

Ann Jones, MS  
Chair, Llywydd's Committee  
Senedd Cymru  
Cardiff  
CF99 1NA

1 October 2020

Dear Chair,

### **Estimate Submission to the Senedd**

I am very pleased to be able to present, for the first time, the Electoral Commission's Estimate for its work on devolved elections in Wales during the financial year 2021-22.

As you will be aware the submission of this Estimate marks the beginning of our formal accountability to the Senedd, and I am grateful to staff at the Senedd Commission for their contributions to the development of the reporting and accounting processes which we now have in place, and to you, and the Llywydd, for your input in ensuring we have reached this significant milestone.

Accompanying the Estimate is the Commission's [Corporate Plan](#) which sets out our goals and objectives for the period including the next financial year. We are currently consulting with stakeholders to inform our objectives for the next five years. We expect to present you with this new Corporate Plan, for the period up to 2025-26, in the coming months. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss the detail of that plan with you at that time.

In the year ahead the Commission stands ready to support the delivery and effective regulation of elections in Wales. This includes the effective implementation of any electoral law changes legislated for by the Senedd and enhancing information for voters about digital campaigning. We will also commence work on a programme of activity to strengthen the capacity of the electoral administration community in Wales, to ensure it is able to continue to meet the needs of voters and provide continuing trust in our democracy.

### **Funding arrangements**

While the Commission team in Wales leads on work related to devolved Welsh elections it also draws on regulatory and guidance expertise from across the whole organisation, enabling us to operate in the most efficient and cost effective way. Our work in Wales derives benefit from this expertise, and in return our staff here also contribute to work on UK-wide issues.

Consequently, our Estimate for the costs attributable to the Senedd are divided into the following two streams:

- I. Costs that are directly attributable to the Senedd, such as the costs of our activity in relation to Senedd and local government elections and activity related to the register used for Senedd and local government elections in Wales.

In the year 2021-22, these costs will be largely electoral event related and focussed on supporting the delivery and oversight of the 2021 Senedd elections and preparations for the 2022 local government elections.

These costs for 2021-22 is £1,422k.

- II. Indirect costs relating to the share of Commission-wide costs which work on devolved electoral matters, such as corporate costs (including depreciation) that underpin the Commission's general functions.

As agreed with you and HM Treasury officials these costs have been apportioned by percentage of population from ONS data (Mid 2019) with a 5% share for Wales.

These costs for 2021-22 amount to £328k.

The relative balance of these two streams will vary over time, with direct costs increasing in years with busy electoral cycles and reducing in quieter years.

Further information about the activity which will be funded via both streams is provided below and is included in the Memorandum of Understanding which has been previously provided.

Approved funding by the Senedd to meet the costs of the Commission's work under the proposals in this letter and the Estimate will be drawn down by Welsh Ministers from the Welsh Consolidated Fund. This is for reason of agreed effective administration as S129 of the Government of Wales Act 2006 does not presently include the Commission - an independent non-governmental body that is accountable to the Senedd - as a payee body. This anomaly can be rectified by amendment of the Act at the earliest suitable opportunity.

## Directly attributable costs: Supporting the delivery of devolved Welsh elections and the electoral reform agenda in Wales

In the next 12 months the Commission's work to support the delivery of the 2021 Senedd election and preparations for the 2022 council elections will be central to our goals of enabling the continued delivery of free and fair elections and on ensuring an increasingly trusted and transparent system of regulation in political finance.

The Senedd election in 2021 will be taking place against the backdrop of the Covid-19 pandemic. Key to our work in supporting the poll will be ensuring that the electoral community has the resilience to cope with the changing situation, keeping the needs of voters at the forefront of planning so that they are able to vote with confidence using their preferred method of voting. We will continue to work with the Welsh Government and the electoral community to plan for this.

