

Annual Report and Accounts 2020/21 You are in the Our plans and priorities section Home Our plans and priorities In this section Performance analysis 2020/21: Goal one Performance analysis 2020/21: Goal two Performance analysis 2020/21: Goal three Performance analysis 2020/21: Goal four Looking ahead to 2020/21 and using our resources to support the delivery of our goals Overview This section provides an overview of the Electoral Commission, our purpose, our performance during the last year and the key risks to achieving our goals. We have included summary financial information within the performance report. This is consistent with the financial statements, where more detail is available. The Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 (PPERA) established the Electoral Commission. We are independent of government and political parties and directly accountable to the UK, Scottish and Welsh Parliaments. We have prepared our 2020/21 Annual Report and Accounts in accordance with an accounts direction, set out on page 120, issued by HM Treasury under paragraph 17 (2) of Schedule 1 PPERA. We have prepared the powers and sanctions report on page 44 in accordance with paragraph 15 Schedule 19(b) and paragraph 27 Schedule 19(c) PPERA. Foreword Foreword As for many other organisations and public bodies, the Commission's 2020/21 year was dominated by mitigating the impact Covid-19 pandemic. Our over-arching priority was to ensure we responded effectively and efficiently to this challenge, continuing the delivery of the Commission's statutory functions and supporting the increased needs of our stakeholders. The polls scheduled for May 2020 were postponed for a year, a decision the Commission supported, to allow local authorities to focus on front line public services and to mitigate risks to voters and campaigners. This meant, however, that the polls scheduled for May 2021, covering the whole of Great Britain, would be one of the most complex sets of polls in recent years. The Commission quickly refocused its efforts and over the course of the year provided extensive guidance, support and leadership to the electoral community. We worked closely with electoral administrators, the UK's governments, public health authorities, parties and campaigners. We supporting detailed planning and preparations for a Covid-safe democratic process, including the development of new legislation, and undertook extensive communications activity with the public to ensure that all eligible voters who wished to participate in the elections had the information they needed to do so. Our aim was to support well-run elections in which voters were able to participate in the polls safely and confidently, and campaigners and parties were able to put their case to the electorate. The polls took place outside this reporting period, and to the credit of everyone involved were delivered efficiently and effectively. We will be reporting on the undertaking of the polls in due course, so that important lessons can be captured and learnt, not least about delivering elections during a pandemic. Looking beyond preparations for these challenging elections, we also continued to press ahead on delivering against our corporate plan and to improve the core services for which we are responsible. For the electoral administrator community, this year also saw the implementation of improved rules for the electoral registration canvass in Great Britain, on which we provided guidance, support and challenge, alongside preparations for a canvass of electors in Northern Ireland. Alongside fulfilling our statutory regulatory responsibilities – including providing transparency through the publication of political financial data, maintaining the register of political parties, and enforcing the political finance rules – we continued to develop and extend the way we support parties and campaigners to comply. We also continued to respond to the impact of digital campaigning, working with campaigners and governments on intended changes to the regime, and with

