

Part H – Performance standards for Returning Officers in Great Britain

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1 Introduction

1.1 The purpose of this Part is to assist Returning Officers to complete their self-assessment reports against the Electoral Commission's performance standards published in March 2009.



The self-assessment form will be available to download from the Commission's website at www.electoralcommission.org.uk/performance-standards/assessment-criteria.

1.2 The EAA amended PPERA to give the Commission powers to set standards of performance for Electoral Registration Officers, Returning Officers¹ and Referendum Counting Officers in Great Britain.² Under these provisions, the Commission may:

- determine and publish standards of performance for relevant electoral officers in Great Britain (Electoral Registration Officers, Returning Officers and Referendum 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

1.3 Returning Officers will be issued with a Direction to report under PPERA, which will require them to provide the Commission with a report on performance against the standards. After submission of the reports the Commission will publish an assessment of the level of performance by Returning Officers against the standards.

¹ The performance standards provisions introduced by the EAA do not apply to local government elections in Scotland.

² Sections 9A and 9B, PPERA, as amended by Section 67, EAA. See Section 5, 'Legislation' for the full legislative text.

2 Development of performance standards for Returning Officers

Consultation and development of standards

2.1 The Commission consulted on a draft set of performance standards for Returning Officers between September and December 2008 and received 43 responses. The Commission also discussed the contents of the standards at a number of seminars nationwide and one-to-one with a number of electoral administrators. The Commission published a response to the consultation exercise outlining the comments that the Commission received and explaining the reasons for any changes to the standards. On 16 March 2009 the Commission published performance standards for ROs.

Links with guidance and support from the Commission

2.2 The Commission has statutory powers to provide advice and assistance to Returning Officers on the interpretation and administration of electoral law, and on the promotion of electoral participation. The Commission currently provides a range of guidance and advisory services, briefing events, research and practical tools for use by Returning Officers and their staff. These are delivered through the Commission's devolved and regional offices across Great Britain as well as through its Head Office team based in London.

2.3 The performance standards for Returning Officers are intended to both reflect and support the Commission's guidance. In particular, they reflect those priority areas where the Commission believes there would be significant risk to confidence in the effectiveness of the electoral process if the standards were not met.

3 The performance standards framework

3.1 The performance standards framework intends to provide a clear picture of what needs to be achieved to support a well-run election and to provide an objective process for assessing performance against commonly agreed standards.

Objectives for performance standards

3.2 The standards outline the key requirements to support the effective delivery of a Returning Officer's statutory duty. The performance standards framework, including the reporting and assessment process, will have a number of related purposes:

- **public accountability** – providing assurance that a well-run election process is in place
- **service benchmarking** – enabling individual Returning Officers to compare performance against their peers, identify and share good practice and identify opportunities for improvement over time
- **policy development and evaluation** – providing evidence to policy makers to support improvements in the overall legislative and funding framework for elections

3.3 The Commission expects that the framework will be used by a range of individuals and groups, including:

- **Electors** – dependent on well-run elections to exercise their right to vote.
- **Returning Officers** – responsible for delivering the statutory function of running elections. The standards will help to ensure that delivery of elections is well planned and managed by making clear the expected approach in relation to a number of key areas.
- **Councillors** – responsible for appointing Returning Officers and providing resources for Returning Officers to carry out their statutory duties. The standards framework will help to provide assurance that elections are delivered effectively and provide value for money.
- **Electoral administrators** – those who in practice administer elections on behalf of Returning Officers. The standards will support the development of effective plans for the delivery of elections.
- **Governments and policy makers** – responsible for ensuring that an effective legal framework is in place to support the delivery of elections. The standards framework will help to assess the performance of the legal framework, and to identify areas where performance improvement may need to be supported by legislative change or further guidance and advice.
- **Elected representatives/members of legislatures** – responsible for scrutinising government policy and legislative proposals. The standards framework will help to provide assurance in relation to the delivery of

3.4 The performance standards framework focuses initially on identifying agreed and consistent minimum standards of performance for Returning Officers. However, the Commission also aims to support improvement beyond the minimum standard wherever possible. The framework helps to highlight where additional work may be required to support the delivery of an election. However, the Commission has no legal powers to direct Returning Officers in the conduct of their statutory duties, and the responsibility for delivering any improvement will remain with individual Returning Officers.

4 The self-assessment process

Completing the performance standards self-assessment

4.1 This section explains in more detail the self-assessment process for Returning Officers and contains explanatory notes on completing the assessment against the seven performance standards.

4.2 The Electoral Commission has legal powers to direct Returning Officers to provide a report on their performance against the published standards (see Section 5, 'Legislation' for full details of the legislation). Therefore, the standards should be reflective of the work, knowledge and experience of the Returning Officer. In particular, the first performance standard, 'Skills and knowledge of the Returning Officer', is aimed solely at the Returning Officer, and should as such be completed by that person. The Commission appreciates that much of the operational work and day-to-day duties may be carried out by other electoral services staff and this has been reflected in standards 2 to 7 by using the words 'The Returning Officer ensures...' before each provision. However, it must be remembered that the legal responsibility for the delivery of the election remains with the Returning Officer.

4.3 The aim of the self-assessment process is to support a simple, but comprehensive and systematic, review of the statutory duties of a Returning Officer. The result should be an honest assessment which recognises areas not only where performance is at or above the specified standard, but also where there may be room for improvement.