In 2019-2020 the Senedd enacted to extend the franchise in Wales to sixteen and seventeen year olds and qualifying foreign nationals. The practical implementation of these reforms will provide a focus to our work in the coming year and we will work closely with the electoral community to ensure that the newly enfranchised voters are aware of their right to vote at Welsh elections and have access to clear information about how to exercise their right. We are also working to enhance transparency for voters through the development of Codes of Practice on campaign spending at devolved Senedd elections.

Our detailed programme of work to support the delivery of the devolved Welsh elections in 2021-22 is summarised in the annexe to this letter.

While there have been a number of welcome GB wide reforms to the annual household canvass in 2020-21, there are further reforms required to make the current system of electoral registration more joined up with other public services. There is still considerable potential to explore how existing public data could be utilised to support further reform. In the year ahead we will continue to work with the Welsh Government and other stakeholders to progress this work.

In 2021-22, the Commission will be finalising new performance standards for Electoral Registration Officers and we intend to lay those standards before the Senedd in 2021. Together with a variety of tools that have also been developed, the standards will be used by both EROs and the Commission throughout the year, to support understanding and improve performance, ensuring ultimately that registers are as accurate and complete as possible.

## Indirect costs: Supporting the Commissions wider activity

The indirect costs to which the Senedd will be contributing underpins the Commission's wider work to ensure fairness, trust and confidence in our democratic processes. This work is delivered by regulatory, legal, policy, communications and guidance teams based across the UK. It includes ensuring high standards in electoral registration and administration across the UK, and giving voters transparency over money spent and received by campaigners and parties.

The Senedd's share of these costs also supports investment in programmes of work to support confidence in our electoral processes. This includes work to increase voter confidence in the transparency of digital campaigning; strengthening the resilience of electoral administrators to deliver elections in an increasingly pressurised environment and providing enhanced support to parties and campaigners to ensure that they can comply with their obligations under electoral law. Further information about these programmes of work can be found in the accompanying Corporate Plan.

## Impact of Covid-19

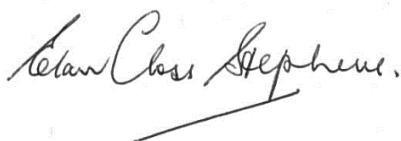
As noted above, the Commission is working closely with the Welsh Government, the Wales Electoral Coordination Board and Public Health Wales to consider and mitigate the impact of Covid-19 on devolved Welsh elections. This work is being met within current budgets.

However, we are conscious that Covid-19 policy and guidance is subject to change based on the developing epidemiology and the emerging evidence base. In the event that there is a significant shift in the pandemic, or the policy approach to the pandemic, ahead of the 2021 and 2022 polls then it is possible that additional measures will be required which are not provided for within the Estimates that we are submitting. If that is the case, we may be required to submit a Supplementary Estimate on which possibility we would liaise closely with your officials before taking this step.

I hope you agree that these proposals are appropriate in meeting the challenges facing the electoral community and voters over the next financial year. We will of course measure the impact of our work throughout the year to ensure that our activities address these challenges.

I commend this budget and plan for 2020/21 to the Llywydd's Committee and look forward to discussing it with you when appropriate.

Yours sincerely,



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Dame Elan Closs Stephens CBE,  
Electoral Commissioner - Wales

Bob Posner  
Chief Executive, Electoral Commission,  
Accounting Officer

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## Annual Estimate 2021-22

<b>Senedd Costs</b>	<b>2021-22</b> <b>£000s</b>
<b>Direct Costs</b>	
Electoral Administration	
Wales	230
Support	5
Guidance	92
Support & Improvement	80
	407
Legal	
Legal	97
Regulation	109
	206
Communication, policy & research	
Campaigns & Corp Identity	559
Digital communication & learning	64
External communications	34
Research	63
Policy	89
	809
<b>Total direct Costs</b>	<b>1,422</b>
<b>Indirect Costs</b>	
Resource	255
Depreciation	73
	328
<b>Total indirect Costs</b>	<b>328</b>
<b>Total contribution</b>	<b>1,750</b>

## Annexe: Activity in support of the 2021 Senedd election and 2022 local government elections

### **Supporting voter participation**

We want to ensure that all eligible electors know how to register and cast their vote in the 2021 Senedd election and the 2022 local government elections in Wales. This will include having information well in advance of the poll to enable them to make an informed choice about their method of voting.

