



Designing a new electoral service

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Translations and other formats

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1 Introduction

1.1 The Electoral Commission is an independent body set up by the UK Parliament under the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 (PPERA). Our aim is integrity and public confidence in the UK's democratic process. We regulate party and election finance and set standards for well-run elections. Our current corporate plan sets our strategic direction over the five years from April 2008. This is to set and guarantee standards in key areas of democratic life in the UK, and to ensure effective electoral registration and administration, including through a new performance standards framework for Returning Officers and Electoral Registration Officers. Our objectives for the period 2008–9 to 2012–13 are:

- integrity and transparency of party and election finance
- complete and accurate electoral registers supported by a well-run electoral registration process
- well-run elections and referendums which produce results that are accepted
- public understanding of the way our democracy works
- fair boundary arrangements for elections

1.2 In order to meet our objectives in respect of electoral registration and the conduct of elections we are keen to ensure that electoral services units in local authorities providing these services are set up in such a way as to achieve a high level of effectiveness. The creation of new unitary authorities as a result of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 poses challenges in scale that have not had to be addressed before in the creation of electoral services units in new authorities.

1.3 In producing this document, we intend to:

- outline the basis for the current organisation of electoral services
- set out the statutory and regulatory aspects of the service which must be provided as a minimum
- identify current areas that help define best practice
- outline the factors that should be considered in designing a new electoral services unit
- specify what help is available so that a new unit can operate to the highest possible level of effectiveness within the existing legislative structure

1.4 As we do not believe that there is a 'one size fits all' solution to the creation and implementation of a new electoral services unit, the purpose of this paper is to highlight common issues for consideration by authorities involved in such a project. We will revisit and expand on issues in this paper as appropriate based on the outcome and experiences of those local authorities currently involved in building electoral services units.

1.5 Given the different structure for registration and management of elections in Scotland, this document has restricted its focus to the structure of electoral services units in England and Wales.

1.6 In raising these issues for consideration, we are seeking consensus from key stakeholders and accordingly have consulted with both the Association of Electoral Administrators (AEA) and the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers (SOLACE).

The Local Government Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 and new English unitary authorities

1.7 As a result of proposals made under Section 2 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health (LGPIH) Act 2007, orders were laid in February 2008 to create seven new unitary authorities in England. Of these authorities five, namely Cornwall, Durham, Northumberland, Shropshire and Wiltshire, were to be based on existing county areas and the orders specified the abolition of former district and borough councils to create a new single unitary authority in each county. In addition the county area of Cheshire was to be divided so that two new unitary authorities, Cheshire East, and Cheshire West and Chester, were created in that area to replace existing district and borough councils and the county council. In March 2008 a further order was laid abolishing Bedfordshire County Council and creating two new unitary authorities of Bedford (based on existing borough boundaries) and Central Bedfordshire which amalgamated existing South Bedfordshire and Mid-Bedfordshire District Councils.

1.8 There are also structural reviews currently being undertaken by the Boundary Committee for England in Devon, Norfolk and Suffolk, which may result in the creation of further unitary authorities.

1.9 The impact of these changes on the local government structure in the affected areas was on a scale not previously seen in recent local government re-organisation in England, certainly not in terms of the number of authorities being replaced by the new unitary authorities.

1.10 In respect of the provision of electoral services, from April 2009 the new county unitary authorities will take responsibility for work on registration and the conduct of elections previously undertaken by all of the different district and borough councils in the areas of those new unitary authorities.

1.11 The effect is, for example, that in Durham electoral services will no longer be provided by the seven former district councils but will be provided by the one new unitary council. In Cornwall and Northumberland six former districts will be replaced by one authority, in Shropshire five, Wiltshire four, and in West and East Cheshire each authority will replace three former district councils.

1.12 The challenge therefore facing the new unitary authorities is to create effective new electoral services units from a large number of former providers, and to do so within severe time constraints governed by the holding of elections either to the new authority or, in the case of Cheshire, Durham and Northumberland where elections have already taken place, to the European Parliament in June 2009.

1.13 In addition to the creation of the new unitary authorities, the LGPIH Act gives local authorities in England certain new powers concerning electoral boundaries and some other related matters, in particular the devolution of matters such as the creation of parishes and their electoral arrangements from the Secretary of State and the Electoral Commission to local government and local communities in England.

1.14 It also made provision for the Secretary of State to make an Order moving the date of local government elections to the same date as European Parliamentary elections in years when they are scheduled to take place.

1.15 Clearly these additional powers and the possibility of combined elections will mean that any new electoral services unit will need to allow for the additional capacity required to undertake work relating to community governance reviews and have plans in place for managing the implications of the possible combination of elections.

Lessons from previous structural change and the situation in Scotland and Wales

1.16 Several major structural changes have been made to the organisation of local government in Great Britain since the 1960s, the most recent of which (prior to the current re-organisation) occurred in the mid- to late-1990s.

1.17 In the 1990s it was decided that the two-tier system that was in place across most of Great Britain (excepting notably London and the metropolitan counties) was not the most efficient in many cases. Scotland and Wales had their two-tier systems replaced in 1996, in Scotland by a single-tier system of council areas, and in Wales by a similar system of unitary authorities.

1.18 In England the situation was more complex as the Local Government Commission for England recommended that some areas retain the existing two-tier structure and others be set up as single-tier unitary authorities. Parliament approved re-organisation in 25 counties and the subsequent process of restructuring occurred in phases between 1995 and 1998.

1.19 In England the changes that occurred more than 10 years ago were not necessarily comparable in scale to the re-organisation currently happening. In a large number of cases urban unitary authorities were created based upon a single former second-tier authority. In terms of provision of electoral services, this resulted in a continuing provision of services from what was very much the same authority, for example in Derby, Luton, Milton Keynes and Plymouth.

1.20 In other cases two or three authorities were amalgamated to create a new authority. For example, Rochester and Gillingham combined to form the new Medway Council, Bath City and Wansdyke combined to form the new Bath & North East Somerset Council. In the largest case of amalgamation, four authorities and part of a fifth combined to form the new Herefordshire Council.

1.21 The new authorities and new electoral services units created in the 1990s faced rather different challenges to those faced today, apart from that of the scale of the numbers of authorities affected by each re-organisation. The electoral landscape was far different; there was no rolling registration, no postal voting on demand, no absent voting identifiers, and no performance standards.

1.22 The organisational challenges faced would have been similar however. Staffing and structural issues needed to be addressed and experiences from those involved in electoral services during that round of re-organisation would be useful to draw upon.

