

Looking ahead to 2020/21 and using our resources to support the delivery of our goals
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Looking ahead to 2021-22 2021-22 will be a busy year for the Commission. We are
responsible for overseeing the delivery of a large and complex set of polls, and for
ensuring that they are delivered safely and in a way that commands public confidence
against the continuing backdrop of the pandemic. The arrival of a new Chair, the
outcome of the enquiries by the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs
Committee of the UK Parliament and the Committee on Standards in Public Life, and the
progress through Parliament of a significant Elections Bill will all impact on the
work of the Commission as we start to emerge into a post-Covid environment. We will
produce a Corporate Plan for the next five years. And we will for the first time be
directly accountable to the Scottish Parliament and the Senedd Cymru in the same way
as we are accountable to the UK Parliament through the Speaker's Committee. Our first
priority is the delivery of the May 2021 polls, which will be the most complex for
some considerable time. As highlighted above we have done substantial work with
stakeholders and voters to prepare, but we do not underestimate the magnitude of the
task. We welcomed a new Chair in the spring as well as two new Commissioners. This
will provide refreshed strength in our strategic direction and governance as the
Commission continues to deliver against a background of continuing change. Spring
sees the expected introduction of the Electoral Integrity Bill; we will work closely
with the UK Parliament to ensure parliamentarians have timely and evidence-based
advice. Both the Committee for Standards in Public Life and the Public Administration
and Constitutional Affairs Committee of the UK Parliament will publish reports
relating to the Commission and electoral law. We welcome this scrutiny and look
forward to seeing the recommendations. We welcome too our new accountabilities and
relationship with the Senedd Cymru and the Scottish Parliament. We will work closely
with both over the coming year to build our new relationship and support the
implementation of any emerging plans for electoral reform. We will equally continue
to work with stakeholders in Northern Ireland, particularly in supporting the 2021
canvass and preparing for the next Northern Ireland Assembly elections Core to our
role is to 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 the May 2022 scheduled elections. We recognise the challenges.
Strain and pressure on electoral administrators as a result of outdated and
increasingly complex electoral law and continued pressure on resources and capacity
continues to pose a risk to the successful delivery of registration and elections. We
will continue work to develop and implement a strategy to support the increased
resilience of local electoral services. And the nature of political campaigning
continues to develop. Parties are spending a higher portion of their budgets on
digital advertising and voters need to have confidence that they can critically
examine and test political messages they see online. There is a risk that public
confidence in digital campaigning will continue to fall, which poses a challenge for
us, other regulators, governments and campaigners A different kind of challenge comes
from adapting to the emerging post-Covid landscape. The Covid-19 pandemic has brought
change and challenge for us as it has for every organisation. As it recedes we will
put in place new post-Covid-19 working practices reflecting the fundamental changes

likely to be brought about for us and for our stakeholders. All of this will feed into the new five-year Corporate Plan and Financial Strategy which we will develop over the course of the year and which will set out how we propose to meet these and other challenges. We will continue to deliver on our four goals

Goal one support the May 2021 polls, working closely with the electoral community to ensure that they are delivered effectively continue to provide expert advice and guidance to electoral administrators, candidates and agents, including providing guidance, support and challenge in relation to preparations for the May 2022 elections continue to work with partners on improving the accessibility of elections so that everyone has equal access to election information and processes undertake a voter registration campaign ahead of polls, focusing particularly on groups which are harder to reach. support Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) in Great Britain, and lay new performance standards for them before the UK, Scottish and Welsh Parliaments. support the 2021 canvass in Northern Ireland and for the May 2022 Assembly election, including through electoral registration public awareness activity continue work to develop and implement a strategy to support increased resilience in the delivery of electoral services at a local level. support the implementation of the Scottish and Welsh governments' changes to the franchise and raise public awareness through our targeted Welcome to Your Vote campaign and working with a wide range of partner groups. continue to combat electoral fraud through close engagement with the police and with local authorities, supported by our Your Vote is Yours Alone campaign and by research and data analysis.

