

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT
GENERAL COMMITTEES

Public Bill Committee

ELECTIONS BILL

First Sitting

Wednesday 15 September 2021

(Morning)

CONTENTS

Programme motion agreed to.
Written evidence (Reporting to the House) motion agreed to.
Motion to sit in private agreed to.
Examination of witnesses.
Adjourned till this day at Two o'clock.

No proofs can be supplied. Corrections that Members suggest for the final version of the report should be clearly marked in a copy of the report—not telephoned—and must be received in the Editor’s Room, House of Commons,

not later than

Sunday 19 September 2021

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The Committee consisted of the following Members:

Chairs: SIR EDWARD LEIGH, † CHRISTINA REES

† Anderson, Fleur (<i>Putney</i>) (Lab)	† Randall, Tom (<i>Gedling</i>) (Con)
† Bell, Aaron (<i>Newcastle-under-Lyme</i>) (Con)	† Rutley, David (<i>Lord Commissioner of Her Majesty's Treasury</i>)
† Bristow, Paul (<i>Peterborough</i>) (Con)	† Shelbrooke, Alec (<i>Elmet and Rothwell</i>) (Con)
† Clarkson, Chris (<i>Heywood and Middleton</i>) (Con)	† Smith, Cat (<i>Lancaster and Fleetwood</i>) (Lab)
Furniss, Gill (<i>Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough</i>) (Lab)	† Smith, Chloe (<i>Minister for the Constitution and Devolution</i>)
† Gibson, Peter (<i>Darlington</i>) (Con)	† Smith, Nick (<i>Blaenau Gwent</i>) (Lab)
† Grady, Patrick (<i>Glasgow North</i>) (SNP)	Adam Mellows-Facer, Chris Stanton, <i>Committee Clerks</i>
† Hollern, Kate (<i>Blackburn</i>) (Lab)	
† Hunt, Jane (<i>Loughborough</i>) (Con)	
† Mayhew, Jerome (<i>Broadland</i>) (Con)	
† O'Hara, Brendan (<i>Argyll and Bute</i>) (SNP)	† attended the Committee

Witnesses

The Rt Hon Lord Pickles

Richard Mawrey QC, Henderson Chambers

Councillor Peter Golds, Leader of the Conservative Group, Tower Hamlets Council

Gillian Beasley, Returning Officer, Peterborough City Council

Assistant Chief Constable Gareth Cann QPM, West Midlands Police, and National Police Chiefs' Council
Portfolio Lead for Election-Related Crime

Public Bill Committee

Wednesday 15 September 2021

(Morning)

[CHRISTINA REES *in the Chair*]

Elections Bill

9.25 am

The Chair: Before we begin, I have a few preliminary announcements. In line with current Government guidance and the House of Commons Commission's decision, I encourage Members to wear masks when not speaking. Please give each other and members of staff space when seated and when entering and leaving the room. *Hansard* colleagues would be grateful if Members could email their speaking notes to hansardnotes@parliament.uk. Please switch off electronic devices or put them on silent mode. Tea and coffee are not allowed during sittings.

We will first consider the programme motion on the amendment paper. We will then consider a motion to enable the reporting of written evidence for publication and a motion to allow us to deliberate in private about our questions before the oral evidence session. In view of the time available, I hope that we can take those matters formally. I call the Minister to move the programme motion standing in her name, which was discussed on Monday by the programming sub-committee for the Bill.

Ordered,

That—

(1) the Committee shall (in addition to its first meeting at 9.25 am on Wednesday 15 September) meet—

- (a) at 2.00 pm on Wednesday 15 September;
- (b) at 11.30 am and 2.00 pm on Thursday 16 September;
- (c) at 9.25 am and 2.00 pm on Wednesday 22 September;
- (d) at 9.25 am and 2.00 pm on Tuesday 19 October;
- (e) at 11.30 am and 2.00 pm on Thursday 21 October;
- (f) at 9.25 am and 2.00 pm on Tuesday 26 October;
- (g) at 11.30 am and 2.00 pm on Thursday 28 October;
- (h) at 9.25 am and 2.00 pm on Wednesday 3 November;

(2) the Committee shall hear oral evidence in accordance with the following Table:

Date	Time	Witness
Wednesday 15 September	Until no later than 10.25 am	The Rt Hon Lord Pickles; Henderson Chambers
Wednesday 15 September	Until no later than 11.25 am	Councillor Peter Golds; National Police Chiefs' Council; Gillian Beasley, Peterborough City Council
Wednesday 15 September	Until no later than 2.30 pm	Professor David Howarth, Professor of Law and Public Policy, University of Cambridge; Blackstone Chambers

Date	Time	Witness
Wednesday 15 September	Until no later than 3.15 pm	The Electoral Office of Northern Ireland; The Electoral Commission; Association of Electoral Administrators
Wednesday 15 September	Until no later than 4.00 pm	SOLACE; Birmingham City Council
Wednesday 15 September	Until no later than 5.00 pm	Dr Kate Dommett, Department of Politics and International Relations, The University of Sheffield; Professor Justin Fisher, Director of Public Policy, Brunel University London; Darren Grimes
Thursday 16 September	Until no later than 12.15 pm	Conservatives Abroad; Liberal Democrats Overseas; Labour International
Thursday 16 September	Until no later than 1.00 pm	Race on the Agenda
Thursday 16 September	Until no later than 2.45 pm	Matrix Chambers
Thursday 16 September	Until no later than 3.30 pm	Disability Rights UK
Thursday 16 September	Until no later than 4.30 pm	Dr Alan Renwick, Deputy Director of the University College London Constitution Unit

(3) proceedings on consideration of the Bill in Committee shall be taken in the following order: Clause 1; Schedule 1; Clause 2; Schedule 2; Clauses 3 to 5; Schedule 3; Clauses 6 and 7; Schedule 4; Clauses 8 and 9; Schedule 5; Clause 10; Schedule 6; Clause 11; Schedule 7; Clauses 12 to 26; Schedule 8; Clauses 27 to 34; Schedule 9; Clauses 35 to 43; Schedule 10; Clauses 44 to 48; Schedule 11; Clauses 49 to 62; new Clauses; new Schedules; remaining proceedings on the Bill;

(4) the proceedings shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at 5.00 pm on Wednesday 3 November.—(*Chloe Smith.*)

Resolved,

That, subject to the discretion of the Chair, any written evidence received by the Committee shall be reported to the House for publication.—(*Chloe Smith.*)

The Chair: Copies of written evidence that the Committee receives will be made available in the Committee Room, and will be circulated to Members by email.

Resolved,

That, at this and any subsequent meeting at which oral evidence is to be heard, the Committee shall sit in private until the witnesses are admitted.—(*Chloe Smith*)

9.27 am

The Committee deliberated in private.

9.29 am

On resuming—

The Chair: We are now sitting in public. Do any Members wish to make a declaration of interest in connection with the Bill? No.

Examination of Witnesses

The Rt Hon Lord Pickles and Richard Mawrey QC gave evidence.

9.31 am

Q1 The Chair: We will now hear evidence from Richard Mawrey QC of Henderson Chambers and Lord Pickles. Before calling the first Member to ask the first question, I remind hon. Members that questions should be limited to matters within the scope of the Bill and that we must stick to the timings in the programme motion. This session will end at 10.25 am. Will the witnesses please introduce themselves?

Lord Pickles: My name is Eric Pickles. I am a Member of the House of Lords and I also had the honour of sitting in the House of Commons. I wrote a report for the Government on trying to secure the ballot box, some of the recommendations of which are incorporated in the Bill. It is an honour and a privilege to be with Members of the House of Commons again.

Richard Mawrey: My name is Richard Mawrey, I am a QC at the London Bar, practising in the Temple. I have sat as an election commissioner—election judge—in most of the high-profile disputed local authority elections in the past 20 years, particularly those elections involving electoral fraud and other malpractice. In particular the elections in Birmingham, where the trial took place in 2005, and that concerning the former Mayor of Tower Hamlets, where the trial took place in 2015.

The Chair: Thank you. Minister, would you like to ask the first question?

Q2 The Minister for the Constitution and Devolution (Chloe Smith): I would. First, may I welcome our witnesses? It is an absolute pleasure to have you here. You begin our day with the highest quality.

Richard, you highlighted in your judgment on Tower Hamlets and elsewhere how we see interlocking types of fraud that all together create broad criminality. Would you be able to talk us through the extent of that?

Richard Mawrey: Tower Hamlets was a particularly bad example. There, you had a political culture where winning and retaining power was everything. If there were rules, they were to be, at best, circumvented and, at worst, broken. Not only was there electoral fraud in the sense of false votes—almost all postal votes—but the system developed so there was misuse of public funds, which I later decided was bribery, largely as a result of Lord Pickles' initiative to employ a top firm of accountants to investigate the doings of the council, from which it appeared that large sums of money had been diverted for political purposes.

In Tower Hamlets, the trickiest thing of all was manipulation of voters by religious means. That operated within one community: members of the Bangladeshi community, at the instance of the Mayor and his cronies, were being induced by their religious leaders to back one lot of Muslim politicians against another lot of Muslim politicians. It was not, as you might expect, Muslims versus the rest. They were saying, "If you are a good Muslim, you will vote for Lutfur Rahman and his chums. If you are not and you vote for someone else, whether Muslim or non-Muslim, you are beyond the religious pale." Clearly, that was unacceptable, therefore I made my findings of undue religious influence.

