

Speech: Association of Electoral Administrators: Chris Skidmore speech

Thank you very much for the introduction.

I wanted to fly up from London to be here with you today, as I felt that it was important as Minister for the Constitution, and the minister responsible for elections and democratic engagement to speak with you directly, and to say thank you.

To thank you for the time and effort that all of you as electoral administrators, registration officers and returning officers, have given over the past trying few months.

To thank you for the role that you have played in making not only the Local Elections and the Mayoral Elections run as smoothly as possible, but also the integral role that you all performed in ensuring that the snap General Election took place without any significant problems.

And to thank you for the personal and family sacrifices that each and every one of you, together with your staff, have made to ensure that our democracy has been able to function seamlessly over these past few months.

As the minister responsible for the smooth running of the elections that have taken place this year, I will be writing to every Electoral Registration Officer personally, to thank them and their teams for the work that they have undertaken: but my thanks extends to all of you here in this room today.

To the casual observer or the media, reporting on General Election night, as images of ballot boxes being rushed into counting halls across the country filled the TV screens, of teams of counters sifting through thousands of ballots at counts across the country, it is all too easy to forget that behind each and every result that night was not just a political story of which party gained or lost seats, whose share of the vote went up or down, but also a story of dedication: your dedication to ensuring that our British democracy is the best it can be, and indeed the best in the world.

I know that it has not been easy, even if you have made it look that way.

At every stage, you have been tried and tested, but have come through with flying colours.

And you have done so because I know that each and every one of you believes passionately in giving every person who can vote in our democracy the right to have their say at the ballot box.

Over the past year as Minister for the Constitution, I have toured every region of the country in an effort to ensure that we can build a Democracy that Works for Everyone. What has struck me as I have spoken and discussed issues with Electoral Registration Officers at the roundtables and meetings I

have held, is your determination and your commitment to your vocation; a vocation that I believe deserves to be held in the highest regard. For there can be fewer duties more important than ensuring that democracy prevails.

At a time when, across the world, questions and challenges are being raised about the security of democratic processes and elections, I want you to know how proud I am, as the minister responsible for our electoral community, of your ability to deliver time and again polls which no observer, foreign or domestic, calls into question.

I know that I am addressing you here today as the Association of Electoral Administrators; however, in my mind you are not just 'administrators' but professionals, whose profession belongs to one of the finest traditions of public service. A public service that, at its core, I believe, runs that same devotion to social justice as you witness in our education or health services.

For we must recognise that the effective running and performance of elections is something which is not simply an administrative issue, focused on the technical measures of the elections process, but an essential public service. What you do, and what you have done so brilliantly over these past few months, has ensured that every member of our society, regardless of where they live, their background or whether they have a disability or health condition, has been able to have that equal chance, that equal right, to participate in our democracy, and to have their say.

This is social justice at its heart, and we, you, should not be afraid to say so.

For the first time voter, entering a polling station for the first time; for the unwell unable to vote who needed an emergency proxy; for military service personnel away on tour needing a postal vote; to the blind and partially sighted or those with a disability needing assistance, you were there to help each and every one of them be a part of our democracy.

Over the past year, I calculated that, taking the EU referendum, the PCC and local and mayoral elections and the General Election together, there has been nearly 114 million ballots cast across a period of less than a year. I believe that is a record number of votes cast in a single period of a year in the history of British democracy; testament not only to the strength of our democracy, but to your ability to have made this happen. Thank you.

In my last speech to Parliament before the General Election took place, I spoke about politicians being very much actors on the democratic stage; a stage which, behind the scenes, is managed and run smoothly by yourselves, the producers of these democratic displays that are our elections.

This year, your success has been particularly notable, not least when it has come to managing and processing the number of people who have registered to vote. Back in March, just under 24 million people had accessed the online IER system to register to vote since its creation, and I previously had been talking to officials about a plan to celebrate us passing the 25 million

mark. The General Election was then called, resulting in the number of people who have now registered to vote using the system reaching over 27 million (27,633,473 to be precise).

On the deadline day for registration for the recent General Election as we approached the midnight deadline, over 622,000 people applied to register to vote, compared with 525,000 on the last day for the EU Referendum and 485,000 on the last day for the 2015 General Election.

Informal estimates suggest that the number of people registered to vote now stands at a record high of 46.9 million, up from 46.4 million in 2015.

And while this is cause itself to celebrate the growing levels of participation in our democracy, I recognise the challenges that this brings to each and every one of your staff and offices. Challenges that I want to work with you to help resolve, and to assist you in the work that you already do so brilliantly.

I have not come here today to make a brand new policy announcement. The General Election, along with the local and Mayoral elections, provides a period of important reflection to learn what needs improvement, and what can be done better, and I look forward to the AEA's own reports on these issues. I want to continue my full engagement with your organisation, and for you to know that if there are issues that you wish to raise through your own executive, my door is always open to listen and engage with the AEA.

I want to ensure that your relationship between government, through the Cabinet Office, and the AEA remains a strong one, where we work together for the people who, together, we both serve: the voters whose experience of electoral registration and at the ballot box deserves to be the best it can be.

