



April 2022

Dear Constituent,

Thank you for contacting me about identification at polling stations.

A secure electoral system is a vital component of a healthy democracy, and the public must have confidence that our elections are secure and fit for the 21st century. Asking voters to bring identification to their polling station is an important way of achieving this and the Elections Bill will put such a requirement into law. This is part of a wider package of proposals in the Elections Bill to strengthen electoral integrity – including measures to tackle postal and proxy voting fraud, tackling intimidation, increasing transparency of digital campaigning, and preventing foreign interference in elections.

Identification to vote has been backed by the Electoral Commission and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, which state that its absence is a security risk. At present, it is harder to take out a library book or collect a parcel at a post office than it is to vote in someone else's name.

In Northern Ireland voters have been required to produce personal identification before voting in polling stations since 1985, with photographic identification being required since 2003 when introduced by the last Labour Government. Ministers at the time noted that *"the Government have no intention of taking away people's democratic right to vote. If we believed that thousands of voters would not be able to vote because of this measure, we would not be introducing it at this time."*

The Electoral Commission has also commented that *"since the introduction of photo ID in Northern Ireland there have been no reported cases of personation. Voters' confidence that elections are well-run in Northern Ireland is consistently higher than in Great Britain, and there are virtually no allegations of electoral fraud at polling stations."*

Under the Government's proposals, anyone without a form of identification will be able to apply for a new free Voter Card – meaning that no voter will be disenfranchised. Ministers assure me that this system will be in operation in good time ahead of the implementation of voter identification.

The Elections Bill makes provision for a wide range of photographic identification to be used for voting at the polling station. These documents have been carefully chosen with security and accessibility in mind.

Identification that does not show a photograph of the elector cannot provide an appropriate level of proof to prevent personation at the polling station. It is also worth noting that not all forms of photographic identification comply with the same rigorous security checks. I am concerned that using these forms of identification could undermine the very protection and security that



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introducing the use of identification at the polling station will put in place. It is for this reason that I do not support proposals to expand the list of accepted identification documents.

Let me assure you that 98% of electors already own one of the documents specified in the Elections Bill. Expired forms of identification will also be accepted so long as the photograph is of a good enough likeness. Moreover, anyone without identification will be able to apply for a free Voter Card from their local authority. The Elections Bill also includes provision to update the list of acceptable identification in the future, in recognition that available forms of identification will change over time.

Thank you again for taking the time to contact me.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Chris'.

CHRIS HEATON-HARRIS MP
MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR DAVENTRY