There were also other things, such as the provision in the Representation of the People Act 1983 whereby you cannot make false statements about the personal characters of the other candidates. You may remember the case of Phil Woolas up in the Manchester area. If you go beyond that limit and go public saying, basically, that your principal opponent is a racist who supports racists organisations, when it is totally untrue, that is, again, unacceptable.

You have virtually the whole catalogue of offences laid down by the 1983 Act; they were almost ticking the boxes, one by one, as they did it. That is what happens when you have a political culture that gets corrupted, in all senses, into the belief that, "The rules don't apply to us. We do what we want in order to get the results." That is the danger that one perceives. Of course, Tower Hamlets was an extreme case.

The other cases that I tried were largely cases of straightforward voter fraud using postal votes—misuse of the actual votes themselves: stealing them, altering them, and that sort of thing—or putting on the register people who had no right to be there, either because they lived somewhere else or because they did not exist at all. Those are the problems that I have seen, although I must emphasise that my experience is entirely with local authorities, naturally, because parliamentary elections are tried by proper judges, so to speak.

However—I think that Lord Pickles will agree with me here—local authority elections are the easiest to manipulate. You have relatively small electorates, a relatively small geographical area, and communities, although not necessarily racial or religious communities, that can operate as a sort of support mechanism in any frauds that you are perpetrating. I do not expect a large amount of fraud in parliamentary elections, referendums, or anything like that, but it is a serious problem in local elections. I do not think that Lord Pickles would disagree with that.

Q3 Chloe Smith: Across a selection of your cases—Tower Hamlets, Birmingham, and Slough—we see the range of corrupt practices, also known as crimes or elections fraud, including, as you say, postal voting practices, proxy voting practices and personation, notably, in Slough.

Richard Mawrey: Not so much proxy. Proxy votes are very rare, and proxy fraud is very rare. It is mostly personation, of both kinds: putting the wrong people on the register—what the Australians call "roll stuffing"—and misusing genuine votes for genuine people by diverting them, altering them, or, in some cases, simply destroying them.

Q4 Chloe Smith: Thank you. Two questions, if I may: would you agree that, where one of those avenues may be cut off by the law, criminals might turn to others? Criminals, by nature, are able to use a range of techniques, and, naturally, wish to do so. Secondly, may I ask for your assessment of who the victims of such crimes are? Where does the harm fall?

Richard Mawrey: I think the harm falls on the community as a whole if you have someone who is elected as a councillor, let us say, but has no right to be because the votes cast on their behalf are false. Take Birmingham, for example: in the two wards that I tried—although it was actually fairly common in all the wards with a substantial Muslim population—approximately half of

the votes cast for the winning candidates were false. That is serious. The winning candidates got between 3,000 and 4,000 votes each. It was three per ward, so they got that, and their rivals got 200 or 300 below.

Of those 3,000-odd votes, somewhere between 1,500 and 2,000 were completely bogus. They were votes that had been harvested in various ways—not, funnily enough, by putting bogus people on the register. They had stolen voting papers. They had applied for votes to be sent to the wrong address. They had gone down streets collecting the voting papers from houses in multiple occupation—they would get themselves in and there was a huge pile of voting papers. They knew they would be there because they had applied, without the knowledge of the voters, for those votes to be postal votes. They went in, there was a pile of postal votes and the inhabitants of the block did not know. They collected the lot and filled them in.

If any of the people living in those houses went to vote in person, they were told, “Oh no, you voted by post,” much to their annoyance, as you might imagine. I had witnesses called before me who said, “I went down to the polling station expecting to vote, but they said, ‘I’m sorry, Mr Jones, but you’ve already voted.’” He said, “No, I haven’t,” and they said, “Oh yes, you’re marked: we’ve got your ballot paper.” So they, of course, are the losers.

The other thing is that if you have a culture of political corruption, it seeps into all other life. I think of the money in Tower Hamlets that could have been spent for the benefit of Tower Hamlets but that was actually being spent on providing, in effect, free meals for voters—which is what they were doing, among other things—and subsidising organisations that had not asked for a subsidy. Tower Hamlets is not a borough that has money to spare or to throw around, and I felt that the people who had lost out—I said this in my judgment—were what I might call the rank-and-file members of the Bangladeshi community that they were claiming to represent. They were the losers. If they were looking at it in any sort of tribal way, they were doing down their own kind—the people they were claiming were their power base. That is not tolerable.

Q5 Chloe Smith: Eric, you then had the opportunity to follow up on Richard’s work and to say what ought to be done about it. Is it still your view that something ought to be done about all of those things?

Lord Pickles: Yes. In terms of vulnerability, there might be the odd seat in the House that is vulnerable, but this is about local government. I think it would be a big mistake to say that this is just about voting, democracy and elections. It is actually about power and money. A place like Tower Hamlets has a budget of £1 billion. Many of the large cities have budgets of large sums of money. Even a small district council has considerable ability to dispose of assets and to make appointments.

The reason I put commissioners in Tower Hamlets was, like many things, based on quite a small thing. I looked at the small grants that were available to many organisations, some of which could be distributed by councillors. They were there to relieve poverty. I had a map that showed me where the grants had been distributed and another map that showed me where the deprivation was, and there was no relationship between the two. Then, I looked at the number of decisions that had been

overturned by councillors and the number of decisions they had granted without a business plan. It was on that basis that we decided to put the thing through.

I was asked to look at it and we started taking evidence on the types of fraud. I have been involved in politics for a long time and have seen most things on the street, but I was quite shocked by some of the frauds that were being committed. Richard will be able to tell you about warehousing. There was a warehouse in Birmingham, I think, where they were literally changing the ballot papers on an almost commercial basis. There were things like carousel fraud, where a ballot is palmed—a fresh ballot is taken out, filled in and given to another person and it is palmed—as a way of controlling the election; landlords insisting on seeing a photograph of their ballot being completed; and people suddenly finding out that their landlord has registered six or seven people at their house just before an election, only for their names to disappear afterwards.

It is really important to understand that that is not endemic within the system; it is an example of how vulnerable the system is. If Tower Hamlets represents the future, we have to ensure that that future is terminated. We probably will not be burgled, but we lock our houses. The measures in the Bill are moderate and reasonable, and they ensure at least that we will not find some of our large cities run by kleptocrats—this is about rewarding friends; it is not necessarily about politics. Sorry, I went on a bit there.

Richard Mawrey: Could I just come in here on what Lord Pickles has said? The Bill addresses something that was a real problem in Tower Hamlets: the registration of political parties. The Electoral Commission blithely signed off Tower Hamlets First as a party, but it was a joke. It had no premises, and it had—as I discovered to my amazement by asking questions—no bank account. I said to Lutfur Rahman, “If I want to give a donation to your party, do I have to come along with an envelope of used non-consecutive fifties?” Obviously, he was dying to say yes, but that would clearly have been the wrong answer. You can see the levels to which it has come. If anyone can just say, “I am a political party,” and give themselves a name, you lay yourself wide open, particularly once they are registered and can say, “I am a registered political party and have all the rights of a registered political party.”

Lord Pickles: The system is vulnerable. To misquote John Major, it is about old maids cycling to evensong and drinking warm beer, and in most places, that rather twee, gentle system kind of works. When I was a councillor, in gentle rural villages in my own wards, it was fine, but where there is money, we have to protect the integrity of the ballot and of governance.

Q6 Cat Smith (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): Richard, can I start with you and the Tower Hamlets examples that you have already outlined? Thank you for that. You said that in Tower Hamlets there was a wide range of different types of electoral fraud that was used to try to manipulate. I was particularly struck by what you said about public funds being diverted for political advantage. Does anything in the Bill prevent public funds being diverted for political influence?

Richard Mawrey: The Bill, as I read it, does not make any particular changes to the laws relating to bribery. The laws relating to bribery, in actual terms under the

1983 Act, are quite clear. The problem is that bribery was a common law offence, and it then became a statutory defence under the Victorians. Before the secret ballot, the Victorians had a system whereby you voted in public and everyone knew how you voted. Rich candidates would simply put money in the hands of the electors, who would not be very large in number, to pay them to go and vote. That was the principal thing that led to both the secret ballot and the introduction of electoral courts in the 1860s.

We have moved on from that now. Very few candidates have the sort of money that allows them to put fivers in people's pockets, so to speak, but they do control public money. The answer is not necessarily electoral law, but better control, particularly in local authorities, of local authority finance. It is better auditing and more independent scrutiny. The law is clear; it is policing it that is the problem. You don't need to change the law; you need to change the policing of it. Would you agree?

Lord Pickles: Yes, I think I almost certainly would agree. When it starts to go wrong, it is a terrible thing. I do not think I am betraying confidences, because I am sure they would be happy for me to say this, but the two Labour Members of Parliament within the borough came to see me and laid out all these various things, and said that basically the Electoral Commission was ignoring them, that the police were ignoring them, but there was something deeply wrong within the administration, and they urged me to take action.

Obviously, a Secretary of State can only go in on a reasonable basis, and I went in on a reasonable basis because it seemed to me that the way in which grants were being delineated for every small thing was entirely wrong, entirely arbitrary and not based on fact. So the point is that this Bill is about just tightening up and trying to make the system reasonably proof in terms of personation and various other things. It is not going to cure corruption and it is not going to stop bad people being elected; it just reduces the chances of a community being abused.

Q7 Cat Smith: Turning to postal votes, this legislation obviously makes some minor changes to the way in which postal votes are handled, in terms of limiting the number of postal votes that an elector may hand in at a polling station on the day, but there is nothing to prevent postal votes being posted in a post box. So I just wonder whether you consider that the legislation might not be effective in reducing postal votes, which I think you said was the greatest weakness in the system.