When I last addressed the AEA at your conference in Brighton earlier this year – a different world politically – I announced the establishment of an Electoral Summit, to be held with the AEA's participation. I am still planning on holding this event later this year, and I hope that, through the AEA executive, it will provide a crucial means of reporting feedback into government, and strengthening and improving our electoral processes.

I am also still intending on launching the government's Democratic Engagement Strategy later this year, and I hope that, when this is complete, I will be able to build on the strong working relationship we have with the AEA, who have kindly been a constant presence at the roundtables that I have held exploring early work on this Strategy, by ensuring the AEA and the voice of electoral administrators and EROs will be heard in that process.

2017 has been a remarkable electoral year. But if I may end by turning to next year, 2018: not to discuss the local elections, though I am sure you are already turning your minds to your preparations for these, but to the fact that on 6 February, we will celebrate the 100th anniversary of women getting the right to vote. Of course, that was not even the equal right to vote, which came in July 1928, just ninety years ago.

For while we can talk of our democratic traditions being some of the oldest in the world, making reference to Magna Carta and the institution of Parliament, we all know in this room, that when it comes to the real face of democracy, with every person in every region across the country being given an equal right to vote, regardless of their gender or background, our democratic history remains a young one.

But in our shared history, we should not only recognise the enormous progress that has been made, celebrating those unsung heroes who fought for reform but also to recognise and celebrate the silent work of those who made it actually possible for ballots to be cast, the dedication of electoral administrators past and present.

And in reflecting upon our democratic history over these past hundred years, we can perhaps also reflect on not only how far we have come, but also what more we can do, together, to ensure that everyone who wants to make an application to register to vote, and go that one step further by casting their ballot, is given the opportunity to do so; to remove the last remaining barriers that still prevent certain groups of society from participating in elections through no fault of their own; and to make ours a democracy that works for everyone.

In this endeavour I look forward to continue to working with yourselves and the AEA.

Thank you.

Press release: Foreign Secretary statement on the continued Gulf tensions

I welcome Qatar's statement that it will respond to Kuwait today (3rd July) on the concerns raised by Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Egypt. I also welcome the joint statement by these four countries agreeing to Kuwait's request for more time to enable Qatar's response to be received.

This is an important step in building confidence between the parties. We strongly support Kuwait's mediation efforts. I hope that progress can continue to be made to restore Gulf Cooperation Council unity, which is a key element of stability in the Gulf region.

Press release: The OTS points the way to simplify corporation tax

The Office of Tax Simplification (OTS) is the independent adviser to government on tax simplification. The OTS responds to calls for corporation tax to be modernised and simplified in its report [Simplification of the Corporation Tax Computation](#) published today 3 July 2017.

This report sets out some significant steps towards creating a 21st-century corporation tax system in the UK, responding to calls from businesses of all sizes to make the calculation of corporation tax simpler, with fewer changes and more time to plan. It also recognises the importance of reducing the burdens on small business, and keeping this country an attractive destination for trade and investment in a post Brexit world.

The report takes a bold look across four broad themes

- simpler tax for smaller companies
- aligning the tax rules more closely with accounting rules where appropriate
- simplifying tax relief for capital investment
- a range of further issues affecting the largest companies

It also highlights the links with HMRC's work on Making Tax Digital, which offers a real impetus to move towards a simpler system by use of technology.

Angela Knight CBE, Chair of the OTS Board, said:

Despite the attention corporation tax has received in recent years, in particular regarding multi-nationals, there has been little focus on making the tax simpler. In response to a clamour from companies of all sizes and types, the main recommendation is that the government should develop a clear and coherent roadmap for corporation tax simplification to give certainty for all companies.

Paul Morton, Tax Director, said:

A simpler approach would be to align the tax more closely with a company's accounts, making it more intuitive, reducing compliance costs and saving time. This is particularly attractive for smaller

incorporated businesses, which represent the overwhelming majority of companies.

The report makes recommendations to achieve this objective in a variety of innovative ways. In addition, it sets the scene for further work on the costs and benefits of moving to a depreciation-based approach to giving relief for capital expenditure which could offer a significant simplification for companies of all sizes.

Main recommendations

A corporation tax simplification roadmap

Small companies

- For the very smallest companies, to use the accounting profit prepared under accounting standard FRS105 as the taxable profit without any adjustments.
- For slightly larger companies, the proposal is that companies should only need to consider a set list of five or six potential tax adjustments.

Aligning tax with accounts

Across the whole range of companies, for

- the tax definition of capital and revenue to be more closely aligned to the accounts definitions,
- the rules for trading and management expenses to be aligned
- the 19th century schedular system (under which different types of income are calculated separately subject to slightly different rules) to be replaced with a “whole business” approach, in line with most other countries

Capital expenditure

For the OTS to undertake further work on capital expenditure to explore the issues involved in replacing the present capital allowances system with an accounts depreciation approach, recognising the need to consider the impacts on particular industry sectors.

Large companies

For improvements to be made in a number of technical areas, in the context of promoting stability and certainty in the corporation tax system.

