

New performance standards for Returning Officers

Response to consultation

November 2013

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1 New performance standards for Returning Officers (ROs)

1.1 The Electoral Commission sets standards and monitors and reports on the performance of ROs.¹ The Commission first set standards for ROs in March 2009, and revised the framework in December 2011.

1.2 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 (including those with a power of direction such as Regional Returning Officers), which aims to support ROs in delivering a consistent high-quality service for voters and those standing for election.

1.3 Our consultation set our proposed new approach to performance standards for ROs. It also highlighted how the proposed framework would work at elections where there is a statutory office holder with a power of direction, and set out our proposals for setting standards for such statutory office holders.

1.4 The consultation closed on 14 October 2013 and the new framework has now been finalised, taking into account the feedback we have received.

1.5 This paper summarises the comments we received during the consultation period and sets out our response to the points that were made. It also includes the final standards and an overview of how the new framework will work.

Background

1.6 We want people across the UK to be confident that electoral events are well run, and that they will receive a consistently high quality service, wherever they live and whichever polls are taking place. ROs are personally responsible for the conduct of the poll and we aim to support them in fulfilling their responsibilities in order to deliver the best outcome for voters and those standing for elections.

¹ Sections 9A and 9B of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 (PPERA), as inserted by Section 67 of the Electoral Administration Act 2006.

1.7 Performance standards for ROs were first introduced with the key objective of delivering a greater consistency of practice across Great Britain. The current standards, which were introduced in December 2011, are designed to provide assurances that the necessary planning and preparations are carried out, to ensure that the elections are well-run, and to identify and address any performance issues that may affect the successful delivery of the elections. Since 2011 there has been continuing improvement in performance against the standards, with the majority of ROs meeting the standards at the May 2013 scheduled elections.

1.8 Our research with voters shows high levels of confidence, with nine in ten voters telling us they were confident that the local elections held in many parts of England and on the Isle of Anglesey on 2 May 2013 were well run, and 97 per cent of polling station voters and 96 per cent of postal voters saying that they were satisfied with their experience of voting. This reflects positively on the work undertaken by ROs and their staff to deliver a high-quality service to voters.

1.9 The challenges facing all of those involved in delivering successful elections in the coming years will, however, be significant, and should not be underestimated: there will be major UK-wide elections with the 2014 European Parliamentary elections and the 2015 UK Parliamentary general election; in 2016 there will be elections to the Scottish Parliament and the National Assembly for Wales, Greater London Authority elections and Police and Crime Commissioner elections across England and Wales; and each year there will also be scheduled local elections in parts of England. In addition, the implementation of major changes to the registration system in Great Britain, beginning later this year, will last until after the 2015 elections. And all of this important work is taking place in the context of significant pressures on both central and local government budgets.

1.10 Additionally, we believe that there is still more that can be done to improve the service to voters and candidates in certain areas, including by reviewing the management of ballot paper and poll card printing processes and the management of counts.

1.11 With this in mind, while the Commission is not required to set and monitor performance standards – we have a statutory power to do so, not a duty – we intend to continue with this work, but with modifications to our approach. We intend to apply a risk-based approach to working with ROs to ensure that support can be provided where needed to enable the provision of a high-quality service to voters and those standing for election, and we will place less emphasis on checking that all ROs are achieving a certain minimum level of performance where we have no reason to believe that this wouldn't be the case.

2 Summary of consultation responses

2.1 The consultation paper asked respondents to consider a number of questions on the proposed performance standards framework and how it would work, including whether it would be effective in supporting ROs in delivering a consistent high-quality service for voters and those standing for election.

2.2 All respondents to the consultation welcomed the new approach and there was widespread recognition of the work that has been done to respond to feedback from the electoral community, particularly in respect of the less-prescriptive approach and the risk-based approach to monitoring.

2.3 This chapter summarises the responses we received. Appendix A sets out the new performance standards for ROs, with the amendments made as a result of the consultation shown as tracked changes.

Scope of the new framework

What we proposed

2.4 The new framework was 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

What we sought views on

2.5 We asked respondents whether the new framework would help to ensure a consistent high-quality service of voters and those standing for election, and sought views on whether it focuses on the right outcomes.

