

Ms Miriam Reilly

MO4/0122

Dear Ms Reilly,

I have been asked by Mr. Darragh O'Brien, T.D., Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage, to refer to your letter regarding a motion agreed at a meeting of South Dublin County Council held on the 10 January 2022.

The Minister notes South Dublin County Council's support in expanding voting rights to include 16 and 17-year-olds.

The Programme for Government contains a broad range of electoral reforms including specific commitments to establish an independent, statutory Electoral Commission and to "Examine the Scottish experience of reducing the voting age to 17, in order to draw conclusions" within the lifetime of the current Dáil.

In December 2020, the Government approved the General Scheme of an Electoral Reform Bill which provides for the establishment of the proposed Electoral Commission, the modernisation of the electoral registration process, the regulation of online political advertising during election periods as well as provisions which are aimed at assisting with the holding of electoral events where Covid-19 restrictions are in place.

The General Scheme was published in January 2021 and is available on the Department's website at the following link <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/34cf6-general-scheme-of-the-electoral-reform-bill-2020/>. Pre-legislative scrutiny of the General Scheme was completed in the summer of 2021 and the Bill is now included on the list of priority legislation in the Government's current legislation programme. It is anticipated that it will be published and will commence its progress through the Houses of the Oireachtas early this year.

One of the Electoral Commission's statutory functions will be to conduct research on electoral policies and procedures with a view to providing advice to the Oireachtas, the Government and the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage as may be required from time to time. Following its establishment, the Electoral Commission will be well placed, if requested, to examine, among other matters, the prospect of reducing the age at which a person would be entitled to vote at elections and referendums held in the State having particular regard to the experience in Scotland as well as in other countries where a reduction in the voting age has taken place.

Yours sincerely,

Niamh Redmond

Private Secretary