

# Consultation on new performance standards for Electoral Registration Officers

Supporting Electoral Registration Officers in delivering the transition to Individual Electoral Registration

**May 2013**

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# 1 Developing new performance standards for Electoral Registration Officers (EROs)

## Purpose

1.1 EROs will have a critical role in delivering the transition to individual electoral registration (IER). Given the significant change to existing processes that the transition will involve, we are developing a new performance standards framework to support EROs in meeting the challenges inherent in effectively delivering the transition to IER.

1.2 We are committed to ensuring that EROs and their staff have the opportunity to input into the development of the new performance standards framework, and so we are now seeking views from the electoral community to inform this work.

1.3 This paper sets out how the proposed performance standards framework will work and in particular how it will be used to identify those EROs who most need support in order to ensure effective delivery of the transition. The paper seeks views on whether the new framework will be effective in measuring how well the challenges of the transition to IER are being met.

## Background

1.4 The Electoral Administration Act 2006 (EAA) gave the Electoral Commission powers to set and monitor performance standards for electoral services<sup>1</sup>. Under these provisions, the Commission may:

- determine and publish standards of performance for relevant electoral officers in Great Britain (EROs, Returning Officers and Counting Officers)
- direct relevant officers to provide the Commission with reports regarding their performance against the published standards

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<sup>1</sup> The current performance standards framework introduced by the EAA does not apply in Northern Ireland; however, a set of draft registration standards have been agreed with the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland (EONI) and we are currently piloting the draft standards and evidence requirements.

- publish its assessment of the level of performance by relevant officers against the published standards

1.5 In July 2008 the Commission published performance standards for EROs and has monitored and reported on the performance of EROs against these standards in each year since.<sup>2</sup>

1.6 The current performance standards framework was designed to provide EROs with a clear picture of what is needed to support a well-run electoral registration process, and to provide an objective process for assessing performance against common agreed standards. Since 2008 there has been continuing improvement in performance against the standards, with a significant increase in the number of EROs meeting the standards over the past five years. Considerable progress has been achieved, with the majority of EROs now having formal documented plans in place designed to ensure that their electoral registration processes are managed effectively and lead to the best possible outcomes for electors.

1.7 There are, however, still some aspects of performance where there remain areas of concern, principally in relation to the performance of EROs against current standard 3: house-to-house enquiries. While there has been an improvement in performance against this standard since 2011 when 58 EROs (15%) did not meet the standard, there are still 30 EROs (8%) who do not currently meet the standard, and we want to ensure that this number reduces further.

1.8 This standard aims to ensure that properties which have not responded to the annual canvass and where the ERO is not otherwise satisfied that eligible electors are resident will be subject to house-to-house enquiries on at least one or more occasions. As part of our assessment of ERO performance against this standard we take into account the extent of house-to-house enquiries that are carried out; what, if any, other methods were used in addition to the steps specified in S9A of the RPA 1983 (for example, telephone, e-mail, personal canvassing outside the canvass period, mini canvass, etc.); and the outcomes of the canvass.

1.9 It is particularly important to make sure that in preparation for the transition to IER EROs do all they can now to ensure that their registers are as complete and accurate as possible by taking all available steps – including carrying out house-to-house enquiries and using available local data to identify and target potential electors – before the transition to IER begins.

1.10 A comprehensive canvass in 2013-14 will help to maximise the number of electors who can be ‘confirmed’ during the transition, which will in turn help

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<sup>2</sup> The current performance standards for EROs can be found at:  
[www.electoralcommission.org.uk/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0007/57949/Performancestandards-2008-06-25\\_final-webres.pdf](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0007/57949/Performancestandards-2008-06-25_final-webres.pdf).

to reduce the number of electors that EROs will need to follow up with and invite to register individually. We therefore intend to continue to use the current standards to monitor performance in advance of the last household canvass in 2013. **As the new performance standards framework will be in place by the end of September 2013, this means that there will be a period between the end of September 2013 and spring 2014 when both sets of standards will be in effect, and we will work to ensure that EROs and their staff are clear as to what this means for them in practice.**

## Transition to Individual Electoral Registration

1.11 On 31 January 2013 the Electoral Registration and Administration Act (ERA Act) received Royal Assent, paving the way for the introduction of individual electoral registration (IER) in Great Britain from summer 2014. While some of the key activities to be undertaken in delivering IER will be similar to or largely based on processes which EROs currently follow, there will be several significant aspects of the process which will be different for EROs.

