

Agenda – Llywydd's Committee

Meeting Venue:	For further information contact:
Video Conference via Zoom	Huw Gapper
Meeting date: 18 October 2021	Committee Clerk
Meeting time: 10.30	0300 200 6568
	SeneddLLC@senedd.wales

In accordance with Standing Order 34.19, the Chair has determined that the public are excluded from the Committee's meeting in order to protect public health. This meeting will be broadcast live on www.senedd.tv

- 1 Introductions, apologies, substitutions and declarations of interest**
(10.30)
- 2 Scrutiny of the Electoral Commission's financial estimate 2022/23 and five year plan**
(10.35 – 11.30) (Pages 1 – 246)
Dame Elan Closs Stephens CBE – Electoral Commissioner, Wales
Bob Posner – Chief Executive, Electoral Commission
Kieran Rix – Director, Finance and Corporate Services, Electoral Commission
Rhydian Thomas – Head of Electoral Commission, Wales, Electoral Commission
- 3 Motion under Standing Order 17.42(vi) to resolve to exclude the public from the remainder of the meeting**
- 4 Scrutiny of the Electoral Commission's financial estimate 2022/23 and five year plan: Consideration of evidence**
(11.30 – 12.30)

Document is Restricted

David Rees MS
Chair, Llywydd's Committee
Senedd Cymru
Cardiff
CF99 1NA

27 September 2021

Dear Chair

I am pleased to provide you with the Commission's Main Estimate for the 2022/23 financial year. This is underpinned by our draft five year Corporate Plan for the period 2022/23 to 2026/27.

As you would expect, the estimate and accompanying narrative sets out how we plan to support the delivery and effective regulation of elections in Wales in 2022/23. This includes activity and required resource for any currently proposed electoral reform legislated for by the Senedd.

The draft Corporate Plan sets out five strategic objectives for the period. These seek to maintain the high standards and public trust in the electoral system, as well as to address pressures and areas for development to further enhance the strength of democracy in Wales and the wider UK.

Our strategic objectives

Accessible registration and voting

We will continue to seek to remove barriers that prevent people registering or casting their vote. Alongside our ongoing activities to encourage voter registration and protect against electoral fraud, we will work to retain voter confidence in political campaigning as it evolves.

Transparent political campaigning and compliant political finance

We will support parties and campaigners to comply with the law, while continuing to ensure political finance is transparent.

Resilient local electoral services

We will support local authorities to meet the significant economic, social and environmental challenges they face in delivering well-run electoral services. We will also

support electoral administrators to adapt to the increasingly diverse approach to the way elections are delivered, brought about by devolution and the changing needs of voters.

Fair and effective electoral law

During the period of this plan, we will work with others to secure changes in electoral law, ensuring it keeps pace with other developments in our society, harnessing technology and working on a continual process of modernisation.

A modern and sustainable electoral system

We will also work with others to secure changes in the operation of the electoral system to ensure it is resilient to changes in society. Critical to this will be taking on board advances in digital technology, seeking sustainable solutions and improving the coherence and efficiency of how we work with other organisations involved in the electoral system.

Ensuring the Commission is equipped to deliver benefits to the electoral system

Underpinning the plan is the requirement to provide value for money and maintain a well-run organisation. The plan incorporates a renewed focus on equality, diversity and inclusion, and is designed to encourage staff engagement, development of skills and use of the technology required to support effective ways of working and continuous learning and improvement.

Delivering value for money

Proposed budgets for the Commission are set out in the Corporate Plan. In preparing these budgets we have had regard to the considerations set out in the Minister for Finance and Local Government's letter of 2 August and have applied the agreed funding formula.

We are pleased to be able to confirm that the Senedd's planned contribution will be lower in real terms by the end of the Corporate Plan period than in 2021/22. We will of course continue to keep our budgets under review and the proposed plan represents our current view of maximum budgets. This reflects our commitment to ensuring value for money, and a recognition of the fiscal position, while allowing us to respond to Welsh Government priorities in later years, for example in relation to electoral reform. We also note and welcome that from time to time Welsh Government may request advice and assistance from the Commission on specific electoral related matters. This would be in addition to the funding provided by the Senedd.

As is usual, the profile of spend reflects the electoral timetable. The Committee will of course note that the contribution peaks in 2025/26, representing preparations for the Senedd elections scheduled in 2026. Equally, however, the contribution falls substantially in 2022/23, reflecting the schedule of elections in Wales. The key assumptions underlying the plan include not only the timing of relevant elections but also the rate of inflation (GDP deflator) and pay settlements (assumed to average 1% across years). The key risks are

changes to these assumptions. In the event that current inflation figures underpinning the budgets were to change to a degree that could not be accommodated within these plans, the Commission may need to amend predicted budgets to ensure they will be no higher in real terms at the end of the period than the start.

Turning to the next financial year (2022/23) specifically, the total contribution is substantially lower than 2021/22, as noted above. This still allows us to meet our significant agenda in Wales for the coming year.

In the next 12 months the Commission's work in Wales will focus on the delivery and evaluation of the 2022 local government elections. This includes ensuring that the wider electoral community in Wales continues to have the resilience in place to cope with the changing environment. This will once again keep voters at the forefront of planning so that they are able to participate with confidence using their preferred method of voting. We will also be supporting, challenging and monitoring the performance of Returning Officers, and will publish a statutory report on the elections.

We also expect to work closely with Welsh Government and the Senedd on the potentially extensive programme of electoral reform relating to devolved elections in Wales. This includes work around any pilots for 2022. Work will also continue with developing an education programme to ensure that voters – especially those that are newly enfranchised – are aware of their democratic rights.

Measuring performance

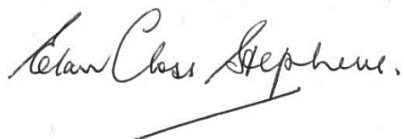
Section 10 of the draft Corporate Plan contains performance measures, which are also included in Annex 1. We have a key role to work with other partners within the electoral system. We have included a number of performance measures that are 'partnership indicators', as our work together with that of others impacts on the performance in those parts of the system.

There will be an opportunity in early 2022, with the benefit of further data and benchmarking, for the Commission to set targets for the first year of the plan (2022/23). This will also inform the targets for subsequent years. This work will be reflected in the final version of the Corporate Plan which we will submit to you in early 2022.

I hope you agree that the Corporate Plan we are proposing is appropriate to address the size and nature of the challenges at hand and will ultimately result in greater public confidence in our electoral system. We will measure the impact of our planned activities throughout the period of this plan to ensure they address the challenges outlined above.

We commend both the attached estimate and five-year Corporate Plan to the Llywydd's Committee, and look forward to discussing these with you when appropriate.

Yours sincerely

Handwritten signature of Dame Elan Closs Stephens in black ink.

Dame Elan Closs Stephens CBE
Electoral Commissioner - Wales

Handwritten signature of Bob Posner in black ink.

Bob Posner
Chief Executive and Accounting Officer,
Electoral Commission

Annex 1 – Measuring performance

Strategic objectives	Improvements	Performance indicators
1. Accessible registration and voting	Increased ease of registering and voting	Public satisfaction with the system of registering to vote
		Public satisfaction with the process of voting
		Accuracy of the electoral register
		Completeness of the electoral register
		Votes rejected and not included in the count for elections
		Public perception that the process of voting is easy
		Additions to electoral registers during our public awareness campaigns
2. Transparent political campaigning and compliant political finance	Maintained availability of information	Publish donation and loan reports within deadlines
		Publish statements of accounts within deadlines
	Increased confidence in decision making	Applicants are notified of the outcome of their registration application within the working day targets
		Decisions on final notices issued for representations within the deadlines
Increased compliance with electoral law	Responses to requests for regulatory advice on financial reporting within targets	

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Strategic objectives	Improvements	Performance indicators
3. Resilient local electoral services	Maintained quality of electoral services	Public perception that appropriate action will be taken by the authorities if a political party or a campaigner is caught breaking the rules on campaign funding
4. Fair and effective electoral law	Maintained confidence in the electoral process	Formal Electoral Registration Officers and Returning Officers performance assessment of when standards are not met
		Guidance products for electoral administrators published on time with no substantive errors
		Confidence that elections are well run
		Election reports published within deadlines
	Increased parliamentary accountability	Public confidence in knowing how to register to vote
		Public confidence in how to cast their vote
		Election, referendum and other reports responded to by the relevant government within deadlines
5. A modern and sustainable electoral system	Improved security of the electoral system	Responses to policy proposals and legislative consultations by the deadlines
		Responses to Members of the Senedd's correspondence within deadlines
		Public perception that voting in general is safe from fraud and abuse

The strategic objectives are underpinned by three key factors

Key factors	Improvements	Performance indicators
1. We demonstrate independence and integrity	Improved reputation as an independent regulator	Responses to oral and written Senedd questions within timeframes
		Responses to requests for advice from Electoral Registration Officers and Returning Officers within deadlines
		Responses to requests for elections guidance from candidates and agents within deadlines
		Responses to requests and enquiries from the public within deadlines
2. We are a skilled organisation where diversity is valued	Maintained staff well-being	Staff engagement score from the annual employee survey
3. We are a learning organisation where improvement is continuous and resources are used efficiently	Increased value for money	Agreed auditors' recommendations that are implemented by the target date

Indicators being developed and to be set for 2022/23

Developing our corporate plan has identified a number of areas of performance where suitable data has not previously been collected or where the data is not currently available. Research and development for potential indicators in the areas below is currently underway, with the ambition to consider and set these for 2022/23.

Strategic objectives	Improvements	Performance areas
1. Accessible registration and voting	Increased ease of registering and voting	Levels of new voter registrations by groups that currently have difficulty engaging in the process
		Eligible/registered voters who cast their vote from groups that currently have difficulty engaging in the process
Transparent political campaigning and compliant political finance	Maintained availability of information	Register of regulated entities
	Reducing regulatory barriers to campaigning	Campaigner opinion on finance rules reducing actual or perceived barriers to campaigning
	Increased trustworthiness of campaigning	Voter opinion on confidence in the trustworthiness of campaigning
3. Resilient local electoral services	Maintained quality of electoral services	Electoral administrator opinion on resilience of electoral services
5. A modern and sustainable electoral system	Improved customer service	User pop-up survey on satisfaction with our website and systems
	Improved security of the electoral system	Allegations of electoral fraud/security incidences

Strategic objectives	Improvements	Performance areas
	Improved partnerships within the electoral system	Key engagements with partners
	Increased environmental sustainability	Meeting requirements if existing and emerging or new environmental legislation

Key factors	Improvements	Performance areas
1. We demonstrate independence and integrity	Improved reputation as an independent regulator	Parliamentarian survey on our independence, reputation and satisfaction with our services
	Maintained confidence in the electoral process	Voter opinion on our reputation as an independent regulator
2. We are a skilled organisation where diversity is valued	Maintained staff well-being	Employees booked on learning and development training ¹
		External training offered to employees ¹
	Increased staff diversity	Commissioner and staff diversity ¹

¹ Whole Commission target to be set

Key factors	Improvements	Performance areas
3. We are a learning organisation where improvement is continuous and resources are used efficiently	Increased value for money	Costs saved ¹
	Increased environmental sustainability	Public value framework ¹
		Energy consumption ¹
		Waste and recycling levels ¹

Annual Estimate 2022-23		Electoral Commission, Wales	
Senedd Costs		2022-23	Commentary
		£000s	
Direct Costs (pay and non-pay)			
	Electoral Administration		
	Wales	308	This represents the Committee's share of the costs of preparing for and supporting the delivery of the 2022 Local Government elections in Wales. This will include developing and delivering online guidance and providing resources for candidates and agents, Returning Officers/Electoral Registration Officers and electoral administrators. We will use our performance standards in our engagement with ROs/EROs to support and challenge them on their delivery of electoral events and activities. We will work closely with the electoral community in Wales through the various stakeholder groups we manage, for example the Wales Electoral Coordination Board and Senedd Parties Panel. We will work closely with the Welsh Government to provide advice and expert opinion as electoral reforms, such as pilots, are developed. The Wales team will also provide resource and support for projects being led outside of Wales (e.g. on ending dual reporting) but with a direct impact on devolved elections. We will continue to fulfil our statutory responsibility by meeting the Welsh Language Standards set by the Welsh Language Commissioner and will lead and support the wider Commission to ensure that our commitments to the Welsh Language are upheld.
	Support	47	This represents the Committee's share of the cost of monitoring and supporting the work of Returning Officers and Electoral Registration Officers in Wales for 2022-23, including redeveloping and consulting on a new set of performance standards for Returning Officers, to be laid at the Senedd during the financial year.
	Guidance	44	This represents the Committee's share of the cost to support the Local Government Elections Wales 2022. We will provide advice in response to queries from Returning Officers/Electoral Registration Officers and electoral administrators throughout the year, but particularly before, during and after the election.
	New resource for devolved elections	93	This represents the costs of two staff members who will be employed to support the delivery of the Welsh Government and Senedd's extensive programme of electoral reform - ensuring that this complex legislation is clear and workable - as well as furthering

				our education programme with voters, and in particular young people.
			492	
	Legal			
	Legal	115		This represents the Committee's share of the total cost of providing legal support to the Commission's advice, guidance and regulation functions and real-time legal advice before, during and after the 2022 Local Government elections in Wales. It also includes supporting post-poll regulation and the development of any policy recommendations as well as providing general and on-going legal advice on Welsh legislation and support of the Commission's functions as they relate to Wales (including registration, regulation, policy, electoral administration, governance, and compliance with Welsh Language Standards).
	Regulation			
	Registration & reporting	41		This represents the Committee's share of the costs for the work associated with the statutory reports required from political parties in Wales, such as quarterly donations and loans reports, annual registration of party details and annual Statement of Account submission. The Wales team provides support to parties through each of these processes and we publish the financial data associated with these submissions.
	Monitoring & enforcement	39		This represents the Committee's share of the costs that are associated with compliance and enforcement work arising from parties and campaigners in Wales. Our monitoring work includes reviewing campaign activity, and carrying out enforcement work if required. The Commission works with regulated entities including parties, campaigners, candidates and elected members to ensure compliance with the rules in an effort to avoid having to take enforcement action. We also work closely with the Single Point of Contact (SPOC) within each Police Force area to provide advice and guidance during the election period. Our advice services are available to all regulated entities and stakeholders.
				As part of our monitoring and enforcement, we are working with Senedd officials to bring an end to dual reporting in Wales. Currently, MS' have to report certain donations and loans twice, to both the Senedd and to the Electoral Commission. Bringing dual reporting to an end, as has been the case in both Westminster and the Scottish Parliament, will relieve the administrative burden of elected members having

				to report the same donation or loan twice to two different bodies.
		Regulatory support	30	This represents the Committee's share of the costs associated with developing spending, donations and post-poll reporting guidance for the 2022 Local Government elections in Wales. As part of this work, we provide candidates and agents with training sessions prior to elections, that take place at party conferences, local authority candidate sessions and bespoke Commission seminars, to ensure high levels of compliance with the rules.
				The Wales team also provides advice and guidance to candidates and agents prior to elections, which will include the 2022 Local Government elections in Wales, and we provide the same advice service to parties, campaigners and elected members year round.
		Communication, policy & research	225	
		Campaigns & Corp Identity	126	This represents the Committee's share of the costs of the Commission's campaigns team based on our estimate of how their time will be spent. We will run two public awareness campaigns ahead of the 2022 Local Government elections in Wales - our 'Got 5?' voter registration campaign and our 'Welcome to Your Vote' franchise campaign for 16/17 year olds. These costs cover working with our media buyer and social media advertising during two weeks of campaign activity in 2022-23, alongside collating data and completing a final evaluation report post-campaign. We will also undertake partnership work with a range of democratic and third sector organisations across Wales, encouraging them engage with our campaign, voter information and education materials to ensure they reach newly enfranchised, under-registered and disengaged groups.
		Digital communication & learning	61	This represents the Committee's share of the costs of the Commission's digital communications and learning team based on our estimate of how their time will be spent. This covers building on our existing political literacy work by developing our education resources to cover more Wales specific content, taking into account the wider educational context in Wales including changes to the national curriculum in 2022; the extension of the franchise to 16-17 year olds and the 2022 Local Government elections in Wales. We will also undertake consultancy work with a variety of teachers, youth organisations and young people across Wales to

				get their feedback and input on our resources to ensure they are effective and fit for purpose.
		External communications	59	This represents the Committee's share of the costs of the Commission's external communications team (press office and public affairs) based on our estimate of how their time will be spent. This covers handling reactive press and public affairs enquiries; carrying out proactive media engagement during our campaign period and for routine regulatory publications and Commission reports and preparing for meetings with Members of the Senedd. Press office and public affairs support will be increased for activity relating to the Welsh Government electoral reform agenda, such as pilots.
		Research	67	This represents the Committee's share of the costs of the Commission's research team based on our estimate of how their time will be spent. This covers a programme of research around the 2022 Local Government elections in Wales likely to include; annual public attitudes surveying; data collection on accuracy and completeness of electoral registers, surveying of candidates and gathering feedback from EROs, ROs and electoral administrators.
		Policy	62	This represents the Committee's share of the costs of the Commission's policy team based on our estimate of how their time will be spent. This covers analysis and reporting on the 2022 Local Government elections in Wales to identify trends and issues for consideration by policymakers and drawing together evidence and analysis from across other parts of the UK and internationally to inform our positions on specific proposals from Welsh Government.
			375	
		Total direct Costs	1092	
		Indirect Costs		
		Resource	252	5% of back office costs, including rent, rates, ICT, finance, HR and management costs
		Depreciation	75	5% of the depreciation for capital expenditure, including upgrading of the Political finance and other systems
			327	
		Total indirect Costs	327	

		Total contribution	1,419	

Corporate
Plan for
Wales
2022/23 -
2026/27



Corporate
Plan for
Wales
2022/23 –
2026/27

Corporate
Plan for
Wales
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Foreword



Working with others, we constantly strive to improve the electoral system for the benefit of voters, campaigners and electoral administrators.

This five-year Corporate Plan has been prepared and is submitted pursuant to paragraph 16B of Schedule 1 to the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000. It covers the Electoral Commission's activities in Wales for the period 2022/23 to 2026/27, and replaces and develops our interim plan put in place after the December 2019 UK general election.

The Electoral Commission works independent from governments to promote public confidence in the electoral system, ensuring the integrity of elections and the legitimacy of their results. We aim to deliver our responsibilities impartially, ensuring independence of thinking and decision making that can be trusted.

We have UK wide responsibilities, are accountable to the UK Parliament, the Senedd and the Scottish Parliament, and our work is directed to meeting the needs of each of the four parts of the UK.

Our statutory responsibilities are integral to the electoral system – whether regulating political finance laws; providing oversight, guidance, or support on the delivery of elections; supporting voters to engage with the democratic process with confidence; or providing evidence and insights to inform future improvement. Working with others, we constantly strive to improve the electoral system for the benefit of voters, campaigners and electoral administrators.

Elections in both Wales and the UK as a whole are well-run. Our survey work shows very high levels of public satisfaction in the processes in place for voters to register and cast their votes. We also have one of the most transparent systems of political finance in the world. However, there are pressures on the whole electoral system which need our attention.

We will continue to seek to remove barriers that deter people from registering or casting their vote. Alongside our ongoing activities to encourage voter registration and protect against electoral fraud, we will work to retain voter confidence in political campaigning as it evolves.

Foreword continued



We look forward to working constructively with the Welsh Government, Senedd, other UK governments and parliaments, parties and campaigners, electoral administrators and other interested groups to maintain voter confidence in our electoral system.

We will support parties and campaigners to comply with the law, while continuing to ensure political finance is transparent. We will support local authorities to meet the significant economic, social and environmental challenges they face in delivering well-run electoral services. We will also support electoral administrators to adapt to the increasingly diverse approach to the way elections are delivered, brought about by devolution and the changing needs of voters.

During the period of this plan, we will work with others to secure changes in the law and in the operation of the electoral system that will ensure it is resilient to changes in society. Critical to this will be taking on board advances in digital technology, seeking sustainable solutions and improving the coherence and efficiency of how organisations involved in the electoral system work together.

Underpinning the plan is the requirement to provide value for money and maintain a well-run organisation. The plan incorporates a renewed focus on equality, diversity and inclusion, and is designed to encourage staff engagement, development of skills and use of the technology required to support effective ways of working and continuous learning and improvement.

We look forward to working constructively with the Welsh Government, Senedd, other UK governments and parliaments, parties and campaigners, electoral administrators and other interested groups to maintain voter confidence in our electoral system.

John Pullinger
Chair

**Dame Elan Closs
Stephens CBE**
Electoral
Commissioner
- Wales

Bob Posner
Chief Executive and
Accounting Officer

1. The electoral system

The electoral system enables democracy across and within the nations, regions and local areas of the UK by:

- encouraging people to register to vote, and to trust and value elections and referendums
- achieving high levels of compliance with registration, reporting and other political finance laws
- ensuring the delivery of free and fair elections and referendums

A range of bodies operate within the electoral system to enable it to function efficiently and effectively. These include:

- the Senedd and Welsh Government
- the UK Parliament and Government
- candidates, parties and campaigners
- local electoral services led by the Electoral Registration Officers and Returning Officers, who are responsible for directly delivering elections throughout Wales and the UK, and the Wales Electoral Coordination Board
- The Electoral Commission which has specific duties related to the oversight of elections, running referendums and the regulation of political finance, along with other bodies that have regulatory and law enforcement responsibilities relating to elections

Scheduled elections in Wales in the period April 2022 to March 2027:

May 2022

- Welsh Local Government

May 2024

- UK Parliamentary
- Police and Crime Commissioners (England and Wales)

May 2026

- Senedd

2. The Electoral Commission

The table below summarises the key factors which guide and shape the work of the Electoral Commission:

Vision	People trust, value and take part in elections
Purpose	<p>The Electoral Commission is the independent body which oversees elections and regulates political finance in the UK.</p> <p>We work to promote public confidence in the electoral system and ensure its integrity.</p>
Key benefits	<p>Increased trust</p> <p>Increased value</p> <p>Increased participation</p>
Strategic objectives	<p>Objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • accessible registration and voting • transparent political campaigning and compliant political finance • resilient local electoral services • fair and effective electoral law • a modern and sustainable electoral system <p>Three key factors will help us achieve our objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • we demonstrate independence and integrity • we are a skilled organisation where diversity is valued • we are a learning organisation where improvement is continuous and resources are used effectively
Values	<p>Engaged</p> <p>Authoritative</p> <p>Making an impact</p> <p>Transparent</p> <p>Independent</p>

The Electoral Commission continued



We work to promote public confidence in the electoral system and ensure its integrity.

Our purpose

The Electoral Commission is the independent body which oversees elections and regulates political finance in the UK.

We work to promote public confidence in the electoral system and ensure its integrity.

Our strategic objectives

Our five strategic objectives for the period April 2022 to March 2027 are:

1. Accessible registration and voting

Free and fair elections depend on all people who are eligible and want to vote being able to do so. We will work to ensure:

- increased levels of voter registration, especially amongst groups that currently have difficulty engaging in the process
- the removal of barriers, especially those that affect people who currently have difficulty trying to cast their vote

We will achieve these outcomes by working collaboratively with policy makers and other partners to identify barriers to participation and propose solutions. We will directly support people who have difficulty engaging in the process, with tailored accessible information and learning resources, and targeted public awareness activity. We outline our plans to support accessible registration and voting in Section 3 of this Corporate Plan.

2. Transparent political campaigning and compliant political finance

Parties and other campaigners should be able to campaign without facing undue actual or perceived barriers, while we continue to ensure political finance is transparent. This will support voters to hear a range of campaign voices to help them take decisions when voting. We will work to ensure:

- increased levels of confidence shown by candidates, parties and other campaigners in their ability to understand, apply and comply with the law on campaigning and political finance
- high levels of compliance with registration, reporting and other political finance laws

We will achieve these aims by maintaining the official registers for parties and campaigners, and ensuring political finance data is accessible, transparent and complete. We will provide guidance and support for all types of campaigners and make regulatory decisions which command the confidence of candidates, parties, campaigners, and voters. We outline our plans for transparent political campaigning and compliant political finance in Section 4 of this Corporate Plan.

The Electoral Commission continued



It is essential for the electoral system that the laws which underpin it are fair, effective and well understood.

3. Resilient local electoral services

Local electoral services need to be able to respond to increasingly challenging economic, social and environmental pressures. We will support local authorities and electoral administrators to deliver effective, sustainable and resilient electoral services, ensuring that voters receive the service they should be able to expect. We will work to ensure:

- sustained and consistent high performance in the delivery of well-run elections
- increased levels of confidence shown by electoral administrators in the resilience of the electoral system

We will achieve these aims by setting challenging standards for electoral administrators, and providing guidance and support to ensure they are met. We will work collaboratively with local authorities, national bodies, the Welsh Government and Senedd, and other UK governments and parliaments to build resilience into the electoral system. We outline our plans to ensure resilient local electoral services in Section 5 of this Corporate Plan.

4. Fair and effective electoral law

It is essential for the electoral system that the laws which underpin it are fair, effective and well understood. Electoral law must also keep pace with other developments in our society, harnessing technology and working on a continual process of modernisation. We will work to:

- support the Welsh Government and Senedd, and other UK governments and parliaments to reform electoral law to make it less complex
- reduce the risks and inefficiencies associated with electoral law which impact our electoral system

We will achieve this aim by continuing to research and understand how electoral law could be reformed to help voters, campaigners, electoral administrators, and other organisations. We will also continue to provide expert advice on the practicability and impact of any changes to improve the electoral system. We outline our plans to work towards fair and effective electoral law in Section 6 of this Corporate Plan.

5. A modern and sustainable electoral system

The electoral system needs to be resilient to the challenges that lie in and beyond the period of this plan. It needs to modernise to maintain and improve value for money, transparency, trust and compliance. And, it needs to reduce its environmental impact to be sustainable. We will work to ensure:

- data and technology are harnessed to meet the needs of voters, campaigners and electoral administrators
- the changing risks to the election system from the misuse of data and technology are understood and acted upon
- strong relationships and streamlined working practices with all bodies that are part of the electoral system are developed
- the Welsh Government, other UK governments and the wider electoral community are supported to adopt a strategy and implementation plan which reduces the environmental impact of our electoral system

We will achieve these aims by working with others to explore and implement new ways to use data and technology across the electoral system. We will also continue to monitor, advise and act on the misuse of data and technology. We will develop a strategy and implementation plan which reduces the environmental impact of the electoral system, to include innovative evidence-based solutions. We outline our plans to work towards a modern and sustainable electoral system in Section 7 of this Corporate Plan. We also outline our plans to make our organisation carbon neutral, consistent with governments' targets, in Section 8.

Underpinning this work

Three key factors will make a difference to how we achieve these strategic objectives:

1. We demonstrate independence and integrity

To fulfil its duties, it is essential that an electoral commission remains independent from governments, and acts impartially and with integrity. We will continue to demonstrate how we fulfil this by:

- taking decisions on the evidence and being transparent about the reasons for them
- basing our policy positions and recommendations on analysis of evidence
- effectively communicating our work and views
- providing responsive services to those we support
- maintaining effective governance arrangements

2. We are a skilled organisation where diversity is valued

We work hard to ensure our people feel part of a diverse, inclusive and supportive workplace. In the next five years we will:

- implement refreshed working practices to reflect wider changes in our work environment and culture
- attract, retain and develop the people we need
- maintain and improve high standards of management, with a focus on developing our people
- further embed equality, diversity and inclusion in all aspects of our work

3. We are a learning organisation where improvement is continuous and resources are used efficiently

We are committed to utilising technology, funding, time and resources to deliver maximum value. We will invest in our systems and in reducing our environmental impact.

In the next five years we will:

- procure and implement value for money technology that improves service delivery as appropriate
- maintain a sound prudent financial strategy
- continue to develop techniques to learn from experience, seek continuous improvement and become more efficient and effective
- develop a corporate environmental strategy that meets policy and legislative requirements

3. Putting voters first



Public awareness of the electoral system is key to voter engagement and confidence.

To have a healthy democracy, voters need to be engaged in our electoral process, and confident that elections are free and fair. We will work to increase voter engagement and confidence in Wales and the wider UK by:

- raising public awareness of the electoral process
- removing barriers to registering and voting
- ensuring laws for parties and campaigners are clear and followed
- ensuring the electoral system works effectively

Raising public awareness

Public awareness of the electoral system – including how to register and vote – is key to voter engagement and confidence. Our research demonstrates that public awareness of how to register and vote is currently high. In February 2021, 93% of those surveyed (both in Wales and UK wide) as part of our annual public opinion tracking survey stated they knew how to register to vote, and 92% were confident they knew how to cast their vote. It is important that we continue to maintain and increase this awareness, and we will continue to refine and deliver effective public awareness activity ahead of elections in Wales and other parts of the UK. We will ensure the information we provide to voters is accessible and transparent, keeping pace with developments in digital communications, and ensuring our public information services are tailored to voters' needs.

Putting voters first continued

We will develop and expand our learning work, producing political literacy resources to help people understand how to get involved in our democracy. We will continue to undertake public awareness campaigns and work with the wider electoral community and partner organisations. Following the extension of the franchise to 16 and 17 year olds and foreign nationals resident in Wales, we will continue to work to ensure new voters understand their eligibility and can confidently participate in the 2022 local government elections and 2026 Senedd election.

We will also continue to work alongside all relevant partners to promote greater consistency in political education, and increase political knowledge and understanding amongst young people to ensure they can fully engage in our democratic system in Wales. This will include developing the good work already achieved with the publication of education resources and the further development of an education and learning programme in Wales.

Removing barriers to registering and voting

Our research shows that the current electoral system could be improved to meet the needs of all eligible voters. Results from our 2021 UK wide public opinion tracking survey show that people with a disability are more likely to be dissatisfied with the process of voting (10%) than those without a disability (6%). We already know what many of the barriers people experience are, but we will do further work to identify issues with registering and voting, and will then take action to address them. We will broaden the range of third sector organisations we work with to understand the challenges, and will collaborate with policy makers and other partners to identify solutions. This includes influencing the development of new policies, to ensure additional barriers are not introduced. We will deliver effective targeted voter awareness activities for the groups identified, and will specifically support under-registered groups to engage in the democratic process. We will also continue to explore the feasibility of modernising the voting process itself, aware of the changing needs of voters in our digital age.

Putting voters first continued

Ensuring laws for parties and campaigners are clear and followed

The legitimacy of elections is dependent on clear laws which are understood and respected by parties and campaigners. We will ensure voters have accessible information about parties and campaigners participating in elections, including transparency on how they are funded and what they spend. We will raise public awareness of the rules on party and campaigner registration, donations, and campaign spending, and will help voters take action if they see something which concerns them. We will continue to maintain the official registers of parties and non-party campaigners, and will seek to remove barriers to campaigning to ensure that voters hear from a wide and diverse range of campaigners. We will improve voter access to our Political Finance Online database by updating and upgrading the search functionality. Where political financial data is incomplete, we will continue to enforce the law to ensure transparency and increased voter confidence in the system. We provide more details on how we will support parties and campaigners to comply with the law in Section 4 of this Corporate Plan.

Ensuring the electoral system works effectively

Key to voter confidence is an electoral system that works effectively. People should be confident elections are well-run, and should trust in the legitimacy of the results. Our 2021 public opinion tracking survey showed that 75% of people in Wales are confident that elections are well-run (compared to 80% UK wide). We will continue to conduct significant research to report on how elections have been run, including detailed understanding of voters' experiences. This will enable us to raise concerns and make evidence-based recommendations where appropriate, with the ultimate aim of maintaining public confidence in the electoral system. We outline our plans to ensure the delivery of free and fair elections in Section 5, including our work to support resilient local electoral services.

4. Supporting and securing campaigner compliance with the law



Electoral law is complicated, but understanding and applying it should not be a barrier to those who want to campaign.

Campaigners being able to get their messages to voters is a fundamental part of the democratic process. Campaigners, including parties, must be able to communicate with voters to explain their views and policies, so that voters are informed when they vote. And it's important that voters hear from a wide and diverse variety of campaigners.

So campaigners must be able to campaign without facing undue actual or perceived barriers, while we continue to ensure political finance is transparent. We will improve the transparency of political campaigning, and help parties and campaigners to comply with the law, by:

- ensuring campaigners can access support to understand the law in the way and at the time that works best for them
- ensuring political finance laws are enforced fairly, working with law enforcement and other regulators
- publishing complete and accurate political finance data
- providing insights to campaigners and parliaments on how campaigning methods directly affect voter confidence in elections

Ensuring campaigners can access support to understand the law in the way and at the time that works best for them

Electoral law is complicated, but understanding and applying it should not be a barrier to those who want to campaign. We will work to ensure that campaigners can get on with campaigning, and examine barriers – both real and perceived – which prevent people who want to campaign from doing so. We will use these insights to ensure our guidance and other support tools work well for all campaigners no matter their financial size or experience.

Supporting and securing campaigner compliance with the law continued

We will also complete and consolidate the strategic shift in the way we approach regulation outlined in our last Interim Corporate Plan, putting greater emphasis on tools to promote compliance. We will launch our new Political Finance Online database, continue to develop our proactive support for campaigners, transition to an intelligence-led approach to monitoring, and embed an effective regulatory insights and horizon-scanning process. We will also work with our partners to provide cybersecurity advice to parties and campaigners.

We will work closely with the Welsh Government to update the statutory Codes of Practice on election spending prior to the 2026 Senedd election, if necessary. We will ensure they reflect any changes to the law that are made. We will also support the Welsh Government with considering other future changes to the law, such as the potential introduction of digital imprints.

We will also continue to work with Senedd officials as they draft the new reporting rules and processes to enable the rules to be adopted and dual reporting brought to an end. The Standards and Business Committees in the Fifth Senedd agreed that dual reporting will be brought to an end in Wales and that elected members will only be required to report to the Senedd.

Ensuring political finance laws are enforced fairly, working with law enforcement and other regulators

Parties, other campaigners and voters want confidence that political finance laws are enforced proportionately, consistently, and impartially. We will continue to conduct investigations, and be transparent about the outcomes of all our work.

We will ensure the way we respond to electoral fraud is as effective as it can be, and will provide support and advice to regulators and law enforcement.

Supporting and securing campaigner compliance with the law continued

Publishing complete and accurate political finance data

Compliance with the political finance reporting laws is already high. We will work to make compliance even higher, by introducing compliance tools that work for a range of campaigners, and through proportionate and impartial enforcement of the law.

In Section 3, we noted our plans to make political finance data more accessible for voters. Our new Political Finance Online database will also be an important tool for campaigners, making reporting easier and faster. We will work to ensure consistent timely publication of financial data from parties, candidates and campaigners.

Providing insights to campaigners and parliaments on how campaigning methods directly affect voter confidence in elections

In Section 3, we noted our plans to help voters understand the rules on campaigning, with the aim of increasing confidence in elections. Another way we aim to increase voter confidence is by providing evidence-based insights to campaigners and parliaments to ensure they better understand the impact that different campaigning methods have on the way voters perceive elections and their results. We will also provide support and advice on new and developing campaigning methods.

5. Supporting local electoral services delivery and resilience



We will set and ensure compliance with challenging performance standards.

Local electoral services face significant economic, social and environmental challenges which risk impacting on their ability to deliver well-run elections and referendums. We will help local authorities and electoral administrators in Wales and the wider UK to respond to these pressures. We will work to support the consistent delivery of high-quality services for voters, and the development of resilient local electoral services by:

- setting challenging performance standards for local electoral services
- providing accessible guidance and support for electoral administrators
- supporting increased resilience of local electoral services
- ensuring the electoral system works effectively

Setting challenging performance standards for local electoral services

We will continue to support Returning Officers to deliver the elections scheduled to take place during the period of this Corporate Plan, and remain prepared to respond to unscheduled polls if required to do so. We will also support Electoral Registration Officers to deliver electoral registration services, including the annual canvass in Wales, for each year of this Corporate Plan.

We will set and ensure compliance with challenging performance standards. We will provide guidance and advice to help electoral administrators meet the standards and challenge them when we identify areas for improvement. We will review the performance standards framework for Returning Officers to further enhance its role in identifying and driving performance improvements, and providing accountability for the elections they deliver.

Supporting local electoral services delivery and resilience continued

Providing accessible guidance and support for electoral administrators

We published accessible digital guidance for Electoral Registration Officers in May 2021 to support the delivery of the first reformed annual canvass in Wales and the other nations of Great Britain. We are working to ensure all guidance for Returning Officers, candidates and agents is published in this accessible format on our website, and we will continue to refresh this guidance on an election-by-election basis. We seek the views of electoral administrators after set of elections, and over three-quarters of administrators that responded to our survey after the May 2021 elections told us they had found our guidance very or fairly useful. We will continue to seek feedback from and consult with electoral administrators to ensure our guidance meets their needs. We will continue to provide in person and telephone support, to help electoral administrators in their work.

Supporting increased resilience of local electoral services

Our research and the feedback we gather from electoral administrators after each set of elections tells us about the pressures on the electoral system that are currently being experienced at the local level. In response we will develop and deliver a programme of activity to support resilient electoral services. We will work collaboratively with electoral administrators to understand the challenges they face and identify solutions to address them. We will implement agreed measures to build resilience, working in partnership with local authorities and the wider electoral community to ensure maximum impact. We will also explore how data on the costs of electoral services can be collected and used to identify and drive efficiencies in the delivery of electoral processes.

Ensuring the electoral system works effectively

Electoral administrators need confidence that the electoral system works effectively. We will continue to conduct research to report on how elections have been run, including to secure a detailed understanding of electoral administrators' experiences. This will enable us to raise concerns and make evidence-based recommendations where appropriate, ensuring electoral administrators have confidence in the electoral system as a whole.

