

The  
Electoral  
Commission



# Annual report 2008–9

HC 847



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# Foreword

The Electoral Commission's focus continues to be on the effective regulation of party and election finance and well-run elections and electoral registration. This report summarises the progress we have made towards these important objectives in 2008–9.

The Commission has a critical role in increasing and maintaining public confidence in democracy, and in defending politics itself. Political parties and free and fair elections are vital to democracy. Political parties allow competing views to be debated peacefully. Our ability to choose between those views securely and in private through safe elections, is the foundation that underpins our democracy.

People need to be confident that political parties are funded transparently because our democracy is threatened if this confidence does not exist. The Commission ensures that voters have the information they need about political funding. In 2008–9 we published details of donations to political parties, totalling more than £51 million.

In the past year we took significant steps to strengthen our role as a regulator of party and election finance. The Political Parties and Elections Bill, if passed as expected, will give us more appropriate powers of investigation and a wider and more proportionate range of sanctions when rules are broken. We are committed to being a transparent, accountable and consistent regulator. We ensure that political parties – including their many volunteers – have the information they need to comply with party finance requirements. We will continue to provide advice to parties following any changes in the rules.

An effective regulator cannot operate in isolation from its regulated community and we appreciate the cooperation of political parties in our work. We would particularly like to thank the members of the Parliamentary Parties Panel, the Northern Ireland Assembly Parties Panel, the Wales Political Parties Panel and the Scottish Parliament Political Parties Panel. The panels' input has once again proved invaluable in 2008–9 and we look forward to lively engagement from party staff and volunteers as we consult on our new enforcement policy.

An estimated eight to nine per cent of eligible electors are not on the electoral register. Nobody who wants to vote should be denied that opportunity because they were not aware of the need to register, or it was too difficult for them to register. At the same time, the register needs to be thoroughly accurate. We published 10 performance standards for Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) in July 2008, and our assessment of performance against these standards in April 2009. Eight out of 10 EROs were meeting or exceeding the three standards relating to accuracy and completeness of electoral registration records. But one in five EROs were not meeting the standards relating to their central responsibility. Performance across other areas such as integrity, participation, and planning and organisation was more varied. We want to see all EROs meet all of the standards. This will be a priority for us and them in 2009–10.

We welcome the proposed introduction of individual electoral registration in Great Britain, which we have been calling for since 2003. The right to vote is fundamental, and it is important that individuals take personal responsibility for their registration and that it is straightforward for them to do so. The move to individual registration will lead to a more accurate and secure electoral register. However, it is crucial that this change does not make it more difficult for people to get on to the register. We look

forward to working to implement this important change.

In March 2009, we published seven performance standards for Returning Officers (ROs) covering the management of elections. These standards guided the work of ROs for the European Parliamentary elections and local elections in England in June 2009. We will publish their performance against these standards in autumn 2009 and will work closely with ROs to drive improvements in electoral services for the benefit of voters.

We published a report in August 2008 laying out recommendations to strengthen the system of electoral administration in Great Britain. A key recommendation was the establishment of electoral management boards to create leadership, co-ordination and support for elections in different regions and we look forward to taking the debate on in 2009–10.

We are committed to being an organisation that is effective throughout the UK. We have offices across the UK and we will continue to work to understand and respond to the different needs of voters in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

We would like to thank our hard-working, dedicated and skilled workforce, without whom we would not have realised our achievements in 2008–9. We look forward to building upon this work in 2009–10, ensuring that the interests of the voter are put first in all we do.

We would also like to pay tribute to Sam Younger CBE, our founding Chair, who left the Commission at the end of 2008 after seven years' service. We would like to thank Sam for his central role in making the Commission what it is today.

Peter Wardle, Chief Executive and  
Jenny Watson, Chair

## Our aim

Integrity and public confidence  
in the UK's democratic process

## Our values

**Fair** – we are fair in the way we  
treat each other and the people  
and organisations we deal with

**Impartial** – we are impartial in our  
decisions and actions

**Transparent** – we are transparent  
about how we work

### Jenny Watson – new Chair of the Commission

In January 2009 Jenny Watson became the second Chair of the Electoral Commission since its introduction in 2000. Jenny brings extensive experience in the governance of major public bodies and a keen interest in politics and participation in democracy.

Jenny was the last Chair of the Equal Opportunities Commission prior to the creation of the Commission for Equality and Human Rights, and is a past Deputy Chairman of both the Banking Code Standards Board and the Committee on Radioactive Waste Management. She has worked in a number of human rights organisations, including Liberty and Charter88.

Jenny is also a Commissioner at the Audit Commission and a trustee of the charity Money Advice Trust.



# Integrity and transparency of party and election finance

As the regulator of political party funding in the UK, our role is to ensure transparency and integrity in party and election finance. This is important in maintaining and enhancing confidence in UK democracy.

Political parties, and other regulated organisations and individuals, can accept donations and loans only from certain specified sources. We check that they follow the rules on accepting donations, and publish information about where they get their money and how they spend it.

We are always conscious that political parties are largely reliant on volunteer support. Our aim, therefore, is to ensure that parties and other regulated entities fully understand the rules and comply with them voluntarily. We provide guidance, advice and training to help them meet their legal obligations.

We aim to regulate in a proportionate and risk-based way, in line with the principles of good regulation. We follow up suspected breaches of the law, and take appropriate action when we find evidence that the law has been broken. This can range from issuing a fine for a late report, to referring serious cases to the police or the prosecution authorities for further investigation or possible criminal prosecution.

Political funding is a fast-changing environment, and we work with the Government, political parties, and others who have an interest, to ensure that the legal framework remains relevant and up-to-date.



## Key success measures

- Increasing stakeholder confidence that the financial regulation of political activity is effective and that the Commission operates appropriately in this area.

Our research found that 59% of people were not confident that authorities would take appropriate action if political party finance rules were broken. Sixty-two per cent agree that there is more information available now than in the past about how parties are funded, and how they spend their money.

- Increasing levels of compliance with statutory financial reporting requirements.

It is important that parties comply with statutory financial reporting requirements as it assures electors that the rules are being followed. It also allows us to cross-check different financial information to ensure that this is the case.

Tables 4 to 6 indicate the level of compliance by political parties with statutory reporting requirements during 2008. We have seen improvements in levels of compliance in recent years, especially since 2007, when we began to implement fines for late submissions. Ninety-four per cent of party donation returns and 89% of party borrowing returns were compliant in 2008; whereas in 2005 (prior to reporting obligations for loans) only 63% of parties met the donation return requirements.

### Key success measures (continued)

- Identification of gaps in the legislative framework leading to any necessary amendments.

The Political Parties and Elections Bill was introduced in the UK Parliament in July 2008. The Bill includes important changes to the law to ensure better regulation of party and election finances. We have been calling for these changes for some time (see page 6 for more information).

## Key activities

- 1 Ensure a strategic, risk-based approach to regulation in order to focus resources on high risk areas.

We are in the process of developing a transparent, risk-based approach to our regulatory work. This is important to maintain public and stakeholder confidence in the transparency and integrity of political finances.

- We have drawn on the principles of good regulation set out in the Hampton and Macrory reports to develop a new risk framework.<sup>1</sup> This will help us to develop a better picture of when and how non-compliance might occur, how far it might undermine confidence in the transparency and integrity of political finance, and how likely it is to materialise. It will inform the way we deploy our regulatory resources such as training, audit, monitoring and the analysis of statutory returns.
- In July 2008 the Government introduced the Political Parties and Elections Bill, including new investigatory powers and civil sanctions which will enable us to enforce the law more effectively and proportionately. In January 2009 we published a paper setting out our future approach to investigation and enforcement, to assist Parliament's consideration of the Bill. We will consult publicly on our new risk framework and enforcement policy in summer 2009,

before Parliament is asked to give us access to the new sanctions and powers (see page 6 for more information).

- 2 Adopt a rigorous approach to enforcement where breaches by parties and candidates occur, maintaining effective partnerships with prosecuting authorities.

