

Press release: Government launches consultation to protect political debate

The government is launching its consultation today (Sunday 29 July) for a new electoral offence which aims to crack down on threats and abuse towards those standing for election.

The consultation, which will run until 22 October, also seeks views on clarifying the electoral offence of undue influence of voters. Currently, a person is guilty of undue influence if they threaten electors to vote a certain way or stop them from voting.

The consultation will review whether the requirement to have imprints, which is added to election material to show who is responsible for producing it, should be extended to digital communications.

This would also have the benefit of increasing transparency in digital campaigning, in light of recent concerns about the potential risks of 'fake news' and foreign interference in future ballots.

Following on from the recommendations set out by the Committee on Standards in Public Life (CSPL) last year, the Prime Minister announced that the government will consult on a new offence that would be in addition to the current offence of electoral intimidation which relates to undue influence on voters.

The consultation also comes amid concerns voiced by politicians and campaigners on all sides about the increasing intimidation and abuse of people taking part in elections.

The proposals would toughen current electoral law, which includes provisions against undue influence of voters, by introducing a new offence to tackle intimidation of Parliamentary candidates and campaigners. This new law could see people stripped of their right to stand for or hold public office, should they be found guilty of threatening or abusive behaviour, either in person or online.

Extreme cases of intimidation are considered a serious criminal offence, punishable with a custodial sentence where evidence of sustained, pressurising behaviour intended to cause distress and impact campaigning is found.

Minister for the Constitution, Chloe Smith said:

This government recognises that rising intimidation in public life is stopping talented people from standing for election and putting voters off politics and we want to tackle this extremely serious

issue.

We are consulting on three new measures that will protect voters, candidates and campaigners so they can make their choice at the ballot box or stand for public service without fear of being victims of misinformation or abuse.

We can't let intimidation of our candidates, campaigners, the public and those that serve us continue unchecked and I would encourage everyone to take part in this consultation.

Lord Bew, Chair of the Committee on Standards in Public Life, said:

Intimidation presents a real threat to the integrity, diversity, and vibrancy of our public life.

People of all backgrounds should not be put off from standing for public office as a result of intimidatory behaviour.

We warmly welcome that the government are implementing our recommendation to consult on a new electoral offence of intimidating Parliamentary candidates and introducing digital imprints.

The Electoral Commission identified these gaps in electoral law in evidence to our review, and these measures would play an important part in protecting candidates and voters at election time.

Press release: Government launches consultation to protect political debate

Updated: Changed end date to 11:45pm on 28 October.

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The consultation, which will run until 11:45pm on 28 October, also seeks views on clarifying the electoral offence of undue influence of voters. Currently, a person is guilty of undue influence if they threaten electors to vote a certain way or stop them from voting.

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Press release: Minister for Africa visits Zambia and Malawi

Minister for Africa Harriett Baldwin travelled to Commonwealth countries Zambia and Malawi between 25-28 July, to strengthen relations, and focus on shared prosperity, sustainable development, and joint efforts to tackle climate change and the illegal wildlife trade.

In Zambia, Minister Baldwin and Minister Matthew Nkhuwa signed the Energy Africa Compact, a partnership between the UK and Zambian governments and the private sector to support the growth of the sustainable energy sector. Minister Baldwin announced £22m of new UK aid funding which will support the development of innovative energy solutions and help millions of Zambians access reliable, affordable off-grid solar energy.

Minister Baldwin said:

The warm welcome I've received in Zambia shows the deep friendship between our countries.

I have reaffirmed our shared commitment to accelerate sustainable economic development, while ensuring that the poorest and most vulnerable are not left behind.

Partnering with Zambia to deliver a more secure and sustainable energy future will help lift Zambians out of poverty, drive economic development, and tackle climate change.

During her visit, Minister Baldwin met with the Zambian Vice-President Inonge Wina and cabinet ministers.

Minister Baldwin also visited UK aid-supported projects to see how the UK is working with local communities and organisations to support development and reduce poverty. She announced £8.5m to improving access to finance for individuals and businesses, for example expanding mobile money to help businesses and families better manage their finances.

