

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
	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	

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	Increased parliamentary accountability	<p>Formal Electoral Registration Officers and Returning Officers performance assessment of when standards are not met</p> <p>Guidance products for electoral administrators published on time with no substantive errors</p> <p>Confidence that elections are well run</p> <p>Election reports published within deadlines</p> <p>Public confidence in knowing how to register to vote</p> <p>Public confidence in how to cast their vote</p> <p>Election, referendum and other reports responded to by the relevant government within deadlines</p> <p>Responses to policy proposals and legislative consultations by the deadlines</p> <p>Responses to Members of the Senedd's correspondence within deadlines</p>
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

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	<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>
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
2. 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