We will continue to work closely with and support the work of the Wales Electoral Coordination Board which is in a key position to lead on the delivery of electoral events and activity in Wales. We continue to recommend that this group should become a statutory board similar to the Electoral Management Board in Scotland. This, we believe, will not only assist with the effective planning of electoral events in Wales but also will ensure greater resilience of the electoral system.

6. Making sure electoral law is fair and effective



We will continue to scrutinise new electoral legislation and provide expert briefings to governments and parliaments on legislative proposals.

Our electoral system is underpinned by a legal framework which establishes how elections are delivered. It sets out who is allowed to vote and the various ways they can cast their vote. It sets out who can stand for elections, who can campaign, and how much they can spend. And it sets out how electoral administrators should deliver elections, including counting and declaring the results.

Given its cross cutting impact, we want to work with parliamentarians and governments to improve electoral law so that it is fit for purpose, reduces complexity, inefficiencies and risk, and enables innovation. We will work with others to reform electoral law by:

- supporting effective consideration and implementation of legislation in the Senedd and the UK and Scottish parliaments
- engaging with governments' current electoral law reform agendas, while continuing to make the case for further reform
- continuing to provide expert advice on the practicability and impact of any changes which could be made to improve the electoral system

Supporting effective consideration and implementation of legislation in the Senedd and the UK and Scottish parliaments

We will continue to scrutinise new electoral legislation and provide expert briefings to the Welsh Government and the Senedd, and to other UK governments and parliaments on legislative proposals. We will focus on providing an evidence-based analysis of any proposed changes to electoral law, to support informed consideration of any changes.

We will also work to support effective implementation of any new legislation, ensuring that voters, electoral administrators and campaigners understand what it means for them in each case.

Making sure electoral law is fair and effective continued

We will work closely with the Welsh Government and the Senedd as they develop legislation for Welsh elections. This may include reform ahead of the next local government elections in May 2022, a wider local government elections Bill and reform of Senedd elections ahead of the 2026 polls. We will provide advice on the practical implementation of proposals which reflect the views of the electoral community.

Through our role in designing forms and our public awareness activity, we will also play a key role in implementing any changes, such as making the postal voting system more accessible. We also expect to play a key role in evaluating and publishing a report on the piloting of any reform measures, which may include early voting centres, mobile polling stations and voting in educational establishments.

Engaging with governments' current electoral law reform agendas, while continuing to make the case for further reform

There is an urgent need for the Welsh Government and other UK governments to simplify and modernise electoral law. It is increasingly complex, which is not just a technical or legal problem. There are real costs and consequences for voters, campaigners and electoral administrators, as well as for the regulators and enforcement bodies which struggle to uphold and enforce the law. The UK's Law Commissions have produced a blueprint for simplified and modernised electoral law, which is supported by us, parliamentary select committees, electoral administrators, electoral lawyers and academics. We will continue to make the case for the implementation of this electoral law reform, while supporting parliamentarians and governments with reform when it happens.

Making sure electoral law is fair and effective continued

Continuing to provide expert advice on the practicability and impact of any changes which could be made to improve the electoral system

We want to maintain high levels of public confidence in the electoral process, including perceptions of the legitimacy of the results. We will continue to research public attitudes to understand how the electoral system could be improved to meet voters' needs. We will also continue to conduct research on the delivery of and participation in elections and referendums, and use this research to identify reforms to electoral law and process that would improve them. We will continue to support governments to successfully implement changes to electoral law, and will provide evidence-based recommendations, expertise and practical advice.

Technological advances in digital campaigning bring new challenges, and we know that lack of transparency is already a concern for voters. Results from our 2021 public opinion tracking survey show that 33% of people in Wales disagree that they can find out who has produced the political information they see online (37% UK wide). And, 37% are concerned about how or why online political adverts are targeted at them (40% UK wide). We will therefore continue support to the Welsh Government and other UK governments to implement our recommendations on digital campaigning, while encouraging further improvements.

7. A modern and sustainable electoral system



Working with others, we will ensure we utilise data and technology to achieve efficiencies in the electoral system, to increase compliance with electoral law, and to provide accessible information to voters.

We need to make sure our electoral system keeps pace with digital developments. We need to capitalise on the scope for greater compliance, transparency and the financial savings technology offers, while working to retain voter confidence in the electoral system. We also need to modernise the electoral system to ensure it is environmentally sustainable. We will work towards a modern and sustainable electoral system by:

- harnessing data and technology to meet the needs of voters, campaigners and electoral administrators
- understanding, calling for action and acting on the changing risks to the election system from the misuse of data and technology
- continuing to build strong relationships and streamlining working practices with all bodies that are part of the electoral system
- supporting governments and the wider electoral community to adopt a strategy and implementation plan which meets environmental standards required of our electoral system

Harnessing data and technology to meet the needs of voters, campaigners and electoral administrators

Data and technology present opportunities for democracy. Working with others, we will ensure we utilise data and technology to achieve efficiencies in the electoral system, to increase compliance with electoral law, and to provide accessible information to voters. We will undertake research to provide an evidence base for how data and technology can be harnessed. We will develop and implement plans to utilise data and technology to meet the needs of voters, campaigners and electoral administrators. We will work with others to implement new practices in the use of data and technology across the electoral system.

A modern and sustainable electoral system continued

Understanding, calling for action and acting on the changing risks to the election system from the misuse of data and technology

Data and technology also present significant risks for democracy. We will work with others to explore and implement new practices in the use of data and technology across the electoral system, to improve the accessibility, security and efficiency of elections in Wales and other parts of the UK. We will also undertake research to understand how data and technology threatens the integrity of elections, paying specific attention to voters' trust in the electoral system as a whole.

Continuing to build strong relationships and streamlining working practices with all bodies that are part of the electoral system

We work closely with other bodies that are part of the electoral system. We know that by working collaboratively we are better equipped to respond to the challenges the electoral system faces. We will continue to strengthen these relationships, including with a number of regulators and law enforcement bodies that play a role in enforcing electoral law. We will also continue to help voters understand who is responsible for specific areas of electoral law, and will work to ensure they know who to contact if they have concerns. We will continue to ensure we work with these other bodies in an efficient way, with the ultimate aim of increasing the impact we and they have in the delivery of an effective and trusted electoral system.

Supporting governments and the wider electoral community to adopt a strategy and implementation plan which meets environmental standards required of our electoral system

Over the life of this plan it will become increasingly important to understand and reduce the environmental impact of the electoral system, ensuring it meets the challenging environmental targets which are likely to be brought into law by the Senedd and the UK's other parliaments. Responding to these targets will also increasingly challenge the local delivery of well-run elections and referendums. We will develop a strategy and implementation plan which seeks to reduce the environmental impact of our electoral system, to include innovative evidence-based solutions. We will work with the Welsh Government, other UK governments and local authorities to identify actions to reduce environmental impact. And, we will keep under review potential solutions which may lead to increased sustainability.

8. Underpinning this work



Given our unique role, our integrity needs to be clear and demonstrable.

The preceding sections of this Corporate Plan summarise the work we will undertake to achieve our five strategic objectives. We will ensure we are equipped as an organisation to meet these objectives, focussing on the key enabling activities summarised below.

1. We demonstrate independence and integrity

The electoral system depends on the Electoral Commission being an independent non-partisan body, and we therefore hold ourselves to high standards of integrity. We work hard to ensure we are respected for our expertise, and that our advice and decision making are free from bias. Given our unique role, our integrity needs to be clear and demonstrable. We will continue to demonstrate our integrity by:

- taking decisions on the evidence and being transparent about the reasons for them
- basing our policy positions and recommendations on analysis of evidence
- effectively communicating our work and views
- providing responsive services to those we support
- maintaining effective governance arrangements

Taking decisions on the evidence and being transparent about the reasons for them

In making decisions, of a regulatory nature or otherwise, we will proceed based on the law, evidence, fairness and proportionality, and in accordance with sound governance processes. Our published policies, such as our Corporate Governance Framework and Enforcement Policy, provide a clear understanding of how we operate and make decisions. Wherever and to the extent it is appropriate for us to provide reasons for decisions we will do so, including in accordance with freedom of information and data protection law. To that end we will continue to publish the outcome of every investigation, and highlight instances where learning from investigations could assist other campaigners in understanding and applying the law. We are accountable to the Courts

Underpinning this work continued

for our decisions and the reasons for them, as well as being accountable to parliaments.

Basing our policy positions and recommendations on analysis of evidence

Our recommendations must be evidence-based and underpinned by research if they are to be trusted, adopted and taken forward. We will continue to conduct research to understand how elections and referendums have been run and experienced. We will continue to develop our evidence base on all issues that impact the electoral system – from voters' perceptions of the legitimacy of elections, to challenges faced by electoral administrators. We will embed the horizon-scanning approach that underpins our policy development work, and will continue to identify challenges and recommend solutions.

Effectively communicating our work and views

We want to ensure our work and our considered views have impact. We will therefore continue to ensure all information relevant to Wales is published in English and Welsh. We will use plain English and Cymraeg Clir, avoid jargon to aid understanding, and will communicate clearly to all audiences. We will continue to make our services and the information we provide accessible.

Providing responsive services to those we support

We support our stakeholders – including voters, campaigners, and electoral administrators – with accessible information and guidance on all aspects of the electoral system. They come to us for advice and support, and expect a responsive service that meets their needs. We will continue to consult our stakeholders to understand their expectations of our services, and will make improvements based on their needs. We will maintain high standards of customer service.

Maintaining effective governance arrangements

We outline our governance arrangements in Section 12 of this Corporate Plan.

2. We are a skilled organisation where diversity is valued

We want our workforce to feel valued and be supported to achieve their potential. In the next five years we will:

- implement refreshed working practices to reflect wider changes in our work environment and culture
- attract, retain and develop the people we need
- maintain and improve high standards of leadership and management, with a focus on developing our people
- further embed equality, diversity and inclusion in all aspects of our work
- ensure the Welsh language is treated no less favourably than the English language

Underpinning this work continued

Implement refreshed working practices to reflect wider changes in our work environment and culture

The coronavirus pandemic has impacted our working practices and resulted in new behaviours and approaches. We will learn from this to ensure that we retain the benefits, embedding more flexible working in ways that benefit our people, the Commission as a whole and our stakeholders. We will ensure our culture and behaviours reflect these values. We will also strengthen our approach to internal communications, working hard to keep our people connected, informed and motivated. We provide more information about how we will utilise technology to support new working practices below.

Attract, retain and develop the people we need

Our people are the core of our organisation. We will enable them to be skilled, with the diverse expertise needed to deliver our work. We will ensure they are capable, with a focus on being effective in everything they do, and committed, with a passion for democracy and our role in supporting it. We don't take these qualities for granted, and we will continue to implement our People Strategy to ensure we continue to attract, retain and develop the best team possible.

Maintain and improve high standards of leadership and management, with a focus on developing our people

Learning is a key part of our people's day to day work, and we are committed to supporting their development. We will continue to achieve high standards of leadership, management and people development, consulting our people to ensure we support their specific needs.

Further embed equality, diversity and inclusion in all aspects of our work

We value diversity, and aim to be an open and inclusive organisation. We celebrate the breadth of thinking, skills and experience that our people bring to our organisation. And, we are committed to being an inclusive regulator, with strategies and processes that reflect the diversity of those we serve. We will deliver a renewed equality, diversity and inclusion strategy. We will implement the Business in the Community Race at Work Charter. And, we will work to increase and support diversity at senior levels, including representation on our Commission Board.

Underpinning this work continued

Ensure the Welsh language is treated no less favourably than the English language

We are committed to treating the Welsh and English languages equally in all our work. We will continue to ensure that people in Wales can access our services and all information we publish which relates to Wales in both Welsh and English. We will continue to fulfil our statutory responsibility by meeting the Welsh Language Standards, set by the Welsh Language Commissioner through the Compliance Notice.

We plan to strengthen our commitment to these standards, and the Welsh language more generally, by implementing a new Welsh Language Compliance Plan. This will include appointing a senior owner of the Welsh Language Standards within the Electoral Commission. The Electoral Commission in Wales will continue to lead and support other teams throughout the UK to uphold the Welsh Language Standards.

3. We are a learning organisation where improvement is continuous and resources are used efficiently

The world around us is changing rapidly. We need to adapt fast to be successful. In order to do this we aim to be rigorous in learning from experience and seek continuous improvement in all that we do. With pressures on public spending set to continue, it is crucial that we continue to manage our costs and make effective use of our technology, funding, time and resources. In the next five years we will:

- procure and implement value for money IT systems that improve service delivery
- maintain our financial strategy to keep the Commission within approved budgets
- continue to develop techniques to learn from experience, seek continuous improvement and become more efficient and effective
- develop a corporate environmental strategy that meets policy and legislative requirements for reduced environmental impact

We will do this through effective leadership and management within a five-year financial plan that is aimed at costs of no more after inflation in 2026/27 than it does in 2021/22.

Underpinning this work continued

Procure and implement value for money IT systems that improve service delivery

Technology and data are crucial to our work. Our website and Political Finance Online database allow us to publish vital information which is in the public interest, bringing transparency to our democracy. Our internal systems are key to ensuring the quality of our work, and enable us to effectively manage risk. We will continue our programme to procure and implement new IT systems. We will ensure our infrastructure is up to date and fit for purpose. We will launch our new Political Finance Online database to make it easier and faster for parties and campaigners to submit financial data. We will also implement a new customer relationship management tool.

Maintain our financial strategy to keep the Commission within approved budgets

We detail our financial strategy in Section 8. With pressures on public spending and a need to ensure value for money, our spend on core services will be no higher in real terms at the end of the Corporate Plan period than it is at the beginning. We will work to increase the value we deliver for parliaments.

Continue to develop techniques to learn from experience, seek continuous improvement and become more efficient and effective

Technology enables us to run an efficient workplace, but our processes are also key to ensuring the quality of our work. We will embed quality management processes across all our services and functions. We want to improve the way we make decisions, and will also make better use of our knowledge. We will develop and implement a new knowledge management framework. We want to meet the needs of voters, parties and campaigners, electoral administrators and parliaments, and will undertake research to understand their expectations of our services.

Develop a corporate environmental strategy that meets policy and legislative requirements

We outline our plans to reduce the environmental impact of the electoral system in sections 2 and 5 of this Corporate Plan. We are also committed to reducing the environmental impact of our organisation. We will enhance our expertise, ensuring we have the environmental skills we need. We will carry out an environmental audit. We will develop and implement an action plan to achieve our environmental targets in line with legislation. This will include reducing waste and increasing recycling where possible.

9. Managing our costs

“ Spending on core budgets includes our work supporting voters, electoral administrators, parties and campaigners outside of the cycle of elections, as well as our corporate overheads.

Our budget varies from year to year depending on the cycle of elections. Our event budget reflects the costs associated with each year's elections. This varies significantly year-to-year owing to the cycle of elections, and will change if unscheduled polls are added which need to be delivered effectively. This is presented as a separate budget line to allow for more effective control and scrutiny of our core budget.

Spending on core budgets includes our work supporting voters, electoral administrators, parties and campaigners outside of the cycle of elections, as well as our corporate overheads. Our core budget will be no larger at the end of the period, after inflation, than it was at the beginning (using HM Treasury's preferred measure for public spending and inflation assumptions where available). While we would always seek to manage our costs within these budgets, increases to the rate of inflation or changes to our work programme to reflect changes outside our control represent the main risks to our spending plans.

Budgets 2022/23 – 2026/27

£ millions	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27
Core expenditure	13.35	13.37	13.78	14.21	14.38
Event	6.05	4.10	5.28	6.25	4.56
The Elections Bill	2.06	2.84	2.55	2.35	2.41
Operational spending	21.46	20.31	21.61	22.81	21.35
Policy Development Grants	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.00
Depreciation	1.50	1.49	1.57	1.56	1.57
Provisions	0.15	0.15	0.15	0.20	0.20
Total Spending plans	25.11	23.95	25.33	26.57	25.12
Capital budget	0.63	0.47	1.55	0.50	1.09

Managing our costs continued

Our capital budgets reflect planned and forecast needs to invest in capitalised IT hardware and software. The levels of capital spending in 2024/25 and 2026/27 represent new or renewed leases for offices in Cardiff and Edinburgh. We remain committed to having continued presence in all parts of the UK, and as we take advantage of increasingly flexible ways of working we will keep our office needs under continuous review.

Funding

We are jointly funded by the Senedd, the UK Parliament, and the Scottish Parliament. The box below explains more about how that works.

Draft devolved funding shares 2022/23 – 2026/27

	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27
Budget on funding basis (£m)	22.96	21.80	23.18	24.37	22.93
Senedd					
£m	1.42	1.25	1.25	1.65	1.79
%	6.18%	5.74%	5.39%	6.75%	7.80%
UK Parliament					
£m	19.70	19.03	20.35	20.25	18.33
%	85.81%	87.27%	87.78%	83.12%	79.96%
Scottish Parliament					
£m	1.84	1.52	1.58	2.47	2.81
%	8.01%	6.98%	6.83%	10.13%	12.24%

Managing our costs continued

Focus on accountability and funding

As part of the devolution of powers relating to elections, the Wales Act 2017 made provision for the Commission to become accountable to the Senedd. The Scotland Act 2016 also makes the Commission accountable to the Scottish Parliament, and we remain accountable to the UK Parliament.

The direct costs of delivering our functions for each parliament are funded by that parliament, with overheads (including depreciation but not capital budgets or provisions) shared according to population. Cost shares can vary due to changes in work programme or electoral cycle.

In Wales, as a result of the Senedd and Elections (Wales) Act 2020, the Llywydd's Committee oversees our funding and corporate accountability. In Scotland, this role is undertaken by the Scottish Parliament Corporate Body, and in the UK Parliament by the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission. Scrutiny and accountability on specific aspects of our work is generally undertaken by specific policy committees, such as the Senedd's Local Government and Housing Committee.

Each year in the autumn we submit an estimate of income and expenditure to the committees, accompanied by our plans for the coming year (or five years when we submit a Corporate Plan). The committees then consider these according to the timetables in each parliament.

The plans, budgets and other information that we submit to the committees are as required by each committee. We will continue to work with the committees, the parliamentary officials and other relevant partners to ensure effective accountability.

10. Measuring our performance

Throughout our plan we identify improvements we will deliver. These aim to benefit the public, parties and campaigners, electoral administrators and parliaments. We will measure how well we realise these improvements over the course of our Corporate Plan using a range of indicators for Wales and across the UK. We will use a mix of quantitative and qualitative measures, using them to drive continuous improvements in our procedures and skills. This will include annual and five-year targets against key measures.

Measuring our performance

Strategic objectives	Improvements	Performance indicators
1. Accessible registration and voting	Increased ease of registering and voting	Public satisfaction with the system of registering to vote Public satisfaction with the process of voting Accuracy of the electoral register Completeness of the electoral register Votes rejected and not included in the count for elections Public perception that the process of voting is easy Additions to electoral registers during our public awareness campaigns

Measuring our performance (continued)

Strategic objectives	Improvements	Performance indicators
2. Transparent political campaigning and compliant political finance	Maintained availability of information	Publish donation and loan reports within deadlines Publish statements of accounts within deadlines
	Increased confidence in decision making	Applicants are notified of the outcome of their registration application within the working day targets Decisions on final notices issued for representations within deadlines Progression and conclusion of investigations within targets for complexity
	Increased compliance with electoral law	Responses to requests for regulatory advice on financial reporting within targets Public perception that appropriate action will be taken by the authorities if a political party or a campaigner is caught breaking the rules on campaign funding
3. Resilient local electoral services	Maintained quality of electoral services	Formal Electoral Registration Officers and Returning Officers performance assessment when standards are not met Guidance products for electoral administrators published on time with no substantive errors Confidence that elections are well run Election reports published within deadlines
	Maintained confidence in the electoral process	Public confidence in knowing how to register to vote Public confidence in how to cast their vote
4. Fair and effective electoral law	Increased parliamentary accountability	Election, referendum and other reports responded to by the relevant government within deadlines Responses to policy proposals and legislative consultations by the deadlines Responses to members of the Senedd's correspondence responded to within deadlines
5. A modern and sustainable electoral system	Improved security of the electoral system	Public perception that voting in general is safe from fraud and abuse
	Increased environmental sustainability	Meeting requirements if existing and emerging or new environmental legislation

The strategic objectives are underpinned by three key factors

Key factors	Improvements	Performance indicators
<p>1. We demonstrate independence and integrity</p>	<p>Improved reputation as an independent regulator</p>	<p>Responses to oral and written Senedd questions within timeframes</p> <p>Responses to requests for advice from Electoral Registration Officers and Returning Officers within deadlines</p> <p>Responses to requests for elections guidance from candidates and agents within deadlines</p> <p>Responses to requests and enquiries from the public within deadlines</p>
<p>2. We are a skilled organisation where diversity is valued</p>	<p>Maintained staff well-being</p>	<p>Staff engagement score from the annual employee survey</p>
<p>3. We are a learning organisation where improvement is continuous and resources are used efficiently</p>	<p>Increased value for money</p>	<p>Agreed auditors' recommendations that are implemented by the target date</p>

11. Managing risks and opportunities

We have designed our risk management processes to:

- maintain a clear framework across the organisation within which risks are identified, assessed, managed and regularly reviewed
- assign specific responsibility for managing risks in their areas of responsibility to individual Executive Team members (including managing risks to significant projects)
- ensure that the likelihood and impact of risks are assessed on a consistent basis
- ensure that existing risks are regularly reviewed and that new risks are identified and managed
- provide the Chief Executive, the Audit and Risk Committee and the Board with assurance that the risks are being managed appropriately

We identify and evaluate risks by:

- taking key decisions following consideration of opportunities, risks and associated mitigations, which are separately identified in papers for the Board and those taking delegated decisions
- considering whether new risks should be added to the organisational risk register, and whether the existing risks' profiles need to be changed, both as changes are identified and as part of our quarterly review of risk
- completing a review of risk at the start of each year, to ensure that the organisational risk register captures risk to the delivery of objectives in our Corporate Plan
- presenting a risk report to each meeting of the Audit and Risk Committee and also annually to the Board
- identifying risk through our planning process, audit, review of operations and training activities
- assigning owners to risks who formally review the likelihood, potential impact and the mitigations in place for all risks each quarter subject to review by the Audit and Risk Committee

We are committed to continuously improving our risk management processes and are currently reviewing our procedures to ensure they remain in line with good practice and match our ambitions for this Corporate Plan period.

12. Our governance arrangements

We are led by a Board of Commissioners, who set the strategic direction and are responsible for our work.

The Board is made up of ten Commissioners, one of whom is the Chair. Three of the Commissioners are appointed to represent Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland respectively. These Commissioners provide advice and support in relation to these nations of the UK. They also advise on the impact of our work and are consulted by the Commission Board on matters in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Four of the Commissioners are nominated by the leaders of political parties: one by the party with the largest number of MPs in the UK Parliament, two more by the second and third largest parties respectively, and one by the other political parties with two or more MPs elected to and having taken their seats in the UK Parliament. The remaining two Commissioners have no specific brief, which enables them to bring their expertise and experience to work areas for the Commission as the need arises. All Commissioners are appointed by Her Majesty the Queen, on a motion of the UK Parliament.

As part of the Corporate Framework the Board has two sub-committees: the Audit and Risk Committee and the Remuneration and Human Resources Committee. Both are chaired by Commissioners.

Alongside the Board of Commissioners, we also consult regularly with the Parliamentary Parties' Panel for Wales, and equivalent Panels for the UK, Scotland and Northern Ireland. These were set up to allow political parties to give us feedback about matters affecting them. We also consult with other advisory groups.

The Chief Executive is the Accounting Officer.

We are accountable to the Senedd, the UK Parliament and the Scottish Parliament.

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The Electoral Commission

The Electoral Commission is the independent body which oversees elections and regulates political finance in the UK. We work to promote public confidence in the electoral system and ensure its integrity.

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Ein cyf/Our ref: CG/10081/21

David Rees MS,
Chair
Llywydd's Committee
Senedd Cymru

seneddllc@senedd.wales

5 October 2021

Dear David,

I am writing in response to your letters of 27 September to myself and the Minister for Finance and Local Government, about the Electoral Commission's financial estimate for 2022-23 relating to its work on devolved Welsh elections and its five-year plan for 2022-23 to 2026-27. I am replying as the Minister responsible for elections, but I am copying this letter to the Minister for Finance and Local Government given her interest in expenditure out of the Welsh Consolidated Fund and in the administration of elections by local authorities.

While we are yet to receive confirmation of the level of funding, which will be transferred to Wales by HM Treasury in relation to these costs, from the discussions held we anticipate it will be of an amount which would provide sufficient cover for the expenditure outlined in the estimate. Any sums not covered by the transfer would have to be found from elsewhere within the resources available to Wales, thereby reducing the sums available for other activities covered by the Annual Budget Motion.

I can confirm that the activities described by the Electoral Commission in the estimate and five-year plan are in line with the Welsh Government's expectations about what will be required during the periods these cover and the planned elections during that timeframe. This includes work we have commenced on a number of pilots to address Ministerial priorities and on continued awareness raising amongst newly enfranchised voters. The Committee may wish to be aware that expenditure for the 2022 local government elections is likely to fall within the current financial year and the 2022-23 financial year.

Canolfan Cyswllt Cyntaf / First Point of Contact Centre:
0300 0604400

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

My officials have worked with the Electoral Commission to put in place a payment agreement, which sets out how the Welsh Government will pay it from the Welsh Consolidated Fund, according to the budget agreed by the Senedd. The first two payments for 2021-22 have been made to the Electoral Commission and a process is in place for making subsequent ones.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Mick Antoniw". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

Mick Antoniw AS/MS

Gwnsler Cyffredinol a Gweinidog y Cyfansoddiad
Counsel General and Minister for the Constitution



National Audit Office

Comptroller and Auditor General
Gareth Davies

David Rees MS
Deputy Presiding Officer
Chair of Llywydd's Committee

By email: seneddLLC@Senedd.Wales

**The UK's independent public spending
watchdog**

Direct Line +44 (0)20 7798 7777
Email Gareth.Davies@nao.org.uk

Our Reference PR-010968
Date 01 October 2021

Dear Mr Rees,

NAO MEMORANDUM: PROGRESS IN ENGAGING YOUNG VOTERS IN WALES

I am pleased to submit to the Llywydd's Committee a memorandum in which my team has examined how The Electoral Commission (the Commission) has managed its role in engaging young voters in the 2021 Welsh elections.

We undertook this work in response to requirements under the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 (PPERA), as amended by the Senedd (and Wales) Elections Act 2020, to produce a report to the Llywydd's Committee on the use of resource by the Commission to discharge its functions in relation to devolved Welsh elections and devolved Welsh referendums. The report is now due in response to the production of both the Commission's financial estimate and its five-year Corporate Plan.

The memorandum considers how the Commission has managed its role in engaging young voters (aged 16-34) in Wales; it does not include a formal VFM conclusion. We have, where appropriate, highlighted practical considerations which the Commission could further develop to enhance its planning and reporting processes on future campaigns, as part of its new 2022-27 business plan. I hope you will find this report helpful to support discussions in the Committee's upcoming October meeting.

A Welsh translation of this memorandum will be circulated separately. The Director on this study, Liz Fox (liz.fox@nao.org.uk), would be happy to discuss further or answer any questions you might have.

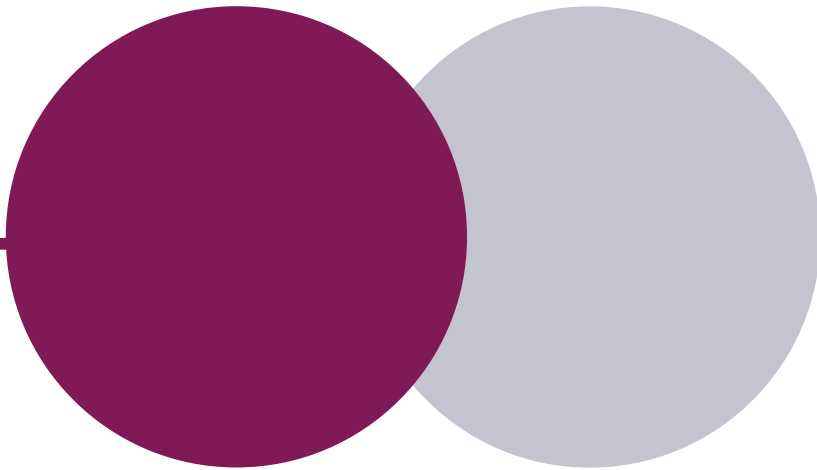
Yours sincerely,

GARETH DAVIES





National Audit Office




Progress in engaging young voters in Wales

The Electoral Commission

**MEMORANDUM FOR
THE LLYWYDD'S
COMMITTEE**

by the
National Audit Office

OCTOBER 2021



**We are the UK's
independent
public spending
watchdog.**

**We support Parliament
in holding government
to account and we
help improve public
services through our
high-quality audits.**

The National Audit Office (NAO) scrutinises public spending for Parliament and is independent of government and the civil service. We help Parliament hold government to account and we use our insights to help people who manage and govern public bodies improve public services.

The Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG), Gareth Davies, is an Officer of the House of Commons and leads the NAO. We audit the financial accounts of departments and other public bodies. We also examine and report on the value for money of how public money has been spent.

In 2020, the NAO's work led to a positive financial impact through reduced costs, improved service delivery, or other benefits to citizens, of £926 million.



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Philip Bradburn, Brian Kennedy, Ioana Stefu and Katie Taylor, under the direction of Liz Fox.

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Introduction

1 The Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG) is required under the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 (PPERA), as amended by the Senedd (and Wales) Elections Act 2020, to produce a report to the Llywydd's Committee (the Committee) on the use of resource by the Electoral Commission (the Commission) to discharge its functions in relation to devolved Welsh elections and devolved Welsh referendums (or, if the C&AG so determines, any of those functions). The report by the C&AG is due on production of both the Commission's five-year Corporate Plan and its financial Estimate.

2 The Electoral Commission is the independent body that oversees elections and regulates political finance in the UK. The Commission seeks to promote public confidence in the democratic process and ensure its integrity. It was set up under the PERA to be independent of government and political parties and is directly accountable to the UK Parliament and to the devolved parliaments.

3 The Commission monitors elections and referendums to make sure they are fair and run well, promoting public confidence in the democratic process. The Commission provides the guidance and advice that enables the delivery of elections, as well as setting performance standards for how they should be delivered. As part of this role, the Commission runs public awareness campaigns ahead of elections to encourage people to register to vote. For the 2021 elections in Wales, this has included campaigns and resources focused on newly enfranchised voters, following the legislative changes to extend the right to vote for elections to the Senedd to persons aged 16 and 17 and to qualifying foreign citizens. The Commission's five-year plan includes £1.3 million of funding for future digital communications and campaigns in Wales over the period 2022-23 to 2026-27.

4 To support the Llywydd's Committee in its work, our memorandum considers how the Commission has managed its role in engaging young voters (aged 16–34) in Wales. We considered: the Commission's strategy and objectives for raising awareness, registration and engagement in young people in the 2021 elections; the supporting plans and governance arrangements; and any arrangements for monitoring and evaluating the outcomes and learning lessons. We have, where appropriate, highlighted practical considerations that the Commission could further develop to enhance its planning and reporting processes on future campaigns as part of its new 2022–2027 business plan.

5 The content of this memorandum has been shared with the Commission to confirm that the evidence presented is factually accurate.

Strategy and objectives

6 In examining the Electoral Commission's (the Commission's) approach to engaging young voters we have considered the extent to which it has:

- developed clear objectives;
- used lessons learned from previous projects to inform the current strategy; and
- set out clear roles and responsibilities of partners and stakeholders.

Goals and objectives

7 The Commission aims to enable the continued delivery of free and fair elections and referendums and to make sure that registration and voting are accessible to all. A key part of this is the engagement of young voters, identified as individuals between the age of 18 and 34 years across the UK, and additionally those aged 16 and 17 years for Senedd and local government elections within Wales and Scotland.

8 To support engagement of young voters, the Commission undertook a voter registration campaign ahead of the May 2021 elections. This campaign ran from March to April 2021 and had particular focus on influencing groups that have been traditionally harder to reach. In addition to its overall organisational goals, the Commission set specific objectives for its public awareness campaign for the 2021 elections in Wales. These objectives were:

- a primary objective of increasing voter registration ahead of the electoral event to ensure that those who wish to cast their vote are able to; and
- a secondary objective of raising awareness of upcoming elections and the electoral system.

9 The delivery of these objectives was to be supported by the creation, distribution and promotion of an updated programme of educational resources for the voter. This included a set of resources aimed at 14–18-year-olds in Scotland and Wales ahead of the devolved elections.

Use of lessons learned

Strategy design

10 The Commission’s wider strategy to raise public awareness of elections and voting across the UK noted that its current plans were “based on the knowledge, expertise and extensive data it has built up each year, as well as the value for money shown by results of its past campaigns”. In designing the Welsh Public Awareness Plan, the Commission:

- targeted its advertising at those who have failed to register due to lack of awareness or oversight, rather than those who are consciously disengaged, which it knew to be more effective;
- used research to support a primary focus on 18–34-year-olds for the campaign;
- drew on its learning that mass-media advertising had been less effective than communicating through organisations who already have a strong voice in the community; and
- used existing networks to draw on local authorities’ specific knowledge of under-registered groups in their areas.

Barriers to voting

11 In 2020, the Welsh Government carried out exploratory research on how best to renew democratic engagement. This involved identifying the key motivations for, and barriers to, voting in Welsh elections and their importance to young people in Wales. Six main barriers were identified (**Figure 1**).

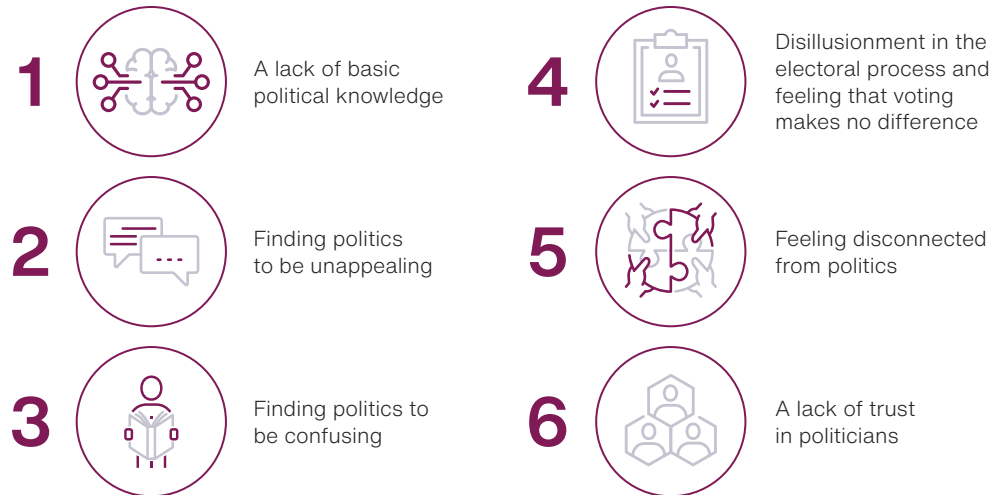
12 Our review of campaign and press plans identified three main actions that the Commission has taken in response to these barriers. These are a public awareness advertising campaign, the provision of educational resources for local authorities and partners (including both a *Handbook for Educators* and a *Handbook for Young People*), and the production and delivery of a voting guide to every household in Wales. These initiatives addressed three of the six barriers the Welsh Government had identified (**Figure 2** on page 8).

13 The Commission is responsible for activity to generate additions to the electoral register and uses information on barriers to inform its work. The Commission produced a detailed budget for the May 2021 elections with separate funding for initiatives in Wales. It allocated funding for activities including media campaigns, tracking research and production of educational resources. For Wales, this included £224,000 for media specifically targeting 18–34-year-olds and a further £30,000 for media specifically targeting 16–17-year-olds.

Figure 1
Barriers to voting in young people in Wales

The Welsh Government identified six main barriers

The most common barriers identified were:



Note

1 The Welsh Government’s sample to identify the barriers spanned four broad groups of participants: young people aged 14–17 (eight focus groups); disengaged adults aged 18+ (eight groups); foreign nationals (28 participants); and stakeholders (12 participants). Five focus groups were convened in Welsh. In total, 148 people took part in the research between late July and early November 2019 in Aberystwyth, Ammanford, Caernarfon, Cardiff, Newtown, Swansea, Torfaen, Welshpool and Wrexham.

Source: National Audit Office analysis of Welsh Government, *Renewing Democratic Engagement*, Exploratory Research

Role and responsibilities – working with partners

14 The Commission works with a range of partners including the Welsh Government, the Senedd Commission, local authorities, and other organisations including those who work with young people. It has produced a partnership plan, which outlines how it will execute its work with each partner organisation. It has identified that its partners and other stakeholders are best placed to target disengaged audiences who have made a conscious decision not to register to vote, as well as voters who need specific support and information to participate in elections. It has carried out stakeholder mapping exercises to ensure that it optimises the impact from its engagements with partner organisation.

Figure 2

The Electoral Commission's public awareness campaign in Wales addressed barriers to voting seen in young people

Three of the six identified barriers to voting seen in young people were addressed by the Electoral Commission's (the Commission's) campaign

Barriers to voting in young people	Public awareness advertising campaign	Resources for local authorities and partners	Voting guide for households
A lack of basic political knowledge	✓	✓	✓
Finding politics to be unappealing			
Finding politics to be confusing	✓	✓	✓
Disillusionment in the electoral process and feeling that voting makes no difference			
Feeling disconnected from politics	✓	✓	✓
A lack of trust in politicians			

Source: National Audit Office analysis of Welsh Government, *Renewing Democratic Engagement* Exploratory Research

Future considerations on strategy and objectives

15 The Commission drew on existing work and lessons learned to help design its objectives. These objectives are clear and well-defined. The Commission also took appropriate action to help improve knowledge and clarity in the electoral process and address disconnection between voters and the election process.