Richard Mawrey: I appreciate the risk of going on about my King Charles's head. Postal voting is going to be open to fraud, however hard you try and however much you do. Legislation has, since the Birmingham judgment, tried to stop all the mouseholes, but as the old saying goes, the better mousehole breeds the smarter mouse, so you can try and stop all your mouseholes but the mouse will still get out eventually. Obviously you need to tighten up registration, but the problem is resources. If every time somebody wrote in asking to register Mr Jones at 1 Acacia Avenue, if you had unlimited resources you could send someone around to see whether there was a Mr Jones at 1 Acacia Avenue. Had they done that in Slough, things would have been very different.

The thing that blew Slough open was a small road—I still remember its name, Hawtrey Close—of four houses, in which, just before the election, 19 people were registered to vote. What drew the attention of the Labour party, who were on the qui vive for fraud, was that they went along to Hawtrey Close and all four houses had been boarded up and unoccupied for several years. None the less, they had 19 voters in them. Surprisingly, they all voted for the winning candidate. But you couldn't blame the town hall. The town hall said, "Here is an address. It is a perfectly good address." The town hall didn't know that the houses were boarded up. "Here are these people wanting to be registered; we've got to register them." They did not have the resources to send someone out who would look at this thing and say, "Of course there's nobody registered, as there's no one living there." So that is the problem. It is resources, not the law. The law is quite clear: you cannot be registered unless you are a genuine person, living within the ward or constituency.

Lord Pickles: What the Bill does is restrict the number of people you can handle. So you cannot go door to door collecting postal votes, as has been common practice between all political parties for a number of years. I did receive quite a lot of representations from people who just hated the whole idea of postal votes and wanted to go back. I am old enough to remember when you had to make a case—you had to get your employer or your doctor to sign to say it was necessary. But I took the view that it would be just about impossible to turn the clock back and go back to that kind of system. It is probably not fashionable to mention Richard Nixon, but he was told, "Once the toothpaste is out of the tube, it is awfully hard to get it back in."

Rather than trying to go back to what was, in some people's eyes, a golden age, we need instead to restrict it. Returning officers tell me of people arriving at 6 pm on polling day, which as we all know is a busy time, with a crisp packet box full of postal votes—perhaps 200, 300 or 400, which all have to be separately verified, which slows the process down. It could be that that is all straightforward, but I do not think so. It is trying to restrict the handling of postal votes, ensuring that parties cannot pick them up—I think the Labour party went round with a mock ballot box to put papers in. I am not suggesting that it was attempting to do anything wrong—it was trying to get the vote out—but it is important to demonstrate that a vote is important and should not be handled by anyone other than the voter.

Q8 Cat Smith: I wanted to pick up on the example given of Birmingham, which was quite a long time ago. The laws around postal votes and electoral registration have changed since, and a national insurance number is now required, or an electoral registration form with a date of birth and a signature on the postal vote return slip. I wonder whether the example given, of a street where people were registered and postal votes applied for, could happen under the existing law today and the changes that have been made.

Richard Mawrey: It certainly could happen. Instead of having 19 entirely fictitious people living at the address, someone could—if they have sufficient organisation—get entirely genuine people who just live somewhere else. That was done in Slough, where a whole lot of people were registered who actually lived in Walthamstow. Walthamstow did not have elections, so the people were

not voting twice. The people registered in Slough by the fraudsters were genuine people, with national insurance numbers and everything—they would have been A1 at Lloyd's—but they just did not live there. They claimed to have moved just before the election and, curiously, moved back to their old houses just after the election. It was of course fraudulent, and not one of them had set foot outside Walthamstow. Their names were being used, with their permission and their connivance. If someone knows their national insurance numbers, it can be done without their connivance, because the signature on the application form for the postal vote can be replicated if someone has a copy of it.

National insurance numbers were not needed back in 2008, when I did Slough. It is difficult now to put a completely fictitious person on the register, but it is not difficult to harvest votes, with or without consent, from real people who live somewhere else. Of course, the old Irish habit was to vote the graveyard.

Lord Pickles: In terms of warehousing, where the ballots are changed, the signature would not be touched because it is outside the envelope. It is the envelopes that are opened and the vote changed. The signature authenticates something that has been changed subsequently.

Q9 Cat Smith: If I understand it correctly, Richard, in most cases it would require the consent of everyone involved. The people registered at an address that they were not actually living at would need to provide their national insurance numbers—they would have to be in on it. That makes it harder to do on a bigger scale, which feeds into your point that the smaller electorates of local government make it easier to manipulate the outcomes than in a parliamentary election. Given that, does it therefore follow that increasing the turnout at an election makes it harder to commit electoral fraud, so a higher turnout is a good mitigating factor against electoral fraud and a good weapon to combat it?

Richard Mawrey: I think that is absolutely right, because fraud is obviously a relatively risky occupation, and the more bogus votes you have to put in, the more difficult it is. That is why it is very rare in parliamentary constituencies and would be completely unfeasible in any form of referendum, even a local referendum. However, when 50 or even 100 votes is likely to make a difference, then the game is worth the candle, unfortunately.

Lord Pickles: To be clear, nobody really cares that much about Parliament. There is no money in Parliament. You would have to be certain that someone was eventually going to get to a point where they would actually be issuing contracts. However, there is plenty of money in local authorities. As you are probably well aware, there have been, I think, two attempts to unseat a Labour MP using these kinds of methods. Pleasingly, they fell well short, and I was pleased to offer help and assistance in that, because it is massively important that this place remains absolutely secure, but the real money is in local authorities, not here.

Richard Mawrey: And, of course, a local councillor perversely has rather more influence, particularly in the sorts of boroughs where influence is perceived by the public to matter—“Oh, yes, he can swing this for me. He can swing that for me”—far more, curiously enough, than the MP himself or herself, who may be seen as a rather distant figure who you might go and moan to if

your granny is not getting proper treatment from the NHS, or something like that. If I may say so with respect, you are not handling the readies: you are not dishing out jobs or contracts, and that is why people are keen to become local councillors. In some cases, it is a different sort of keenness from the keenness to become a Member of Parliament.

Q10 Cat Smith: My final question is about the resources of local government, because under this legislation, local government will be asked to do more because of the requirement to issue free voter ID cards. Our electoral returning officers are quite stretched already, and the Association of Election Administrators has already made representations about the pressure on electoral registration officers. In terms of their ability to spot potential fraud, given the increase in workload and the cuts to local government, do you have concerns about the resources of local government to be able to do their jobs, frankly?

Richard Mawrey: I know it is not in your Bill, but it occurred to me that a solution—although not necessarily one that the Electoral Commission would welcome—would be if the Electoral Commission had resources so that, if necessary, it could assign someone. If a local registration officer or returning officer said, “I think we have a problem, but we cannot handle it because we do not have the resources,” the Electoral Commission could, under this theory at least, put in what might be termed a hit squad to go and see what was going on and deal with it.

That would also have the benefit that this would be an independent, external body coming in, so the local councillors and the local officials would not be getting local flak. These would be people rather like the commissioners appointed by Lord Pickles to go into Tower Hamlets, who were completely independent of the borough and were therefore able to find out all about the financial misappropriations and so on. We have the ability to put in external people. Frankly, I would not necessarily rely on the police, because one, they are overstretched, and two, they do not have the available techniques, resources and skills to deal with this—and they hate doing it, and they make quite clear that they hate doing it. My suggestion is that the question of whether the Electoral Commission itself might be able to assist might at least be considered at some future time. I do not know whether you would go along with that.

Lord Pickles: This is a really important question. If you go to a count, say for Parliament, the chief executive turns up or maybe the mayor, and I as the returning officer—the person who is doing the work is not them, and for too long, electoral registration has been in the legions of the damned. They are forgotten about and not properly resourced.

If chief executives understood that it was part of their terms of contract to deliver a fair poll, and that they would be personally held responsible, that would be an important point. The point that you make about electoral returns being poorly resourced is absolutely right. I do not think that it would take an enormous increase in resources to improve the situation, but what is in the Bill makes their life that bit easier because there are fewer things for them to worry about. I agree with the substantive point that you make.

The Chair: I have a long list of Members who want to come in, so I ask Members to keep their questions short, and witnesses to shorten their answers. I will endeavour to get everyone in.

Q11 Alec Shelbrooke (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con): I am seeking a comment on what I am about to read to you. I apologise to the Committee that what I am about to read is exceptionally offensive and, frankly, quite evil. This relates to the Batley and Spen by-election. This is something that happened in June of this year. What I am about to read to you we were not able to trace, no matter how hard we tried, but I seek your comments on it. This relates to your comment on religious pressure:

“Brothers & Sisters of Batley & Heckmondwike I am publicly calling out members of our communities who we have supported in the past: Shabbir Pandor, Ghulam Maniyar, Dr Rajpura and others who have shamelessly brought the Labour Candidate (who is openly Lesbian) to the ‘Masjids’ (the house of Allah) for votes. Would Allah be happy with their actions considering he destroyed the people of Lut A.S which is clearly referenced in the Holy Quran as a lesson for mankind? We are already powerless in schools against forced LGBT education and the effect it is having on our children. Must people from our community promote this agenda too? Mr Maniyar who is part of the Muslim burial committee is trying to land his daughter Fazila the job she previously had under the late Jo Cox. I ask him ‘Would you like to be buried with this on your conscience? You are promoting an MP that could potentially harm the Imaan of our children.’ This is not an endorsement of another party or candidate. I want you all as a community to understand that the blind loyalty to the Labour Party of these people for selfish gains be it ‘peerages’ or ‘better job roles’ is being asked FROM US at a cost of the corruption of our future generations. (PLS SHARE THE TRUTH SO PPL MAY KNOW)”.

