

T: 0300 244 4000
E: scottish.ministers@gov.scot

Rushanara Ali MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State
(Homelessness and Democracy)
Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local
Government
2 Marsham Street
London

By email: PSRushanaraAli@communities.gov.uk

30 May 2025

Dear Rushanara,

Online Absent Voting Application

I write in relation to the Absent Voting (Elections in Scotland and Wales) Bill, the Private Members' Bill of Tracy Gilbert MP, and the moves to ensure access for voters in Scottish and Welsh Parliament and local elections to the Online Absent Voting Application (OAVA) system. As we discussed previously, I was pleased when the Bill completed its second reading on 17 January.

I appreciate that our officials remain in close contact and that much progress has been made in relation to the complex transitional provisions that need to be put in place in order for OAVA to be available to voters in next year's Scottish Parliament and Senedd elections. I also acknowledge that the agreed amendments have been tabled for some time.

I am however most concerned that the Committee Stage for Ms Gilbert's Bill has still not yet been reached. As you know, the Scottish Parliament will need to be asked to provide legislative consent for the Bill. This can only be sought once Committee Stage has been completed. With the Scottish Parliament due to break for summer recess between 28 June and 31 August 2025, this leaves very little time for legislative consent to be provided. And we will of course seek to make the necessary secondary legislation as soon as the Bill becomes law.

I understand that it is still hoped that the Committee stage will occur before 28 June. While I readily appreciate the demands on legislative timetables and parliamentary business, I would like to stress my concern over the limited time now available for the Scottish Parliament to give its consent and also that I will now be obliged to ask it to do so to an expedited timetable. I would therefore like to ask you to use your best endeavours to ensure progress with the Bill.

Scottish Ministers, special advisers and the Permanent Secretary are covered by the terms of the Lobbying (Scotland) Act 2016. See www.lobbying.scot

I have copied this letter to Ms Gilbert, to Cabinet Secretary Bryant and to the Convener of the Scottish Parliament's Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee.

Yours,



JAMIE HEPBURN

Scottish Ministers, special advisers and the Permanent Secretary are covered by the terms of the Lobbying (Scotland) Act 2016. See www.lobbying.scot

St Andrew's House, Regent Road, Edinburgh EH1 3DG
www.gov.scot

INVESTORS IN PEOPLE™
We invest in people Silver