What the consultation responses said

2.6 There was general agreement that the framework would support the consistent and effective delivery of elections, and it was noted by several

respondents that it would be an important mechanism for identifying and addressing performance issues that may affect the delivery of well-run polls.

2.7 There was broad support for the outcomes as being the right ones to focus on, with a clear agreement that these were outcomes which all ROs should be aiming to deliver in any case. While the scope of the framework was supported, there were several suggestions for amendments to the wording of the overarching outcomes of the standards to ensure that they fully reflected the content of the standards in each case. These amendments are shown as tracked changes in the final version of the standards set out in Appendix A.

What the RO needs to do

What we proposed

2.8 In developing the new framework, we have built on the lessons we have learned from monitoring the performance of ROs over the last five years, taking into account the experiences of ROs and their staff. We have sought to respond to the feedback we have received, including that received through our recent stakeholder survey. The key areas highlighted to us and which we have worked to address are ensuring that the framework is sufficiently flexible to take account of local knowledge and circumstances, and that our monitoring is focussed on areas where there is the greatest risk to the successful delivery of well-run elections.

2.9 A key change to our approach which reflects the feedback we have received is to avoid being prescriptive about the ways in which things should be done, unless there is a very clear rationale for doing something in a particular way in the interests of voters. This approach aims to ensure that local knowledge and experience can be taken into account in considering the most appropriate way to deliver services using available resources, but still seeks to guarantee that they are provided in such a way as to meet an agreed standard.

2.10 For example, under the current framework, ROs are required to have regard to Electoral Commission guidance when allocating electors and staff to polling stations. Although our guidance does not require ROs to use the recommended ratios it contains, we have until now sought confirmation that ROs have had regard to our guidance and, where they have not adopted these ratios, we have required them to provide an explanation of their alternative approach.

2.11 It remains important that polling stations are properly staffed so that voters receive a high-quality service. We therefore continue to believe that ahead of an election ROs should review their planning assumptions for the provision and staffing of polling stations, taking account of population increases, demographic trends and levels of postal voters, as well as projected turnout. ROs should allocate enough staff to deal with all electors

who may wish to vote, and ensure that the size and layout of the premises used are able to cope with the number of people who want to vote. But while our guidance will continue to include recommended ratios, the proposed new performance standards framework will focus on the need for ROs to undertake proper planning, and leave it for ROs to explain their individual decisions on what is appropriate for their particular local circumstances.

2.12 The information outlined in the new framework as demonstrating whether the key outcomes can be delivered should be the information that an RO will need in order to be confident that the election in their area is well-run and which should enable ROs to demonstrate that they have done everything that they can to ensure that voters and those standing for election receive a consistently high standard of service. The Commission will use this information to identify where there is a risk to the delivery of the outcomes set out above and to provide targeted support to any relevant ROs. Similarly, for elections where there is a statutory office holder with a power of direction, the information will enable them to identify any risks and challenges to the effective delivery of the poll and to recommend or direct local ROs to make any improvements as they see fit.

2.13 The consultation paper also set out a risk-based approach to monitoring performance against the standards, with the key objective of ensuring that support can be provided where needed to enable the provision of a high-quality service to voters and those standing for election. This approach would see less emphasis placed on checking that all ROs are achieving a certain minimum level of performance where we have no reason to believe that this wouldn't be the case. The risk-based monitoring would also be supplemented by monitoring of a random sample of ROs to mitigate the risks which could arise from only monitoring a known sample of ROs.

What we sought views on

2.14 Respondents were asked to consider whether what the framework lists as being what the RO needs to do is the right indicator of whether the key outcomes can be delivered. Views were also sought on whether the information outlined in the standards would demonstrate whether the outcomes can be delivered, and whether there would be any difficulties in supplying any of the information, including whether the provision of it would represent an additional cost for the RO.

2.15 We also asked whether a risk-based approach to monitoring was the right one and if so, whether respondents had any views on specific factors that should be taken into account in assessing risk. In addition, we invited views on how we should collect and review information.