I apologise for how offensive that was, but I think it is important to the Committee. That was in June of this year, in the parliamentary by-election. I seek your comments on what I have just read.

Richard Mawrey: I quite agree with you that it is offensive, but there is an obvious line to be drawn regarding individuals expressing strong, perhaps bigoted, perhaps extreme religious or indeed ideological views, for example against LGBT people and so on. The key, I think, with religious influence is that, first of all, it has to be directed. Directed against a candidate is perfectly okay for what was, I think, section 115 of the Representation of the People Act 1983, because it is just as much an offence to try to get somebody unelected as to get a named person elected. Quite often if something false is spread about a candidate’s personal character, so as to engage, I think, section 113, it does not matter that that may not be directed to the election of any other person, but just in order to get a candidate unelected, as it were.

The point about religious influence is that it has to be a way of influencing people. The fact that somebody expresses a view such as that might just fall short. If that person were himself an imam, some other religious teacher, or somebody of standing within the community who is saying, “Don’t vote for this candidate because their views are against our religion,” then you probably might breach the threshold of undue influence, because people would be voting not on general principles but on strictly narrow sectarian principles. That would be true of any religion; it just happened in this case to be Muslim.

Lord Pickles: I have nothing to add to that. I agree with everything that Richard said.

Q12 Brendan O’Hara (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): I have a couple of questions, directed to both of you, but I will start with Lord Pickles. You said that there have been some shocking examples of postal vote fraud, and you gave some examples. However, you said that it is not endemic in the system but that the system is vulnerable. Do you think that, with the system being vulnerable, we are missing an opportunity to tighten up on postal vote fraud in the Bill? It does not seem to be a huge part of the Bill. Given what you have said, the Bill seems to be almost looking in the wrong places to tighten up on fraud. Where could we tighten up more on the postal vote fraud that you say is not endemic but to which the system is vulnerable?

Lord Pickles: Thank you. That gives me a brief opportunity to clarify the remarks. If postal vote fraud was widespread, it would be too late, and this place would be stuffed with people with a vested interest in keeping a vulnerable system. It is vulnerable. We have delineated a number of court cases, over several years, and showed how vulnerable it is. What we want to do is to close that.

Obviously, it is up to the Committee to move various amendments further to restrict postal votes. The recommendations that you have here plough a middle route between taking away from things that people have become very used to and restricting too much. For example, having to renew every three years is important; restricting the number of people who can handle postal votes is important. As Richard says, postal votes are by their very nature more vulnerable than votes at the polling station. Things like carousel fraud are no less possible, but they are hard to do.

You have to come to a judgment. Certainly, I would urge you to put down some amendments to test the Government on restrictions on postal ballots. However, in many ways the horse has bolted on that—people have become used to it. Going back so that everybody voted in person, except in cases of illness or business, would probably be a step too far, but it would certainly be worth putting down a probing amendment. Obviously, I am not saying to my Conservative colleagues that they have to vote for it, but nevertheless it would be a good debate.

Q13 Brendan O’Hara: The problem that you have both identified is around postal voting, and the examples of personation that you have given have been pretty few and far between. It is fair to say from what you have said that where the system is most vulnerable and weak is around postal voting.

Richard, you were talking about a particular culture that existed in Tower Hamlets and manipulation by religious means. You said yourself that that was an extreme case. The Tower Hamlets example has been used in previous debates to claim that voter ID cards are absolutely necessary. In your opinion, how would voter ID cards at polling stations have changed what you witnessed at Tower Hamlets?

Richard Mawrey: Tower Hamlets would be a bad example. In Tower Hamlets, as I said, they virtually ticked every box of electoral offence. But for my being rather kind-hearted, they would have ticked the intimidation box as well—they ticked them all. Voter fraud played a very small part, funnily enough, in Tower Hamlets.

There was a handful of personation cases. Because they were orchestrated by the candidate, they were enough, as it were, to get him over the line.

If you as the candidate, or as an agent of the candidate, procure one false vote, you are out. It is all or nothing: you do not have to show that it made a difference. There was simply a handful. I regret to say that, in that case, a number of people who were carrying out these frauds by registering themselves at the wrong address were people who were councillors who lived outside the borough and registered in the borough, but that was a rare occurrence.

Birmingham, in particular, Slough and Woking were all cases that were purely postal fraud. Voter ID at polling stations, frankly, is neither here nor there. Personation at polling stations is very rare indeed, because it is so dangerous—if someone turns up to a polling station and says, “I am Mr Jones of Acacia Avenue”, and somebody says, “I know Mr Jones; you are not him”, the next thing is a policeman’s hand on his shoulder and he’s up at the local Crown court—but postal vote personation, whereby you are voting in the name of a non-existent person or a person who lives somewhere else, is very difficult to detect and to trace. It is only when you have a full-scale petition that it comes to light and you are able to unseat someone.

Voter ID in polling stations is all right, but voter ID for the purposes of registering votes would require checking. If you do not have a mechanism to check—even just to spot check—then registering people at addresses where they do not live, which is the key to that sort of postal fraud, which is a form of personation, voter ID is going to be quite difficult to operate. What you need is simply to check that if Mr Jones is registered at 1 Acacia Avenue, there is a Mr Jones living there. That takes money and resources. We do not have an identity card system in this country, for good or ill, so there is no way, obviously, of cross-checking that. Voter ID only takes you so far with postal votes. Beyond that, the system is vulnerable, and necessarily vulnerable.

Lord Pickles: Thank you for the really interesting question. I did not recommend photo ID, but I think things have moved on since then. I was very interested to see that the Government said that 98% of the population has some form of photo ID. To emphasise the importance of voting, to be able to demonstrate that you are that person by producing, in my case, my bus pass—I could not use my driving licence, because I still have a paper one; I am that old—or something from work is a very sensible process. It occurs to me that the 2% who do not have any kind of photo ID might in itself have a wider use beyond voting in a polling station. It is an important check and a way of emphasising the importance of the vote. If Barack Obama can sign for his ballot paper, which might be an alternative, it is not unreasonable to have the same level as we have for getting a pair of Nike trainers from Amazon.

Q14 Brendan O’Hara: That is a purely subjective view. The fact that you did not recommend photo ID in your report and it is now being introduced would suggest that it is a solution seeking a problem.

Lord Pickles: No, not really. I did bear in mind what had happened in Northern Ireland. I am sure you will recall that it started with paper ID for the first few years and then went over to photo ID. A lot of things have

happened. Essentially, what the Government are suggesting, so far as I can follow what they are doing, is that we are moving to the Northern Ireland system without an intermediate stage with paper ID—

Q15 Brendan O’Hara: Sorry, Lord Pickles, can I interrupt? Are you seriously suggesting that the situation in the United Kingdom in 2021 bears any similarity to the situation in Northern Ireland in the 1980s and 1990s?

Lord Pickles: In what respect? I do not understand the question.

Brendan O’Hara: Well, you say we are moving to the Northern Ireland system. The Northern Ireland system was introduced for very specific reasons. Are you saying we should move to the Northern Ireland system because there are similarities between what is happening here in 2021 and what was happening in Northern Ireland in the 1980s and 1990s?

Lord Pickles: I think you are putting words in my mouth. My remarks on Northern Ireland were restricted to the point that at first there was a paper check, and then photo ID. The Government are suggesting that we move on to photo ID now. What has changed since 2016 is the growth of photo ID. It is important to be able to demonstrate who you are when you go to the polling station, not just in order to deal with personation but to emphasise the importance of the vote. No doubt you will spend many happy hours together debating that point. I shall read the debates with great interest.

Q16 Aaron Bell (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Con): I wanted to pick up on your point about policing, Mr Mawrey. You have been very critical, in both your judgments and your previous evidence to Parliament, of the police and their determination not to get involved. My question is twofold. What does that imply about how many cases have not been brought that perhaps ought to have been? Does the Bill empower the police, and would you expect them to be more willing to be involved in future?

Richard Mawrey: Those are two separate questions. One was whether the police are empowered. They have the necessary powers now. In the aftermath of my critical remarks in the Birmingham judgment, a number of forces had designated officers to deal with the issue, but for various reasons, there were never enough officers for some to be spared to deal with electoral matters only, so they tended to be somebody who added this issue to his or her other duties—say, with the fraud squad, or whatever it was. They did not have the time or resources, because obviously this was regarded—not unreasonably—by some police forces as being very low priority. They tend to think, “This is a squabble between politicians. Let them sort it out.”

In certain areas—Tower Hamlets is a good example—the police force was wary of the local politicians, who were, of course, only too anxious, particularly in the case of Lutfur Rahman, to meet any sort of criticism or investigation with cries of “Institutional racism!”, mentions of the Macpherson report, and all that. The police were wary of dealing with that. They have the powers; whether they have the resources and the will is an entirely different matter.

On whether lots of cases are going undetected, the answer is undoubtedly yes. It is very difficult to prove fraud, and when you have proved it, it is very difficult and time-consuming to prove who benefited from it. In some systems—in Australia, for example—you can prove fraud until you are blue in the face, but you no longer prove who benefited from it, so anyone elected with fraudulent votes stays elected. That is obviously not a good idea. What you see in the cases that I try is the tip of the iceberg, and those cases exist only because concerned citizens are prepared to put their money—their houses, sometimes—on the line in order to fight that fraud. You can end up, as the petitioners did in Tower Hamlets, with a large order for costs against someone who cheerfully declares themselves bankrupt, and you find yourself having spent a fortune doing what you think to be right, only to see none of that money back.

