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Rt Hon Sir George Howarth MP
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Dear Sir George,

Thank you for your email of 24 August regarding the accessibility of elections for blind and partially sighted people.

It is integral to our democracy that everybody is able to make their voice heard and that elections are accessible for all those eligible to vote. I can assure you that changes announced in the Elections Bill will not reduce the requirement to support blind and partially sighted voters but instead change the way this is delivered.

Across 2017 and 2018 the Government carried out a Call for Evidence on Access to Elections to get the views of people with disabilities and the organisations that represent them on how best they can be supported to take part in the democratic process. It was clear from this exercise that the current approach of requiring Returning Officers to provide a specific prescribed device at the polling station solely for voters with sight loss was not the best way to ensure the varied needs of disabled electors are met as it is overly restrictive, and does not encourage innovation.

This is why, for the first time in electoral law, we are putting in place a broader requirement for Returning Officers to consider the needs of all disabled voters when providing equipment for polling stations. This will allow Returning Officers to tailor the package of equipment they offer to their voters to take into account developments in equipment and technology, in order to best meet the needs of people with disabilities.

We will continue to work with leading charities and civil society organisations, alongside the Electoral Commission and local authorities, to ensure that this process is implemented as effectively as possible and that the most appropriate support is provided for voters with disabilities.

Thank you again for writing and I hope the above reassures you of the Government's commitment to the accessibility of elections for people with disabilities.

Yours ever,



Chloe Smith MP
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