Notes for editors

The OTS advises the Chancellor on tax simplification, challenging tax complexity to help all users of the tax system; it does not implement changes – these are a matter for government and for Parliament.

The OTS team is led by Chairman Angela Knight CBE and Tax Director Paul Morton and has a small staff drawn from HM Treasury, HM Revenue & Customs and the private sector.

The OTS works to improve the experience of all who interact with the tax system. It aims to reduce the administrative burden – which is what people actually encounter in practice – as well as simplifying the rules. Simplification of the technical and administrative aspects of tax are each important, both to taxpayers and HMRC.

The vast majority of companies are small: Of the 1.75 million UK private sector companies in 2016: 1.5 million have under 10 employees.

Press Enquiries only please contact Ed Rowley, OTS Press Officer Phone: 03000 585 028

[News story: Animal medicines prosecution: Horse Health Wessex Ltd](#)

Details of the prosecution of Horse Health Wessex Ltd. Published in July 2017.

On 21 June 2017 at Southampton Magistrates Court, Horse Health Wessex Ltd pleaded guilty to placing a veterinary medicinal product on the market, contrary to regulations 4(1) of the Veterinary Medicines Regulations 2013.

HORSE HEALTH WESSEX LTD between 1/10/2013 and 26/02/2017 at Southampton, placed a veterinary medicinal product on the market referred to as Sarcoid Cleansing Salve and Super-S Cleaning Salve, whereas the product has not been granted a marketing authorisation by the Veterinary Medicines Directorate.

The company was given credit for an early plea and ordered to pay a fine of £5,000 with a victim surcharge of £150 and costs of £250.

Press release: Western half of Dawlish Warren beach recharge ends a month early

Around the clock dredging and recharge works at Dawlish Warren has paid off, with the completion of the recharge of the western end of the beach a month ahead of schedule.

The equivalent of 50 Olympic swimming pools full of sand have been pumped onto the beach since the beginning of June and, as a result, the beach now boasts increased sand levels of up to 3 metres in places.

As well as providing an improved beach for visitors to enjoy, the increased sand levels will reduce damage to the defences protecting the amenity infrastructure and help the internationally important sand dunes grow and roll back naturally. This is a legal requirement for the scheme to deliver.

Richard Cox, project manager for the Environment Agency, said:

The good news is we've completed the beach recharge at the western end of Dawlish Warren well ahead of our original schedule which tied in with the start of the summer holidays at the end of July.

This innovative scheme continues to be a balance between enhancing the natural environment whilst performing a flood defence function to protect communities at Dawlish Warren and in the Exe Estuary.

Beach goers can now reap the benefit of an improved beach at the western end and once the scheme is complete we'll have reduced the risk of flooding to more than 2,900 properties around the Exe Estuary.

Beach replenishment works will continue through the summer, with another 50 Olympic swimming pools worth of sand being placed on the eastern half of the beach. This part of the scheme will be complete by the end of August. Dredging and beach recharge was specifically programmed between June and August to protect internationally important species of birds and to protect fish movements in the Exe Estuary.

The trailing suction hopper dredger, the Mahury, which has been collecting sand from Pole Sands, just off shore from Dawlish Warren, will stay in situ until beach replenishment is complete.

Councillor Humphrey Clemens, Teignbridge District Council's executive member for housing and planning which includes coastal services, said:

This is excellent news for residents, traders and visitors, and it is even better news that the recharge work for the main beach has been completed ahead of schedule.

Credit should go to the teams on the ground carrying out this work: BMM the contractor, alongside staff from Teignbridge and the Environment Agency. Importantly, thanks go to the many residents, traders and visitors for their patience and understanding so far.

The safety and interests of the public have always been our main consideration throughout the works and many have been very positive and genuinely interested in what's happening.

There's still work to do with recharge continuing on a section of the beach past groyne 6 but it's progressing well. Dawlish Warren beach is looking wonderful and the area will now benefit from a multi-million-pound investment in flood defences that provide a modern standard of protection but also help preserve the beauty of this special place.

Since work started in January, 1.2km of stone filled gabion baskets have been removed from the warren. The timber groynes have been refurbished, extended and replaced along the warren to help hold sand on the beach. Over 200 new 7 metre long kingposts have been installed to form the new groynes (groynes 10 to 14) and more than 1,500 new planks have been installed to raise the groynes to suit the new beach levels. Construction of a new revetment between groynes 3 and 4 is ongoing but will be complete before the school summer holidays.

Work on the new 'sandbag' defence buried deep under the dunes at the narrowest point of the warren (the Neck) will be ongoing throughout the summer. Giant bags are being pumped full of sand and water which drain to create compacted sand bags up to 2.85 metres high. When finished, the bags will be buried in the back face of the dune. This structure is designed to reduce flood risk behind from the most severe of storms and prevent the warren breaching along this vulnerable section.

The main construction works are due to be finished by October.

The estimated economic benefit of the warren continuing to shelter communities and the main railway line from storms has been calculated at around £158 million.

News about Dawlish Beach Management Scheme will be shared via:

- www.facebook.com/DawlishWarrenBMS/

• DawlishWarrenBMS