- We handled 105 allegations of non-compliance with party and election finance laws in the 2008 calendar year.<sup>2</sup> Of these, 78 were closed without action, 24 were closed after an initial review and three were closed following investigation. We resolved 97% of cases involving potential breaches of rules within six months.
- We welcomed the High Court's decision in January 2009 to order the re-hearing of a case concerning impermissible donations to a party. We had brought a judicial review of the decision by the Magistrates' Court to order the party to forfeit only £18,000 of the more than £367,000 in impermissible donations that it had accepted. However, we were concerned that the High Court judgement did not provide the level of clarity needed by the political parties, the Commission or the Magistrates' Court. We will go to the Court of Appeal in July 2009 to argue for the guidance to be clarified and amended.

1 The Hampton Report (*Reducing Administrative Burdens: Effective Inspection and Enforcement*), published in 2005, sets out principles of good regulatory practice including the use of risk assessments, provision of advice and proportionate sanctions. The Macrory Report followed the Hampton Report and focused specifically on sanctions and the principles of good regulation as espoused by the Government's Better Regulation Executive (BRE).

2 The Party and Election Finance Directorate generally operates under a calendar year for compliance purposes.



- We reviewed 867 statements of accounts relating to the 2008 calendar year. We levied 119 penalties for late or non-submission of statements of accounts: 107 to political parties and 12 to accounting units.
- We levied 34 penalties for late or non-submission of quarterly donation returns.
- We levied 28 penalties for late or non-submission of quarterly loan returns.
- We have reviewed our procedures for handling allegations of breaches by parties and candidates. Our strengthened procedures will allow us to manage allegations more effectively now and under the new powers proposed in the Political Parties and Elections Bill. This will mean that voters and those we regulate can be confident that we regulate fairly and effectively.



Raise awareness of the regulatory system and its underpinning principles to promote greater public confidence in the standards we enforce.

- We held training courses at political party conferences to raise awareness of the regulatory system and to help people understand the rules.
- We conducted a series of meetings with parties and third parties about rules for the European Parliamentary elections.<sup>3</sup>
- In Northern Ireland we delivered training to parties about loans controls which were introduced in July 2008.
- We have publicised those cases where we have taken regulatory action, such as asking the courts to order the forfeiture of donations that should not have been accepted. We have also published information about how we will use the new investigatory and sanctioning powers in the Political Parties and Elections Bill.



Improving our regulatory powers: the Political Parties and Elections Bill

Based on our experience in regulating political party finance since 2001, we have been calling for reform to the law on party and election finance. Therefore, we welcomed the Government's decision to introduce the Political Parties and Elections Bill to the UK Parliament in July 2008.

Political parties are made up mainly of volunteers and the regulatory framework needs to take this into account. We need the right powers to act fairly and proportionately when the rules are broken.

The Bill includes a number of measures that we have been calling for, including a broader and more appropriate range of sanctions for those we regulate when they do not comply with the law. These changes will allow us to act proportionately to ensure compliance. They will allow us to, where appropriate, move away from referring a case for criminal investigation or the rigid imposition of a statutory fine, and instead use constructive new approaches. For example, we may decide that it is more appropriate to issue a notice requiring a non-compliant body to take specific steps to become compliant, such as training party officers or amending systems. Another important change proposed is to provide us with the ability to request information from any relevant person in the course of an investigation, rather than just those we regulate.

3 A third party is any individual or organisation that is not standing or fielding candidates at an election, but who campaigns for or against a political party, policy, single issue or candidates at that election.

4 Publish data and analysis about political finances in a timely and accessible manner in order to provide a clearer picture of party finances to the public, media and other external stakeholders.

- Parties registered to contest elections in Great Britain must declare to us each quarter details of donations they have received and loans they have taken. We published both a summary and the full details of donations and loans declared to us each quarter on our website and to the media. We aim to publish details of donations and loans within 20 working days of the statutory deadline for parties to declare the information to us. During 2008–9, we published 98% of loan and donation returns reported to us within this target.

- Parties registered to contest elections in Northern Ireland are required to declare the same information on donations they have received and loans they have taken. However, as required by legislation, permissible donations and loans reported to us are not published.
- We published financial details relating to parties' activity in 2008, which included a total of £51.2 million in donations (including public funds) and £449,000 in new borrowing. Tables 1, 2 and 3 provide a breakdown of these figures. Further details can be found on our website, [www.electoralcommission.org.uk](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk).
- The overall total of outstanding loans held by political parties at the end of 2008 was £20 million.

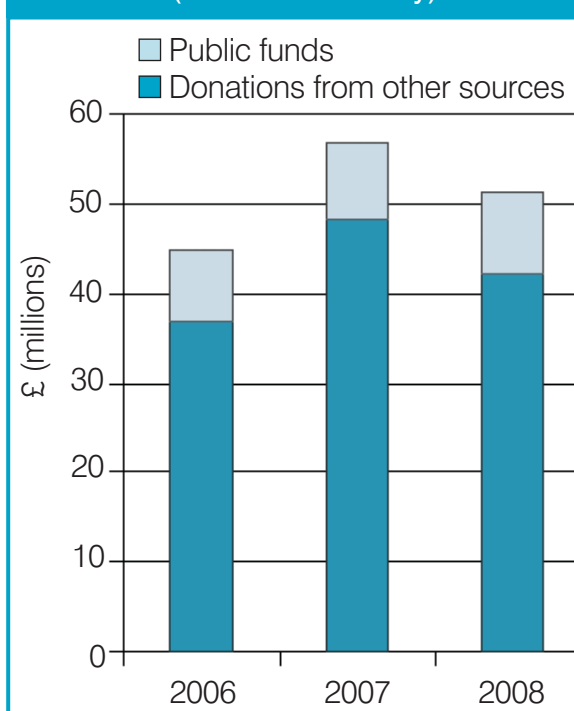
Table 1: Total donations reported for 2008 (Great Britain only)<sup>4</sup>

	Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Quarter 3	Quarter 4	Total
Public funds (£)	2.4m	2.3m	2.0m	2.3m	9.1m
Donations from other sources (£)	8.2m	10.9m	13.6m	9.5m	42.2m
<b>Total (£)</b>	<b>10.6m</b>	<b>13.1m</b>	<b>15.7m</b>	<b>11.8m</b>	<b>51.2m</b>

Table 1a: Year on year comparison of donations (Great Britain only)<sup>4</sup>

	2006	2007	2008
Public funds (£)	8.0m	8.6m	9.1m
Donations from other sources (£)	36.9m	48.2m	42.2m
<b>Total (£)</b>	<b>44.9m</b>	<b>56.8m</b>	<b>51.2m</b>

Figure 1: Year on year comparison of donations (Great Britain only)



<sup>4</sup> Figures provided have been rounded. In some instances this has resulted in a discrepancy between the sum of these rounded amounts and the totals provided.

**Table 2: Total amount of donations reported for 2008 for parties with more than £100,000 in declared income (Great Britain only)<sup>4</sup>**

	Conser- vative	Labour	Lib Dem	Co- op	Plaid Cymru	SNP	UKIP	New Party	Other parties	Total
Public funds (£)	5.6m	0.4m	2.5m	0.0m	0.2m	0.3m	0.0m	0.0m	0.0m	9.1m
Donations from other sources (£)	19.2m	17.5m	3.0m	0.8m	0.6m	0.2m	0.2m	0.1m	0.2m	42.2m
<b>Total (£)</b>	<b>24.8m</b>	<b>18.0m</b>	<b>5.6m</b>	<b>0.8m</b>	<b>0.8m</b>	<b>0.5m</b>	<b>0.2m</b>	<b>0.1m</b>	<b>0.2m</b>	<b>51.2m</b>

**Table 3: Breakdown of borrowing (£) taken in 2008 by Conservative / Labour / Liberal Democrat / Plaid Cymru / Scottish National Party and other parties<sup>4</sup>**

	(£000)	Conser- vative	Labour	Lib Dem	Plaid Cymru	SNP	Other parties	Total
Loans	Taken	51	237	15	56	13	63	434
	Repaid	79	4,291	29	108	0	62	4,569
Credit facilities	Taken	15	0	0	0	0	0	15
	Repaid	0	5	3	0	0	0	7
Connected transactions	Taken	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Repaid	0	0	0	0	0	10	10

**Key for tables 2 and 3:**

 Lib Dem = Liberal Democrats  
 SNP = Scottish National Party

 Co-op = The Co-operative Party  
 UKIP = United Kingdom Independence Party

**Table 4: Donation returns received for 2008 within statutory deadlines**

	Jan–Mar	Apr–Jun	Jul–Sep	Oct–Dec
Registered parties	327	327	318	335
Compliant	88.6%	93.6%	96.3%	97.5%
Non-compliant	11.4%	6.4%	3.7%	2.5%

Table 5: Borrowing returns received for 2008 within statutory deadlines

	Jan–Mar	Apr–Jun	Jul–Sep	Oct–Dec
Registered parties	327	327	318	335
Compliant	79.5%	85.9%	95.2%	97.0%
Non-compliant	20.5%	14.1%	4.8%	3.0%

Table 6: Statement of accounts received in 2008

Statement of accounts	Received	Late / non-submitted	On time
Political parties	347	119	65.7%
Accounting units	520	12	97.7%

5 Encourage high levels of party and candidate compliance with current and new controls on political finances by providing clear, timely and practical guidance tailored to the needs of regulated bodies whilst minimising the administrative burden on them.