Goal two Maintain the registers of political parties and campaigners, ensuring voters have clarity about registered parties and campaigners on the ballot paper Publish financial data from parties, candidates and campaigners, including that related to elections, ensuring transparency for voters Continue to evolve our effective enforcement of the political finance rules, ensuring voters, parties and campaigners have confidence that the rules are enforced proportionately and with impact, within our current powers. We will continue to publish the outcome of each investigation for transparency, including in full reports where that is warranted, so voters, parties and campaigners can see the way we act to enforce the rules. We will also continue to publish the outcomes of all investigations. Deliver a new Political Finance Online system to support parties and campaigners to deliver their financial returns efficiently Provide timely advice and guidance to parties and campaigners to support them in meeting their legal requirements, including for the major and complex polls scheduled for 2020 Consult on and then develop our new strategic framework to ensure effective and impactful proactive support which will have the greatest effect on compliance with the law continue to enhance the quality of our regulatory work by rolling reviews of regulatory procedures and completing a project on enhancing our enforcement processes. respond to the changing environment and impacts of digital campaigning. We will work with government, social media companies and other providers of digital advertising to ensure their services and policies support transparency for election and referendum campaign activity; we will continue to scrutinise their proposals and bring forward proposals of our own as appropriate. Administer the policy development grants scheme and ensure it operates effectively by making timely recommendations to the UK Government for any necessary changes

Goal three continue to provide expert advice and support to political parties, campaigners, governments and the public to inform policy change, educate and inform the public and promote partnership working Support the UK Parliament to scrutinise the expected Elections Bill report on the administration of elections in line with our statutory duties to ensure we utilise learning to improve the delivery

of future events continue to promote and build support for improvements to our democratic processes take forward work on a project to explore voters' attitudes to the voting process and options for change that would ensure their needs and expectations can continue to be met into the future continue to develop our evidence base to enable greater understanding of the electoral environment, including horizon scanning for emerging issues, risks and opportunities to the electoral system undertake public awareness activity to increase voter understanding of the rules already in place to regulate the digital campaigning techniques increasingly used to reach voters continue to expand our suite of education and learning materials designed to support understanding of the democratic process, for students and teachers across the whole of the UK. continue to develop our corporate website, using open data and digital tools to improve accessibility Goal four Design new working practices and shape a culture which helps us maximise performance and meet changed staff expectations as we start to emerge from the pandemic Publish a new Corporate Plan for 2022-27, led by the new Chair of the Commission. We will also develop a new five-year financial strategy Develop new working arrangements with the Senedd and the Scottish Parliament as well as the UK Parliament to reflect our new accountabilities Delivered and developed our People Strategy Continue our focus on equality, diversity and inclusion through our new Race at Work Taskforce and the publication of a new Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy Continue our focus on learning and development, including our Leadership and Management Development Programme Continue to develop our quality management approach, building on our initial progress in 2020/21 Continue to upgrade our internal financial systems and performance tracking systems to improve efficiency and our ability to forecast Our commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion The Commission is committed to the principle of equality of opportunity and the value of diversity. We are subject to a range of legislation including the Public Sector Equality Duty as set out in the Equalities Act 2010, and Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, which prohibits discrimination and promotes equality of opportunity and good relations across a range of protected characteristics. Our commitment goes beyond compliance. We serve a diverse society, and diversity is at the heart of a democracy that works for every voter. We have three key objectives: that everyone who is eligible is able to participate in the democratic process, by identifying barriers, making recommendations and working with others to remove them that we embed equality and diversity in all our work, treat all customers fairly and with respect, and are transparent in the decisions we make equality of opportunity for everyone and that all staff are treated fairly and with respect These objectives are central to the Commission's work: We know which groups of voters are least likely to be registered, and have focussed communications and engagement activities to assist them. For example we have designed campaigns aimed at younger voters and in particular those from black and minority ethnic backgrounds whom we know from research are less likely to be registered, and have worked with a large range of groups such as those representing refugees, gypsies and travellers and voters with a disability. We completed equality impact assessments on relevant policies and procedures throughout 2020/21. The equality impact assessments support a commitment to evidence-based policy making. In addition to arrangements for consultation and monitoring, the assessment process helps to develop effective policies that meet the needs of people in respect to any protected characteristics. We have reviewed and enhanced our process and will fully implement this during 2021-22. We want to improve the diversity of our staff at all levels in the organisation, and consider it important that we reflect the diversity of the people