Role of the Electoral Commission and government departments

The Electoral Commission

1.23 The Electoral Commission is an independent body, established by the UK Parliament in November 2000. Section 10 of PPERA allows the Commission to provide advice and assistance to Electoral Registration Officers, Returning Officers and registered political parties. The Commission cannot, however, give a definitive legal view on any subject as this is ultimately a matter for a court to decide in any particular case.

1.24 In addition to this provision of advice and assistance, the Commission has a number of statutory functions and powers in relation to elections and electoral registration, and these are set out in PPERA. These include:

- setting and publishing performance standards for electoral services and collecting information on the costs of electoral services from Electoral Registration Officers (EROs), Returning Officers and Referendum Counting Officers
- attending at certain election proceedings
- preparing and publishing a code of practice on the attendance at elections of representatives of the Commission, accredited observers and nominated members of accredited organisations, and managing a scheme for the accreditation of electoral observers
- promoting public awareness of electoral matters
- publishing reports on the administration of elections and referendums
- conducting reviews of the law and practice relating to elections and referendums
- being consulted by the UK Government on proposals to amend electoral law

- being consulted on the allocation of party political broadcasts
- maintaining, monitoring and making available for reasons of transparency a register of political parties, and the registration of political party descriptions where parties wish to field candidates standing under the party name or a description other than 'Independent' on the ballot paper
- maintaining, reviewing and publishing for reasons of transparency a register of donations made to registered political parties and others regulated by the legislation
- reviewing and publishing the annual statements of accounts of political parties
- reviewing and publishing the returns of campaign expenditure incurred by political parties in respect of their election campaign
- reviewing returns of donations and loans to, and the expenditure by and on behalf of, candidates and their agents
- receiving from Returning Officers copies of candidates' returns of election expenses

Ministry of Justice

1.25 The Ministry of Justice (MoJ) is the central government department with responsibility for the legislative framework for UK Parliamentary elections, European Parliamentary elections and national referendums, including franchise, conduct and funding. The MoJ also has responsibility for policy on the conduct of local government elections and mayoral and local government referendums, and has responsibility for all issues covered by PPERA. These include generic issues associated with national and regional referendums, the registration of political parties, rules on donations to political parties and third party donations.

1.26 The Electoral Policy Division is the part of the MoJ with responsibility for issues concerning the conduct of elections. The division currently has five branches: the Franchise, Boundaries and Conduct branch; the Electoral Registration and Implementation branch; the Electoral Modernisation branch; the Political Parties and Referendums branch; and the Democratic Engagement branch.

1.27 The Franchise, Boundaries and Conduct branch has responsibility for policy on the conduct of local government elections in England and Wales.

Communities and Local Government

1.28 Communities and Local Government (CLG) is the government department that deals with national policy on local government in England, including what it does, how well it works and how it is funded. The CLG is responsible for setting the cycle of local government elections in England and also has responsibility for the legislation that governs the review and updating of electoral arrangements within local authorities, work which is a statutory duty of the Electoral Commission.

National Assembly for Wales

1.29 The National Assembly for Wales has no direct role or function with respect to local government elections. It does, however, coordinate the All Wales Election Planning Group.

Our agenda for electoral administration

1.30 In our paper of March 2008, *Examination of the structure of electoral administration in the United Kingdom*, we set out the issues and the problems facing the delivery of electoral administration.

1.31 Since 2001 we have observed and heard evidence of an inconsistent approach to electoral administration across and within the UK, which means that electors and those standing for election do not always receive an adequate or satisfactory service. We believe that the current structures for the delivery of electoral administration functions fail to ensure that electors and candidates receive a consistently high-quality service across the UK.

1.32 We believe that change is needed to improve the complex legal framework and the fragmented funding arrangements for elections, and to provide effective mechanisms for ensuring accountability for electoral administration delivery.

1.33 We wish to ensure that, as far as possible, the electoral administration process is considered as a whole rather than in a piecemeal fashion.

1.34 We believe that in order to ensure confidence in the integrity and effectiveness of UK elections and to produce results that are accurate and accepted, the delivery of electoral administration functions must:

- serve electors' interests and support the role of political parties and candidates in the electoral process
- conform with and respect the rule of law
- be performed in a non-partisan and neutral fashion
- ensure transparency and accountability for actions and decisions
- meet existing UK standards of equality of access
- help to meet the UK's international obligations in respect of elections

1.35 The examination considers:

- the functional requirements for electoral administration – what an effective electoral service must do
- the fundamental principles for electoral administration – how those functions should be delivered
- possible options for delivering the principles and functional requirements for electoral administration – the structures that should be in place to secure effective electoral administration

1.36 In addition to the examination project, a significant focus of our current activity is the implementation of the new performance standards framework for Returning Officers and Electoral Registration Officers. This is set out in more detail in paragraphs 3.19 to 3.23.

1.37 While the intention of the examination project is a drive for change in the long term of electoral administration, the initial results to be published this summer will contain information and insight, which we would recommend those planning new electoral services units in the shorter term should keep abreast of.

1.38 Equally, the performance standards which we will shortly set for Returning Officers and EROs, and the subsequent collection of information and publication of results, will provide a foundation on which those staff planning new electoral service units may develop the unit from a best practice perspective.

2 What electoral services units must do

Role and statutory functions of the Electoral Registration Officer, Returning Officer and Counting Officer

The Electoral Registration Officer

2.1 In England the council of every district and London borough is required to appoint an officer of the council to be the Electoral Registration Officer (ERO). In Wales, the appointment of the ERO is made by the county or county borough council. The person appointed must be an officer of the council. Councils may approve a deputy for the ERO and the deputy can carry out any of the duties and powers of the ERO (Section 52(2), Representation of the People Act 1983 (RPA 1983)).

2.2 EROs have several statutory functions. Each ERO has a duty to maintain a register of Parliamentary electors and a register of local government electors (Section 9, RPA 1983). They must also maintain a register of those citizens of European Union member states who are entitled to vote at European Parliamentary elections (Regulation 5(2), European (Franchise) Regulations 2001) and those peers living outside the UK who have made a declaration to vote at European Parliamentary elections (Section 3(7), Representation of the People Act 1985 (RPA 1985)).

2.3 These registers contain the details of all those who are registered to vote and must be combined as far as is practicable.

