

Corporate Plan

2018/19 – 2022/23

Foreword

Welcome to our 2018-23 Corporate Plan. It sets out our priorities and work programme for the next five year period and explains how we plan to fulfil our responsibilities.

In the last five years, the Commission has overseen, and in the case of UK wide referendums, delivered, an unprecedented series of high profile electoral events, making it one of the busiest periods in the short history of the Commission. It is a measure of the strength of our electoral system that so many had confidence in the results, however great the passion of those campaigning. The processes of registering voters, and casting and counting votes, have continued to be carried out with great rigour and transparency. Our public opinion surveys consistently show very high levels of satisfaction about how well elections are run.

Similarly, while there is certainly room for more reform, we have one of the most transparent political finance regimes in the world, governing donations to political parties and their spending during election campaigns, with a general culture of compliance with the rules.

There is much to be proud of here. However, we cannot be complacent. The next five years are likely to be just as challenging, if not more so. Any failure to keep pace with developments in wider society could risk our electoral systems no longer meeting the needs and wishes of voters, and could lead over time to erosion of the trust that underpins our democracy.

Our first responsibility is of course, to the voters, whose expectations are constantly evolving. Digital service provision now permeates every corner of our lives and there is a growing expectation that our democratic processes must change too. This will not be easy. For example, risks and benefits will need to be carefully balanced if and when it comes to considering any introduction of e-voting. Other innovations enabled by digital technology would bring significant benefit to voters now. For example, the registration system needs further reform to build on the successes of Individual Electoral Registration: enabling greater use of data-matching with national databases; exploring automatic registration; and driving greater efficiency and protection against fraud by connecting the currently dispersed electoral registers. We need action soon to ensure that our system keeps pace with change and that the practicalities of registering and voting do not come to symbolise a system which is out of touch.

In order to create an electoral system that can keep pace with voters' expectations, we must first be sure that our foundations are firm – foundations including electoral law, resources and public confidence. All are currently under strain.

The legal framework of our democracy requires urgent attention; current electoral legislation is fragmented, fiendishly complex, and not fit for purpose. The three UK Law Commissions published welcome recommendations for reform in 2016. We

believe these must now be implemented by the UK legislatures, to the benefit of all involved in the electoral process, from candidates to voters.

The second area of strain is on the resources available to run elections, above all in local authorities. They have been affected by spending cuts, like the rest of the public sector. Experienced electoral administrators who are retiring are not always being replaced, and staff needed for basic functions, like counting, are increasingly hard to find and recruit. This means that reforms to election processes which ease burdens while continuing to enable well-run elections are ever more important.

In the political sphere, the nature of modern political campaigning has changed remarkably over the past five years, with the emergence of digital campaigning and increasing use of social media. The next five will no doubt see further advancement of existing trends but also the emergence of new technologies, bringing fresh opportunities and threats. As in other areas of our lives, some advances will be used for the good of free and fair democracy; others may be less so. Looking across the globe we see examples and allegations of the misuse of personal data; the creation and dissemination of fake news; and hacking and other outside interference with electronic systems. Voters need reassurance that our systems will remain transparent, credible and safe from fraud.

Within the UK, the next five years will see increasing diversification to reflect the increasing devolution of responsibility for the electoral framework. At the time of writing we already see differing approaches and proposals emerging from consultations in Scotland and Wales. These will bring significant opportunities as well as, no doubt, some new issues.

These are among the major external challenges which face us as the Electoral Commission; I am confident of our ability to respond effectively, working in partnership with all concerned, including the governments and parliaments of the United Kingdom. This document, beginning with the Chief Executive's introduction, sets out how we plan to do so.

We have an overall responsibility to voters to keep on improving the system in order to make voting easier, more accessible and more secure. There are always costs and political risks in change, but the investment is worthwhile if it means our precious democracy remains vibrant, credible and appreciated by all groups in society. The costs and political risks of doing too little will in the end be greater.

Sir John Holmes
Chair

Introduction

As the independent body which oversees elections and regulates political finance in the UK, the Electoral Commission works to promote public confidence in the democratic process and ensure its integrity.

The Chair's foreword outlines some of the key challenges which our electoral system faces over the next five years. This Corporate Plan sets out how the Commission will take a leading role in delivering, coordinating and contributing to a response. To do this we have set ourselves four goals and, by focusing on these we will ensure we balance our different roles supporting the delivery of elections, as a regulator and as a thought leader whilst also ensuring the Commission is a modern, well-run organisation.

Central to our work is our activity to enable the delivery of free and fair elections and referendums. The period covered by this plan includes 17 separate scheduled polls, at different scales, for different elected bodies, across different electorates and with differing voting systems.

The guidance and support we provide to electoral administrators, parties and candidates will continue to evolve over this period to adapt to the changing needs of our users. Our public awareness campaigns will also need to continue to drive voter registration ahead of polls. We will work to support reform in the delivery of elections, to improve the service offered to voters and address the resource pressures being felt so keenly at a local level. It is our hope that, within the period covered by this plan, this work will be underpinned by governments' delivery of urgent and important reforms to electoral law, as recommended by the Law Commissions in their detailed and thorough assessment of 2016.