- We consulted in 2008 on proposals to introduce standard requirements for the annual statements of accounts that registered political parties must submit to us. Following discussions with political parties on these proposals and initial drafts of the new guidance, we have concluded that there are important transparency benefits to be gained by a mandatory approach to the reporting of parties' accounts, but that it will be impractical to introduce it before 2011. Our aim is to achieve the required level of transparency while imposing the minimum necessary burden on parties and their staff, many of whom are volunteers.
- We provide a year-round enquiry service. We responded to 1,396 enquiries in 2008–9 regarding party election finance issues. We responded to 93% of routine requests for information within five working days and are focusing on improving this service to meet peak demand.
- We provided written responses to queries from parties, candidates and agents on complex issues. This included issuing one formal advisory opinion.
- We continued to provide guidance materials for those we regulate. These included guidance on donations and loans for political parties and guidance for regulated donees.
- We published guidance for political parties, candidates and third parties for the May 2008 elections and June 2009 elections. This covered issues such as election spending controls and reporting of donations.
- As part of our work to revise the party registration process, we developed a new simple guide for those considering registering a political party, so that they can more easily understand their responsibilities.
- We are undertaking a complete review of the structure, format and delivery of the guidance we provide to those we regulate. We have conducted interviews with users of our guidance to gain their feedback and have reviewed the guidance and training provided by other regulators. During 2009–10 we will be issuing revised materials in light of the review. We are also taking early action in developing guidance on the new regulatory requirements in the Political Parties and Elections Bill.



- Significant development work has taken place on an online system which will allow those we regulate to submit statutory information electronically. This will improve the range of information available to both the Commission and stakeholders. Work will continue on this system in 2009–10.

**6 Use the party registration process to confirm the capacity of each party to meet the requirements of the legal framework.**

Political parties are required to register with us to contest elections in the UK. With registered status comes responsibilities, and we aim to ensure that parties understand their responsibilities and carry them out. We hold one register of political parties for Great Britain and another for Northern Ireland.

- During the registration process for political parties we discuss the legislative requirements with the prospective applicant to ensure that they understand their statutory obligations.
- 365 parties were registered with us at 31 December 2008. Twenty-six new parties registered with us during 2008, 97% of which were registered within 20 working days of receipt of their application. We also de-registered 35 parties in 2008 for failure to submit annual confirmation of registered details as required, aiding our ability to effectively regulate active political parties.

**7 Distribute public funds to political parties efficiently and fairly.**

The Commission administers a grant scheme to support policy development by political parties. Under this scheme, the £2 million annual allocation is divided between eligible parties to cover the costs of developing policies for inclusion in their manifestos. The funds cannot be used by parties on routine expenditure or campaigning. Eligible parties are those that,

on 7 March each year, have at least two Members of the House of Commons who have taken the oath of allegiance and are not disqualified from sitting or voting in the House. Since 2004 we have called for eligibility to be extended beyond those parties with representation at Westminster, to include parties with at least two sitting members in either the House of Commons, European Parliament, Scottish Parliament, Welsh Assembly or the Northern Ireland Assembly.

- In 2008–9 there were seven parties eligible for a grant. We received 48 grant claims and distributed £1,835,015 in grants.
- In September and October 2008 we held meetings with all parties that receive a grant to review their claims for the 2007–8 financial year.

**8 Monitor the legal framework for regulation of political finances to ensure the rules are appropriate in the light of changes to the wider political environment, making recommendations for changes to the law, as necessary.**

- In July 2008 the Government introduced the Political Parties and Elections Bill. This proposes a series of changes to the law, many of which are based on our recommendations. See page 6 for more information on the Bill.
- Our work under this activity during 2008–9 focused on the Bill. We worked closely with the Government on the development of the Bill, responding to the Government’s White Paper and engaging with the Ministry of Justice on policy development. We also provided briefings to Parliament and interested stakeholders on the Bill and the potential changes it could bring about for the regulation of political finances.



# Complete and accurate electoral registers supported by a well-run electoral registration process

We want electoral registers to be as complete and accurate as possible. This means that every person who is entitled to be on the electoral register is on it, and that there are no false entries.

Those entitled to vote should be confident that registering is as straightforward, accessible and secure as possible. We also want them to receive a consistently high-quality service wherever they live.

It is estimated that eight to nine per cent of eligible electors are not on the electoral register. It is important that this situation is improved while maintaining the accuracy of the electoral register.

We believe that the introduction of individual electoral registration in Great Britain is crucial to ensure that the electoral register is comprehensive, accurate and secure. We also believe that it is important that individuals take responsibility for their own registration. We have been calling for individual electoral registration for a number of years and welcomed the Government's decision to introduce it as part of the Political Parties and Elections Bill.

Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) are responsible for compiling and maintaining complete and accurate electoral registers. The UK Government is responsible for the legal and funding framework that enables EROs to fulfil their responsibilities.

Our role is to monitor the performance of EROs through our performance standards framework and research programme, to highlight where electoral registration is run well and to challenge both EROs and the Government when the service or the legal and funding framework is not up to standard. We provide support to enable improvements in electoral registration practice. We also run UK-wide public information campaigns to make sure that people understand how to register to vote and to encourage them to do so. These campaigns target groups that have particularly low registration rates such as young people, people who have recently moved home, those in private rented accommodation and some minority ethnic communities.



## Key success measures

- [Performance standards framework for electoral registration established by September 2008.](#)

We published 10 performance standards for EROs in July 2008. We received positive and constructive engagement from electoral administration professionals during the development of the standards. We are confident that they target the main areas that EROs should be focusing on to achieve complete and accurate electoral registers.

- [An increase in the percentage of electors in Great Britain whose local authorities are meeting electoral registration performance standards, from January 2009 onwards.](#)

In April 2009 we published performance against the standards. This was the first such assessment, and will be used as a benchmark against which improvement will be



### Key success measures (continued)

measured in 2009–10. Eighty-five per cent of electors live in local authority areas where the ERO is meeting the performance standards relating to accuracy and completeness of electoral registration records. One in five EROs were not meeting these standards regarding their central responsibility. Performance across other areas such as integrity, participation, and planning and organisation was more varied. We want to see all EROs meeting all standards and will work with them to improve performance (see page 13 for more information).

- **An increase in the proportion of the eligible voting-age population registered to vote.**

There is no exact measure of the eligible voting-age population in the United Kingdom. It is therefore not possible to calculate a precise estimate of the proportion of this population registered to vote. However, Office for National Statistics data shows an increase in the number of electors on the UK local government electoral register of 0.5%, or 227,374 electors, between December 2007 and December 2008. The total number of electors on the UK local government electoral register at December 2008 was 46,147,877.

- **Stakeholder satisfaction with our advice and guidance materials on registration.**

We introduced an updated and extended suite of guidance materials in 2008–9. We will evaluate these materials in 2009–10.

## Key activities

**9** Establish and operate a performance standards framework to support improvements in the accuracy and completeness of electoral registers, targeting our support in areas of demonstrated need.

- Performance against the standards established for EROs was published in April 2009. Following this we produced an action plan to help drive continuous improvement in performance. See page 13 for more information.
- This performance standards framework does not apply to Northern Ireland. We believe that appropriate performance standards should be introduced in Northern Ireland.

**10** Ensure that EROs are clear about their statutory responsibilities and have access to appropriate tools and resources to assist in the compilation and updating of registers.