2.4 For the purposes of maintaining the electoral register, the ERO has a statutory duty to conduct an annual canvass and to maintain the register throughout the year by way of the rolling registration process (Section 13A, RPA 1983). These two strands of maintaining the register are of equal importance. The duty set out in Section 9A, RPA 1983, to take all steps that are necessary in order to maintain the register is equally applicable to the rolling registration process as to the annual canvass.

The Returning Officer

2.5 The Returning Officer is responsible for the running of an election and for ensuring that it is run in accordance with the law. The duties of the Returning Officer are separate from their duties as a local government officer, and they are personally liable for the conduct of an election. This is an important distinction and will require, for example, the provision of a suitable insurance policy for any person designated as a Returning Officer.

The Returning Officer – local government elections

2.6 In England, every district council is required to appoint an officer of the council to be the Returning Officer for the election of district councillors and for the election of councillors of any parishes within the district (Section 35(1), RPA 1983). In Wales, every county or county borough is required to appoint an officer of the council to be the Returning Officer for the election of

councillors to the local authority, and for the election of councillors for any communities within the principal area (Section 35(1A), RPA 1983).

2.7 A Returning Officer has the power to appoint deputies to carry out any of their functions (Section 35(4), RPA 1983). Where separate counts are held a deputy should be appointed to run each count.

The Returning Officer – UK Parliamentary elections

2.8 At UK Parliamentary elections the Returning Officer for a county constituency is the High Sheriff of that county. The chairman or mayor of the council is the Returning Officer for a borough constituency. The Returning Officer is, however, a figurehead who takes little active part in running the election, usually only retaining duties in connection with receipt of the writ and the declaration of the result of the election.

2.9 The Acting Returning Officer is responsible for the actual conduct of the election. The officer of the district council who is appointed as ERO is appointed Acting Returning Officer by virtue of Section 24(1), RPA 1983 (in Wales by virtue of Section 24(1), RPA 1983, as amended by paragraph 68 of Schedule 16 to the Local Government (Wales) Act 1994). Where a Parliamentary constituency crosses local authority boundaries, then the Acting Returning Officer from one of the authorities affected will be designated to have responsibility for the constituency.

2.10 An Acting Returning Officer may appoint deputies to discharge all or any of their duties. There is no statutory requirement as to the qualification required by a Deputy Acting Returning Officer.

The Regional Returning Officer – European Parliamentary election

2.11 At a European Parliamentary election a Returning Officer for each region is designated by order of the Secretary State and is a person who is an Acting Returning Officer at a Parliamentary election by virtue of Section 28(1), RPA 1983. The functions of a Regional Returning Officer under the European Parliamentary Elections Regulations 2004 (EPE Regs) are primarily in relation to the nomination of registered political parties and individual candidates and to the allocation of seats. The poll is conducted across the region by Local Returning Officers.

2.12 A Local Returning Officer is a person who, in relation to a Parliamentary election in England and Wales, is the Acting Returning Officer. The Local Returning Officer for each Parliamentary constituency wholly or partly comprised in an electoral region is responsible for the conduct of the poll in that region including the printing of ballot papers (unless directed otherwise by the Returning Officer), the issue and receipt of postal ballot papers, the verification of ballot paper accounts, and the counting of votes given in that constituency (Regulation 6, EPE Regs 2004).

2.13 As at a UK Parliamentary election, a Regional Returning Officer or Local Returning Officer may appoint deputies to discharge all or any of their duties.

The Counting Officer

2.14 The Chief Counting Officer (who is the Chair of the Electoral Commission or someone appointed by them) appoints a Counting Officer for each district within a referendum area. It is the duty of the Counting Officer for each voting area wholly or partly comprised in a referendum area to:

- conduct the poll in that area
- verify the ballot papers at the poll
- count the votes cast in that poll, certifying the number of votes cast in favour of each answer to a question asked in the referendum and passing that information to the Chief Counting Officer

2.15 Counting Officers may appoint staff to discharge any or all of their functions.

The council's duties to support Electoral Registration Officers, Returning Officers and Counting Officers

2.16 The council that appointed the ERO is required to provide officers to assist the ERO in carrying out their statutory functions (Section 52(4), RPA 1983).

2.17 The Acting Returning Officer at UK Parliamentary elections and the Returning Officer at local government elections frequently employ local authority staff to carry out these functions, and in this capacity such staff are under their direction and not that of the local authority. Local authorities can permit their staff to work on the election but they are not required to do so. The Returning Officer will need to agree all such arrangements with the local authority.

2.18 Each local authority in a referendum area is required to place the services of its officers at the disposal of the Counting Officer appointed for that local authority area, for the purpose of assisting them in conducting the referendum.

Funding arrangements

2.19 At a Parliamentary election Acting Returning Officers can recover the costs of running the election for 'services properly rendered, or expenses properly incurred, for or in connection with the election' (Section 29, RPA 1983). However, the services or expenses must be of a kind specified in an order made by the Secretary of State. There will be a Parliamentary Elections (Returning Officers' Charges) Order, which will provide the statutory requirements. Acting Returning Officers will have 12 months from the date of the declaration of the result of the election in which to submit their accounts.

2.20 At an election to a principal area all expenditure properly incurred by a Returning Officer in relation to the election shall be paid by the council. However, expenditure must not exceed any scale which has been fixed by the

council (Section 36(4), RPA 1983). At the request of the Returning Officer the council should advance a reasonable sum in respect of expenses at the election. In some areas the scale of fees is fixed on a county-wide basis for local authorities within that county.

2.21 At a parish or community council election any expenditure properly incurred shall be paid by the principal area council and, where there is a scale fixed by the principal area council, expenditure should not exceed that scale. The principal area council may, however, require the parish or community council to repay such expenditure (Section 36(5) and (5A), RPA 1983).

2.22 The budget for registration should be settled between the ERO and the council that appointed them, and should be sufficient to allow the ERO to fulfil their duty to maintain the register.

2.23 Expenditure for electoral registration will fall into two main categories: funding the annual canvass; and funding the year-round registration process, known as 'rolling registration'. The expenses of registration must be properly accounted for by the ERO and then paid by the council (Section 54, RPA 1983). The amount of finance allocated to this service will, however, be determined by the council which will need to balance it against provision of finance across all services. This is in contrast to the provision of adequate staffing resource in order to assist the ERO, which is a direct duty of the council and should not be subject to wider constraints (Section 52(4), RPA 1983).

2.24 Each local authority is required to provide its ERO with adequate funds to carry out house-to-house, postal or other enquiries as are necessary in order to produce and maintain the register of electors.