Recent years have seen the Commission adopt a more proactive stance to the regulation of political finance in the UK. This can be seen in our real time monitoring of campaigning, our engagement with those we regulate and our enforcement actions when rules are broken. This will continue to develop under this Plan, as we work to increase the transparency of political finance in the UK's democratic system and work with others to address the regulation of developments such as digital campaigning. We will create new regulations and Codes of Practice where needed and where we have the powers to do so; and we will also make recommendations for the enhancement of our role and powers where a strong case of the benefits to voters can be made.

During the life of this Plan we will see the twentieth anniversary of our founding legislation and of the creation of the Commission. Over that time, the organisation has built a substantial body of expertise and of experience, which can be effectively deployed to further our goals and to improve transparency and public confidence. In some areas the Commission's role is to feed directly into delivering change, such as in our work to evaluate voter ID pilots. In other areas we can play a role through convening and informing debate, such as through our collaborative projects to address broader shifts in the needs, expectations and behaviours of voters. In a third

category, we will contribute our specialist elections expertise to broader debates, on issues such as cyber-crime, the use of personal data in campaigning, and the dissemination of fake news. These are issues which affect our elections but also have far wider implications.

In undertaking all of our work, we are responsive to the changing relationships we have with the devolved administrations as devolution continues. As a UK wide Commission, we are proud of the role that we have played to date in delivering an effective service to voters across the UK with and through their elected bodies. We are fully committed to the devolutionary journey and look forward to increased accountability to the Scottish Parliament and National Assembly for Wales and working with them as they develop their electoral plans.

Our service to the UK electorate will be underpinned by a continuing and resolute focus on providing value for money. This Plan highlights the structures we have in place to increase our efficiency and to be able to respond quickly to changes in our external environment which affect our priorities, including unscheduled polls.

As ever, this is not possible without the right people, the right skills and the right resources. The Commission's staff have risen to the challenges facing them and I am confident we will continue to do this and to develop the skills we need to be a modern regulator. This is also true of the other organisations with whom we work, both within and without the electoral community, some of whom are facing unprecedented challenges.

What follows is an ambitious plan setting out how we will continue to meet the challenges of ensuring we realise our vision of being a world-class public sector organisation – innovative, delivering great value and getting right what matters most to voters and legislators.

Claire Bassett

Chief Executive

Our role

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.

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.**

We plan to achieve this vision through a five year work programme with four goals:

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

Developing our goals

In 2016, we undertook a strategic review of the organisation. As part of this, we sought views from political parties and parliamentarians, NGOs, academics and electoral administrators from across the UK.

We received over 120 responses and were grateful for the detailed and extensive feedback on future challenges, risks and opportunities, which, along with developments in 2017, have informed and shaped our four goals and our work programme.

The resulting five year Corporate Plan and annual Business Plan are focused on moving our vision forward, building on our strong track record, setting out how we will achieve our goals, and prioritising what we do, to ensure we are putting voters at the heart of our work.

Work programme

Our five year work programme is set out in this document. Annually we prepare a business plan for the year ahead which provides further detail on what we will do in the coming year to achieve the goals outlined in this plan.

The changing context

The last five years have seen significant changes to the environment in which we work. Increased numbers of complex electoral events, planned and unplanned, cuts to public sector funding, and an increased need to maintain public confidence in the integrity of elections have been key features of this. These are trends which have an important effect on our work, the work of the wider electoral community, and voters, and which are likely to continue. We aim to be robust in addressing these challenges, as we provide support and oversight to the electoral community, including candidates and parties, improve our effective regulation of elections, and directly deliver referendums where necessary.

Important aspects of the context in which we work include:

- **Voters' expectations in a digital world.** Accessing public services and information online is an expectation of many voters – ease of access and use is vitally important in encouraging voter participation. We need to consider how registration and voting can be updated to meet voters' needs and expectations in our digital society, whilst ensuring the democratic system remains secure against cyber threats, and protected from fraud.
- **The increasing challenge of delivering well run elections.** Recent years have seen an increase in the number of elections overall, such as the snap elections in Northern Ireland and in the UK as a whole, as well as a number of complex scheduled polls, including new ones such as the Combined Authority Mayoral elections. Although we believe that both we and the wider electoral community have responded well, it is important to recognise that this increases the difficulties of delivering well run elections, especially when polls are unplanned, and where local authorities are faced with reduced resources and a growing number of skilled professionals leaving electoral work. As we work to support local authorities, we will continue to explore routes to enhance processes and systems to deliver savings and efficiencies, while still ensuring successful delivery of elections and electoral registration services.
- **The urgent need to modernise electoral law.** The legislation governing the UK's elections is significantly out of date, and has become increasingly complex and inconsistent. In 2016, the Law Commissions published their proposals for simplifying electoral law, improving the administration of elections and making our laws fit for the 21st century. We very much welcome the reforms outlined by the Law Commissions and would like to see progress by the UK's governments towards implementing their recommendations, including proposals to modernise electoral offences and simplify the process of challenging elections. Implementing the Law Commissions' proposals, as

well as other recommendations that both we and Sir Eric Pickles have made in recent years, would help to improve confidence in the security and integrity of elections.