- We updated our guidance manual for EROs, which provides information on the full range of their responsibilities.
- We provided a range of resources to help EROs plan and conduct the 2008 annual canvass. This included canvass-specific guidance, planners, risk logs and presentations for staff training sessions.
- We provided a year-round enquiry service for EROs and electoral administrators. We responded to 270 enquiries relating to electoral registration through this service.
- We ran seminars before the May 2008 and June 2009 elections, and published guidance and support materials specific to the elections. As this work provided guidance on both electoral registration and the management of elections, we have reported it under our third objective: Well-run elections and referendums which produce results that are accepted (see page 18 for more information).



## Measuring the standard of electoral registration in Great Britain

Electoral registration is the cornerstone of our electoral system. Electors deserve an electoral registration service which delivers complete, accurate and secure electoral registers.

In July 2008, we published and laid before the UK Parliament 10 performance standards for EROs in England, Scotland and Wales. The standards were developed following extensive consultation with local authorities and other stakeholders, and came into effect before the autumn annual canvass of electors. The standards covered a wide range of performance issues for this vital public service function, including improving the accuracy and integrity of the register as well as promoting participation and planning.

EROs were asked to perform a self-assessment of performance against the standards. One hundred per cent of EROs submitted information to us. Following our verification of 30% of the self-assessment returns, we published performance against the standards in April 2009. Table 7 summarises the results of this assessment.

**Table 7: Results from assessment of performance standards for EROs**

Subject area	Performance standard	% of electors living in local authority areas where the ERO is performing below the standard	% of electors living in local authority areas where the ERO is performing at the standard	% of electors living in local authority areas where the ERO is performing above the standard
Completeness and accuracy of the electoral register	Standard 1: Use of information sources	4.5	39.6	55.9
	Standard 2: Property database	0.3	72.3	27.4
	Standard 3: House-to-house enquiries	14.1	67.2	18.7
Integrity	Standard 4: Integrity	32.8	54.3	12.9
	Standard 5: Supply and security	0.9	46.9	52.2
Public awareness	Standard 6: Public awareness	61.0	33.1	5.9
	Standard 7: Working with partners	27.9	57.0	15.1
	Standard 8: Accessibility and communication of information	10.7	81.4	7.9
Planning and organisation	Standard 9: Planning	19.9	68.4	11.7
	Standard 10: Training	5.7	75.2	19.1



### Measuring the standard of electoral registration in Great Britain (continued)

The assessment found that 85% of electors live in local authority areas where the ERO is meeting the performance standards relating to accuracy and completeness of electoral registration records. One in five EROs were not meeting these standards regarding their central responsibility. Performance across other areas such as integrity, participation, and planning and organisation was more varied.

We want to see all EROs meeting all of the standards. The 2009 annual canvass of electors is likely to be the final one prior to a UK Parliamentary general election and the introduction of individual electoral registration. It is crucial that performance is improved prior to this point. We plan to meet all EROs who did not meet the standards relating to accuracy and completeness of electoral registration records and agree with them an action plan to improve performance. We will also work closely with EROs who did not meet the standards in other areas to drive improvement.

#### 11 Establish and operate a financial information reporting regime which enables us to identify any funding barriers to the completeness and accuracy of electoral registers.

- In September 2007, following the development of a financial information survey in conjunction with the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, we requested that Returning Officers (ROs) and EROs from a selection of local authorities submit information about their expenditure at the conclusion of the 2007–8 financial year.
- By July 2008, we had received information from a total of 347 ROs and EROs, representing a return rate of 86%. Following analysis of this information, results will be published in summer 2009.
- Headline findings regarding voter registration included:
  - The estimated total expenditure on electoral registration across Great Britain was £78.6 million.
  - Expenditure per elector across Great Britain was £1.80, with expenditure in Scotland (£2.58) higher than that in England (£1.74) and Wales (£1.64).

- Our aim is to help ensure that adequate and appropriate resources are available to deliver electoral registration. We believe that the information we have collected will provide greater transparency about the way electoral registration is funded.
- Over time, this work will enable us to identify any relationship between funding and performance. In 2009–10, we plan a further round of collection and analysis of financial data from the 2008–9 financial year.

#### 12 Work with EROs, political parties, the police, and prosecuting authorities in devising strategies and tools to promote integrity in the electoral registration process.

- We ran a range of seminars and produced a number of guidance products to combat fraud around the May 2008 and June 2009 elections. As this work covered the prevention of fraud in both the electoral registration process and at elections, we have reported it under our third objective: Well-run elections and referendums which produce results that are accepted (see page 19 for details).



**13** Deliver public information campaigns, targeted particularly at under-registered groups, to improve the completeness of the register.

- We ran public information campaigns to promote registration ahead of the May 2008 Greater London Authority elections and local elections across England and Wales. The campaign for the London elections was run in partnership with London Elects. The campaigns resulted in more than 117,000 orders for voter registration forms through our call centre, text response service or by downloading from the [aboutmyvote.co.uk](http://aboutmyvote.co.uk) or London Elects' websites (see page 16 for more information).
- We conducted targeted campaigns throughout the year focusing on under-registered groups including service personnel, British citizens living abroad, students and recent home-movers. Key results from these campaigns included:
  - service personnel – 4,200 packs were distributed to service units across the world including voter registration forms and posters
  - British citizens living abroad – 3,700 voter registration forms were downloaded from [aboutmyvote.co.uk](http://aboutmyvote.co.uk)
  - students – 8,900 voter registration forms were downloaded from [aboutmyvote.co.uk](http://aboutmyvote.co.uk) and 326 ordered via text message
  - recent home-movers – 90,000 records were added or amended to electoral registers (included 84,500 from the campaign in Great Britain and 5,500 from the campaign in Northern Ireland)<sup>5</sup>
- Through our partnership grants programme, we continued to support 18 third-sector organisations to promote registration among particularly under-represented groups.

This included projects conducted by Operation Black Vote, Barnardo's and Rethink.

**14** Undertake a rolling programme of research to increase understanding of why registers are incomplete or inaccurate, and how to tackle these weaknesses.

- We began a review into the accuracy and completeness of a sample of local authority electoral registers.<sup>6</sup> These case studies will support our monitoring of the quality of registers across Great Britain. We expect to report results from this work in early 2010.
- In September 2008, we published a report on the accuracy and completeness of the Northern Ireland electoral register.<sup>7</sup> The report found that the register published on 1 December 2007 was estimated to be 94% accurate and contained an estimated 83% of the eligible population. Non-registration was more likely among young people aged 18–24 and people who had been at their current residence for less than one year. The key source of inaccuracy was registered voters moving within Northern Ireland without notifying the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland, with other sources including deceased persons remaining on the register and people moving out of Northern Ireland without notifying the Electoral Office. This research provides a benchmark measure of the accuracy and completeness of the Northern Ireland register, two years after the introduction of continuous registration. This research will allow us to make informed comment on the status of the electoral register ahead of the next UK Parliamentary general election and local government and Northern Ireland Assembly elections in 2011.

<sup>5</sup> Estimation of Great Britain-wide result based on the 55,323 registrations reported from the 269 local authorities who responded to request for information. This activity took place in quarter four of 2007–8 but as results were not available until July 2009, it has been reported here.

<sup>6</sup> 'Completeness' is a measure of under-registration, i.e. assessing whether every person who is entitled to be registered is on the electoral register. 'Accuracy' refers to the number of false entries on the register.

<sup>7</sup> For the purposes of this study 'accuracy' referred to whether the addresses of those on the register were correct.



15

Monitor electoral registration law and promote changes that will facilitate improvements to the accuracy and completeness of electoral registers, including the introduction of individual electoral registration in Great Britain.

- We welcomed the Government's decision to introduce individual electoral registration in Great Britain through the Political Parties and Elections Bill. We have been calling for this for a number of

years. It will lead to a more accurate and secure electoral register and allow individuals to take personal responsibility for their registration. We will play a central role in ensuring that individual electoral registration is implemented effectively, and we are developing plans to fulfil this responsibility.



## If you want to vote, make sure nothing stops you – our voter registration campaigns

An estimated eight to nine per cent of eligible electors are not on the electoral register. As part of our work to improve this situation, we run public information campaigns to encourage voter registration.

As with all major electoral events, we ran campaigns before the May 2008 elections to the Greater London Authority and local elections in England and Wales. Our campaign for the London elections was run in partnership with London Elects – an independent body reporting to the Greater London Returning Officer.