16 To support further increases in voter registration, the Commission should, while maintaining its impartiality, work with its partners to plan and deliver actions to address the remaining barriers to voting.

Delivery and monitoring

17 In examining the Electoral Commission's (the Commission's) approach to delivering and monitoring performance we have considered the extent to which the Commission has:

- key performance indicators (KPIs) that are suitably linked to campaign objectives;
- access to frequent, real-time data that allow it to monitor and evaluate progress in a timely manner, and take actions to help improve project delivery; and
- a risk management process that allows it to understand and mitigate campaign risk.

Key performance indicators

18 To ensure that delivery of the campaign is on track, the Commission sets and monitors progress against KPIs. The Commission has five KPIs aimed at 18–34-year-olds for its public awareness campaign (**Figure 3** overleaf). The minimum target for each KPI is based on past performance and considers resource allocation and spend in each campaign area.

19 These indicators support both the primary objective of increasing voter registration and the secondary objective of raising awareness of upcoming elections and the electoral system. For the 2021 campaign, performance against these KPIs was broadly in line with identified targets.

Using data and evaluation

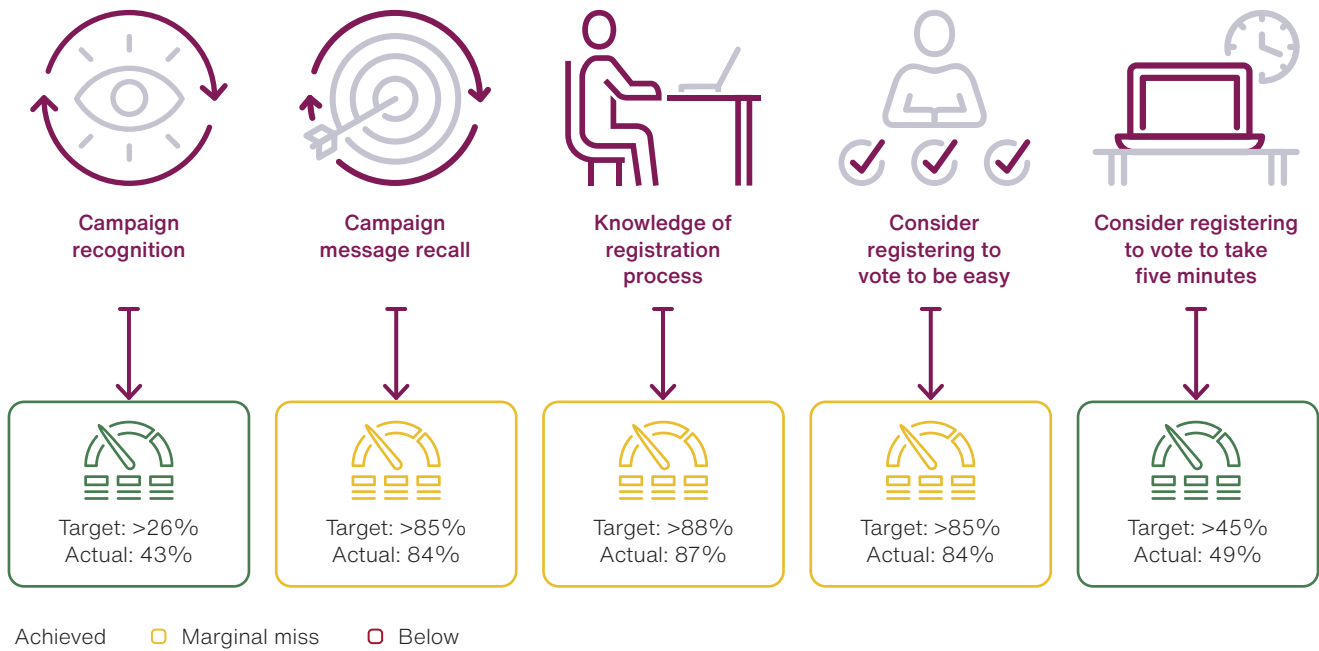
20 The Commission carries out an evaluation after every campaign. For the Welsh public awareness campaign the evaluation considered:

- the number of applications by age;
- the number of articles published which referenced the Commission's key voter registration and voter information messages;
- the number of councils and local publications which made use of the Commission's press releases;
- engagement levels with social media posts; and
- campaign spend and campaign reach.

Figure 3

Key performance indicators (KPIs) of the Electoral Commission’s public awareness campaign in Wales

The Electoral Commission (the Commission) met two of its five KPIs for 18–34-year-olds that underpinned its public awareness campaign in Wales



Note

1 YouGov sample to assess the Commission’s performance against their KPIs comprised 614 respondents from Wales. The fieldwork ran from 21 April to 5 May 2021 and the samples were weighted to be representative of the population by age, gender, region, social grade and education level.

Source: National Audit Office analysis of YouGov evaluation data of the Electoral Commission’s public awareness campaign

21 The Commission has monitored the performance of its campaign using a number of metrics – including recognition and recall of the campaign, and engagement (likes and clicks) with social media. It also has aggregate data on the final outcome of additional registrations. However, it lacks a link between the two, which would allow it to understand what works most effectively in removing barriers and encouraging registration.

22 The Commission has access to daily voter application data and website traffic via the gov.uk dashboard, as well as data on the performance of its digital adverts. The data to assess performance against KPIs are, however, only available at the conclusion of a campaign and published as part of the Commission’s elections evaluation report.

Risk management

23 Commission staff held daily meetings throughout the live dates of the public information campaigns, alongside Senior Leadership meetings on a weekly basis. This was in addition to the regular meetings held by the Cabinet Office and Welsh Government, attended by staff from the Commission, to make sure that risks were accounted for and being appropriately mitigated. The Commission also established a sub-group of the Welsh Electoral Coordination Board to discuss communication plans and resource allocation between all relevant partners across Wales. This minimised the risk of decisions being taken in isolation to the detriment of other campaign areas.

24 We also assessed the Commission's project risk register for its public awareness campaigns. It included nine identified risks and the potential impact of each risk had been considered. A minimum of two mitigation approaches had been provided for each, with most risks supported by four or more mitigation approaches. There was also a contingency plan in place for delays and overruns, setting out the latest possible date decisions could be made and the shortest possible timeframes that the Commission could realistically achieve.

Future considerations on delivery and monitoring

25 The Commission's KPIs were clearly linked to both its primary and secondary objectives. It had considered how best to monitor and evaluate campaign progress, and the Commission acts on the data it gathers to improve future performance.

26 To support increased effectiveness in future voter registration campaigns the Commission should:

- consider whether it could make further use of real-time performance data from agencies and delivery partners. This will allow the Commission to take appropriate and efficient action, if necessary, during campaigns; and
- build on previous research on the impact of voter registration campaigns by exploring the potential for trials that link the data on individual voter registration outcomes to data from campaign tracking. This would provide more detailed evidence on what works in achieving additional vote registrations in specific geographical areas and sub-sets of young voters.

Governance and learning

27 To support appropriate governance arrangements and embedding lessons learned into future working, we considered:

- accountability arrangements, in particular for senior project sponsors;
- evidence of the Electoral Commission's (the Commission's) impact;
- communication of campaign results to share best practice and areas for future improvement across the organisation; and
- plans for drawing out and sharing lessons to inform future strategy.

Accountability arrangements

28 Within the Commission, the director of communications, policy and research is the senior responsible officer for the overall delivery of the public awareness campaign. Under their direction, the campaign team is required to submit plans to the Commission Board for each new project. These plans must be approved for a campaign to be able to proceed. We have reviewed the papers submitted to the Commission Board for both the Public Awareness campaign and the Political Literacy education campaign. Key topics covered in each board paper included:

- the strategy and purpose of the campaign;
- stakeholder engagement and partnership work; and
- how to measure the impact of the campaign.

29 However, there was no formal requirement for project teams to report back in detail to the Commission Board once campaigns are under way. Project teams submit only a brief monthly update on campaign progress as part of the chief executive officer's report. This means that the Commission Board may not always have early sight of any issues which might affect the timeliness or effectiveness of a campaign.

Attribution of results

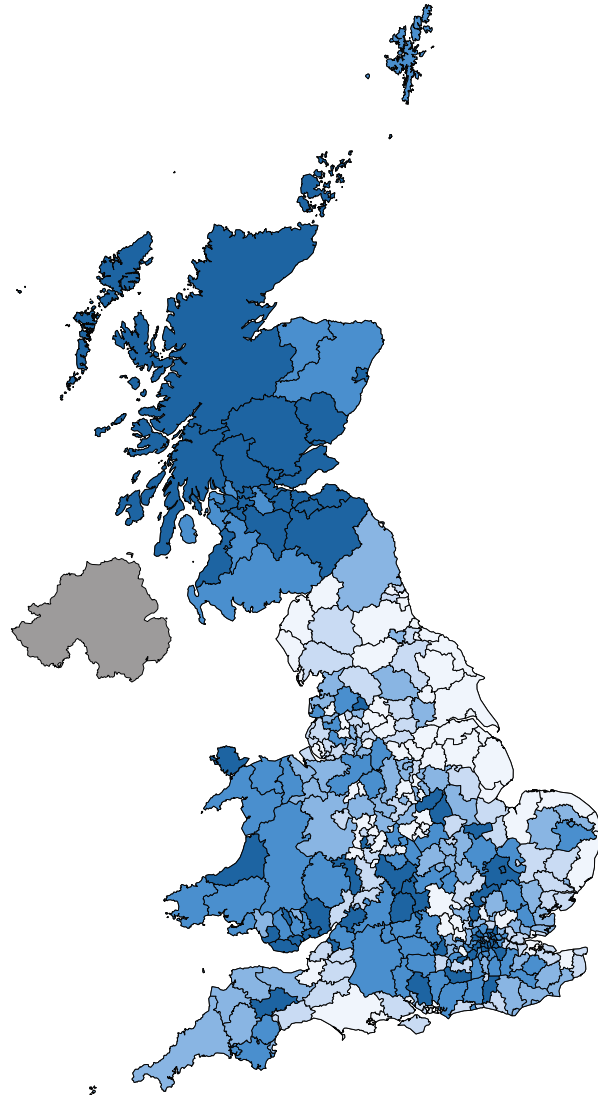
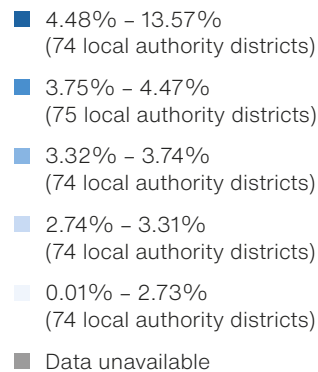
30 The Commission had a target of generating at least 50,000 new voter applications in Wales over the duration of its campaign. It exceeded its target with final data showing 71,562 new voter applications, including 7,704 applications from 16-17-year-olds. Registration rates for new voters varied both by local authority district in Wales and across the UK (**Figure 4** and **Figure 5** on page 14). The applications data only include applications made during the timeframe of the Commission's campaign. However, given the number of factors influencing voter applications it is difficult to demonstrate the additional impact of the Commission's work.

Figure 4

Recent voter registration among young adults (18–34-year-olds) in the UK, by local authority

The percentage of 18–34-year-olds who submitted an application to vote between 9 March and 19 April 2021, by local authority

Percentage of 18–34-year-olds who submitted an application to vote

**Notes**

- 1 The data supplied by the Electoral Commission for our use described applications submitted between 9 March and 19 April 2021 but was aligned with 2019 local authority boundaries, which include 371 local authorities in England, Scotland, and Wales.
- 2 The Electoral Commission did not provide data for Northern Ireland because there were no polls or voter registration campaigns carried out in Northern Ireland during this time period.
- 3 The percentage of 18–34-year-olds who submitted an application to vote (between 9 March and 19 April 2021) in the UK ranged from 0.01% to 13.57% and averaged 3.77% overall.
- 4 The total population of 18–34-year-olds in England, Scotland, and Wales was estimated by the ONS to be 14,196,998.

Source: National Audit Office analysis of voter registration data from the Electoral Commission and mid-year population estimates from the Office for National Statistics. Population data from ONS, Crown Copyright Reserved (from Nomis on 16 September 2021). Shapefile from Office for National Statistics licensed under the Open Government Licence v.3.0. Contains OS data © Crown copyright and database right (2021)

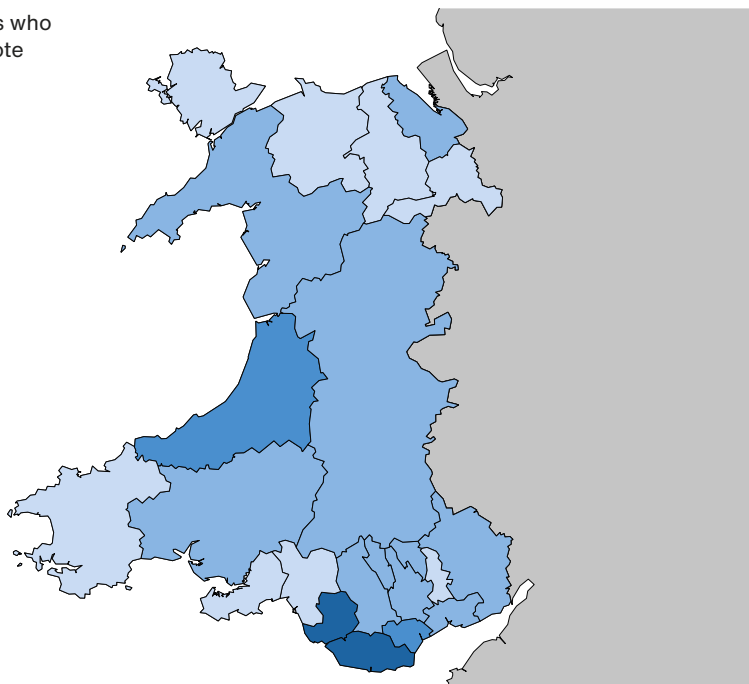
Figure 5

Recent voter registration in Wales among 14–17-year-olds, by local authority

The percentage of 14–17-year-olds who submitted an application to vote between 9 March and 19 April 2021, by local authority

Percentage of 14–17-year-olds who submitted an application to vote

- 11.60% – 14.49%
(2 local authority districts)
- 8.70% – 11.59%
(2 local authority districts)
- 5.80% – 8.69%
(10 local authority districts)
- 2.90% – 5.79%
(8 local authority districts)
- 0.00% – 2.89%
(0 local authority districts)
- No data available



Notes

- 1 For Senedd and local elections in Wales, a voter becomes eligible to vote at age 16. 15-year-olds and some 14-year-olds are entitled to be included on the register as attainers. For the purpose of the local government register in Wales, an attainer is someone who turns 16 by the end of the twelve months following the 1 December after the relevant date.
- 2 The data supplied by the Electoral Commission for our use described applications submitted between 9 March and 19 April 2021 but was aligned with 2019 local authority boundaries, which included 22 local authorities.
- 3 The percentage of 14–17-year-olds who submitted an application to vote (between 9 March and 19 April 2021) ranged between 4.47% and 14.49% and averaged 7.36% overall.
- 4 The total number of 14–17-year-olds in Wales was estimated by the ONS to be 137,883.

Source: National Audit Office analysis of voter registration data from the Electoral Commission and mid-year population estimates from the Office for National Statistics. Population data from ONS, Crown Copyright Reserved (from Nomis on 16 September 2021). Shapefile from Office for National Statistics licensed under the Open Government Licence v.3.0. Contains OS data © Crown copyright and database right (2021)

31 Other data provide some evidence of the Commission's impact. The Commission's evaluation survey, carried out across Wales by YouGov after the campaign, found that 43% of 18–34-year-olds in Wales recognised at least one element of the Commission's campaign. When considering knowledge of the campaign's core messages in 18–34-year-olds, there was a noticeable increase when comparing the pre- and post-campaign data. The percentage of young people who knew that you need to be registered to vote increased from 78% to 84%, and the percentage of young people who believed that it took roughly five minutes to register to vote increased from 41% to 49%. The collection of both pre- and post-campaign survey results is one input in helping the Commission to consider the impact of its work.

Communication of findings

32 The Commission told us that its intranet blog is used to share regular updates by its Campaigns, Digital Communications and Learning, and the Wales teams. The full campaign evaluation report – which includes progress against targets, key performance measures and stakeholder survey results – was also circulated internally with the wider office. We consider this to represent good practice in sharing learning. The Commission also included a section on newly enfranchised voters in its election report, which was published on 14 September. This was a condensed version of the section on newly enfranchised voters in the evaluation report, which we have assessed as part of this memorandum.

Learning and sharing lessons

33 *Managing Public Money* highlights that it is essential to effective internal decision-making that arrangements are in place to draw out and share lessons learned. For the Commission, this means using the results of the 2021 campaign to inform future work, specifically on young voters and more widely on other awareness campaigns. We have reviewed the May 2022 paper to the Commission Board on public awareness campaigns across the UK for the May 2022 elections. There is clear evidence that findings from the May 2021 campaign have been used to inform future strategy. This includes using:

- campaign recognition scores to assess whether advertising concepts (such as the 'Got 5' concept) are still performing well and should be re-used;
- engagement data to consider the performance of paid digital advertising and amend target audiences; and
- application data for newly enfranchised voters to establish a baseline and develop young voter application targets for May 2022.

Future considerations on delivery and monitoring

34 The Commission held regular monitoring meetings with both delivery agencies and partners throughout the campaign period, as well as fortnightly internal meetings with all workstream leads. The Commission also met its target of adding at least 50,000 new voter applications in Wales throughout the campaign period and used findings from this campaign to inform future strategy.

35 To support further increases in voter registration and accountability, and because raising voter awareness is a priority, the Commission should:

- review current reporting arrangements for campaigns with the Commission Board and Executive to ensure that arrangements are best placed to support accountability; and
- consider producing a more detailed evaluative report of progress in registering 16–17-year-olds in Scotland and Wales that includes measures against each of the five overall KPIs that were identified for 18–34-year-olds.

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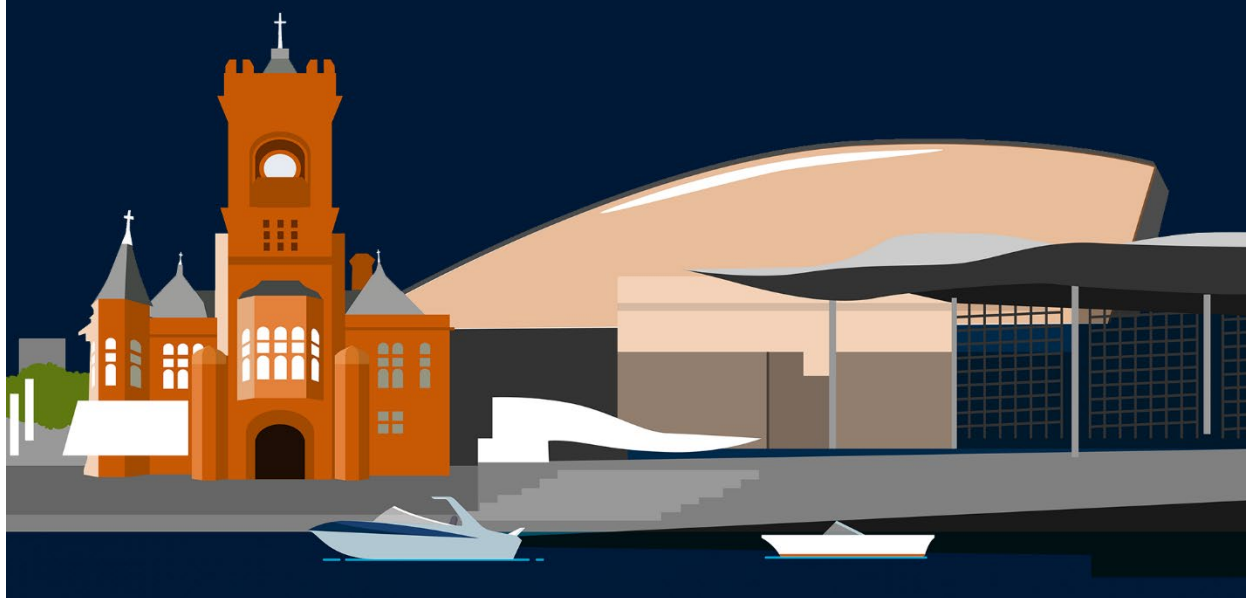
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National Audit Office

Report on the May 2021 elections in Wales

September 2021



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The Electoral Commission is required to report on the administration of Senedd and Police and Crime Commissioner elections. This report looks at how the May 2021 elections were run, how voters were able to take part, and how campaigners participated, as well as what lessons can be learned for the future.

The elections were well-run in challenging circumstances

In July 2020, during a time of rising concern about the coronavirus pandemic, discussions began around the management and administration of the Senedd elections in a pandemic environment. Whilst there had been speculation that the elections might be postponed, in February 2021, the Welsh Government announced its firm intention that the elections would go ahead as planned on 6 May 2021. The UK Government also confirmed that the Police and Crime Commissioner elections postponed from May 2020 would take place on the same date.

Rules for the Senedd election were made by Welsh Government while rules for the Police and Crime Commissioner election were made by the UK Government. This combination, which included the difference in voter eligibility between the two sets of elections, together with the pandemic, resulted in a high level of complexity for those administering the polls.

However, people were able to register to vote and take part in the elections. There were 51,500 applications to register made from 26 March to 27 April, and a total of 2.3 million were registered to vote in the elections in Wales. For the first time 16 and 17 year olds and foreign citizens resident in Wales were able to register to vote at the Senedd elections.

Turnout across the elections was similar to previous years, suggesting Covid-19 did not stop voters from taking part. Voting by post or appointing a proxy were highlighted as options for those who did not feel comfortable, or safe, voting in person, and there was a small increase in the number of people who applied to vote by post at these polls.

Alongside the usual challenges for Returning Officers and electoral administrators in running and overseeing successful elections, there were a number of extra requirements imposed by Covid-19 to comply with public health guidance and regulations and ensure that everyone could participate safely.

The experience of these polls has again highlighted concerns about the resilience and capacity of electoral administration structures in Wales, which are coupled with the challenges of delivering elections within an outdated and increasingly complex electoral law framework.

For campaigners, the changing public health regulations and restrictions caused uncertainty, and they had to adapt their plans as official guidance changed before and during the campaign period. Campaigners were able to communicate with voters using a number of methods including online, through printed material and eventually face-to-face. However, feedback from candidates shows that campaigning ahead of these elections was challenging.

Digital campaigning was particularly important to campaigners for the May polls and this trend is likely to continue in future years. Transparency around who is responsible for producing campaign material online remains of critical importance, and lessons from elsewhere in the UK about digital imprint rules should be a consideration for future devolved elections taking place in Wales.

Overall, the evidence and feedback we have collected indicates that the 2021 elections in Wales on 6 May 2021 were well-run and voters and campaigners had confidence in the management of the polls, despite the difficulties they encountered as a result of the Covid-19 restrictions

Our recommendations are:

- Recommendation 1: Welsh Government should ensure that changes to emergency proxy provisions introduced due to Covid-19 should be maintained for any reasons of medical self-isolation.
- Recommendation 2: Welsh Government should legislate to ensure that a digital imprint is required for online campaign material for future Senedd and Welsh local government elections.
- Recommendation 3: The Wales Electoral Coordination Board is in a unique position to provide a link between governments and Returning Officers in Wales and to provide advice on the delivery of elections and introduction of electoral reforms. We recommend that the Board should be strengthened and that it should have a statutory role, similar to the role of the Electoral Management Board in Scotland.
- Recommendation 4: Developing and delivering proposals to support resilient electoral services for the future will need to be supported through appropriate resourcing.

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Voting at the elections

The experience of voters at the May 2021 elections

- Most people were confident that the elections were well-run, even though they took place in unprecedented and challenging circumstances. People were highly satisfied with the process of registering to vote and casting their vote.
- Changes that were put in place helped to support and reassure voters. People were confident that they could vote safely at the elections, and the overwhelming majority were able to vote using their preferred method.
- New rules allowed people who were required to isolate to appoint a proxy to vote on their behalf as late as 5pm on polling day. This positive change helped to provide a safeguard for anyone whose circumstances changed close to the polls.

On 6 May 2021 an election took place to elect 60 members of the Senedd, 40 representing the constituencies of Wales and 20 representing the regions. The election was combined with the Police and Crime Commissioner elections, postponed from May 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic. In some constituencies, local authorities also held by-elections.

The franchise for each election was different with 16 and 17 year olds and foreign citizens legally resident in Wales able to vote in the Senedd election for the first time. Two different voting systems were used: the Additional Member System in the Senedd election, and the Supplementary Vote for the Police and Crime Commissioner election.

Returning Officers, consistent with Electoral Commission guidance, put in place new procedures in polling stations to comply with public health guidelines and to ensure that voters were confident that they could vote safely. To make sure everyone knew about the different voting options available to them and the safety measures in place, the Commission, along with local authorities, took a lead role in communicating these messages before the elections.

Voters continue to have positive views about how elections are run

Notwithstanding the challenges of a complex set of polls held during the Covid-19 pandemic, people had high levels of satisfaction with the process of registering to vote and voting, and thought they had enough information about the elections to enable them to take part. Our research showed that:

- 86% of people were satisfied with the process of registering to vote
- 95% of people who voted at the election were satisfied with the process of voting

- the vast majority (94%) of voters in Wales said it was easy to fill in their ballot papers for the Senedd election whereas only 83% of those who voted at the Police Crime Commissioner said the same
- first time voters were more likely to say they were dissatisfied with the process of voting (10%) and were significantly more likely to find the electoral system confusing compared to repeat voters (55% compared to 22%)

Three-quarters of people said they were confident that the elections were well-run; however, at least one in 10 were not. This figure is lower than the proportion of people in 2016 who thought the elections were well run (83%).

Reasons given by those who said they were not confident the election was well-run were:

- there wasn't enough information about the candidates (25%)
- did not think it was safe for people to vote at polling stations because of Covid-19 (22%)
- did not feel it was appropriate for the election to take place during the pandemic (20%)
- there wasn't enough information about the elections (20%)

The pandemic does not appear to have stopped people from turning out to vote

Turnout, at 46.8%, was slightly higher than at the 2016 elections (45.6%). Turnout among 16 and 17 year olds seems largely in line with other younger age groups and notably lower than turnout among the over 55s.

Postal and proxy voting were highlighted as alternative ways of voting due to the pandemic and the number of voters choosing these methods did increase, although perhaps not as highly as some had anticipated in a pandemic environment, with 458,928 issued with a postal vote in 2021 compared to 395,878 in 2016 (19.2% compared with 17.6%).

Turnout compared with other elections

	2016	2021
Senedd election	45.6%	46.8%
PCC election	45.2%	45.7%

People were confident that they could vote using their preferred method

Although public health restrictions were in place at the time of the elections, people had a choice of how to cast their vote. They could choose to vote in person at their polling station, by post, or by asking someone to do so on their behalf (proxy voting).

94% of people who voted said they were able to use their preferred method of voting.

Voters using polling stations were confident that they were safe places to vote

Across Wales, measures were in place to make sure that voting at polling stations was as safe possible during the pandemic.

To support and advise on what changes should be made to voting in polling stations, the Electoral Commission worked with public health experts across the UK to provide [guidance for electoral administrators](#). The Wales Electoral Coordination Board also worked closely with the AEA Wales to set out a minimum safety standard which constituency Returning Officers should put in place at polling stations.

The Commission also provided resources to local authorities designed to reassure voters that polling stations would be safe places to vote, including highlighting the other ways to vote, for those vulnerable or concerned and encouraging voters to start thinking about their preferred voting option early.

Resources included material for use on social media, animated videos, posters and template press releases.

Polling stations were set up and managed to minimise public health risks

Almost all of the respondents to our research who voted in person said that they felt safe at a polling station with the provisions in place:

- 95% of electors who voted in person say that they felt safe at a polling station with Covid-19 safety provisions in place – with almost two thirds feeling very safe. Only a very small proportion of voters said that they felt unsafe
- nearly three-quarters of electors aged 35-54 and 55+ felt it was very safe compared to just over half (57%) of those aged 16-34
- almost all (99%) polling station voters said that they noticed at least one of the various safety provisions that had been put in place

People were most likely to notice

People were least likely to notice

Hand sanitiser provided on exit and entry

Cleaning of pencils

Staff wearing face coverings

Cleaning of booths

A one-way system with floor markings

Polling station staff also felt that polling stations were safe places to work (90% of staff responding to our survey agreed) and that the safety of voters was adequately provided for by the changes introduced (91%).

Candidates were also satisfied with Covid-19 safety measures in polling places, with three-quarters saying they were fairly or very satisfied.

The new safety measures, including the limits on the number of people who could enter the polling station, meant that voting took longer for some people. The combination of polls, where voters had more than one ballot paper to complete, may also have contributed to this. Our research showed that:

- half of those people questioned said that voting in these elections took about the same time as usual despite the Covid-19 safety provisions being in place. However, 42% said it took longer
- 48% of electors who voted in person said they waited less than five minutes, 34% waited five to 10 minutes and 16% said they waited more than 10 minutes before they were able to vote

There were reports of queues at some polling stations

There were reports in the media on polling day of queues at certain polling stations and instances where voters felt unable to cast their vote as a result.

To better understand the situation across Wales, we asked Returning Officers and electoral administrators to provide detail on the voter experience in their areas. All authorities responded and 10 reported receiving some complaints about queuing including:

- a small number (21) of people across Wales complained about being disenfranchised (11 in one authority area)
- the last polling stations to close were in Cardiff at 23:40, in Rhondda Cynon Taf at 23:20, and Newport at 00:45
- the reasons cited for why queues formed were: adhering to Covid-19 guidance, and less availability of suitable buildings for use as polling station because of requirements relating to the pandemic

This showed that while there were instances of queuing, it was not perceived by voters as

a widespread problem in Wales. Generally, voters understood that Covid-19 procedures were being followed, and in most instances people were prepared to queue.



Electors appreciated the steps being taken to ensure their safety.”

Returning Officers felt that having polling station ‘marshals’ or ‘greeters’ worked well, and that these staff were able to direct and help voters, making the experience more ‘welcoming’, particularly for young and new voters. The Wales Electoral Coordination Board have concluded that this arrangement should be continued at future polls, resource permitting.

People who didn’t want to go to a polling station had options for voting remotely

People who don’t want to vote in person at the polling station can apply to cast their vote by post or appoint someone to vote on their behalf, known as a proxy. If their situation changes close to an election due to work or disability, people can appoint an emergency proxy up to 5pm on polling day to vote on their behalf.

The law was changed ahead of these elections so that so that anyone who had to self-isolate close to polling day because they had tested positive for Covid-19, or had been in close contact to someone who had tested positive, could also appoint a proxy.

Most people knew what options they had if they didn’t want to vote in a polling station. Our research showed that:

- 75% of people said that they found it easy to get information about the different methods of voting that they could choose from
- older voters were more likely than younger voters to say it was easy to get this information
- one in five first time postal voters said they chose to vote that way because they were prompted by information sent by their local authority. A similar number (21%) said that they chose to vote by post because they saw advertising from the Electoral Commission
- over three-quarters (78%) of those electoral administrators that replied to our survey said that they had run a campaign about postal voting in their area

The majority of calls from the public to the Electoral Commission’s public information helpline in Wales related to the postal voting process, with callers not having access to a printer in order to print off and complete the form, or being unclear about where to return their postal vote application form.

People found postal voting straightforward

At these elections we saw a small increase in the proportion of voters choosing to vote by post, but the number of proxy voters remained at the same level:

	2021	2016
% of postal voters	19.2%	17.6%
% of proxy voters	0.14%	0.13%

Of those who were first-time postal voters, half said they voted this way because of Covid-19 safety concerns, while 25% say it is more convenient. A third of electors who voted by post did so for the first time.

An overwhelming majority (96%) said that it was easy to understand what to do in order to return their postal vote.

First time voters (15%) and those aged 16-34 (14%) were more likely to say it was difficult. The most common reasons for saying it was difficult were receiving more ballot papers than they were expecting, not being clear which envelopes they should return the completed ballot(s) in and not being clear on what information they had to provide.

Rates of postal vote rejections rose slightly

When a postal ballot pack is returned to the Returning Officer, the signature and date of birth (known as the personal identifiers) provided on the postal vote statement (PVS) are checked against those previously provided by the elector. Where either or both the signature and date of birth are missing or do not match, the postal vote is rejected and is not included in the count. This is a security measure to ensure that the ballot paper has been returned by the elector it was sent to.

Data from electoral administrators shows that 13,695 (3.9%) of returned postal votes were not included in the count after the required checks on voters' personal identifiers. The rate of rejection is slightly higher than at the 2016 Senedd election where 9,291 (3.24%) postal votes were rejected as invalid.

The most common reasons for rejection were mismatched identifiers (signature/date of birth), these account for 46% of rejections.

Postal vote rejection rates

	% of postal votes rejected	Most common reasons for rejection	
		Mismatched date of birth	Mismatched signature
2016	3.2%	20%	16%
2021	3.9%	28%	12%

While the percentage of postal votes not included in the count is relatively small, it remains a matter of concern that some postal votes are not counted because voters do not complete the PVS correctly.

The Electoral Commission will continue to work with Returning Officers and Electoral Registration Officers to support voter understanding of how to complete and return their postal ballot pack correctly. The postal vote stationery used plays an important role in aiding voter understanding with the application and voting process, and they should continue to review the information they provide to make sure it is as clear and helpful as it can be to voters.

People who needed to isolate because of Covid-19 could appoint a proxy to vote on their behalf

Voters whose situation changes close to an election due to work or disability can appoint an emergency proxy up to 5pm on polling day to vote on their behalf. Changes to these rules in March 2021 gave voters the option to apply for an emergency proxy if they tested positive for Covid-19 close to polling day, or had to self-isolate due to someone close to them testing positive.

Of all proxies appointed, 5% were emergency proxies and 2% were due to Covid-19.

Recommendation 1: Retain an emergency proxy option for isolating voters

Legislation introduced for these elections to allow emergency proxy votes for anyone who tested positive for Covid-19, or had to self-isolate, helped provide a safeguard for anyone whose circumstances changed close to the polls and ensure that they were not prevented from participating. Although the provision was not widely relied upon in practice, it was nevertheless an important change to ensure that no one lost their ability to vote.

We recommend that Welsh Government should ensure this option continues to be available if people are required to self-isolate as part of the public health response to Covid-19.

Further education and engagement is required to support new voters to understand and participate in Welsh elections

The Senedd and Elections Wales Act 2020 extended the voting franchise for Welsh elections to 16-17 year olds and qualifying foreign citizens. This meant that approximately 100,000 new voters were eligible to vote for the first time in the Senedd election.

To ensure new voters understood this change and knew how to register, the Electoral Commission worked with the Welsh Government, the Senedd Commission and partners across Wales including NUS Wales, the Welsh Refugee Council and the Trussell Trust to encourage registration and educate new voters about their vote.

Welcome to Your Vote - a new voter registration campaign

In the run up to the election we ran a new voter registration campaign targeted at the newly enfranchised, titled 'Welcome to your vote'. This ran alongside our 'Got 5?' registration campaign, which targeted the whole of the electorate in Wales, but was more

heavily weighted towards known under-registered audiences, such as private renters and those under 35.

Alongside the campaigns, we sent a voter information booklet to all households in Wales containing key election messages including how to register, how to vote by post or proxy and what to expect when voting at a polling station. Earned press and media activity also helped us to spread these messages.

During the campaign period a total of 71,562 people in Wales applied to register to vote, including 7,704 16-17 year olds and 935 qualifying foreign citizens. The foreign nationalities with the most applications were USA, Syria, China and Turkey.

We worked with partners to reach under-registered groups

We also supplemented our campaigns with partnership work to fully explain the complexities of the election to new voters, and other groups who are typically under-registered or disengaged. We worked with local authorities and 33 different third sector and democratic organisations on a number of initiatives. These included the provision of bespoke resources and 'train the trainer' sessions, and working with the Senedd Commission on joint activities for 16-17 year old voters during 'Welcome to your Vote Week'.

A sub-group of the Wales Electoral Coordination Board was also established to specifically look at communication with these new audiences. This group will continue to operate moving forward towards next year's local government elections in Wales.

Partnerships case study: The Democracy Box

In January 2021, as part of our partnership working ahead of the May elections the Commission became a collaborator on the Democracy Box project – a non-partisan research and development project looking at how young people can creatively inform and engage all generations in our UK democracy. The project’s research found that many people do not have a sound basic understanding of UK democracy and how local, devolved and UK Governments all work together and why. The project’s goal of informing and educating people about the different administrations, voting systems and democratic participation aligned closely to the goals of our own education work.

32 young people aged 16-30 from across Wales led the project as paid content creators, identifying how and where they want to see the educational content. To date they have produced a [podcast](#), [Instagram](#), [TikTok](#) and [YouTube](#) channels all exploring key themes like how to get in touch with your MP, how to vote and devolution.

“It’s a great opportunity to use my skill set in politics, technology, software, design and video editing. It’s a fantastic chance to just do something completely positive, and help other people engage in democracy.” Young Co-Creator aged 16

We supported the project via our education resources and attended feedback and brainstorming sessions with the young co-creators. This allowed us to gain valuable insight into the effectiveness of the resources and our ‘Welcome to Your Vote’ campaign.

Some new voters found taking part more difficult than returning voters

Our research found that the majority of people were satisfied with the processes of registering to vote and voting. However, first time voters were more likely to say they were dissatisfied with the process of voting (10% compared to 3% of repeat voters) and were significantly more likely to find the multiple electoral systems confusing compared to repeat voters (55% compared to 22%). First time voters were also less likely than repeat voters to say that it was easy to get information on how to register (82% compared to 94%) and cast their vote (75% compared to 88%).