- **The changing nature of modern campaigning.** Over the last few years, we have seen an increased use of digital campaigning methods, such as targeting particular groups of voters with specific messages and increased public debate about the need for transparency in all forms of campaigning. We need to remain alert to this trend, ensuring that there is maximum transparency and accountability, as voters have a right to know who is trying to influence them and who is paying for it. The way we monitor and regulate their activities needs to ensure continued transparency.
- **Leaving the European Union.** Following the EU Referendum, we have reviewed our future plans in the context of the UK leaving the European Union. This is likely to impact directly on our work through the change in focus in the legislative schedule. On a practical level, there may be changes to the electoral schedule and there will be changes to the framework supporting the delivery of electoral events across the UK with the disappearance of the European Parliamentary Regional Returning Officers' structure.

In the preparation of this plan, we have aimed to ensure that we incorporate appropriate flexibility to enable us to respond to unscheduled external events, recognising that we may need to reprioritise our work accordingly.

How we work

In order to deliver this ambitious plan alongside our day to day activities, we have divided our work into three categories:

- **Business delivery:** At the core of our work are activities as the regulator of political finance and delivery of the electoral cycle. We are mindful of the need to retain focus on these statutory functions and on the important role that we play in delivering a successful and healthy democratic system. Electoral events of recent years have been recognised as well run, but we are not complacent about these shared achievements with electoral colleagues, and continue to give them primacy in our work plan. For example, to enable effective regulation going forward we have recommended enhancement of our role and powers.
- **Improvement projects:** Activities in this category intend to make transformative interventions in the way we do things. These projects have agreed outcomes and plans in place to deliver them and – whether working alone or with others – the Commission is central to their successful delivery. For example, one of our improvement projects aims to deliver an improved electoral observers scheme, learning lessons from the first ten years of its operation and from international comparators.
- **Innovation and development projects:** While these projects are varied in their content, in each case they seek to address strategic challenges which face us,

the wider sector, or our democratic systems overall. In most cases, we will need to work closely with others to develop the scope and ambition of the projects. For example, an innovation and development project we will be working over the course of this plan looks at how registration can be modernised to meet voters' needs and expectations in our digital society.

To provide a framework for the organisation, and to ensure we are delivering work to achieve our vision, we have aligned activities to at least one of our four key goals. As well as providing a unifying objective to work within each area, the goals enable us to take a broad view and review the balance of work across our responsibilities. To promote knowledge sharing across the organisation, ensure that our Commissioners have strategic engagement in our work, and to help us all work together to identify interdependencies, we have also introduced steering groups focused around our priorities, to facilitate these discussions.

To help measure and monitor our success, for each goal we have identified key activities which contribute towards its delivery and corresponding performance measures, which we will use to assess the quality of our work. Beneath the activities and measures we have also included impact indicators to illustrate the context in which we work and highlight the impact to which we want our work to contribute.

A significant majority of our impact indicators originate from information contained in our annual Winter Tracker survey, which tracks voter opinion on key issues such as the perception of electoral fraud and confidence in spending rules. This survey is a key element of our work as it enables us to ensure we are prioritising issues that matter most to voters and keeping them at the forefront of our work.

Our approach to risk

Like any organisation, we face a number of risks and uncertainties. Some come from outside our organisation, others from within. Some we cannot control or foresee, while others are more predictable.

We have a programme of risk management that encompasses strategic, project and operational risk. Strategic and operational risks are reviewed and monitored by our Executive Team, Audit Committee and Commission Board.

Project risks are reviewed and monitored as part of our project management framework, which includes a process where any significant project risks are automatically escalated for consideration by the Executive Team.

To support our risk management, and ensure we are resilient to alternative future environments, we undertake regular horizon scanning exercises to identify potential uncertainties that may impact on our work.

Working across the UK

As a public body which works across all nations of the UK, we are flexible and proactive in adapting our approach to suit the demands and requirements of different governments, legislatures and electorates. Since the Commission was created, we

have fully embraced devolution in our areas of responsibility, providing a tailored service to each nation but drawing strength from our joint expertise in elections and political finance regulation.

Following the Scotland Act 2016, responsibility for Scottish Parliament elections was transferred to the Scottish Parliament in May 2017; they already had this responsibility for local government elections. The Wales Act 2017 also provides for the legislative competence for local government and Assembly elections to be transferred to the National Assembly for Wales.

These changes mean a further evolution in the ways we report and are held accountable for our work in Scotland and Wales. We are working with the Scottish Parliament and the National Assembly for Wales to establish this accountability in terms of both budget and operational delivery.

In England, the devolution of power to local government has grown over the last few years, with 'devolution deals' and directly elected mayors. Over the course of this Corporate Plan, we will see further elections for combined authority mayors who will, in conjunction with the combined authorities, exercise powers and functions devolved from Government in areas such as planning, housing, further education and business support. We will develop the role of our English regional teams to support these changes and enable us to continue to work collaboratively with local authorities across England as a whole.

The view from Northern Ireland

Political instability has dominated Northern Ireland politics since the start of 2017 and, at the time of writing, attempts continue to establish a working Executive. For our part, we continue our work of putting voters first in Northern Ireland. The successful delivery of two unscheduled elections in 2017 should provide everyone with confidence that both the Electoral Commission and the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland stand ready for any future electoral events.

