

## Summary of 1<sup>st</sup> Sitting Committee Stage: 17<sup>th</sup> October 2018

**Chair: Laurence Robertson**

**Layla Moran (Liberal Democrat)** pledged her party's support for the bill but tabled an amendment to extend the franchise for overseas electors to 16-17 year olds in line with Liberal Democrat policy. This was supported by all Labour members present since it is in line with Labour policy on reducing the voting age.

**Christian Matheson (Labour)** began by criticising the fact that this bill had 'leapfrogged' over others in the queue: this was a reference to the Private Member's Bill on Parliamentary Constituencies sponsored by Labour MP for Manchester Gorton, Afzal Khan, for which the Government was withholding a Money Resolution (for more details see summary of the Money Resolution debate). He and others spoke at length in favour of the amendment which was put to a vote, which the Government won by 8 votes to 7 (one Labour member was absent).

**Glyn Davies (Conservative)** argued that his was a 'single purpose bill' and that changing the voting age was a much wider issue to be considered elsewhere.

**Alex Norris (Labour)** also raised a complaint about Afzal Khan's bill being 'stymied' by the Government. His amendments sought to do two things:

- impose the condition that a potential overseas elector must have been on the register or resident in the UK 'at some point during the past 15 years' or be a member of the Armed Forces or work for an international organization or NGO under an enlarged definition.
- to stagger the introduction of the end of the 15 year rule on a year by year basis, making it easier for EROs to implement but meeting the long-term aims of the bill in a practical way. More voters would become eligible each year, rather than a huge number coming forward and applying at once.

**Chloe Smith (Conservative)** argued that 'gradual' admittance to the club of democracy was a bad idea in principle and pledged that new burdens arising from the bill would be met by central Government, as stated in the bill's Impact Assessment.

**Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Conservative)** read out an appeal from veteran campaigner Harry Shindler to Opposition Members asking them not to block the vote as this was not a political issue.

The amendments were withdrawn 'in the spirit of accepting the minister's pledge to support the recommendations made by the AEA in its report on the 2017 election for improving electoral management'.

**Christian Matheson (Labour)** tabled an amendment seeking clarification of the definition of 'resident'. Electoral residence in the UK is ambiguous because registration in more than one place is allowed even though the elector must choose only one place to vote. The debate on this had only just started when the debate was adjourned just after 4pm as scheduled.