Approximately 50% (32,121, of an estimated 70,000) of eligible newly enfranchised 16-17 year olds registered to vote in this election. There is insufficient data available to enable us to report on qualifying foreign nationals.

More focus on political education is needed

Last year the Commission published a new set of [online resources](#) to educate young people about the democratic process. The resources aimed to support young people, including those who were voting for the first time at the Senedd elections, and prepare educators to teach political literacy with confidence. We worked with our partners to promote and gain feedback on the resources, which were also published on the [Hwb](#) platform alongside resources from the Welsh Government and Senedd Commission. Covid-19 did impact both schools and colleges in being able to deliver political literacy training to students ahead of the Senedd elections in May.

We plan to extend the reach and impact of our education programme ahead of the local government elections in 2022 and Senedd election in 2026. We want to build on the work already achieved by engaging further with young people and educators across Wales to identify more themes and topics our resources can address.

We will work with all relevant partners in Wales, including the Welsh Government and Senedd Commission, to ensure that the Commission's focus in this area is appropriate and effective. This could mean not only enhancing existing resources but also developing support programmes for those working with these groups as well as expanding networks with the groups themselves.

Campaigning at the elections

The experience of campaigning at the May 2021 elections

- Campaigners communicated with voters using a number of methods including online, through printed material, and eventually face-to-face. However, feedback from candidates shows that a sizeable amount said they could not campaign effectively with the Covid- 19 restrictions in place.
- Communication about legislative changes and new restrictions was generally good; however, there was a sizeable minority of candidates who remained unclear about the changes.
- Transparency about who is responsible for producing campaign material online remains important for voters, and lessons from elsewhere in the UK about digital imprint rules should be considered for future elections in Wales.

Campaigning is an essential element of a healthy democracy. This includes publishing and distributing campaign material, sending election communications to electors, displaying advertising hoardings and banners, canvassing door to door, and speaking to voters on polling day.

Campaigners had to adapt their activities due to the pandemic and there was a lack of certainty when planning for the elections which meant it was not straight forward for campaigners to plan and deliver their activities.

Parties and candidates did not appear to be deterred from participating in the poll

A total of 308 candidates stood for election across the 40 Senedd constituencies in 2021. The number of constituency candidates represents an increase from the 248 candidates who stood at the National Assembly for Wales election in 2016.

In May 2021, a total of 326 candidates stood on a regional list at the Senedd elections. This again, was an increase from the 305 candidates that stood on a regional list in 2016.

For the Police and Crime Commissioner elections, 21 candidates stood in May 2021, which was an increase from 19 candidates in 2016.

The changing public health context caused uncertainty for campaigners

Some changes to legislation were made close to the start of the election period

Given the changing context of the pandemic, it was understandably more difficult for Welsh Government to ensure changes to legislation were in place at least six-months before campaigners or electoral administrators needed to comply with them. However some changes to help the nomination process were made very close to when they would affect campaigners, and this added to the uncertainty and risk for candidates and electoral administrators.

Just over half of the candidates who responded to our survey (56%) agreed that they were well informed about legislative changes made as a result of the pandemic, however a sizeable minority (24%) disagreed.

Official guidance on campaigning activities changed during the election period

Under the public health restrictions during the campaign period, leafletting activities could not begin in Wales until 15 March 2021. Prior to this date, campaigning took place primarily online. Door-to-door canvassing was only a permitted campaign activity in Wales after 12 April and campaigners had to follow specific Covid-19 guidelines.

Some changes to campaign-related rules came after the start of the regulated period, particularly the updates to Covid-19 restrictions for campaigning. Four in five (79%) candidates who responded to our survey said their concerns about the restrictions placed on campaigning impacted their campaign 'a lot'. Only 3% said it had no impact.



It was very difficult to run a campaign. I had a lot of anxiety because of the uncertainty”.

We published guidance to support candidates and agents in these Covid-19 safe elections, informed by the latest expert advice from public health bodies. Of those who used it, 73% found the guidance clear and helpful.

From December 2020, and on a rolling basis after each three week review by the First Minister, we also circulated to political parties the latest guidance from Welsh Government that reflected changes to methods of campaigning allowed under the 'stay local' and social distancing Covid-19 rules.

Campaigners were able to engage with voters while following public health regulations and guidance

Campaigners used a range of digital, print and in-person campaigning to communicate with voters

Despite the initial restrictions on in-person campaign activities in early 2021, people continued to receive information about candidates and parties at the elections from a

range of different sources, and in a variety of formats. The most common ways voters reported seeing information on parties and candidates are shown in the following table:

Campaigning methods

On a leaflet or flyer, either from a candidate/political party (52%) or another source (29%)

Party leaders debate on TV (21%)

On news websites (17%)

In newspapers (16%)

Posters or billboards (15%)

TV advert or message (14%)

On social media (14%)

By word of mouth (14%)

Party leaders debate on TV (21%)

After the elections, we surveyed candidates about their campaigning activities. Some candidates told us that digital campaigning was particularly important during early 2021, when in-person activities were less manageable and they were unsure how voters would react to door-knocking and face-to-face campaigning. However, other candidates told us that relying on social media to campaign as a result of the pandemic restricted opportunities to get their views across to voters:



Fewer hustings events with all candidates, and being mostly restricted to broadcasting our messages meant that there was little opportunity to listen to voters rather than just tell them what we think”.

Digital campaigning was an important activity for some candidates who responded to our survey. One in 10 (12%) estimated that over 75% of their campaign was digital activity, and 15% said digital made up 51-75% of their campaign.

However, the largest segment of candidates who responded said that digital activity was not such an important part of their campaign: two-fifths of candidates (40%) said it made up less than 25% of their campaign and nearly a quarter (23%) estimated it was between 25-50% of their campaigning activity.

Candidates told us they used more unpaid social media messaging on various platforms compared to paid-for adverts. Two-thirds (68%) of candidates who responded put posts about their campaign on social media and over half (53%) asked supporters to share their posts. Other popular methods were uploading videos to social media (44%), and emailing supporters (38%). Paying for ads on social media was the most popular method of paid digital campaigning (32%).

Although campaigners used a variety of methods to put their message to voters prior to the election, our research shows that 57% of people responded saying that they had enough information to make an informed decision, which is down from 75% in 2016.

Some candidates said they were not able to campaign effectively

Over half (55%) of candidates who responded to our survey said that they were unable to campaign effectively due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. A third (32%) said they were able to campaign ‘fairly effectively’ and only 5% said they could do so ‘very effectively’.

The biggest impact on campaigning due to Covid-19 related to the opportunities for face-to-face campaigning. Almost nine in 10 (87%) said concerns about face-to-face campaigning impacted their campaign ‘a lot’.



The election should have been deferred. We were not permitted to leaflet until far too late. By the time we were permitted to canvass it wasn't a viable option as my campaign team was me. Every door knocked takes ten to twenty times as long as leafleting. I believe that failing to defer the election has benefited incumbent candidates and hamstrung the rest of us”.



We were unable to do full door to door canvassing because of time constraint/ limited number of volunteers due to anxieties regarding Covid-19.”

Transparency about who is responsible for producing campaign material online remains important

During the last 10 years, digital campaigning has become commonplace, and voters are now subjected to many political adverts on social media and via other methods online. Digital campaigning accounts for an increasingly large proportion of spending reported by campaigners after elections.

An imprint on printed material, which includes details showing who has produced and paid for the material, is a legal requirement. We have long recommended that digital campaigning could be further improved for voters if the imprint rules were extended to cover all material from campaigners. This would help improve public trust and confidence in digital campaigns.

Our research after the election confirmed that people continue to value transparency about who is responsible for political campaign activity online at elections with:

- a majority (69%) of people agreeing that it is important for them to know who has produced the political information they see online
- three in five agree (59%) they would trust digital campaigning material more if they knew who produced it

At the 2021 Scottish Parliament elections, the requirement for imprints on digital campaign material was introduced for the first time in any election in the UK. The UK Government

has also published a Bill that would introduce digital imprint rules for both UK Parliamentary general elections, and Police and Crime Commissioner elections taking place in Wales.

Recommendation 2: We recommend that the Welsh Government should legislate on a digital imprint law

We recommend that Welsh Government should legislate to ensure that a digital imprint is required for online campaign material for future Senedd and Welsh local government elections.

Processes for submitting nominations prioritised access and safety

Changes to nomination processes to minimise public health risks were welcomed and candidates agreed the process was well-run

The publication of notice of election took place a week earlier than usual to allow for a longer period of time for candidates and parties to submit their nomination forms. Extended hours for submission were also introduced to help with the process of informally checking nomination forms and then formally submitting the paperwork.

While completed nomination forms were still required to be submitted by hand, electoral administrators made changes to their processes to minimise the risk to those involved:

- a legislative change was made to allow the consent to nomination form to be signed and submitted electronically instead of by hand
- informal checking of nomination forms prior to submission was offered more frequently using email
- arrangements for safe hand delivery of nomination forms ensuring social distancing measures were in place
- candidate and agent briefing sessions were generally held via video conferencing

Of the candidates who responded to our election survey, nine in 10 (90%) agreed that the nomination process was well run. Nearly three in five (58%) agreed that longer hours for delivery of nomination forms was useful. Four in five (80%) agreed that the electronic submission of consent forms was useful.

Feedback from stakeholder groups in Wales was that digitisation worked well at these elections, improving the nomination process through online checks and increasing attendance by moving briefing sessions online. Embedding these changes for future elections has the potential to benefit both candidates and electoral administrators, as would further consideration of how electronic methods could improve the nomination process.

Codes of practice provided clarity on spending

New codes of practice on election spending were introduced to support candidates and parties

Under electoral legislation, the Commission can prepare guidance on what is, and is not, included in the categories of campaign spending that appear on the spending returns for parties and candidates. For the Senedd elections, the Commission developed statutory codes of practice on election spending for both candidates and political parties taking part in the Senedd elections. The codes are the first statutory codes of their kind in the UK.

The codes help parties, candidates and agents meet their legal obligations and improve transparency for voters.

The codes provide:

- clarity on campaign spending
- how this campaign activity should be reported
- whether the spending should appear in a candidate or party spending return
- give people confidence that election spending is reported correctly

Of those who used them, two-thirds (66%) found the Commission's codes of practice clear and helpful.

Regulators strengthened collaboration during the election period

For the May 2021 elections, we worked with regulator partners to run an online public awareness campaign and encourage voters to find more information from [a new section of our website](#). The campaign aimed to encourage people to think more carefully about political campaign adverts they see online, and it provided information about which regulators or other organisations they could contact if they had concerns.

Evaluation of the campaign showed that over 7.6 million people across Britain saw our adverts on websites and social media platforms. The number of people who clicked through to find more information from the adverts was encouraging, and provides a good foundation for further awareness-raising activity at future elections.

Delivering the elections

The experience of electoral administration at the May 2021 elections

- The elections were well run, notwithstanding their complexities and challenges, due to the significant efforts of electoral administrators and Returning Officers over a prolonged planning period.
- Voters and campaigners reported high levels of satisfaction and confidence and there were only a small number of issues that had an impact on their experience in some areas.
- The particular circumstances that led to the development and introduction of legislative changes in February and March 2021 were unprecedented, but the timing of these changes close to the start of the election period created additional challenges and risks for the delivery of the elections.
- The experience of these polls has highlighted concerns about the resilience and capacity of electoral administration structures in the UK, coupled with the challenges of delivering elections within an outdated and increasingly complex electoral law framework.
- We will work in partnership with members of the Wales Electoral Coordination Board, the wider electoral community, Welsh Government, and local authorities to identify and implement solutions to develop and deliver more resilient electoral services.

Overall, our evidence shows that the polls were well-run. Voters and campaigners reported high levels of satisfaction and confidence, and there were only a small number of issues that had an impact on their experience.

For Returning Officers and electoral administrators, however, these elections presented unique and difficult challenges and it was only thanks to their considerable effort and commitment that the polls were delivered successfully.

Early planning helped in managing the elections

Planning groups helped in decision making

The elections that were postponed from May 2020 meant that the Senedd and Police and Crime Commissioner elections were combined across Wales. The establishment of the First Minister's Elections Planning Group in June 2020 provided a useful forum for discussion and early decision making. The group, which brought together political parties, Regional Returning Officers (RROs), Welsh and UK Government officials, the AEA and the Commission met regularly to consider the required changes to legislation to maximise democratic participation whilst also protecting public health.

Welsh Government also established a Senedd Elections Operations Group which again provided a high level forum to discuss the management and operation of the elections during the pre-election period.

The Wales Electoral Coordination Board played a valuable role supporting administrators and promoting consistency

The Wales Electoral Coordination Board was established in 2017. The Board co-ordinates the planning for all Wales electoral events, as well as activity related to electoral modernisation and reform, and helps collaboration between Regional and Local Returning Officers, Electoral Registration Officers and key partners in Wales.

The Board played a significant and important role in the planning and preparation for these elections, and in ensuring that the safety requirements could be effectively and consistently delivered across Wales. The Board was represented on the First Minister's Elections Planning Group and participated in the Senedd Elections Operations Group, providing a link between government and Returning Officers throughout the extended pre-election period.

Key examples of the importance of this group included:

- the introduction of minimum safety requirements for polling stations and the count agreed through effective joint working between the Wales Electoral Coordination Board and AEA Wales
- advice given to Ministers and Welsh Government officials about proposed changes to the rules, including those aiming to ensure the elections were Covid-secure
- agreement on daytime counting across Wales
- the colour of the ballot papers

We recommended in our May 2017 report on the local government elections that Welsh Government should consider how the role of the Board could be developed to support Welsh Government's overarching electoral modernisation programme. We also recommended that the Government give consideration to the Board becoming a statutory group, as is the case in Scotland.

Four years on, this recommendation is now even more relevant, given that Welsh Government is responsible for legislating for elections in Wales and intends to bring forward a range electoral reforms in the coming years.

Recommendation 3: Statutory role for the Wales Electoral Coordination Board

The Wales Electoral Coordination Board is in a unique position to provide a link between governments and Returning Officers in Wales and to provide advice on the delivery of elections and introduction of electoral reforms.

We continue to recommend that the Board should be strengthened and that it should have a statutory role, similar to the role of the Electoral Management Board in Scotland.

The capacity and resilience of electoral administration teams and suppliers are significant risks for future polls

The challenging circumstances of these elections exposed pressures on the capacity of local electoral services teams

Electoral administrators' ability to plan and deliver their work for these elections was impacted by Covid-19 restrictions in the months leading up to them:

- 88% said that the Covid-19 restrictions had made their job more difficult, with 75% of respondents saying that their workload had increased because of the Covid-19 restrictions during the elections
- 63% said that they were concerned for their own health because of Covid-19

Some electoral administrators told us they had seen a significant impact on the capacity and wellbeing of their teams. Others told us that delivering the election had left them feeling totally overwhelmed and that they felt they had no choice but to put their work life before their family life. Support that would have been relied on at previous election from other parts of the local authority was unavailable due to Covid-19.



...well-run elections come at a cost and I think you will see a lot of elections officers leaving this role because we are worried about our health."

Administrators also highlighted the difficulty they had finding suitable venues to use as polling stations. Covid-19 restrictions meant it was harder to contact people to make bookings, and in some venues there were issues with the facilities as they had been shut down for long periods in advance due to lockdowns. Temporary porta cabins were also difficult to secure as many were being used as vaccination centres.



Lots of polling stations had been shut up in the last year – we had to carry out six chlorination processes as they had not checked water – all this had to be checked out."

Finding staff to work on polling day was a key challenge for Returning Officers and their staff.

The complexity of these elections and the extra requirements that were needed in terms of Covid-19 restrictions placed added pressure on Returning Officers and electoral teams during the pre-election period and on polling day and throughout the counts.

76% of those who responded to our survey said they had difficulty recruiting polling station staff. Concerns were also expressed about the reduction in the number of experienced Presiding Officers and it was noted that poll clerks with several years' experience were reluctant to step-up.

Recommendation 4: Build resilience and capacity for electoral administration

We have repeatedly highlighted concerns about the resilience and capacity of electoral administration structures in the UK, which are coupled with the challenges of delivering elections within an outdated and increasingly complex electoral law framework.

We will work in partnership with the Wales Electoral Coordination Board and the wider electoral community to develop and deliver proposals to support resilient electoral services for the future but this approach will need to be supported through appropriate resourcing.

Late confirmation of legislation and interventions made it harder for Returning Officers to plan in some areas

On 26 February 2021, Welsh Government confirmed that the Senedd election would go ahead on 6 May and provided £1.5 million to support Returning Officers to secure venues, staffing and run Covid-19 secure elections. Cabinet Office provided additional funds to support the running of the Police and Crime Commissioner election.

The Coronavirus Act 2020 (Emergency Bill) was introduced on 16 March giving the Llywydd powers to postpone the election, in the event this was required in the interests of public health.

The conduct order setting out the rules for the election did not receive royal assent until 18 March, only four days before the date for publishing the notice of election and seven weeks before polling day.

In addition to our usual core suite of guidance and resources to support administrators with the delivery of elections, we also worked with public health bodies, the UK and Welsh Governments and the electoral community to develop and publish [supplementary guidance](#) to support the delivery of Covid-19 safe elections.

This was issued on a rolling basis from September 2020, and was informed by both the requirements of administrators and the latest expert advice from public health bodies. It was kept under review throughout the election period, and was updated to reflect the legislative changes to the nominations and proxy voting process as a result of Covid-19.

Many electoral administrators said they found that uncertainty about the elections made it difficult for them to plan effectively. Three-quarters of administrators (75%) who responded to our survey after the elections said that they felt the initial uncertainty about whether the elections would go ahead made it difficult for them to plan.

The particular circumstances that led to the development and introduction of changes to electoral law ahead of the May 2021 polls were unprecedented. While the legislative changes due to Covid-19 were understandable they demonstrated, in practice, the risks and challenges of introducing late legislation. The timing of these changes created additional challenges and risks for the delivery of the elections. It affected when Electoral Commission guidance and resources to support the delivery of the polls, such as

amended nomination forms, could be provided and when electoral administrators could implement them.

New electoral reforms being considered very close to the election created additional pressures and uncertainty

Welsh Government also considered introducing significant electoral reform for the Senedd elections in the final months before the poll. Potential changes included the introduction of early voting centres, and changes to the postal voting statement.

Neither of these options were in the end introduced for May 2021, but the discussions around these proposals resulted in confusion and introduced uncertainty and speculation during the election planning process, in what was already a highly pressured environment.

This approach must be avoided for future national elections, and the agreed six month principle should continue to be applied when developing any new legislation. Early clarity of legislation, together with good communication and engagement, supports the effective preparation and the delivery of well-run polls. It also ensures that guidance and resources can be made available to electoral administrators and candidates and agents well in advance of the elections, and that complex planning is not disrupted by unforeseen change. It will also support the provision of early, clear information to voters, to help them understand what to expect and how they can take part in the elections.

We call on Welsh Government to ensure that any legislation related to electoral reform or changes to the voting process is in place six months before the election and that Ministerial intent should be shared with the electoral community well before this time.

Broad agreement reached on the timing of the count

A national consensus on the timing of the count was reached by the Wales Electoral Coordination Board in early January resulting in a decision that the Senedd election count should take place the day after polling day and not overnight. This was necessary as the verification and count processes would require more staff and take longer to perform because of Covid-19 restrictions.

Whilst there was positive feedback from Returning Officers and electoral administrators on the approach to the timing of the count, we did gather some feedback from the political parties that suggested there were some reservations about adopting this approach at all future Welsh elections. Some political parties suggested that elections taking place outside of a pandemic situation should revert back to overnight counts rather than counting the next day, as candidates would prefer to know the outcome of the election as soon as possible. Also, there was a concern that not enough counting agents would be available to scrutinise the verification and count processes efficiently if polling day and the count were carried out across multiple days.

The Wales Electoral Coordination Board should carefully consider all views, including those of political parties and candidates, ahead of any decision on timing for the 2026 elections.

Voting processes generally ran smoothly despite challenging conditions

The planning and preparation before the elections was shown to be worthwhile by the limited number of issues with the delivery of voting processes on polling day.

An error with the regional ballot paper in parts of North Wales affected the experience of voters

In the North Wales region there was a local printing error which led to the name of an independent candidate not being included on the regional ballot paper issued in two North Wales constituencies. The error affected ballot papers issued both by post and at polling stations. It was detected during the second hour of polling and immediate action was taken to address the problem.

While recognising the pressures faced by Returning Officers and their teams and the challenging circumstances of the elections, it is important that voters, candidates and political parties can have confidence in the election process and that the ballot papers they receive are accurate.

After the polls, we considered the issue in line with our performance standards for Returning Officers and concluded that in both cases the Returning Officers did not fully meet those standards.¹ Both Returning Officers have agreed to surrender a part of the fee they receive for carrying out their role.

Further work is also being undertaken by the Wales Electoral Coordination Board to develop a protocol and guidance to assist Returning Officers when ballot paper proofing in future elections.

Election teams updated count processes to support social distancing while maintaining transparency

Some authorities' usual count centres were in use as mass vaccination centres so alternative venues needed to be found which would be large enough to allow for social distancing of both count staff and observers. The minimum PPE requirements agreed upon by the Wales Electoral Coordination Board were implemented across all count centres in Wales.

Count centres adhered to all social distancing measures set out in Welsh Government guidance and reflected the supplementary guidance published by the Commission. This included:

¹ Gwynedd County Council and Isle of Anglesey County Council

- prominent signage reminding people to keep a two metre distance apart
- ensuring everyone at the count wore a face covering at all times (unless exempt)
- one way systems and a separate entrance and exit
- using perspex screens to separate count staff from observer

Overall, new innovations introduced at count venues to address the need for social distancing were largely seen as a welcome addition to the process. For example, in Ceredigion County Council² in order to address the fact that a limited number of candidates and agents were able to be in the count centre, activities were live streamed to them in an adjacent hall within the count venue.

A camera above each count table allowed attendees in an adjacent hall to have full sight of the verification and count process for each table. The candidates and agents were able to request that the angles be changed as required, and this was done remotely. Doubtful ballot papers were also placed on a visualiser and the images shown on screens for the candidates and agents to see.

These measures helped ensure social distancing could be maintained, while also ensuring that the count remained open and transparent.

Observation and scrutiny of the count by candidates was affected by social distancing measures

Positive feedback has been received from candidates and agents regarding the arrangements that were put in place to ensure the integrity of the elections but also to keep all present as safe as possible.

However, while the majority of candidates were confident that the elections were well run, fewer were satisfied with their ability to observe and scrutinise the count.

Whilst 72% of candidates agreed that election staff made it clear what was happening throughout the count process and 75% agreed that the delayed/daytime count was acceptable for Covid-19 safety, only half (51%) agreed that it was possible to observe and scrutinise the count effectively, and over a third (38%) disagreed.

Some parties have reported that due to the Covid-19 safety provisions in place at count venues, they were not permitted to appoint as many counting agents as they considered were needed to enable full scrutiny, and that layouts at some of the count centres were not clear and impeded proper observation of the verification and count processes.

Positive work was delivered nationally and locally through good dialogue between the political parties and election managers and, whilst not always what we would expect in

² Count centre for the regional Senedd election in Mid and West Wales and the Police and Crime Commissioner election for the Dyfed-Powys region.

normal times, the arrangements were broadly effective in ensuring transparency in the circumstances.

Regular and effective communication between Returning Officers and political parties and candidates through established forums such as the Wales Electoral Coordination Board should continue to ensure that any concerns of parties and candidates can be properly considered and acted upon.

Annual Report and Accounts 2020/21



HC 517
ELC/2021/01

Annual Report and Accounts 2020/21

Presented to Parliament pursuant to Schedule 1, Paragraphs 20(1) and 18(2)(b) of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000

Ordered by the House of Commons to be printed 14 July 2021

Presented to the Scottish Parliament pursuant to Schedule 1, Paragraph 20A(1) of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000

Presented to the Welsh Parliament pursuant to Schedule 1, Paragraph 20A(1) of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000

HC 517

ELC/2021/01



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Phone: 0333 1031928

Email: info@electoralcommission.org.uk

ISBN: 978-1-5286-2806-8

CCS: CCS0721895560 07/21

Printed on paper containing 75% recycled fibre content minimum

Printed in the UK by the APS Group on behalf of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office

Pack Page 120

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Preface

I joined the Electoral Commission as Chair on 1 May, after the end of the year to which this report relates. The report contains a detailed review of the year. I applaud the work of Commissioners and staff in achieving so much in the immensely challenging environment of the COVID-19 pandemic. Their careful preparations for the elections that took place on 6 May are especially noteworthy.

I am looking forward to working with colleagues at the Electoral Commission, and people in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and across the whole of the UK, to nurture our electoral system in the short term and help it rise to the longer-term challenges that lie ahead.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'J. J. P.', with a long, sweeping underline.

John Pullinger
Chair

Foreword

As for many other organisations and public bodies, the Commission's 2020/21 year was dominated by mitigating the impact Covid-19 pandemic. Our over-arching priority was to ensure we responded effectively and efficiently to this challenge, continuing the delivery of the Commission's statutory functions and supporting the increased needs of our stakeholders.

The polls scheduled for May 2020 were postponed for a year, a decision the Commission supported, to allow local authorities to focus on front line public services and to mitigate risks to voters and campaigners. This meant, however, that the polls scheduled for May 2021, covering the whole of Great Britain, would be one of the most complex sets of polls in recent years.

The Commission quickly refocused its efforts and over the course of the year provided extensive guidance, support and leadership to the electoral community. We worked closely with electoral administrators, the UK's governments, public health authorities, parties and campaigners. We supporting detailed planning and preparations for a Covid-safe democratic process, including the development of new legislation, and undertook extensive communications activity with the public to ensure that all eligible voters who wished to participate in the elections had the information they needed to do so.

Our aim was to support well-run elections in which voters were able to participate in the polls safely and confidently, and campaigners and parties were able to put their case to the electorate. The polls took place outside this reporting period, and to the credit of everyone involved were delivered efficiently and effectively. We will be reporting on the undertaking of the polls in due course, so that important lessons can be captured and learnt, not least about delivering elections during a pandemic. Looking beyond preparations for these challenging elections, we also continued to press ahead on delivering against our corporate plan and to improve the core services for which we are responsible.

For the electoral administrator community, this year also saw the implementation of improved rules for the electoral registration canvass in Great Britain, on which we provided guidance, support and challenge, alongside preparations for a canvass of electors in Northern Ireland.

Alongside fulfilling our statutory regulatory responsibilities – including providing transparency through the publication of political financial data, maintaining the register of political parties, and enforcing the political finance rules – we continued to develop and extend the way we support parties and campaigners to comply. We also continued to respond to the impact of digital campaigning, working with campaigners and governments on intended changes to the regime, and with providers of digital advertising to encourage greater transparency.

During the year we worked closely and constructively with the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Senedd (as well as the Speaker's Committee of the UK Parliament) to lay the foundations for new direct accountability to them from April 2021. Our focus is on building

strong, transparent and cooperative relationships to ensure that we deliver priorities for each legislature, continuing to share good practice.

We also as one of our core functions provided detailed, evidence-based advice to officials and parliamentarians on the development and passage of new legislation.

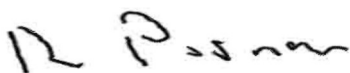
Our work to support voter confidence also continued. Alongside our ongoing voter registration campaign activity, we launched a new campaign to increase voter understanding of the rules already in place to regulate digital campaigning, and a first suite of education and learning materials to increase political literacy.

During 2020, the Commission adapted how it operated in the wider context of the pandemic and worked diligently to deliver its responsibilities and duties, with impartiality, integrity and independence. We invested in our staff, technology, the working environment and working practices and systems to ensure that we continue to deliver value for money for the voter and evolve our services in line with changing expectations, putting quality centre stage and placing a renewed focus on equality, diversity and inclusion. At a time when public finances are under severe pressure, we delivered the work programme, and accommodated additional pressures such as supporting a remote workforce, within our approved annual budget.

Looking forward to the 2021/22 year, it will be a year of continued focus on providing support to our key stakeholders, as well as managing other developments and change. The Commission will continue to work constructively with all concerned – governments, parliaments, parties and campaigners, electoral administrators and other interested groups – to maintain confidence and trust in elections, including making preparations for the delivery of those scheduled for May 2022.

We welcome a new Chair and two Commissioners, providing refreshed strength in our strategic direction and governance. And our service to the UK electorate will continue to be underpinned by providing value for money; maintaining the organisation as well-run, with engaged, skilled staff and the technology required to support effective ways of working. We thank Sir John Holmes who has completed his four-year term of office as Chair, leading the Commission through an exceptionally busy period of electoral events.

The Commission's statutory responsibilities place it in a unique position in the sector. In some areas the Commission's role is to directly deliver functions. In other areas we provide oversight, guidance, support and – where required – enforcement. On some matters we have a role in convening or informing debate. Each aspect of our role makes a significant contribution to well-run elections and to achieving tangible improvements to the system for voters, campaigners and administrators.



Bob Posner
Chief Executive and Accounting Officer

Performance Report



Overview

This section provides an overview of the Electoral Commission, our purpose, our performance during the last year and the key risks to achieving our goals.

We have included summary financial information within the performance report. This is consistent with the financial statements, where more detail is available.

The Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 (PPERA) established the Electoral Commission. We are independent of government and political parties and directly accountable to the UK, Scottish and Welsh Parliaments.

We have prepared our 2020/21 Annual Report and Accounts in accordance with an accounts direction, set out on page 120, issued by HM Treasury under paragraph 17 (2) of Schedule 1 PERA.

We have prepared the powers and sanctions report on page 44 in accordance with paragraph 15 Schedule 19(b) and paragraph 27 Schedule 19(c) PERA.

About us

Our role

The Electoral Commission is the independent body which oversees elections and regulates political finance in the United Kingdom. We work to promote public confidence in the democratic process and ensure its integrity.

Our vision and goals

Our vision is to be a world-class public sector organisation – innovative, delivering great value and getting right what matters most to voters and legislators.

In 2020/21 we worked towards achieving four goals:

1. To enable the continued delivery of free and fair elections and referendums, focusing on the needs of electors and addressing the changing environment to ensure every vote remains secure and accessible
2. To ensure an increasingly trusted and transparent system of regulation in political finance, overseeing compliance, promoting understanding amongst those regulated and proactively pursuing breaches
3. To be an independent and respected centre of expertise, using knowledge and insight to further the transparency, fairness and efficiency of our democratic system, and help adapt it to the modern, digital age
4. To provide value for money, making best use of our resources and expertise to deliver services that are attuned to what matters most to voters. This goal underpins and supports all of our work

We will continue to focus on delivering these goals in 2021/22.

Our role across the UK

We deliver for voters across all parts of the UK, with Electoral Commission offices in Belfast, Cardiff, Edinburgh and London. We work closely with the UK and devolved governments and, from April 2021, have new accountabilities to the Scottish Parliament and the Senedd.

Our 2020/21 year at a glance

April – June 2020

- We set up a Crisis Management Team to coordinate our response, and expanded our videoconferencing facilities to ensure we could all communicate with each other and with stakeholders.
- We launched a new online tool for the public to see and analyse candidate spending returns from the 2019 UK general election
- We responded to the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee (PACAC) enquiry on the Fixed Term Parliament Act
- The Lords Committee on Democracy and Digital Technologies published its report, advocating many of the Commission's long-standing policy proposals.
- Internally we launched the Commission's People Strategy.
- The Commission gave evidence to the Committee on Standards in Public Life, after it launched a new review into electoral regulation.

July – September 2020

- We carried out a survey to check on the wellbeing of our staff
- Our campaign targeted at newly enfranchised voters, with a series of adverts across social media, radio and print.
- We completed our first research into public attitudes to voting in the context of Covid 19, to inform preparations for the 2021 elections
- We became advisors to the Wales Elections Planning Group established by the First Minister to establish a consensus on legislation needed to ensure elections are well-run in the light of the Covid-19 pandemic
- We carried out an internal review to learn lessons from our response to the initial stages of the pandemic
- We published updated core guidance for electoral administrators and candidates and agents to support them with preparing for and delivering the May 2021 elections

October – December 2020

- We published our Welsh language standards annual monitoring report
- We submitted the first financial Estimate to the Llywydd's Committee and the Scottish Parliament, as part of establishing our new accountabilities to devolved parliaments
- We published the first part of supplementary guidance to support electoral administrators with managing the COVID-specific impacts on the polls
- We launched a new set of resources for young people in Scotland and Wales to educate young people in Wales about their vote and the democratic process.
- Worked with the UK, Scottish and Welsh governments and parliaments on their respective legislation to prepare for holding elections during the pandemic.
- We submitted written evidence to the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Select Committee of the House of Commons and gave oral evidence given to the new Llywydd Committee of the Senedd
- After a four-year term of office as Chair, Sir John Holmes left the Commission. John Pullinger CB began his term of office in May 2021

January – March 2021

- We organised pre-election seminar for Returning Officers and Electoral Registration Officers in Scotland with the Electoral Management Board for Scotland
- We launched a public consultation on a draft Disability Action Plan in line with statutory equality duties in Northern Ireland
- We formed our Race at Work Charter task force to extend our work to improve diversity and equality
- Work started to update our London offices to improve our ways of working
- We marked 'Welcome to your Vote' awareness week in Scotland and Wales by hosting virtual events and sharing resources for engage newly enfranchised voters
- We co-organised the annual Electoral Fraud Reduction and Prevention National Seminar in collaboration with the National Police Chiefs' Council
- We published a report on public attitudes towards the transparency of political party and campaigner finance in Northern Ireland.
- We agreed a Statement of Financial Principles across Scotland, Wales and Westminster setting out the new financial relationship between us and the three legislatures; Senedd Cymru, Scottish Parliament and UK Parliament.

Our year in numbers

Used £20.4m of resources, including £1.3m capital spend	Invested 56% of our resource expenditure on staff costs (£10.7m)	Achieved 72% employee engagement score
Answered 4,463 public enquiries – a 569% decrease on last year due to no electoral events this year	Responded to 153 Freedom of Information requests	Published 1,186 routine financial returns from parties and campaigners
Notified 58% of the 134 party registration applications of their outcome within 30 days	Completed 54 investigations, 94% of them within 180 days	Published 888 annual statement of accounts for political parties and accounting units
Published 100% of our guidance products on time with no substantial errors	Responded to 2,130 requests for advice from local authorities – 99.39% within 3 days	Collected £69k of civil sanctions in our role as a regulator

Performance analysis

Goal one

To enable the continued delivery of free and fair elections and referendums, focusing on the needs of electors and addressing the changing environment to ensure every vote remains secure and accessible.

This goal captures our role in overseeing the delivery of elections across all parts of the UK and focuses on three areas: delivering well-run electoral events, maximising and modernising electoral registration, and tackling electoral fraud.

Key achievements

To help deliver well-run electoral events we:

- published guidance and resources, and provided support to electoral administrators, candidates and agents for the scheduled elections in May 2021, including those postponed from May 2020; this included a range of supplementary guidance for administrators and candidates and agents to support the delivery of the polls in the context of the pandemic
- worked with stakeholders from across the electoral community to identify and publish a shared set of high-level objectives for delivering successful elections in the developing public health environment
- published a range of resources for local authorities to use to help share messages about the safe running of the polls and the voting options available
- worked with the National Police Chiefs Council, Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) and the College of Policing to provide new guidance for candidates and campaigners on recognising and reporting intimidation
- worked with organisations supporting people with a disability to raise awareness of how to take part in elections and what support they can expect to receive
- launched a new system for processing applications for accreditation for electoral observers

To help maximise and modernise electoral registration, we:

- supported Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) in Great Britain with delivery of the first annual canvass using the reformed process; including through the provision of guidance and advice, and the publication of supplementary guidance to support EROs with managing the canvass in the context of the pandemic

- published a response to our consultation on performance standards for EROs, and used the updated framework to inform our support and challenge work with EROs throughout the canvass
- worked closely with the Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland on preparations for the electoral registration canvass, now expected to take place in 2021

To help tackle electoral fraud, we:

- worked with the police and local authorities to provide training and review integrity plans to help prevent electoral fraud
- published updated data on alleged cases of electoral fraud reported during 2019, and new data on a small number of cases reported during 2020
- worked with partners to prepare a campaign to raise awareness of electoral fraud, ahead of the May 2021 elections
- delivered, with the National Police Chiefs Council, our annual conference for police elections Single Points of Contact as an online event
- worked with the City of London Police Economic Crime Academy to host and contribute content to four training courses for police officers

Performance measures

Measure	Performance
We publish 100% of guidance products relating to electoral registration on time with no substantive errors	96.7% Achieved¹
We provide accurate advice to Returning Officers (ROs) and EROs within three working days of receipt of the request. (Target 100%)	99.4% Achieved²
Additions to electoral registers during our public awareness campaigns meet or exceed our targets (Target 0% - no campaign was held)	0% Achieved³

Our activities during the year

Delivering well-run electoral events

Owing to the pandemic and the consequent decisions taken by the UK's governments, there were no electoral events in 2020/21 apart from local government by-elections in Scotland. The Commission therefore quickly focused in 2020/21 on supporting the electoral community to prepare for the elections scheduled – and rescheduled – for May 2021.

To support administrators with preparing for and delivering polls in the context of Covid-19, we produced a suite of supplementary guidance and resources that reflected the specific requirements of managing the 2021 polls in a Covid-19 secure way. The supplementary guidance documents were designed to be read in conjunction with our suite of core guidance for Returning Officers and were developed in close consultation with the electoral community and public health bodies across Great Britain.