Transparency is essential in increasing public confidence in the democratic process. Information on how political parties, candidates and other campaigners raise and spend money should be open to timely public scrutiny. We therefore welcome the Transparency of Donations and Loans Order 2018 which will allow us for the first time to publish information on reported donations and loans in Northern Ireland. We look forward to publishing this data by Spring 2018 and then in line with the rest of the UK thereafter. We will continue to press the UK Government to bring forward legislation that would enable us to publish donation and loan information from 1 January 2014.

The introduction of online electoral registration in Great Britain in 2014 led to a significant increase in applications to register to vote. While we acknowledge the unavoidable delays to its implementation in Northern Ireland we would encourage

the Chief Electoral Officer to ensure the online application process is open and available to voters in Northern Ireland, certainly well in advance of elections in 2019.

Continual improvement in the delivery of electoral services will always be our focus as we look to build on the success of improvements to the count process, and to set meaningful performance standards to assess how elections and electoral registration are delivered to voters in Northern Ireland in line with the rest of the UK.

Anna Carragher, Commissioner

A Scottish perspective

Having had five sets of Scotland-wide elections and two significant referendums since 2014, Scotland now finds itself in the unusual position of having no scheduled elections until 2021. This provides us with a welcome opportunity to look at how we deliver elections. The Commission in Scotland is actively engaging with the Scottish Government consultation on electoral reform and any proposed electoral legislation that follows from this. In particular we will be looking at how we can ensure that our elections are sufficiently accessible in order that all voters are able to vote independently and in secret. This may involve difficult questions about the advantages and risks of any new technologies for improving access to our democracy. We'll also want to see the rules for candidates, parties and campaigners aligned across all Scottish elections to ensure there is full transparency for the public so that they can continue to have trust in both the process and the outcomes of our elections.

Scotland is in the unique position of having an Electoral Management Board (EMB) to co-ordinate, support and challenge the work of Returning Officers and Electoral Registration Officers at council elections and the Commission would like to see that role extended to Scottish Parliament elections. The Commission will be working to support the development of the EMB in this respect.

The lowering of the franchise in Scotland to 16 for Scottish Parliament and local government elections will also require the Commission to work closely with education services to ensure that we are using all opportunities available to empower and engage young people in our democracy whilst they are still in school where they can be reached.

Finally, with the commencement of provisions in the Scotland Act 2016, the Commission will be accountable to the Scottish Parliament for our work in relation to Scottish Parliament elections as we already are for council elections in Scotland. We have actively welcomed this increased accountability and we will continue to work closely with the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Government along with the Speaker's Committee to ensure that the appropriate reporting and accounting structures are in place.

Dame Sue Bruce, Commissioner

The view from Wales

It would perhaps be an understatement to say that these are interesting times for those of us that are involved in the management of electoral events in Wales.

The Wales Act 2017 provides the National Assembly for Wales with legislative competence over local government and Welsh general elections, and our elected representatives have wasted no time in developing various ambitious programmes of reform ahead of April 2018, when this Act will be commenced.

As we look forward, we can expect to see two separate pieces of Welsh legislation published over the next 12 months – one focussing on local government elections and the other on the elections to the National Assembly for Wales - and we are committed to working with both the Welsh Government and the Assembly to ensure that the final proposals are implemented in a way that always puts voter interests first.

One of the ways in which we hope to do this is by working with those groups and individuals who are concerned with the reform of elections and electoral registration in Wales. The Wales Electoral Coordination Board, in particular, will have a critical part to play in the modernisation programme, given the enormous amount of expertise and experience it is able to call upon.

We welcome the changes brought about by the Wales Act and look forward to continuing to work with the Llywydd and her team in developing on the positive relationship we have built with the National Assembly for Wales, which includes establishing new and appropriate reporting structures.

On behalf of the team in Wales, I would like to thank all of our partners – from Returning Officers to political parties, Governments to the Assembly, the public to the police – for working with us during what is a busy but critically important period for all of us with an interest in our democracy in Wales.

Elan Closs Stephens CBE, Commissioner

All of our work is set against the backdrop of planned electoral events. As part of the development of our plans and budgets, we have included event expenditure on the preparation of, delivery of, and reporting on electoral events. The table below sets out those currently scheduled over the next five years.

Scheduled elections over the period of the Corporate Plan

May 2018 – English local government
– Local Mayoral (four areas)

May 2019 – English local government
– Northern Ireland local government
– European Parliamentary*
– Local Mayoral (three areas)

May 2020 – Mayor of London and London Assembly
– English local government
– Police and Crime Commissioners (England and Wales)
– Combined Authority Mayoral (England)
– Local Mayoral (one area)

May 2021 – Scottish Parliament
– National Assembly for Wales
– English local government

May 2022 – UK Parliament
- English local Government
- Scottish local Government
- NI Assembly Elections

* These elections are dependent on the current negotiations to exit the European Union

Our goals and priorities over the next five years

Goal 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

This goal captures our central role in overseeing the delivery of elections and referendums across the UK's nations. To achieve this goal, our work focuses on four key areas:

Delivering well-run electoral events

During the period covered by the Corporate Plan, we will be supporting the delivery of 17 scheduled electoral events, including the UK Parliamentary General Election in May 2022. In the lead-up to these events, we will support electoral administrators, candidates and parties across the UK by providing guidance and tailored advice, as well as information for voters on registration and voting. We will also ensure we are fully prepared to respond to any unscheduled electoral events which arise during the period of this plan.