4.4 The basis of the self-assessment is derived from four key questions within the performance standards framework:

- Do Returning Officers have the appropriate plans and processes in place to satisfy the definition of the standards?
- How well do these plans and processes meet the needs and interests of the key stakeholders?
- Do Returning Officers review and evaluate the plans and processes they have, making changes or improvements where necessary?
- How well are the plans and programmes supported?

4.5 Although Returning Officers should use the four questions as the basis of their approach, the questions should be flexibly interpreted in the light of the individual Returning Officer's specific goals and take into account any contextual factors. Under each standard there is space provided for Returning Officers to provide additional information to further support their assessment.


4.6 The nature of self-assessment will vary according to the criteria in each standard. Returning Officers will need to demonstrate an understanding of what they do well, what needs improving and how this improvement can be monitored, achieved and evaluated over time. The key test of the resulting self-assessment report is its ability to demonstrate how high quality is sustained and improvement is ensured. An annual self-assessment report

4.7 The performance standards are grouped in three subject areas representing the most important areas on which Returning Officers should focus, listed in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Performance standards for Returning Officers in Great Britain

Subject area	Performance standards
Planning and organisation	1. Skills and knowledge of the Returning Officer 2. Planning processes in place for an election 3. Training
Integrity	4. Maintaining the integrity of an election
Participation	5. Planning and delivering public awareness activity 6. Accessibility of information to electors 7. Communication of information to candidates and agents

4.8 Returning Officers are asked to assess themselves against each of the seven standards according to three different categories: 'Not currently meeting the standard', 'Performance standard', and 'Above the performance standard'. The assessments are to be made in accordance with this guidance, which outlines the level of performance the Commission would expect in order to satisfy the particular criteria at each level.

 The Returning Officer should assess themselves against the seven standards by putting one tick in the box for each standard that matches their current level of performance. All requirements of the particular level chosen by the Returning Officer must be met. Where a Returning Officer feels that their performance falls between two standards, the Returning Officer should mark themselves at the lower level and use the free text boxes to explain the assessment they have chosen.

4.9 For some of the standards there are two levels of performance in the 'Not currently meeting the standard' section and, in one case, two levels of performance in the 'Above the standard' section. Within the 'Not currently meeting the standard' section, the lower level indicates that the Returning Officer does not carry out any activities towards meeting the standard, while the second level indicates that some of the activities the Commission would expect are being carried out, but not sufficiently to meet the standard.

4.10 The sections within each standard are cumulative. Therefore, if the Returning Officer assesses themselves to be 'Above the standard', the Commission expects that they carry out **all** the measures listed in the 'Performance standard' section.

4.11 The self-assessment form should be returned to the relevant Electoral Commission devolved or English office. Once the self-assessment form has been returned and the returns collated, the Commission will contact a random

sample of Returning Officers to arrange verification of evidence. Any verification activities carried out by the Commission will look at the evidence held by Returning Officers, not only to demonstrate that their self-assessment is accurate, but also to look at initiatives and practices which could be shared, with a view to improving performance more widely. Furthermore, a thorough analysis of the information will enable the Commission to identify general and specific activities that might be required to support Returning Officers who are performing below the required standard.



Returning Officers are not required to send in any evidence when returning their self-assessment form. However, the Commission will ask to see evidence from a sample of Returning Officers at a later date during the verification process.

4.12 After the Commission has received all the self-assessment forms and verified the selected sample, the Commission will publish details of each Returning Officer's assessment of their performance against the standards on the Commission's website at www.electoralcommission.org.uk/performance-standards.

4.13 The Commission will also undertake an analysis of the returns, which will aim to build a national picture of performance. This will also identify any trends or anomalies, as well as areas where there may be evidence of good practice that could be shared and considered further. In addition, the analysis will assist in identifying areas where the Commission needs to provide further assistance or guidance. Further, it will play a role in reviewing the standards and ensuring that they contain relevant and appropriate information.

4.14 The following pages contain the published performance standards for Returning Officers in Great Britain and explanatory notes to assist in the completion of the self-assessment form. The Commission has made references to other Parts of this guidance and our *Essentials of effective election management: Planning for a local government election in England and Wales*, where appropriate.

Planning and organisation

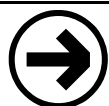
Performance standard 1: Skills and knowledge of the Returning Officer		Supports vision theme:	
Subject: Planning and organisation		Professionalism – a clear and consistent approach to delivery	
This standard aims to ensure that Returning Officers have sufficient skills and knowledge to carry out their statutory duties.			
Performance against the standard		Assessment	Evidence to support assessment
Not currently meeting the performance standard	1. The Returning Officer is aware of the personal nature of the duties and responsibilities of the role but does not meet the criteria outlined below.		
Performance standard	2. The Returning Officer: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> is aware of the contents of the Electoral Commission’s guidance materials for the administration of elections and has a working knowledge of electoral legislation is able to identify and oversee the necessary actions to rectify any errors in procedure commands the required staff and resources required for a well-run election 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Appointment agreement including an acknowledgement of role, duties and responsibilities Election team management structure showing the roles of the Returning Officer and their election team members