providers of digital advertising to encourage greater transparency. During the year we worked closely and constructively with the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Senedd (as well as the Speaker's Committee of the UK Parliament) to lay the foundations for new direct accountability to them from April 2021. Our focus is on building strong, transparent and cooperative relationships to ensure that we deliver priorities for each legislature, continuing to share good practice. We also as one of our core functions provided detailed, evidence-based advice to officials and parliamentarians on the development and passage of new legislation. Our work to support voter confidence also continued. Alongside our ongoing voter registration campaign activity, we launched a new campaign to increase voter understanding of the rules already in place to regulate digital campaigning, and a first suite of education and learning materials to increase political literacy. During 2020, the Commission adapted how it operated in the wider context of the pandemic and worked diligently to deliver its responsibilities and duties, with impartiality, integrity and independence. We invested in our staff, technology, the working environment and working practices and systems to ensure that we continue to deliver value for money for the voter and evolve our services in line with changing expectations, putting quality centre stage and placing a renewed focus on equality, diversity and inclusion. At a time when public finances are under severe pressure, we delivered the work programme, and accommodated additional pressures such as supporting a remote workforce, within our approved annual budget. Looking forward to the 2021/22 year, it will be a year of continued focus on providing support to our key stakeholders, as well as managing other developments and change. The Commission will continue to work constructively with all concerned – governments, parliaments, parties and campaigners, electoral administrators and other interested groups – to maintain confidence and trust in elections, including making preparations for the delivery of those scheduled for May 2022. We welcome a new Chair and two Commissioners, providing refreshed strength in our strategic direction and governance. And our service to the UK electorate will continue to be underpinned by providing value for money; maintaining the organisation as well-run, with engaged, skilled staff and the technology required to support effective ways of working. We thank Sir John Holmes who has completed his four-year term of office as Chair, leading the Commission through an exceptionally busy period of electoral events. The Commission's statutory responsibilities place it in a unique position in the sector. In some areas the Commission's role is to directly deliver functions. In other areas we provide oversight, guidance, support and – where required – enforcement. On some matters we have a role in convening or informing debate. Each aspect of our role makes a significant contribution to well-run elections and to achieving tangible improvements to the system for voters, campaigners and administrators. Our role The Electoral Commission is the independent body which oversees elections and regulates political finance in the United Kingdom. . 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. In 2020/21 we worked towards achieving 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 We will continue to focus on delivering these goals in 2021/22. Our role across the UK We deliver for voters across all parts of the UK, with Electoral Commission offices in Belfast, Cardiff, Edinburgh and London. We work closely with the UK and devolved governments and, from April 2021, have new accountabilities to the Scottish Parliament and the Senedd. Our 2020/21 year at a glance April – June 2020 We set up a Crisis Management Team to coordinate our response, and expanded our videoconferencing facilities to ensure we could all communicate with each other and with stakeholders. We launched a new online tool for the public to see and analyse candidate spending returns from the 2019 UK general election We responded to the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee (PACAC) enquiry on the Fixed Term Parliament Act The Lords Committee on Democracy and Digital Technologies published its report, advocating many of the Commission's long-standing policy proposals. Internally we launched the Commission's People Strategy. The Commission gave evidence to the Committee on Standards in Public Life, after it launched a new review into electoral regulation. July – September 2020 We carried out a survey to check on the wellbeing of our staff Our campaign targeted at newly enfranchised voters, with a series of adverts across social media, radio and print. We completed our first research into public attitudes to voting in the context of Covid 19, to inform preparations for the 2021 elections We became advisors to the Wales Elections Planning Group established by the First Minister to establish a consensus on legislation needed to ensure elections are well-run in the light of the Covid-19 pandemic We carried out an internal review to learn lessons from our response to the initial stages of the pandemic We published updated core guidance for electoral administrators and candidates and agents to support them with preparing for and delivering the May 2021 elections October – December 2020 We published our Welsh language standards annual monitoring report We submitted the first financial Estimate to the Llywydd's Committee and the Scottish Parliament, as part of establishing our new accountabilities to devolved parliaments We published the first part of supplementary guidance to support electoral administrators with managing the COVID-specific impacts on the polls We launched a new set of resources for young people in Scotland and Wales to educate young people in Wales about their vote and the democratic process. Worked with the UK, Scottish and Welsh governments and parliaments on their respective legislation to prepare for holding elections during the pandemic. We submitted written evidence to the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Select Committee of the House of Commons and gave oral evidence given to the new Llywydd Committee of the Senedd After a four-year term of office as Chair, Sir John Holmes left the Commission. John Pullinger CB began his term of office in May 2021 January – March 2021 We organised pre-election seminar for Returning Officers and Electoral Registration Officers in Scotland with the Electoral Management Board for Scotland We launched a public consultation on a draft Disability Action Plan in line with statutory equality duties in Northern Ireland We formed our Race at Work Charter task force to extend our work to improve diversity and equality Work started to update our London offices to improve our ways of working We marked 'Welcome to your Vote' awareness week in Scotland and Wales by hosting virtual events and sharing resources for engage newly enfranchised voters We co-organised the annual Electoral Fraud Reduction and Prevention National Seminar in collaboration with the National Police Chiefs' Council We published a report on public attitudes towards the

transparency of political party and campaigner finance in Northern Ireland. We agreed a Statement of Financial Principles across Scotland, Wales and Westminster setting out the new financial relationship between us and the three legislatures; Senedd Cymru, Scottish Parliament and UK Parliament. Our year in numbers Used £20.4m of resources, including £1.3m capital spend Invested 56% of our resource expenditure on staff costs (£10.7m) Achieved 72% employee engagement score Answered 4,463 public enquiries – a 569% decrease on last year due to no electoral events this year Responded to 153 Freedom of Information requests Published 1,186 routine financial returns from parties and campaigners Notified 58% of the 134 party registration applications of their outcome within 30 days Completed 54 investigations, 94% of them within 180 days Published 888 annual statement of accounts for political parties and accounting units Published 100% of our guidance products on time with no substantial errors Responded to 2,130 requests for advice from local authorities – 99.39% within 3 days Collected £69k of civil sanctions in our role as a regulator performance analysis Jump to: Goal one Goal two Goal three Goal four Looking ahead to 2021/22 and using our resources to support the delivery of our goals Download our full annual report and accounts Annual report and accounts 2020/21