we serve. We have taken a range of initiatives. Our People Strategy has equality, diversity and inclusion at its heart. Our work on diversity is supported by a number of staff groups. Our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion group meets regularly. Our Chief Executive chairs a Race at Work Taskforce and we have appointed a champion to lead actions on this work. The Dignity, Respect and Empowerment group holds the organisation to account on challenging bullying and harassment, working with a Director level Anti-Bullying Champion. Our Wellbeing Group and our Mental Health First Aiders provide support to staff. We will be publishing a new Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy during 2021-22 alongside a new Employer's Statement on Equal Opportunities.

Northern Ireland Under Section 49A of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA 1995) (as amended by Article 5 of the Disability Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 2006), the Electoral Commission is required when carrying out its functions to have due regard to the need to: promote positive attitudes towards disabled people; and encourage participation by disabled people in public life ('the disability duties'). Under Section 49B of the DDA 1995, the Electoral Commission is also required to submit to the Equality Commission a disability action plan showing how it proposes to fulfil these duties in relation to its functions. In January we published a draft Disability Action Plan and began a 12 week public consultation in Northern Ireland, as recommended by the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland. We intend to have the final action plan in place by June 2021 and will report annually on our progress on implementing the plan to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland.

Wales The Electoral Commission is committed to the principle that in its conduct of public business and provision of resources and services, the Welsh and languages should be treated on a basis of equality. During 2020/21, important work was undertaken with regard to the Welsh language within the Commission. Our campaigns were created and run bilingually in Wales, such as Got 5/Oes 5 'da ti general voter registration campaign, and the Welcome to Your Vote/Croeso i Dy Bleidlais campaign, to encourage registration among those newly enfranchised voters in Wales. New educational resources were also created for use in schools in both Welsh and . A complaint was made to the Welsh Language Commissioner during 2020 relating to the Commission's statutory process to maintain the registers of political parties and to take registration decisions. In its response the Commission reinforced its commitment to providing an exceptional service to partners in Wales in the language of their choice and to ensuring that the Welsh Language Standards, set in July 2016, are not only met, but that the Commission is innovative and ambitious in the services that it provides. We commissioned an external agency to carry out a review of the Commission's adherence to the Standards and the final report from this work will inform the organisation's next steps regarding Welsh Language provision.

Scotland We continue to work with a range of delivery partners to promote equal access to and understanding of democracy in Scotland. Using our resources to support the delivery of our goals Our people Staff relations and engagement The expertise, hard work and high level of commitment of our workforce enable successful performance and delivery of our Corporate Plan. We value the positive and constructive relationship we have with colleagues and work hard to maintain it. Our staff engagement group meets on a regular basis to seek input from colleagues on emerging issues and help to maintain good relations with staff. We also actively encourage staff involvement as part of the day-to-day process of line management, and we share information on current and prospective developments widely and regularly. To support this, we have a recognition agreement with the Public and Commercial Services Union. We completed our latest staff survey in March 2020 and 86%

