

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee

3rd Meeting, 2022 (Session 6), Wednesday
23 February 2022

PE1921: The Scottish Government must
confirm that it will not introduce voter ID in
devolved elections

Note by the Clerk

Petitioner	Maddy Dhesi on behalf of Hands Off Our Vote
Petition summary	Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to: - confirm that it will not introduce voter ID in the devolved Holyrood and local elections in Scotland - communicate that to Scottish voters.
Webpage	https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE1921

Introduction

1. This is a new petition that was lodged on 17 January 2022.
2. The petition seeks to get confirmation from the Scottish Government that it will not introduce mandatory photo ID for voters in General Elections in Scotland. The petitioner believes to do so would isolate those who do not have any appropriate forms of ID, will disproportionately impact some marginalised communities and would not be cost effective given the threat of voter fraud is minimal. A summary of the petition and can be found at **Annexe A**.
3. A SPICe briefing has been prepared to inform the Committee's consideration of the petition and can be found at **Annexe B**.

4. While not a formal requirement, petitioners have the option to collect signatures on their petition. On this occasion, the petitioner elected to collect this information. 149 signatures have been received.
5. The Committee seeks views from the Scottish Government on all new petitions before they are formally considered. A response has been received from the Scottish Government and is included at **Annexe C** of this paper.

Action

6. The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take on this petition.

Clerk to the Committee

Annexe A

PE1921: The Scottish Government must confirm that it will not introduce voter ID in devolved elections

Petitioner

Maddy Dhesi on behalf of Hands Off Our Vote

Date Lodged:

17/1/22

Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to:

- confirm that it will not introduce voter ID in the devolved Holyrood and local elections in Scotland
- communicate that to Scottish voters.

Previous action

I have contacted all my MSPs asking them to oppose voter ID in Scotland. Some did not get back to me, some strongly supported voter ID, and one of the Labour MSPs met with us to discuss actions we could take and highlighted a petition would be a good idea.

Background information

We understand that many MSPs reject the UK Government's plans for mandatory photo ID for voters in General Elections held in Scotland. Although the UK Government states that ID will curb threat of voter fraud, cases of voter fraud in the UK are minimal, with only two convictions of fraud since 2017.

I believe that voter ID in elections held in Scotland will harm Scottish democracy. The 3.5 million people in the UK do not possess any form of photo ID will be isolated from democracy and access to ID disproportionately impacts marginalised communities. BAME, transgender, disabled, older and homeless people, as well as first time voters, are all less likely to have accepted photo ID. The cost of a free voter identity card for those without ID will cost £180m over 10 years. Voter ID is an expensive attack on voters and a threat to Scottish democracy.

Annexe B

The logo for SPICe, featuring the text 'SPICe' in a white, sans-serif font on a dark purple background.The logo for The Information Centre, featuring the text 'The Information Centre' and 'An t-Ionad Fiosrachaidh' in a white, sans-serif font on a dark blue background.

Briefing for the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee on petition PE1921: Confirmation that Scottish Government will not introduce voter ID at devolved elections, lodged by Maddy Dhesi on behalf of Hands Off Our Vote

Brief overview of issues raised by the petition

The petition seeks confirmation from the Scottish Government that photographic voter ID will not be introduced at devolved elections.

The UK Government introduced the [Elections Bill](#) in the House of Commons on 5 July 2021. A [SPICe blog on the Elections Bill](#) explains the provisions of the Bill in detail.

One of the Bill's provisions is a requirement for voters to show photo ID before being issued with a ballot paper. This provision relates only to reserved electoral events in Scotland (i.e. UK Parliament elections and UK wide referendums)

The [UK Government has said](#) that the proposal will prevent voter fraud, saying *“Showing ID is something that people of all backgrounds already do every day...Proving who we are before we make a decision of huge importance at the ballot box should be no different.”*

The Scottish Government has voiced its concern over the voter ID proposals at reserved elections and the impact the requirement may have on specific groups. It lodged a [legislative consent memorandum \(LCM\) on the Elections Bill](#) on 22 September 2021.

The Scottish Government's position set out in the LCM is that "*there is no evidence of significant electoral fraud to justify voter ID measures in Scotland.*"

The [Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee](#) considered the LCM for the Elections Bill. The Committee [published its report](#) on 22 December 2021.

Sarah McKay
Senior Researcher

22/12/21

The purpose of this briefing is to provide a brief overview of issues raised by the petition. SPICe research specialists are not able to discuss the content of petition briefings with petitioners or other members of the public. However, if you have any comments on any petition briefing you can email us at spice@parliament.scot

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in petition briefings is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware however that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.

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Annexe C

Scottish Government submission of 19 January 2022

PE1921/A – The Scottish Government must confirm that it will not introduce voter ID in devolved elections

Thank you for your email of 20 December 2021 on behalf of the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee seeking the Scottish Government's views on the following petition:

“The Scottish Government must confirm that it will not introduce voter ID in devolved elections.”

The practical effect of the proposal in the petition would be to require the Scottish Government to give an undertaking that it will not introduce a requirement for voters at devolved elections to provide photographic identity before they would be able to cast their vote at a polling station.

The Scottish Government has no plans to replicate the plans set out in the UK Government's Elections Bill (“the Bill”) which was introduced into the House of Commons on 5 July 2021 and is making its way through the Westminster Parliament. The Bill and supporting documents can be found at: <https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3020>.

One of the provisions in the Bill would require voters to show an approved form of photographic identification before collecting their ballot paper to vote at UK Parliamentary General Elections in Great Britain, local elections in England, and Police and Crime Commissioner elections in England and Wales.

Documents including passports, driving licences, concessionary travel passes and photocard parking permits issued as part of the Blue Badge scheme would be accepted.

Any voter who does not have an approved form of identification would be able to apply for a local Voter Card from their local authority. The UK Government has noted that in Northern Ireland voters have been

required to produce personal identification before voting in polling stations since 1985, with photographic identification being required since 2002.

Although this measure is wholly reserved, and will not apply in relation to devolved elections, various stakeholders, politicians and commentators, have expressed concern about the impact of this provision on voters and electoral administrators in Scotland in relation to UK Parliament elections.

There appears to be considerable scope for confusion in the event of a UK poll occurring on the same day as a Scottish poll (e.g. where a by-election for one Parliament occurred on the same day as a general election to the other Parliament).

In such a case ID would only be required for one of the contests, which is likely to confuse voters and will place an additional responsibility on the Presiding Officer at each polling station to police the ID requirement.

The Scottish Government considers that there is no evidence of significant electoral fraud to justify voter ID measures in Scotland Parliament and Scottish local government elections. This was explained in its Legislative Consent Memorandum in relation to the UK Elections Bill (at paragraphs 6 to 8). The Memorandum is available at <https://www.parliament.scot/-/media/files/legislation/bills/lcms/elections-bill/splcms068.pdf>.

The Minister for Parliamentary Business, Mr George Adam, MSP set out the Scottish Government's position when giving evidence to the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee on the UK Elections Bill on 25 November 2021:

“We fundamentally disagree with the UK Government on the issue. I do not think that the Scottish Government has been quiet about its position that it does not believe that voter ID is the way forward. As (the Committee) ... has heard from me today, it has been shouted from the rooftops that we fundamentally disagree with voter ID.”

The Committee may also wish to be aware that the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee published its 4th Report, 2021 on the Legislative Consent Memorandum on the Elections Bill on 22 December 2021.