What the consultation responses said

Demonstrating how the outcomes can be delivered

2.16 While the majority of respondents agreed that what is listed as being what the RO needs to do is the right indicator of whether the key outcomes

can be delivered, some respondents highlighted that the list is not exhaustive and that ROs often do more than what is set out in the new framework.

2.17 The framework does not aim to capture all of the activities of the RO, but instead sets out a minimum of what needs to be done to enable the provision of a high-quality service to voters and those standing for election, with a focus on the key areas where there is the greatest risk to the successful delivery of well-run elections. We do, however, understand that there are ROs who are employing good practice and innovations going beyond this minimum, and we intend to develop a mechanism to recognise this, which will operate separate to the performance standards framework (see 'Identifying, recognising and sharing good practice' below).

2.18 In response to feedback, however, we have made an addition to performance standard 1 to reflect the fact that an accurate result is equally important to voters as it is to those standing for election. This addition to standard 1 reflects what is already contained in standard 2, and so does not represent an addition to either what the RO is expected to do or the information to be provided to demonstrate how this is being done.

2.19 A small number of respondents raised concerns about the expectation that ROs should 'ensure poll cards are received as soon as possible' and how this would be assessed at local government elections where an RO might expect certain seats to be uncontested and so delay the distribution of poll cards until they are certain that there will be a contested election. While we understand that not printing poll cards where candidates are elected unopposed is a potential means of saving costs, poll cards tell people about the elections and may encourage their involvement and can often prompt them to update their registration details. While we remain of the view that it is important in all cases to get poll cards to electors as early as possible, it will be for the RO in each case to make an assessment of the optimum distribution date for poll cards in each electoral area, and in any cases where this does not take place until after nominations have closed, we would expect ROs to have considered how they will mitigate the risk of poll cards only being received by electors close to, or potentially after, the registration deadline.

2.20 The definition of the provision of 'written guidance' to candidates was queried by a significant proportion of respondents, and in particular how this would be assessed in light of the fact that the Commission no longer provides printed copies of its guidance for candidates and agents. While we will continue to provide our guidance online, we won't be returning to the provision of hard copy materials, but we are continuing to explore how we can make it more straightforward for ROs to download and print guidance for candidates and agents from our website. In order to be able to achieve the outcome that 'people who want to stand for election receive all the information they need to take part', it is important that ROs ensure that information on the election process and spending is easily available for candidates and agents, both through briefing sessions and written guidance. It need not always be the case that such written guidance must be produced in hard copy – in some instances it may be appropriate for the RO to provide candidates and agents with a link to where they can find the relevant information online – and it will

be for the RO in each case to ensure that candidates can easily access the information they need and to do whatever is necessary to facilitate this. This definition will be reflected in the Commission's guidance on planning for and delivering the polls.

2.21 There was broad agreement that the information set out in the new framework as demonstrating whether the outcomes can be met is currently produced by ROs, and no concerns were raised about supplying any of the information listed or that provision of the information would result in an additional cost for the RO. Some respondents did, however, raise concerns about the format the information should be presented in and whether there was an expectation that particular templates or documents should be used. While the Commission provides guidance, tools and templates for ROs to support them in planning for and delivering elections, we understand that individual ROs will have their own preferences for how to approach this in practice and so we would not expect the information to be provided in a particular format. Instead, we would simply seek to ensure that the information provided demonstrates what is being done to ensure that the outcomes set out in the framework can be delivered.

2.22 The majority of respondents agreed that e-mail was the most appropriate method for submission of information and would cause minimum disruption for ROs during the pre-election period, particularly given that almost all relevant documentation would be stored electronically. In addition to e-mail submission, some respondents suggested that discussions by telephone or a face-to-face visit would be beneficial to enable the RO to explain or provide context to their submission, but that the purpose and scope of such discussions would need to be established in advance to enable their effectiveness to be maximised.

2.23 A number of respondents also highlighted the importance of ensuring that the timescales for providing information are made available well in advance of the submission dates, so that ROs and their staff have sufficient time to ensure that the necessary arrangements are in place. We are committed to delivering this, and will seek to make the timescales for providing information available by six months before each set of scheduled elections. A schedule which sets out when information will need to be submitted in respect of the May 2014 polls can be found at Appendix B.