We will use our performance standards frameworks for EROs and ROs to support and challenge their planning for and delivery of well-run electoral registration services and events, but will also review our approach to ensure that we will continue to be able to do this effectively into the future. We also aim to drive continuous improvement by reporting on the administration of major polls, the accuracy and completeness of electoral registers, and allegations and cases of electoral fraud. Continuously improving our work and processes also helps us to be prepared to respond effectively to any unscheduled events that may occur over the next five years.

Maximising electoral registration

We want to ensure that the UK's electoral registers support and enable effective participation in elections and referendums for all, and to help to maximise electoral registration. We do this by delivering effective, value for money, voter registration campaigns across the UK, targeting in particular under registered groups such as recent home movers, young people, students, Black and Minority Ethnic groups and UK citizens living overseas. We will continue working in partnership with public, private and voluntary organisations to expand our public awareness activities for voters.

Modernising electoral registration

We will continue to engage with the Cabinet Office led *Modern Electoral Registration Programme*, while encouraging the UK's governments to work towards an electoral registration system which is more joined-up with other public services, and to make registering to vote even simpler for the public and more efficient for EROs. This will include evaluating pilot schemes designed to inform potential permanent changes to the annual canvass and exploring other improvements such as integrating applications into other public service transactions, making better use of national data to identify new electors or home movers, and looking at the potential of more automatic registration processes.

Tackling electoral fraud

Voters are entitled to be confident that fraud is deterred and detected. We welcomed the review of electoral fraud published by Sir Eric Pickles in 2016, which supported many of the recommendations we have previously highlighted. The UK Government response to Sir Eric's review announced that it intended to take forward a number of measures to prevent electoral fraud, including piloting voter ID requirements in polling stations at local elections in 2018. We will be evaluating the results of these pilots.

We monitor and support the work of EROs, ROs, police forces and prosecutors to tackle electoral fraud, so voters can be confident that fraud is deterred or prevented and that any allegations are appropriately investigated and prosecuted. We collect, analyse and publish data from police forces about cases of alleged electoral fraud, which helps us to focus our support and challenge in areas where there is higher risk.

We will work with the UK Government and Parliament to consider how to strengthen the current voluntary *Code of Conduct for Campaigners in Great Britain*. We also believe that further modernisation of the electoral registration system could help to identify and prevent fraud, for example by showing the extent of double registrations and making easier the detection of double voting.

By taking a proactive and robust approach that prevents incidents of electoral fraud and enables robust action when it happens, we aim to deter and minimise its incidence.

Our work between 2018/19 and 2022/23 will include activity to:

- Develop and implement a strategy for the delivery of **modern, accessible and sustainable guidance** for the electoral community. This project will make full use of available technology and include extensive consultation to ensure we meet the needs of our users.
- Strengthen our relationships and **improve engagement with EROs and ROs** to ensure that we can both support and challenge them effectively where needed, including through our performance standards frameworks.
- Identify good practice in the delivery of electoral registration and elections and **develop mechanisms to share this good practice** on a continuous basis. We will work closely on this with the Association of Electoral Administrators, Scottish Assessors Association and others in the electoral community.
- Encourage and enable new **approaches towards preventing and detecting electoral fraud** so voters can be confident fraud is deterred and detected. This will involve using our research and data insights, working with stakeholders to review and further strengthen policies and practices.
- Work specifically with the UK Government and other partners to **support the implementation of policy changes following Sir Eric Pickles' electoral**

fraud review. This will include planning to evaluate any electoral integrity pilot schemes at elections.

Corporate Key Performance Measures and Impacts

The measures and impacts below set out how we will measure the success of our work in achieving this goal

Activities to achieve this goal			
Provide timely and accurate guidance and advice to ROs and EROs to support their provision of high quality services for voters	Set performance standards frameworks and support ROs and EROs to deliver well-run elections and registration systems to ensure their provision of high quality services	Deliver public awareness campaigns and facilitate others' support for those campaigns , so that people register to vote and are able to take part in elections and referendums	
Monitor and support co-ordinated work between EROs, ROs, police forces and prosecutors to tackle electoral fraud , so that fraud is prevented or deterred and any allegations of fraud are appropriately investigated and prosecuted	Undertake and publish high quality research and reporting on elections and referendums and on electoral registration , so that ROs, EROs and governments can identify changes which would improve the delivery of elections and referendums for voters	Scrutinise and comment on policy and legislative proposals ahead of scheduled polls , so that Governments deliver timely and workable legislation in relation to elections and registration	
Measuring our performance			
We publish 100% of guidance products on time with no substantive errors	We provide accurate advice to ROs and EROs within three working days of receipt of the request	Additions to electoral registers during our public awareness campaigns meet or exceed our targets.	
We review 100% of integrity plans from local authorities identified to be at a higher risk of fraud	We publish 100% of our reports to planned deadlines	We comment on 100% of relevant legislation and policy proposals	
Impact indicators			
No electors are served by ROs or EROs who fail to meet our performance standards	Increasing public confidence in their understanding of and satisfaction with the system of registering to vote	Increasing public confidence in and satisfaction with the process of voting	The electoral registers in the UK maintain or improve current levels of accuracy and completeness

