

Putting voters first You are in the Corporate plan 2022/23 to 2026/27 section
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First published: 25 April 2022 Last updated: 25 April 2022 Introduction To have a healthy democracy, voters need to be engaged in our electoral process, and confident that elections are free and fair. We will work to increase voter engagement and confidence by: raising public awareness of the electoral process removing barriers to registering and voting ensuring laws for parties and campaigners are clear and followed ensuring the electoral system works effectively Raising public awareness Public awareness of the electoral system – including how to register and vote – is key to voter engagement and confidence. Our research demonstrates that public awareness of how to register and vote is currently high. In February 2021, 93% of those surveyed as part of our annual public opinion tracking survey stated they knew how to register to vote, and 92% were confident they knew how to cast their vote. It is important that we continue to maintain and increase this awareness, and we will continue to refine and deliver effective public awareness activity ahead of elections. We will develop and expand our learning work, producing political literacy resources to help people understand how to get involved in our democracy. And we will ensure the information we provide to voters is accessible and transparent, keeping pace with developments in digital communications, and ensuring our public information services are tailored to voters' needs. Focus in Wales and Scotland Focus on Scotland: Raising public awareness In Scotland, our public awareness work will include ensuring voters understand the differences between the various voting systems in use for different elections. It also includes supporting voter understanding of the different franchises for UK and Scottish elections. For example, we will work to raise public awareness of the Single Transferable Vote system which will be used for the Scottish Council elections in May 2022, and will ensure people are aware of who is eligible to vote in each election type, through to the next Scottish Parliament election in 2026. Focus on Wales: Our learning work Following the extension of the franchise to 16 and 17 year olds and foreign nationals resident in Wales, we will continue to undertake public awareness campaigns and work with the wider electoral community and partner organisations. We will work to ensure new voters understand their eligibility and can confidently participate in the 2022 local government elections and 2026 Senedd election. We will also continue to work alongside all relevant partners to promote greater consistency in political education, and increase political knowledge and understanding amongst young people to ensure they can fully engage in our democratic system in Wales. This will include developing the good work already achieved with the publication of education resources and the further development of an education and learning programme in Wales. Removing barriers to registering and voting Our research shows that the current electoral system could be improved to meet the needs of all eligible voters. Results from our 2021 public opinion tracking survey show that people with a disability are more likely to be dissatisfied with the process of voting (10%) than those without a disability (6%). We already know what many of the barriers people experience are, but we will do further work to identify issues with registering and voting, and will then take action to address them. We will broaden the range of third sector organisations we work with to understand the challenges, and will collaborate with policy makers and

other partners to identify solutions. This includes influencing the development of new policies, to ensure additional barriers are not introduced. We will deliver effective targeted voter awareness activities for the groups identified, and will specifically support under-registered groups to engage in the democratic process. We will also continue to explore the feasibility of modernising the voting process itself, aware of the changing needs of voters in our digital age.

Focus of Northern Ireland and England

Northern Ireland: Reaching people who are unregistered

The 2021 electoral registration canvass in Northern Ireland provided an important opportunity to ensure that everyone's details are up to date and accurate on the electoral roll. Following publication of the revised register in December 2021 we will be able to use up to date data to focus our efforts on reaching out and engaging with those groups who have not registered or are less likely to do so. This work has begun as we prepare for the May 2022 Northern Ireland Assembly election and we will continue to build on it ahead of the local government elections in May 2023. We will also carry out an assessment of the accuracy and completeness of the electoral registers in Northern Ireland in December 2022, which will provide us with an updated evidence base to inform the detail of our registration activity.

Focus on England: Supporting local authorities to engage with their residents

We know that local authorities already do a lot of good work to target different groups within their area and encourage them to register, as part of their work to maintain accurate and complete electoral registers. We want to do more to capture the learning from this activity and to share the good practice that exists, helping other local authorities to benefit from practices that have been shown to be effective.

Ensuring laws for parties and campaigners are clear and followed

The legitimacy of elections is dependent on clear laws which are understood and respected by parties and campaigners. We will ensure voters have accessible information about parties and campaigners participating in elections, including transparency on how they are funded and what they spend. We will raise public awareness of the rules on party and campaigner registration, donations, and campaign spending, and will help voters take action if they see something which concerns them. We will continue to maintain the official registers of parties and non-party campaigners, and will seek to remove barriers to campaigning to ensure that voters hear from a wide and diverse range of campaigners. We will improve voter access to our Political Finance Online database by updating and upgrading the search functionality. Where political financial data is incomplete, we will continue to enforce the law to ensure transparency and increased voter confidence in the system. We provide more details on how we will support parties and campaigners to comply with the law in Section 4 of this Corporate Plan.

Ensuring the electoral system works effectively

Key to voter confidence is an electoral system that works effectively. People should be confident elections are well-run, and should trust in the legitimacy of the results. Our 2021 public opinion tracking survey shows that 80% of people are confident that elections are well-run. We will continue to conduct significant research to report on how elections have been run, including detailed understanding of voters' experiences. This will enable us to raise concerns and make evidence-based recommendations where appropriate, with the ultimate aim of maintaining public confidence in the electoral system. We outline our plans to ensure the delivery of free and fair elections in Section 5, including our work to support resilient local electoral services.

Navigation 2. The Electoral Commission

Section 2 of our 2022/23 to 2026/27 corporate plan

4. Supporting and securing campaigner compliance with the law

Section 4 of our 2022/23 to 2026/27 corporate plan