1.12 In order to deliver the transition to IER effectively it will be critical that EROs:

- **Understand the particular challenges in their registration area and develop a plan for engaging with residents which responds to these challenges.**

As part of the transition to IER, EROs will need to compare existing electors' names and addresses on the electoral registers with records held by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) in order to 'confirm' the identity of people currently on the registers. The levels of confirmation will vary within an ERO's area and across different local authority areas, and so the nature and scale of the challenges facing different EROs may vary considerably. Analysis of the results of the confirmation dry-run which is taking place in summer 2013 will help EROs to understand the challenges relevant to them and will inform the development of a local public engagement strategy. Once this strategy is in place, details of how it will be implemented should be embedded within the ERO's overall implementation plan covering everything that needs to be done to deliver the transition effectively. The Commission will provide a template public engagement strategy, implementation plan and risk register to support EROs in preparing for the transition.

- **Deliver their local implementation plan, monitoring progress and making amendments where necessary**

EROs will need to implement their plans to most effectively target electors. EROs will need to ensure that they have in place systems to track progress against their plans, allowing them to monitor and evaluate

their progress and amend their plans as required, and helping them to be able to target their resources appropriately.

1.13 The Commission will be producing guidance and tools for EROs such as templates based on national public awareness for EROs to use locally, as well as revised versions of the types of resources the Commission currently provides for EROs, which includes planning tools and resources to support canvassers. As with the guidance previously produced by the Commission for EROs, it will be designed to provide an end-to-end guide on managing electoral registration services during this period. The guidance will work alongside the new performance standards framework to support EROs in responding to the challenges inherent in effectively delivering the transition to IER. The guidance will also highlight what information and data we expect to request as part of the monitoring process.

1.14 The Commission will use the new performance standards framework to:

- review the strategies and plans EROs have in place, ensuring that a comprehensive analysis and assessment of the confirmation dry run results has been carried out and has informed their planning for the transition
- monitor the implementation of the plans and review their effectiveness
- identify where there may be issues so that targeted support can be provided to those who most need it
- inform an assessment of how effective the processes employed by individual EROs are, as well as informing a wider assessment of the effectiveness of implementation

## 2 How the new performance standards framework would work

2.1 In developing the new performance standards framework, we have built on the lessons we have learned from monitoring the performance of EROs and Returning Officers (ROs) over the last five years. We have also sought to respond to the feedback we have received, including through our recent stakeholder survey.

### Objective

2.2 The overall objective of the new performance standards framework is to support EROs in planning for and delivering the transition to IER. The new framework will apply to the transitional period only, and will be in place from autumn 2013 up to May 2015. The framework will be reviewed and updated, following consultation, with the new standards coming into effect after the May 2015 polls.

2.3 We have developed the new framework around the key challenges facing EROs in the transition; we want to focus on what EROs will need to do and know in order to effectively deliver the transition and what information EROs and the Commission will need in order to determine whether these challenges are being met.

2.4 The proposed framework sets out:

- the key challenges facing EROs during the transition to IER
- what the ERO needs to do to meet the challenges
- what will demonstrate how the challenges have been met

2.5 The standards essentially seek to establish whether EROs have plans in place which are based on an analysis of their particular local circumstances, and whether they are working in practice.

2.6 We have aimed to focus on the relevant data and information that will already be produced and used by EROs and their staff to inform how they plan for and deliver the transition. As well as enabling us to target support where it is needed, both the Commission and the Cabinet Office will want to be able to build a comprehensive picture of what progress is being made throughout the transition to understand how it is working across Great Britain.