Risk-based approach to monitoring

2.24 There was strong support for the proposed risk-based approach to monitoring, with acknowledgment that this would be a more appropriate method to identify those ROs who need support than seeking to collect information from all ROs even where there is no reason to believe that there is a risk to the delivery of well-run polls in an area. However, respondents also widely supported the concept of random sampling to work alongside the monitoring of the risk-based sample.

2.25 In terms of the factors to be taken into account in assessing risks, the key factors highlighted as important considerations included inexperience of the RO or their key staff, significant recent changes in staffing structure (for

example, a recent move to shared services), previous performance against the Commission's performance standards, issues that have arisen in previous elections, and particular resourcing challenges, specifically in terms of staffing. These broadly mirror the factors the Commission already considers when assessing risk, and we will ensure that we take these into account in selecting ROs for risk-based monitoring going forwards.

Support

What we proposed

2.26 We will continue to provide advice and guidance to ROs and their staff. As with the guidance that we currently produce for scheduled elections, our core guidance will continue to cover all aspects of the administration of elections to support ROs in planning for and delivering well-run elections, and the new performance standards framework will be embedded throughout it. We will also continue to produce online guidance for candidates and agents on standing for election.

2.27 While support will be provided through our teams across England, Scotland and Wales, we are also keen to explore other options to help support individual ROs where it is needed. We want to encourage and support electoral services teams in establishing and building on existing networks to share experiences and examples through peer support, ensuring that those ROs who need support can benefit from other ROs who have faced similar challenges.

What we sought views on

2.28 We invited views on our approach to delivering support and asked respondents to identify whether there were any other mechanisms for providing support that we should be exploring.

What the consultation responses said

2.29 In terms of support mechanisms, a number of respondents stated that the most effective support could be provided by experienced local ROs and electoral administrators, but acknowledged that during busy election periods this support could be difficult to source. Working with the RROs, we intend to explore how this can be facilitated most effectively at the 2014 polls, with support being provided from within the electoral region where appropriate and possible.

2.30 There was widespread support for enabling electoral services teams to share experiences and examples through peer support by establishing and building on existing networks. Building on the work we are currently undertaking with EROs to support their preparations for the transition to individual electoral registration – which, for example, has included facilitating workshops with EROs and their staff to share learning on the development of

local public engagement strategies – we intend to explore how this can be carried forward into elections work, ensuring that those ROs who need support can benefit from other ROs who have faced similar challenges.

Identifying, recognising and sharing good practice

What we proposed

2.31 We do not believe that the performance standards framework is the most effective mechanism for identifying and recognising good practice, and believe there are better, alternative processes we can put in place to enable good practice to be identified, recognised and shared. The consultation paper proposed working with the EAB and the ERRWG to develop a robust process to enable formal recognition of practices or processes that have been identified as good practice or as showing innovation or excellence. An agreed set of principles could be applied as part of the criteria for deciding when practices are good practice, such as the cost effectiveness of an approach and whether it has resulted in improvements in the experience for voters and those standing for election.

2.32 Good practice examples could also be incorporated into the Commission's core guidance and where relevant be published as part of the Commission's support programme as resources for other ROs to use. We would also want to build on existing networks to share experiences and examples, ensuring that those ROs who need support can benefit from other ROs who have faced similar challenges.

What we sought views on

2.33 As part of the consultation we sought views on the best mechanisms for identifying, recognising and sharing good practice, including what principles could be applied as part of the criteria for determining when practices are 'best practice'.

What the consultation responses said

2.34 There was general support for the principle of identifying, recognising and sharing good practice, and broad agreement that the performance standards framework itself was not the best mechanism for this and so an alternative approach should be considered.

2.35 Respondents identified common themes around the criteria that should be applied in assessing whether something can be considered as good practice. Essentially, to be capable of being defined as good practice, it was widely accepted that processes should in some way be able to demonstrate that they promote one or more of the following principles:

- Integrity
- Transparency
- Accessibility
- Public confidence
- Efficiency
- Consistency
- Cost savings

2.36 The approach we outlined in the consultation paper of working with the electoral community to identify examples of good practice or innovation was broadly welcomed. There was strong support for building on existing networks for this work, with SOLACE and the AEA highlighted as examples of organisations which already have a role in sharing practices between their members. We intend to work with the EAB, at which both of these organisations are represented, and the ERRWG on taking this work forward.