Our campaigns target groups less likely to be on the electoral register, including young people, people in private rented accommodation, and certain minority ethnic communities. The key message is that you have to register in order to vote. We present this in a humorous and light-hearted way, which we know from past campaigns is the most effective way to reach under-registered groups.

The 2008 campaigns used advertising through a range of media channels including television, radio, press and online. The advertising was supported by editorial coverage across print and electronic media.

The campaign for the London elections was our most successful in recent years. We distributed more than 88,000 registration forms during the campaign period through downloads from our website, orders to our call centre and field marketing activity. For the first time, we also provided a service that allowed people to order a registration form by sending a text message.

Our campaign for the England and Wales local elections was also successful, with more than 28,000 voter registration forms ordered. The campaign was analysed by the Central Office of Information, which compared its results to other recent public sector campaigns. They found that of the 18 campaigns included in the analysis, ours represented best value in terms of cost per active response (an active response to our campaign was defined as an order or download of a voter registration form).

We produced a range of resources for local authorities and community groups to use for their own public awareness work around the elections. Working with partners in this way will continue to be a key element of our public information campaigns.



# Well-run elections and referendums which produce results that are accepted

We want electors to be confident that the process of casting their vote is as straightforward as possible, and that their votes are counted accurately. Electors can expect the process of voting to be secure, with no unnecessary barriers to voting.

Returning Officers (ROs) are responsible for the conduct of elections in the UK. The UK and Scottish Governments are responsible for the legal and funding frameworks that enable ROs to fulfil their responsibilities.

Our role is to monitor performance through the performance standards framework and research programme, to highlight where elections are well run and to challenge both ROs and the Government where the legal and funding framework, or the service received by electors, needs to be improved. We provide support and advice to those involved in elections – including ROs, electoral administrators, candidates and agents – to ensure a strong and transparent system of election management for the benefit of voters.

In 2008–9, our work in this area covered the 2008 local government elections in England and Wales, the 2009 elections to the European Parliament and the 2009 local government elections in England.



## Key success measures

- Performance standards regime for elections and referendums fully established for the 2009 elections.

We published seven performance standards for ROs in March 2009. The standards cover all aspects of the work of ROs, including planning the election process, communicating with parties, candidates and potential voters, and maintaining election security. The standards will apply to the work of ROs for the June 2009 elections and thereafter (see page 19 for more information).

- An increase in the percentage of electors in Great Britain who are serviced by local authorities meeting elections and referendum performance standards, from the scheduled May 2009 elections onwards.

We will publish information about the performance of ROs against the standards at the June elections in autumn 2009. We will use the percentage of electors serviced by local authorities meeting the standards as a baseline from which we will look to drive improvement for future elections and referendums.

- Stakeholder satisfaction with our election support programme and training materials.

We received positive feedback from ROs about our support programme and training materials for the May 2008 elections. Some suggestions for improvement were made which were considered when developing our programme and materials for the June 2009 elections.



### Key success measures (continued)

- Increased public satisfaction with the voting experience in the UK.

Our research shows that 75% of electors are satisfied with the process of voting at elections. This percentage has remained relatively stable since we began to monitor this in 2003. It is important that electors are satisfied with the process of voting and through our performance standards framework we are working with ROs to improve public satisfaction.

## Key activities

16

Establish and operate a performance standards framework to support improvement in the quality of election and referendum management, targeting our support on areas it is most needed.

- We undertook a survey of ROs in Great Britain to identify appropriate areas of focus for the performance standards framework. We had an 87% response rate to this survey and used the information received to develop draft standards.
- Following consultation with electoral administrators, Government, and others with an interest in the management of elections, we developed seven final standards which were published and laid before the UK Parliament in March 2009. These standards came into effect for the June 2009 elections (see page 19 for more information).
- This performance standards framework does not yet apply to Northern Ireland. We believe that appropriate performance standards should be introduced in Northern Ireland.

17

Ensure that ROs are clear about their statutory responsibilities and have access to appropriate resources to support them in managing elections and referendums.

- We provide a year-round enquiry service for ROs and electoral administrators. In 2008–9 we responded to over 300 enquiries from electoral officials specifically regarding the management of elections.

- We ran seminars for ROs and electoral administrators following the May 2008 elections. The seminars provided an opportunity to share knowledge and experiences from the elections and provide feedback on the support and resources we provided.
- We published a range of resources for the June 2009 elections including a comprehensive guidance manual for ROs, polling station handbooks, presentations for use in training polling station staff and guides on managing doubtful ballot papers. We established a working group of electoral administrators, nominated by Regional Returning Officers (RROs), and consulted them throughout the development of this guidance.
- We also worked with RROs to deliver seminars on key operational issues before the June 2009 elections. The seminars aimed to ensure consistency in the administration of elections both within and across electoral regions.

18

Establish and operate a financial information reporting regime to enable us to identify and tackle any funding barriers to well-run elections.

- In September 2007, we requested information from ROs and Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) in Great Britain about their expenditure at the conclusion of the 2007–8 financial year (see page 14 for more information on this survey).



## → Setting standards for well-run elections

In March 2009, we published performance standards for ROs in England, Scotland and Wales. The standards, which came into effect for the June 2009 elections, will apply to their work managing all future elections across Great Britain, with the exception of local government elections in Scotland.

The seven standards were developed in consultation with electoral administrators, the Government and other parties interested in how elections are run. They cover all aspects of the work of ROs, from planning the poll and communicating with candidates and potential voters (for example, making sure voters know where and how to vote) to maintaining election security (for example, by ensuring links are developed with the local police).

The standards, which were laid before the UK Parliament, relate to:

- skills and knowledge of the ROs
- planning processes in place for an election
- training
- maintaining the integrity of an election
- planning and delivering public awareness activity
- accessibility of information to electors
- communication of information to candidates and agents

The performance standards framework will provide a valuable tool to help us drive improvements in the management of elections. We will publish performance against the standards in autumn 2009, and voters will be able to view the performance of their local RO on our website. We will use the information gained through this assessment, along with our knowledge from observing the 2009 elections, to develop an action plan to ensure continuous performance improvement.

- Key findings regarding the management of elections included:
  - The estimated total expenditure on elections management across Great Britain was £78.7 million.
  - Expenditure per elector in Great Britain was £1.94, with expenditure in Scotland (£4.14) higher than that in England (£1.74) and Wales (£1.56). The higher spend in Scotland was mainly due to electronic counting being used for the Scottish Parliamentary elections in 2007.
- Our aim is to help ensure that adequate and appropriate resources are available to deliver elections. We believe that the information we have collected will provide greater transparency about the way elections are funded.

- Over time, this work will enable us to identify any linkages between funding and performance. In 2009–10, we plan a further round of collection and analysis of financial data from the 2008–9 financial year.

19

**Work with ROs, political parties, the police, and prosecutors in devising strategies and tools to promote electoral integrity.**

Electors need to feel confident that their vote is secure and that they are participating in fair and transparent elections. Electoral malpractice severely damages this confidence. We work with partners to ensure that the scale and nature of electoral malpractice is understood and appropriate action is taken when allegations are made.



- We published a report on electoral malpractice allegations at the May 2008 elections, in partnership with the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) Police National Information and Co-ordination Centre. The report found that the elections were free from major incidents of electoral fraud, and that there were no elections in which the outcome was challenged on the grounds of, or shown to have been affected by, incidents of electoral malpractice. Of a total of 103 cases of alleged electoral malpractice, one case resulted in a conviction and nine resulted in a caution. In 82 cases police decided to take no further action. Thirteen cases are still under investigation or awaiting a decision by the Crown Prosecution Service. The report was the first of its kind in the UK and sets a benchmark for the analysis of electoral fraud in future elections.
- In our continuing efforts to work with partners to combat electoral fraud, we undertook significant work before the May 2008 and June 2009 elections.
  - We held electoral integrity round-table meetings following the elections in 2008 and in preparation for the elections in 2009. These were attended by EROs, ROs, electoral administrators, political parties, Government officials, the police and prosecution authorities. The meetings allowed for the sharing of experience in combating electoral malpractice and fraud.
  - We held a training event for police Single Points of Contact (SPOCs) in England and Wales in partnership with the ACPO. The event was well attended by police forces, electoral administrators and political parties. We held a similar training event in Scotland in partnership with the ACPO in Scotland.
  - We held seminars in England, Scotland and Wales for police SPOCs and electoral administrators. The seminars allowed for the sharing of knowledge

and techniques for the prevention, detection and prosecution of fraudulent electoral activity.