What the Bill does not deal with, although it might have done, is any reform of the process of electoral petitions, trying disputed elections, and all that—things on which Lord Pickles and I have given evidence on other occasions. I am sorry that it does not deal with that, but it is a big, long Bill; perhaps you will get round to it later. The idea that it should be made easier for elections to be challenged by citizens or candidates, and less expensive—

The Chair: I am sorry; I have to come in there. We have one minute left, so we can have a very short question and answer.

Q17 Fleur Anderson (Putney) (Lab): I have a very short question. To clarify for the record, what was the proportion of postal vote fraud, as opposed to in-person, polling station fraud, in Tower Hamlets and Birmingham? I think you have said that all the fraud in Birmingham was postal votes, for example. Is that correct? What was the proportion in Tower Hamlets?

Richard Mawrey: The proportion proved in Tower Hamlets was very small—really only a handful of votes were proved to be fraudulent. It was enough, because they had been orchestrated by the candidate himself.

Q18 Fleur Anderson: Do you have the number of postal votes?

Lord Pickles: To get a prosecution, you do not need to prove everything; you just need to prove some. I agree entirely with the point about electoral petitions. I would like to put that on the record.

Fleur Anderson: Have the elections in Birmingham and Tower Hamlets—

The Chair: Order. I am afraid that brings us to the end of the time allotted for this panel. On behalf of the Committee, I thank our witnesses for their evidence.

Examination of Witnesses

Councillor Peter Golds, Gillian Beasley and Assistant Chief Constable Gareth Cann QPM gave evidence.

10.26 am

The Chair: For this panel we have until 11.25 am. I will bring in Cat Smith first and then the Minister, but please take no more than 10 minutes each, in order to leave time for Back Benchers.

Q19 Cat Smith: Thank you, Ms Rees. My first question is to the witnesses from local government. What will be the practical and cost implications for electoral administrators and councils of implementing the Bill's voter ID proposals? Also, what pressure will there be on electoral administrators as a result of having to cope with two different categories of EU citizens when it comes to voting rights—whether they are a qualifying EU citizen? Do you anticipate any difficulties in managing that, and what kinds of resources do you expect to have to increase or bring in to meet those difficulties, as well as the requirements to administer free ID cards?

Councillor Golds: Is that for me first? Remember that I am an elected councillor, rather than an official, but obviously I can give you some ideas because I am extremely familiar with the electoral services department of Tower Hamlets Council and how it interfaces with the rest of the council. The electoral services department does understand the need to clean up the system we have, and I believe that there is a will within our council to provide extra resources to electoral services, but of course it is the Government who pay costs toward electoral services. One thing that the department often complains about is the adverts that go out when there is an election, because suddenly they will be inundated when tens of thousands of people ask, "Am I on the electoral register?" A quarter of a million people apply to go on the electoral register, but about 85% of them are already on it, so electoral services are sitting there saying, "Yes, yes, yes." That is expensive and time consuming.

Gillian Beasley: There are important resource implications for both areas. Looking at how electoral services teams will have to respond, we certainly anticipate that having to produce these new electoral identity documents will require additional resources. We know from experience that voters tend to turn their minds to voting very close to polling day, and if they discover that they do not have the requisite documents to prove their identity and we have to issue those documents, we will probably see a surge at what is the busiest time for electoral services teams, the pre-election run-up, when they are dealing with late registrations, and proxy and postal vote applications, so there will be resource implications for them.

Returning officers, which is what I have been since 1999, will probably have dedicated teams that are able to do that, because when someone discovers that they do not have the requisite documents and they need to bring in other documents, depending on what those are, they sometimes do not bring the right ones and we have to send them home, so there is a lot of administrative burden in that regard. We will also need to train and resource that at polling stations in a better way, because there will be problems in polling stations over this. We need confident presiding officers who understand the law and are trained well, so there will be additional burdens there.

I think that in our arena, in particular, there will be significant resource issues. It is not the case that we do not want to do it; we just need to ensure that is highlighted at very busy times during the electoral process, because of voter behaviour. That has been our experience in Peterborough, and I am sure that it is the experience of other returning officers.

Assistant Chief Constable Cann: From a policing point of view, it is difficult to estimate with any precision what the resource impact might be. Some elements of the Bill, if put into law, might go some way towards helping. For example, voter ID could potentially help to avoid various demands that we have around it. I do not want to overstate that, because it would not be a huge thing, but it could be helpful. On the other hand, until we understand fully what is involved in the digital imprints regime, for example, it is a little difficult to be precise about the likely impact on police resources at the moment.

Q20 Cat Smith: If I may follow up on that, my question to you, Gareth, was going to be slightly different. It is on the policing of electoral fraud, particularly in relation to overseas voters. With regard to overseas voters making political donations that are unlawful, or voter fraud, what powers does the UK have to detect infringements and prosecute?

Assistant Chief Constable Cann: With regard to any infringements that might be committed overseas or by non-UK citizens, for example, our powers to deal with that are very limited.

Q21 Chloe Smith: I welcome all three witnesses. I have one question for each. Councillor Golds, thank you for giving us your time today. Can you tell us a little about the experience on the ground of how people might have been victims of electoral fraud in Tower Hamlets, and perhaps how difficult it can be for some of those stories to come forward?

Councillor Golds: I have been studying it. I have been involved in elections in the borough for 20 years. I should quickly declare that over the years, I have been an election agent in 13 general elections. In fact, I have been an election agent for every kind of election we can have in this country, from Parliament and European Parliament to GLA, GLC and local council, and I have never seen anything like what I saw in Tower Hamlets.

The thing that always upsets me, and that I find terribly disappointing, is that ordinary people's votes were effectively stolen. When I knock on a door, somebody will say to me, "Mr Golds, my father used to vote for Mr Attlee." I smile at them, and then they say, "But what's the point of voting now?" The problem is that, as both Mr Mawrey QC and Lord Pickles said, those are the people whose votes have been stolen. Most of all, however, there are our Bangladeshi voters, who sometimes come forward and say to me, as their local councillor, "Can you provide this information?" I say, "But you have to go on record, otherwise it is hearsay," and they will then say, "I'm frightened to do so."

That is a very intimidating situation, and I have to say it is not only in Tower Hamlets. Mr Shelbrooke read what had happened in Batley and Spen. A few years ago I took a friend of mine, who had contested an election in Calderdale, to meet the Electoral Commission. It was a waste of his time, because the Electoral Commission, as it so often is, was completely uninterested. He had a dossier as large as the one I brought with me today, which he handed to the Commission; as far as I know, it is probably still sitting in an archive, gathering dust.

Q22 Chloe Smith: As a brief follow-up, could you please explain what types of fraud people may have encountered? Be specific; is it personation, postal votes or other types?

Councillor Golds: In the election petition, I submitted eight witness statements and approximately 2,000 pages of backing documentation, covering as much as possible. That includes, for example, where we tracked fraudulent postal votes using postal vote returns in the election data. You can see how things were marked on postal voting.

Tracking personation is much more difficult, but I will give you an interesting example. In the 2010 mayoral election, when Lutfur Rahman was first elected, I wrote one of my many unanswered letters to the Metropolitan Police. At 7.15 on polling day, I was present at Christ Church Primary School polling station in Brick Lane. A man entered and approached the desk where electors from Brick Lane were being processed. He had in his hand a poll card and envelope. However, this poll card was dated May 2010, was issued by the London Borough of Enfield, and referred to the Edmonton general election constituency. He tried to give a name and address in Brick Lane but was unable to accurately do so, by which time he was leaning over to the council staff and trying to point at an electoral register in front of the council and say, "That's me, that's me." Eventually, the council officer started to ask questions, and he left the polling station.

I would add that outside there were supporters of Tower Hamlets First with copies of the electoral register. They mark on the electoral register what we all know exists: the vote return. They know if people vote. They have a list of people who may not regularly vote, and people were coming up, talking to them and effectively being given names to go into the polling station.

If you want another extraordinary example—one that made all sorts of press—it was the incident in the 2006 by-election in the Shadwell ward where a figure, about six-foot-something tall, dressed from head to foot in traditional Islamic gear but with huge red trainers, entered a polling station. An hour later, the same figure entered the polling station, and then an hour after that they entered the polling station.

The Conservative and Labour polling agents then compared notes, rang their agents and were told that the one thing they could do would be to ensure the presiding officer asked the statutory questions. When this person came for the fourth time and the statutory questions were put, he merely hooked up the clothing he was wearing and fled down Bigland Street. Everybody asked the policeman on duty what he was going to do, and he shrugged his shoulders and just said, "Nothing. It's nothing to do with me."

Those are two particularly extreme examples, but I can give you examples of cases, exactly as Mr Mawrey said—I have them recorded—where for houses that were boarded up, names appeared on the electoral register and votes were cast, or where people turned up only to discover that their votes had been stolen. Staggeringly, on 6 May this year, Francis Hoar, the barrister for the election petitioners in Tower Hamlets, went to vote in Lambeth and unfortunately his vote had already been cast on his behalf. That is what went on.

Q23 Chloe Smith: Thank you very much indeed. I have a brief question for both Gillian and Assistant Chief Constable Cann. Gillian, thank you very much for joining us; it is good to see you again. We have done

some work together, because Peterborough was part of early pilots on how to tackle electoral fraud, and you took forward measures about postal and proxy voting. With reference to the measures in the Bill—for example, clause 6, introducing the requirement of secrecy for postal votes—could you explain to us the problems you encountered, how you tried to deal with them and how you think the Bill will affect that?