2.37 There were a variety of suggestions received on how good practice once identified should be disseminated, which we will take into account in taking forward our work in this area. These ranged from incorporation of the examples into our guidance and support package to establishing a separate area of our website to highlight good or innovative practices, and recognising good practice as part of our election reporting.

2.38 Further information on the next steps for our work on establishing a robust process for identifying, recognising and sharing good practice can be found in chapter 3 – What happens next, below.

Statutory office holders with a power of direction

What we proposed

2.39 In the consultation paper we set out our intention to continue to monitor the performance of local ROs at elections where there is a statutory office holder with a power of direction, such as an RRO at a European Parliamentary election. Feedback from such statutory office holders at previous elections has demonstrated that they find the monitoring information provided by the Commission useful in co-ordinating the delivery of the polls in their area. We undertook to continue to pass the information on to the relevant RRO so that they can follow up with local ROs and recommend or direct any improvements as they see fit, and proposed that we would work with RROs to help to ensure that local ROs can be provided with the support they need to successfully deliver well-run elections.

2.40 We recognise that there is a risk that inconsistencies may arise between guidance or directions issued by statutory office holders and the requirements of the performance standards framework, and set out how we have sought to mitigate the risk of such conflict. We want the new framework to reflect what

we and the electoral community agree that ROs should be aiming to achieve. Obtaining this shared agreement, along with the amendments we've proposed to enable greater flexibility in how the standards are achieved, should reduce the risk of conflict.

2.41 We also establishing a standard specifically covering the role of statutory office holders with a power of direction, building on the work we did with Police Area Returning Officers at the Police and Crime Commissioner elections in November 2012. The proposed additional standard focusses on the management and co-ordination aspects of the polls, and would be applied with the relevant parts of performance standards 1 and 2.

What we sought views on

2.42 We asked respondents to consider whether the new framework was appropriate for use at elections where there is a statutory office holder with a power of direction, and also whether the new framework would be effective in monitoring the performance of such statutory office holders.

What the consultation responses said

2.43 There was broad agreement that the new framework was appropriate for use at elections where there is a statutory office holder with a power of direction, and no concerns were raised about the potential for conflict between guidance or directions from the statutory office holder and the performance standards framework.

2.44 The proposed extension of the framework to statutory office holders with a power of direction was widely welcomed, and there was general agreement that the proposed standard would be an effective tool for monitoring their performance. Several respondents sought clarification on whether all statutory office holders with a power of direction would be monitored or whether, similar to local ROs, a risk-based approach would be adopted. Given the particular nature of the role, managing and co-ordinating polls across multiple local authority areas, and the infrequency with which it is generally required to be carried out, our intention is to monitor all such statutory office holders. At the European Parliamentary elections in 2014, all RROs will be required to provide the information as set out in performance standard 3, in addition to the relevant parts of performance standards 1 and 2. Further information on how the framework will be applied to RROs for the May 2014 polls can be found in chapter 3 – What happens next, below.

Reporting

What we proposed

2.49 Throughout the period of planning for and delivering an election those ROs who are selected as part of the sample will be asked to demonstrate the activities that have been undertaken to ensure that the key outcomes can be

delivered through the provision of information as set out in the proposed framework. We will review all of the information, using criteria based on our guidance, to ensure a consistent approach is taken in reaching an assessment. We will then provide feedback throughout the election period to those ROs and provide support wherever we have identified that it is required. This will enable ROs to make any changes to their plans and processes to ensure that the key outcomes can be delivered.

2.50 After the election, we will reach an assessment of the performance of those ROs who have been selected as part of the sample. In the consultation paper we proposed establishing a panel, which could include representatives from the EAB and ERRWG, to consider those assessments, particularly in those cases where it appears that an RO does not meet one or more of the standards. For elections where there is a statutory office holder with a power of direction, we would liaise with them before any assessments of their local ROs' performance are considered by the panel.