We developed an extensive range of new voter information materials, to support public understanding of how to participate with confidence in the forthcoming elections in the changed context. These included resources focused on informing people about the voting options available to them, and encouraging forward planning, and resources

¹ 326 of 337 guidance products were published on time; for those not published as planned, these reflected conscious decisions to re-prioritise work in order to be able to provide guidance on Covid-secure elections more quickly

² 2130 of 2143 requests for advice were responded to on time

³ 2020 elections were postponed due to the Covid-19 pandemic, so no campaign was held

communicating the safety measures that would be in place in polling stations. While used directly by the Commission, their primary purpose was to support local authorities and other stakeholders to provide accurate and timely information to their communities.

Maximising and modernising electoral registration

2020 saw the first annual canvass in Great Britain run under a new reformed process allowing EROs to use national and local-level data to identify addresses where there is likely to have been a change in the people who are eligible to register to vote. This allows EROs to focus their resources in areas of greatest need. We see these reforms as an important step towards improving our electoral registration system and we intend to report on the running of the canvass, using data collected from EROs, in summer 2021.

Our work to support the introduction of these reforms included providing extensive guidance and advice to help electoral administrators understand their new responsibilities, designing and delivering new voter registration forms, and ensuring our new performance standards for EROs are aligned with the new process. We also developed additional guidance to address the specific challenges of running a canvass in the context of the pandemic.

Our scrutiny of proposals from the Northern Ireland Office and our continual dialogue with the Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland on a full canvass of electors – originally planned for 2020 but now scheduled to take place in 2021 – have helped to ensure that preparations for the canvass have progressed well. Alongside the work undertaken by the Chief Electoral Officer, we will be running a new multimedia public awareness campaign across Northern Ireland to encourage the electorate to register during the canvass period. We have also committed to reporting on the conduct of the canvass, and plan to publish this in advance of the May 2022 Northern Ireland Assembly election.

Tackling electoral fraud

We provided guidance and advice to support EROs, ROs and the police to deal with electoral fraud. For the fourth year in a row, we also worked with the City of London Police Economic Crime Academy to host and contribute content to four training courses for police officers. We jointly organised the 16th Annual National SPOC (single point of contact) seminar which took place virtually for the first time, working with our partners at the National Police Chiefs' Council. We also supported SPOC seminars in Scotland and Wales, and provided dedicated election briefings for new SPOCs.

Throughout the year, police forces across the UK sent us data about allegations of electoral fraud that they received and investigated. Every year we report on the number, type, and outcome of these allegations, to understand what has happened and how cases are resolved. We provided updates on outcomes from cases reported in 2019, including from the UKPGE, and also published data on the small number cases reported during 2020.

Goal two

To ensure an increasingly trusted and transparent system of regulation in political finance, overseeing compliance, promoting understanding amongst those regulated and proactively pursuing breaches.

This goal captures our regulatory role. We focus on two areas which are at the heart of a healthy democracy: ensuring transparency, and good regulation.

Key achievements

To ensure transparency, we:

- published financial reports from parties and campaigners
- worked with parties to deliver financial reports, and adapted our pattern of routine publications as a consequence of challenges parties faced with delivering reports as a result of the pandemic
- registered political parties and other campaigners and published details in online registers
- produced new guidance to help campaigners understand and comply with new legal requirements for transparency of digital campaign material introduced by the Scottish Parliament

To support good regulation we:

- found flexible and new ways to continue our focus on supporting parties and campaigners during the pandemic
- built up our regulatory intelligence work to drive proactive interactions with individual campaigners
- took action and imposed sanctions when the political finance law were broken
- continued to evolve our regulatory approach to deliver a greater package of support for parties and campaigners

Performance measures

Measures	Performance
We publish routine financial returns from parties and campaigners, including statements of accounts, within 30 working days of receiving them (target 100%)	37.99% Not achieved⁴
We check a minimum of 25% of all financial returns for accuracy and compliance each year	38.95% Achieved
We publish 100% of guidance products on time with no substantive errors	100% Achieved
We provide accurate advice within five to 20 days of receipt of the request, depending on the complexity of the advice (Target 90%)	94.44% Achieved
We notify applicants of the outcome of their registration applications within 30 days of a complete application 75% of the time (Target – 75%)	58.21% ⁵ Not achieved
We conduct timely and proportionate investigations of which 90% are completed within 180 days	94.44% Achieved
We issue 90% of final notices setting out our sanctions within 21 days of the deadline for representations.	94.29% Achieved
We make timely regulatory recommendations that reflect the principles guiding our approach to effective regulatory framework	100% Achieved

⁴ As a consequence of the Covid pandemic many parties were unable to complete and deliver their statements of account by the legal deadlines, which meant that we were unable to publish them within 30 days of that deadline.

⁵ As a result of the postponement of the 2020 polls, an unprecedented number of applications to register political parties or amend registered details were received in the months running up to the 2021 polls. In addition a small number of applications raised complex issues that required additional time to resolve.

Our activities during the year

Ensuring transparency

Throughout the year, we focussed on delivering the responsibilities we are accountable for to the UK's parliaments. We maintained the registers of political parties, ensuring only parties meeting the legal tests are on the register, and we continued reviewing descriptions to help voters identify the party for which candidates are standing.

We worked with parties and campaigners as soon as the likely impact of the pandemic became clear to recognise the challenges of delivering financial reports during the pandemic, and adapted our pattern of routine publications appropriately. We published donations and loans data, statements of accounts, and spending data for the 2019 UK Parliamentary General Election as quickly as possible given understandable delays in delivery, and in some cases without any delay at all.

We continued developing a new online portal for party registration and finance, which we will launch in 2021 and will improve how parties and campaigners register and deliver financial returns

We also developed a new online tool that enabled people to view candidate spending data following the 2019 UKPGE in an interactive and accessible way. Publishing the data in this format provides greater transparency about the money received and spent by candidates at elections.

Good regulation

We further developed our approach to regulatory intelligence to be more proactive and quickly identify and intervene where this could prevent or minimise non-compliance. This reduced the number of cases requiring enforcement action, and helped to prevent campaigners from breaking the rules. We will continue to focus on this. We are also developing a more systematic approach to gathering evidence of areas where targeted guidance and support can most benefit parties and campaigners.

We set up a new regulatory support team dedicated to developing and implementing new and innovative ways to provide proactive support for parties and campaigners to help them comply with the law. Our outreach work included training sessions, seminars or other engagement with the Greater London Authority, the Local Government Association, the National Council for Voluntary Organisations, and others. We also conducted a survey of campaigners on how they expected the pandemic to impact on their activities at the May 2021 polls to help us understand their challenges and concerns better. Increased stakeholder engagement and outreach work meant we were able to provide clarity to parties, candidates and campaigners on our work and preparations for the May 2021 polls.

We produced new guidance for the digital imprint regime introduced by the Scottish Parliament, and produced our usual bespoke guidance for parties candidates and agents and campaigners in good time for the May 2021 polls despite the unusually high number of different elections taking place and the need to take account of the pandemic restrictions.

The pandemic led to other new guidance, such as Frequently Asked Questions on the voiding of candidacy rules for the postponed 2020 elections, and guidance on sponsorship and valuing digital conference stands for party conferences. Finally, we continued to update our guidance where appropriate, including changes arising from the UK's departure from the European Union.

We continued to use our investigation and sanctioning powers to identify and respond to non-compliance and deter future non-compliance where appropriate. We imposed financial penalties totalling £34k throughout 2020/21 and accepted the voluntary forfeiture of impermissible funds totalling £9k, removing these from the political finance system. We did not however take enforcement action where reports were delivered late due to the impact of the pandemic.

Goal three

To be an independent and respected centre of expertise, using knowledge and insight to further the transparency, fairness and efficiency of our democratic system, and help adapt it to the modern, digital age.

This area of work focuses on innovation and strengthening our evidence base. Our expertise in policy, research and communications are core to enabling this work.

Key achievements

To contribute to innovation and strengthening our evidence base, we:

- reported on the 2019 UK Parliamentary general election and made recommendations to help improve future electoral events
- commissioned qualitative research with the public across the UK to explore attitudes to current voting processes and access to information about elections
- provided the Scottish and Welsh governments and parliaments with independent expert advice on legislative and policy changes arising from their respective electoral reform agendas
- supported the UK, Scottish and Welsh governments to develop and put in place legislation to help meet the challenges of delivering well-run elections in the context of public health restrictions
- published a set of modular citizen education resources for 14-18 year olds in Scotland and for the first time in Wales, ahead of Scottish Parliament and Welsh Senedd elections
- submitted a detailed response to the UK Government's technical consultation to inform the development of new transparency requirements ('imprints') for digital campaign material
- launched a public awareness campaign and supporting online information hub to increase digital literacy in relation to online campaigning – developing content in partnership with the Information Commissioner's Office, Ofcom, the UK Statistics Authority, and the Advertising Standards Authority
- monitored the delivery of electoral events around the world that were held in the context of Covid restrictions, to inform the development of practices in the UK
- published a series of research reports about attitudes towards voting ahead of the May 2021 polls
- published the findings of qualitative research into public attitudes to the transparency of political finance in Northern Ireland
- gave evidence to parliamentary committees to ensure our expert analysis about elections and regulation would inform their work.

Performance measures

Measure	Performance
We publish 100% of our reports to planned deadlines	100% Achieved
We comment on 100% of relevant legislation and policy proposals	100% Achieved
Work in support of the electoral law reform recommendations from the England and Wales, Scotland and the Northern Ireland Law Commissions	Ongoing

Our activities during the year

Innovation and strengthening our evidence base

We published our statutory report on the delivery of the December 2019 UK Parliamentary general election. We found that the election was generally well-run, but our analysis highlighted new evidence showing challenges for the future. Our report described how the UK's electoral administration structures are operating under significant strain, and highlighted that people have growing concerns about some aspects of election campaigning. The UK Government's response welcomed our report, noting that it helps "to ensure that our democracy remains world-leading by identifying current challenges and opportunities".

We provided expert advice and support to the UK, Scottish and Welsh governments and parliaments, to help develop policy and legislation to support the delivery of elections in the context of developing public health restrictions. This included advice on 24 separate proposals for draft legislation during this year; our input helped to ensure these would be workable in practice.

We provided expert advice to the UK and Scottish governments as they developed proposals for improving the transparency of digital campaign material. Our extensive experience of regulating the current requirement for campaigners to include an 'imprint', showing who is responsible for printing and promoting printed campaign material, helped the Scottish Government to put in place a new requirement for digital election campaign material for the first time in the UK. We also provided a comprehensive response to the UK Government's technical consultation to inform its own plans for legislation which is expected to be introduced later this year.

We gave evidence to parliamentary committees to ensure our expert analysis about elections and regulation would inform their work. In the UK Parliament, this included the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, in response to its inquiry into the work of the Electoral Commission, as well as a joint session with the Local Government Association and the Association of Electoral Administrators focussing on preparations for the May 2021 polls. We also worked with the Committee on Standards in Public Life in response to its review of electoral regulation.

In the Senedd, we gave evidence to the Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee on the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Bill, and to the Assembly Electoral Reform Committee's inquiry into electoral systems and boundaries, and the Constitutional and Legislative Affairs Committee on the Senedd and Elections (Wales) Bill.

In the Scottish Parliament, we gave evidence to the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee on the Scottish Elections (Franchise and Representation) Bill and the Scottish Elections (Reform) Bill. We also gave evidence to the Finance and Constitution Committee on the Referendums (Scotland) Bill.

Acting on analytics and feedback from user testing, we continued to develop our website, both functionality and content. We continued to ensure compliance with website content accessibility guidelines (WCAG 2.1), converting content from PDF to HTML.

Goal four

To provide value for money, making best use of our resources and expertise to deliver services that are attuned to what matters most to voters.

This goal provides a focus to activities that support the organisation and ensure we have the appropriate skilled people, resources, technology, systems and governance. The aim is to deliver services that are efficient, effective and economical.

Key achievements

To support our organisation, we:

- implemented our new accountability arrangements with the Scottish Parliament and Senedd which come into effect 1 April 2021.
- reviewed and refreshed how we deliver legal services
- supported staff with the challenges of home working through the pandemic, while continuing to support our stakeholders and deliver on the organisation's priorities
- implemented our new People Strategy to support the best use of our resources
- commenced an internal consultation on our new Equality Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) strategy and approach
- set up a Race at Work Taskforce
- commissioned an external report on bullying and harassment in response to staff survey feedback and appointed a champion to lead our response
- implemented new IT systems including, a new e-procurement system, new unified communication systems (including telephone, upgraded video conferencing, instant messaging and a new planning performance system)
- renovated our working environment to support our new flexible ways of working
- set up a Quality Assurance initiative to help us continuously improve our processes

Performance measures

Measure	Performance
Learn practical lessons from current home and remote working practices and design future accommodation accordingly	Ongoing⁶
Deliver our Ways of Working project to deliver digitally enabled business change to reflect the expectations on a modern employer and ensure the core ICT offering can support those changes.	Completed
Stakeholder and staff satisfaction with IT tools	Ongoing⁷
Work with the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Senedd to implement our new accountability arrangements, including a new funding formula and business plans for Scotland and Wales	Completed
Implement our new People Strategy	Ongoing
Maintain high staff engagement scores in the annual staff survey and ensure indicators such as staff turnover are at appropriate levels	Staff engagement score: 72% (Civil Service average: 62%) Staff turnover: 9.23%
Identify options, costs and benefits of e-procurement and implement a new system accordingly	Completed
Monitor significant variances on all budgets and, where appropriate, reduce these variances over the five years of our Corporate Plan	Completed
Deliver a project to examine how well we manage customer enquiries across the whole range of the Commission's work	Ongoing

Supporting the organisation

In common with all organisations, the Covid-19 pandemic has transformed the way we work and presented major challenges, including almost total home-working through the

⁶ The impact of covid-19 has meant that there has been an unexpectedly and significant change to our working practices over the past year. We have undertaken extensive consultation with staff during this period and are trialing new approaches to working time and location in the coming year

⁷ We have continued to roll out upgrades across infrastructure, devices and applications in this year, however implementation was delayed due to the impact of Covid-19. We shall evaluate in the coming year

reporting year. Our aim throughout has been to support staff wellbeing while remaining focused on our important role to deliver for voters and to support our electoral stakeholders. We carried out an internal review of our initial response over the summer, followed by an internal audit at the end of the year. Both found that we had handled the situation well and had learnt lessons, in particular about formalising our structures for decision making in a crisis.

We have invested significant effort in supporting and developing our people. Our People Strategy includes actions to facilitate a culture where employees are able to perform their roles more effectively. We started this work by reviewing our performance management and development processes.

We invested more in learning and development and ensured staff were aware of the range of options for development that are possible. We also continue with the roll out of our leadership and management development programme for all managers.

We continued supporting staff groups that we set up to address particular areas, such as the staff engagement group, to ensure our employees have input into corporate policies and programmes.

We also have groups dedicated to supporting staff with bullying and harassment, to supporting those with mental health issues and to promoting dignity and respect at work. We maintain strong links with our trade union, the Public and Commercial Services Union.

We have made significant progress on equality, diversity and inclusion. We have set up a Race at Work Taskforce to ensure that the voices of our black, Asian and minority ethnic staff are heard and provide a force for change. We have prepared and will be consulting on a new Equality, Diversity and Inclusion strategy. We are reviewing and enhancing our Equality Impact Assessment process.

We have continued to transform the way we work through significant investments in our digital infrastructure, to improve its resilience and support flexible working practices. The roll-out of new laptops to all staff will enable more efficient working practices and is nearly complete. We have also introduced a new unified communications system.

This year has seen significant investment in our offices to ensure that we are ready for new and more flexible working practices post-pandemic. This has been completed on schedule despite the constraints of the pandemic.

We have also made significant improvements to our business delivery systems. We have implemented a new project management framework and set up a Quality Assurance initiative to help us ensure continuous improvement. We have also set up a new performance management and tracking system to enhance our reporting mechanisms.

We have also continued working with the National Cyber Security Centre to improve how we monitor our networks and platforms.

We report to the Scottish Parliament and the Senedd for our policy work on devolved issues, from 1 April 2021 we will be formally accountable to them in the same way as we are to the UK Parliament and have agreed a Statement of Funding Principles. In addition

to revised accountabilities, this will change the way funding is received £17.2m of budget will be from Consolidated Fund Administered by HM Treasury, £2.6m from Scottish Parliament Corporate Body and £1.8m from Welsh Consolidated Fund for 2021/22

Impact of Covid-19

The postponement of the elections saw our activity adapted on how it operated, this created opportunities to review working practices.

We carried out a review of our response to the pandemic. This found that we had balanced the needs of supporting staff with continuing to deliver the organisation's priorities, and that the Commission had acted swiftly and effectively.

A further audit was carried out by our internal auditors in early 2021 which confirmed these findings. We have made a number of changes to enhance further our response, notably in setting up a formal Gold/Silver command structure to support decision-making.

The additional costs to the Commission to support staff whilst working at home totalled £85k. This could be broken down in to three areas:

- home working allowance to all staff members (£67k)
- courier services (£8k) – enable essential equipment from the offices to home addresses
- the purchase of additional equipment to enable people to work at home successfully (£10k).

The additional costs have been absorbed due to underspends caused by the pandemic within the event budget across the Commission.

Impact of EU exit

There are no further European Parliamentary Elections due to be held in the UK, with the related elections legislation repealed.

As a result of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018, changes were introduced to the rules for parties, candidates, non-party campaigners and regulated donees accepting donations and loans, and to the registration of non-party campaigners. These changes came into force on 31 December and required the guidance team to update all of its guidance and resources in GB and NI. This amounted to approximately 70 guidance resources.

There were no additional financial costs to complete this work.

Looking ahead to 2021-22

2021-22 will be a busy year for the Commission. We are responsible for overseeing the delivery of a large and complex set of polls, and for ensuring that they are delivered safely and in a way that commands public confidence against the continuing backdrop of the pandemic. The arrival of a new Chair, the outcome of the enquiries by the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee of the UK Parliament and the Committee on Standards in Public Life, and the progress through Parliament of a significant Elections Bill will all impact on the work of the Commission as we start to emerge into a post-Covid environment. We will produce a Corporate Plan for the next five years. And we will for the first time be directly accountable to the Scottish Parliament and the Senedd Cymru in the same way as we are accountable to the UK Parliament through the Speaker's Committee.

Our first priority is the delivery of the May 2021 polls, which will be the most complex for some considerable time. As highlighted above we have done substantial work with stakeholders and voters to prepare, but we do not underestimate the magnitude of the task.

We welcomed a new Chair in the spring as well as two new Commissioners. This will provide refreshed strength in our strategic direction and governance as the Commission continues to deliver against a background of continuing change. Spring sees the expected introduction of the Electoral Integrity Bill; we will work closely with the UK Parliament to ensure parliamentarians have timely and evidence-based advice. Both the Committee for Standards in Public Life and the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee of the UK Parliament will publish reports relating to the Commission and electoral law. We welcome this scrutiny and look forward to seeing the recommendations.

We welcome too our new accountabilities and relationship with the Senedd Cymru and the Scottish Parliament. We will work closely with both over the coming year to build our new relationship and support the implementation of any emerging plans for electoral reform. We will equally continue to work with stakeholders in Northern Ireland, particularly in supporting the 2021 canvass and preparing for the next Northern Ireland Assembly elections

Core to our role is to continue to work constructively with all concerned – governments, parliaments, parties and campaigners, electoral administrators and other interested groups – to maintain confidence and trust in elections, including making preparations for the delivery of the May 2022 scheduled elections. We recognise the challenges. Strain and pressure on electoral administrators as a result of outdated and increasingly complex electoral law and continued pressure on resources and capacity continues to pose a risk to the successful delivery of registration and elections. We will continue work to develop and implement a strategy to support the increased resilience of local electoral services. And the nature of political campaigning continues to develop. Parties are spending a higher portion of their budgets on digital advertising and voters need to have confidence that they can critically examine and test political messages they see online. There is a risk that public confidence in digital campaigning will continue to fall, which poses a challenge for us, other regulators, governments and campaigners

A different kind of challenge comes from adapting to the emerging post-Covid landscape. The Covid-19 pandemic has brought change and challenge for us as it has for every organisation. As it recedes we will put in place new post-Covid-19 working practices reflecting the fundamental changes likely to be brought about for us and for our stakeholders.

All of this will feed into the new five-year Corporate Plan and Financial Strategy which we will develop over the course of the year and which will set out how we propose to meet these and other challenges.

We will continue to deliver on our four goals

Goal one

- support the **May 2021 polls**, working closely with the electoral community to ensure that they are delivered effectively
- continue to **provide expert advice and guidance to electoral administrators, candidates and agents**, including providing guidance, support and challenge in relation to preparations for the May 2022 elections
- continue to work with partners on improving the **accessibility** of elections so that everyone has equal access to election information and processes
- **undertake a voter registration campaign** ahead of polls, focusing particularly on groups which are harder to reach.
- support **Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) in Great Britain**, and lay new performance standards for them before the UK, Scottish and Welsh Parliaments.
- **support the 2021 canvass in Northern Ireland and preparations for the May 2022 Assembly election**, including through electoral registration public awareness activity
- continue work to **develop and implement a strategy to support increased resilience in the delivery of electoral services at a local level**.
- support the implementation of the Scottish and Welsh governments' **changes to the franchise** and raise public awareness through our targeted Welcome to Your Vote campaign and working with a wide range of partner groups.
- continue to combat **electoral fraud** through close engagement with the police and with local authorities, supported by our Your Vote is Yours Alone campaign and by research and data analysis.

Goal two

- **Maintain the registers of political parties and campaigners**, ensuring voters have clarity about registered parties and campaigners on the ballot paper
- **Publish financial data from parties, candidates and campaigners**, including that related to elections, ensuring transparency for voters
- **Continue to evolve our effective enforcement of the political finance rules**, ensuring voters, parties and campaigners have confidence that the rules are enforced proportionately and with impact, within our current powers. We will continue to publish the outcome of each investigation for transparency, including in full reports where that is warranted, so voters, parties and campaigners can see the way we act to enforce the rules. We will also continue to publish the outcomes of all investigations.
- Deliver a new **Political Finance Online system** to support parties and campaigners to deliver their financial returns efficiently
- Provide **timely advice and guidance** to parties and campaigners to support them in meeting their legal requirements, including for the major and complex polls scheduled for 2021
- Consult on and then develop our new strategic framework to ensure **effective and impactful proactive support** which will have the greatest effect on compliance with the law
- continue to enhance **the quality of our regulatory work** by rolling reviews of regulatory procedures and completing a project on enhancing our enforcement processes.
- respond to the changing environment and impacts of **digital campaigning**. We will work with government, social media companies and other providers of digital advertising to ensure their services and policies support transparency for election and referendum campaign activity; we will continue to scrutinise their proposals and bring forward proposals of our own as appropriate.
- Administer the **policy development grants** scheme and ensure it operates effectively by making timely recommendations to the UK Government for any necessary changes

Goal three

- continue to **provide expert advice and support** to political parties, campaigners, governments and the public to inform policy change, educate and inform the public and promote partnership working
- Support the UK Parliament to scrutinise the expected **Elections Bill**
- **report on the administration of elections** in line with our statutory duties to ensure we utilise learning to improve the delivery of future events
- continue to promote and build support for improvements to our democratic processes

- take forward work on a project to explore **voters' attitudes to the voting process** and options for change that would ensure their needs and expectations can continue to be met into the future
- continue to **develop our evidence base** to enable greater understanding of the electoral environment, including horizon scanning for emerging issues, risks and opportunities to the electoral system
- undertake **public awareness activity** to increase voter understanding of the rules already in place to regulate the digital campaigning techniques increasingly used to reach voters
- continue to expand our suite of **education and learning materials** designed to support understanding of the democratic process, for students and teachers across the whole of the UK.
- continue to develop our **corporate website, using** open data and digital tools to improve accessibility

Goal four

- Design new working practices and shape a culture which helps us maximise performance and meet changed staff expectations as we start to emerge from the pandemic
- Publish a **new Corporate Plan** for 2022-27, led by the new Chair of the Commission. We will also develop a new five-year financial strategy
- Develop new working arrangements with the **Senedd and the Scottish Parliament** as well as the UK Parliament to reflect our new accountabilities
- Delivered and developed our **People Strategy**
- Continue our focus on equality, diversity and inclusion through our new Race at Work Taskforce and the publication of a new **Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy**
- Continue our focus on learning and development, including our **Leadership and Management Development Programme**
- Continue to develop our **quality management** approach, building on our initial progress in 2020/21
- Continue to upgrade our **internal financial systems** and **performance tracking systems** to improve efficiency and our ability to forecast

Our commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion

The Commission is committed to the principle of equality of opportunity and the value of diversity. We are subject to a range of legislation including the Public Sector Equality Duty as set out in the Equalities Act 2010, and Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998,

which prohibits discrimination and promotes equality of opportunity and good relations across a range of protected characteristics. Our commitment goes beyond compliance. We serve a diverse society, and diversity is at the heart of a democracy that works for every voter.

We have three key objectives:

- that everyone who is eligible is able to participate in the democratic process, by identifying barriers, making recommendations and working with others to remove them
- that we embed equality and diversity in all our work, treat all customers fairly and with respect, and are transparent in the decisions we make
- equality of opportunity for everyone and that all staff are treated fairly and with respect

These objectives are central to the Commission's work:

We know which groups of voters are least likely to be registered, and have focussed communications and engagement activities to assist them. For example we have designed campaigns aimed at younger voters and in particular those from black and minority ethnic backgrounds whom we know from research are less likely to be registered, and have worked with a large range of groups such as those representing refugees, gypsies and travellers and voters with a disability.

We completed equality impact assessments on relevant policies and procedures throughout 2020/21. The equality impact assessments support a commitment to evidence-based policy making. In addition to arrangements for consultation and monitoring, the assessment process helps to develop effective policies that meet the needs of people in respect to any protected characteristics. We have reviewed and enhanced our process and will fully implement this during 2021-22.

We want to improve the diversity of our staff at all levels in the organisation, and consider it important that we reflect the diversity of the people we serve. We have taken a range of initiatives. Our People Strategy has equality, diversity and inclusion at its heart. Our work on diversity is supported by a number of staff groups. Our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion group meets regularly. Our Chief Executive chairs a Race at Work Taskforce and we have appointed a champion to lead actions on this work. The Dignity, Respect and Empowerment group holds the organisation to account on challenging bullying and harassment, working with a Director level Anti-Bullying Champion. Our Wellbeing Group and our Mental Health First Aiders provide support to staff

We will be publishing a new Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy during 2021-22 alongside a new Employer's Statement on Equal Opportunities.

Northern Ireland

Under Section 49A of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA 1995) (as amended by Article 5 of the Disability Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 2006), the Electoral Commission is required when carrying out its functions to have due regard to the need to:

- promote positive attitudes towards disabled people; and
- encourage participation by disabled people in public life ('the disability duties').

Under Section 49B of the DDA 1995, the Electoral Commission is also required to submit to the Equality Commission a disability action plan showing how it proposes to fulfill these duties in relation to its functions.

In January we published a draft Disability Action Plan and began a 12 week public consultation in Northern Ireland, as recommended by the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland. We intend to have the final action plan in place by June 2021 and will report annually on our progress on implementing the plan to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland.

Wales

The Electoral Commission is committed to the principle that in its conduct of public business and provision of resources and services, the Welsh and English languages should be treated on a basis of equality. During 2020/21, important work was undertaken with regard to the Welsh language within the Commission. Our campaigns were created and run bilingually in Wales, such as Got 5/Oes 5 'da ti general voter registration campaign, and the Welcome to Your Vote/Croeso i Dy Bleidlais campaign, to encourage registration among those newly enfranchised voters in Wales. New educational resources were also created for use in schools in both Welsh and English.

A complaint was made to the Welsh Language Commissioner during 2020 relating to the Commission's statutory process to maintain the registers of political parties and to take registration decisions. In its response the Commission reinforced its commitment to providing an exceptional service to partners in Wales in the language of their choice and to ensuring that the Welsh Language Standards, set in July 2016, are not only met, but that the Commission is innovative and ambitious in the services that it provides. We commissioned an external agency to carry out a review of the Commission's adherence to the Standards and the final report from this work will inform the organisation's next steps regarding Welsh Language provision.

Scotland

We continue to work with a range of delivery partners to promote equal access to and understanding of democracy in Scotland.

Using our resources to support the delivery of our goals

Our people

Staff relations and engagement

The expertise, hard work and high level of commitment of our workforce enable successful performance and delivery of our Corporate Plan. We value the positive and constructive relationship we have with colleagues and work hard to maintain it. Our staff engagement group meets on a regular basis to seek input from colleagues on emerging issues and help to maintain good relations with staff. We also actively encourage staff involvement as part of the day-to-day process of line management, and we share information on current and prospective developments widely and regularly. To support this, we have a recognition agreement with the Public and Commercial Services Union.

We completed our latest staff survey in March 2020 and 86% of employees responded. Our employee engagement score was 72% (up from 65% in 2018-19). Our scores compared most positively to the Civil Service benchmark in areas such as our people agreeing that:

- we took action after the previous survey
- they feel a strong personal attachment to our organisation and its work
- they would recommend the Electoral Commission as a place to work

The areas where we compared least positively to the Civil Service benchmark and we need to improve on include people agreeing that:

- there are opportunities for them to progress in their careers at the Electoral Commission
- they have the IT systems and equipment they need to do their jobs effectively
- we are committed to creating a diverse and inclusive workplace

Occupational health and safety

We review our health and safety policy annually. We also have procedures, guidance and risk assessments in place to cover our core activities. A health and safety group oversees our arrangements. They meet regularly and report to our senior leadership group. However, primary responsibility for health and safety sits with people managers.

We initiate independent health and safety audits of our premises each year, which involves inspecting working environments and reviewing safety management systems. These audits tell us if our arrangements are suitable and highlight any improvements we need to make. In 2020/21 we carried out specific risk assessments to ensure our sites were Covid secure prior to re-opening; routine assessments will restart once travel across the UK is permitted and our sites are back in use.

Our environmental impact

We recognise that delivering our activities has an impact on the environment and we continue to work towards minimising this impact.

We lease office space in four cities from a combination of public and private sector property owners. We do not have direct control of utility supplier and waste disposal targets and management at our premises. For a number of our offices, the property owner manages energy and water consumption as well as waste disposal and recovers costs through a consolidated service charge.

Offices in Edinburgh, Cardiff and Belfast have relocated to smaller, more environmentally efficient premises in the last 10 years. We completed the renewal of the lease for our London office in 2020.

Initiatives are in place to help minimise environmental impact:

- reduced printed resources provided to electoral administrators and other groups, focusing on electronic provision wherever possible
- encouraged the use of video and teleconferencing to avoid unnecessary travel with consequential CO2 emissions
- operated recycling facilities in all our offices
- upgraded to more energy efficient information communication technology equipment

Summary (London office)

Performance commentary on emissions

We aim to decrease our fossil fuel consumption year on year, an ongoing effect of the property owner's introduction of measures to reduce levels of electricity consumption, including lower 'out of hours' operation of plant and machinery and the introduction of energy-efficient lighting.

Coronavirus has meant that the office has not been open during 2020/21 for all staff therefore our performance has not been measurable this year.

Waste report

General waste and recycling figures are based on a proportion of total building waste and are not directly controllable by us. Confidential waste disposal for the organisation is handled separately from that for other building occupants. We shred the confidential waste we generate on-site before it is recycled into low-grade paper.

The general and recycled waste is based on a proportion of total building waste. All general waste produced in the building, including that generated by us, is sent to a nearby energy from waste plant, instead of landfill sites.

Using our financial resources efficiently

In 2020/21, the resource initially made available to us by the UK Parliament was £23.3m for voted activity. We received non-voted funding of £200k to pay Commissioners' fees.

In January 2021, we had our Supplementary Estimate Approved, which decreased our resource budget to £20.3m and increased our capital budget to £1.5m. We also reduced our AME budget to £0.3m.

The budget changes were due to the postponement of the polls scheduled for May 2020 and the increased costs for our political finance online system.

Our final budget breakdown:

		Voted £m	Non-Voted £m	Total £m
Departmental Expenditure Limit	Resource	20.3	0.2	20.5
	Capital	1.5		1.5
Annually Managed Expenditure	Resource	0.3		0.3
Total Net Budget	Resource	20.6	0.2	20.8
	Capital	1.5		1.5
Net cash requirement		21.5		21.5

In achieving our objectives, we have used £19.1m worth of resources for the whole year. This was out of the available sum of £20.5m approved by the UK Parliament in our Supplementary Estimate (HC 64) for the net resource voted requirement. The graphic below summarises our financial performance on the 'voted' element of our budget.

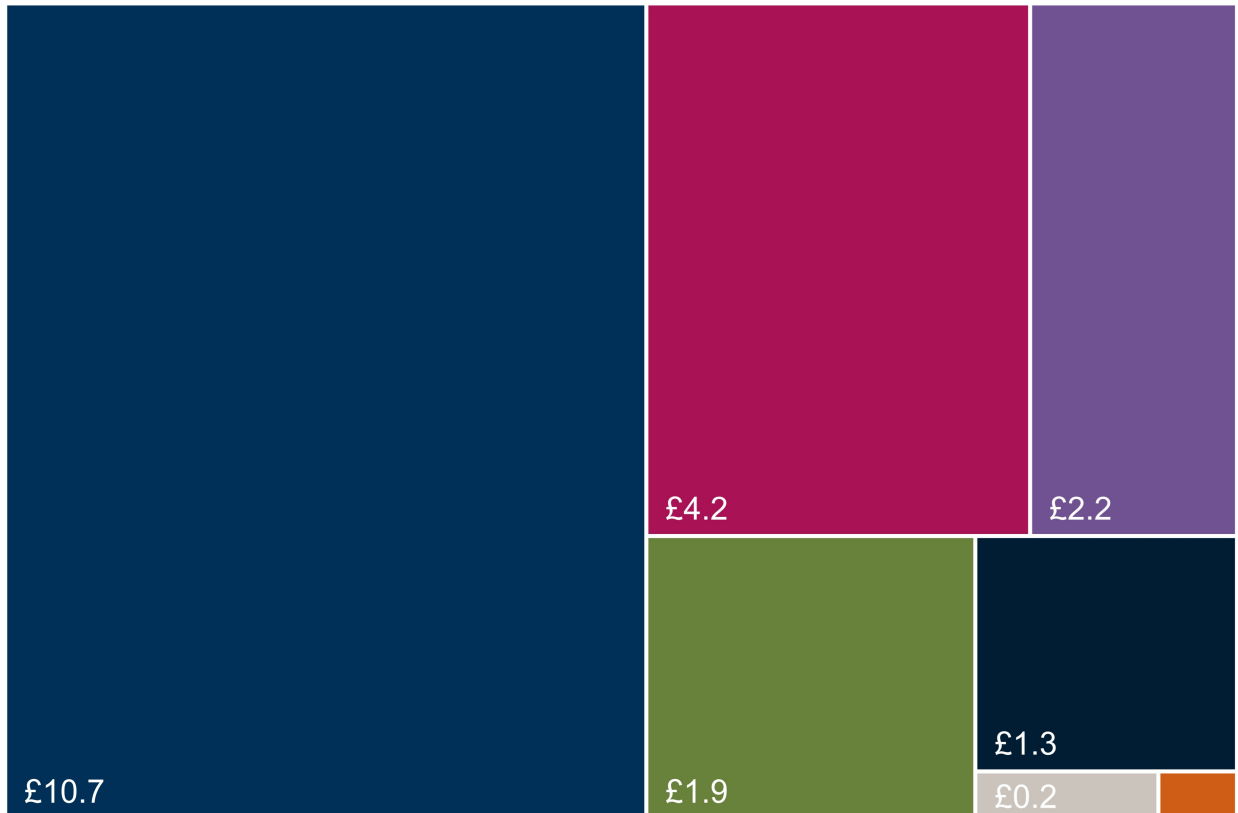
Financial performance 2020/21

Our financial performance follows our strategic performance, being dominated by a shifting electoral timetable. For the year 2020/21:

- our staff costs represented 55% of our resource expenditure, which is an increase of 8% from 2019/20.
- our capital expenditure increased by £0.4m due to the refurbishment works within the London office.

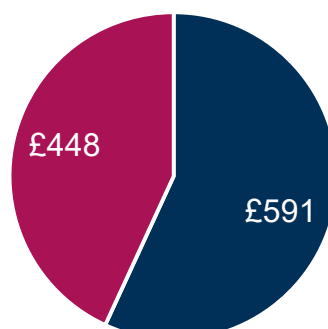
Expenditure 2020-21 (£m)

- Staff costs
- Operating costs
- Public Awareness
- Policy Development Grant
- Local Government Scotland
- Senedd
- Capital expenditure



We report our underspend to reflect in-year operational decisions; R-DEL excluding depreciation and PDGs. In 2020/21 this was £1.0m against the voted budget of £17.9m (5.6%). This was predominantly due to unused contingency and other savings in campaigning for the May 2021 elections.

Operating Underspend - £000s



■ Event Activity ■ Core staffing & operating costs

The operating underspend is comprised of:

- £591k reduced spend within our campaigning budget for the May 2021 campaigns. (including contingency for Covid related campaigns that was not required)
- £103k as a combination of under and over spends within staff costs
- £253k due to reduced Welsh translation and travel costs
- £92k as a combination of individually small underspends across the Commission

Other underspend

- £112k in unclaimed policy development grant
- £39k in depreciation
- £147k in provisions due to lower than expected costs
- £279k in capital projects

The £80k underspend against non-voted funding is due to lower than expected costs for Commissioners due to vacancies.

Our income in our accounts relates to charges for registering political parties and work completed for the Senedd and Scottish Parliament. We collect fines raised against political parties and individuals for failure to comply with the rules on party and election finance and then surrender these to the Consolidated Fund as required by law. The penalties due was £41k in 2020/21 received by 31 March 2021 and surrendered to the Consolidated Fund.

