting out its assessment of the likely impact of the late confirmation of legislation for campaigners, electoral administrators and electors.

Recommendation 9: Clarifying the law relating to candidates' commonly used names The UK Government should amend the law to remove the requirement for the commonly used name to be

different to any other forename or surname that the candidate has, while retaining the existing safeguard that ROs may reject the use of a commonly used name on the grounds that (a) its use may be likely to mislead or confuse electors or (b) it is obscene or offensive. Recommendations: Candidates and campaigners

Recommendation 10: Registration of party names and descriptions for use on ballot papers We continue to recommend that where a candidate represents a political party on an election ballot paper, it should be clear to voters which party the candidate represents. We are concerned that the legal provisions for registration of party descriptions present risks of confusion for voters and restrict the participation of political parties. The UK Government should reform or remove the provisions on party descriptions. It will be important to consult political parties, other governments with legislative competence over elections within the UK, and the Commission on the practical considerations of achieving this change.

Recommendation 11: Transparency and regulation of open primary party selection contests held close to an election or during a candidate regulated period We recommend that governments with legislative competence over elections within the UK should consider transparency and regulation of open primary party selection contests held during a candidate regulated period. If an open primary contest takes place during a candidate regulated period, the campaign spending that promoted the successful open primary contestant should be transparent and subject to appropriate limits, and relevant donations towards this spending should be subject to appropriate controls. Consideration should also be given to transparency of the costs of unsuccessful primary contestants and the central party in relation to such open primaries. We would be happy to work with political parties and relevant governments to discuss how this could be achieved within the existing regulatory framework.

Recommendation 12: Costs relating to an individual's disability Governments with legislative competence over elections within the UK should amend the definitions of political party and candidate spending so that reasonable expenses that can be attributed to an individual's disability are exempt, (as was recently set out in the revised PPERA rules for non-party campaigners).

Recommendation 13: Costs relating to translation from Welsh to and vice versa As the PPERA non-party campaigner rules now exempt the costs associated with translating Welsh to and vice versa, we recommend that equivalent legal provisions should be introduced into the election rules covering spending by political parties and candidates by the relevant government/s at that time.

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