2.51 In line with our current reporting procedures, we would then write to ROs setting out our assessment of their performance against the standards, giving each RO an opportunity to comment. As is currently the case, any representations received would be considered on a case-by-case basis and responded to before a final decision is made ahead of publication.

2.52 We will continue to include information about the performance of ROs in our election reports.

What we sought views on

2.53 We asked respondents for their views on our proposed approach to making assessments of performance, including the potential establishment of a panel to consider the assessments.

What the consultation responses said

2.54 Respondents were keen that the framework be used to provide support and feedback to ROs, rather than simply as a mechanism to report publicly on performance. While we will seek to make a final assessment of performance after the election, our focus will be on reviewing the information provided and working with ROs in the course of planning for and administering the polls to provide them with feedback and the support that they need, with the objectives of supporting them in delivering well-run polls which provide a consistent high-quality service for voters and those standing for election.

2.55 Many respondents stated the importance of timeliness, transparency and consistency in assessment of performance against the standards. We fully agree that these principles are essential and, as stated in the consultation paper, will continue to make assessments against criteria drawn from our guidance, which is applied equally to all submissions.

2.56 There was broad support for the creation of a panel to review our assessments, and some respondents suggested this panel could also review appeals against assessments. While we don't intend to introduce any further appeals mechanism beyond our current process of considering and responding to representations we receive from ROs before publishing a final assessment of performance, we will now take forward work on the establishment of a panel to consider assessments, including any representations received from ROs, commencing with discussions with the EAB at their December meeting. Further information on how we intend to take this work forward can be found in chapter 3 – What happens next, below.

3 What happens next

3.1 Appendix A contains the new performance standards for ROs, with the amendments made as a result of the consultation shown as tracked changes. The new performance standards framework reflects what we and the UK Electoral Advisory Board agree that ROs need to do to prepare for and deliver well-run elections.

Local Returning Officers

3.2 We will continue to provide ROs with guidance, tools and templates to support them 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. The core guidance for the May 2014 polls will be available on the Commission's website by not later than Friday 20 December.

3.3 A sample of 20% of ROs will be selected for monitoring at the May 2014 polls. The selection of this sample will be principally risk-based, taking into account factors such as the experience of the RO and any previous issues as well as any other available information. We will work with the RROs in the selection of the risk-based sample of local ROs for monitoring. Additionally, the sample will include a random selection of ROs to mitigate the risks which could arise from only monitoring a known sample of ROs

3.4 ROs who are selected to be part of the sample will be notified of that fact by not later than Friday 20 December. A schedule which sets out what information those ROs will need to submit and by when can be found in Appendix B.

3.5 We will, however, keep the sample under review and should issues emerge over the course of an election period we may seek to expand the monitoring to cover additional ROs and to use this to identify and fulfil any additional support needs.

3.6 Where the information provided highlights issues which may impact on the successful delivery of the poll, the Commission's teams across England, Scotland and Wales, working with the relevant Regional Returning Officer (RRO), will seek to provide additional guidance and support as appropriate in each case. Additionally, we want to build on existing networks to share experiences and examples, ensuring that those ROs who need support can benefit from other ROs who have faced similar challenges.

3.7 We will aim to provide any such support as soon as practicable to enable ROs, where necessary, to make any changes to their plans and processes as early as possible, and in any case will provide feedback on the information

provided within five working days of the latest date for submission set out in the schedule.

3.8 In reaching an assessment of the performance of ROs after the election, we intend to establish a panel, including representatives from the EAB and the Elections, Referendums and Registration Working Group (ERRWG), to consider those assessments, particularly in those cases where it appears that an RO does not meet one or more of the standards. We will liaise with the RRO before any assessments of their local ROs' performance are considered by the panel.

3.9 Following this, in line with our current reporting procedures, we will write to ROs setting out our assessment of their performance against the standards, giving each RO an opportunity to comment. As is currently the case, any representations received will be considered on a case-by-case basis and responded to before a final decision is made.

3.10 We will be discussing the establishment of the panel and the process for finalising assessments with the EAB at their December 2013 meeting.