3 What electoral services units should do

3.1 In addition to the statutory duties of an electoral services unit outlined in Chapter 2 there are a number of schemes and initiatives which focus on the delivery of services from a best practice perspective, and which may be used by those involved in the set-up of an electoral services unit as tools to assist with the building and benchmarking of a high quality service.

Our vision for quality electoral services

3.2 In preparation for performance standards we 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. Electoral Registration Officers (EROs), Returning Officers, electoral administrators and political parties were consulted during its development and we are confident that the vision enjoys broad support.

3.3 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

The full text of the vision for quality electoral services can be seen in the Appendix.

National Occupational Standards

3.4 SkillsPlus, a strategic partnership involving key UK local government bodies, has worked closely with the Electoral Commission and other key stakeholders throughout the UK, including the Association of Electoral Administrators (AEA) and the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE) to develop National Occupational Standards (NOS) for staff working in electoral services. After more than 12 months of research and development, the NOS for electoral services staff were approved by the UK's education and training regulators in September 2007.

3.5 The NOS will constitute a model of good practice that details the activities that staff and managers need to carry out, the standard of performance they must achieve and the knowledge and understanding they need.

3.6 The NOS will complement our work on performance standards as the former describes the expected performance of individuals, whereas the latter addresses overarching service-level standards.

3.7 The NOS cover the work of electoral services staff at all levels and are broken down into the following areas:

- increasing participation
- electoral registration
- managing/administering
- elections and referendums
- equality and diversity
- working with people
- managing resources
- managing projects
- managing information
- health and safety
- managing the organisation

3.8 There are currently 46 units of competence which describe what a member of staff should be able to do, the standard of performance they must achieve and the knowledge and understanding they need in order to be effective.

3.9 NOS are very flexible tools, which have been used in the local government sector for many years. They are valuable for developing job descriptions and candidate specifications, designing in-house induction and training programmes, and performance appraisal and development.

3.10 In terms of an ideal electoral services unit NOS will provide a valuable tool for consideration of the desirable skills and experience needed within the workforce, for assessing the skills already in place in the workforce and for developing training and recruitment plans to fill any identified gaps and shortages.

3.11 Each unit of the NOS for electoral services is broken down into the following areas:

- what is the unit about?
- who is the unit for?
- links with other units
- scope of the unit (i.e. description of which electoral services functions are covered by the unit)
- outcomes of effective performance (i.e. the activities in which the employee must be competent)
- knowledge and understanding (i.e. the legislation, policy and practice about which the employee must have knowledge and understanding, in order to carry out the activities in question effectively)

3.12 The full suite of standards can be viewed at www.ukstandards.org/Find_Occupational_Standards.aspx?NosFindID=4&FormMode=ViewModeSuite&SuiteID=1237.

3.13 The suite of standards is not only aimed at the skill set of electoral administrators, but also at EROs, Returning Officers and Counting Officers and is therefore a valuable planning tool at all levels of the new unit.

Beacon Scheme

3.14 The Beacon Scheme is sponsored by Communities and Local Government (CLG) and facilitated by the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA).

3.15 The Beacon Scheme recognises excellence and innovation in local government service delivery. Beacon status is granted to those authorities that demonstrate a clear vision, excellent services and a willingness to innovate within a specific theme. A major feature of the award is the responsibility to be proactive in sharing information and expertise with others.

3.16 The beacon theme for electoral services was included in the 2007 round of the scheme and highlighted three key areas where improvements could be made towards excellent service delivery. These were the improvement of registration levels, encouraging participation and ensuring that processes were secure. The successful authorities in this round were the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham, Shrewsbury and Atcham Borough Council and Swindon Borough Council.

3.17 While all three authorities undertook different projects to achieve beacon status they all shared a commitment to putting the public at the heart of what they were doing.

3.18 Further information on the scheme can be found on the Beacon website at <http://beacons.idea.gov.uk>. This includes case studies and contact details for the three authorities as well as a link to the Hammersmith and Fulham website on which they make available a range of their materials and guidance for the use of other electoral services teams.

Electoral Commission performance standards

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

- determine and publish standards of performance for relevant electoral officers in Great Britain
- 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

3.20 We intend to publish standards of performance for EROs in Great Britain in July 2008 and to request reports from them against the standards in December 2008. We aim to have published performance standards for Returning Officers by early 2009, in advance of the scheduled 2009 elections.

3.21 The performance standards framework is intended to provide a clear picture of what needs to be achieved to support a well-run electoral registration process, and to provide an objective process for assessing performance against common agreed standards.

3.22 The performance standards framework will focus initially on identifying agreed and consistent minimum standards of performance for EROs and Returning Officers. However we aim to support improvement beyond the minimum standard where possible. The framework will help to highlight where additional work may be required to support key electoral registration and electoral event processes.

3.23 Following submission of reports by EROs and Returning Officers we plan to publish an assessment of the level of performance against the standards. Our intention is that this should provide an overall picture of levels of performance and that it should identify those procedures, policies or practices where performance is particularly weak and to which EROs and Returning Officers may need to pay particular attention in future. It will also identify where performance is particularly strong, from which other EROs and Returning Officers may be able to learn in future.

Equality Impact Assessments

3.24 Local authorities generally have a good track record in promoting equality of access and opportunity across their services and this must be reflected in the work of the electoral services unit. The unit should undertake an Equality Impact Assessment in relation to its activities to ensure that it is responsive to the diverse needs of the communities that it serves and that where there are issues in relation to service delivery that the appropriate action is in hand to deal with those issues.

3.25 Section 69 of the EAA introduced a duty on EROs to encourage participation in the electoral process. We believe that equal access to elections and the electoral registration process is an essential part of a healthy democracy and are necessary to ensure high levels of voter participation and a complete register.

3.26 Our publications *Managing electoral registration in Great Britain: guidance for Electoral Registration Officers*¹ and *Managing a local government election in England and Wales: guidance for Returning Officers*² contain material on participation and the promotion of equal access for disabled, ethnic minority and other under-represented groups in addition to legislative background.

¹ The Electoral Commission, *Managing electoral registration in Great Britain: guidance for Electoral Registration Officers* (2008).

² The Electoral Commission, *Managing a local government election in England and Wales: guidance for Returning Officers* (2007).

4 Key factors for consideration

4.1 This section outlines the key factors that will need to be considered and addressed in order to provide a highly effective electoral services unit. The experience of those authorities facing re-organisation in the current round of local government re-structuring strongly reflects these areas of consideration.