Welcome and thank you to ACC Cann, as well. Given that electoral law can be a relatively niche area within policing, can you tell us how the wider profession works to ensure that the right knowledge, training and capacity are in place in local forces to enable them to play the role that is needed from the police?

Gillian Beasley: I will start by saying that we have a very close relationship with the police in Peterborough and our electoral integrity plan is co-produced between us and them. Our police, as well as our electoral services team, have a really good and detailed understanding of the electoral offences in law. There is a lot of co-operation there, which has helped us to home in on where integrity is at risk.

First, I would say that we have seen less personation in polling stations in the recent past. Probably our last prosecution was some years ago, and that is because there are some tight measures not only in polling stations, but around ensuring that we have a good electoral register. We go through our electoral register very carefully, removing duplicate names, and we visit a lot of premises where there are a number of people registered or where we are told there is an empty property, to ensure that they are the right people and that they are real people. Of course, the individual voter registration division has helped tremendously with that.

Where we have issues, as the Minister knows, is in postal voting. That is where our concerns are. The allegations we tend to get are around harvesting. They are allegations of people going into properties where people live—they are proper voters who have applied for a postal vote—and getting that person to make a declaration and signature with date of birth, but not fill the ballot paper. Those are then taken away and the proxies put against the relevant candidate. Those are the allegations. We get allegations about those being taken from properties, and where we get those allegations, we work together with the police in joint operations to visit those premises and make it absolutely clear that there is no tolerance for that and that those properties will be raided. We have never had any prosecutions for that, but we have made a clear statement about not tolerating that kind of behaviour.

The provision on not handing your postal vote to a campaigner is welcome. We will use that as a good communications tool to say to people, “Your vote is your vote. It is important that you post your vote or take it into a polling station.” The restrictions on how many postal votes can go into polling stations is a good provision, and documenting who is going in with those postal votes is important. Harvesting those votes will now be an offence, and although it will be difficult evidentially to get people to make those allegations, to stand by them and to go to court, nevertheless as returning officers we can do some important publicity around that fact: “This is your vote, you must keep it

and it is a criminal offence if somebody takes it from you.” I see some strength there, and I support those provisions.

The other area I think is interesting is around undue influence. That is by far the most difficult; we hear allegations, but it is difficult for people who are subject to whatever form of undue influence or intimidation it may be to feel confident to come forward, give evidence and take that through to a court process. We encourage people to do that, but it is still difficult for them.

The change in the provision on undue influence, where you induce or compel somebody not to vote at all, is important; that covers the point that was made about collecting votes where they have not even been marked. My issue as a returning officer is that I send out thousands and thousands of postal votes, and we get them carefully delivered to the correct premises, but what happens behind those closed doors? It is about getting people to confidently give evidence if they are subject to undue influence or somebody comes and tries to take their vote. As I say, we have a really good relationship with the police, who are prepared to take forward and understand the offences. There is a joint communications plan between us and the police telling people that we will take it seriously, take cases forward and investigate every single allegation that is made, but it is still very difficult to get people confident enough to come forward with those kinds of allegations.

Assistant Chief Constable Cann: In terms of developing police knowledge and capacity, I like the description of electoral law being a niche area. I think that is accurate. The RPA is not a widely known piece of legislation among police officers.

One of the reasons that the national portfolio that I lead was created was to raise awareness through some degree of central co-ordination and training across police forces. One of the first things that we recognise is that we are not on our own with this. Gillian has spoken very well about the importance of partnership working between the police, the Association of Electoral Administrators, administrators more locally, the Electoral Commission, the CPS, the parties themselves and Royal Mail. We form strong partnership relationships with a whole range of people, which helps to build capacity and capability within the police service generally.

More specifically, we have established a network of officers, one in every force. We have SPOCs—single points of contact—who are the lead for that force for electoral-related matters. They are knowledgeable in electoral crime and procedure. They usually sit within economic crime teams, but not always. We have created a bespoke training course that is run through the City of London police, which holds particular expertise of its own in this regard. We hold an annual conference for all those single points of contact and a number of other people. There is a very strong, successful partnership from that conference particularly with the Electoral Commission, and with people such as Gillian and other electoral administrators.

We have developed the scope of the portfolio over the last 10 years or so to cover matters of policing the election itself—not just preventing and detecting any fraud, crime or malpractice, but policing the election, so matters of public order and wider security. We have developed guidance in relation to policing elections, which is available on the College of Policing’s website. It

is called “Authorised Professional Practice”, and it is about the way police doctrine is expressed and made available to officers up and down the country.

I like to think that, certainly over the last 10 years or so, we have raised the consciousness in the service of electoral malpractice. It is taken extremely seriously and we have some extremely capable and knowledgeable people involved in the work, but it is fair to say that it is something of a niche area. Most officers will not come across it, and in any event the law is slightly difficult to navigate, even for those who have a particular interest and specialism.

Q24 Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): Good morning to the witnesses. I have two questions to ACC Cann. Do you think the penalties for those committing electoral fraud are sufficient to deter the bad actors?

Assistant Chief Constable Cann: I think the penalties vary, because there is a blend of a civil and a criminal regime at play here. I do not know, because I am not an elected person, a candidate or anything like that, but I imagine that the harsher sanction will be around matters such as being disqualified from holding office or taking part in future electoral matters, rather than a specific fine or a direct sanction. In that regard, there is some significant deterrence there. Generally speaking, when matters go to the courts, it is generally felt that the courts are quite keen to address the seriousness of the matter before them and hand down a suitable penalty.

Q25 Nick Smith: Thank you for that. My second question is this. Mr Mawrey, one of our earlier witnesses, said something like, “Voter ID at polling stations isn’t necessary because there is very little personation.” What is the incidence of personation at polling stations, do you know?

Assistant Chief Constable Cann: I think it is right to say that we have relatively small numbers of those offences coming through to us so, in that sense, it is not a major issue in terms of workload or demand for policing at election time. I imagine that in any case, part of the motivation behind the proposal for voter ID is an element of deterrence. In that regard, if it were to be brought in, we would see some value in that and would broadly welcome that proposal, notwithstanding the fact that, as I say, we do not tend to prosecute or get asked to investigate a significant number of personation allegations.

Q26 Tom Randall (Gedling) (Con): Councillor Golds, you gave some examples earlier today about behaviour in polling stations. Had there been a voter ID regime in place in Tower Hamlets previously, do you think the behaviour that you saw in polling stations might have been different?

Councillor Golds: I certainly think it would have improved. We had a byelection as recently as 12 October, where in one polling station—the Sundial Centre in Shipton Street—the police were called on two occasions to disperse unruly crowds outside the polling station intimidating voters. That is one polling station in one byelection held this summer. I have to say that Assistant Chief Constable Cann’s description of the police activity is positively Panglossian in its optimism; I just wonder whether any of this has percolated through to the Metropolitan police.

Q27 Tom Randall: In Mawrey’s judgment, he described—possibly unkindly—the behaviour of polling staff and the police as taking the three wise monkeys as their role models. Do you feel that after the Rahman trial, the police picked up the issues that arose from it?

Councillor Golds: Frankly, no. There was an inquiry organised by the police called Operation Lynemouth, which said in one of its closing descriptions that

“The policing of the election and the subsequent investigation was deficient in too many areas. There was a lack of corporate responsibility, a lack of training and insufficient resources for the SET investigation. In essence, the MPS did not consider the election and investigation a priority.”

Of course, at the time when they were supposed to be dealing with Tower Hamlets, they were also involved in the infamous Operation Midland, which was another subject. Indeed, one or two officers involved in the Tower Hamlets fiasco drifted through Operation Midland, much to my lack of surprise.

One thing about the police that is truly concerning me, as recent as this year, is the need to defend the secrecy of the ballot. The fundamental Act dealing with balloting in this country is the Ballot Act 1872, which says that you vote in secret. That Act has never been repealed. I have before me an email—a complaint—from a resident. They say that upon their visit to their polling station,

“I noticed 2 separate occasions where 2 people were in the polling booths together with the male member ‘influencing’ the female member’s vote.”

That is one person at midday at the polling station where, incidentally, I vote.

This has travelled to the police and is now in the hands of one Trevor Normoyle, who is the detective inspector of the special inquiry team and, to my horror, informed us that he will be in charge of Tower Hamlets next year. He seems to be completely unaware of the requirement for secrecy of the ballot, because he writes to this resident to say, “In relation to the concerns you have raised, inquiries were carried out”—incidentally, the elector reported this to the presiding officer—“and cannot substantiate any allegation that any influence was being exerted within the polling station, nor are any other electoral laws being broken. The reported matter is now closed”. So nothing will be done, but here we had two people effectively instructing others how to vote inside a polling station in London in 2021, which the police are ignoring—

The Chair: Order. Can we move on? We are very short of time.

Councillor Golds: Okay, but it is an example of the police’s utter failure to look at electoral malpractice in London.

Q28 Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): Thank you to the witnesses. I have a rather technical question for Gillian Beasley, but I want to ask Councillor Golds a little bit more. A lot of the examples that we are hearing about in Tower Hamlets were described by the previous witnesses as “extreme” and “isolated”. In a lot of the examples, people have been brought to justice. The elections were annulled and the candidates were disqualified. What you are describing is police inaction. If your contention is that the police are not enforcing

the laws as they already stand, what gives you confidence that the Bill will be any more enforceable or make any more of a difference? Is the contention that there is even more going on—there is even more fraud and there are lots of Tower Hamletses out there—and we are just lucky that we are picking up what is happening in Tower Hamlets, and we have to stop it happening elsewhere in the country where we cannot see it?