of employees responded. Our employee engagement score was 72% (up from 65% in 2018-19). Our scores compared most positively to the Civil Service benchmark in areas such as our people agreeing that: we took action after the previous survey they feel a strong personal attachment to our organisation and its work they would recommend the Electoral Commission as a place to work The areas where we compared least positively to the Civil Service benchmark and we need to improve on include people agreeing that: there are opportunities for them to progress in their careers at the Electoral Commission they have the IT systems and equipment they need to do their jobs effectively we are committed to creating a diverse and inclusive workplace Occupational health and safety We review our health and safety policy annually. We also have procedures, guidance and risk assessments in place to cover our core activities. A health and safety group oversees our arrangements. They meet regularly and report to our senior leadership group. However, primary responsibility for health and safety sits with people managers. We initiate independent health and safety audits of our premises each year, which involves inspecting working environments and reviewing safety management systems. These audits tell us if our arrangements are suitable and highlight any improvements we need to make. In 2020/21 we carried out specific risk assessments to ensure our sites were Covid secure prior to re-opening; routine assessments will restart once travel across the UK is permitted and our sites are back in use. Our environmental impact We recognise that delivering our activities has an impact on the environment and we continue to work towards minimising this impact. We lease office space in four cities from a combination of public and private sector property owners. We do not have direct control of utility supplier and waste disposal targets and management at our premises. For a number of our offices, the property owner manages energy and water consumption as well as waste disposal and recovers costs through a consolidated service charge. Offices in Edinburgh, Cardiff and Belfast have relocated to smaller, more environmentally efficient premises in the last 10 years. We completed the renewal of the lease for our London office in 2020. Initiatives are in place to help minimise environmental impact: reduced printed resources provided to electoral administrators and other groups, focusing on electronic provision wherever possible encouraged the use of video and teleconferencing to avoid unnecessary travel with consequential CO2 emissions operated recycling facilities in all our offices upgraded to more energy efficient information communication technology equipment Summary (London office) Performance commentary on emissions We aim to decrease our fossil fuel consumption year on year, an ongoing effect of the property owner's introduction of measures to reduce levels of electricity consumption, including lower 'out of hours' operation of plant and machinery and the introduction of energy-efficient lighting. Coronavirus has meant that the office has not been open during 2020/21 for all staff therefore our performance has not been measurable this year. Waste report General waste and recycling figures are based on a proportion of total building waste and are not directly controllable by us. Confidential waste disposal for the organisation is handled separately from that for other building occupants. We shred the confidential waste we generate on-site before it is recycled into low-grade paper. The general and recycled waste is based on a proportion of total building waste. All general waste produced in the building, including that generated by us, is sent to a nearby energy from waste plant, instead of landfill sites. Using our financial resources efficiently In 2020/21, the resource initially made available to us by the UK Parliament was £23.3m for voted activity. We received non-voted funding of £200k to pay Commissioners' fees. In January 2021, we had our Supplementary Estimate Approved,

which decreased our resource budget to £20.3m and increased our capital budget to £1.5m. We also reduced our AME budget to £0.3m. The budget changes were due to the postponement of the polls scheduled for May 2020 and the increased costs for our political finance online system. Our final budget breakdown: Departmental Expenditure Limit Voted (£m) Non-voted (£m) Total (£m) Resource 20.3 0.2 20.5 Capital 1.5 n/a 1.5 Annually Managed Expenditure Voted (£m) Non-voted (£m) Total (£m) Resource 0.3 n/a 0.3 Total Net Budget Voted (£m) Non-voted (£m) Total (£m) Resource 20.6 0.2 20.8 Capital 1.5 n/a 1.5 Net cash requirement Voted (£m) Non-voted (£m) Total (£m) Non 21.5 n/a 21.5

In achieving our objectives, we have used £19.1m worth of resources for the whole year. This was out of the available sum of £20.5m approved by the UK Parliament in our Supplementary Estimate (HC 64) for the net resource voted requirement. The graphic below summarises our financial performance on the 'voted' element of our budget. Financial performance 2020/21 Our financial performance follows our strategic performance, being dominated by a shifting electoral timetable. For the year 2020/21: our staff costs represented 55% of our resource expenditure, which is an increase of 8% from 2019/20. our capital expenditure increased by £0.4m due to the refurbishment works within the London office. Expenditure 2020/21 (£m) Staff costs £10.7 Public Awareness £2.2 Local Government Scotland £0.1 Capital Expenditure £1.3 Operating Costs £4.2 Policy Development Grant £1.9 Senedd £0.2 We report our underspend to reflect in-year operational decisions; R-DEL excluding depreciation and PDGs. In 2020/21 this was £1.0m against the voted budget of £17.9m (5.6%). This was predominantly due to unused contingency and other savings in campaigning for the May 2021 elections. The operating underspend - £000s Event activity £448 Core staff and operating costs £591 The operating underspend is comprised of: £591k reduced spend within our campaigning budget for the May 2021 campaigns. (including contingency for Covid related campaigns that was not required) £103k as a combination of under and over spends within staff costs £253k due to reduced Welsh translation and travel costs £92k as a combination of individually small underspends across the Commission Other underspend £112k in unclaimed policy development grant £39k in depreciation £147k in provisions due to lower than expected costs £279k in capital projects The £80k underspend against non-voted funding is due to lower than expected costs for Commissioners due to vacancies. Our income in our accounts relates to charges for registering political parties and work completed for the Senedd and Scottish Parliament. We collect fines raised against political parties and individuals for failure to comply with the rules on party and election finance and then surrender these to the Consolidated Fund as required by law. The penalties due was £41k in 2020/21 received by 31 March 2021 and surrendered to the Consolidated Fund. In addition to monitoring performance against budgets, we also managed within our cash limits set by the UK Parliament. We required cash amounting to £20.3m in 2020/21 to finance our voted activities, which was £1.2m less than the sum of £21.5m approved by the UK Parliament in our Supplementary Estimate. The reconciliation of net resources outturn to net cash requirement provides a reconciliation from our outturn to the net cash we required in-year. The Statement of Cash Flows shows that the cash balance as at 31 March 2021 was £26k. The Statement of Financial Position as at 31 March 2021 shows positive taxpayers' equity of £0.9m. Supplier payments Although we are independent of government, we aim to comply with the Prompt Payment Code that operates across the public sector. The target is to pay undisputed invoices within 30 days. In 2020/21, we paid 85% of invoices (81.6% in 2019/20) within 30 days. The pandemic created a backlog in paying invoices during the first part of the year due to the closure of the offices; e-processes were set up and within the last