3.11 We will continue to include information about the performance of ROs in our post-election reports.

Statutory office holders with a power of direction

3.12 All RROs at the 2014 European Parliamentary elections will be required to provide the information as set out in performance standard 3. They will also be required to provide information which relates to those parts of performance standards 1 and 2 that are applicable to their role as RRO, which principally covers communication with candidates. A schedule which sets out what information RROs will need to provide and by when can be found in Appendix B.

3.13 As for LROs, we will provide RROs with guidance and templates to support them in the management and co-ordination aspects of the polls. These will set out what we expect RROs 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.

3.14 Where the information provided highlights issues which may impact on the successful management and co-ordination of the poll, the Commission will seek to work with those RROs as appropriate in each case. Additionally, we expect to build on existing networks – principally the EAB and the ERRWG – to share experiences and examples, ensuring that those RROs who need support can benefit from other ROs who have faced similar challenges.

3.15 After the election, we will reach an assessment of the performance of RROs based on the information provided. We will write to them setting out our

assessment of their performance against the standards, giving them an opportunity to comment. Any representations received will be considered on a case-by-case basis and responded to before a final decision is made ahead. We will include information about the performance of RROs in our election reports.

Identifying, recognising and sharing good practice

3.16 We will carry out work to develop a mechanism to enable formal recognition of practices or processes that have been identified as good practice or as showing innovation or excellence

3.17 We will work with the EAB and ERRWG from spring 2014 to establish a robust process for identifying, recognising and sharing good practice, and intend to have the system in place by the end of 2014.

3.18 Once identified, we will seek to reflect good practice examples in the Commission's core guidance and, where relevant, publish these as resources forming part of the Commission's wider support programme for other ROs to use. Good practice examples will also be shared directly with those ROs who we have identified as needing support and may benefit from other ROs who have faced similar challenges.

Appendix A – Performance standards for Returning Officers

The following pages contain the final performance standards for ROs, with the amendments made to the draft standards as a result of comments received during the consultation process shown as tracked changes.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 • Ensure poll cards are received by 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 • Information on the poll easily accessed

	<p>voters as soon as possible so that voters have the maximum amount of time to act on the information</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 	<p>through the local authority website</p>
<p>Voters are satisfied with the experience of voting <u>Voters receive a high-quality service</u></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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

<p>Voters have confidence that their vote will be counted in the way they intended</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 • <u>Ensure count processes are designed and managed to secure an accurate result, with a clear audit trail</u> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Record of the number of postal votes issued, received and opened</u><u>Arrangements to maintain a clear audit trail of the issue, receipt and opening of postal ballot packs</u> • 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 • <u>Arrangements in place to maintain a clear audit trail of the count processes</u>
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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
<p>People who want to stand for election receive all the information they need to take part</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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
<p>Candidates have confidence that the process is well-managed, and have confidence in the results</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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

	<p>attend, with information provided to attendees on the processes to be followed</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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
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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
<p>To ensure that local ROs have the necessary plans and arrangements in place to conduct the <u>deliver well-run</u> elections in their area</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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

	<p>awareness and engaging with electors across the area</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Where appropriate, develop a process for receiving and submitting local results	<p>delivering public awareness activity and engaging with electors across the area</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Arrangements on how you intend to manage the process of collating local results, including any protocols and guidance issued to local ROs
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Appendix B – Schedule for submission of information for May 2014

Local Returning Officers²

Latest date for submission of information to the Commission	What does the RO need to do to achieve the outcome	What will demonstrate how the outcome has been met
24 January 2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and implement robust project management processes • Evaluate planning for and delivery of previous polls and identify lessons learnt, updating plans as required • 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 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project planning documentation which is kept under regular review • Planning documentation reflecting lessons learnt • Processes for dealing with integrity problems
28 February 2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Put in place arrangements to manage contractors and suppliers to ensure that the work is delivered as required by the specification 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arrangements in place for the management of contractors and suppliers • Processes for the proof-checking of voter materials, notice of poll

