The Electoral Commission

Performance standards for Returning Officers in Great Britain

November 2013

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Contents

1 Overview

Background

1.1   The Electoral Administration Act 2006 gave the Electoral Commission powers to set and monitor performance standards for electoral services. Under these provisions, the Commission may:

- determine and publish standards of performance for relevant electoral officers in Great Britain (Electoral Registration Officers, Returning Officers (ROs) and Counting Officers)
- direct relevant officers to provide the Commission with reports regarding their performance against the published standards
- publish its assessment of the level of performance by relevant officers against the published standards

1.2   The Commission first set standards for ROs in March 2009, and revised the framework in December 2011. Building on the lessons we have learned from monitoring the performance of ROs over the last five years and taking account of the feedback we have received, we have now developed a new performance standards framework for ROs which aims to support ROs in delivering a consistent high-quality service for voters and those standing for election.

The performance standards

1.3   The framework has been developed around key outcomes from the perspective of voters and those who want to stand for election, and in particular whether ROs are taking the necessary steps to deliver the following outcomes:

- Voters are able to vote easily and know that their vote will be counted in the way they intended
- It is easy for people who want to stand for election to find out how to get involved, what the rules are, and what they have to do to comply with these rules, and they can have confidence in the management of the process and the result

1.4   The framework also includes a standard specifically covering the role of statutory office holders with a power of direction which will be applied with the relevant parts of performance standards 1 and 2.

1.5   The Commission will provide guidance, tools and templates to support ROs in planning for and delivering an election. These will set out what we expect ROs will need to have in place, and what we would expect to see when reviewing the information, to be able to be satisfied that the key outcomes of the standards can be delivered.

1.6   The following pages set out the new performance standards for ROs.

2　　Performance standards for Returning Officers in Great Britain

Performance standard 1: Voters		
Ensuring that planning for and delivery of the poll enables voters to vote easily and know that their vote will be counted in the way they intended		
Outcome	What does the RO need to do to achieve the outcome	What will demonstrate how the outcome has been met
Voters receive the information they need, in an accessible format and within time for them to cast their vote	• Develop and implement robust project management processes • Evaluate planning for and delivery of previous polls and identify lessons learnt, updating plans as required • Put in place arrangements to manage contractors and suppliers to ensure that the work is delivered as required by the specification • Ensure robust processes are in place for ensuring that there are no errors on voter materials, notice of poll and notice of election	• Project planning documentation which is kept under regular review • Planning documentation reflecting lessons learnt • Arrangements in place for the management of contractors and suppliers • Processes for the proof-checking of voter materials, notice of poll and notice of election • Information on the method for delivery of poll cards, including an estimation of when poll cards will be delivered

	• Ensure poll cards are received by voters as soon as possible so that voters have the maximum amount of time to act on the information • Ensure information on the poll, including the notice of election and notice of poll, is easily accessible to voters, such as through the local authority website	• Information on the poll easily accessed through the local authority website
Voters receive a high-quality service	• Ensure that access needs are taken into account when planning for and setting up polling stations • Decide on the allocation of electors and staff to polling stations to ensure polling stations are properly staffed so that voters receive a high-quality service, giving consideration to the factors set out in Commission guidance • Ensure polling station staff are trained to set-up polling stations in such a way that takes account of voter needs • Ensure postal ballot packs are received by voters as soon as possible so that voters have the maximum amount of time to act on the information	• Assessment regarding access needs, identifying any problems and actions taken to remedy these • Approach taken to allocating electors and staff to polling stations • Guidance/training provided to polling station staff • Information on the method for delivery of postal ballot packs, including an estimation of when postal ballot packs will be delivered

Voters have confidence that their vote will be counted in the way they intended	• Maintain a clear audit trail of the issue, receipt and opening of postal ballot packs • Have in place processes to identify any patterns of activity that might indicate potential integrity problems, including what steps are to be taken to deal with any such problems • Maintain the secure storage of ballot papers and postal ballot packs at all times • Put in place appropriate resources to ensure the verification and count is timely • Ensure the results are communicated to voters in a clear and timely way • Ensure count processes are designed and managed to secure an accurate result, with a clear audit trail	• Arrangements to maintain a clear audit trail of the issue, receipt and opening of postal ballot packs • Processes for dealing with integrity problems • Arrangements for securely storing ballot papers and postal ballot packs • Information on how the verification and counting is to be organised and managed, including the process you followed to arrive at your decision • Arrangements for communicating results to voters • Arrangements in place to maintain a clear audit trail of the count processes

Performance standard 2: Those who want to stand for election

Ensuring that planning for and delivery of the poll enables people who want to stand for election to find out how to get involved, what the rules are, and what they have to do to comply with these rules, and enables them to have confidence in the management of the process and the result

Outcome	What does the RO need to do to achieve the outcome	What will demonstrate how the outcome has been met
People who want to stand for election receive all the information they need to take part	• Ensure information on the election process and spending is easily available for candidates and agents, including through providing briefing sessions and ensuring they are issued with written guidance • Ensure that candidates have the opportunity to have their nomination papers informally checked prior to their formal submission	• Written guidance issued to candidates • Date(s) of briefing sessions and briefing resources • Arrangements in place for candidates to have their nomination papers informally checked prior to formal submission
Candidates have confidence that the process is well-managed, and have confidence in the results	• Ensure that those entitled to attend postal vote opening sessions are able to follow what is happening, where and when • Ensure count processes are transparent, with everything at the verification and count carried out in clear view of all those entitled to	• Layout plan of postal vote opening sessions • Information provided to attendees at postal vote opening sessions • Layout plan of the count • Information provided to attendees at the count

	attend, with information provided to attendees on the processes to be followed • Ensure count processes are designed and managed to secure an accurate result, with a clear audit trail • Have in place processes to identify any patterns of activity that might indicate potential integrity problems, including what steps are to be taken to deal with any such problems	• Arrangements in place to communicate progress at the count • Arrangements in place to maintain a clear audit trail of the count processes • Processes for dealing with integrity problems

Performance standard for statutory office holders with a power of direction

Performance standard 3: Co-ordination and management of the poll		
Co-ordinating the planning for and delivery of the poll to ensure a consistent high-quality experience for voters and those wanting to stand for election		
Outcome	What does the statutory office holder need to do to achieve the outcome	What will demonstrate how the outcome has been met
To ensure that local ROs have the necessary arrangements in place to deliver well-run elections in their area	- Develop and implement robust project management processes - Develop guidance and issue directions where necessary to ensure the effective administration of the polls in each local RO area - Develop and implement plans for communicating with local ROs - Develop and implement a strategy for co-ordinating and delivering public	- Project planning documentation which is kept under regular review - Arrangements for ensuring the consistent delivery of the poll, including guidance issued and whether and how you have used your power to give directions - Plans for communicating with local ROs - A strategy for co-ordinating and

	awareness and engaging with electors across the area • Where appropriate, develop a process for receiving and submitting local results	delivering public awareness activity and engaging with electors across the area • Arrangements on how you intend to manage the process of collating local results, including any protocols and guidance issued to local ROs