4.2 In any re-organisation it is not simply a question of setting up a new unit from scratch as several distinct and disparate services from other authorities will need to be brought together to form the new unit. This presents its own unique problems and challenges and requires from the start a considerable degree of strategic planning, project management, and clear and unequivocal leadership in order to achieve a smooth transition to an effective new unit.

Location of electoral services units within the local authority structure

4.3 Traditionally the location of electoral services units within a range of local authority functions reflects the fact that there is no perfect fit for the service within a local authority. As a service that has traditionally operated as very much a stand-alone operation, its location may have frequently been determined by a variety of local and historical circumstances rather than any wider or more detailed consideration.

4.4 It is a fairly common practice for electoral service units to be located within the democratic services function of a local authority. These units will often, as a core function, oversee the running of council committees and executive functions, will provide support to elected members and ensure statutory and constitutional compliance. It may be that this decision has been based on inclusion of the service under the umbrella of 'democracy', with the link to the election of councillors and subsequent support being the rationale.

4.5 The advantages of locating within democratic services are that there will be an appreciation of the role of electoral services as the initial and fundamental process in providing a 'democratic' service. The disadvantages are that close links to elected members could be seen to undermine the independence and impartiality of the service, and that a small core unit may not be able to provide the massive additional support that may be required during peak election and registration activities.

4.6 It is also common for the function to be set alongside that of local land charges. There is no clear rationale for this other than some similarities in that both are reliant upon property and land databases and both are, to a large extent, perceived as stand-alone services.

4.7 The advantage of such a location, particularly in smaller authorities, is that in addition to sharing property data it provides some flexibility in spreading work between services which may both have an element of peaks and troughs in workload throughout the year. The disadvantages are that there is no real link in functions and that, even by grouping stand-alone

services, there is little capacity for providing the required additional resources during peak activities or sufficient back up in expertise.

4.8 In some authorities the electoral services unit is located within the legal services function on the basis that elections are events which are heavily regulated by legislation, and are also very much open to interpretation of legislation. Where the Chief Executive of an authority is not the Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) and Returning Officer, then it is sometimes the Head of Legal Services who will perform this role.

4.9 The advantages of locating within a legal services function are that there is an appreciation and understanding of the complexity of the legislative framework within which the service operates, and that there is expert advice and assistance on hand in interpreting legislation. The disadvantages, as with democratic services, are that the legal service may well be a small core unit unable to provide the required additional support at peak periods.

4.10 Of the databases held by a local authority, the electoral register is likely to be the largest in terms of records in that it should reflect every eligible elector in the authority's area. Given that it uses as its core a consolidated address database, it is sometimes the case that an electoral services unit will sit alongside the council tax function which is another large organisational database and situated within the finance function.

4.11 The advantages of locating within the finance function are that there is the opportunity to share databases and information, and also draw upon what may well be a larger body of support at peak periods. The disadvantages are that council tax has its own peak periods which often coincide with ordinary elections in May and there will inevitably be a pull on resources in the other direction.

4.12 In unitary authorities there is often wider scope for the location of the service as they will provide a wider range of regulatory services. For example, the registration of electors may be seen to have an affinity with other registration duties such as those carried out by the registrar of births, marriages and deaths.

4.13 The advantages of being located within a broader registration service are an appreciation of the regulatory requirements of the service, and an ability to utilise person and address data more easily across the functions. The disadvantages again revolve around the size of the registration unit and the ability to cope with peaks in workload around elections and the canvass.

4.14 Wherever an electoral services unit may have historically been positioned, it should not be overlooked that the electoral services unit has one of the largest direct customer contact functions of any department in the authority. While the individual resident's direct engagement with the service may well be limited to contact at voter registration and elections, nevertheless a case could be made for locating this service within a much larger customer centred operation.

4.15 Very few authorities seem to have gone down this route although an increasing number are using customer contact centres as the first point of call for service users, especially at peak periods.

4.16 Given the conclusion of Ron Gould's report into the 2007 Scottish elections³ that the interests of the voter should be at the heart of the process, it may be timely to challenge the view that electoral services units need to be located within the corporate centre alongside other governance activities. An advantage of locating within a broader customer services function may, as well as providing a focus on customer care, enable the service to draw upon additional support at critical periods.

4.17 In determining the best location for the service, it is important to weigh up the balance of interest and power of the person assigned as ERO and Returning Officer and given overall responsibility for managing and delivering the service. Location of that individual and the unit within an area with little natural affinity for electoral services may lead to the focus of the officer in charge being diverted away from the work of the specialised electoral services unit. Similarly the location of the unit within an area of responsibility which had little organisational influence would lead to difficulties in securing sufficient resources and support.

Centralised or devolved service?

4.18 The challenges faced by the new unitary authorities created in 2008, 2009 and subsequently will be unique in terms of the geographical scale of local government re-organisation and the number of councils which will be affected by each re-organisation. This has prompted examination of the best way to create the most effective and efficient structure for the service while taking into account the need to provide a local and customer focused service delivery operation. There is a balance to be struck between a centralised service or a devolved service based on small units in outlying areas.

4.19 In a reasonably compact area with good transport links then a centralised service in one location seems the obvious solution. It will not disadvantage electors and will provide the opportunity for a streamlined, economical and efficient delivery of service.

4.20 Retaining core staff in a central location could be supplemented by providing additional customer facilities in any local offices or one stop shops provided by the authority. This is a common method of operation with the satellite units providing services such as general advice and application forms, together with the ability to provide an immediate link to more specialised assistance at the central electoral services office if it is required.

4.21 A devolved service has to be considered where the geographical coverage of an area is extensive, as in the new county unitary authorities. The number of devolved units and the criteria on which they should be based

³ Ron Gould CM et al, *Scottish elections 2007: The independent review of the Scottish Parliamentary and local government elections 3 May 2007* (The Electoral Commission: 2007).

must be considered carefully. Options include basing the units on former authority areas, basing them on distinct electoral areas such as Parliamentary constituencies, locating them in the main population centres of the authority's area, or even locating them according to the accommodation available to house them.

4.22 Each devolved service option has its merits and disadvantages. Basing services on former authority areas would be easy to initiate for a new unitary authority, but may not have a continuing relevance within the area of the new authority. Basing services on constituencies (new Parliamentary constituencies rather than ones existing in 2008) would have a geographic and administrative rationale but may be subject to change in future. Locating services in large, significant or convenient population centres would provide a good measure of customer focus but would require careful administrative organisation. A solution of providing units wherever accommodation is available may necessitate a pragmatic mixture of all approaches with a combination of advantages and disadvantages.