2.7 Whilst the new performance standards framework aims to ensure consistency in service for electors, we recognise that the individual challenges faced by each ERO will vary depending on the local circumstances in each

area. Our evaluation report on the pilot schemes to assess the usefulness and reliability of the proposed confirmation process showed that results varied between pilot areas and that the levels of confirmation are unlikely to be consistent across Great Britain.<sup>3</sup> Therefore the nature and scale of the challenges facing different EROs will vary considerably. Consequently, the new framework aims to be flexible, taking account of the differing circumstances across local authorities.

## What does the ERO need to do to meet the challenges?

2.8 Our guidance, which will be developed in close consultation with the UK Electoral Advisory Board (EAB) and the Elections, Registration and Referendums Working Group (ERRWG), aims to set out what EROs will expect of their staff in order to prepare for and deliver a successful transition to IER. Similarly, we want the new performance standards framework to reflect what we, the UK EAB and the ERRWG agree that EROs need to do to ensure a successful transition to IER and what success will look like. The standards will focus on the key areas of activity that will form part of the transition. The guidance will be designed to work alongside the standards and will set out in detail what EROs will need to do to meet the challenges and what we would expect to see to demonstrate how the challenges have been met.

2.9 The two key areas of focus will be the local public engagement strategy and the implementation plan. Both will be defined in detail in our guidance on preparing for IER, which will be published in June 2013; at the same time, templates will be made available to support EROs in developing these, setting out everything we would expect to be included.

2.10 In summary, the **public engagement strategy** should identify the challenges for the local area and what mechanisms will be used to engage with residents to maximise registration on the IER register. This should include:

- Analysis of the confirmation dry-run results and other available information
- Identification of the different groups of residents and what approaches should be used to target each of these
- Analysis of what local partners can be used to support the dissemination of messages and how these relationships can be established
- Analysis of what public awareness activities can be used to support direct engagement with residents, including paid for and non-paid for advertising

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<sup>3</sup> Data matching pilot: confirmation process – evaluation report, April 2013.



2.11 The **implementation plan** should set out how the transition will be delivered, and should cover areas including:

- Identification of the required resources, including identification of staffing requirements and any necessary recruitment arrangements
- Identification of training needs, incorporating external and internal sources of training, such as Commission briefings
- The management of contractors and suppliers, including printers and software suppliers
- Implementation of the public engagement strategy, including how direct contact with residents will be managed
- Details of how the necessary steps as set out in Section 9A of the Representation of the People Act 1983 will be carried out, both during the canvass and throughout the year, including leading up to the May 2015 polls
- Processes to identify any patterns of activity that might indicate potential integrity problems, including what steps are to be taken to deal with any such problems

## What will demonstrate how the ERO has responded to the challenge?

2.12 The new framework sets out the information that both EROs and the Commission will want to know to understand what progress is being made throughout the transition. This will include contextual data to help us and EROs to understand both the scope and scale of the challenges and what progress is being made in response to these. The ERO will be able to use this information to demonstrate that they have done everything that they can to ensure a successful transition, and will be able to share this information locally, including with elected representatives, to demonstrate the progress being made. Similarly, the Commission will be able to see how the challenges of the transition to IER are being met, and where issues are identified, to work with EROs to put the necessary arrangements in place.

2.13 In autumn 2013 the engagement strategies of all EROs will be reviewed to understand what the challenges facing each ERO are and how they intend to respond to these. Additionally, we may seek to review the full implementation plans of a sample of EROs to determine how they plan to deliver the transition as a whole. We will provide EROs with guidance, tools and templates to support them in their planning. These will set out what we expect EROs will need to have in place, and what we would expect to see in the review of the documentation, to be able to be satisfied that they have met the challenges of the transition.

2.14 We will identify where support is needed for EROs so that they can make changes to their plans and processes to ensure that the challenges of the transition are met effectively. It is important that EROs keep their plans under regular review and use these to monitor progress throughout the

transition, and we will continue to work with EROs, particularly where we identify that there are significant challenges or where there have been particular issues, to support this work.