In Malawi, the Minister visited Majete National Park to see how the UK is supporting their efforts to tackle the Illegal Wildlife Trade, a serious organised crime. She met members of the British military who are providing training to park rangers. The UK has also been working with African Parks to improve their communications systems, allowing them to track both animals and poachers more effectively. The Minister met people from nearby communities to see how they can benefit from the running of the Park as the UK works to tackle the crime and corruption the trade causes, which holds back development across the continent.

Minister Baldwin said:

The cooperation between Majete Park Rangers and the British soldiers who are sharing their experience to help them crack down on poachers is a wonderful example of how our two countries can work together to tackle major shared issues, making the world a more secure place.

I have been delighted to visit Zambia and Malawi, close Commonwealth friends, to strengthen our political, trade and development ties. The UK continues to be a steadfast partner for Africa's peace, security and prosperity.

Whilst in Malawi, Minister Baldwin met with government ministers, opposition party figures, and business and civil society representatives, and visited UK-funded projects. Minister Baldwin announced new UKAid funding to the education sector of £37.5 million to support early grade learning and keep more girls in school.

The UK is a long-standing development partner in both Zambia and Malawi.

Further information

- Follow the Harriett Baldwin on Twitter [@hbaldwin](#)
- Follow the Foreign Office on Twitter [@foreignoffice](#) and [Facebook](#)

- Follow the Foreign Office on [Instagram](#), [YouTube](#) and [LinkedIn](#)

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Press release: UK's Minister for Africa concludes Malawi visit

The UK's Minister for Africa, Harriett Baldwin, visited Malawi from 26 to 28 July to reaffirm the strong and historic ties between the two Commonwealth partners. She saw how Malawi and the UK are working together on shared interests, and the impact of UK aid investments aimed at reducing poverty and inequality and promoting prosperity.

This was the Minister's first visit to Malawi. Minister Baldwin had productive and warm discussions with senior government officials. They discussed a number of issues, including opportunities and challenges facing Malawi, and announced new UK funding to the education sector amounting to £37.5 million to support early grade learning and keep more girls in school in Malawi. She also set out the importance of having peaceful and transparent elections next year.

The Minister also held discussions with government officials, including the heads of law enforcement agencies (Directorate for Public Prosecutions, Anti-Corruption Bureau and Financial Investigations Authority) and the Malawi Electoral Commission Chair, Justice Jane Ansah, as well as meeting business representatives and opposition parties' leaders.

Minister Baldwin said:

Malawi's long-term success matters to the UK. Our partnership is anchored by the Commonwealth connection and the strong personal links between our nations, particularly with Scotland. I have been struck by the warmth of the people of Malawi and their resilience to overcome some of the most difficult challenges.

The UK is committed to helping Malawi achieve its vision of increased prosperity for all. This means tackling issues like corruption and energy constraints, adapting to climate change and making the most of the country's potential through strengthening agriculture and renewable energy.

On a visit to Majete National Park, Minister Baldwin met Malawi Park Rangers that are receiving training and advice from the British military on how to combat the illegal wildlife trade.

Minister Baldwin said:

The cooperation between Majete Park Rangers and the British soldiers who are sharing their experience to help them crack down on poachers is a wonderful example of how our two countries can work together to tackle major issues, making the world a more secure place.

The UK is a long-standing development partner of Malawi. UK aid plays a critical role in improving the lives of millions of poor children and adults. This includes investments in health, family planning, education, business development and adapting to climate change.

Press release: PM meeting with Prime Minister Juri Ratas of Estonia: 27 July 2018

PM meeting with Prime Minister Juri Ratas of Estonia: 27 July 2018 – GOV.UK

Prime Minister Theresa May met with Estonian Prime Minister Juri Ratas today in Salzburg.



A Downing Street spokesperson said:

The Prime Minister met the Estonian Prime Minister Juri Ratas at the Salzburg Festival.

Prime Minister Ratas expressed his appreciation for the deployment of UK troops to NATO's enhanced forward presence in Estonia. The Prime Minister underlined our ongoing support for Estonia's and Europe's collective security.

The Prime Minister outlined the UK's proposals for our future relationship with the EU. Both leaders agreed on the particular importance of continued security and defence cooperation.

The Prime Minister updated on the investigation into the death of Dawn Sturgess and thanked Prime Minister Ratas for Estonia's solidarity following the attack on the Skripals in Salisbury. They agreed that the response had been an important signal of European unity.

Published 28 July 2018

Thank you for your feedback