All votes cast are included in the count for elections in the UK (votes rejected is as close to 0% as possible)	100% of our election and registration reports are responded to by the relevant government	The results of elections are trusted and accepted (the number of successful legal challenges is as close to zero as possible)	100% of required legislation for scheduled polls is clear six months before it is required to be implemented with no errors identified
---	---	---	--

Goal 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

This goal captures our regulatory role, and is vital to ensuring the transparency which sits at the heart of any healthy democracy. Our business delivery work in this area is already wide-ranging, while we are taking steps through our project work to become increasingly proactive in the way we regulate, through real time intervention and engagement with those we regulate. The two key areas are:

Ensuring transparency

Voters should be able to see and understand clearly how political parties and other campaigners are funded, and what they spend on campaigning. This includes ensuring that digital campaigning is regulated effectively, with any required changes to the law recommended to governments and UK legislatures. More broadly, we deliver transparency by publishing information about donations and loans, annual accounts from registered parties, and campaign spending which parties and others are required to report to us.

We also register political parties and other campaigners, and maintain an online database of registered political parties and other campaigners. We will be increasingly robust in ensuring that new registrations meet the statutory requirements and that all registrations remain compliant for them to remain on the registers.

In 2017, we made the case for transparency about donations to political parties in Northern Ireland and will work with parties, MPs and MLAs in Northern Ireland following the laying of The Transparency Order 2018 to ensure clarity about the order, and its implications. Once the new order comes into force, we will start publishing information about Northern Ireland donations and loans, in line with the rest of the UK, enabling voters to have access to information about political funding in Northern Ireland.

Good regulation

We will continue to provide high quality advice and guidance to support parties, candidates and campaigners in complying with the rules. Alongside this, we will also continue to take action, and where appropriate, impose sanctions, when the rules

are broken, in accordance with the statutory Commission Enforcement Policy. We will also continue to improve our compliance monitoring, working towards real-time monitoring where we can intervene as soon as an issue is identified. We will continue to publish promptly all outcomes of investigations.

As statutory regulator of political finance we will continue to be proactive in taking forward significant investigations where the rules may have been breached. We work closely with police and prosecutor bodies in the UK, as well as other regulators. Whilst we have appropriate investigatory powers, we have recommended that our role should be extended into regulating candidate expenditure, and that the level of penalties we can impose should be significantly increased to ensure an effective deterrent.

Our work between 2018/19 and 2022/23 will include activity to:

- Improve the **usability and efficiency of our current database *Political Finance and Regulation Online*** with the aim of increasing usage of the site from the public and political parties. Having completed a thorough review of the system, we will re-develop and launch the site over the course of this five year plan.
- Build the case for **changes to legislation to improve confidence and transparency in political finance regulation, including relating to digital campaigning**. We will make the case for improvements to the regulatory controls, and develop a proposal for higher and more proportionate sanctions.
- Reinforce our regulatory role by **creating new regulations and Codes of Practice**, where we have the powers to do so, with the aim of increasing transparency and clarifying what is required of political parties and others.
- Continue to **improve registration and oversight of political parties and campaigners through a more pro-active approach**. We will complete a review of all descriptions on the register of political parties and expand our proactive reviews of parties' financial procedures.
- Improve our **regulatory casework** to ensure robust outcomes with a high impact on compliance, not least by using our full range of statutory investigation and sanctioning powers as appropriate.
- Review and **assess the impact of new powers** we might exercise, and consult on a **prosecution policy leading to and governing a level of appropriate prosecutions work**.

Corporate Key Performance Measures and Impacts

The measures and impacts below set out how we will measure the success of our work in achieving this goal.

Activities to achieve this goal			
Publish financial returns from parties and others we regulate so that voters can easily see how parties and campaigns are funded and how the money has been spent	Check financial returns against the rules on a sample basis so that voters can be confident parties and campaigners are following the rules	Provide timely and accurate advice, guidance and support to parties and campaigners so that they can understand and comply with the political finance rules	
Maintain and publish accurate registers of political parties and campaigners so that candidates can stand for election and the public can rely on the registers	Take enforcement action where appropriate so that parties and campaigners know they need to comply with the rules and voters can be confident they are complying	Respond proactively to potential regulatory issues so that we can work with parties and campaigners to bring them into compliance before any risks materialise	
Measuring our performance			
We publish routine financial returns from parties and campaigners, including statements of accounts , within 30 working days to comply with statutory deadlines.	We check a minimum of 25% of all financial returns for accuracy and compliance each year	We publish 100% of guidance products on time with no substantive errors	We provide accurate advice within five to 20 days of receipt of the request, depending on the complexity of the advice
We notify applicants of the outcome of their registration applications within 30 days of a complete application 75% of the time	We conduct timely and proportionate investigations of which 90% are completed within 180 days	We issue 90% of final notices setting out our sanctions within 21 days of the deadline for representations. We publish the outcome of all our investigations.	We make timely regulatory recommendations that reflect the principles guiding our approach to effective regulatory framework
Impact indicators			
Increasing public confidence that the spending and funding of political parties and candidates at UK	Increasing public confidence that appropriate action will be taken by the authorities if a campaigner is	All donations and loans for larger parties are accurate and comply with the rules and are	All campaign spending returns are accurate and comply with the rules and are submitted on time

elections is open and transparent	caught breaking the rules on campaign funding	submitted on time	
--------------------------------------	---	-------------------	--

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 digital age

This goal responds to an appetite which came through clearly in our Strategic Review, for us to take on a more leading role in guiding the sector through the challenges it faces. This is a developing area of activity. For example, after seeing a rise in digital campaigning, we are conducting enquiries into how such campaigning has been used in recent electoral events to learn lessons for future regulation and build voter confidence that the rules are followed by parties and campaigners. We will build on existing recommendations to improve transparency, such as requiring imprints on online campaign material, to lead the debate on ways to ensure digital campaigning is fairly and effectively regulated.