Councillor Golds: Let us be absolutely clear that the disqualification was nothing to do with the police, who completely ignored it. It was done by four brave citizens who lost a fortune on it, because they are liable for everybody's costs, including Lutfur Rahman's.

On the issue of potential Tower Hamletses, they are out there in other places. Commissioner Mawrey mentioned Slough and he mentioned the problem of Woking, where the returning officer himself said that he did not believe that he had declared an accurate result in all his time as a returning officer. There are issues in Bradford and in other parts of the country. Indeed, we heard from one of your colleagues, who read that extraordinary email that was circulated in the Batley and Spen by-election. That would be typical here.

Outside a polling station, in one of my elections, there were people placed to tell every single Bangladeshi voter two subjects: one, that Councillor Golds is a Jew, and the second, that Councillor Golds is gay. To prove the second point, they had an extract from the election address to ensure that it was understood that the person I have lived with for the past 23 years is male. That was done in London in 2010. Please, as Mr Shelbrooke has said, do not say it is not happening elsewhere. The Bill is essential to clean our elections.

Indeed, we have the appalling situation in Peterborough where a fraudster can sit at a polling station, can turn up at the count, can be present at the reception of postal votes and can stand there smirking for selfies. This is a man who has gone to prison for election fraud and who has been disqualified from voting, but who is taking part in elections. We can all see it. This man Tariq Mahmood tweets it repeatedly. We need the law clearing up so that we do not have what Alec Shelbrooke has said happened in the metropolitan borough of Kirklees, which is repeated in Peterborough and seen in Tower Hamlets. We want clean elections so that people on the Isle of Dogs can vote with the same security as Mr O'Hara's constituents, the good people of Argyle and Bute.

Q29 Patrick Grady: I want to pick up on some of the questions that Gillian Beasley has been asked about the process of electoral administration. The Bill creates these different categories of EU citizens: EU citizens with retained rights and qualifying EU citizens. How do you anticipate that adding to all the other burdens that we discussed earlier, such as the surge in late voting and the potential surge in late applications for voter ID? How does the creation of yet more categories on the electoral register fit in with the overall package of the Bill?

Gillian Beasley: Thank you for that question. I was talking to my electoral administrators this week about those divisions, and there is undoubtedly going to be more complexity around that. It is already quite complex, if you walk into a polling station with a presiding officer, working out what all the letters mean and who

can and cannot vote. I think it means that we need not only highly trained electoral administrators, but highly trained presiding officers. I think it has got a training burden. We are finding it more difficult to get presiding officers because of the complexity, and we will need some really detailed and careful training packages to make sure that the right people get to vote and we administer the register in a proper way. We do expect there to be some burdens and some additional resource needed to ensure we can administer that properly and carefully.

The Chair: Gareth Cann, do you have anything to add?

Assistant Chief Constable Cann: Nothing specific. Quite a few issues were raised by Councillor Golds there, but nothing specific for me to come back on, other than that it felt to me that the police had not so much ignored that allegation as assessed and investigated it, and unfortunately it could not be substantiated, which they reported back to the interested parties. I have nothing specific to add on the last question.

Q30 Paul Bristow (Peterborough) (Con): Gillian, it is nice to talk to you in a different context, and thank you for everything that you do to keep elections free and fair in my city. You are right to say that there have been accusations of postal vote harvesting—I have seen it with my own eyes—so it is good to see that you are comforted that the legislation will help you with that. In the most recent elections in the city—certainly when I was elected in December 2019—the city council placed CCTV at polling stations. Will you explain why you felt the need to do that?

Gillian Beasley: In Peterborough, we have a range of measures to make sure that electoral integrity is maintained. The CCTV was a result of personation allegations of individuals going to one polling station to vote and then taking a polling card to another polling station. We decided to observe the polling stations and who was going into them very closely to see if we could pick up evidence of personation and use it in the prosecution.

CCTV is also a deterrent, to a degree. We are open about the fact that we have CCTV. We tell everybody, including the election agents, that that is going to happen, and we say that we will use the CCTV in evidence if we detect that kind of activity going on. Councillor Golds made the point about people congregating outside polling stations. We get to observe that, and if it is happening, we would get the presiding officer—or the police, who are sometimes in polling stations for assistance with personation—to go out and disperse those who are congregating, so that people can walk into the polling station and feel confident that they will not be subject to any intimidation or comment. We use CCTV for a number of reasons: for the purposes of potential prosecution and to keep an eye on what is happening outside the polling station so that we keep it free and enable voters to go in.

Q31 Paul Bristow: I have one follow-up question. Would you say that CCTV also gives the electorate confidence in the process and that personation and other things will not happen?

Gillian Beasley: I think exactly that. We want to say that we take it very seriously, and that seriousness is exemplified by the CCTV and the measures we have put

in place. It is a confidence mechanism as well, and we communicate that not just to those who are involved in the administration, but to the wider public.

The Chair: Gareth Cann, do you have anything to add?

Assistant Chief Constable Cann: No, nothing on that one.

Q32 Fleur Anderson: My question is also for you, Gillian, on the nitty-gritty of the increased resources that you said will be needed. I know that my children will certainly want the free ID card to be able to go into pubs and nightclubs, so there will be more demand for them all year round. As you said, there will be a peak about two weeks before the election, when people realise that they need it. How many staff do you think you will need all year round to provide those ID cards? How many additional staff will you need in that peak before elections, and how much will the additional training cost? Have you been able to provide the estimate of all the costs of what the Government have asked for?

Gillian Beasley: We have not done that yet, but we have started to think about working out how many people we think would apply and how many people would have the ID so they would not have to apply. At the moment, we think we probably need one more administrator just to make sure we have enough before the election. Running up to the election, speaking to my electoral administrators this week, we will probably mobilise a small team of two or three people. The reason for that is because we know that people will come in that surge—people will feel anxious because they will be worried that they will lose their votes, so we need to be responsive and be confident that we can help them. Inevitably, they will not in the first case bring the right documentation—that is our experience—so they will need to go back.

With the surge and the late registration, I think probably one additional person in the team and probably a really good team of about two to three people around the surge period, to deal with the throughput and to make sure that we do not disenfranchise people, which is the worst thing we could do. That is the first thinking that we have, but experience will tell us. We will probably overstate the resource in the first instance so we do not fall foul of it, because we want to make sure that a new provision is properly implemented in our area and gives confidence rather than lack of confidence to the electorate.

Q33 Fleur Anderson: How much did the CCTV—really innovative work—cost to put in?

Gillian Beasley: We have worked with the police on that, and they have employed some of their CCTV. We were able to use our own CCTV as some of that is in the right place. The cost of the CCTV was not huge. The biggest cost is when we have to act. The police resource in Peterborough is quite considerable on the day. We have police in a van to help us manage what is happening inside and outside the polling stations. We get a good sign up by the police to give us that resource on the day. We do cost that out at the end of every election and we have our policing plan in mind for the next election.

Q34 Fleur Anderson: I have a quick question for Councillor Golds. Are you now confident that Tower Hamlets elections are done with integrity? Can the people of Tower Hamlets trust the results of elections now?

Councillor Golds: In all honesty, no, because we had the by-election in Weavers ward on 12 August. There were two incidents of mobbing in one polling station. I was interested that Gillian Beasley mentioned the steps they take in Peterborough to deal with mobbing. In Tower Hamlets it can reach dozens, sometimes hundreds, of people. I refer you all to a report by an organisation called Democracy Volunteers, which talks about the mobbing of polling stations and about family voting inside polling stations.

The issue of people being unable to reach a polling station is difficult. I was walking down Shipton Street at dusk on 12 August, which I calculate must have been just after 9 o'clock. There was a woman inside; the presiding officer had called the police, and seven police officers appeared, because she could not get to the polling station without being surrounded by men who were canvassing or harassing her. A woman walking down the street at 9 o'clock at night to go to vote does not need 10 men to surround her to instruct her how to vote. This has to be dealt with.

The Chair: Order. Chris Clarkson.

Q35 Chris Clarkson (Heywood and Middleton) (Con): Thank you, Ms Rees. It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship. Councillor Golds, to pick up on what you said about that going on in other parts of the country, I can attest to that. In Rochdale there is a sitting councillor who, three years ago, accepted a caution for electoral fraud after being caught voting twice. He is still sitting there and did not lose the Labour Whip.

As an experienced election agent, do you think the relatively low level of detection of personation is down to the fact that it is so easy to do? I could pick up a copy of the marked register tomorrow, find out whether you vote routinely in elections, turn up to your polling place, claim to be Peter Golds and vote on your behalf. Or do you agree with Mr O'Hara that it is a solution looking for a problem? If you contest that, what would you describe as an acceptable level of electoral fraud?

Councillor Golds: I disagree with Mr O'Hara. When you have the marked register, if you get the proverbial Sid and Doris Bonkers who have never cast a vote in their life, and someone turns up at the polling station and says, "I am Sid Bonkers," they are given a ballot paper. If Sid Bonkers does not turn up to say he is going to vote, nothing happens. I have to say that there are far too many instances.

I had one incident of a lady who lives in Woodseer Street, E1, who telephoned me to say that she had gone to vote. She knew that the people next door were off on holiday and furthermore that they were Jehovah's Witnesses and never voted, but democracy had taken place on this particular occasion. When she was marked off on the electoral register, she saw that their names were marked off. She asked the presiding officer why they were marked off, and he said, "Because they voted." That is an absolutely classic example. Somebody knew that these people were Jehovah's Witnesses, somebody knew that they never voted, but democracy took place.