Performance against the standard	Assessment	Evidence to support assessment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • supports the staff administering the election and provides appropriate oversight of their work • oversees the planning, project management and risk analysis elements of the election and provides direction and receives regular feedback on activities and monitors progress • understands the main processes and procedures at the election in order to review the planning, question any aspect of and quality assure the whole election process • ensures that election accounts are completed in a timely manner • has a working relationship with the Electoral Registration Officer 		
Above the performance standard	<p>3. The Returning Officer, in addition to the above:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • can demonstrate a strong knowledge of electoral law and both existing and developing practice • undertakes continuous personal development in regards to election management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Record of training and briefing events attended • Continuing Professional Development programme/training plan

Performance standard 1: Skills and knowledge of the Returning Officer

Meeting the performance standard (level 2)

4.15 To meet the 'Performance standard', the Returning Officer should meet all the requirements as outlined in the standard. This includes having a working knowledge of the legislation to conduct the election and supporting the staff administering the election.



Section 3, 'Your responsibilities as Returning Officer' in *Essentials of effective election management: Planning for a local government election in England and Wales* provides a list of responsibilities attached to the role of the Returning Officer, which should be referred to when making an assessment against this standard.

Above the performance standard (level 3)

4.16 To be 'Above the performance standard', in addition to meeting the requirements at level 2, the Returning Officer should be able to demonstrate that they have a strong knowledge of electoral law and both existing and developing practice, and that they undertake continuous professional development (CPD) with regard to election management.

4.17 The Returning Officer should have an understanding of the framework of electoral legislation. The Returning Officer is able to identify and interpret relevant provisions when necessary and appreciates the practical implications of such interpretation. The Returning Officer should ensure that this understanding is kept up to date with any changes in the legislation.

4.18 Additionally, the Returning Officer should keep up to date with new innovations, new practices and new legislation and attend training as necessary. This should be documented in a CPD programme or training plan.

Performance standard 2: Planning processes in place for an election		Supports vision theme:	
Subject: Planning and organisation		Professionalism – a clear and consistent approach to delivery	
This standard aims to ensure Returning Officers have developed robust planning processes for an election.			
Performance against the standard		Assessment	Evidence to support assessment
Not currently meeting the performance standard	1. The Returning Officer does not ensure that a written plan is in place and relies on unstructured management controls such as oral or written updates and past experience only. Objectives, risks, any external contracts and available resources are not formally documented.		
Performance standard	<p>2. The Returning Officer ensures that formal, written plans are in place for an election. These should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • clearly defined objectives and success measures • risks – identification and mitigation • recruitment of temporary/permanent staff where needed • business continuity arrangements • consideration of physical and communication accessibility, including a plan of the layout of the count premises • an outline of the roles and duties of all the staff present at the count <p>As well as a written plan, the Returning Officer ensures that contracts are in place for all outsourced functions or supplies and that contingency plans are prepared in case of failure of any of these contracts.</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan(s) • Risk register • Business continuity arrangements • Plan of layout of the count premises • Contracts and contingency plans

Performance against the standard	Assessment	Evidence to support assessment
Above the performance standard	<p>3. The Returning Officer, in addition to the above, ensures that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a thorough evaluation of all processes outlined in the plan is carried out • feedback is sought from all appropriate stakeholders including candidates, agents and staff (both temporary and permanent) • the plan is amended, where necessary, for future elections as a result of the evaluation findings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation plan • Documented feedback

Performance standard 2: Planning processes in place for an election

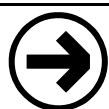
Meeting the performance standard (level 2)

4.19 To meet the 'Performance standard', the Returning Officer should have a written plan in place for an election.

4.20 All plans should cover:

- clearly defined objectives and success measures, i.e. what do you want to achieve and what will success look like?
- risks – identification and mitigation – the plan or separate risk register should identify all risks and the necessary actions to reduce or mitigate risks
- recruitment of temporary/permanent staff where needed
- business continuity arrangements to cover for loss of election staff, loss of service and loss of venue during the election period
- consideration of physical and communication accessibility, including a plan of the layout of the count premises
- an outline of the roles and duties of all the staff present at the count

4.21 The above plans and information should be sufficiently clear and detailed so that they can be followed by any persons delegated to carry out work on behalf of the Returning Officer.



Essentials of effective election management: Planning for a local government election in England and Wales provides detailed information on planning for a local government election, including:

- managing contractors and suppliers
- election finance
- equal access
- training
- communication
- electoral integrity

The Commission has also developed election planning templates, which are available to download from the Commission's website at

www.electoralcommission.org.uk/guidance/resources-for-electoral-administrators/local-elections.

Above the performance standard (level 3)

4.22 To be 'Above the performance standard', in addition to the above, the Returning Officer should carry out a thorough evaluation of all processes outlined in the plan, seeking feedback from stakeholders and amending the plan, where necessary, for future elections. An evaluation plan and documented feedback should be available as evidence to support the assessment.

4.23 The evaluation plan should document all activities that are planned as part of the evaluation process, who they involve, what will be covered and when these will be carried out. This may cover such activities as seeking feedback from stakeholders and staff (including verbal feedback or through a structured survey or report).

4.24 Particular parts of the process which may be considered as part of the evaluation include:

- polling places and polling stations
- contract management
- staffing
- equipment and supplies
- finance
- count arrangements
- the management of postal voting



Part F, 'After the declaration of result', Section 5, 'Review of election procedures' provides further information on reviewing election procedures.