² Information in italics only applies where the local RO also has a scheduled local government election on 22 May 2014.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure robust processes are in place for ensuring that there are no errors on voter materials, notice of poll and notice of election • 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 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 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 	<p>and notice of election</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information on the method for delivery of poll cards, including an estimation of when poll cards will be delivered • Assessment regarding access needs, identifying any problems and actions taken to remedy these • Approach taken to allocating electors and staff to polling stations • Information on the method for delivery of postal ballot packs, including an estimation of when postal ballot packs will be delivered
28 March 2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure polling station staff are trained to set-up polling stations in such a way that takes account of voter needs • Ensure that those entitled to attend postal vote opening sessions are able to follow what is happening, where and when • Maintain a clear audit trail of the issue, receipt 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guidance/training provided to polling station staff • Layout plan of postal vote opening sessions • Information provided to attendees at postal vote opening sessions • Arrangements for maintaining a clear audit trail of the issue, receipt and opening of postal ballot packs

	<p>and opening of postal ballot packs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 • <i>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</i> • <i>Ensure that candidates have the opportunity to have their nomination papers informally checked prior to their formal submission</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 • <i>Written guidance issued to candidates</i> • <i>Date(s) of briefing sessions and briefing resources</i> • <i>Arrangements in place for candidates to have their nomination papers informally checked prior to formal submission</i>
2 May 2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure count processes are transparent, with everything at the verification and count carried out in clear view of all those entitled to attend, with information provided to attendees on the processes to be followed • Ensure count processes are 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Layout plan of the count • Information provided to attendees at the count • Arrangements in place to communicate progress at the count • Arrangements in place to maintain a clear audit trail of the count processes

	designed and managed to secure an accurate result, with a clear audit trail	
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Regional Returning Officers

Latest date for submission of information to the Commission	What does the RO need to do to achieve the outcome	What will demonstrate how the outcome has been met
24 January 2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 awareness and engaging with electors across the area • Ensure robust processes are in place for ensuring that there are no errors on voter materials, notice of poll and notice of election 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 delivering public awareness activity and engaging with electors across the area • Processes for the proof-checking of voter materials, notice of poll and notice of election
28 March 2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure information on the election process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Written guidance issued to candidates

	<p>and spending is easily available for candidates and agents, including through providing briefing sessions and ensuring they are issued with written guidance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that candidates have the opportunity to have their nomination papers informally checked prior to their formal submission • Ensure count processes are designed and managed to secure an accurate result, with a clear audit trail • Develop a process for receiving and submitting local results • Ensure the results are communicated to voters in a clear and timely way 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Date(s) of briefing sessions and briefing resources • Arrangements in place for candidates to have their nomination papers informally checked prior to formal submission • Arrangements on how you intend to manage the process of collating local results, including any protocols and guidance issued to local ROs • 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
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Appendix C – List of respondents

In addition to receiving feedback in discussions with a number of Returning Officers and representative bodies we received direct responses to our consultation from the following:

Organisations

- Association of Electoral Administrators (AEA) – national response
- AEA London Branch
- AEA Southern Branch
- Electoral Management Board for Scotland

Returning Officers and Local Authorities

- Aberdeen City Council (Deputy Returning Officer)
- Basildon Council (Democratic Services Manager)
- Bolsover District Council (Returning Officer)
- Brighton & Hove City Council (Electoral Services Manager)
- Cheshire West & Chester Council (Democratic Services Manager)
- Derbyshire Dales District Council (Democratic Services Manager)
- Greater London Authority (Greater London Returning Officer)
- Lancaster City Council (Chief Executive)
- Leeds City Council (Returning Officer)
- New Forest District Council (Democratic Services Manager)
- Ryedale District Council (Deputy Returning Officer)
- Salford City Council (Electoral Services Manager)
- Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council (Electoral Services Manager)
- South Ayrshire Council (Returning Officer)
- South Lanarkshire Council (Returning Officer)
- Stratford – Upon – Avon District Council (Democratic Services Manager)
- The Moray Council (Returning Officer)
- Wellingborough Borough Council (Head of Resources)
- West Dorset District Council (Electoral Services Officer)
- West Dunbartonshire County Council (Head of Democratic Services)
- West Lancashire Borough Council (Borough Solicitor)
- Weymouth & Portland Borough Council (Electoral Services Officer)
- Wokingham Borough Council (Electoral Services Manager)