- In partnership with the ACPO and the ACPO in Scotland, we produced guidance for police in preventing and detecting electoral malpractice. This included a pocket guide for police officers.
- We produced a pocket guide for political party workers to support the integrity of postal voting.
- We produced a pocket guide for Royal Mail drivers and delivery staff to provide information on how to detect and report suspicious activity involving postal voting.

20

Ensure that political parties and candidates are clear about their statutory entitlements and responsibilities and have access to appropriate resources to help them comply with electoral law and meet standards of good practice.

- We published guidance for political parties and candidates ahead of the May 2008 and June 2009 elections, covering topics including nomination requirements, rules around campaigning and rules on spending and donations.

21

Produce timely and influential reports on the administration of elections and referendums, and evaluation reports on any electoral pilot schemes designated by the Government. Make recommendations for improvements in election law and process, including an examination of electoral administration structures.

- We published separate reports for England and Wales on the administration of the local elections that took place in May 2008. Both reported that overall the elections ran relatively smoothly, with fewer problems than the elections in 2007. We were pleased that almost all ROs checked personal identifiers on



- 100% of returned postal voting statements, despite electoral law requiring only 20% to be checked. We have again called on the UK Government to make it mandatory for all postal voting statements to be checked.
- We published a report on the administration of the Greater London Authority elections that took place in May 2008. While there were few problems that would have been visible to voters, our report highlighted significant concerns about the use of electronic counting, including apparent discrepancies between the numbers of ballot papers recorded as having been issued and the numbers scanned, and errors in the transmission of results data to the central count centre at City Hall. In particular, we are concerned about the reduced transparency of electronic counting systems compared with counting ballot papers by hand, and the high level of technical knowledge required to understand and properly scrutinise electronic counting. We continue to call on the UK Government to put in place a clear national strategy for electronic counting before it is used in future elections, including carrying out a full cost-benefit analysis of electronic counting, an analysis of the legal changes required to support it, and appropriate safeguards to ensure that electronic counting is accurate and transparent.
  - We published reports on the UK Parliamentary by-elections at Crewe and Nantwich, Henley-on-Thames, Haltemprice and Howden, Glasgow East and Glenrothes. Although the elections were well run, we highlighted that the short timetable for UK Parliamentary elections could make it difficult for people to register to vote in time for polling day. We have recommended that the election timetable should be increased to 25 working days, consistent with the timetable for local government elections.
  - We published reports on the structures for the delivery of electoral administration across the UK. These reports made recommendations to governments, ROs, EROs and the Electoral Commission itself on improving the administration of elections for the benefit of voters (see page 22 for more information).
  - We conducted research into the usability and accessibility of voting materials such as ballot papers, notices in polling stations and booths, postal voting statements and accompanying guidance. We identified a number of issues concerning the design of current materials. As a result, we will be producing UK-wide standards for voter materials.
- 22** Maintain a constant state of readiness to support a UK Parliamentary general election and to oversee the conduct of a referendum.
- Plans are in place to ensure that we are prepared for a general election whenever it may be called. These plans were continually updated in 2008–9.
- 23** Scrutinise new electoral and referendum law to ensure it is practicable and robust.
- We responded to a number of government consultations including:
    - The Department for Communities and Local Government's consultation on the intelligibility of draft referendum questions on local government governance issues. Our work included commissioning user-testing of the Government's draft questions and some alternatives, in order to help us establish the likely experience of voters when reading referendum questions.



- The Department for Communities and Local Government's consultation on combining the 2009 local elections in England with the European Parliamentary elections. We recommended combining the elections because it would be less confusing for electors, facilitate administrative efficiency and effectiveness, potentially reduce costs and facilitate proper accounting for election expenditure by political parties and candidates.
- The Ministry of Justice's consultation on weekend voting. Our view was that there was not sufficient evidence to support a move to weekend voting at this point, but that the issue should be considered as part of an electoral modernisation strategy which we have called on the Government to produce.
- The Northern Ireland Office's consultation on improvements to the administration of Northern Ireland Assembly elections. We welcomed a number of measures which in our view will improve the efficiency of administration to Assembly elections, including changes to the way in which Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) and Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) are replaced, the time at which Assembly counts can be suspended and an extension to the period for candidate nominations.
- The Scottish Government's consultation on the Chief Returning Officer concept. We supported the focus on principles and outcomes and suggested that the post of Chief Returning Officer could be synonymous with an Elections Convener of an Electoral Management Board (see below for further information).
- The Scotland Office's consultation on a draft Scottish Parliament (Elections etc.) (Amendment) Order 2009. We supported the extension of the electoral timetable for general elections but indicated that the timetable for by-elections should also be extended.
- The Ministry of Justice's draft regulations for the 2009 European Parliamentary elections. The Government accepted our recommendation that, in order to reduce the risk of voter confusion, party names should appear first on ballot papers for those elections.



## Examining the structure of electoral administration

Following the Gould report into the conduct of the 2007 elections to the Scottish Parliament, we began a review looking at the structures in place to deliver electoral administration in the UK. After consulting with a wide range of groups, in August 2008 we published two reports making recommendations to strengthen the structures. One report focused on the UK as a whole and the other focused specifically on Scotland.

We found concerns that in some areas the structures in place for the administration of elections were stretched almost to breaking point. Although the vast majority of elections continue to be delivered without challenge, we believe that the current structures dating from the 19th century are not well placed to provide high levels of assurance for the delivery of elections in the 21st century.

We want to see better engagement between ROs and EROs within and across regions. There also needs to be clearer responsibility for delivering key tasks such as planning, monitoring performance and ensuring the availability of staff and resources. We also believe that in future there will need to be powers to require action by local officers to ensure consistent and effective performance.



### Examining the structure of electoral administration (continued)

We suggested that one way to achieve this would be to establish Electoral Management Boards (EMBs) to include ROs and EROs across Great Britain.

In Scotland, for example, an interim EMB was established to support the RRO in the delivery of the 2009 European Parliamentary elections. The Board will continue to support and monitor the delivery of electoral administration in Scotland over the coming years. We believe that the Board would be strengthened by providing its Convener with statutory powers to direct ROs and EROs. The development of a power of direction is currently being considered by the UK and Scottish governments.

Although the establishment of EMBs is one possible solution, we would not necessarily want to see one particular structure imposed across Great Britain. Rather, we have challenged ROs and EROs to develop improved structures that will best deliver the changes we want to see in their own regions. We believe that it will be particularly important that any structures developed allow for the effective monitoring of issues at a local level. It is also clear that individuals or bodies responsible for monitoring and directing ROs and EROs in a region will need to carry credibility and weight among them.

We do not believe that change can be postponed – the challenges for electoral administration are likely to increase in the years to come, and the structures for delivery need to adapt to ensure that they continue to deliver successful elections and referendums. If progress towards the goals of improved coordination, enhanced leadership and more effective accountability for electoral administration cannot be agreed, then we believe it will be necessary to consider again the fundamental question of operational responsibility and accountability for electoral administration, and we have not yet excluded the possibility of a unified electoral administration body for Great Britain.



# Public understanding of the way our democracy works

Voters need to understand the way our democracy works. An important element of this is understanding key information about elections. We communicate this information through public information campaigns, websites, a public enquiries service, and by working with organisations who share our objectives in this area.

From the beginning of the 2009–10 financial year, our work in this area will be reported under our third objective: Well-run elections and referendums which produce results that are accepted. This reflects the importance of communicating information to voters as part of a well-run election.



## Key success measures

- An increase in the percentage of the UK public who say they know how to register and vote.

Our research indicates that 88% of people feel confident about how to register to vote. Ninety-two per cent of respondents indicated that they are very or fairly confident about how to cast a vote at elections. We will continue to monitor this in coming years. These figures will be used as a baseline from which we will measure improvement in coming years.

- An increase in the number of visits to our website, [www.aboutmyvote.co.uk](http://www.aboutmyvote.co.uk), and calls to our call centre.

The aboutmyvote website received an average of 47,000 visits per month in 2008–9. This represents a 11% increase on visits received in 2007–8. We responded to 44,124 calls through our public information service, including our year-round service and the call centre service we provide around election periods. This was an increase of 51% on 2007–8.

- Increasing awareness and understanding of democratic institutions.

