

Our plans for the future

Our central purpose over the next five years is to **set and guarantee standards** in key areas of democratic life in the UK. We have set ourselves an ambitious agenda with a significant shift in our focus and our attitude. These changes are already underway.

Demonstrating our effectiveness as a regulator

We intend to demonstrate and enhance our effectiveness as the regulator of party and election finance. Since 2001 we have, through the provision of guidance and advice, encouraged regulated bodies and individuals to comply with the legal obligations introduced by the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000. As political parties have become more familiar with the legislation we have begun to intervene more rigorously to ensure compliance and will continue with this trend over the next five years. We will:

- Ensure a strategic, risk-based approach to regulation, focusing resources on high risk areas.
- Adopt a rigorous approach to enforcement where breaches by parties and candidates occur, maintaining effective partnerships with prosecuting authorities.
- Raise public and stakeholder awareness of the regulatory system and its underpinning principles to promote greater public confidence in the standards we enforce.
- Publish data and analysis about political finances in a timely and accessible manner in order to provide a clearer picture of party

finances to the public, media and other external stakeholders.

- Keep operating procedures and our use of technology under constant review, to ensure that our approach to regulation is both proportionate and robust.
- Encourage high levels of party and candidate compliance with current and new controls on political finances by providing clear, timely and practical resources tailored to the needs of regulated bodies while minimising the administrative burden on them.
- Use the party registration process to confirm the capacity of each party to meet the requirements of the legal framework.
- Distribute public funds to political parties efficiently and fairly.

Setting and monitoring performance standards

We will also give high priority to our new role in setting and monitoring performance standards for electoral registration and electoral administration. To drive this forward we have established regional teams to work within all nine regions of England as well as from our existing offices in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and our Head Office in London. We will:

- Establish and operate a performance standards regime to drive improvement in the accuracy and completeness of electoral registers, and the quality of election management.
- Ensure that Electoral Registration Officers and Returning Officers are clear about their statutory

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responsibilities and have access to appropriate tools and resources.

- Establish and operate a financial information reporting regime to enable the Commission to identify any funding barriers to well-run elections and the accuracy and completeness of electoral registers.
- Work with Electoral Registration Officers, Returning Officers, political parties, police and prosecuting authorities in devising strategies and tools to promote integrity and tackle fraud.
- Establish and run an efficient accreditation scheme for international and domestic electoral observers at UK elections.

[Building public awareness about the electoral process](#)

We will continue to play a role in building public awareness about the electoral process, but this work will now focus on registration rather than voting. We will:

- Deliver public information campaigns to improve the completeness of the register, targeted particularly at under-registered groups.
- Work with local authorities to help develop their internal capacity to promote electoral registration and participation and so fulfil their new statutory duties in this area.
- Provide year-round public access to information about how our democracy works.

[A focused approach](#)

Some areas of our work will become less prominent or disappear altogether:

- We will stop our grants to organisations in the voluntary and community sector, redeploying

these funds to support other aspects of Commission activity.

- We will work with Government and the existing boundary commissions to develop proposals for a reduced role for the Commission in boundary work. Until such times as these changes are embodied in law, we will continue to conduct high-quality electoral reviews of local authorities in England in consultation with local interests, making Electoral Change Orders in good time to be implemented for the next elections.
- We will not seek to drive the policy agenda. But we will monitor the law to identify changes needed to secure improvement in the conduct of elections and referendums, the accuracy and completeness of electoral registers, and the rules for regulation of political finances. We will also report on the administration of elections and referendums, and provide independent evaluation of electoral pilot schemes designated by the Government.
- We will focus our research programme on projects designed to underpin delivery of our core objectives. In particular, we will undertake a rolling programme of research to increase understanding of why registers are incomplete or inaccurate, and how to tackle these weaknesses.

[Further information](#)

A fuller guide to our plans for the next five years will be contained in our corporate plan to be published in April 2007.

www.electoralcommission.org.uk