During the spring of 2021 we will run a public awareness campaign which will aim to increase voter registration ahead of the Senedd elections focussing on reaching under-registered groups, those who experience additional barriers to participation and those people who are newly enfranchised and who will be voting for the first time. This campaign in 2021 will include a voter information mailing to all households in Wales containing information on how to register and vote. We will also continue to provide a public information service for all electors in Wales providing online, email, telephone and written contact options. Working with the Senedd Commission and Welsh Government we are also developing education resources for Welsh schools to support political literacy ahead of the 2021 Senedd election.

We will run a similar public awareness campaign ahead of the local government elections in 2022 and that work will commence in the 2021-22 financial year.

### **Supporting the delivery of the election**

The Commission will provide support to Returning Officers at both constituency and regional level and to electoral administrators. We will provide written and oral guidance and resources, facilitate training/briefing sessions on the administration of the election working alongside the Wales Electoral Coordination Board (WECB) and Wales Electoral Practitioners Working Group (WEPWG), and provide an advice service on electoral matters. In the coming financial year we will also be developing our suite of guidance materials to support the delivery of the 2022 council elections.

Ahead of the election, the Commission will also work with the WECB and WEPWG to identify the key risks and challenges in place for these complex elections, including the implications of Covid-19 for the electoral process, The Commission will also manage the performance of ROs against the statutory performance standards through our performance monitoring process as well as provide of additional targeted support to specific areas where required.

### **Work with candidates and agents, parties and campaigners**

The Commission will provide guidance to parties, candidates and campaigners ahead of the elections. We will give additional support through tailored training sessions where required to ensure that these regulated entities are aware of the rules in place for those

standing and campaigning in elections, including the new rules regarding disqualification. We will have quarterly meetings with the Senedd Parties Panel meetings, which I Chair, on a quarterly basis and attend local authority led briefing sessions for candidates and agents which will give us a direct opportunity to provide advice and guidance to those standing for election. We will also provide an advice service throughout the regulated period to provide guidance on campaigning and also post-poll reporting obligations.

Following the election we will publish details of spending by parties and campaigners. Where we have reason to suspect that the campaign rules we regulate have been breached then we will appropriate steps to bring people into compliance and to enforce the rules.

Our aim is to ensure voters have transparency over money spent and received by candidates, parties and campaigners and to ensure that all candidates, parties and campaigners are clear about their obligations in respect of the campaigning rules in force at the relevant election.

### **Electoral Integrity**

In order to ensure continued trust in our elections we will continue to work closely with the four Police forces in Wales and the appointed integrity leads at each. We will facilitate meetings of the Wales Integrity Network and provide relevant guidance to ensure others who have roles in the regulation of elections, are fully briefed on electoral matters which will avoid duplication of effort so we can all effectively fulfil our roles.

### **Reporting on elections**

We have a statutory duty to report on the administration of the Senedd In order to inform our report we will carry out research into voters' experience at the election and we will also draw on the views of other electoral participants, including candidates, political parties and administrators.

As part of reporting process we will also continue to consider the accessibility of the voting process for disabled people. This will include carrying out research both directly with disabled people and also via organisations such as RNIB Wales.

Our report on the election will be laid before the Senedd and, where appropriate, may include recommendations for improving the delivery of future polls in the best interest of voters. We will continue to welcome opportunities to discuss our findings with Members of the Senedd, whether individually, or through the established Wales Advisory Board and relevant Committees.

## **Electoral Observers**

Independent observation is a crucial part of the electoral process. It helps to ensure that elections and relevant referendums are carried out in a way which is transparent, accessible, impartial and secure.

The Commission will continue to administer the observer's accreditation scheme for elections in Wales ahead of both the 2021 and 2022 elections.

*End.*