We have shifted our focus away from increasing broad awareness of democratic institutions to generating awareness of key information around elections. Our research indicated that 73% of people were aware of the election date and 77% aware of the polling station opening hours for the 2008 London elections. For the local elections in England and Wales, 45% were aware of the election date and 77% aware of the polling station opening hours.

## Key activities

24

Deliver public awareness campaigns around elections and referendums to explain our democratic institutions and voting systems, and any changes.

- We ran public information campaigns before the May 2008 elections. The campaigns raised awareness that the elections were taking place and communicated key information such as

polling station opening hours and how to cast a vote. The campaign for the Greater London Authority elections was delivered in partnership with London Elects.

- Approximately 301,000 visits were recorded to the aboutmyvote website or London Elects' website during the campaign period. We also responded to approximately 25,000 enquiries to our call centre. For the London elections we



trialled a service which allowed users to receive the location of their polling station by text message. We sent approximately 7,300 text messages through this service.

- Through our partnership grants programme, we continued to support 18 third-sector organisations to improve understanding of the way our democracy works particularly among under-represented groups. This included projects conducted by Operation Black Vote, Barnardo's and Rethink.

### 25 Provide year-round public access to information about how our democracy works, developing the role of online services.

- Our public enquiries service responded to 5,720 enquiries throughout the year. Key areas for enquiries were voter registration, accessing the electoral register, candidate and agent enquiries, and enquiries regarding party and election finance.
- We re-designed our corporate website, [www.electoralcommission.org.uk](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk) and launched the new site in June 2008. The site allows for content to be structured to the needs of the user. The site received approximately 428,000 visits between launch and the end of the 2008–9 financial year.
- We re-designed our [aboutmyvote](http://aboutmyvote.org.uk) website. This is our voter information site, to which our campaigns direct people for further information on registration and elections (see page 26 for more information).
- We provide a series of resources on registration and voting, which can be ordered by local authorities, community groups and others interested in conducting public awareness work in this area. We distributed almost 1.8 million hard-copy resources through our warehouse. Resources were downloaded by users of our Do Politics website almost 20,000 times.

### 26 Work with local authorities to help develop their internal capacity to promote electoral participation at a local level.

- We re-designed our Do Politics website, which provides advice and resources for local authorities and other organisations wishing to run public awareness work on voter registration and elections. Do Politics was integrated into our main corporate site and launched in January 2009 (see page 26 for more information).
- We established public awareness subgroups in each electoral region for the June 2009 elections. The groups, established in partnership with Regional Returning Officers, included electoral administrators and local authority communications staff. We used the groups to disseminate information about our public information campaign and resources we produced for local authorities. We also gained insight into local needs.
- We undertook the Beyond Barriers project to look at the difficulties that people with disabilities face in accessing voter registration and electoral services. In October 2008, we held a consultation event attended by organisations representing people with physical disabilities, learning difficulties, sensory impairments and communication support needs; representatives of the Association of Electoral Administrators; representatives of the Scottish Assessors Association and Commission staff. An action plan has been developed, which we are now implementing. This work will continue in 2009–10.



27 Work with broadcasters to ensure a quality service to electors and fair allocation of time to political parties in airing political broadcasts.

- Broadcasting authorities are required to take account of our views when formulating their policies on the allocation of party political and party election broadcasts. They are also required to

consult with us on their policies concerning the participation of candidates in election coverage. We continued to work with the broadcasters in this way in 2008–9, and we were represented at meetings of the Broadcasters Liaison Group, the forum for consulting with political parties and discussing proposed criteria for the allocation of party election broadcasts.

## → Improving our online services

We re-launched two of our key websites during 2008–9 – [aboutmyvote.co.uk](http://aboutmyvote.co.uk) and [dopolitics.org.uk](http://dopolitics.org.uk).

[Aboutmyvote.co.uk](http://Aboutmyvote.co.uk) is our key voter information site and is the response mechanism most people choose after seeing our public information campaigns. It receives approximately 500,000 visits per year.

The new [aboutmyvote.co.uk](http://aboutmyvote.co.uk) represents a dramatic improvement in the way we provide information to electors. A key feature of the site allows users to fill in a voter registration form online. The details users enter are populated on a PDF form, which users can either print directly from the site or save to their computer to print later. The site also provides the user with the address of their Electoral Registration Officer, based on the postcode they enter. Localised information such as forthcoming elections in the local authority area is also available.

Statistics for the site's first five months of operation show a considerable improvement against the former site's performance in the same period of the previous year. Site visits increased by 20%, the average time each user spent on the site increased by 35% and the number of users leaving the site from the homepage decreased by 49%.

In January, [dopolitics.org.uk](http://dopolitics.org.uk) was re-launched. The site provides local authorities and community groups with all the information and resources they need to run public awareness activity on voter registration and elections.

It also provides case studies of successful public awareness work conducted by local authorities and community groups, as well as offering a range of posters, leaflets and other resources which users can either download from the site or order from our warehouse.

The new [dopolitics.org.uk](http://dopolitics.org.uk) tailors content to the user's area of interest. Users can search for content according to the audience they are interested in, the election that is approaching, or the type of marketing activity they are planning to conduct. Users are also able to sign up for our Do Politics newsletter which provides updates on our public awareness work and resources, case studies of projects undertaken by local authorities or community groups, and general updates on developments in the field of democratic engagement.



# Fair boundary arrangements for elections

People need to be confident that the process involved in the drawing of electoral boundaries is open, transparent and free from political bias or influence. Electoral equality, in the sense of each elector having a vote of equal weight in the election of local councillors, is a fundamental democratic principle. We recognise the importance of setting electoral area boundaries that reflect that principle while also taking account of community identities and interests. In England, this work is currently carried out by the Electoral Commission implementing recommendations made following reviews by the Boundary Committee for England, a statutory committee of the Electoral Commission.

The Boundary Committee's recommendations for changes to local government structure and/or administrative boundaries are reported to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government.

Reviewing the structure of local government in Devon, Norfolk and Suffolk has been a major task for the Boundary Committee, quite different from its normal work in electoral reviews. It has proved to be a highly complex and contentious exercise with strongly held views on all sides. The Committee has undertaken extensive consultation and discussions with local interests across all three counties. In total, it has heard the views of some 40,000 people and organisations on the form local government in their area should take.

The Boundary Committee bade farewell to Deputy Commissioner Robin Gray in December 2008. Robin was a member of the Committee from its establishment in 2002 and was a member of the Local Government Commission for England before this. Robin's knowledge and experience has been greatly appreciated by members and staff of the Committee.



## Key success measures

- Electoral reviews of new unitary authorities completed no later than 12 months after the commencement of the review.

The Secretary of State made structural change Orders in 2008 for the establishment of a number of new unitary authorities – Northumberland, County Durham, Cornwall, Wiltshire, Shropshire, Cheshire East, and Cheshire West and Chester. Reviews of each new unitary authority were commenced at different points through the year. The Shropshire and Wiltshire reviews were completed within nine months of their start. All remaining reviews are scheduled to be completed in 2009–10.

- Structural reviews of areas the Secretary of State has requested advice on, in relation to unitary proposals, completed by 31 December 2008 or any alternative date agreed by the Secretary of State.

The Secretary of State revised the deadline for final advice to 15 July 2009. The Boundary Committee published initial draft proposals for unitary local government in Devon, Norfolk and Suffolk in July 2008 and further draft proposals in March 2009. The Secretary of State altered the date by which she sought the Boundary Committee's advice to 13 February 2009 and then to 15 July 2009.



### Key success measures (continued)

- Electoral reviews to provide for single member wards in local authorities that hold whole council elections, and which have requested such a review, completed within 12 months of the commencement of the review.

The Boundary Committee conducted a review of the West Sussex County Council. The review was completed in nine months.

- Reduction in the proportion of wards in English local authority areas that have electoral variances of 10% or more.

No reviews aimed at this success measure were carried out in 2008–9.

- Appropriate administrative boundary reviews identified and then completed within 12 months of the commencement of the review.

No administrative boundary reviews were commenced in 2008–9.

## Key activities

- 28** Contribute to any review of the current legal framework for the conduct of Parliamentary boundary reviews.

- The Ministry of Justice did not commence a review during 2008–9. The Boundary Committee will contribute to any review once it is commenced.

- 29** Work with Government and the Boundary Commission for England to provide a more effective and joined up approach to boundary-making in England at local government and Parliamentary levels.