In addition to monitoring performance against budgets, we also managed within our cash limits set by the UK Parliament. We required cash amounting to £20.3m in 2020/21 to finance our voted activities, which was £1.2m less than the sum of £21.5m approved by the UK Parliament in our Supplementary Estimate. The reconciliation of net resources outturn to net cash requirement provides a reconciliation from our outturn to the net cash we required in-year.

The Statement of Cash Flows shows that the cash balance as at 31 March 2021 was £26k.

The Statement of Financial Position as at 31 March 2021 shows positive taxpayers' equity of £0.9m.

Supplier payments

Although we are independent of government, we aim to comply with the Prompt Payment Code that operates across the public sector. The target is to pay undisputed invoices within 30 days. In 2020/21, we paid 85% of invoices (81.6% in 2019/20) within 30 days. The pandemic created a backlog in paying invoices during the first part of the year due to the closure of the offices; e-processes were set up and within the last six months of 2020/21 100% of invoices were paid within 30 days.

Freedom of Information, complaints and parliamentary questions

We are committed to the principles of openness and transparency in public life and acknowledge the duty to provide information to the public. In 2020/21, we received 153 Freedom of Information (FOI) requests. We responded to 136 (91.9%) of these within the 20 working days statutory timeframe (target: 90%); a proportion of large and complex requests continues to be high. There were nine FOI internal review requests, one of these requests led to additional information being sent to the requestor.

The global pandemic had an impact on the number of FOI requests submitted to the Electoral Commission and the pattern of submission was not the same as in previous years. The complexity and impact of the requests did have an impact on the organisation, but this was mitigated by improvements in process and communication across teams. This led to the improvement in the number of requests responded to within the statutory response periods.

We received five subject access requests. We responded to all of these promptly. We received one complaint and this is pending closure from the ICO related to a response issued in 2019. We also received two requests for erasure under the General Data Protection Regulation/Data Protection Act 2018.

We handled 29 complaints, compared to 51 in 2019/20. Of the 29 complaints handled; 17 have been completed and 12 are still active. Of the 17 that were completed; 11 were not upheld, two were partially upheld, one was upheld, three were closed due to no clarification being received from the complainant. The learnings gleaned from the investigations of these complaints were fed back to the relevant teams to support our commitment to continuous improvement. These complaints spanned a range of topics. Eight complaints focussed on alleged delays in assessing applications to change a party's name. None of these complaints were upheld. We received one request for review by the Chief Executive. While this review did not change the original outcome of the complaint, it did enable further explanation and assistance.

In addition, we received correspondence from 181 members of the public that did not constitute complaints under our policy. Where possible the complaints team responded

directly to the individual or alternatively forwarded the correspondence to the appropriate team to provide a response if technical expertise was required.

Via our dedicated public information service, we responded to 4,463 public enquiries, received by phone and email. Through this service, we have answered questions about how to register and vote in the May 2021 elections taking place across Great Britain. We have explained the public safety measures in place at polling stations, and how people can use absent voting methods to have their say without attending a polling station.

We responded to 27 parliamentary questions during 2020/21, including questions about digital campaigning, electoral fraud, the accuracy and completeness of the electoral registers and the effectiveness of electoral law. Chris Matheson MP, a member of the Speaker's Committee, was our spokesperson in the UK Parliament and answered questions on our behalf.

Supply estimate for 2021-22

Our supply estimate for 2021-22 (HC1371) provides for a net resource requirement of £17.4m. The Speaker's Committee approved this on 23 March 2021 and was laid before House of Commons on 22 April 2021. The Commission is established by legislation and following the principles of the FReM there is an assumption of continued provision of service, there is nothing to suggest services provided by the Commission will cease or future funding will not be provided.

We plan to use these resources to continue delivering our four goals around the delivery of elections, the regulation of political finance, the use of our expertise to improve democratic processes and the best use of our resources.

Powers and sanctions report

Use of our powers and sanctions between 1 April 2020 and 31 March 2021

We encourage those we regulate to comply with the rules by providing support and guidance. However, where proportionate to do so, we take action when they do not follow the rules.

PPERA provides us with investigation powers, including the ability to:

- require information (through an investigation notice) from anyone where we suspect there has been a breach of the law or (through a disclosure notice) where we do not suspect an offence but require information in order to fulfil our functions
- require suspects or witnesses to attend for interview
- take action if people do not co-operate with our requirements
- in certain circumstances, enter premises (through an inspection warrant from a Justice of the Peace)

We also have a range of sanctions, including:

- fines ranging from £200 to £20,000
- compliance and restoration notices, by which we can require people to take particular actions to achieve compliance or rectify non-compliance
- stop notices, by which we can require people to take a particular action or stop an intended action

These sanctions apply to most, but not all, PPERA offences. There are some offences – generally those involving an element of deliberate dishonesty – for which we cannot issue fines but we can notify the police or relevant public prosecutor.

We are also able to consider ‘enforcement undertakings’ from those we regulate, where for example a party may report an offence voluntarily and propose actions it will take to put things right, avoiding the need for the party and us to go through potentially time-consuming investigations.

Use of investigatory powers

We are required to report on our use of investigatory powers, specifically cases in which:

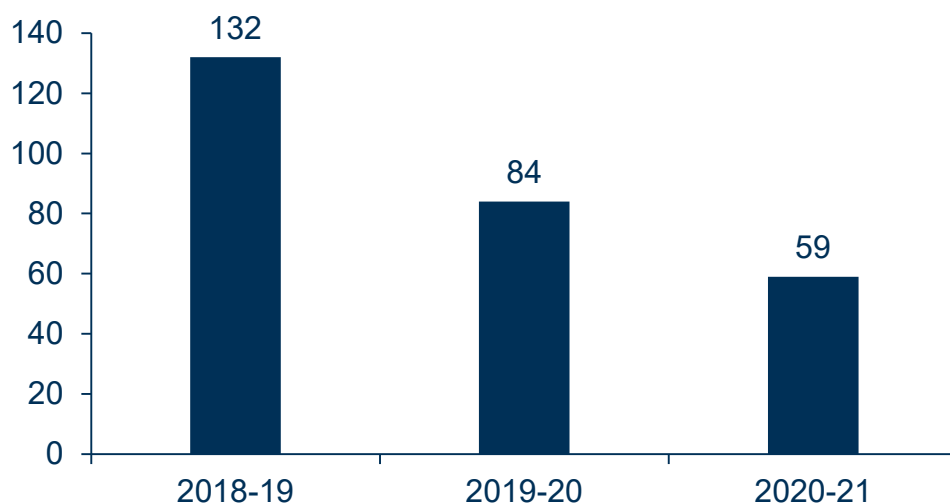
- we issued a disclosure or investigation notice
- premises were entered using an inspection warrant issued by a Justice of the Peace
- we applied to a court for an order for disclosure

We are not required to include information where, in our opinion, to do so would or might be unlawful, or might adversely affect any current investigation or proceedings.

We did not issue any disclosure notices or investigation notices during 2020/21.

We did not use our powers to apply for an inspection warrant to enter premises, or apply for any court orders for disclosure during 2020/21.

Number of concluded investigations



We concluded fifty-nine investigations during 2020/21 compared with 84 investigations concluded the previous year. We continued to regulate and take enforcement action where it was reasonable and in the public interest to do so. The minimal number of elections during 2020/21 was a factor in the reduced number of cases, and we took a proportionate approach to late delivery of returns in the light of the impact of COVID-19, leading to less enforcement activity, which was also a factor.

Use of civil sanctions

We are required to report on our use of civil sanctions, specifically cases in which:

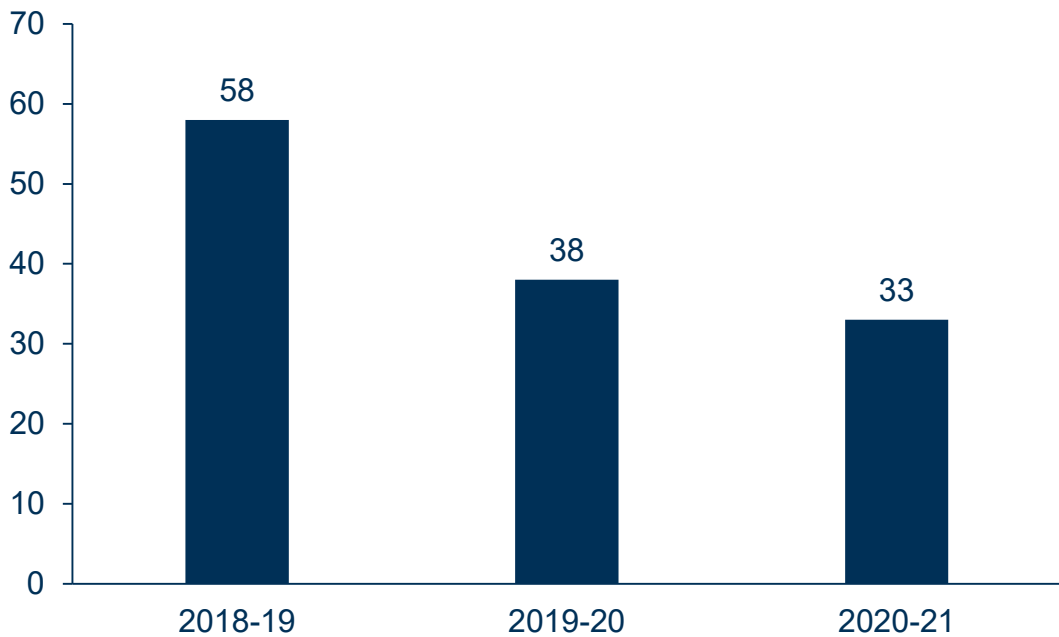
- a fixed monetary penalty or discretionary requirement was imposed or a stop notice served (other than cases in which the penalty, requirement or notice was overturned on appeal)
- liability for a fixed monetary penalty was paid before a notice imposing it was issued
- an enforcement undertaking was accepted

The number of penalties imposed, 33, is less than in 2019/20, and includes cases arising from the 2019 UK Parliamentary General Election.

The 2020/21 period includes three cases where parties paid fixed penalties early so we did not have to issue notices to impose payments.

The information below does not take account of 23 cases where we found an offence but decided not to impose a sanction. **Pack Page 161**

Number of penalties imposed



Details of all penalties imposed during 2020/21 are available on our website here: <https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/who-we-are-and-what-we-do/our-enforcement-work/investigations>

No enforcement undertakings were offered to us during 2020/21. We did not serve any stop notices up to and including 31 March 2021. No appeals were made against decisions to impose civil sanctions.

Bob Posner
Chief Executive and Accounting Officer
28 June 2021

Accountability report



Corporate governance report

The Directors' report

The Commission Board comprises 10 Commissioners appointed by Royal Warrant to exercise our functions as described in PPERA.

The Board appoints the Chief Executive to lead and manage our organisation and the Chief Executive appoints a leadership team of Executive Directors.

Details of Commissioners and Executive Directors are set out in the governance statement.

Register of interests

Commissioners and directors have to complete a declaration of interests. They did not hold any significant company directorships or other interests that may have conflicted with their responsibilities. No Commissioner or director had any other related party interests. We update the register of interests regularly throughout the year and publish this on our website.

Going concern

Our Main Estimate has received approval for the resources we require in 2021/22 and our Corporate Plan until 2024/25. As Government body established by legislation and following the principles of the FReM there is an assumption of continued provision of service, there is nothing to suggest services provided by the Commission will cease or future funding will not be provided.

Auditors

The Comptroller and Auditor General is appointed as our external auditor under Schedule 1 of PPERA.

Our internal auditors from 1 April 2020 were RSM UK.

Full details of remuneration for both audit and non-audit work are in the financial statements.

Other disclosures

Some disclosures required in the directors' report have been included elsewhere in the Annual Report and Accounts. We have reported personal data related incidents in the governance statement. Disclosures on employment and engagement with staff are in the

'our people' section of the performance report. Additional information is included in the remuneration report.

No significant events affecting us have occurred since the reporting date and we have disclosed future developments affecting us in the 'Using our financial resources efficiently' section of the performance report.

Statement of Accounting Officer's responsibilities

Under PPERA, I am required to prepare accounts for each financial year, detailing the resources acquired, held, or disposed of during the year and the use of resources by us during the year.

The accounts are prepared on an accruals basis and must give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the organisation and of its net resource outturn, changes in taxpayers' equity and cash flows for the financial year.

In preparing the accounts, the Accounting Officer is required to comply with the requirements of the Government Financial Reporting Manual prepared by Her Majesty's (HM) Treasury, and in particular to:

- observe the Accounts Direction issued by HM Treasury including the relevant accounting and disclosure requirements, and apply suitable accounting policies on a consistent basis
- make judgments and estimates on a reasonable basis
- state whether applicable accounting standards, as set out in the Government Financial Reporting Manual, have been followed, and disclose and explain any material departures in the accounts
- prepare the accounts on a going concern basis

In accordance with paragraph 19(1) of Schedule 1 to PPERA, the Speaker's Committee has designated the Chief Executive as Accounting Officer of the Electoral Commission, with responsibility for preparing the accounts and for transmitting them to the Comptroller and Auditor General.

The responsibilities of an Accounting Officer – including responsibility for the propriety and regularity of the public finances for which an Accounting Officer is answerable, for keeping proper records and safeguarding the Electoral Commission's assets – are set out in *Managing Public Money* published by HM Treasury.

The Accounting Officer confirms that, as far as he is aware:

- there is no relevant audit information of which the entity's auditors are unaware
- they have taken all the steps that he ought to have taken to make himself aware of any relevant audit information and to establish that the entity's auditors are aware of that information

I hereby confirm that the Annual Report and Accounts as a whole are fair, balanced and understandable, and that I take personal responsibility for the Annual Report and Accounts and the judgements required for determining that they are fair, balanced and understandable.

Disclosure of information to the National Audit Office

The Accounting Officer, who held office at the date of approval of this report, confirms that, as far as the directors are each aware:

- there is no relevant audit information of which the external auditors are unaware
- each director has taken all the steps required to make themselves aware of any relevant audit information and to establish that the external auditors are aware of that information

Governance statement

The Electoral Commission was set up under PPERA. In accordance with Schedule 1(19) of PPERA, the Speaker's Committee has appointed me as Accounting Officer of the Electoral Commission. My responsibilities in this role are set out separately under The Statement of Accounting Officer's responsibilities.

As Chief Executive and Accounting Officer, I have gained assurance that the frameworks, control environment, processes and scrutiny set out in this statement have been effective throughout the financial year by review of documentation, discussions with Commissioners, the independent advisor to the Audit and Risk Committee and staff and meetings with internal and external auditors and other external stakeholders.

Board members, both executive and non-executive, are obliged to report all potential conflicts of interest. All members complete a related party annual declaration. I can confirm that all returns have been reviewed and there are no conflicts of interest.

This governance statement is in accordance with HM Treasury guidance. A summary of the procedures, processes and support structures that are maintained to effectively manage and control the resources made available to me by the UK Parliament.

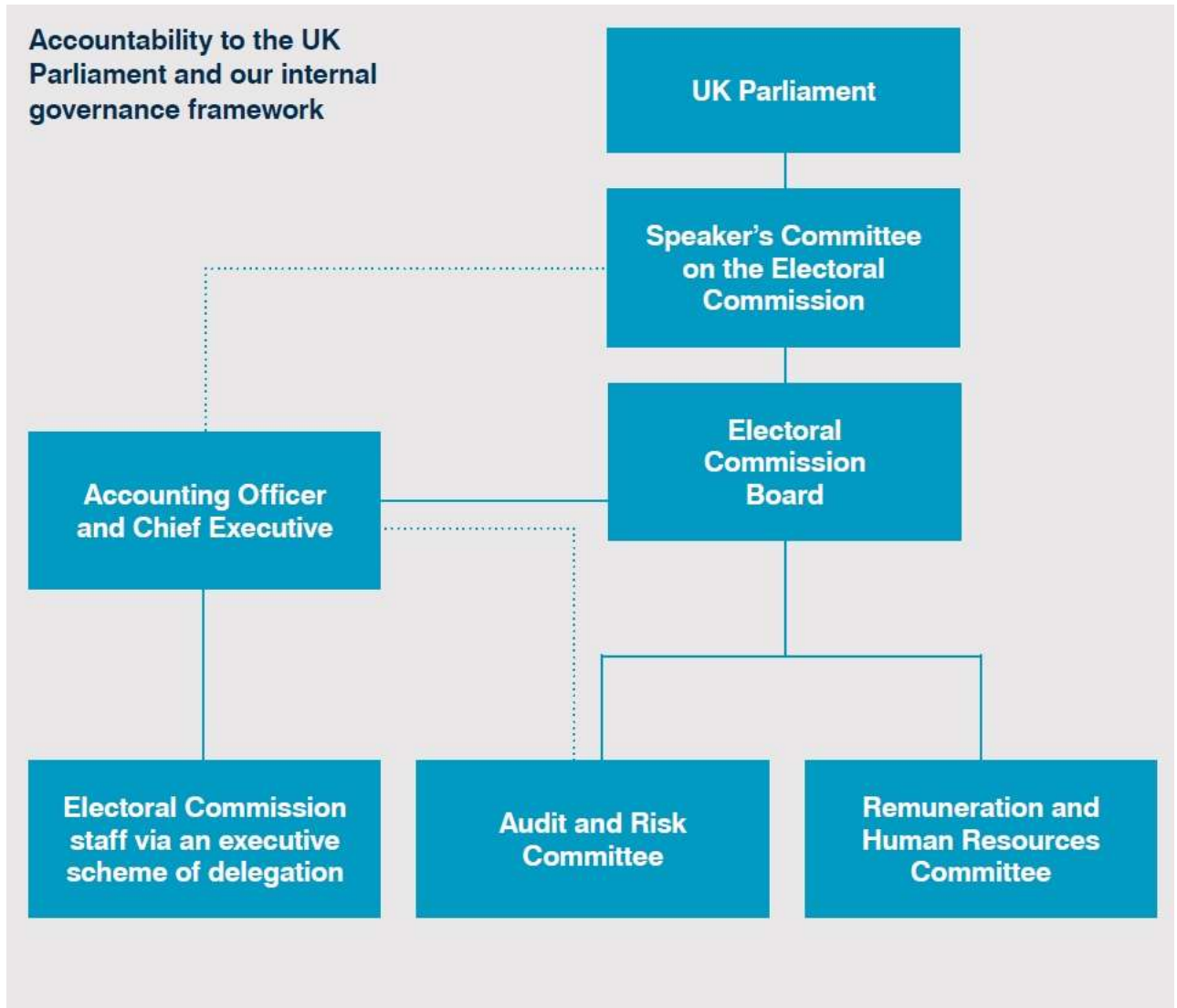
Accountability to UK Parliament and the devolved parliaments

While the Electoral Commission has regularly reported to both the Scottish and Welsh Parliaments in relation to our role at devolved elections, formal accountability (through legislation) has previously only been to the UK Parliament, specifically to the Speaker's Committee of the House of Commons. From 1 April 2021 we will also be formally accountable to both the Scottish and Welsh Parliaments, reporting to the Scottish Parliament Corporate Body (SPCB) and the Llywydd's Committee respectively. Work has been underway throughout 2020/21 to develop the processes to enable this accountability to happen.

During 2020/21 we have been working with the Scottish, Welsh and UK parliaments to develop a funding formula which would enable us to charge all direct costs for relevant elections to the legislatures and to calculate all other costs using the Office for National Statistics population data, valid for the life of our Corporate Plan. We have also been working to develop a "Statement of Funding Principles" which all Parliaments could agree to and this work was completed in March 2021 with the principles coming into effect in April 2021.

In the autumn we submitted our first set of estimates to both the Scottish and Welsh Parliaments enabling the UK Treasury to transfer the agreed level of funding to the Welsh Consolidated Fund and the Scottish Parliament. These processes will ensure all parliaments can be confident in scrutinising our work plans and accounts in the coming years.

Accountability to the UK Parliament and our internal governance framework



The Speaker's Committee

The Speaker's Committee is established under Section 2(1) of PPERA to perform the functions conferred on it by PPERA. These functions include:

- examining our annual resource estimates and laying them before the House of Commons, with or without modification
- examining our five-year plans and laying them before the House of Commons, with or without modification
- receiving our accounts
- designating our Accounting Officer
- reporting to the House of Commons, at least once a year, on how it has carried out its functions

Members of the Speaker's Committee from 1 April 2020 – 31 March 2021 were:

- Right Honourable Sir Lindsay Hoyle MP, Speaker of the House of Commons (Chair)
- William Wragg MP, Chair of the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee
- Right Honourable Michael Gove MP, Minister for the Cabinet Office and Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster
- Luke Hall MP, Minister of State for Regional Growth and Local Government
- Owen Thompson MP (Scottish National Party)
- Karl McCartney MP (Conservative)
- Craig Mackinlay MP (Conservative)
- Cat Smith MP (Labour)
- Christian Matheson MP (Labour) (Committee spokesperson)

The five appointed members are Members of the House of Commons who are not Ministers. The Speaker of the House of Commons makes these appointments.

The Secretary of the Speaker's Committee is Kevin Maddison.

The Speaker's Committee agreed our Supply Estimate for the 2021-22 financial year and our Business Plan in March 2020. The Supply Estimate (HC303) was laid before the UK Parliament on 29 April 2020.

Commission Board and leadership team

The Commission Board

The Commission Board meets on a regular basis to consider our strategic direction and objectives and to review our performance. All members of our Executive Team and other relevant staff attend the Board's formal meetings.

Her Majesty the Queen appoints our Chair and Commissioners on the recommendation of the House of Commons. By custom, Her Majesty normally appoints Commissioners for a period not exceeding four years in the first instance, with the possibility of re-appointments. Our new Chair started in the spring as well as two new Commissioners.

A Commissioner may cease to serve or be removed in accordance with the grounds set out in Schedule 1, paragraphs 3–5 of PPERA. Unless Her Majesty reappoints the Commissioner before their period ends their appointment terminates at the end of the specified period. The Commissioner may also ask to terminate their appointment.

The Chair works for two days each week. The other Commissioners spend an average of two days per month fulfilling their duties.

The table below shows the Commissioners who served during the year, with their terms in office indicated. The Speaker's Committee has started considering the re-appointment or recruitment to Commissioner roles, where the Commissioner resigned or where they are near the end of their current terms of office.

Commissioners serving in 2020/21

Name	From	To
Sir John Holmes	1 January 2017	31 December 2020
Anna Carragher	1 January 2012	31 December 2020
Alasdair Morgan	12 October 2014	30 September 2022
Rob Vincent CBE	1 January 2016	31 December 2023
Dame Susan Bruce	1 January 2017	31 December 2023
Professor Elan Closs Stephens DBE	13 March 2017	12 March 2025
Sarah Chambers	31 March 2018	30 March 2022
Alastair Ross ⁸	1 November 2018	18 February 2020

⁸ Alastair Ross requested permission to resign and Her Majesty approved this on 18 February 2020.

Name	From	To
Joan Walley	1 November 2018	31 October 2022
Lord Gilbert ⁹	1 November 2018	31 October 2022

During the year, the Board delegated specific activities to the Audit and Risk Committee and the Remuneration and Human Resources Committee.

Audit and Risk Committee

The Board established an Audit and Risk Committee to support the Accounting Officer in discharging their formal accountability responsibilities and provide assurance to the Board on the discharge of these responsibilities.

The Audit and Risk Committee offers objective advice and ensures that the most efficient, effective, and economic risk, control, and governance processes are in place. The Audit and Risk Committee also acts on behalf of the Board to provide them with assurance on these issues.

The Audit and Risk Committee reviews:

- the strategic processes for risk, control, and governance
- the planned activity and results within information governance and the Annual Assessment of Information Risk Management
- the Annual Governance Statement and recommend approval of the Statement by the Accounting Officer as appropriate
- the accounting policies and the annual accounts, including the process for review of the accounts before submission for audit; levels of error identified; and management's letter of representation to the NAO
- the plans and reports of the NAO and management responses to any proposals, as well as agreeing the strategic and annual internal audit plans
- assurances relating to our corporate governance requirements, including the approval of policies for whistleblowing, anti-fraud, anti-bribery policy, and authorising claims for expenses, with an opportunity to raise queries with the Board
- proposals for tendering for Internal Audit services, or for the purchase of non-audit services from contractors who provide audit services

The Audit and Risk Committee's focus is to review the risk and control of assurances it receives and the adequacy of assurance arrangements themselves.

The Audit and Risk Committee comprises three Commissioners appointed by the Board and is required to meet at least three times a year. The Board has also approved the

⁹ Baron Gilbert of Panteg (Lord (Stephen) Gilbert)

appointment of an independent adviser to the Audit and Risk Committee, who is a suitably qualified independent person who has no connection with the Electoral Commission. The independent adviser has the right to attend any Commissioner meetings.

The Audit and Risk Committee shares meeting minutes with our Board and formally reports to them annually.

In 2020/21, the Audit and Risk Committee considered the annual accounts and supporting assurance work, the review of legislative compliance and received audit reports on our core financial systems.

Members of the Audit and Risk Committee normally serve for three years, unless a member ceases to be a Commissioner or asks to stand down. The Board may re-appoint them for a further period, normally not exceeding three years.

The Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee during the 2020/21 financial year was Dame Sue Bruce. The independent advisor to the Audit and Risk Committee is Paul Redfern. The members of the Committee during the same period were:

- Dame Susan Bruce, Chair
- Alasdair Morgan
- Professor Elan Closs Stephens DBE

Reviews of audit reports

The Audit and Risk Committee approved and monitored a programme of audit and reviews for 2020/21. The Committee reviews both external and internal audit reports, and monitors which recommendations staff accept and how they implement them. The Audit and Risk Committee also satisfies itself that there are valid reasons for rejecting recommendations.

The Audit and Risk Committee held three meetings in 2020/21. The internal and external auditors routinely attend all meetings, along with staff including the Chief Executive and the Director of Finance and Corporate Services.

Remuneration and Human Resources Committee

The Remuneration and Human Resources Committee comprises three Commissioners and meets at least twice a year.

It supports the Board and the Accounting Officer with their responsibilities for significant changes to staff terms and conditions, reviewing the remuneration policy of the Chief Executive, agreeing the annual negotiating remit for the staff pay award and setting the fee for the independent advisor of the Audit and Risk Committee.

The Committee also acts as an advisory group on the extent to which organisational development and human resource matters support the Board's strategic direction for our organisation.

Members serve for three years, unless a member ceases to be a Commissioner or asks to stand down. The Board may re-appoint them for a further period, normally not exceeding three years.

Remuneration and Human Resources Committee members during 2020/21 were:

- Rob Vincent CBE, Chair
- Joan Walley
- Sarah Chambers

The Committee met four times and discussed our people strategy, pay, equality and diversity strategy, organisational response to the pandemic (particularly our approach to employee wellbeing), and recruitment and exit analyses.

Review of Board and Committee performance during 2020/21

The Board's forward programme of meetings is aimed at engaging at a strategic rather than operational level, inviting effective input and challenge at an appropriate point. During the year, the Board focussed on the following activities:

- reviewing the administration of the May 2019 elections
- preparation at short notice for the European Parliamentary elections in May and an unscheduled UK Parliamentary general election in December 2019
- reviewing the voter ID pilots at the May 2019 elections
- discussing our accuracy and completeness survey and winter tracker research findings
- discussing our modernising electoral registration project
- The Board considered the following topics at informal Commissioner days:
- managing regulatory risk
- our approach to public awareness campaigns

The Audit and Risk Committee, as well as the Remuneration and Human Resources Committee, reviewed their effectiveness during the year. Responses were positive, and the Committees will act on the conclusions during 2020/21.

The Board find the quality of data acceptable. The four main categories of data are:

- public opinion data derived from surveys by reputable, independent research agencies using transparent methods
- elections and registration data collected directly from EROs and ROs, including figures on postal voting and turnout
- accuracy and completeness data compiled using a well-developed and robust methodology of fieldwork by an independent research agency

- financial data provided to the executive team, extracted from the main general ledger and analysed into management reports; the Board obtains assurance through our financial controls, which are subject to regular management scrutiny and internal and external audit

The table below shows Board and Committee meeting attendance during 2020/21 (the maximum possible attendance is in brackets).

Board and Committee attendance 2020/21

Name	Commission Board	Audit and Risk Committee	Remuneration and Human Resources Committee
Sir John Holmes (Chair)	10 (10)	-	-
Dame Susan Bruce	10 (10)	5 (5)	-
Anna Carragher	10 (10)	-	-
Sarah Chambers	10 (10)	-	5 (5)
Professor Elan Closs Stephens DBE	10 (10)	5 (5)	-
Lord Gilbert	10 (10)	-	-
Alasdair Morgan	10 (10)	5 (5)	-
Alastair Ross	8 (8)	-	-
Rob Vincent CBE	9 (10)	-	5 (5)
Joan Walley	10 (10)	-	5 (5)

Chief Executive

The Chief Executive is responsible for our organisation overall, including management and staffing and for financial, conduct and discipline matters.

Executive Team

Our Executive Team, which comprises the Chief Executive and Directors, meets formally once a month to manage the delivery of the organisation's objectives in line with the strategic direction set by our Board. They address ongoing issues and risks in the process. The Executive team meets weekly to discuss current issues and coordinate required activities.

The Directors have delegated authority for day-to-day management with the Chief Executive. These delegations are formally set, recorded, and reviewed on an annual basis.

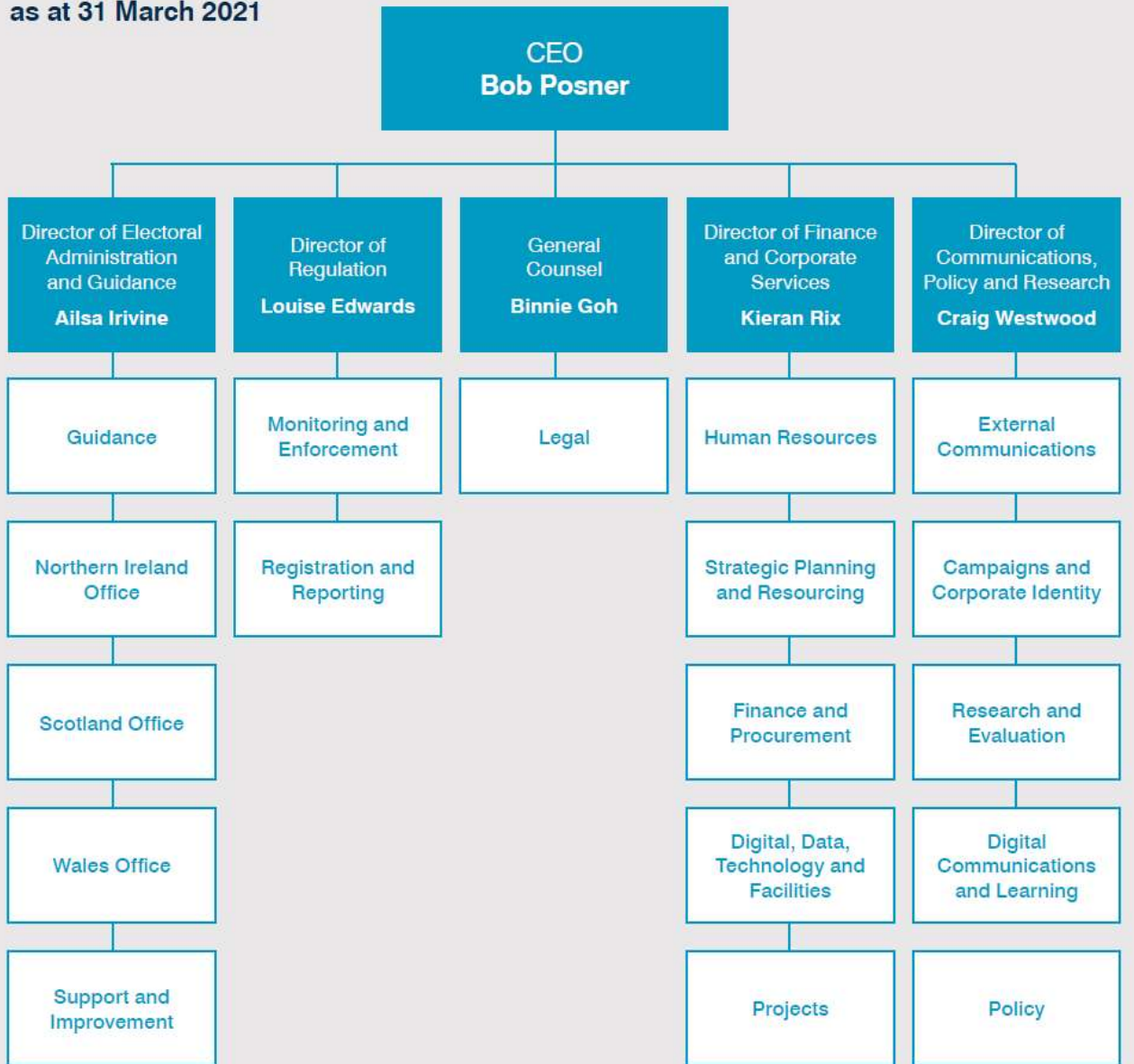
The Executive Team receives monthly reports on performance, finance and risk management across the organisation and on progress with key projects and initiatives. As well as frequent informal discussions, the Chief Executive meets each member of the Executive Team at least once a month to review and challenge operational and financial performance.

Members of the Executive Team during 2020/21 were:

- Chief Executive and Accounting Officer: Bob Posner
- Director of Finance and Corporate Services: Kieran Rix
- Director of Regulation: Louise Edwards
- Director of Communications, Policy and Research: Craig Westwood
- Director of Electoral Administration and Guidance: Ailsa Irvine

The General Counsel also provides advice to the Executive Team and the Board. Binnie Goh succeeded Amanda Kelly as General Counsel in January 2021.

**Organisational structure
as at 31 March 2021**



Risk management, internal control and assurance

We maintain and review the effectiveness of our control framework through the arrangements below.

Corporate governance

The Board reviews our corporate governance framework annually, ensuring that we adopt best practice. The Strategic Planning and Resourcing team are responsible for the operation of the scheme of corporate governance, to ensure we give full effect to the principles of the framework.

Risk management

We have designed our risk management processes to:

- maintain a clear framework across the organisation within which risks are identified, assessed, managed and regularly reviewed
- assign specific responsibility for managing risks in their areas of responsibility to individual Executive Team members (including managing risks to significant projects)
- ensure that the likelihood and impact of risks are assessed on a consistent basis
- ensure that existing risks are regularly reviewed and that new risks are identified and managed
- provide the Chief Executive, the Audit and Risk Committee and the Board with assurance that the risks are being managed appropriately

We identify and evaluate risks by:

- taking all key decisions following consideration of risks and associated mitigations, which are separately identified in papers for the Board and those taking delegated decisions
- the Executive Team considering whether new risks should be added to the organisational risk register, and whether the existing risks' profiles need to be changed, as part of their quarterly review of risk
- the Executive Team completing a full and comprehensive review of risk at the start of each year, to ensure that the organisational risk register captures risk to the delivery of goals in our Corporate Plan
- presenting a full risk report to each meeting of the Audit and Risk Committee and also annually to the Board
- managers and staff identifying risks in their projects or areas of work
- identifying risk through our planning process, audit, review of operations and training activities

- assigning owners to risks who formally review their likelihood, potential impact and the mitigations in place each quarter and reviewed by the Audit & Risk Committee.

The strategic risks we monitored and managed in 2020/21 were:

Commission is ineffective in delivering all or part of its corporate plan

There are several potential causes of this risk including a pandemic impacting on the ability of the Commission to deliver its functions, however, this did not crystallise in 2020/21. The potential impacts of this risk occurring could be but are not limited to:

- Damage to reputation
- Breach of financial or other rules resulting in significant financial fines and/or other action
- Loss of support from the Speaker's Committee; financial or otherwise

The key mitigating activities undertaken were:

- Use of a planning and performance system to monitor and report progress against our corporate goals and objectives with plan within teams and by ET and Board
- Active and on-going engagement with governments and stakeholders on policy priorities
- Cyber Essential accreditation
- Detailed budgets linked to teams plans
- Active governance processes are in place supported by robust project management processes and reporting
- Information management and security policies in place and regularly reviewed

Part or all of an election poll is not well run

There are several potential causes of this risk including a pandemic impacting on the Commission's functions that support well run polls, however, this did not crystallise in 2020/21. The potential impacts of this risk occurring could be but are not limited to:

- Guidance produced by the Commission is misinterpreted
- Guidance is not delivered as quickly as stakeholders would like as a result of short notice electoral events
- Confidence in the Commission amongst electoral community is negatively affected
- Lack of trust in the running of elections and Commission suffers reputational damage
- Delays in the registration of new parties close to polls
- Information is not available to voters, campaigners or electoral administrators
- Commission staff are not able to give consistent and timely advice

The key mitigating activities undertaken were:

- Events Delivery Steering Group met regularly to review and monitor risks and issues related to May polls
- Worked closely with government officials to achieve clear timescales
- Robust approval arrangements in place for approving party registration applications
- Effective approach to supporting and challenging local authorities to deliver successful polls
- Undertook wide but targeted consultation on its core guidance
- Scenario planning to identify the impact on spending rules of different poll timings and combinations
- Robust back up and disaster recovery plans

Ineffective regulation of political finance rules

There are several potential causes of this risk including that the Commission fails, or is perceived to fail, to execute its regulatory function properly or effectively. The potential impacts of this risk occurring could be but are not limited to:

- Reduced public confidence in the funding and campaigning of political parties and non-party campaigners
- Commission is not seen as fair and transparent, or is perceived as biased
- Commission is seen as ineffective in relation to regulation of political finance
- Commission is unable to regulate effectively

The key mitigating activities undertaken were:

- Covid-19 messaging published to stakeholders
- Regulation and Legal teams are adequately resourced
- Regulatory Issues Group has oversight of key issues, trends and themes in campaigning
- Full reports in high impact cases explaining the investigation process and outcomes
- All procedures are documented in the Quality Management System
- Publication of individual case decisions

Commission fails to respond adequately to increased devolution

There are several potential causes of this risk including that the approaches taken by different legislatures and governments increasingly diverge. The potential impacts of this risk occurring could be but are not limited to:

- Commission accountable to Scottish Parliament and National Assembly for Wales directly for activity relating to their elections, but internal processes, structures and decision making do not fully and consistently reflect this
- Commission criticised for being 'out of touch', 'London-centric' or in some other way out of touch with devolution

- External confusion about where the Commission is accountable for

The key mitigating activities undertaken were:

- Project Board in place to oversee changes to accountability
- Briefings to UK Parliament, Scottish Parliament and Senedd on the changes
- Engagement with officials in respective parliaments and governments
- Executive Scheme of Delegation reflects role of Head of Electoral Commission in Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales

Operational risks reflect the strategic risks identified above and operational risk management contributes to mitigating those risks. Operational risks are managed day-to-day through established processes, line management and review, and through management reporting.

