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1 Introduction

1.1 Electoral registration provides the foundation for an effective democratic process. We want people who are entitled to vote to be confident that registering to vote and voting is as straightforward, accessible and secure as possible. We also want them to receive a consistently high-quality service wherever they live. It is the responsibility of Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) and Returning Officers (ROs) across Great Britain to provide this high-quality service.

1.2 Our role is to monitor performance through our performance standards framework, to highlight where electoral registration and elections are well-run and to challenge EROs and ROs where the service received by electors is below standard. We provide support and guidance to enable improvements in electoral practice.

1.3 The Electoral Administration Act 2006 (EAA) amended the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 (PPERA)¹ to give the Commission powers to set standards of performance for EROs, ROs, and Referendum Counting Officers (RCOs) in Great Britain.² Under these provisions, the Commission may:

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

1.4 Prior to the development of this performance standards framework, information on the performance of EROs and ROs had not been collected or analysed consistently nationwide, and there was no mechanism available to assess the performance of EROs and ROs. By setting these standards, the Commission is now able to collect performance information from EROs and ROs in order to assess progress against the key objectives of ‘complete and accurate electoral registers supported by a well-run electoral registration process’ and ‘well-run elections’.

¹ Sections 9A and 9B, Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 (PPERA), as amended by Section 67, Electoral Administration Act 2006 (EAA) – the full legislative text can be found in Appendix A.

² The performance standards provisions introduced by the EAA do not apply in Northern Ireland or local government elections in Scotland.

2 Development of performance standards

Funding electoral services³

2.1 Following the 2001 general election, the Commission identified as a priority the need to review the funding of electoral services – both the registration of voters and management of elections. Our review, which concluded in 2003, identified a number of options for reform of the current arrangements for funding electoral services. We also recommended that whatever funding arrangements were preferred, a performance standards framework should be put in place to provide a clearer framework of quality standards and accountability for meeting those standards.

2.2 The Government published its response to our recommendations in December 2004. Although it did not agree that significant changes should be made to the funding arrangements for electoral services, the Government expressed its support for the introduction of performance standards for electoral services.

Electoral Administration Act 2006

2.3 An Electoral Administration Bill was introduced to the UK Parliament in October 2005 which included provisions for introducing performance standards, to be set by the Commission, to promote good practice in the delivery of electoral services in Great Britain.

2.4 During the passage of the legislation in the UK Parliament, a number of priorities for the introduction of performance standards for electoral services were discussed, including:

- supporting greater consistency of practice across Great Britain
- transparency and accountability for the delivery of electoral services
- maintaining and supporting high standards and the improvement of performance

2.5 The Electoral Administration Act 2006 (EAA) was given Royal Assent on 11 July 2006. The performance standards provisions introduced by the EAA do not apply in Northern Ireland, and do not apply to local government elections in Scotland. It is also important to note that the performance standards legislation applies directly to Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) and Returning Officers (ROs) in their individual capacity as independent statutory office holders, and do not therefore apply to local authorities.

2.6 The Commission has never been given powers to direct EROs and ROs in the exercise of their statutory duties. As such, the performance standards provisions of the EAA are not equivalent to a performance management system – rather, they provide a basis for performance monitoring on a local and national basis.

³ *Funding electoral services, 2003*

The Commission's vision for quality electoral services

2.7 In preparation for the new performance standards duties the Commission was expected to be given under the EAA, it sought to develop a clear vision for quality electoral services which could form the basis for performance standards. The vision sets out the reasonable expectations of electors, candidates and political parties, and those involved in the administration of elections. EROs, ROs, electoral administrators and political parties were consulted during its development and we are confident that the vision enjoys broad support.

2.8 The vision identifies four main themes that support the delivery of quality electoral services:

- **integrity** – a secure process for registration and voting
- **user focus** – an easy and accessible process for candidates and electors
- **professionalism** – a clear and consistent approach to delivery
- **value for money** – efficient and effective service delivery

2.9 Each of these themes is reflected within the proposed performance standards. The full text of the vision for quality electoral services is included in Appendix B.

Consultation and development of performance standards for EROs

2.10 On 21 July 2008 the Commission published performance standards for EROs. The standards were developed after extensive consultation with government departments, specifically the Ministry of Justice, the Department of Communities and Local Government and its Lifting the Burdens Taskforce, the Welsh Assembly Government, local authorities, electoral administrators and other stakeholder organisations such as the Association of Electoral Administrators, the Scottish Assessors' Association and the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives. Between September and December 2007, the Commission also carried out a baseline survey of all EROs which provided an initial picture of performance and supported the development of the final standards.⁴

2.11 The 10 performance standards for EROs are grouped within four broad subject areas:

- Completeness and accuracy of electoral registration records (standards 1–3)
- Integrity of the registration process (standards 4–5)
- Encouraging participation in the registration process (standards 6–8)
- Planning and organisation (standards 9–10)

⁴ *Baseline performance information – electoral registration in Great Britain (initial analysis) May 2008*

Consultation and development of performance standards for ROs

1.1 On 16 March 2009 we published performance standards for ROs. The standards were developed after extensive consultation with government departments, specifically the Ministry of Justice and Communities and Local Government, local authorities, electoral administrators and other organisations such as the Association of Electoral Administrators, the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Scope. Following the English local government and Greater London Authority elections in May 2008, we also carried out a baseline survey of all ROs which provided an initial picture of performance and supported the development of the final standards.

1.2 The seven performance standards for ROs are grouped within three broad subject areas:

- Planning and organisation (standards 1–3)
- Integrity (standard 4)
- Participation (standards 5-7)

Appendix A – Legislation

Sections 9A and 9B, Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000, as amended by Section 67, Electoral Administration Act:

9A Setting of performance standards

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

9B Returns and reports on performance standards

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

Appendix B – Vision for quality electoral services

In the United Kingdom people have the right to say who governs them. They therefore have a right to vote (or not to vote) in secret, for who they want, in a way that is easy for them, and to have their vote counted. They expect that the core values of public office should be enshrined in electoral services (registration and elections) and should support the modernising and ethical standards agenda in public service.

| | Electors can expect | Candidates and parties can expect | Those involved in administration can expect | Those involved in government and the Electoral Commission can expect |
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| Integrity – a secure process for registration and voting | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To know information about them is accurate and to be clear how it is used • Their vote is confidential and they can make it free from pressure • To know their vote is counted | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Processes which are transparent and checked • Accurate results | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support from bodies such as the Electoral Commission, government departments and local authorities • Independence from political parties • Police, courts and prosecutors who are conversant with electoral law | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The results of any election are accepted by the public and candidates • The voter has confidence in both the process and the results |
| User focus – an easy and accessible process for candidates and electors | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A voting process that is easy to understand • To have a choice of ways to vote • To be able to vote in a way that suits their lifestyle and needs • Information and advice which is accurate, prompt and easy to understand | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To know how to stand for election • Consistency of approach and realistic timescales • Clarity and impartiality in the process • A clear process of redress | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • External suppliers who deliver what is expected of them | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Electoral staff are proactive in encouraging registration and voting • Participating in democracy seen as part of active citizenship |

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