The Commission's election planning templates also include an evaluation template which can be used to inform the evaluation of the election. The election planning templates can be downloaded from the Commission's website at www.electoralcommission.org.uk/guidance/resources-for-electoral-administrators/local-elections.

Performance standard 3: Training		Supports vision theme:	
Subject: Planning and organisation		Professionalism – a clear and consistent approach to delivery	
This standard aims to ensure Returning Officers have provided appropriate training for all staff used to deliver an election.			
Performance against the standard		Assessment	Evidence to support assessment
Not currently meeting the performance standard	1. The Returning Officer does not ensure provision of any training to either permanent or temporary staff other than a basic induction.		
	2. The Returning Officer ensures provision of basic training for permanent members of staff only, to ensure awareness and understanding of legislative requirements.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schedule of training activities
Performance standard	<p>3. The Returning Officer ensures provision of training to both permanent and temporary staff on an ongoing basis, to ensure awareness and understanding of legislative requirements.</p> <p>The Returning Officer has ensured that training for polling station and count staff includes information and a briefing on access issues and procedures, and disability awareness training as appropriate.</p> <p>The Returning Officer ensures that evaluation of individual training activities is carried out.</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schedule of training activities Training materials Evaluation of the individual training activities

Performance against the standard	Assessment	Evidence to support assessment
Above the performance standard	4. The Returning Officer, in addition to the above, ensures that a written training plan for both permanent and temporary staff is in place, and evaluation of the effectiveness of the plan, including identification of training needs for the future, is carried out on a regular basis.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training plan • Evaluation plan

Performance standard 3: Training

Meeting the performance standard (level 3)

4.25 To meet the 'Performance standard', all staff (whether permanent or temporary) should receive training to understand and carry out their roles.

4.26 The schedule of training activities will list the topics covered in the training, and should cover when and how that training will be delivered. The schedule should cover all training given to ensure awareness and understanding of legislative requirements, whether provided by internal or external sources.

4.27 As part of the provision of training to meet the 'Performance standard', polling station and count staff should receive training on access issues and disability awareness.

4.28 It may be appropriate for this to be provided by the local authority's access officer or by local groups of disabled people who have the necessary expertise.

4.29 Particular aspects to be considered as part of this training may include all polling station staff to be:

- trained in the use of tactile devices, which enable blind or partially sighted electors to vote without assistance
- made aware of the large-print ballot paper to be displayed in the polling station, the hand-held enlarged copy of the ballot paper which will be available for reference by voters, and any translations of official notices into alternative formats that the Returning Officer has deemed appropriate and will be providing to polling stations
- made aware of the importance of the layout of the polling station, including how to place notices, taking lighting levels into account, and how to offer assistance to disabled people
- made aware of the provisions which allow disabled people to have a companion to assist them to vote or to require the Presiding Officer to assist them
- made aware of the importance of speaking clearly to people who have a learning disability or hearing difficulties
- given advice on how to assist voters
- provided with guidance notes on access issues to refer to on polling day
- provided with a checklist of issues to consider when setting up a polling station
- shown how to install any temporary ramps safely, if appropriate

4.30 The evaluation should monitor the effectiveness of the training. Methods of evaluating individual training activities may include the provision of feedback forms for staff attending training activities. The evaluation should include how the training can be adapted to enable continuous improvement.



Section 11, 'Training' in Essentials of effective election management: Planning for a local government election in England and Wales provides information on the training of election staff.

The Commission has also developed a range of template support materials to assist with the training and briefing of staff, including:

- a Handbook for polling station staff (this includes a polling station set-up list and outlines equality issues that staff need to be aware of)
- *A quick guide for polling station staff*
- template training materials

The materials are available to download from the Commission's website at www.electoralcommission.org.uk/guidance/resources-for-electoral-administrators/local-elections.

Returning Officers can also use the National Occupational Standards for electoral services staff to identify the skills and knowledge that will be needed in the election team. The complete suite of standards can be downloaded from <http://ukstandards.org.uk>.

Above the performance standard (level 4)

4.31 To be 'Above the performance standard', in addition to the above, the Returning Officer should also be able to provide a training plan and an evaluation plan.

4.32 The training plan will expand on the schedule by including details of the information that will be covered and the methods and activities by which these are to be delivered. The plan may include copies of or links to presentations and notes of information to be conveyed.

4.33 Any evaluation plan, whether contained in the training plan or forming a separate document, should include methods of evaluating the training sessions and materials. The purpose of evaluation is to analyse the activity and results of the training in order to agree lessons learned that can inform recommendations for new or improved training in the future.

4.34 It is important to note that this need not be a separate evaluation plan from that required in performance standard 2. Indeed, if the evaluation of the training sessions and materials is covered under the evaluation plan in performance standard 2, this will suffice for evidence to support the assessment for this standard also.