In particular, we use quality management and review processes to provide assurance that our regulatory activity complies with legal and other requirements, and to ensure we commence, conduct and conclude our investigations properly. These processes include separation between investigators and decision-makers. Legal advice and review is included in the process at all relevant stages in the process.

We have identified and campaigned for improvements to election and political finance law. However, it remains the case that in some areas the law is complex and unclear. As a result, and because our findings are often challenged by the parties concerned, our decisions are sometimes subject to legal challenge. When subject to legal challenge, we review cases and defend them where appropriate, engaging external legal advice, including counsel, as required. We review all cases as appropriate, after conclusion on legal challenges, to see what lessons we can learn.

The Covid-19 pandemic's primary impact on the Electoral Commission is that the Coronavirus Act 2020 postponed the scheduled May elections in England and Wales to May 2021. The impact on planned activity was significant in 2020/21, as the postponed polls will now happen alongside scheduled ones and in the context of continuing public health restrictions.

The management processes, risk reviews and mitigations put in place for 2020/21 have assured the Accounting Officer that we have maintained an appropriate risk management regime.

External audit

The Comptroller and Auditor General is the head of the National Audit Office and our external auditor, as set out under Schedule 1 of PPERA. The NAO did not provide any non-audit services in 2020/21.

The National Audit Office provides management letters, planning, update and completion reports as part of the statutory audit process that also informs the Accounting Officer of observations made.

Internal audit

Our internal auditors in 2020/21 were RSM UK.

RSM completed audits in accordance with their methodology, which aligns with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards. Their reports offer an independent opinion on the adequacy and effectiveness of our control systems. Our Audit and Risk Committee approved the agreed risk-based audit programme.

RSM completed one internal audit report, the Risk Maturity Review. The remaining four reports will continue into 2021-22, Budget Management and Monitoring (Inc. financial forecasting), Covid-19 Lessons Learned (incident response and disaster recovery), Quality Assurance and Regulation (financial investigation).

For the completed audit, the internal auditors provided a report that included their key findings, an indication of the level of assurance from their findings and recommendations for action to strengthen any control weaknesses. They did not classify any of the recommendations as 'high risk'. The Audit and Risk Committee monitors how we implement report recommendations. The Audit Opinion considered our governance, risk management and internal control arrangements as substantial in their overall adequacy and effectiveness.

Policy development grants

We provide policy development grants to qualifying political parties, as outlined at note 3 to the accounts. We maintain control over grant payments through a comprehensive claim and review process. All parties submitted expenditure returns resulting in payments of £1.888m with no issues identified.

Information governance

Our management of information risk is an ongoing process. We inform and measure our approach against the Lord Chancellor's Code of Practice on the management of records, the Cabinet Office's Security Policy Framework (SPF) and the ISO27001 Standard for Information Security.

The Audit and Risk Committee oversees our approach to managing information risk. Executive responsibility lies with the Director of Finance and Corporate Services in his role as Senior Information Risk Owner (SIRO).

Consistent with Cabinet Office guidelines, the Audit and Risk Committee and Chief Executive receive an annual report of information risk management from the SIRO.

For 2020/21, the report concluded that we manage information risk effectively. The report covered risk management, transparency, confidentiality of information, availability of information, integrity of information, incident management and procedures to ensure continuing awareness of responsibilities and risks.

The Audit and Risk Committee and Chief Executive considered and were satisfied with the SIRO assessment of the effectiveness of overall information risk management including assessment against relevant guidance and frameworks.

Personal data related incidents

In 2020/21, there were four personal data incidents, none of which were reportable to ICO. The majority of the incidents were due to human error such as including email addresses in the wrong fields. One incident relates to the management of records sent to offsite archive. This is an area of work that will be seeing significant focus over 2021/22 to improve controls and audit.

We have seen an increase in subject access requests for personal data and requests for erasure, as individuals become more aware of their rights.

Review of effectiveness

As Accounting Officer, I have responsibility for reviewing the effectiveness of the control environment. In completing this review, I consider:

- the work of managers who have responsibility for developing and maintaining the control framework
- the work of the internal auditors
- comments made by our external auditors in their reports to those charged with the governance of our organisation

The Audit and Risk Committee advises me on the effectiveness of my control systems. I am satisfied that the annual assessment of information risk, as received by the Audit and Risk Committee, highlighted no areas of undue concern. The Audit and Risk Committee confirmed the assessment of the effectiveness of overall information risk management, including assessment against relevant guidance and frameworks.

During 2020/21 the Board considered matters arising from an external review, this was overseen by two of the Commissioners; to consider and implement the agreed actions from the previous Board effectiveness review and internal audit on governance. The Board agreed that, as they were awaiting a new chair to defer a more complete review until after his arrival. The Audit and Risk Committee and The Remuneration Committee have both reviewed their effectiveness.

I am satisfied that no control weaknesses identified during the year were sufficient to introduce significant risks to our policies, aims and objectives, or material errors in our financial statements. I am also satisfied that the weaknesses that were identified have been, or are being, addressed through appropriate action.

The review of effectiveness includes consideration of our whistleblowing policy. This provides employees and workers with alternative routes to disclose malpractice, illegal acts or concerns about wrong doings. There were no instances of whistleblowing during 2020/21 and I am satisfied sufficient controls are in place.

Remuneration and staff report

Chair and Commissioners remuneration

Commissioners are appointed by Royal Warrant to exercise their functions as described in PPERA. Following the departure of Sir John Holmes on 31 December 2020, Rob Vincent stepped in as to serve as interim Chair of Commissioners pending the appointment of a permanent successor.

The House of Commons has resolved that fees for the Commissioners shall increase on 1 April each year, by the percentage increase paid for High Court judges. In accordance with this arrangement, fees increased by 1% from April 2020.

The Chair's salary and Commissioners' fees are paid out of the Consolidated Fund, as may be specified in a resolution of the House of Commons. The fee for each day worked in the period 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021 was £398 (2019/20: £390).

Commissioners are paid in arrears based on the actual days worked and on submission of claims from the Commissioners. The table below presents the fee payments each Commissioner received on a cash-basis to match the funding from the Consolidated Fund during the 2020-21 financial year. The salary for the Chair of the Commissioners is also included. The House of Commons provides for Commissioner pensions in a resolution.

Salary and fee payments to Commissioners in 2020/21 (Subject to audit)

Name	2020/21 £	2019/20 £
Sir John Holmes (Chair)	60,376	80,523
Dame Susan Bruce ¹⁰	1,674	12,975
Anna Carragher	6,069	12,319
Sarah Chambers	5,567	9,399
Professor Elan Closs Stephens DBE	11,675	17,337
Lord Horam of Grimsargh	0	32
David Howarth	0	20
Alasdair Morgan	7,154	10,016

¹⁰ Fees paid for Dame Susan Bruce for 2020/21 were paid in April 2021 and therefore not shown in the above table these will form part of the 2021-22 accounts

Name	2020/21 £	2019/20 £
Bridget Prentice	0	40
Alastair Ross	0	9,267
Joan Walley	13,124	8,880
Rob Vincent CBE	7,943	9,906
Lord (Stephen) Gilbert	4,553	7,923

All figures shown above are inclusive of Employers' National Insurance.

The remuneration for the independent advisor to the audit and risk committee, as set by the Remuneration and Human Resources Committee, is the same as the daily rate for Commissioners. Paul Redfern received £1,395 for his role in respect of 2020-21 (£690 for 2019-20). Reasonable travel and subsistence expenses actually incurred are paid in accordance with our travel and subsistence policy. No pension arrangements are in force for this role.

Business expenses: travel and accommodation (Subject to audit)

Name	2020/21 £	2019/20 £
Sir John Holmes (Chair)	0	384
Dame Susan Bruce	415	581
Anna Carragher	707	1,779
Sarah Chambers	0	25
Professor Elan Closs Stephens DBE	273	0
Lord Horam of Grimsargh	0	0
David Howarth	0	0
Alasdair Morgan	1,003	2,531
Bridget Prentice	0	0
Rob Vincent CBE	179	684
Joan Walley	350	1,424
Alastair Ross	154	1,540

Lord (Stephen) Gilbert

0

0

Reimbursed business expenses are non-taxable and do not form part of any benefits in kind payment.

Chief Executive and Executive Team remuneration

The Remuneration and Human Resources Committee is responsible for advising the Board on the remuneration of the Chief Executive and agreeing the annual negotiating remit for staff pay awards (including the Executive Team). Details of the Committee’s responsibilities and membership are in the governance report.

We are not part of the Civil Service and therefore not bound by the Civil Service pay guidance. However, Schedule 1 of PPERA requires that we shall have regard to the desirability of keeping staff terms and conditions of employment broadly in line with those of the Civil Service. The Remuneration and Human Resources Committee also takes account of wider economic considerations and the affordability of their recommendations.

Chief Executive and director remuneration is funded through the Supply Estimate and accounted for in the resource accounts.

The people covered by this report hold appointments which are open-ended (except for the Chief Executive), although staff have the option to retire and draw pension from the age of 60 or 65 dependent on their particular pension scheme rules. Early termination with qualifying service, other than for misconduct, would normally result in the individual receiving compensation as set out in the Civil Service Compensation Scheme.

Remuneration (including salary, benefits in kind and pensions)

Single total figure or remuneration (Subject to audit)

Directors	Salary £'000		Pension benefits ¹¹ (to nearest £1000)		Total £000	
	2020/21	2019/20	2020/21	2019/20	2020/21	2019/20
Bob Posner ¹² Chief Executive	160-165	135-140	45	147	205-210	285-290

¹¹ The value of pension benefits accrued during the year is calculated as (the real increase in pension multiplied by 20) plus (the real increase in any lump sum) less (the contributions made by the individual). The real increases exclude increases due to inflation or any increase or decreases due to a transfer of pension rights.

¹² From April 2020 the Chief Executive received a retention allowance of £21,109 included in his remuneration package. This was provided on the basis of pay grading and benchmarking undertaken by independent consultants and approved by the Remuneration and Human Resources Committee

Kieran Rix Director of Finance and Corporate Services	100-105	100-105	47	41	150-155	140-145
Ailsa Irvine Director of Electoral Administration and Guidance	100-105	100-105	46	41	150-155	140-145
Craig Westwood Director of Communication, Policy and Research	100-105	100-105	41	40	145-150	140-145
Louise Edwards Director of Regulation	100-105	100-105	42	53	145-150	155-160

Salary

Salary includes gross salary, overtime, London weighting or London allowances, recruitment and retention allowances, and any other allowance to the extent that it is subject to UK taxation. This report is based on accrued payments made by the Electoral Commission and thus recorded in these accounts.

Benefits in kind

The monetary value of benefits in kind covers any benefits provided by the Commission and treated by HM Revenue and Customs as a taxable emolument. Executive Team members' benefits in kind include Benenden Healthcare membership, for which we also make a payment to HMRC. The value of these benefits for each Executive Team member for 2020/21 was £138 (2019/20 was £138). All staff receive these benefits.

Instant thank you rewards

The Electoral Commission no longer pays bonuses based on a performance appraisal process. Instead, since 2020-21 employees below Executive Team level are eligible to be nominated for an 'instant thank you' reward of between £25 and £500. In 2019-20 members of the executive team each received a bonus of £250.

Civil Service Pensions

Pension benefits are provided through the Civil Service pension arrangements. From 1 April 2015 a new pension scheme for civil servants was introduced – the Civil Servants and Others Pension Scheme or alpha, which provides benefits on a career average basis

with a normal pension age equal to the member's State Pension Age (or 65 if higher). From that date all newly appointed civil servants and the majority of those already in service joined alpha. Prior to that date, civil servants participated in the Principal Civil Service Pension Scheme (PCSPS). The PCSPS has four sections: three providing benefits on a final salary basis (classic, premium or classic plus) with a normal pension age of 60; and one providing benefits on a whole career basis (nuvos) with a normal pension age of 65.

These statutory arrangements are unfunded with the cost of benefits met by monies voted by Parliament each year. Pensions payable under classic, premium, classic plus, nuvos, and alpha are increased annually in line with Pensions Increase legislation. Existing members of the PCSPS who were within 10 years of their normal pension age on 1 April 2012 remained in the PCSPS after 1 April 2015. Those who were between 10 years and 13 years and five months from their normal pension age on 1 April 2012 will switch into alpha sometime between 1 June 2015 and 1 February 2022. All members who switch to alpha have their PCSPS benefits 'banked', with those with earlier benefits in one of the final salary sections of the PCSPS having those benefits based on their final salary when they leave alpha. (The pension figures quoted for officials show pension earned in PCSPS or alpha – as appropriate. Where the official has benefits in both the PCSPS and alpha the figure quoted is the combined value of their benefits in the two schemes.) Members joining from October 2002 may opt for either the appropriate defined benefit arrangement or a 'money purchase' stakeholder pension with an employer contribution (partnership pension account).

Employee contributions are salary-related and range between 4.6% and 8.05% for members of classic, premium, classic plus, nuvos, and alpha. Benefits in classic accrue at the rate of 1/80th of final pensionable earnings for each year of service. In addition, a lump sum equivalent to three years initial pension is payable on retirement. For premium, benefits accrue at the rate of 1/60th of final pensionable earnings for each year of service. Unlike classic, there is no automatic lump sum. Classic plus is essentially a hybrid with benefits for service before 1 October 2002 calculated broadly as per classic and benefits for service from October 2002 worked out as in premium. In nuvos a member builds up a pension based on their pensionable earnings during their period of scheme membership. At the end of the scheme year (31 March) the member's earned pension account is credited with 2.3% of their pensionable earnings in that scheme year and the accrued pension is uprated in line with Pensions Increase legislation. Benefits in alpha build up in a similar way to nuvos, except that the accrual rate is 2.32%. In all cases members may opt to give up (commute) pension for a lump sum up to the limits set by the Finance Act 2004.

The partnership pension account is a stakeholder pension arrangement. The employer makes a basic contribution of between 8% and 14.75% (depending on the age of the member) into a stakeholder pension product chosen by the employee from the appointed provider - Legal and General. The employee does not have to contribute, but where they do make contributions, the employer will match these up to a limit of 3% of pensionable salary (in addition to the employer's basic contribution). Employers also contribute a further 0.5% of pensionable salary to cover the cost of centrally-provided risk benefit cover (death in service and ill health retirement £21,486).

The accrued pension quoted is the pension the member is entitled to receive when they reach pension age, or immediately on ceasing to be an active member of the scheme if they are already at or over pension age. Pension age is 60 for members of classic, premium and classic plus, 65 for members of nuvos, and the higher of 65 or State Pension Age for members of alpha. (The pension figures quoted for officials show pension earned in PCSPS or alpha – as appropriate. Where the official has benefits in both the PCSPS and alpha the figure quoted is the combined value of their benefits in the two schemes, but note that part of that pension may be payable from different ages).

Cash Equivalent Transfer Values (CETV)

A Cash Equivalent Transfer Value (CETV) is the actuarially assessed capitalised value of the pension scheme benefits accrued by a member at a particular point in time. The benefits valued are the member's accrued benefits and any contingent spouse's pension payable from the scheme. A CETV is a payment made by a pension scheme or arrangement to secure pension benefits in another pension scheme or arrangement when the member leaves a scheme and chooses to transfer the benefits accrued in their former scheme. The pension figures shown relate to the benefits that the individual has accrued as a consequence of their total membership of the pension scheme, not just their service in a senior capacity to which disclosure applies.

The figures include the value of any pension benefit in another scheme or arrangement which the member has transferred to the Civil Service pension arrangements. They also include any additional pension benefit accrued to the member as a result of their buying additional pension benefits at their own cost. CETVs are worked out in accordance with The Occupational Pension Schemes (Transfer Values) (Amendment) Regulations 2008 and do not take account of any actual or potential reduction to benefits resulting from Lifetime Allowance Tax which may be due when pension benefits are taken.

The real increase in the value of the CETV

This reflects the increase in CETV that is funded by the employer. It does not include the increase in accrued pension due to inflation, contributions paid by the employee (including the value of any benefits transferred from another pension scheme or arrangement) and uses common market valuation factors for the start and end of the period.

For 2020/21, employer's contributions of £1,952,616 were payable to the Schemes (2019/20; £1,641,743) at one of four rates in the range 26.6% to 30.3% (2019/20; 26.6% and 34.1%) of pensionable pay, based on salary bands. The Scheme's Actuary reviews employer contributions every four years following a full scheme valuation. The contribution rates reflect benefits as they accrue, not the costs as they are actually incurred, and reflect past experience of the scheme.

Employees can opt to open a partnership pension account, a stakeholder pension with an employer contribution. Employers' contributions of £28,785 (2019/20; £30,052) were paid to an appointed stakeholder pension provider. Employer contributions are age-related and range from 8% to 14.75% of pensionable pay. Employers also match employee contributions up to 3% of pensionable pay. In addition, employer contributions of £865.87 being 0.5% of pensionable pay, were payable to the PCSPS to cover the cost of the future

provision of lump sum benefits on death in service and ill health retirement of these employees.

Contributions due to the partnership pension providers at the Statement of Financial Position date was nil. Contributions prepaid at that date were nil.

We did not pay any pension contributions to Commissioners during the period. However, we are required to pay pensions to certain former Commissioners of the Local Government Commission for England (LGCE). The total provision for these costs have reduced to £161k at 31 March 2021 (£167k at 31 March 2020).

Pension information for directors (£000) (Subject to audit)

Directors	Accrued pension at pension age as at 31/3/21 and related lump sum	Real increase in pension and related lump sum at pension age	CETV at 31/3/21	CETV at 31/3/20	Real increase in CETV
Bob Posner Chief Executive	30-35	2.5 - 5	669	625	46
Kieran Rix Director of Finance and Corporate Services	30-35	2.5 - 5	472	425	27
Ailsa Irvine Director of Electoral Administration and Guidance	30-35	2.5 - 5	387	351	19
Craig Westwood Director of Communication, Policy and Research	10-15	0 – 2.5	119	90	18
Louise Edwards Director of Regulation	15-20	0 – 2.5	160	132	16

Notes

- There was no employer contribution to partnership pensions. CETV is the Cash Equivalent Transfer Value
- The accrued pension quoted in the table above is the pension the member is entitled to receive when he or she reaches 60 for 'Classic', 'Classic Plus' and 'Premium'

pension schemes, 65 for the 'Nuvos' pension scheme, and at state pension age (or 65 if later) for the 'Alpha' pension scheme

Compensation on early retirement or for loss of office

There was no payments made during 2020/21 for early retirement or for loss of office (2019/20 £0).

Payments to past directors

During 2020/21, no payments were made to any person who was not a director at the time the payment was made, but who had been a Director previously.

Fair pay disclosure (to nearest £1000) (Subject to audit)

Reporting bodies are required to disclose the relationship between the remuneration of the highest-paid director in their organisation and the median remuneration of the organisation's workforce.

	2020/21	2019/20
Highest paid Director	160-165	135-140
Median remuneration (all other staff)	41	39
Ratio	4	3.5

The banded remuneration of the highest-paid director in The Electoral Commission in the financial year 2020/21 was £160k-165k (2019/20, £135k-140k). This was 4 times the median remuneration of the workforce, which was £41k (2019/20, £39k).

In 2020/21, no employee received remuneration in excess of that of the highest-paid director. Remuneration rates for staff other than the highest paid director (based on full-time equivalent rates) ranged from £24,400 to £104,600 (2019/20: £23,900 to £102,500).

Total remuneration includes salary, non-consolidated performance-related pay and benefits-in-kind. It does not include severance payments, employer pension contributions and the cash equivalent transfer value of pensions.

The remuneration of the highest paid Director increased by 2% with effect from 1 April 2020, which was consistent with all staff salary increases, the remuneration report shows highest paid director information.

Staff report

Staff composition

The number of directors employed during the period was five (three of whom were male and two female).

The number of Commissioners and staff in post and appointed during the year was as follows:

	Female	Male	Totals
Chair and Board	5	5	10
Directors/Heads (permanent staff)	12	11	23
Directors/Heads (temporary/fixed term staff)	2	1	3
Other staff (permanent)	86	51	137
Other staff (temporary/fixed term)	7	6	13
Contract/Agency	12	12	24
Total	124	86	210

Staff costs (to nearest £000) (Subject to audit)

	Permanently employed staff	Others	2020/21 Total	2019/20 Total
Wages and salaries	7,567	313	7,880	7,067
Social security costs	861		861	718
Other pension costs	1,953		1,953	1,645
Sub total	10,381	313	10,694	9,430
Less recoveries in respect of outward secondments				0
Voluntary Exit Costs provision				0
Total net costs	10,381	313	10,694	9,430

Average number of persons employed (Subject to audit)

During 2020/21, the average number of full-time equivalent persons (FTE) employed was 147 (2019/20: 141). In addition, there was an average of 16 FTE (2019/20: 12) temporary staff covering established posts or staff working on projects outside the establishment.

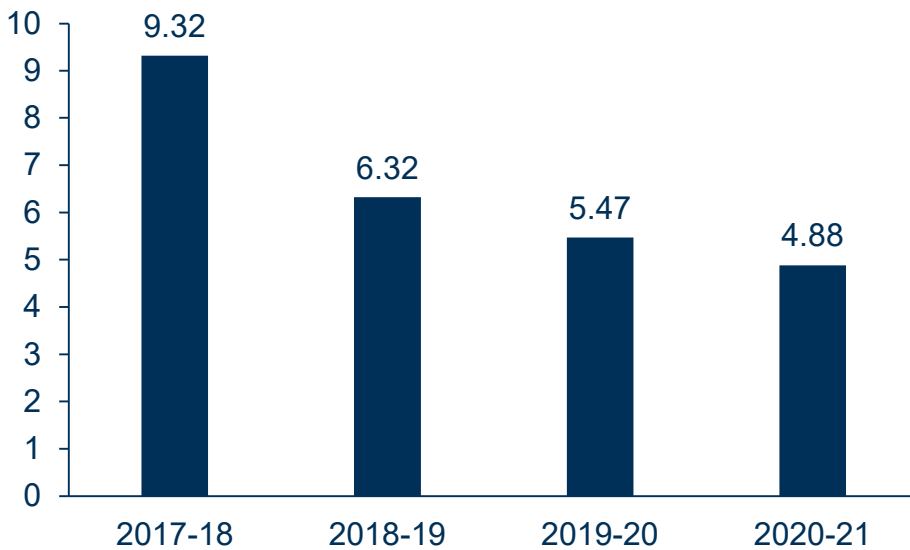
	2020/21	2019/20
Full time equivalent - Permanently employed staff	147	141
Temporary staff	16	12
Total	163	153

Sickness absence

In 2020/21, the average number of day's sickness absence was 4.88 per person compared to 5.35 per employee in the previous year. This shows a decrease in absences compared to previous years.

The human resources function will continue to focus on supporting managers in the management of both short and long-term absence in 2021/22, including ensuring all staff have an effective return to work discussion with their line manager upon return, and effective monitoring and support during long-term absence. We are committed to the health and wellbeing of all staff and promote a balanced life style, including a corporate membership with Benenden Healthcare. There is a comprehensive sickness absence policy and guidance for managers on dealing with staff absence. During 2020/21 we have prioritised the wellbeing of our employees in order to support them through the pandemic.

Average sickness absence rate per employee



Staff policies

We applied staff policies consistently during the year when we considered applications for employment and recruiting staff. We ask all applicants to provide equality monitoring data, which is withheld from the panel, and we therefore shortlist candidates based on their skills and experience relevant to the role.

Staff who declare a disability, or become disabled in line with the definition of the Equality Act 2010, are given the opportunity to request reasonable adjustments should they be required. Occupational Health may be consulted to make recommendations and health and safety risk assessments are carried out. Flexible working will also be considered as part of reasonable adjustments. Training is provided, as required, to all staff in the required format.

Expenditure on consultancy

Expenditure on consultancy is £425k for 2020/21 (2019/20: £158k). The increase was due to the refurbishment works completed at our London office.

Off-payroll engagements

There were 3 off-payroll engagements during the financial year 2020/21 (2019/20: 0). These were for short-term specialist roles within the Commission. All roles were paid over £245 per day.

Temporary off-payroll worker engagements as at 31 March 2021.

No. of existing engagements as of 31 March 2021	3
Of which...	
No. that have existed for less than one year at time of reporting.	3
No. that have existed for between one and two years at time of reporting.	0
No. that have existed for between two and three years at time of reporting.	0
No. that have existed for between three and four years at time of reporting.	0
No. that have existed for four or more years at time of reporting.	0

All temporary off-payroll workers engaged at any point during the year ended 31 March 2021.

No. of off-payroll workers engaged during the year ended 31 March 2021	3
--	---

Of which...

No. determined as in-scope of IR35	0
------------------------------------	---

No. determined as out-of-scope of IR35	3
--	---

No. of engagements reassessed for compliance or assurance purposes during the year	3
--	---

Of which...

No. of engagements that saw a change to IR35 status following review	0
--	---

No. of engagements where the status was disputed under provisions in the off-payroll legislation	0
--	---

Of which...

No. of engagements that saw a change to IR35 status following review.	0
---	---

In line with the current Declaration of Interests policy for special advisers, all special advisers have declared any relevant interests or confirmed they do not consider they have any relevant interests. The Accounting Officer has considered these returns and there are no relevant interests to be published.

All off-payroll workers are assessed HMRC's "Check Employment Status for Tax" before any contract is authorised.

Exit packages (Subject to audit)

There was one exit package agreed during the financial year 2020/21 of £66k (2019/20 £0). Redundancy and other departure costs are paid in accordance with the provisions of the Civil Service Compensation Scheme, a statutory scheme made under the Superannuation Act 1972, or by negotiation of settlement agreements.

	2020/21			2019/20		
Exit package cost band	Number of compulsory redundancies	Number of other departures agreed	Total number of exit packages by cost band (total cost)	Number of compulsory redundancies	Number of other departures agreed	Total number of exit packages by cost band (total cost)
<£10,000	0	0	0	0	0	0
£10,000 - £25,000	0	0	0	0	0	0
£25,000 - £50,000	0	0	0	0	0	0
£50,000 - £100,000	1	0	0	0	0	0
£300,000-£350,000	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total number of exit packages	1	0	1	0	0	0
Total resource cost - £000	66	0	66	0	0	0

Redundancy and other departure costs have been paid in accordance with the provisions of the Civil Service Compensation Scheme (CSCS), a statutory scheme made under the Superannuation Act 1972. The table above shows the total cost of exit packages agreed and accounted for in 2020/21 (2019/20 comparative figures are also given). £66,017 exit costs were paid in 2020/21, the year of departure (2019/20: nil). Where the department has agreed early retirements, the additional costs are met by the department and not by the Civil Service pension scheme. Ill-health retirement costs are met by the pension scheme and are not included in the table.

There were no ill-health retirements in 2020/21 (2019/20 nil). Ill health retirement costs are met by the pension scheme.

Parliamentary accountability and audit report

Statement of Outturn against Parliamentary Supply (SOPS)

In addition to the primary statements prepared under IFRS, the Government Financial Reporting Manual (FReM) requires the Electoral Commission to prepare a Statement of Outturn against Parliamentary Supply (SOPS) and supporting notes.

The SOPS and related notes are subject to audit, as detailed in the Certificate and Report of the Comptroller and Auditor General to the House of Commons. The SOPS is a key accountability statement that shows, in detail, how an entity has spent against their Supply Estimate. Supply is the monetary provision (for resource and capital purposes) and cash (drawn primarily from the Consolidated fund), that Parliament gives statutory authority for entities to utilise. The Estimate details supply and is voted on by Parliament at the start of the financial year.

Should an entity exceed the limits set by their Supply Estimate, called control limits, their accounts will receive a qualified opinion.

The format of the SOPS mirrors the Supply Estimates, published on gov.uk, to enable comparability between what Parliament approves and the final outturn.

The SOPS contain a summary table, detailing performance against the control limits that Parliament have voted on, cash spent (budgets are compiled on an accruals basis and so outturn won't exactly tie to cash spent) and administration.

The supporting notes detail the following: Outturn by Estimate line, providing a more detailed breakdown (note 1); a reconciliation of outturn to net operating expenditure in the SOCNE, to tie the SOPS to the financial statements (note 2); a reconciliation of outturn to net cash requirement (note 3); and, an analysis of income payable to the Consolidated Fund (note 4).

The SOPS and Estimates are compiled against the budgeting framework, which is similar to, but different to, IFRS. An understanding of the budgeting framework and an explanation of key terms is provided in the financial review section of the performance report. Further information on the Public Spending Framework and the reasons why budgeting rules are different to IFRS can also be found in chapter 1 of the Consolidated Budgeting Guidance, available on gov.uk.

The SOPS provides a detailed view of financial performance, in a form that is voted on and recognised by Parliament. The financial review, in the Performance Report, provides a summarised discussion of outturn against estimate and functions as an introduction to the SOPS disclosures.

Summary financial tables

Summary table 2020/21

All figures presented in £000s

Type of Spend	SoPS note	Outturn			Estimate			Outturn Vs Estimate, savings/ (excess)		Prior year outturn Total 2019-20
		Voted	Non-Voted	Total	Voted	Non-Voted	Total	Voted	Total	
		Departmental Expenditure Limit								
Resource	1.1	19,081	120	19,201	20,289	200	20,489	1,208	1,288	19,273
- Capital	1.2	1,257	0	1,257	1,536	0	1,536	279	279	879
Total		20,338	120	20,458	21,825	200	22,025	1,487	1,567	20,152
Annually Managed Expenditure										
- Resource	1.1	89	0	89	250	0	250	161	161	(15)
Total		89	0	89	250	0	250	161	161	(15)
Total Budget										
- Resource	1.1	19,170	120	19,290	20,539	200	20,739	1,369	1,449	19,258
- Capital	1.2	1,257	0	1,257	1,536	0	1,536	279	279	879
Total Budget Expenditure		20,427	120	20,547	22,075	200	22,275	1,648	1,728	20,137

Figures in the areas outlined in thick line cover the voted control limits voted by Parliament. Refer to the Supply Estimates guidance manual available on gov.uk, for the details on the control limits voted by Parliament.

Our estimate values are driven by the election activity throughout the year and therefore vary year-on-year. Note 2 of the accounts shows an analysis of costs for our key deliverables.

Net Cash Requirement 2020/21

All figures presented in £000s

Item	SoPS note	Outturn	Estimate	Outturn VS Estimate, saving/ (excess)	Prior Year Outturn total, 2019/20
Net Cash Requirement	3	20,323	21,519	1,196	20,191

Explanations of variances between estimate and outturn are in the performance report. The notes below form part of these accounts.

Notes to the Statement of Outturn against Parliamentary Supply 2020/21 (£000s)

SoPS 1. Outturn detail, by Estimate Line

SoPS1.1 Analysis of resource outturn by Estimate line

Type of Spend [Resource]	Resource Outturn Programme			Estimate	Outturn vs Estimate, saving/(excess)	Prior year outturn Total 2019/20
	Gross	Income	Net Total	Net Total		
Spending in Departmental Expenditure Limit [DEL]						
Voted expenditure:						
A. Core expenditure	19,279	(198)	19,081	20,289	1,208	19,094
Non-voted expenditure						
B. Commissioners fees	120	0	120	200	80	179
Total spending in DEL	19,399	(198)	19,201	20,489	1,288	19,273
Voted expenditure:						
C. Provisions created or utilised in the year	89	0	89	250	161	(15)
Total spending in AME	89	0	89	250	161	(15)
Total resource	19,488	(198)	19,290	20,739	1,449	19,258

SoPS 1.2 Analysis of net capital outturn by Estimate Line

Type of Spend [Capital]	Outturn			Estimate	Outturn vs Estimate, saving/(excess)	Prior year outturn Total 2019/20
	Gross	Income	Net Total	Net Total		
Spending in Departmental Expenditure Limit [DEL]						
Voted:						
A. Core expenditure	1,257	0	1,257	1,536	279	879
Total spending in DEL	1,257	0	1,257	1,536	279	879
Total capital	1,257	0	1,257	1,536	279	879

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SoPS 2. Reconciliation of outturn to net operating expenditure

Item	Reference	Outturn total	Prior year outturn Total, 2019/20
Total Resource outturn	SOPS 1.1	19,290	19,258
Less: Income payable to the Consolidated Fund	SOPS 4	(101)	(66)
Net Operating Expenditure in Comprehensive Net Expenditure	SOCNE	19,189	19,192

SoPS 3. Reconciliation of net resource outturn to net cash requirement

Item	Reference	Outturn total	Estimate	Outturn vs Estimate, savings/ (excess)
Total Resource outturn	SOPS 1.1	19,290	20,739	1,449
Total Capital outturn	SOPS 1.2	1,257	1,536	279
<i>Adjustments to remove non-cash items:</i>				
Depreciation/amortisation	3	(373)	(412)	(39)
Auditors' remuneration and expenses	3	(45)	(44)	1
New provisions and adjustments to previous periods	3	(98)	(250)	(152)
Other non-cash items	3	0	0	0
<i>Adjustments to reflect movements in working balances:</i>				
Increase/(decrease) in receivables	10	341	0	(341)
(Increase)/decrease in payables	11	57	0	(57)
Use of provision	12	14	150	136
Total		20,443	21,719	1,276
Removal of non-voted budget items:				
Consolidated Fund Standing Services	SOPS 1.1	(120)	(200)	(80)
Total		(120)	(200)	(80)
Net cash requirement		20,323	21,519	1,196

We compile outturn and the Estimates against the budgeting framework, not on a cash basis. Therefore, this reconciliation bridges the resource and capital outturn to the net cash requirement.

SoPS 4. Amounts of income to the Consolidated Fund

SoPS 4.1 Analysis of income payable to the Consolidated Fund

In addition to the income retained by The Electoral Commission, the following income is payable to the Consolidated Fund (cash receipts being shown in italics).

Item	Outturn total		Prior year 2019/20	
	Accruals	<i>Cash basis</i>	Accruals	<i>Cash basis</i>
Income outside the ambit of the Estimate	0	<i>0</i>	0	<i>0</i>
Excess income surrendered to Consolidated Fund	101	<i>101</i>	66	<i>66</i>
Total amount payable to the Consolidated Fund	101	<i>101</i>	66	<i>66</i>

Excess income from 2019/20, £66k, was surrendered to the Consolidated Fund during 2020/21. The excess income, £101,707, collected during 2020/21 will be surrendered during 2021/22.

SoPS4.2 Consolidated Fund Income

Consolidated Fund income shown in SoPS4.1 does not include any amounts collected by the Commission where it was acting as agent for the Consolidated Fund rather than as principal. The amounts collected as agent for the Consolidated Fund (which are otherwise excluded from the SoPS4.2 statements) were:

Item	Outturn total	Prior year Outturn Total 2019/20
Taxes and licence fees	0	0
Fines and penalties	41	219
Other income	0	0
Less:		
Costs of collection – where deductible	0	0
Uncollectible debts	0	0
<hr/>		
Amount payable to the Consolidated Fund	41	219
<hr/>		
Balance held at the start of the year	28	33
Payments into the Consolidated Fund	(69)	(224)
<hr/>		
Balance held on trust at the end of year	0	28

Notes

The fines and penalties due for 2020/21 was £69,460. All receipts for fines and penalties received by 31 March 2021 were surrendered to the Consolidated Fund, as required by law.

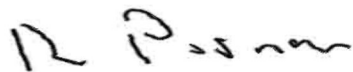
Parliamentary Accountability Disclosures

Losses and special payments (subject to audit)

There were no reportable losses or special payments which require disclosure for the Electoral Commission for 2020/21 (2019/20 £0).

Remote contingent liabilities (subject to audit)

There are no remote contingent liabilities to report for 2020/21.



Bob Posner
Chief Executive and Accounting Officer
28 June 2021

The Certificate and Report of the Comptroller and Auditor General to the Houses of Parliament

Opinion on financial statements

I certify that I have audited the financial statements of the Electoral Commission for the year ended 31 March 2021 under the Political Parties, Elections, and Referendums Act 2000. The financial statements comprise: the Statements of Comprehensive Net Expenditure, Financial Position, Cash Flows, Changes in Taxpayers' Equity; and the related notes, including the significant accounting policies. These financial statements have been prepared under the accounting policies set out within them. The financial reporting framework that has been applied in their preparation is applicable law and International Accounting Standards as interpreted by HM Treasury's Government Financial Reporting Manual.

I have also audited the Statement of Parliamentary Supply and the related notes, and the information in the Accountability Report that is described in that report as having been audited.

In my opinion, the financial statements:

- give a true and fair view of the state of the Electoral Commission's affairs as at 31 March 2021 and of the Electoral Commission's net operating expenditure for the year then ended; and
- have been properly prepared in accordance with the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 and HM Treasury directions issued thereunder.