Q36 Chris Clarkson: So in your opinion, if I had to turn up with a piece of identification that said, "I am Peter Golds," and I could not provide it, I should be issued a ballot paper.

Councillor Golds: Yes—[*Laughter.*] Sorry, I misunderstood what he said; my hearing is not terribly good.

Chris Clarkson: If I could not prove that I was you, should I be issued with a ballot paper?

Councillor Golds: No. If you go to collect a parcel without ID, you are not issued with a parcel. For example, if you go to select a Labour candidate, you have to take ID. We had a selection in 2019 of a Labour candidate, and her document to members of the Poplar and Limehouse constituency Labour party says not to forget to bring photo ID. To go to select Apsana Begum, you had to bring photo ID, but to elect her, or not elect her, anybody can be given a ballot paper.

The Chair: Thank you. Have the other witnesses anything to add to that, or can I move on?

Q37 Kate Hollern (Blackburn) (Lab): I have a very quick question for Gillian. For local authorities to issue the free voter ID, what evidence would you need from the person applying?

Gillian Beasley: That is something that we really need to think about: what evidence is required when somebody applies if they do not have a passport or driving licence. Evidence of where they live—bills, bank statements and other such identification—is what we used when we did our proxy pilots.

What we need is some really good guidance about what would be acceptable. As a group of administrators, we would like to have a conversation with Government about what we think would be sufficient before that provision is enacted, so that we are all consistent about what is sufficient. We need to learn from the pilots, because there is obviously some learning from the pilots about what kind of identification is sufficient, and to bring that together so that we have a consistent and safe approach. How do we actually make sure that the documentation is secure and safe enough? There are still some conversations that need to be had and there is some discussion around that at the moment.

Q38 Kate Hollern: So there is quite extensive work to go into the actual detail of producing voter IDs. That brings me on to the additional burden on local authorities. You mentioned how difficult it is to get presiding officers, so there is obviously a huge cost implication in this for local authorities—plus the practical solutions of identifying and delivering voter ID. However, surely it would be quite simple for someone to come and say, “I am X, I live at this address and I need an ID card.” Are you looking at photo ID?

Gillian Beasley: I think that that is the discussion that we need to have as a sector—about what is sufficient. You are absolutely right; my concern would be that somebody would be able easily to produce a false document to say that they lived at a particular address. The conversation that we need to have across the sector, and the guidance that we need, is: what is sufficient ID? That makes the system safe, because we can be sure, or as sure as we can be, that that ID actually locates that person as a real person who we can be confident in giving an ID document to. There is more work and discussion that we need to have around that. Obviously, the Association of Electoral Administrators will have

some thoughts on that, and I am sure my team would, as we move forward. That is a discussion that needs to be carefully had.

Q39 Kate Hollern: Thank you. Turning to Peter, like you I was a councillor for 21 years, so I have seen the problems with voting systems over the years, but I am pleased that a number of measures were taken in that long period to address some of your concerns. I was also pleased that in your evidence to the House of Lords you said that there is much more discipline in Tower Hamlets now and that the presiding officer should be the chief executive. In Blackburn, that is exactly what happens.

A number of issues have obviously improved, but you felt the issues that have not improved seem to be the lack of co-operation from the police responding to your concerns and the town hall staff not being equipped or resourced enough to deal with the issues. What do you see in the Bill that will address your concerns about the lack of action and co-operation by the police or the inefficiencies in some town hall services?

Councillor Golds: That is a very interesting point and thank you for highlighting what I said to the House of Lords. I think it was quite intentional that the senior officers of the council in 2014 all declined to act as returning officer. It was devolved to the head of committee services, who was a junior officer, and he was effectively asked to act as a returning officer. In future Bills I believe that the returning officer in elections should be the most senior officer of the local authority, and that should be written into law. They should not be able to cop out, as they are paid.

Where do I look in the Bill? The Bill tidies up the procedures for postal voting. It strengthens this issue of saying that people cannot turn up to a polling station with a Sainsbury’s bag full of postal votes.

Q40 Kate Hollern: Sorry, we do not need a change in legislation for that. I have been involved with many elections, and it is good practice from parties, both Labour and Conservative, to say in their instructions to candidates and campaigners, “You do not touch a postal vote.” If a resident has some difficulty, we phone the town hall and the returning officer sends someone out to help. It seems to me that the problems that Tower Hamlets have experienced, which we accept have got much better, are actually with management within Tower Hamlets. That does not need legislation to find solutions.

Councillor Golds: I am sorry; I have to disagree with you there. Obviously, we are all pleased that Blackburn has tidied up its act, and I am interested and pleased that you refer to cross-party co-operation.

I am sorry to say that I do not think it has improved in other places, and I refer to what Mr Shelbrooke has said. When Paul Bristow fought his by-election, I went there to campaign. I was taken to the central part of Peterborough and I felt so at home. It was exactly what you would expect to see: somebody suddenly arriving with the proverbial Sainsbury’s bag full of postal votes and people standing outside polling stations harassing voters. It should not happen. I believe that everybody should have the right to go to a polling station and vote in freedom.

If we voted in France, election day is a day of reflection. There is no campaigning. You go and vote in secret, behind curtains. Here, we have this wonderful Victorian sense of trust and co-operation between people, because we trust each other in many ways. As you have said, your colleagues in Blackburn work with colleagues of another party to ensure that the parties work well together, but where that trust breaks down, it collapses.

Q41 Kate Hollern: But how will the legislation address the issues raised? Surely that is a police matter.

Councillor Golds: First, we have the tightening of the rules about what you can and cannot say, and where people can be abusive at elections. For example, I have to say that—

The Chair: Order. We have to have short questions and answers now as we are running out of time.

Councillor Golds: I am happy to submit information in writing if you would like to see it. Would you like me to do that?

Kate Hollern: I just want you to answer the question.

Councillor Golds: Okay.

Q42 Kate Hollern: People are being intimidated outside polling stations—I have experienced it—and the police should deal with that. People are making allegations about candidates—I believe, at some point, there was a leaflet with me in a burqa. How will this legislation improve such harassment?

Councillor Golds: The legislation tightens up the rules of, effectively, what we would call the Miranda Grell situation, whereby people cannot be abusive. The legislation tightens up the rules, as we have seen, about people turning up to a polling station and just asking for a ballot paper and being given one. It tightens up the rules on postal voting.

There are other matters that I would like to address. I believe that there should be an amendment to reaffirm the secrecy of the ballot, because I cannot believe that the police can possibly argue that we do not have a secret ballot in this country, as they appear to be doing. I would think that, of what—

Q43 Kate Hollern: Sorry. Basically, people intimidating someone on the street should be a police matter. I accept that there should be limits on what can be said and done within a poll, but that is already in the rules. On the secret ballot, you gave a case—I think Gillian addressed it as well—where someone was with a woman actually casting a ballot, and you found that the lady was intimidated. Did she allege it was intimidation, or did she just require support because she did not speak or read English?

The Chair: Order. We need a very short answer. We have two more Members who would like to come in.

Councillor Golds: The law is clear that you vote in secret.

Q44 Jerome Mayhew (Broadland) (Con): I will build on the questions that my colleague, Mr Clarkson, posed to Councillor Golds a moment ago, about personation in polling stations and how prevalent it is. In his judgment

in the Bordesley Green ward and Aston ward Birmingham fraud trials back in 2005, the election judge, Mr Mawrey QC, stated that,

“there is likely to be no evidence of fraud, if you do not look for it.”

Your teams in the polling booths are the frontline in identifying personation. What tools do you currently have to look for personation fraud?

Gillian Beasley: When we organise our elections, we graduate our polling stations to the ones where we think the most issues will be. We employ presiding officers who have a lot of experience in dealing with the administration of their polling station. However, more than that, we train them around the issues of personation and ensure that they know the statutory questions. There are also ways in which, when someone comes into a polling station and they ask them to give their names, they are very particular about ensuring that we keep with the processes.

We also always have police in those polling stations. There will be two police officers, and there will also be polling agents, so we give a very clear statement that we take personation seriously. When you walk into a polling station in that area, you will see well-trained staff and police officers, and you will likely see a polling agent. There is training that we do. There is also an incident response, so if staff are concerned about an elector, they have a police officer they can talk to. If a polling agent raises an issue, it can be responded to immediately.

The message goes out there that that is what you will find when you go into a Peterborough polling station and those that we consider to be at risk. That is the approach that we take in ensuring that the training and the experience is really good. As Paul Bristow said, we also have CCTV. It conveys how seriously we take electoral fraud in those stations.

Q45 Aaron Bell: I just wanted to briefly ask ACC Cann about polling day, and whether he thinks that the measures around voter ID and undue influence will make polling day easier for the police.

Assistant Chief Constable Cann: I am not sure I heard the question. I think it was whether the measures around undue influence are likely to make life easier for the police.

Aaron Bell: And voter ID on polling day.

Assistant Chief Constable Cann: Thank you very much. I think, in general, they are potentially helpful measures indeed. It is always difficult for policy makers to strike the balance between an accessible system and a secure system. If the balance was struck in that particular way in any future Act then, on balance, yes, it would probably be helpful for the police if those measures were brought in.

The Chair: Order. That brings us to the end of the time allotted for the Committee to ask questions and, indeed, for this morning's sitting. I thank our witnesses on behalf of the Committee for their evidence. The Committee will meet again at 2 pm to continue taking oral evidence.

11.25 am

The Chair adjourned the Committee without Question put (Standing Order No. 88).

Adjourned till this day at Two o'clock.