Integrity

Performance standard 4: Maintaining the integrity of an election Subject: Integrity		Supports vision theme: Integrity – a secure process for registration and voting	
This standard aims to ensure Returning Officers have a process in place to identify any patterns of activity that might indicate electoral malpractice and any security issues that may arise.			
Performance against the standard		Assessment	Evidence to support assessment
Not currently meeting the performance standard	1. The Returning Officer does not ensure that there is a system in place to assess risks of electoral malpractice when planning for an election.		
	2. The Returning Officer ensures that there is an informal system in place to assess risks of electoral malpractice but does not document this.		
Performance standard	3. The Returning Officer has ensured that links have been developed with the local police/single point of contact (SPOC) to enable any concerns around electoral malpractice and any public order and safety issues to be referred. The Returning Officer ensures that there is a written plan outlining what steps are to be taken to deal with concerns about electoral malpractice. The plan contains a risk assessment that will identify and note action to take to tackle any concerns about electoral malpractice.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Records of meetings/discussions/correspondence with local Police/SPOC, political parties, independent candidates and other relevant bodies including the Electoral Registration Officer • Plan • Risk assessment documentation

Performance against the standard	Assessment	Evidence to support assessment
	The Returning Officer ensures that work, with political parties and independent candidates, is carried out as well as working with other relevant bodies including the Electoral Registration Officer.	
Above the performance standard	4. In addition to the above, the Returning Officer carries out an evaluation of the processes outlined above and implements initiatives to protect those who may be at risk of electoral malpractice.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation document • Documented details of initiatives

Performance standard 4: Maintaining the integrity of an election

Electoral malpractice definition

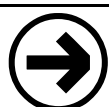
4.35 Electoral malpractice can be defined to include actions or conduct which is contrary to electoral legislation or other legislation relevant to the election period and processes. The RPA 1983 defines most electoral offences. However, other legislation or common law provisions may also apply.

Meeting the performance standard (level 3)

4.36 To meet the 'Performance standard', the Returning Officer is required to ensure that links with local police and/or the SPOC have been developed, to have a written plan in place outlining steps to be taken to deal with concerns about electoral malpractice, and to work with political parties, independent candidates and other relevant bodies.

4.37 The plan should contain as a minimum:

- an outline of steps to be taken to deal with concerns of electoral malpractice
- a risk assessment that will identify and note action to take to tackle any concerns about electoral malpractice



The Commission has published a range of products and guidance to promote electoral integrity. These include:

- *Guidance on preventing and detecting electoral malpractice*, which includes a list of topics that might be discussed at pre-election planning meetings between the local authority contact and the police election SPOC officer. This guidance also contains a list of offences and a Code of conduct for political parties.
- A pocket guide, *Guidance on policing elections in England and Wales*.
- *Postal voting – a quick guide for party workers*.
- *Postal voting – a quick guide for Royal Mail drivers and delivery staff*.

The materials are available to download from the Commission's website at www.electoralcommission.org.uk/guidance/resources-for-electoral-administrators/integrity-guidance/electoral-events.

Section 17, 'Electoral integrity' in *Essentials of effective election management: Planning for a local government election in England and Wales* provides further guidance on electoral integrity matters.

Above the performance standard (level 4)

4.38 To be 'Above the performance standard', in addition to the above, the Returning Officer should also be able to provide an evaluation of the processes outlined above and evidence of carrying out initiatives to protect those who may be at risk of electoral malpractice.

4.39 As part of an evaluation, the Returning Officer carries out a review of arrangements in place for previous elections and in particular reviews any

4.40 In order to implement initiatives to protect those who may be at risk of electoral malpractice the Returning Officer will first need to identify those who may be at risk. This may include those in houses in multiple occupation (HMOs), care homes and student accommodation. An example of such an initiative could be hand delivery of absent votes to HMOs or an agreed distribution person/place within the HMO.

Participation

Performance standard 5: Planning and delivering public awareness activity		Supports vision theme:	
Subject: Participation		User focus – an easy and accessible process for candidates and electors	
This standard aims to ensure Returning Officers effectively plan and deliver public awareness activity to communicate election information to electors.			
Performance against the standard		Assessment	Evidence to support assessment
Not currently meeting the performance standard	1. The Returning Officer has not ensured implementation of any public awareness activity and only provides statutory information to electors. There are no response mechanisms in place (such as phone, website or email) to ensure that information is correctly and appropriately communicated.		
Performance standard	2. The Returning Officer ensures that a written public awareness strategy, which covers internal and external communication is in place. The Returning Officer ensures that all outgoing communication provides appropriate contact details to allow interested parties to respond and find out further information. The Returning Officer ensures that there is active engagement with other departments of the local authority.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Written strategy • Examples of outgoing communication • Records of meetings/discussion/correspondence with other departments

Performance against the standard	Assessment	Evidence to support assessment
Above the performance standard		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Records of meetings/discussions/ correspondence with external bodies • Record of work undertaken (if determined to be appropriate)
<p>3. In addition to the above, the Returning Officer ensures that external bodies (such as other authorities, other Returning Officers and Electoral Registration Officers, local media and community groups) have been identified and consulted with to determine whether working with partners to pool resources and communication channels with other partners is worthwhile and, where appropriate, this joint work has been undertaken.</p> <p>4. The Returning Officer, in addition to the above, ensures that an evaluation methodology for all activities undertaken (including those with external partners, the public awareness strategy and different dissemination methods), has been developed.</p> <p>Future work is planned taking account of the outcomes of this evaluation.</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation methodology

Performance standard 5: Planning and delivering public awareness activity

Meeting the performance standard (level 2)

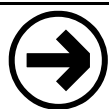
4.41 To meet the 'Performance standard', the Returning Officer must have a written public awareness strategy, ensure that all outgoing communication provides contact details and ensure that there is active engagement with other departments of the local authority.