Strengthening our evidence base and use of this evidence

To support us in achieving this goal, a key business delivery area is to use research, analysis and insight to shed light on challenges and opportunities within our democratic system. As part of this, we will continue to undertake research and report on the accuracy and completeness of the UK's electoral registers. We will also monitor changes to the system of electoral registration and use post-election opinion surveys and our annual UK-wide survey to monitor the public's view on electoral issues and their experiences when taking part in elections. This data informs our decisions and policy recommendations, helps us to influence developments in legislation, policy and practice, and supports us in ensuring we are getting right what matters most to voters.

We will also continue to scrutinise new electoral legislation and provide expert briefings to Governments, Parliaments and Assemblies on legislative proposals. Specifically, we will work with the UK Law Commissions and government officials on the implementation of electoral law reform.

Our project work between 2018/19 and 2022/23 will include activity to:

- Understand the **needs and expectations of voters, and how registering and voting could be modernised to address them**. This work will involve research and policy analysis work looking at digital and other practical solutions, drawing on international experience and experience from the modernisation of other public services in the UK. Our work in this area will also continue to assess the risks of hacking and other forms of digital manipulation which could undermine confidence in the integrity of our electoral processes.
- Assess the interventions which **drive engagement in voting, to understand how participation in democracy could be improved**. This will involve working with and consulting stakeholders, including other Electoral Commissions and bodies overseas, to understand what others are doing to encourage participation and to identify opportunities.
- Identify and evaluate evidence about new approaches to improve the delivery of electoral registration, including through **evaluations** of the UK Government's pilot schemes on the **annual canvass**.

Corporate Key Performance Measures and Impacts

The measures and impacts below set out how we will measure the success of our work in achieving this goal.

Activities to achieve this goal		
Evaluate Government proposals for changes to electoral registration and election processes and political finance regulation, so that legislators have access to independent expert analysis of the impact of proposed policies	Use our expertise to identify long term trends and issues so that policymakers and legislators understand and acknowledge the challenges to the efficiency of our democratic system and can make decisions	
Use our expertise to identify long term trends and issues so that policymakers and legislators understand and acknowledge the challenges to transparency and fairness which may need to be addressed	Develop project work that utilises the Commission’s and external stakeholders’ learning to move forward strategic issues, and make recommendations for change where appropriate	
Measuring our performance		
Publish our evaluation and response to the 2016 and 2017 annual canvass pilot programme	Deliver a project to understand the landscape of public democratic engagement in the UK	Deliver a project to develop and explore the feasibility of proposals to modernise electoral registration and meet voters’ needs and expectations in our digital society
Publish our evaluation and response to the 2018 voter ID pilots	Work in support of the electoral law reform recommendations from the England and Wales, Scotland and the Northern Ireland Law Commissions	
Impact Indicators		
Our expert evidence and views are referenced in public debate about our democratic system and processes, and government proposals reflect our priorities and recommendations for change.		

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

Key to our success over the next five years and beyond is ensuring we have the right services in place to support the delivery of this ambitious plan. This underpinning goal provides a focus to activities that support the organisation and ensure we have the appropriate skilled people and resources, and that the delivery of services is efficient, effective and economical.

Supporting the organisation

This includes providing consistently high quality HR, finance, planning, legal, support and ICT functions. We will develop our *People Strategy* which sets out the activities we will undertake to support the delivery of our Corporate Plan and ensure we promote a culture where staff members are able to perform their roles effectively.

As the external demand for improved technology increases, we will ensure we have a programme of work to keep up to date with new software and systems. We will also manage our resources efficiently to ensure we can continue to deliver services that meet the needs of our stakeholders and provide value for money.

As we respond to the changing expectations of voters and respond to the changing political environment, a challenge for us and our staff is to ensure we have a mix of the right skills, knowledge and capability within our resources. For example, in responding to the changing nature of campaigning, it is vital we can recruit and attract the right skills required to ensure we continue to successfully respond to emerging challenges.

Our work between 2018/19 and 2022/23 will include activity to:

- Implement our **accommodation strategy**. This will support the organisation in setting out a plan for the future and ensuring we have a flexible working environment to support the delivery of effective and efficient work. This will lay the foundations to prepare the organisation for the likely need to secure new accommodation after 2020.
- Complete **upgrades** to our **Finance and HR systems**. This will provide us with a better view of how we are using our resources and promote stronger collaboration between teams.
- Understand the benefits that could be derived from making more **effective use of digital technology**. We will consider implementing a new e-procurement system and e-board paper system to make better use of our time and achieve savings in the ways we buy in goods and services.
- Carry out a programme of work to improve the ways in which we **manage and share information and knowledge** and investigate better ways of making our data available for re-use by others, and increasing transparency for voters.