2.15 The data will be important throughout the implementation phase, supporting an analysis of how effective the processes employed by the ERO are being, as well as demonstrating how effectively the implementation of IER as a whole has been delivered. There will be a focus not only on the overall outcomes but on what enabled that outcome to be achieved and the effectiveness of the mechanisms employed by the ERO. Each ERO will need to understand what the data tells them about how effective their processes are, and use it to keep their arrangements under review throughout the transition. The Commission will support EROs in evaluating and analysing the data and how it impacts on the work they do. In doing so, we will seek to identify what works well and share these examples so that those EROs who need support can benefit from others' experiences.

2.16 The frequency of collection of the data will vary depending on the particular data requested, with some data requiring one return, and others requiring frequent returns.

2.17 As part of this consultation we are especially interested in seeking views on the information that EROs, and the Commission, will need to know in order to assess how effective the processes employed by EROs have been, and how often this information should be reviewed. We are also keen to hear whether the new framework has achieved the right balance between collecting relevant information and data and imposing an unnecessary obligation on EROs.

2.18 We have already indicated to Cabinet Office the types of information we expect to be collecting to enable these requirements to be built into the electoral management software (EMS) systems in order to make the process as straightforward as possible for EROs, and to help to ensure consistent completion of returns. We understand that Cabinet Office have included the requirements in the draft specifications provided to the EMS suppliers and while no issues with these being incorporated are anticipated, we cannot confirm at this stage that these requirements will be reflected in the final systems. We will continue to work with Cabinet Office, and with the software suppliers, to try to achieve this. We would welcome views on what the impact on producing the data would be if the collation of the data cannot be automated, both for the ERO in monitoring the progress of how the challenges are being responded to and for the provision of the data to the Commission.

2.19 We have also been undertaking work to try to improve the process for completing and submitting data to us. In doing this, we have introduced a web-based process for our performance standards for Returning Officers (ROs) whereby each RO is asked to complete a series of online returns rather than being required to complete returns in the form of an Excel spreadsheet. Subject to an evaluation of how this has worked at the May 2013 polls, we intend to introduce a similar system to collect the contextual data as set out in the proposed framework.

## Support

2.20 The aim throughout the transition is to provide ongoing support, where necessary, whether it is through our guidance, tools and templates or through our teams across England, Scotland and Wales, to assist EROs where required so that the transition to IER can be delivered effectively. We will work with EROs, where necessary, to put arrangements in place to ensure that they are in the best possible position to deliver the transition.

2.21 Whilst support will be provided through our teams across England, Scotland and Wales, we will also be working with other external stakeholders, such as the Cabinet Office's Regional Delivery Managers, to establish whether and how they can help to support individual EROs where it is needed. We also want to encourage and support electoral services and electoral registration teams in establishing and building on existing networks to share experiences and examples through peer support, ensuring that those EROs who need support can benefit from other EROs who have faced similar challenges. As part of this consultation we would welcome any views on our approach to delivering support and the best mechanisms for doing so.

## Reporting

2.22 Whilst the emphasis of the new framework is on identifying where support is needed for EROs during the transition, we will make an assessment of whether the standard has been met at two points in the transition: in spring 2014 we will report on the preparedness of EROs to deliver the transition to IER and performance against proposed standard one; and as soon as practicable after the May 2015 polls, we will publish a further report on the performance of EROs focussing on the challenges set out in proposed standard two.

# 3 Letting us know what you think

3.1 Under Section 9A(3) of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 (PPERA), the Commission is required to consult the Secretary of State and any other appropriate person before determining or publishing standards of performance for Electoral Registration Officers (EROs).

3.2 We have written seeking the Secretary of State's views on the proposed performance standards outlined in this paper. This consultation paper has also been sent to all EROs in Great Britain, and to a number of agencies, professional bodies, and representative organisations including:

- Cabinet Office
- Department for Communities and Local Government
- Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE)
- Association of Electoral Administrators (AEA)
- Electoral Management Board for Scotland
- Scottish Assessors Association (SAA)
- Society of Local Authority Lawyers and Administrators in Scotland (SOLAR)
- Scottish Government
- Welsh Government
- Political parties
- Local government associations
- Electoral management software suppliers
- Elected representatives

3.3 We are committed to ensuring that EROs and their staff have the opportunity to input into the development of the new performance standards framework. We want the new performance standards framework to reflect what we, the UK EAB and the ERRWG agree that EROs need to do to ensure a successful transition to IER.