4.42 It is important to note that the public awareness strategy need not be a separate strategy from that required to meet performance standard 6 of the Commission's *Performance standards for Electoral Registration Officers in Great Britain*. Indeed, depending on the structure and split of responsibilities of the local registration and elections functions, there may well be benefits in a joint strategy for both registration and elections as there is an obvious overlap between the two in terms of participation and communication activity.

4.43 A joint internal strategy may also encourage effective working partnerships between Electoral Registration Officers and Returning Officers, communications teams and others within the local authority.

4.44 All strategies should contain a clear plan for the effective delivery of election information to electors, including:

- identifying target audiences – it is important to identify which groups are under-represented in the area and those whom the Returning Officer wants to reach through their activity
- clearly defined objectives and success measures, i.e. what does the Returning Officer want to achieve and what will success look like?
- risks – identification and mitigation – the strategy or a separate risk register should identify all risks and the necessary actions to reduce or mitigate risks
- resources (financial and staffing) – it is important to consider how much budget is available and whether there are any resources that can be accessed, for example the Ministry of Justice Electoral Participation Fund



The Commission's election planning templates include a template public awareness strategy and can be downloaded from the Commission's website at

www.electoralcommission.org.uk/guidance/resources-for-electoral-administrators/local-elections.

The Commission's Do Politics Centre also contains practical materials, and advice and guidance for practitioners aiming to increase voter awareness. All materials are free to access and include case studies, event plans, campaign techniques and templates for communication materials. These can be accessed at www.dopolitics.org.uk.

Above the performance standard (level 3)

4.45 To be 'Above the performance standard', in addition to the requirements above, the Returning Officer should engage with external bodies regarding working with partners and should be able to provide records of meetings/correspondence and a record of work undertaken to support the assessment.

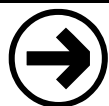
4.46 External bodies will depend on local circumstances, but may include:

- other Returning Officers or Electoral Registration Officers
- local media such as newspapers or radio stations
- voluntary sector groups who may represent, or have influence with, target audiences (e.g. youth democracy organisations and disability organisations)

Above the performance standard (level 4)

4.47 To be at level 4 of 'Above the performance standard', in addition to the above, the Returning Officer should also be able to provide evidence of evaluation of participation activity.

4.48 The purpose of evaluation is to analyse the activity and results of participation activity in order to agree lessons learned that can inform recommendations for new or improved participation activity in the future. Evaluation might include evaluation meetings with key stakeholders/partners, lessons learned reports, or comparison of the results achieved compared with the targets that were set, in order to understand what worked well and what did not.



The Commission's election planning templates include a template evaluation plan and can be downloaded from the Commission's website at www.electoralcommission.org.uk/guidance/resources-for-electoral-administrators/local-elections.

The Do Politics Centre at www.dopolitics.org.uk also provides information on evaluating participation activity, including:

- a glossary of evaluation terms
- more in-depth information about how to evaluate public awareness work

Performance standard 6: Accessibility of information to electors		Supports vision theme:	
Subject: Participation		User focus – an easy and accessible process for candidates and electors	
This standard aims to ensure that Returning Officers provide a simple and user friendly way for electors to access information.			
Performance against the standard		Assessment	Evidence to support assessment
Not currently meeting the performance standard	1. The Returning Officer ensures that information is provided in one format and has not taken account of the needs of different audiences (for example, translation or alternative formats).		
Performance standard	2. The Returning Officer ensures that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • relevant research (in consultation with appropriate organisations) has been carried out to determine the appropriate languages and formats required to communicate with relevant audiences • they are responsive to changes in the demographics of the electoral area and takes note of research as to whether further formats or languages are necessary • information is produced and disseminated in a number of mediums appropriate to the audience • signage (both internal and external) and information to be provided to all polling stations are in appropriate formats and easily accessible 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examples of how the appropriate languages and formats have been decided • Details of what demographic monitoring takes place • Details of dissemination methods • Record of polling station inspector reports on signage

Performance against the standard	Assessment	Evidence to support assessment
Above the performance standard	3. The Returning Officer, in addition to the above, ensures a process is in place for consultation with local organisations (including disability groups) about ways in which election documents can be improved and ensures that an evaluation of the accessibility of information is carried out.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Records of meetings/discussions/ correspondence with those consulted

Performance standard 6: Accessibility of information to electors

Meeting the performance standard (level 2)

4.49 To meet the 'Performance standard', the Returning Officer should be able to demonstrate what research has been carried out to determine the appropriate languages and formats, and provide details of what demographic monitoring takes place and how the most accessible method of disseminating information has been decided. The Returning Officer should also ensure that signage in polling stations is easily accessible.

4.50 The Returning Officer will need to ensure that specific research and/or consultation with appropriate organisations is carried out to determine appropriate languages and formats. This may include:

- discussing with relevant departments within the local authority (e.g. communications, youth and community service teams, access officer)
- liaising with other Returning Officers/Electoral Registration Officers
- using research carried out by organisations such as the Commission, the Local Government Association or government departments
- working with organisations that represent certain audiences, such as Operation Black Vote, the Federation of Poles in Great Britain or the UK Youth Parliament

4.51 It is important to note that this need not be separate research from that required to meet performance standard 8 of the Commission's *Performance standards for Electoral Registration Officers in Great Britain*.