six months of 2020/21 100% of invoices were paid within 30 days. Freedom of Information, complaints and parliamentary questions We are committed to the principles of openness and transparency in public life and acknowledge the duty to provide information to the public. In 2020/21, we received 153 Freedom of Information (FOI) requests. We responded to 136 (91.9%) of these within the 20 working days statutory timeframe (target: 90%); a proportion of large and complex requests continues to be high. There were nine FOI internal review requests, one of these requests led to additional information being sent to the requestor. The global pandemic had an impact on the number of FOI requests submitted to the Electoral Commission and the pattern of submission was not the same as in previous years. The complexity and impact of the requests did have an impact on the organisation, but this was mitigated by improvements in process and communication across teams. This led to the improvement in the number of requests responded to within the statutory response periods. We received five subject access requests. We responded to all of these promptly. We received one complaint and this is pending closure from the ICO related to a response issued in 2019. We also received two requests for erasure under the General Data Protection Regulation/Data Protection Act 2018. We handled 29 complaints, compared to 51 in 2019/20. Of the 29 complaints handled; 17 have been completed and 12 are still active. Of the 17 that were completed; 11 were not upheld, two were partially upheld, one was upheld, three were closed due to no clarification being received from the complainant. The learnings gleaned from the investigations of these complaints were fed back to the relevant teams to support our commitment to continuous improvement. These complaints spanned a range of topics. Eight complaints focussed on alleged delays in assessing applications to change a party's name. None of these complaints were upheld. We received one request for review by the Chief Executive. While this review did not change the original outcome of the complaint, it did enable further explanation and assistance. In addition, we received correspondence from 181 members of the public that did not constitute complaints under our policy. Where possible the complaints team responded directly to the individual or alternatively forwarded the correspondence to the appropriate team to provide a response if technical expertise was required. Via our dedicated public information service, we responded to 4,463 public enquiries, received by phone and email. Through this service, we have answered questions about how to register and vote in the May 2021 elections taking place across Great Britain. We have explained the public safety measures in place at polling stations, and how people can use absent voting methods to have their say without attending a polling station. We responded to 27 parliamentary questions during 2020/21, including questions about digital campaigning, electoral fraud, the accuracy and completeness of the electoral registers and the effectiveness of electoral law. Chris Matheson MP, a member of the Speaker's Committee, was our spokesperson in the UK Parliament and answered questions on our behalf. Supply estimate for 2021-22 Our supply estimate for 2021-22 (HC1371) provides for a net resource requirement of £17.4m. The Speaker's Committee approved this on 23 March 2021 and was laid before House of Commons on 22 April 2021. The Commission is established by legislation and following the principles of the FReM there is an assumption of continued provision of service, there is nothing to suggest services provided by the Commission will cease or future funding will not be provided. We plan to use these resources to continue delivering our four goals around the delivery of elections, the regulation of political finance, the use of our expertise to improve democratic processes and the best use of our resources.