Opinion on regularity

In my opinion, in all material respects:

- the Statement of Parliamentary Supply properly presents the outturn against voted Parliamentary control totals for the year ended 31 March 2021 and shows that those totals have not been exceeded; and
- the income and expenditure recorded in the financial statements have been applied to the purposes intended by Parliament and the financial transactions recorded in the financial statements conform to the authorities which govern them.

Basis for opinions

I conducted my audit in accordance with International Standards on Auditing (ISAs) (UK), applicable law and Practice Note 10 'Audit of Financial Statements of Public Sector Entities in the United Kingdom'. My responsibilities under those standards are further described in the Auditor's responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements section of my certificate.

Those standards require me and my staff to comply with the Financial Reporting Council's Revised Ethical Standard 2019. I have also elected to apply the ethical standards relevant to listed entities. I am independent of the Electoral Commission in accordance with the ethical requirements that are relevant to my audit of the financial statements in the UK. My staff and I have fulfilled our other ethical responsibilities in accordance with these requirements.

I believe that the audit evidence I have obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for my opinion.

Conclusions relating to going concern

In auditing the financial statements, I have concluded that the Electoral Commission's use of the going concern basis of accounting in the preparation of the financial statements is appropriate.

Based on the work I have performed, I have not identified any material uncertainties relating to events or conditions that, individually or collectively, may cast significant doubt on the Electoral Commission's ability to continue as a going concern for a period of at least twelve months from when the financial statements are authorised for issue.

My responsibilities and the responsibilities of the Accounting Officer with respect to going concern are described in the relevant sections of this certificate.

The going concern basis of accounting for the Electoral Commission is adopted in consideration of the requirements set out in HM Treasury's Government Reporting Manual, which require entities to adopt the going concern basis of accounting in the preparation of the financial statements where it anticipated that the services which they provide will continue into the future.

Other Information

The other information comprises information included in the Annual Report, but does not include the parts of the Accountability report described in that report as having been audited, the financial statements and my auditor's certificate thereon. The Accounting Officer is responsible for the other information. My opinion on the financial statements does not cover the other information and except to the extent otherwise explicitly stated in my certificate, I do not express any form of assurance conclusion thereon. In connection with my audit of the financial statements, my responsibility is to read the other information and, in doing so, consider whether the other information is materially inconsistent with the financial statements or my knowledge obtained in the audit or otherwise appears to be materially misstated. If I identify such material inconsistencies or apparent material misstatements, I am required to determine whether this gives rise to a material misstatement in the financial statements themselves. If, based on the work I have performed, I conclude that there is a material misstatement of this other information, I am required to report that fact.

I have nothing to report in this regard.

Opinion on other matters

In my opinion, based on the work undertaken in the course of the audit:

- the parts of the Accountability report to be audited have been properly prepared in accordance with HM Treasury directions made under the Political Parties, Elections, and Referendums Act 2000; and
- the information given in the Performance and Accountability reports for the financial year for which the financial statements are prepared is consistent with the financial statements.

Matters on which I report by exception

In the light of the knowledge and understanding of the Electoral Commission and its environment obtained in the course of the audit, I have not identified material misstatements in the Performance and Accountability reports. I have nothing to report in respect of the following matters which I report to you if, in my opinion:

- adequate accounting records have not been kept or returns adequate for my audit have not been received from branches not visited by my staff; or
- the financial statements and the parts of the Accountability Report to be audited are not in agreement with the accounting records and returns; or
- certain disclosures of remuneration specified by HM Treasury's Government Financial Report Manual are not made; or
- I have not received all of the information and explanations I require for my audit; or
- the Governance statement does not reflect compliance with HM Treasury's guidance.

Responsibilities of the Accounting Officer for the financial statements

As explained more fully in the Statement of Accounting Officer's responsibilities, the Accounting Officer is responsible for:

- the preparation of the financial statements in accordance with the applicable financial reporting framework and for being satisfied that they give a true and fair view;
- internal controls as the Accounting Officer determines is necessary to enable the preparation of financial statement to be free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error; and
- assessing the Electoral Commission's ability to continue as a going concern, disclosing, as applicable, matters related to going concern and using the going concern basis of accounting unless the Accounting Officer anticipates that the services provided by Electoral Commission will not continue to be provided in the future.

Auditor's responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements

My responsibility is to audit, certify and report on the financial statements in accordance with the Political Parties, Elections, and Referendums Act 2000.

My objectives are to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the financial statements as a whole are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error, and to issue a certificate that includes my opinion. Reasonable assurance is a high level of assurance but is not a guarantee that an audit conducted in accordance with ISAs (UK) will always detect a material misstatement when it exists. Misstatements can arise from fraud or error and are considered material if, individually or in the aggregate, they could reasonably be expected to influence the economic decisions of users taken on the basis of these financial statements.

I design procedures in line with my responsibilities, outlined above, to detect material misstatements in respect of non-compliance with laws and regulation, including fraud.

My procedures included the following:

- Inquiring of management, the Electoral Commission's head of internal audit and those charged with governance, including obtaining and reviewing supporting documentation relating to the Electoral Commission's policies and procedures relating to:
 - identifying, evaluating and complying with laws and regulations and whether they were aware of any instances of non-compliance;
 - detecting and responding to the risks of fraud and whether they have knowledge of any actual, suspected or alleged fraud; and
 - the internal controls established to mitigate risks related to fraud or non-compliance with laws and regulations including the Electoral Commission's controls relating to the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000, Scottish Elections (Reform) Act 2020, Senedd and Elections (Wales) Act 2020, Supply and Appropriation (Main Estimates) Act 2020, and Managing Public Money.
- discussing among the engagement team regarding how and where fraud might occur in the financial statements and any potential indicators of fraud. As part of this discussion, I identified potential for fraud in the following areas: revenue recognition, posting of unusual journals and bias in estimates; and
- obtaining an understanding of Electoral Commission's framework of authority as well as other legal and regulatory frameworks that the Electoral Commission operates in, focusing on those laws and regulations that had a direct effect on the financial statements or that had a fundamental effect on the operations of the Electoral Commission. The key laws and regulations I considered in this context included Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000, Scottish Elections (Reform) Act 2020, Senedd and Elections (Wales) Act 2020, Supply and Appropriation (Main Estimates) Act 2020, Managing Public Money, Employment Law, and tax legislation.

In addition to the above, my procedures to respond to identified risks included the following:

- reviewing the financial statement disclosures and testing to supporting documentation to assess compliance with relevant laws and regulations discussed above;

- enquiring of management, the Audit and Risk Committee and in-house legal counsel concerning actual and potential litigation and claims;
- reading minutes of meetings of those charged with governance and the Commission Board; and
- in addressing the risk of fraud through management override of controls, testing the appropriateness of journal entries and other adjustments; assessing whether the judgements made in making accounting estimates are indicative of a potential bias; and evaluating the business rationale of any significant transactions that are unusual or outside the normal course of business.

I also communicated relevant identified laws and regulations and potential fraud risks to all engagement team members and remained alert to any indications of fraud or non-compliance with laws and regulations throughout the audit.

A further description of my responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements is located on the Financial Reporting Council's website at: www.frc.org.uk/auditorsresponsibilities. This description forms part of my certificate.

I am required to obtain evidence sufficient to give reasonable assurance that the Statement of Parliamentary Supply properly presents the outturn against voted Parliamentary control totals and that those totals have not been exceeded. The voted Parliamentary control totals are Departmental Expenditure Limits (Resource and Capital), Annually Managed Expenditure (Resource and Capital), Non-Budget (Resource) and Net Cash Requirement. I am also required to obtain evidence sufficient to give reasonable assurance that the expenditure and income recorded in the financial statements have been applied to the purposes intended by Parliament and the financial transactions recorded in the financial statements conform to the authorities which govern them.

I communicate with those charged with governance regarding, among other matters, the planned scope and timing of the audit and significant audit findings, including any significant deficiencies in internal control that I identify during my audit.

Report

I have no observations to make on these financial statements.

Gareth Davies

Date 01 July 2021

Comptroller and Auditor General

National Audit Office
157-197 Buckingham Palace Road
Victoria
London
SW1W 9SP

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The financial statements



Statement of Comprehensive Net Expenditure

For the year ended 31 March 2021

Statement of Comprehensive Net Expenditure

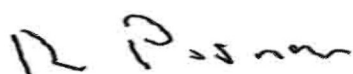
For the year ended 31 March 2021	Note	2020/21 £000	2019/20 £000
Other operating income	4	(299)	(177)
		<u>(299)</u>	<u>(177)</u>
Staff costs	3	10,694	9,430
Purchase of Goods and Services	3	6,042	6,697
Depreciation and amortisation charges	3	373	268
Provision Expense	3	98	(10)
Other operating expenditure	3.1	2,161	2,805
Total operating expenditure		<u>19,368</u>	<u>19,190</u>
Net operating expenditure		<u>19,069</u>	<u>19,013</u>
Commissioners' fees		120	179
Net operating expenditure for the year		<u>19,189</u>	<u>19,192</u>
Other comprehensive net expenditure			
Items which will not be reclassified to net operating costs:			
Actuarial gain/loss on pension scheme liabilities	11	5	9
Comprehensive net expenditure for the year		<u>19,194</u>	<u>19,201</u>

The 'Notes to the Resource Accounts' form part of these accounts.

Statement of financial position

As at 31 March 2021

	Note	31 March 2021 £000	31 March 2020 £000
Non-current assets			
Property, plant and equipment	5	791	302
Intangible assets	6	1,618	1,223
Total non-current assets		2,409	1,525
Current assets:			
Trade and other receivables	7	1,332	890
Cash and cash equivalents	8	26	197
Total current assets		1,358	1,087
Total assets		3,767	2,612
Current liabilities			
Trade and other payables	9	(1,895)	(2,126)
Provisions	11	(18)	(20)
Total current liabilities		(1,913)	(2,146)
Total assets less total current liabilities		1,854	466
Non-current liabilities			
Provisions	11	(913)	(822)
Other payables	9	(4)	0
Total non-current liabilities		(917)	(822)
Total Assets less liabilities		937	(356)
Taxpayers' equity			
General fund		937	(356)
Total taxpayers' equity		937	(356)



Bob Posner
Chief Executive and Accounting Officer
28 June 2021

The 'Notes to the Resource Accounts' form part of these accounts.

Statement of Cash Flows

For the financial year ended 31 March 2021

	Note	2020/21 £000	2019/20 £000
Cash flows from operating activities			
Net operating expenditure		(19,189)	(19,192)
Adjustments for non-cash transactions	3	516	306
Increase in trade and other receivables	7	(442)	(354)
Increase/(Decrease) in trade payables	9	(228)	0
<i>Less movements in receivables and payables relating to items not passing through the Statement of Comprehensive Net Expenditure</i>		(6)	(191)
Use of provisions	11	(14)	(14)
Net cash outflow from operating activities		(19,363)	(19,445)
Cash flows from investing activities			
Purchase of property, plant and equipment	5	(637)	(244)
Purchase of intangible assets	6	(620)	(635)
Movement in Capital Accruals		47	(149)
Net cash outflow from investing activities		(1,210)	(1,028)
Cash flows from financing activities			
From the Consolidated Fund (Supply) - current year		20,151	20,278
From the Consolidated Fund (Supply) - prior year		197	110
From the Consolidated Fund (Non-Supply)		120	179
Advances from the Contingencies Fund		0	2,500
Repayments to the Contingencies Fund		0	(2,500)
Net financing		20,468	20,567
Net increase/(decrease) in cash and cash equivalents in the period before adjustment for receipts and payments to the Consolidated Fund		(105)	94
Fines and penalties received on behalf of the Consolidated Fund		69	224
Payments of amounts to the Consolidated Fund		(135)	(231)
Net increase/(decrease) in cash and cash equivalents in the period after adjustment for receipts and payments to the Consolidated Fund		(171)	87
Cash and cash equivalents at the beginning of the period	8	197	110
Cash and cash equivalents at the end of the period		26	197

The 'Notes to the Resource Accounts' form part of these accounts.

Statement of Changes in Taxpayers' Equity

Financial Year Ended 31 March 2021	Note	General Fund £000
Balance at 1 April 2019		(1,571)
Net Parliamentary Funding – drawn down		20,278
Net Parliamentary Funding – deemed		110
Consolidated Fund Standing Services (non-supply) Current Year		179
Supply Payable adjustment	9	(197)
Comprehensive net Expenditure for the Year	SoCNE	(19,201)
Non-Cash Adjustments:		
Non-cash charges – auditor's remuneration	3	47
Balance at 31 March 2020		<u>(356)</u>
Net Parliamentary Funding – drawn down		20,151
Net Parliamentary Funding – deemed	9	197
Consolidated Fund Standing Services (non-supply) Current Year		120
Supply Payable adjustment	9	(26)
Comprehensive net Expenditure for the Year	SoCNE	(19,194)
Non-Cash Adjustments:		
Non-cash charges – auditor's remuneration	3	45
Balance at 31 March 2021		<u>937</u>

The 'Notes to the Resource Accounts' form part of these accounts.

Notes to the Resource Accounts

1. Statement of accounting policies

1.1. Basis of preparation

These financial statements have been prepared in accordance with an Accounts Direction given by HM Treasury in accordance with Paragraph 17(2) of Schedule 1 to the Political Parties, Elections and Referendum Act 2000.

The statements are prepared in accordance with the 2020/21 Government Financial Reporting Manual (FReM) issued by HM Treasury. The accounting policies contained in the FReM apply International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS) as adapted or interpreted for the public sector context. Where the FReM permits a choice of accounting policy, the accounting policy which is judged to be most appropriate to the particular circumstances of the Electoral Commission for the purpose of giving a true and fair view has been selected. The particular policies adopted by the Electoral Commission are described below. They have been applied consistently in dealing with items that are considered material to the accounts.

The SoPs and related notes have been audited.

1.2. Accounting convention

These accounts have been prepared on an accruals basis under the historical cost convention.

1.3. Property, plant and equipment

Property, plant and equipment are carried at fair value. Expenditure on property, plant and equipment over £1,000 is capitalised. On initial recognition assets are measured at cost including any costs such as installation directly attributable to bringing them into working condition. All property, plant and equipment are deemed to be short life or low value assets and we have therefore elected to value these assets on the basis of depreciated historical cost, as an approximation for fair value.

1.4. Depreciation and amortisation

Non-current assets are depreciated at rates calculated to write them down to estimated residual value on a straight-line basis over their estimated useful lives. Asset lives are:

Intangible assets	3 years
IT hardware	3 years
Fixtures and fittings, furniture and other equipment	5 years
leasehold improvements	5 years

It has been agreed from 2021-22 the asset lives of some assets will change, this will be applied from 1 April 2021 prospectively.

1.5. Intangible assets

Purchased computer software licences, the associated costs of implementation and website costs are capitalised as intangible assets where expenditure of £1,000 or more is incurred. Intangible assets are reviewed annually for impairment and are stated at Depreciated Historical Cost (DHC). Software licences are amortised over the shorter of the term of the licence and the useful economic life. Information Technology developments include any relevant staff costs which are also capitalised.

1.6. Operating income

Operating income relates directly to our operating activities. It comprises of income from rechargeable activity for Scottish Government and Senedd Cymru and from registration and re-registration of political parties. In accordance with IFRS15 revenue is recognised when performance obligations are met.

It does not include income collected for fines and penalties from political parties, as it is fully payable to the Consolidated Fund on receipt.

1.7. Operating leases

Rentals payable under operating leases are charged to the Statement of Comprehensive Net Expenditure on a straight-line basis over the term of the lease.

1.8. Grants payable

Grants payable are recorded as expenditure in the period that the underlying event or activity giving entitlement to the grant occurs.

1.9. Provisions for liabilities and charges

We provide for legal or constructive obligations which are of uncertain timing or amount at the Statement of Financial Position date on the basis of the best estimate of the expenditure required to settle the obligation. Such provisions are discounted to present values where the time value of money is material.

Following the transfer of the functions of the Local Government Commission for England to the Electoral Commission on 1 April 2002 and the incorporation of its assets and liabilities as at that date, a provision has been established to meet its obligations with respect to pension payments to certain former Commissioners of that entity.

1.10. Value Added Tax (VAT)

The work carried out by the Electoral Commission is performed under statute and outside the scope of output VAT. Input VAT is charged to the relevant expenditure category, or if appropriate capitalised with additions to non-current assets. Income and expenditure are reported inclusive of VAT.

1.11. Programme expenditure

The requirements of the FReM have been adapted to enable us to produce these Accounts with sufficient detail to provide a true and fair view of our operations.

For budgeting purposes, we distinguish between our core operating costs and event related activities. In these accounts, we have reported the core running costs as expenditure (note 3) and we have reported event related activities as other operating costs (note 3.1).

The Statement of Comprehensive Net Expenditure includes both costs incurred and any associated operating income.

1.12. Pensions

Past and present employees are covered by the provisions of the Principal Civil Service Pension Scheme(PCSPS). PCSPS is a multi-employer defined benefit scheme and it is not possible to identify the Commission's share of the assets and liabilities, it is therefore accounted for as a defined contribution scheme with payments recognised in the period they fall due.

Refer to note 11.1 for the accounting treatment of the pension for ex-employees of the Local Government Commission for England due to the transfer of its functions to the Electoral Commission on 1 April 2002 and the incorporation of its assets and liabilities as at that date.

1.13. Financial instruments

Financial assets

Trade and other receivables are recognised under IFRS 9 and carried at the lower of their original invoiced value and recoverable amount. Where the time value of money is material, we subsequently measure receivables at amortised cost. We make a provision for balances when there is evidence that we will not be able to recover these in full. We write off balances when we assess the probability of recovery as being remote.

Financial liabilities

We initially recognise trade and other payables at cost, where the time value of money is material, we subsequently measure payables at amortised cost.

As our cash requirements are met through the estimates process financial instruments are of less importance and less risk than in a non-public sector body of a similar size.

We do not have powers to borrow or invest surplus funds. The majority of financial instruments relate to contracts for non-financial items in line with our expected purchase and usage requirements, therefore we are exposed to minimal credit, liquidity or market risk.

We do not hold any complex financial instruments. The only financial instruments other than cash included in these accounts are receivables and payables (see notes 7 & 9).

1.14. Contingent liabilities

Contingent liabilities are disclosed in accordance in International Accounting Standard 37 (Provisions, Contingent Liabilities and Contingent Assets), the Commission discloses for Parliamentary reporting and accountability purposes where the likelihood of a transfer of economic benefit is remote, but which have been reported to Parliament in accordance with the requirements of Managing Public Money.

Where the time value of money is material, contingent liabilities which are required to be disclosed under IAS 37 are stated at discounted amounts and the amount reported to Parliament noted separately. Contingent liabilities that are not required to be disclosed by IAS 37 are stated at the amounts reported to Parliament.

1.15. Going concern

These accounts have been prepared on a going concern basis. The Statement of Financial Position as at 31 March 2021 shows there is net assets of £937k.

The disruption caused by the pandemic within the Electoral Commission, has created liabilities of £100k (under 1% of our total budget); as detailed in the performance report.

Our Main Estimate was laid before Parliament on 22 April 2021 for the resources we require in 2021-22 and our Corporate Plan until 2024/25. As a Government body established by legislation and following the principles of the FReM there is an assumption of continued provision of service, there is nothing to suggest services provided by the Commission will cease or future funding will not be provided.

1.16. Impending application of newly issued accounting statements not yet effective

IFRS 16 specifies how an organisation will recognise, measure, present and disclose leases. The standard provides a single lessee accounting model, requiring lessees to recognise assets and liabilities for all leases unless the lease term is 12 months or less or the underlying asset has a low value.

IFRS16 will be adopted into the FReM on 1 April 2022. Management have made an initial assessment of the impact of the standard and how to apply it, when the standard is effective. In 2022-23 the impact will introduce a "Rights of use" asset and liability within the balance sheet, this will predominately be our building leases. The value will be £5m and £4.5m respectively and will replace note 10 in the accounts.

IFRS17 (effective 2022-23) identifies insurance contracts those contracts under which the entity accepts significant insurance risk from another party, the Commission does not hold any such contracts and will not be affected by this standard.

1.17. Accounting estimates and judgements

We have discussed and agreed the development, selection and disclosure of significant accounting estimates and judgements and the application of these judgements with the Audit and Risk Committee.

As outlined in Note 11, we recognise a liability to make dilapidation payments to the property owners of our office premises on expiry of individual leases. Such payments reflect the expected cost of full reinstatement of tenant alterations and decorations at the times of departure. Management has assessed the level of provision based on a professional assessment of future costs by a chartered surveyor.

As outlined in Note 12, we have not elected to make a financial provision for the legal cases being defended, where it is considered there to be insufficient certainty as to the amount payable and/or the likelihood of payment.

Management have considered the uncertainty around Covid-19 and have assessed the accounting estimates and judgements are not significantly affected.

1.18. Research and development

Expenditure on research is charged to the Statement of Comprehensive Net Expenditure in the year in which it is incurred. Development expenditure is also recognised in the Statement of Comprehensive Net Expenditure when incurred unless it meets the specific criteria for capitalisation.

2. Statement of Operating Costs by Operating Segments

	Elections and Local Referendums	Electoral Registration	European Union Referendum	Electoral Administration	Regulation	2020/21 Total
£000						
Gross Expenditure	3,375	208	7	6,766	9,132	19,488
Income	(18)	(139)	0	(118)	(24)	(299)
Net Expenditure	3,357	69	7	6,648	9,108	19,189
	Elections and Local Referendums	Electoral Registration	European Union Referendum	Electoral Administration	Regulation	2019/20 Total
£000						
Gross Expenditure	4,250	549	566	5,619	8,385	19,369
Income	(84)	(8)	0	0	(85)	(177)
Net Expenditure	4,166	541	566	5,619	8,300	19,192

We report expenditure between our core objectives. In addition, the analysis identifies the marginal costs of the following key deliverables that we manage through formalised segments and project management arrangements. These are set out below.

The elections and local referendums segment governs our work ensuring well-run elections and referendums, providing guidance and assistance to electoral administrators, candidates and agents, developing and monitoring performance standards for ROs and producing reports on the administration of elections and referendums. The electoral registration activity supports our research and design work on forms for voters.

We do not attribute staff costs and corporate overheads to programme or project activity, but for the purposes of this note, we have either directly allocated or apportioned these costs as appropriate, between party election finance and electoral administration activity. We only report the marginal costs of delivery by programme and project to the Commission Board and Executive Team.

From 1 April 2021 we have devolved accountabilities and therefore we will report our Senedd Cymru and Scottish devolved spend separately.

3 Expenditure

	2020/21 £000	2019/20 £000
Staff costs		
Wages and salaries	7,880	7,067
Social security costs	861	718
Other pension costs	1,953	1,645
Less recoveries in respect of outward secondments	0	0
	10,694	9,430
Rentals under operating leases		
Property rent	682	514
Equipment	7	13
Purchase of goods and services		
Section 13 expenditure	2,249	2,958
Research	212	581
Consultancy	425	158
Recruitment	253	190
Staff training and development	132	122
Travel subsistence and hospitality	9	153
Travel and subsistence – Commissioners	(4)	13
Accommodation, maintenance	661	638
Publicity and publications	209	380
Conference/public meeting	4	13
Office supplies book and journals	138	128
Warehouse and Archiving	93	98

IT/Telephone	842	623
Bank and Payroll charges	44	43
Internal audit fees	41	25
	<hr/>	<hr/>
	5,997	6,650

Non-cash items

Depreciation	148	68
Amortisation	225	200
National Audit Office Auditors' fees*	45	47
Provisions made in year	98	(6)
Provisions written back	0	(3)
	<hr/>	<hr/>
	516	306
	<hr/>	<hr/>
	17,207	16,386

* No non-audit services provided by the NAO

3.1 Other Operating Expenditure

	2020/21	2019/20
	£000	£000
Policy development grants	1,888	1,967
EU Referendum - Electoral Commission operational expenditure*	7	566
Local Government Scotland and Welsh Senedd	257	272
Other	9	0
	<hr/>	<hr/>
	2,161	2,805

*All costs are external legal advice.

Section 12 of PPERA provides for the Electoral Commission to administer a scheme to make payments of policy development grants to registered political parties. The current scheme is contained in the Elections (Policy Developments Grants Scheme) Order 2006 as amended.

The scheme requires us to allocate £2,000,000 each year to registered political parties to assist with the costs of developing policies to be included in manifestos for local government, Northern Ireland Assembly, or Scottish, Welsh, Westminster or European Parliamentary elections. To be eligible for inclusion in the scheme, a registered political party must have at least two MPs sitting in the House of Commons on 7 March prior to the year in question, who have sworn the oath of allegiance provided by the Parliamentary Oaths Act 1866.

The annual allocation of £2,000,000 is divided between the eligible parties according to the allocation formula set out in the Scheme.

All parties submitted expenditure returns resulting in payments of £1,888,860.

3.2 Public awareness expenditure

Section 13 of PPERA requires us to promote public awareness of current electoral systems in the UK and any pending such systems, together with such matters connected with any such existing or pending systems as we may determine. The section enables us to carry out programmes of education or information to promote public awareness; or to make grants to other persons or bodies to enable them to carry out such programmes. Section 13 expenditure is limited by The Electoral Commission (Limit on Public Awareness Expenditure) Order date 2002 (SI 2002/505) to £7,500,000 in a financial year. The Section 13 spending limit does not apply to public awareness activity specifically provided for, and undertaken under legislation other than PPERA.

Although not Section 13, any public awareness costs for Scotland (Section 10) are included in the table below.

Public awareness

	2020/21 £000	2019/20 £000
Section 13	2,249	2,958
Public awareness expenditure subject to Section 13 limit	2,249	2,958
Local government Scotland (S10)	77	0
Senedd (S10)	178	0
	255	0
Total Public awareness	2,504	2,958

4 Income

	2020/21 £000	2019/20 £000
Operating Income	Total	Total
New Registration of Political parties	14	9
Re-Registration of Political parties	7	8
Alteration to Registrations of Political parties	3	2
Charges/Transfer of costs to other bodies:		
Scottish Government and Senedd Cymru	275	158
Operating Income	299	177

Income received from political parties does not form part of our income, as it is fully payable to the Consolidated Fund on receipt.

	£000	£000
Fines and penalties collected	69	219

5 Property, plant and equipment

	Leasehold Improvements	Office equipment	Information Technology - hardware	Furniture and Fittings	Total
	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000
Cost or valuation					
At 1 April 2020	887	6	867	57	1,817
Additions	212	15	259	151	637
Disposals	(886)	(6)	(465)	(54)	(1,411)
At 31 March 2021	213	15	661	154	1,043
Depreciation					
At 1 April 2020	886	6	566	57	1,515
Charged in year	0	0	147	1	148
Disposals in year	(886)	(6)	(465)	(54)	(1,411)
At 31 March 2021	0	0	248	4	252
Carrying amount at 31 March 2021	213	15	413	150	791
Carrying amount at 31 March 2020	1	0	301	0	302
Asset financing: Owned	213	15	413	150	791
Carrying amount at 31 March 2021	213	15	413	150	791

	Leasehold Improvements	Office equipment	Information Technology - hardware	Furniture and Fittings	Total
	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000
Cost or valuation					
At 1 April 2019	891	6	959	61	1,917
Additions	0	0	244	0	244
Disposals	(4)	0	(336)	(4)	(344)
At 31 March 2020	887	6	867	57	1,817
Depreciation					
At 1 April 2019	890	5	836	60	1,791
Charged in year	0	1	66	1	68
Disposals in year	(4)	0	(336)	(4)	(344)
At 31 March 2020	886	6	566	57	1,515
Carrying amount at 31 March 2020	1	0	301	0	302
Carrying amount at 31 March 2019	1	1	123	1	126

Asset financing: Owned	1	0	301	0	302
At 31 March 2020	1	0	301	0	302

The disposals shown are the result of the Commission completing an exercise to review all PPE that held a nil net book value. The disposals made were primarily connected to the lease at Bunhill Row finishing in 2019/20 and old hardware that is no longer in use.

From 1 April 2021 asset life will be extended to match the needs of the business and applied prospectively.

6 Intangible assets

	Information Technology	Software Licences	Websites	Information Technology - Assets under Construction	Total
	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000
Cost or valuation					
At 1 April 2020	1,135	148	2,978	216	4,477
Additions	131	1	113	375	620
Disposals	(1,008)	(118)	(1,942)	0	(3,068)
Reclassifications			(707)	707	0
At 31 March 2021	258	31	442	1,298	2,029
Amortisation					
At 1 April 2020	1,076	137	2,041	0	3,254
Charged in year	80	6	139	0	225
Disposals	(1,008)	(118)	(1,942)	0	(3,068)
At 31 March 2021	148	25	238	0	411
Carrying amount at 31 March 2021	110	6	204	1,298	1,618
Cost or valuation					
At 1 April 2019	1,280	201	2,621	53	4,155
Additions	35	0	437	163	635
Disposals	(180)	(53)	(80)	0	(313)
At 31 March 2020	1,135	148	2,978	216	4,477
Amortisation					
At 1 April 2019	1,212	173	1,982	0	3,367
Charged in year	44	17	139	0	200
Disposals	(180)	(53)	(80)	0	(313)
At 31 March 2020	1,076	137	2,041	0	3,254
Carrying amount at 31 March 2020	59	11	937	216	1,223

Information technology - assets under construction (AUC) is primarily Political Finance online, this has been in development since 2018/19 and is due to be completed in 2021/22. This was previously in websites; this has been reclassified as AUC for 2020/21.

The disposals shown are the result of the Commission completing an exercise to review all intangibles that held a nil net book value. The disposals made were old IT equipment and previous websites that are no longer in use.

From 1 April 2021 asset life will be extended to match the needs of the business and applied prospectively.

7 Trade and other receivables

	2020/21 £000	2019/20 £000
Amounts falling due within one year:		
Other receivables	125	88
Consolidated Fund Extra Receipts due to Consolidated Fund	0	28
Deposits and advances	0	25
Prepayments and accrued income	1,207	749
	1,332	890

8 Cash and cash equivalents

	2020/21 £000	2019/20 £000
Balance at 1 April	197	110
Net change in cash and cash equivalent balances	(171)	87
Balance at 31 March	26	197
The following balances at 31 March 2021 were held at:		
Government Banking	26	197
Balance at 31 March	26	197

9 Trade and other payables

2020/21 £000	2019/20 £000
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Amounts falling due within one year

Other taxation and social security	509	439
Trade payables	0	0
Other payables	0	0
Consolidated Fund Extra Receipts due to be paid to the Consolidated Fund (receivable)	0	28
Excess income payable to Consolidated Fund	101	66
Accruals and deferred income	1,259	1,396
Amounts issued from the Consolidated Fund for supply but not spent at year end	26	197
	<u>1,895</u>	<u>2,126</u>

Amounts falling due after more than one year:

Other payables, accruals and deferred income	4	0
	<u>4</u>	<u>0</u>

10 Capital and other commitments

10.1 Commitments under leases

10.1.1 Operating leases

The table below shows total future minimum lease payments under operating leases for each of the following periods.

Obligations under operating leases for the following periods comprise:	2020/21 £000	2019/20 £000
Buildings		
Not later than one year	725	636
Later than one year and not later than five years	3,781	4,023
Later than five years	4,010	0
	<u>8,516</u>	<u>4,659</u>
Total Operating leases	<u>8,516</u>	<u>4,659</u>

There were no capital commitments during 2020/21. (2019/20: £0).

There were no subleases and no receipts are expected during the year.

We expensed a total of £682k in lease payments during the year. We did not make contingent rent and sublease payments during the year. Our commitment under leases is only for the rental of the premises and

11 Provisions for liabilities and charges

	Pension £000	Dilapidations £000	Total £000
Balance at 1 April 2020	167	675	842
Provided in the year	3	69	72
Provisions not required written back	0	0	0
Provisions utilised in the year	(14)	0	(14)
Unwinding of discounts	0	26	26
Actuarial (Gain)/Loss	5	0	5
Balance at 31 March 2021	161	770	931

Analysis of expected timing of discounted flows

	Pension £000	Dilapidations £000	Total £000
Not later than one year	18	0	18
Later than one year and not later than five years	72	86	158
Later than five years	71	684	755
Balance at 31 March 2021	161	770	931

11.1 Pension Liability Statement

We provide for the pension liability for certain former Commissioners of the Local Government Commission for England, following the transfer of functions on 1 April 2002.

The pension provision is unfunded, with benefits being paid as they fall due and guaranteed by the employer. There is no fund, and therefore no surplus or deficit. Actuarial advice was sought to ensure that the provision is set at a realistic level. An actuarial valuation was carried out by the Government Actuary's Department (GAD) to provide a value of the pension liability as at 31 March 2021. A death rate from Covid-19 in excess of that already allowed for in the mortality assumptions would emerge as an experience gain over the next year's accounts. Actuarial gains and losses are accounted for through the Statement of Comprehensive Net Expenditure.

Given the non-materiality of the pension liabilities, the full disclosure requirements of IAS 19 are not required.

The assumptions used by the actuary were:

	2020/21	2019/20
CPI inflation assumptions	2.22%	2.35%
The rate of increase in salaries	2.00%	2.00%
The rate of increase for pensions	2.22%	2.35%
The rate used to discount scheme liabilities	1.25%	1.80%

From 2010–11 the basis for the indexation of retirement benefits was changed from the Retail Price Index to the Consumer Price Index.

The Government Actuary's Department prepared a valuation on 31 March 2021.

	2020/21	2019/20
	£000	£000
Provision at 1 April	167	167
Interest Cost	3	5
Actuarial Loss/(Gain)	5	9
Less benefits paid	(14)	(14)
Past service cost		
Present Value of scheme at end of year	161	167

Present value of scheme liabilities	Value at 31/03/2021 £'000	Value at 31/03/2020 £'000	Value at 31/03/2019 £'000	Value at 31/03/2018 £'000	Value at 31/03/2017 £'000
Liability in respect of					
Active members	0	0	0	0	0
Deferred Pensioners	0	0	0	0	0
Current Pensioners	161	167	167	187	208
Present value of scheme liabilities in respect of current pensioners	161	167	167	187	208

History of experience losses / (gains)	Value at 31/03/2021 £'000	Value at 31/03/2020 £'000	Value at 31/03/2019 £'000	Value at 31/03/2018 £'000	Value at 31/03/2017 £'000
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Experience loss / (gain) arising on the scheme liabilities					
Amount (£'000)	(6)	(6)	(7)	2	1
Percentage of scheme liabilities at the end of year	0.5%	0.5%	0.5%	(0.5%)	0.5%

11.2 Dilapidations

We recognise a liability to make dilapidation payments to the property owners of our office premises on expiry of individual leases. Such payments reflect the expected cost of full reinstatement of tenant alterations and decorations at the times of departure.

Dilapidations are measured at the best estimate, supplied by an external surveyor using the industry price guide, of the expenditure required to settle the present obligation, and reflects the present value of expenditure required to settle the obligation where the time value of money is material. The Commission uses the HM Treasury discount rates to calculate the present value.

12 Contingent liabilities

There were no legal cases that were active at year-end or have since started where the Electoral Commission may need to raise a provision or contingent liability. Management have concluded that no probable present obligation to transfer economic benefits exists.

13 Related-party transactions

The Electoral Commission is a body independent of Government and political parties, directly accountable to the UK Parliament, with reporting obligations to the Scottish Parliament and the Senedd. Other than remuneration as disclosed in the accounts, none of the Commissioners, Executive Team or other related parties connected with them has undertaken any material transactions with the Electoral Commission during the year.

14 Events after the reporting period

In accordance with the requirements of IAS 10 Events after the reporting period are considered up to the date on which the accounts are authorised for issue. This is interpreted as at the date of Certificate of the Comptroller and Auditor General.

Although there has been disruption in our working practices caused by the Covid-19 pandemic within the Electoral Commission this has not created additional liabilities and the Accounting Officer does not expect this to change.

In the Accounting Officer's opinion, there are no events since 31 March 2021 that would affect the financial statements.

Accounts Direction

Electoral Commission

Accounts direction given by the Treasury in accordance with Paragraph 17(2) of Schedule 1 to the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000.

1. The Electoral Commission shall prepare accounts for the financial year ended 31 March 2011 and subsequent financial years in compliance with the accounting principles and disclosure requirements of the edition of the Government Financial Reporting Manual ('the FReM') issued by HM Treasury which is in force for the financial year for which the accounts are being prepared.

2. The accounts shall be prepared so as to:

- (a) give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the Electoral Commission at 31 March 2011 and subsequent financial year ends, and of its net resource outturn, changes in taxpayers' equity and cash flows for the financial year then ended; and
- (b) provide disclosure of any material expenditure or income that has not been applied to the purposes intended by Parliament or material transactions that have not conformed to the authorities which govern them.

3. Compliance with the requirements of the FReM will, in all but exceptional circumstances, be necessary for the accounts to give a true and fair view. If, in these exceptional circumstances, compliance with the requirements of the FReM is inconsistent with the requirement to give a true and fair view, the requirements of the FReM should be departed from only to the extent necessary to give a true and fair view. In such cases, informed and unbiased judgement should be used to devise an appropriate alternative treatment which should be consistent with both the economic characteristics of the circumstances concerned and the spirit of the FReM. Any material departure from the FReM should be discussed in the first instance with the Treasury.

4. This direction replaces the direction dated 27 February 2006.

Chris Wobschall

Head, Assurance and Financial Reporting Policy, HM Treasury

15 April 2011

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The Electoral Commission is the independent body which oversees elections and regulates political finance in the UK. We work to promote public confidence in the democratic process and ensure its integrity.

The Electoral Commission 2021

ISBN: 978-1-5286-2806-8
CCS: CCS0721895560 07/21