4.23 Providing a devolved service would also raise questions about whether there should still be a central core, or where the core should be positioned. For example, the ERO and Returning Officer would probably be based at the main office of the authority, so should the electoral services unit manager also be based at the main office for ease of communication, or could they be based at one of the other units? Other issues raised later in this section will also have particular relevance to any devolved operation: For example:

- What should the size of the devolved units be in terms of staffing, and what level of management and experience would be required to run them?
- How would consistency in delivery of service be ensured?
- How would each unit be supported from the centre, for example in terms of accessing legal advice?
- What powers would each unit be given, for example would they have individual control over recruitment of polling staff and booking of polling stations at election times and how would this be co-ordinated?
- How would the receipt of nomination papers be organised and managed; would there be sufficient and robust access to technology?

4.24 Every aspect of the service would need to be critically examined in the context of devolved service delivery and every risk assessed and controlled to ensure that the structure of the unit was not only compatible with the wider structure of the authority, but also that it met the needs of the elector.

4.25 There are examples of successful models of devolved operation. Staffordshire Moorlands District Council is currently a Beacon Council in the theme of 'Transforming services: citizen engagement and empowerment' for its work in creating a network of integrated public access points across its area. These 'one stop shops' enable trained staff to deal with a range of enquiries and so the customer experiences a seamless service which is delivered locally to meet their needs.

Staffing structure

4.26 As the principal resource in terms of the delivery of an effective service, factors involving staff need to be considered extremely carefully. Putting in place a coherent staffing structure or framework is key to ensuring that staff are able to perform successfully.

4.27 Clear lines of communication and responsibility to the ERO and the Returning Officer should be ensured. Difficulties and tensions arise in many authorities where electoral services units sit within a directorate which has its own line management structure which may in turn place it in conflict with the direct line of responsibility of the electoral services function to the ERO or Returning Officer. It is important that wherever the unit is placed within the organisation, it is positioned in such a way as to avoid conflicting management demands.

4.28 Choice and appointment of the ERO and Returning Officer and their position within the structure of the organisation is of vital importance and will determine much of the underlying structure of the unit within the organisation and its location. Key leadership skills and the ability to influence decisions and to mobilise resource when necessary are essential to placing due weight and emphasis on the work of the electoral services unit and to ensuring the most effective service delivery.

4.29 In an ideal scenario the head of the electoral services unit would report directly to the ERO and Returning Officer and would, in addition, be granted full powers of deputy. In reality this does not often sit neatly within structures as, for example, if the Chief Executive were the ERO and Returning Officer then their direct reports would usually be at director or head of service level. If direct reporting is not a feasible option then it should be clear that line management responsibilities within a directorate should not interfere with the necessary direct line of reporting from an electoral services manager to the ERO and Returning Officer in terms of the ERO's and Returning Officer's direct responsibility for the service.

4.30 A clear structure based upon the how the service is to be delivered should be formulated and presented as early as possible in the process of creating a new electoral services unit. Creating a new structure from several existing structures as in the case of the new unitary authorities brings with it certain difficulties, not the least of which is the need to meet or address the expectations of a large number of similarly experienced and qualified staff whose employment has been transferred from the previous local authorities. A clear illustration of how the service is to be structured and delivered will not solve many of the issues, but will provide clarity as to the future direction of the service to all involved.

4.31 The detailed staffing arrangements for the unit cannot be prescriptive. Whether the manager of the unit should also have a wider managerial span is a matter for local choice but any decision needs to be taken in the context of the scale of the task that the individual will have in establishing and maintaining an effective unit. While the size of an authority may well

determine the number of roles an individual may be expected to hold, it would seem sensible for a single person to be responsible for managing an electoral services unit.

4.32 There should also be provision for an assistant to be appointed to deputise in the absence of the electoral services manager to ensure continuity and accountability. Depending upon the size and structure of the unit, this could be a full time post for an individual or may be a role assigned to a number of people, for example across devolved service units.

4.33 Dependent upon how the service is to be delivered the manager should be supported by a permanent staff group which in turn should be capable of being expanded by the addition of temporary or casual staff at times of particular activity such as the annual canvass or an election event.

Staffing numbers

4.34 Again, it is not possible to be prescriptive in terms of the number of staff required to run an effective electoral services unit. There are a number of dependencies such as the nature and structure of the service, the population of the authority and the socio-economic profile, the number of absent voters, the number of armed forces personnel stationed in the area, the number of electoral areas (including parishes), the budget available to the service and many other variables.

4.35 Staffing numbers already vary considerably between authorities of the same type, and well as between different types. In some areas there is only a single member of staff dealing with electoral services, and in others staff share their time between electoral services and other roles.

4.36 In new unitary authority areas there is potential for reduction of staff numbers in a new service. Loss of too many experienced staff could result in a skills deficit and consequent problems for delivery of service, and could impact on the morale of remaining staff. While settling on the correct number of staff within any structure is important, it is also important to ensure that an appropriate mix of skills and experience is displayed.

4.37 There is no accepted or proven formula for calculating what level of staffing is required. An indication of likely levels may be obtained from looking at existing levels of staffing and adjusting that for any new duties that the unit may be undertaking or any apparent duplication of roles. A survey of staffing resources in electoral services units undertaken by the Southern Branch of the Association of Electoral Administrators (AEA) in 2007 suggested that election staff spend, on average, three minutes per elector of their work time during the year. A similar guideline figure quoted in an independent review of electoral services in the London Borough of Hounslow in 2005 and based upon average staffing levels suggested an average of 40,000 electors would equate to one-full time member of staff, in addition to a full-time manager role.

Staffing – allocation of roles

4.38 Although in smaller units staff have to cover all aspects of electoral work, in larger units there may be a case for allocating defined areas of work to individuals or assigning work based on defined geographical or electoral areas.

4.39 Assigning individuals or teams to manage specific electoral areas is common practice in many larger authorities, irrespective of whether or not they operate on a devolved location basis. For example, in an area comprising several parliamentary constituencies it may be that an individual or team would be responsible for all areas of work affecting one constituency, for example in processing all applications for registration and all absent voting applications, processing and reviewing special category elector applications and records, managing canvassers, booking and staffing polling stations, etc.