4.52 Once accessibility practices have been put in place, it is important that the Returning Officer remains responsive to changes in the demographics of the area by actively researching whether further formats or languages are necessary. Monitoring may include:

- meeting regularly with stakeholders such as other local authority departments and community groups, which will help the Returning Officer to stay abreast of such changes
- reviewing feedback about accessibility needs (such as requests for additional translations), which should be logged systematically and reviewed so that new materials or information required can be scheduled and implemented

4.53 The Returning Officer should be able to provide details of how the most accessible method of disseminating information has been decided. Different audiences will need to be approached differently, and a single communication method or format will not necessarily be sufficient to reach all audiences. The Returning Officer should consider and document:

- The communication needs of different audiences; for example, what barriers do they have that may prevent them from participating?

- The communication habits of different audiences – how do they like to receive information? How much detail do they need? What kind of media do they engage with most (e.g. radio, press, face to face or leaflets through the door)?



The Commission's Do Politics Centre at www.dopolitics.org.uk provides a range of free alternative format and translated materials to download and to order in hard copy.

4.54 The Returning Officer should also ensure that signage in polling stations is easily accessible. There are a number of legal provisions regarding signage and information provided in polling stations which are summarised in Section 12, 'Communication', in *Essentials of effective election management: Planning for a local government election in England and Wales*. However, in addition, if the Returning Officer thinks appropriate, all election notices and documentation provided to polling stations, except for the ballot papers, may be provided in alternative languages and formats.



The Commission's *Handbook for polling station staff* includes a polling station set-up list which includes points that should be considered when ensuring that the necessary signage and information are provided in polling stations.

Above the performance standard (level 3)

4.55 To be 'Above the performance standard', in addition to the above, the Returning Officer should also be able to show that they consult with local organisations about ways in which election documents can be improved, and ensures that an evaluation of the accessibility of information is carried out.

Performance standard 7: Communication of information to candidates and agents		Supports vision theme:	
Subject: Participation		User focus – an easy and accessible process for candidates and electors	
This standard aims to ensure that Returning Officers effectively communicate election information to candidates and agents.			
Performance against the standard		Assessment	Evidence to support assessment
Not currently meeting the performance standard	1. The Returning Officer does not ensure that candidates and/or election agents are issued with any written guidance on the nomination process or count procedure. Briefing sessions with candidates and/or election agents are not offered.		
Performance standard	2. The Returning Officer ensures briefing sessions for candidates and/or election agents are offered and that all candidates and/or election agents are issued with written guidance on the election process. The Returning Officer ensures that candidates have the opportunity to have their nomination papers informally checked prior to formal submission of their nomination.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examples of information given to candidates and/or agents • Log of appointments/meetings with candidates
Above the performance standard	3. The Returning Officer, in addition to the above, ensures that an evaluation of the effectiveness of all information provided to candidates and agents and the communication methods used is carried out.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Details of evaluation of information provided

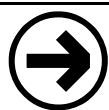
Performance standard 7: Communication of information to candidates and agents

Meeting the performance standard (level 2)

4.56 To meet the 'Performance standard', the Returning Officer should ensure that briefing sessions for candidates and/or election agents are offered and that they are issued with written guidance. Additionally, the Returning Officer should ensure that candidates have the opportunity to have their nomination papers informally checked prior to formal submission of their nomination.

4.57 Information to be provided to candidates and agents through briefing sessions and within the written guidance should include information on the nomination process, postal vote opening, and verification and count process, giving details of what to expect and setting out the procedures to be followed.

4.58 The Returning Officer should also ensure that informal checks of nomination papers are offered to candidates prior to formal submission. Informal checks may help to uncover any errors and allow candidates to submit a fresh nomination paper before the close of nominations. The Returning Officer should consider how they are going to manage this process, for example by putting in place an appointment system.



Section 16, 'Candidates and agents', in *Essentials of effective election management: Planning for a local government election in England and Wales*, and Part B, 'Action before the poll', Section 4, 'Nomination process' of this guidance provide more information on the nomination process and information to be given to candidates and agents.

The Commission has also provided guidance for candidates and agents which can be found on its website at www.electoralcommission.org.uk/guidance/resources-for-electoral-administrators/local-elections.

The Commission's website also provides guidance on election spending at www.electoralcommission.org.uk/guidance/those-we-regulate/candidates-and-agents.

Above the performance standard (level 3)

4.59 To be 'Above the performance standard', in addition to the above, the Returning Officer should also evaluate the effectiveness of all information provided to candidates and agents and the communication methods used. This may include inviting candidates and agents to comment on the information provided.

4.60 It is important to note that this need not be a separate evaluation from that required in performance standard 2. Indeed, if the evaluation of the materials and methods of communication to candidates and agents is covered under the evaluation plan in performance standard 2, this will suffice for evidence to support the assessment for this standard also.

