

## Summary of 2<sup>nd</sup> Sitting Committee Stage: 24<sup>th</sup> October 2018

**Chair: Laurence Robertson**

**Christian Matheson (Labour)** returned to the adjourned discussion of defining residency. He pointed out that there had been no Government response to a Law Commission report of 2016 relating to this matter, which recommended that the law on electoral residence should be clarified in primary legislation. He argued that since the bill proposed to enfranchise millions of expatriate citizens on the basis of past residence (as opposed to electoral registration), this was an important issue.

**Chloe Smith (Conservative)** argued that it was better to use ministerial guidance than legislation which would increase the burden of complexity, and she agreed that the bill would be amended to allow for this. The amendment was withdrawn.

Other Labour amendments from **Alex Norris** and **Christian Matheson** sought clarification of documentary evidence to prove identity in order to prevent fraud and sought a higher burden of proof on overseas electors than domestic:

- a call for a double attestation of ID, one from the overseas elector and one from someone in the constituency of registration to make it more secure.
- consideration of declaration requirements relating to registration renewals which are not currently possible online.
- a request for clearer information for EROs to ensure consistency, rather than allowing them discretion.

**Glyn Davies (Conservative)** replied that his ambition was to make it easier not harder for British citizens to register or renew.

**Chloe Smith (Conservative)** argued that it was better to leave EROS with discretion. Provisions would be included in secondary legislation & the Government would consult with the electoral community on these matters. She also considered that the law already had provisions against fraud.

**Alex Norris (Labour)** proposed a further amendment that the closing date for registration should be pushed back by one week to allow EROs more time to process applications due to the tight electoral timetable. This idea was supported by the Association of Electoral Administrators (AEA).

**Christian Matheson (Labour)** called for reports on how to participate in elections as an overseas voter (addressing the problem of low awareness amongst Britons abroad) and on the effects of the bill on the number of registered electors in each constituency. His point was that this might have implications for constituency boundaries if millions of new voters registered and it did not sit well with the Government's proposal to reduce the number of constituencies. Other technical amendments all went in the general direction of addressing the increased workload that would accrue to EROs who were already under-resourced.

**Layla Moran (Liberal Democrat)** returned to her suggestion that the Government should consider overseas constituencies as a way of addressing the impact on constituency boundaries, and **Christian Matheson (Labour)** expressed concerns over the lack of clarity as to which constituency a newly enfranchised overseas elector might seek to register in.

**Chloe Smith (Conservative)** argued that overseas constituencies would break the fundamental connection between the elector and the constituency on which the British system of democracy was based.

A number of amendments were withdrawn while others were pushed to a vote but none of them were accepted.

The Committee adjourned just before 4pm.

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