3.4 We will be happy to arrange meetings with any of the groups above and any other interested individuals or groups on request.

## Contact details

3.5 We would be grateful if you could return any responses to the contact details outlined below, either by post, fax or e-mail. We are also happy to take any comments over the telephone through your local Commission team.

3.6 Please send your response to:

Ian Fraser  
Project Officer – Performance Standards  
The Electoral Commission  
3 Bunhill Row  
London  
EC1Y 8YZ  
Tel: 020 7271 0658  
Fax: 020 7271 0505  
Email: [performancestandardsinbox@electoralcommission.org.uk](mailto:performancestandardsinbox@electoralcommission.org.uk)

3.7 The deadline for responses to this consultation is **Monday 15 July 2013**. Although we may take into account responses received after this date, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.

3.8 If you anticipate any difficulties responding to this consultation, please do not hesitate to contact us. As discussed above, we will be happy to meet individuals and groups who wish to express their views to us in person, and this may also provide an option for those who are pressed for time in responding.

3.9 To assist us to analyse the results of this consultation, it will be helpful for respondents to make clear in what capacity or on whose behalf their response is submitted. We may therefore contact respondents for further information as to the status of their submission if it is not immediately clear in the response. In addition, we may wish to publish or make available for inspection responses to this consultation paper.

3.10 We aim to publish the final standards in September 2013 in order to give EROs sufficient time to incorporate the standards into their planning for IER.

## Guidelines for responses

3.11 We are seeking views on the new performance standards framework and our proposed approach to how it will work. Respondents may wish to consider the following questions as part of their response:

- Will the new framework be effective in measuring how well the challenges of the transition to IER are being met?
- Will the new framework ensure consistency in service for electors while still recognising varying local circumstances?
- Is the documentation and data going to be useful to EROs?
  - Will it help EROs to monitor progress?
  - If not, what would be more useful?
  - Would there be any difficulties in supplying any of the documentation/data?
  - How often would it be useful to review the documentation/data?

- Would collection of the documentation/data represent an additional cost for the ERO?
- How should the information provided to demonstrate how the challenges are being met, be reviewed?
  - Should the Commission carry out the review in a similar way to how current performance standards returns are reviewed?
  - Are there other options that should be explored?
- Will the framework help identify EROs that need support, and what are the best mechanisms for delivering this support?
  - Is there a role for peer support?
  - Are there any other mechanisms for providing support that should be explored?

## What happens next

3.12 After this consultation on the new performance standards framework for EROs has finished, we will review the responses received, and consider any amendments as a result of those responses. We will then consult with the UK EAB on any amendments or revisions before publication of the performance standards for EROs in September 2013, alongside our guidance, tools and templates to support EROs in delivering the transition to IER.

3.13 We are separately consulting on the development of the detailed guidance that we will produce. More information can be found on our website at [www.electoralcommission.org.uk/guidance/resources-for-electoral-administrators/electoral-registration](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/guidance/resources-for-electoral-administrators/electoral-registration).

## New performance standards for EROs

Performance standard 1: Understand the particular challenges in your registration area and develop a plan for engaging with residents which responds to these challenges

Challenge	What does the ERO need to do to meet the challenge?	What will demonstrate how the challenge has been met?
<p><b>Using all available information, including data from the confirmation dry-run, to understand the key challenges in your local area</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Carry out a comprehensive analysis and assessment of the results of the confirmation dry-run and use this to inform planning for the transition, identifying key challenges faced locally and ways to meet those challenges, including how you will best target residents who will not be confirmed</li> <li>• Consider local data matching where appropriate, assessing the robustness of data source and standard of match</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implementation plan, public engagement strategy and risk register, which cover the key areas set out in Electoral Commission guidance</li> <li>• Documented decisions on whether local data matching is appropriate, and where local data matching is to be undertaken, a list of the data sources to be used, how the robustness of the data has been assessed, and what standard of match is being applied</li> </ul>