Corporate Key Performance Measures and Impacts

The measures and impacts below set out how we will measure the success of our work in achieving this goal.

Activities to achieve this goal		
Improve the performance of our technology to ensure it keeps up to date with good practice including online security, realises efficiency savings and provides the right level of service for the organisation		Implement our accommodation strategy, so that we provide appropriate environments for our staff whilst making best use of our resources, taking into account the benefits that new technology can bring
Consider new ways to procure goods and services, taking advantage of new technology like e-procurement to achieve better value in the goods and services we purchase		Develop our People Strategy to recruit and retain the skilled and experienced workforce required to continue to deliver our vision and goals
Measuring our performance		
Learn practical lessons from current home and remote working practices and design future accommodation accordingly.		Identify options, costs and benefits of e-procurement and implement a new system accordingly.
Stakeholder and staff satisfaction with IT tools	Maintaining high staff engagement scores in the annual staff survey and ensuring indicators such as staff turnover are at appropriate levels	Monitoring significant variances on all budgets and where appropriate reducing these variances over the five-years of this plan

Managing our costs

Our budget includes expenditure on preparing for, supporting the delivery of, and reporting on scheduled electoral events. Over the course of the period covered by this plan, we will support the delivery of all local government, UK Parliament, devolved Parliament and Assembly, Mayoral, London Assembly and Police and Crime Commissioner Elections (see table on page 10). The table below includes our forecast resource requirements in support of these planned events – if the number, scale or nature of these electoral events changes; we will update our resource requirements accordingly.

Core costs fund the activities we will undertake regardless of the electoral cycle; this includes registering and monitoring the funding of political parties, supporting electoral administration and analysing performance standards and some elements of our research work. Core costs also include administrative expenditure on Commission support functions including accommodation, ICT and telephony.

Planned capital expenditure over the next five years includes a significant investment in the Commission's online Political Finance and Regulation online portal, which is used by our stakeholders to maintain their organisational details and report their financial returns to the Commission. The capital plan also includes investments in developing digital tools to deliver modern, accessible and sustainable guidance for the electoral community, updating the Commission's websites and replacing business systems and infrastructure.

In addition to the Commission's operational costs, we are also responsible for administering policy development grants to eligible political parties, in line with the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 (PPERA), which provides for £2,000,000 of grants to be paid to eligible political parties to assist in developing policies for inclusion in their manifestos. We will continue to ensure there are appropriate controls over the distribution and use of these public funds.

The Commission's spending plans for 2018/19 – 2022/23 are summarised in the table below. The figures in the table below are forecast outturn price base. When preparing this plan we have made a number of assumptions to ensure we are setting realistic plans and delivering value for money. Key amongst these is the number and type of electoral events that are planned for the period covered by this plan. The second key determinant is the level of inflation experienced by the Commission, where we have taken the approach to absorb forecast inflationary pressures within our core budget to maximise efficiency savings. We do not think that this would be possible in the first two years of the plan as we complete reactive work (such as investigations) following the 2016 Referendum and 2017 General Election.

Electoral Commission expenditure 2018-19 to 2022-23					
Electoral	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
£m					
Core expenditure	10.853	10.441	10.458	10.447	10.459
Depreciation	0.558	0.549	0.644	0.365	0.339
Core sub-total	11.411	10.990	11.102	10.812	10.799
Event	3.275	2.985	3.224	4.354	4.177
Capital	0.972	0.250	1.100	0.250	0.250
Policy Development Grants	2.000	2.000	2.000	2.000	2.000
Total spending plans	17.658	16.225	17.426	17.415	17.225

Further expenditure in the region of £0.25 million in Commissioner Fees and related expenses does not require annual Parliamentary authority and is instead funded directly from the Consolidated Fund. This amount is not included in the figures above.

Our governance arrangements

The Commission is led by a Board of Commissioners, who set the strategic direction and is responsible for the work of the organisation. The Board comprises ten Commissioners, one of which is the Chair. Three of the Commissioners are appointed to represent Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales respectively. These Commissioners provide advice and support in relation to their country. They also advise on the impact of the Commission's work and are consulted by the Commission Board on matters in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

Four of the Commissioners are nominated by the leaders of political parties: one by the party with the largest number of MPs in 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 Parliament. The remaining two Commissioners have no specific brief. All Commissioners are appointed by Her Majesty the Queen, on a motion of Parliament.

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

The Chief Executive is the accounting officer.

We are accountable to the UK Parliament, specifically the Speaker's Committee, which is chaired by the Speaker of the House of Commons and made up of a cross party group of MPs. A member of the Speaker's Committee is nominated by the Committee to answer questions in the House of Commons about the Electoral Commission. In 2018/19 this role is carried out by Bridget Phillipson MP. Following the Scotland Act 2016, responsibility for Scottish Parliament elections was transferred to the Scottish Parliament in May 2017; they already had this responsibility for local government elections.

The Wales Act 2017 also provides for the legislative competence for local government and Assembly elections to be transferred to the National Assembly for Wales.

Every year we submit an estimate of our income and expenditure, together with our work plan, to the Speaker's Committee for examination and approval.

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