

Ann Jones AM
Chair, Communities, Equality and Local
Government Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
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5 September 2011

Dear Ann,

Performance standards for Returning Officers

I am writing to let you know that the Commission is revising its performance standards for Returning Officers and to invite comments from you or the Committee, as part of our formal consultation on the changes.

As you know, I have previously given evidence to and corresponded with the former Equality of Opportunity Committee on election accessibility issues in particular. Our proposed revisions to the performance standards scheme include a strengthening of the scheme's requirements on accessibility; for example, revised Standard 2a specifically relates to accessibility of polling stations.

The Electoral Administration Act 2006 (EAA) gave the Electoral Commission powers to set standards of performance for Electoral Registration Officers (EROs), Returning Officers (ROs) and Counting Officers (COs) in Great Britain. The Commission has now reported on the performance of ROs following the European Parliamentary elections in 2009 and the UK general election in 2010.

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After two years of measuring RO performance against the existing standards and learning from our experience in monitoring the delivery of the May 2011 elections and referendums, we now intend to develop and improve the current performance standards framework.

We want to make sure that our performance standards focus not only on ensuring that key processes are in place to deliver successful, well-run elections, but also that they look at the quality of the outcomes that these processes produce. We are also aiming to change the way we monitor performance against the standards so that, instead of asking ROs to report on their performance after the poll, we will instead monitor performance in real time. This should allow us to identify any problems, and to work closely with the RO to correct them, before they impact on the delivery of the poll.

We have also used the lessons learnt from the polls in 2011 to try to ensure that the information that we will ask for in future presents as little burden as possible to ROs and their staff and does not impact on their capacity to deliver their core duties.

Before we can determine or publish any standards, the Commission must consult the Secretary of State, and any other person the Commission deems appropriate. We have, therefore, published a consultation paper on our intended new approach, which can be downloaded in English and Welsh from the Commission's website at: www.electoralcommission.org.uk/performance-standards.

We aim to publish the final standards in December 2011 in order to give ROs sufficient time to incorporate the standards into their planning for the May 2012 elections. With this in mind, the consultation will run for six weeks, ending on **Friday 14 October**.

After the consultation has finished, we will review the responses received and consider any amendments to the proposed standards as a result of those responses. We will publish the final revised performance standards for ROs in December 2011, along with our guidance for Returning Officers on planning for and administering the scheduled 2012 elections.

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I have also written to the Minister Carl Sargeant about the consultation.

Yours sincerely



Kay Jenkins
Head of Wales Office
Pennaeth Swyddfa Cymru

Cc: Marc Wyn Jones
Frank Cuthbert