**Contextual data demonstrating the scope and scale of the challenge**

- Number of residents rated red, amber and green following matching against Department for Work and Pensions data during the confirmation dry-run



## Performance standard 2: Deliver your implementation plan, monitoring progress and making amendments where necessary

Challenge	What does the ERO need to do to meet the challenge?	What will demonstrate how the challenge has been met?
<p><b>Effectively delivering your implementation plan, ensuring it remains appropriate, using available data to monitor progress and keep it under review</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analyse and assess the results of the confirmation process, including reviewing how these compare to the confirmation dry run results</li> <li>• Target residents who have not been confirmed to get them individually registered and monitor progress</li> <li>• Send household enquiry forms to relevant properties</li> <li>• Carry out all necessary steps as set out in Section 9A of the Representation of the People Act 1983</li> <li>• Identify and target under-registered groups</li> <li>• Carry out registration activity in early</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public engagement strategy updated as required to reflect the results of the confirmation process</li> <li>• Implementation plan updated as required, including to reflect progress made</li> </ul>

	2015	
<b>Timely<sup>4</sup> publication and supply of the revised register to those entitled to receive it</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Publish and supply the revised register to those entitled to receive it</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Date of publication of the revised register and date[s] supplied (including date[s] requested for those entitled to receive the register on request)</li> </ul>
<b>Maintaining the integrity of registration and absent vote applications</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Have in place processes to identify any patterns of activity that might indicate potential integrity problems, including what steps are to be taken to deal with any such problems</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Details of what the threshold is for the number of absent vote applications being directed to any one address</li> <li>Details of what steps are to be taken to deal with concerns about specific registration or absent vote applications</li> <li>Details of how the approach to preventing and detecting electoral fraud is communicated to voters, candidates and other local contacts</li> </ul>

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<sup>4</sup> As set out in our report on the performance of EROs in 2012, we will be working in the summer of 2013 to clarify what an acceptable timeframe for supply is, consulting with EROs and recipients of the register, and it is this definition of 'timely' that the standard and our guidance to be published in September 2013 will reflect.

### **Contextual data demonstrating the scope and scale of the challenges and progress made in response to these challenges**

- Number of residents rated red, amber and green following matching against Department for Work and Pensions data
- Where local data matching is undertaken, number of residents graded red and amber that were subject to local data matching and the results of the local data matching (numbers from red to green, amber to green)
- Number of confirmation letters sent to residents who have been confirmed that were returned as addressee no longer resident
- Number of residents not confirmed
- Number of individual invitations to register issued to non-confirmed residents
- Response rate for all non-confirmed residents and for absent voters – including numbers subsequently included on IER register, numbers unsuccessful, numbers of reminders issued, and numbers returned by response mechanism (including number provided by letter, number completed electronically and number returned through personal canvassers)
- Number of applications made through the exceptions route
- Number of electors on the register not registered individually
- Number of electors carried forward at the conclusion of the postponed 2013 canvass who are not registered individually and so not included on the 1 December 2014 register
- Number of electors who had an absent vote before 1 December 2014 who re-apply before May 2015 after becoming individually registered
- Total number of compulsory household enquiry forms issued and returned
- Total number of household enquiry forms issued at ERO discretion and numbers returned
- Number of individual invitations sent as a consequence of returned HEFs
- Response rate – including numbers subsequently included on the IER register, numbers unsuccessful, numbers of reminders issued, and numbers returned by response mechanism (including number provided by letter, number completed electronically and number returned through personal canvassers)
- Number of applications made through the exceptions route
- Number of reviews of registration undertaken and total number of electors deleted
- Number of amendments made (including name changes)
- Number of electors registered through rolling registration (via provision of identifiers)
- Number of electors registered through rolling registration (via exceptions process)
- Number of electors registered through rolling registration (via attestation)

- Number of applications to register via online channel