



February 2024

Dear Constituent,

Thank you for contacting me about the Elections Act and the Electoral Commission.

The Elections Act is helping improve the accountability of the Electoral Commission by making provision for a Strategy and Policy Statement to be introduced. I fully support this measure as I believe that making the Electoral Commission more accountable will strengthen the integrity of the electoral process and help prevent fraud.

Once in force, the statement will set out guidance and principles which the Commission will have to consider when carrying out its functions. It is commonplace for the Government to set a broad policy framework, as approved by Parliament, by which independent regulators should work. This is already the case for Ofcom and Ofgem, for example.

As required by the Elections Act, the Government sought views on a draft of the Strategy and Policy Statement from the Electoral Commission, the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission and the Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee.

In light of the feedback of the consultees, the draft statement has been amended to provide additional reassurances that the statement in no way amounts to the Government directing the Electoral Commission. Changes include further clarifying that the Electoral Commission's executive leadership will remain responsible for determining the Commission's priority setting and allocation of its resources. The final draft of the statement has been laid before Parliament for approval.

I do not agree with the view that these reforms will compromise the independence of the Electoral Commission. While the Commission will be required to have regard to the Strategy and Policy Statement, this does not give the Government new powers to direct the Electoral Commission's decision making. The Commission will continue to be governed by the Commissioners and will remain operationally independent of government. The introduction of the statement would not in any way affect the ability of the Commission to undertake investigative, operational or enforcement activity as it sees fit, but it will ensure greater accountability to Parliament on how the Electoral Commission discharges its wider functions. The Government introduced measures to prohibit the statement from including reference to specific investigatory or

enforcement activity to provide further reassurance on the Commission's operational independence.



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I completely agree about the importance of reviewing any Act of Parliament. You may be interested to know that the Government introduced a requirement into the Elections Act which places a duty on the Secretary of State to prepare and publish a report on the operation of the legislation. This requirement is now enshrined in law.

Thank you again for taking the time to contact me.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Chris'.

CHRIS HEATON-HARRIS MP
MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR DAVENTRY