4.40 An alternative approach could be to assign particular roles to staff in areas where the workload makes it viable. This could involve for example detailing staff to manage the registration of special category electors, to be responsible for processing all absent voting applications, or processing rolling registration applications.

4.41 Both approaches have their advantages. Area working can, depending on the size of the team, foster 'ownership' of an area and concentrate skills and knowledge in respect of that area. Specialisation can similarly increase the level of skill applied to categories of electors or specific processes. Possible disadvantages include a corresponding lack of skill or expertise across the whole area so that cover in the event of absence or someone leaving is not as effective. It is therefore vitally important, especially in the case of specialisation that all processes are documented and that appropriate training is in place to ensure that knowledge is not unique to one individual.

Staffing – training, qualifications and staff development

4.42 In staffing an electoral services unit full consideration must be given to ensuring that staff are fully trained to perform their roles, that they hold or are given the opportunity to study for relevant qualifications, and that their personal and career development needs are taken into account.

4.43 The manager of an electoral services unit should ideally have management experience, have received management training or hold a management qualification. In particular the manager should have some experience of both compiling and maintaining the electoral register as well as the running of electoral events. It would be desirable if the manager held a relevant professional qualification from an appropriate body such as the AEA. In addition they should be able to demonstrate managerial skills including knowledge of issues such as project management, health and safety, and risk management. These elements are also included in the AEA's Diploma level qualification.

4.44 While there is no standard person specification for this role SkillsPlus, working in partnership with key stakeholders, has produced a suite of National Occupational Standards for electoral services staff. These standards are now the agreed benchmarks of best practice for everyone involved in the registration of electors and the management of elections and referendums. Currently there are 46 units of competence which describe what a member of staff should be able to do, the standard that they must achieve and the knowledge and understanding that they need to be effective. Twenty of these units were specifically developed for electoral services staff while the others were taken from other sets of National Occupational Standards. It is suggested that the manager of the unit should be able to demonstrate competency in all of the 46 units.

4.45 Any deputy position should have experience of electoral work but would not necessarily need the full range of competencies required of the manager of the unit. These could certainly be acquired over time and should be taken into account in terms of career development.

4.46 The standards should be used to develop job profiles and person specifications for all the posts in the unit and they should also be used to undertake performance appraisals and for the development of staff.

Administrative practices and consistency

4.47 The issue of ensuring consistency over a number of areas and bringing together differing administrative practices is especially important for new unitary authority areas, but can also be relevant to teams within a unit and to devolved location working. Almost every role or procedure that is carried out by more than one person or in more than one location must be tested to ensure that it is dealt with consistently and to a high standard.

4.48 In amalgamating previous units into a new one, an initial problem will be how to combine different filing systems and record maintenance. Common sense suggests that there should be one system to ensure availability and easy use of records and that all staff are instructed and trained accordingly in how to maintain it.

4.49 The same application of consistency applies to all other documentation within the new unit and may well require decisions on the strategic approach of the new unit. For example, risk registers, planning and strategy documents for participation and communication, election project plans, contingency and business continuity plans and so on will all need to be considered, revised and communicated to all relevant staff.

4.50 Not only physical processes and documentation are affected. Training will be vital in ensuring that legislation, guidance and good practice is applied consistently across the service and that any differences in interpretation and practice from previous authorities are identified and eradicated.

4.51 The question of consistency impacts upon every area of a new electoral services unit and will be especially acute if units remain devolved. It must be

addressed at the earliest possible opportunity as the threat to the outside perception of the unit and the quality of delivery of service to the public will suffer if it is not.

Software and technology issues

4.52 Given the reliance on information technology in the running of electoral processes it is inevitable that the choice of software and the implementation of a software package will have a significant bearing on the operation of the new unit. For the new unitaries it has been a critical issue and has determined to a large extent the speed of progress towards amalgamation and the creation of a new services unit.

4.53 There are two approaches to the selection of a software package. In rare instances it may be the case that the acquisition of software is not so much of an issue because all previous units operated the same package, however, it is far more likely that a choice will need to be made either to adopt the package that has been most commonly used in the previous units, or a decision will be required to go out to the market to invite tenders and select a new package.

4.54 Either approach will need careful project management and may involve protracted negotiations with both existing and future suppliers so a realistic appraisal of the required timescale will be necessary. Expediency in adoption will need to be balanced against a realistic appraisal of the ability of the software to meet the perceived requirements of the new unit.

4.55 The benefits of the early adoption of a single software package are that a single combined database can be used for registration and the management of elections. This will provide consistent processes and approaches to work and allow for the development of standardised procedures. Staff can receive the same training on the system and will be able to provide cover across the unit. Corporate branding will be far easier to achieve and documentation can be standardised across the area of the new unit providing clearer and more consistent communication with electors.

4.56 In addition, use of a single database will allow for the register of electors to be produced in an accessible and standardised way, incorporating any relevant and necessary changes to polling district letter designations that may be required as a result of any amalgamation and duplication. To achieve this the timing of implementing a new system would be best targeted to either before a canvass or immediately prior to the publication of the December register. If introduced prior to a canvass then the canvass could be used to validate the new database. If introduced prior to publication then there is a risk in ensuring that data is transferred accurately but, assuming that it is, then the data on the register would be fresh and distribution would be of the new register.

4.57 Implementation of a new software package will need to be tailored to the structure and method of service delivery of the unit. For example, in a devolved service the ability to network and achieve uninterrupted and seamless access to the database will be essential to ensure effective

service delivery. Co-ordination of printing and scanning requirements will also be essential and backup procedures and security of data will need to be considered.

4.58 In addition to software, consideration will need to be given to other communication media, such as telephone and email. Whether based on a central core or devolved locations, protocols for taking telephone calls and dealing with emails will need to be clearly established and implemented to ensure a consistent and effective approach to service delivery both throughout the unit and across the authority.

Equipment and procurement

4.59 In addition to the co-ordination of IT equipment and basic requirements such as office furniture, there will be issues for any new unit in standardising the level and quality of equipment. For example there are currently wide variations in the construction, materials and design of ballot boxes and polling screens. Standardising levels of equipment will be important in ensuring equal levels of quality and accessibility for electors and for staff and will have budgetary implications for the service.

4.60 If there is a considerable volume of purchasing and tendering for contracts required as a result of amalgamation, then it is probable that staff with special procurement skills will be needed to manage the process.

4.61 With an increasing trend towards shared services between local authorities, it is worth considering whether joint procurement of services such as printing of poll cards or ballot papers could provide greater efficiency and economy. Agreements or informal partnerships with neighbouring authorities can provide many benefits, not least in removing the burden of having to resource everything from a single authority's budget.

