

Reflecting on the May elections and changes coming down the road | Electoral Commission Search Reflecting on the May elections and changes coming down the road Posted: 24 May 2022 Written by: Shaun McNally CBE, Chief Executive of the Electoral Commission

Text I will never look at elections in the same way again. Since the age of 18, I have taken the opportunity to vote. I have always enjoyed the process of going to the polling station, going out as a family and stopping to talk to neighbours. But I hadn't fully appreciated how much work goes on behind the scenes until this year. I joined the Electoral Commission as Chief Executive in April, so I now understand that the polls on 5 May represented the culmination of months of planning and preparation, much of which goes unnoticed by voters. I know that electoral administrators, polling station staff and many others worked tirelessly to support voter registration, enable postal and polling station voting, and count the votes that were cast. It was impressive to see the hard work and dedication of all of those in the electoral community. The apparent smooth-running of these polls is a testament to the electoral community's commitment to the democratic process. We know that elections in the UK are well-run, with high levels of public satisfaction. We also have one of the most transparent systems of political finance in the world. But we can't be complacent. There are pressures on the whole electoral system that need our attention, from the complexity of electoral law, to the strains and pressures on electoral services teams. Our priorities over the next five years are focused on addressing these pressures by: Delivering accessible registration and voting processes by seeking to remove barriers that deter people from registering or casting their vote. Supporting parties and campaigners to ensure they are compliant with political finance law, ensuring transparent political campaigning. Supporting resilient electoral services, in the context of the significant challenges and pressures on local authorities. Making sure electoral law is fair and effective, including the effective implementation of legislation introduced by the UK, Scottish and Welsh governments. Securing a modern and sustainable electoral system, working with others to ensure it is resilient to changes in society, such as advances in digital technology. This work is designed to see increased public trust, value and participation in elections. I am committed to ensuring the Commission continues to be a centre of expertise and advice, and as an organisation we'll be investing in the skills and technology required to support the effective delivery of our work. We also have an important role to play to make sure the Elections Act, and the changes it brings, will be delivered effectively. The Elections Act is without doubt the most significant piece of electoral law in nearly twenty years and brings considerable changes for those delivering, participating and campaigning in elections in the UK. Amongst these changes are: a requirement for voters at polling stations in Great Britain to show photo ID; the extension of imprint rules to digital material; the removal of the 15 year limit on voting rights for British citizens living overseas; and a strategy and policy statement for the Commission. We will be working hard to ensure all those we work with are supported through these changes. We will play a key role in raising public awareness and supporting voters to understand the changes that apply to them. We will also provide the electoral community with advice and guidance on how the new legislation applies. We will also be looking to the Government to provide the necessary secondary legislation that provides us with more information about these new measures. The Act introduces a provision for a Strategy and Policy Statement for the Commission, which will set out the UK Government's priorities for electoral matters, and give the Electoral Commission strategic direction. Such a statement marks a significant change

to the current accountability arrangements of the Commission. We remain concerned about its potential impact. As the political finance regulator and the body which oversees free and fair elections, the way we work and our decisions must remain independent. This underpins fairness and trust in the electoral system, as well as public and cross party confidence in the Commission. All parties have stated during the parliamentary consideration of the Elections Act that the independence of the Electoral Commission is vital to the functioning of a healthy democracy. We look to the formal consultation on the Government's proposed Statement once that is available, and will continue to act in an independent and impartial way in order to help maintain public confidence in elections across the UK. I look forward to working across the electoral community over the coming years on these and other important aspects of our democratic processes.