- The Boundary Committee and the Electoral Commission welcomed the introduction of the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Bill to the UK Parliament in December 2008. The Bill proposes the separation of the Boundary Committee from the Electoral Commission, a move that both support.
- We await with interest any Ministry of Justice review following the recommendations of the Committee on Standards in Public Life, that might address how the timing of local government electoral and Parliamentary constituency reviews could be better aligned.

- 30** Conduct reviews of local government structure, electoral arrangements and administrative boundaries resulting from the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007.

- The Boundary Committee conducted public consultation on draft proposals for unitary local government in Devon, Norfolk and Suffolk in summer 2008, receiving over 10,000 representations across the three counties excluding petitions and pro forma responses. The Committee has been subject to judicial review proceedings in relation to its reviews in all three counties. While Divisional Court judgments, and a subsequent Court of Appeal judgment, have meant that the Committee needed to adapt its process, the structural reviews have been allowed to continue, and the Secretary of State has revised the deadline for provision of final advice to take these delays into account. A further round of consultation commenced in March 2009.
- Draft and final recommendations for electoral reviews of Shropshire, Wiltshire and West Sussex were published. Orders were made to implement the Boundary Committee's recommendation in elections in June 2009.



- The Boundary Committee commenced electoral reviews of Cornwall, County Durham, Northumberland, Cheshire East, and Cheshire West and Chester. Public consultation was commenced on all reviews.

31

### Conduct high quality reviews of local authorities in England in consultation with local interests.

- The Boundary Committee completed electoral reviews of Isle of Wight, West Sussex, Shropshire and Wiltshire. We have made Orders to implement new electoral arrangements as a result of the reviews.



## Structural reviews in Norfolk, Suffolk and Devon

Structural reviews have dominated the Boundary Committee's work programme over the past year. In February 2008, the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government asked the Committee to provide advice on patterns of unitary local government in Norfolk, Suffolk and Devon. The Committee was given five criteria on which to judge any advice: affordability; neighbourhood empowerment; value for money services; strategic leadership and a broad cross section of support.

The Committee published draft proposals in July 2008 and began a 12-week long public consultation process. The exercise has not however been without its difficulties. Judicial reviews brought about by local authorities have delayed the provision of the Committee's final advice to the Secretary of State. Further draft proposals, made necessary in order to comply with High Court and Court of Appeal judgments, were published on 19 March 2009 and an eight-week consultation period commenced.

The Committee was delighted with the level and content of response to the two rounds of consultation. In total, around 40,000 people and organisations responded across the three counties, by far the largest response to a consultation to date.

The Committee's main aim in carrying out its consultations is that people in Devon, Norfolk and Suffolk are aware of the proposals on the table, including suggestions about, for example, the role of cities in county-wide unitary authorities and how large unitary authorities can enable towns and villages to take part in decision-making, and know how to respond to the consultation. The Committee will take all the evidence it receives into account when drawing up any advice to the Secretary of State.

# Corporate resources and finance

Our success depends on our workforce, and it is thanks to our hard-working and skilled team that we have been able to continue to deliver results.

In 2008–9 we entered the Sunday Times ‘100 Best Small Companies to Work For’ competition, and achieved ‘ones to watch’ status. We have built upon our results by holding staff focus groups and developing an action plan for continuous improvement.

We have revised our corporate induction and introduced an ‘Aspiring Manager’ programme for non-managers. We have also invested in developing our ‘plain English’ skills and simplified our statement of corporate values.

We continued to strengthen our commitment to equality and diversity in 2008–9. In order to promote good practice and prepare ourselves for possible legislation, we have been drafting a single equality scheme. This will merge our three existing equality schemes – race, disability and gender – and their accompanying action plans into one overarching scheme. This scheme will also take into account equality principles of age, sexual orientation and religion or belief.

In Northern Ireland, we continued to work to our equality scheme, and completed an equality impact assessment on our recruitment and selection policy. We monitored our external communication policy, following a previous equality impact assessment, and we met regularly with the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland throughout the year.

The period from 2007–8 to 2010–11 is covered by a funding settlement that was agreed by the Speaker’s Committee in April 2007. We have identified savings within each year’s budget to ensure that we have adequate finances to meet the challenge of a UK Parliamentary general election.

In February 2009, we put a request to the Speaker’s Committee for a Spring Supplementary Estimate, and laid in Parliament a proposal to implement a ‘carry forward’ of £498,000 for capital funding. This represented unused funds as part of the multi-year settlement in 2007–8. It was the first time that we had used the End Year Flexibility (EYF) arrangements agreed by the Scrutiny Unit in 2005–6. It was agreed that as part of the multi-year settlement, the Commission could in the future take advantage of any unused funds under EYF, in respect of both resource and capital categories of expenditure.

**Table 8: Ethnic breakdown of workforce at 31 March 2009**

Ethnic Group	Number	%
Asian or Asian British	7	4.5
Black or Black British	11	7.1
Chinese or other ethnic group	2	1.3
Mixed	0	0
Undisclosed	18	11.5
White – British and Irish	105	67.3
White – other	13	8.3

**Table 9: Gender breakdown of workforce at 31 March 2009**

Gender	Number	%
Male	76	48.7
Female	80	51.3

## Financial summary

Table 10 below shows the cost of carrying out our objectives by expenditure and resources. The figures, taken from our audited accounts which were laid in the House of Commons in July 2009, are available on our website [www.electoralcommission.org.uk](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk) and set out full details of our financial position and performance.

	2008–9			2007–8		
	Gross expenditure £000	Income £000	Net £000	Gross expenditure £000	Income £000	Net £000
<b>To promote</b>						
Integrity and transparency of party and election finance	5,105	(32)	5,073	5,144	(16)	5,128
Complete and accurate electoral registers supported by a well-run electoral registration process	6,683	–	6,683	6,461	–	6,461
Well-run elections and referendums which produce results that are accepted	3,231	–	3,231	3,653	–	3,653
Public understanding of the way our democracy works	3,587	–	3,587	4,118	–	4,118
Fair boundary arrangements for elections	3,897	–	3,897	2,974	–	2,974
<b>Net operating costs</b>	<b>22,503</b>	<b>(32)</b>	<b>22,471</b>	<b>22,350</b>	<b>(16)</b>	<b>22,334</b>

Costs that are directly attributable have been allocated to individual objectives while indirect costs have been allocated on the basis of time apportionment.

The salary and fees paid from the Consolidated Fund to the Commissioners during 2008–9 were as follows:

**Table 11: Commissioners' remuneration**

<b>Name</b>	<b>2008–9 Salary or fees (£)</b>	<b>2007–8 Salary or fees (£)</b>
Sam Younger CBE (Chair)	117,671	148,898
Jenny Watson (Chair)	24,125	–
Max Caller CBE	52,824	23,640
Henrietta Campbell CB	24,888	13,638
John McCormick	23,315	4,143
Ian Kelsall OBE	18,812	1,381
Karamjit Singh CBE	14,834	19,429

The fees paid by the Commission to the Deputy Commissioners during 2008–9 were as follows:<sup>8</sup>

**Table 12: Deputy Commissioners' remuneration**

<b>Name</b>	<b>2008–9 fees (£)</b>	<b>2007–8 fees (£)</b>
Robin Gray	26,277	12,471
Joan Jones CBE	31,038	16,527
Professor Ron Johnston	24,382	–
Professor Colin Mellors	21,844	10,313
Dr Peter Knight CBE	17,000	4,398
Jane Earl	18,172	–
Ann Kelly	869	11,802

# Commissioners, Deputy Commissioners and Executive Team

## Commissioners

Jenny Watson, Chair

Max Caller CBE

Henrietta Campbell CB

Ian Kelsall OBE

John McCormick

Karamjit Singh CBE

## Deputy Commissioners

Jane Earl

Professor Ron Johnston

Joan Jones CBE

Dr Peter Knight CBE

Professor Colin Mellors

## Executive Team

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Clare Ettinghausen, Deputy Chief Executive

Stephen Rooney, Director of Communication

Andrew Scallan, Director of Electoral Administration and Boundaries

Lisa Klein, Director of Party and Election Finance

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## Democracy matters

We are an independent body set up by the UK Parliament. Our aim is integrity and public confidence in the democratic process. We regulate party and election finance and set standards for well-run elections.

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