Budget

4.62 Any new unit should have some idea of the budget that was required to run previous units and can use this information as a rough guide to gauge the financial requirements for the new unit. Obviously this will be dependent upon a huge variety of factors such as, for example, the structure and numbers of staff employed, consequent IT requirements, the number of electoral contests expected, as well as any finite amount of money that may have been set aside by the authority for this purpose.

4.63 Some budgetary information may also be available from other authorities of a similar size and structure. In addition we will have much more detailed information on electoral services budgets available once our collection of financial data from all authorities in connection with the performance standards framework is completed after the end of July 2008.

4.64 In March 2008 we published a report *Accounting for elections: the National Assembly for Wales elections 2007*,⁴ which identified and commented upon key issues concerning the financial accounting arrangements for those elections and which has relevance to all election accounting across the UK. The Wales Audit Office provided expert assistance in this review and also made a number of suggestions and recommendations regarding best practice.

4.65 Key themes highlighted by the report of particular practical relevance to any new electoral services unit included:

- the need for transparency, clarity and consistency throughout and in particular with regard to payments made in respect of additional election duties to core election administrative teams
- review and consideration of whether in-house local authority services provided the best value for money
- ensuring that arrangements to maintain separation of ordering and payment authorisation duties for staff involved in procurement were robust
- consideration of use of the services of the local authority's internal auditor to review election claims and accounts prior to submission

⁴ The Electoral Commission, *Accounting for elections: the National Assembly for Wales elections 2007* (2008).

5 What help is available

Electoral Commission advice services

5.1 Section 10 of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 allows the Electoral Commission to provide advice and assistance to Electoral Registration Officers and Returning Officers.

5.2 The first point of contact for any queries should be the Commission's English office covering the local authority's electoral area as appropriate, or the Wales Office in the case of authorities in Wales. In addition to telephone support, staff at these offices are available to meet locally with authority staff to discuss and inform developmental work on the structure of an electoral services unit.

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North East and Yorkshire & the Humber

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Wales Office

Joanne Nelson

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Other organisations

Association of Electoral Administrators

5.3 The Association of Electoral Administrators (AEA) is the professional body which represents UK electoral staff and provides help and advice to its members. The AEA is keen to foster the advancement of consistent and efficient administration of electoral registration and the conduct of elections and does this by encouraging training and education and, more generally, the development of experience of its members. The AEA has also developed and administers a professional qualification for electoral administrators, which allows successful candidates to gain a certificate or diploma in electoral administration. For further information see www.aea-elections.co.uk.

SOLACE

5.4 The Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers (SOLACE) is the representative body for senior strategic managers working in the public sector. The Society promotes public sector management excellence, with membership spanning the whole of the UK. For further information see www.solace.org.uk or contact David Monks, Chair Electoral Matters – SOLACE, at david.monks@huntsdc.gov.uk.

Local Government Association

5.5 The Local Government Association (LGA) represents the interests of its local authority members and exists to promote better local government. The LGA may be able to provide support and guidance through their extensive network of contacts. For further contact details see www.lga.gov.uk.

Using National Occupational Standards in setting up an electoral services unit

5.6 The full suite of National Occupational Standards (NOS) for electoral services staff is available for download from the website of SkillsPlus at www.skillsplus.gov.uk. The content of the standards may be used as a basis for developing job descriptions, designing in-house induction and training programmes and for performance appraisal and development.

5.7 SkillsPlus is currently working with the AEA, the Commission and other bodies to develop guidance materials and ‘toolkits’ to help local authorities and others to make practical use of the NOS. These will be freely available to the sector. For further information, contact Sharon Frazer at sharonfrazer@blueyonder.co.uk.

Ongoing guidance, training and development

5.8 The planning and inception stages of a new electoral services unit are likely to take place over a period of many months. We will be pleased to provide ongoing support during this period – including advice by telephone assistance and also through attending planning meetings.

5.9 Please advise us if you identify specific training or support needs at any stage in the process and we will endeavour to assist you. Your first point of contact for any such matters should be the relevant Commission office whose details are specified at the start of this chapter.

5.10 We are also keen to be kept apprised of the detail of the planning and delivery aspects of a new electoral services unit. This information will provide an invaluable knowledge bank to assist local authorities in planning electoral services units in the future.

Appendix – Vision for quality electoral services

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 electoral services (registration and elections) to be should be enshrined in the core values of public office and should support the modernising and ethical standards agenda in public service.				
This means electors can expect.....	This means candidates and parties can expect....	This means those involved in administration can expect....	This means those involved in Government and the Electoral Commission can expect....	
<p>Integrity – a secure process for registration and voting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 🔗 To know information about them is accurate and to be clear how it is used 🔗 Their vote is confidential and they can make it free from pressure 🔗 To know their vote is counted 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 🔗 Processes which are transparent and checked 🔗 Accurate results 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 🔗 Support from bodies such as the Electoral Commission, government departments and local authorities 🔗 Independence from political parties 🔗 Police, courts and prosecutors who are conversant with electoral law 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 🔗 The results of any election are accepted by the public and candidates 🔗 The voter has confidence in both the process and the results 	
<p>User focus – an easy and accessible process for candidates and electors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 🔗 A voting process that is easy to understand 🔗 To have a choice of ways to vote 🔗 To be able to vote in a way that suits their lifestyle and needs 🔗 Information and advice which is accurate, prompt and easy to understand 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 🔗 To know how to stand for election 🔗 Consistency of approach and realistic timescales 🔗 Clarity and impartiality in the process 🔗 A clear process of redress 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 🔗 External suppliers who deliver what is expected of them 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 🔗 Electoral staff are proactive in encouraging registration and voting 🔗 Participating in democracy seen as part of active citizenship 	
<p>Professionalism – a clear and consistent approach to delivery</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ To know if they are eligible to register and vote ✓ To know how and when to register and what to do if they move ✓ To know where to get information and advice ✓ To know who and what they are voting for ✓ Young people to be educated about 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"> ✓ The legislative framework and associated rules are clear and are consistently applied ✓ There is focused and timely training and guidance ✓ Legislation is introduced in a timely manner ✓ 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 ICT. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> £ Maximum registration of eligible citizens £ Maximum participation in elections £ Appropriate use of public money 	

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To contact our offices in Scotland, Wales,
Northern Ireland and the English regions,
see inside back cover for details.

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.

Democracy matters