5 Legislation

Sections 9A and 9B, Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000

9A Setting of performance standards

- (1) The Commission may from time to time—
 - (a) determine standards of performance for relevant officers, and
 - (b) publish, in such form and in such manner as they consider appropriate, the standards so determined.
- (2) The standards of performance are such standards as the Commission think ought to be achieved by—
 - (a) electoral registration officers in the performance of their functions;
 - (b) Returning Officers in the administration of the elections specified in subsection (6);
 - (c) counting officers in the administration of the referendums specified in subsection (7).
- (3) Before determining standards under subsection (1), the Commission must consult—
 - (a) the Secretary of State, and
 - (b) any other person they think appropriate.
- (4) The Commission may determine different standards for different descriptions of relevant officers.
- (5) When the Commission publish standards under subsection (1) they must send a copy of the published standards to the Secretary of State who must lay a copy of the published standards before each House of Parliament.
- (6) The elections specified in this subsection are—
 - (a) an election mentioned in section 5(2);
 - (b) a parliamentary by-election;
 - (c) an election under section 9 of the Scotland Act 1998 (constituency vacancies);
 - (d) an election under section 8 of the Government of Wales Act 1998 (vacancies in constituency seats);
 - (e) a local government election in England or Wales.
- (7) The referendums specified in this subsection are—
 - (a) a referendum to which Part 7 applies;
 - (b) a referendum under Part 2 of the Local Government Act 2000.
- (8) For the purposes of this section and sections 9B and 9C, the relevant officers are—
 - (a) electoral registration officers;
 - (b) in relation to elections within subsection (6), Returning Officers;

(c) in relation to referendums within subsection (7), counting officers.

9B Returns and reports on performance standards

- (1) The Commission may from time to time issue directions to relevant officers to provide the Commission with such reports regarding their level of performance against the standards determined under section 9A(1) as may be specified in the direction.
- (2) A direction under subsection (1)—
 - (a) must specify the relevant officer or officers to whom it is issued (and may specify a description or descriptions of relevant officers),
 - (b) may require the report or reports to relate to such elections or referendums (or both) as may be specified in the direction, and
 - (c) may require the report or reports to be provided in a form specified in the direction.
- (3) A report provided to the Commission in pursuance of subsection (1) may be published by the relevant officer to whom it relates.
- (4) The Commission shall from time to time prepare and publish (in such manner as the Commission may determine) assessments of the level of performance by relevant officers against the standards determined under section 9A(1).
- (5) An assessment under subsection (4)—
 - (a) must specify the relevant officer or officers to whom it relates;
 - (b) must specify the period to which it relates;
 - (c) may specify the elections or referendums (or both) to which it relates.
- (6) The Commission must not prepare an assessment under subsection (4) unless they have received reports in pursuance of subsection (1) from the relevant officer or officers for the matters to which the assessment relates.
- (7) Before publishing an assessment under subsection (4), the Commission shall—
 - (a) provide to each relevant officer a copy of those parts of the assessment which relate to him;
 - (b) have regard to any comments made by him regarding the factual accuracy of the assessment.

6 Vision for quality electoral services

<p>In the United Kingdom people have the right to say who governs them. They therefore have a right to vote (or not to vote) in secret, for who they want, in a way that is easy for them, and to have their vote counted. They expect that the core values of public office should be enshrined in electoral services (registration and elections) and should support the modernising and ethical standards agenda in public service.</p>				
	<p>Electors can expect</p>	<p>Candidates and parties can expect</p>	<p>Those involved in administration can expect</p>	<p>Those involved in government and the Electoral Commission can expect</p>
<p>Integrity – a secure process for registration and voting</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To know information about them is accurate and to be clear how it is used • Their vote is confidential and they can make it free from pressure • To know their vote is counted 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Processes which are transparent and checked • Accurate results 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support from bodies such as the Electoral Commission, government departments and local authorities • Independence from political parties • Police, courts and prosecutors who are conversant with electoral law 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The results of any election are accepted by the public and candidates • The voter has confidence in both the process and the results
<p>User focus – an easy and accessible process for candidates and electors</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A voting process that is easy to understand • To have a choice of ways to vote • To be able to vote in a way that suits their lifestyle and needs • Information and advice which is accurate, prompt and easy to understand 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To know how to stand for election • Consistency of approach and realistic timescales • Clarity and impartiality in the process • A clear process of redress 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • External suppliers who deliver what is expected of them 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Electoral staff are proactive in encouraging registration and voting • Participating in democracy seen as part of active citizenship

<p>Professionalism – a clear and consistent approach to delivery</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To know if they are eligible to register and vote • To know how and when to register and what to do if they move • To know where to get information and advice • To know who and what they are voting for • Young people to be educated and registering and voting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Those involved in administration of the process to be fully conversant with electoral law • Consistent application of electoral law and processes • Clear and timely information, advice and guidance • An appropriate balance between speed and quality in the process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That the legislative framework and associated rules are clear and consistently applied • Focused and timely training and guidance • Legislation is introduced in a timely manner • That the electoral service is recognised as a customer facing service 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The service operates in line with the legislation • There is consistency in service delivery
<p>Value for money – efficient and effective service delivery</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective use of public money 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Electoral administrators to have the right skills • Timely quality checks to be carried out 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adequate resources are available to deliver what is expected • Local context, issues and priorities are recognised • Appropriately skilled staff are available in areas such as project management, contract management and Information Communication Technology 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maximum registration of eligible citizens • Maximum participation in elections • Appropriate use of public money

