

ELECTIONS – PERFORMANCE INDICATORS
(Report by Head of Administration)

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Electoral Administration Act 2006 introduced new powers that permit the Electoral Commission to set and monitor performance standards for electoral services and collect information on costs. The Commission's intention is to measure performance to support improvements in standards with the first return of data scheduled for January 2008 and a full set of indicators in place for the 2008 elections. Indicators have been published for electoral registration purposes and a consultation paper issued on indicators for the conduct of elections with a closing date of 21st December 2007.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Members may be aware from the local government press that the Department for Communities and Local Government has published a new slimmed down framework of 198 indicators for local government, with the Secretary of State promising in a conference speech that 'there's no scope for Whitehall sneaking in targets through the back door'. The Commission's consultation paper inviting comments on indicators for elections was issued only 4 days after the DCLG publication and while it is difficult to fault the principle of using data to drive up standards, the breadth and scale of the criteria proposed by the Commission will involve additional work and cost in measuring and collecting the required data at extremely critical times in the election process.

3. THE INDICATORS

- 3.1 The rationale for the Commission is to develop a clear vision for quality electoral services across the country as set out in Table 1 attached. It announced, in September, the data for electoral registration which must be collected and submitted by 18th January 2008, details of which can be found on the attached link http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/files/dms/Electoralregistrationperformanceindicatorsdatareturnspreadsheet_27512-20253_ENSW.xls
- 3.2 The data is split into the following 8 indicators with 53 individual measures –
- success of the annual canvass of electors,
 - carry forward of electors on the register,
 - changes to the electoral register,
 - completeness of the register,
 - customer service focus within the electoral registration function,
 - activities to improve the accuracy of the electoral register and absent voter lists,
 - encouraging participation and registration, and
 - enhancing electoral integrity.

3.3 The consultation paper on draft election and referendum performance indicators (which can be found on the attached link http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/files/dms/Performance-Standards-Final-V2_23791-17634_E_N_S_W_.pdf) proposes the following 13 indicators with 47 individual measures –

- project management,
- procurement of services,
- design and content of communications with electors,
- issue of postal ballot packs,
- postal vote opening processes,
- recruitment, training and support for polling and counting staff,
- accessibility and organisation of polling stations,
- count administration,
- number of recounts,
- length of count process,
- enhancing electoral integrity,
- encouraging participation, and
- participant satisfaction with the electoral process.

4. COMMENT

4.1 Data on most of the new and proposed measures is not collected at the moment and will require the introduction of systems to capture the required information. Members will know that both elections and, to a lesser extent, registration are extremely time sensitive and highly pressurised processes. The measures require information on such minutiae as counting the number of postal ballot papers issued each day, the layout of polling stations, the accuracy of the paperwork returned by Presiding Officers at the close of poll, the number and reasons for recounts and the time taken to conduct counts. They also require customer feedback and satisfaction surveys of candidates, agents and the electorate to be undertaken.

4.2 Staff working in highly pressurised elections and counting scenarios already have a range of issues to address in ensuring the integrity, accuracy and time lines of the processes involved. There is no doubt that the collation of additional information required by the Commission will involve additional time and cost both in collecting the data and monitoring and improving performance if the Council is to score well against the new indicators.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 The Commission's proposals do not fit comfortably with the Secretary of State's recent announcement of fewer indicators for local government. While its aim of improving standards may be commendable, this will have time and cost implications for the Councils at a time when efficiencies and reductions in expenditure will be required to comply with the also recently announced Comprehensive Spending Review.

5.2 It is suggested that the Commission be informed, in response to the current consultation paper, that the measures proposed are both too numerous and detailed, that there is a danger that they will be counter-productive by diverting staff from the efficiency and accuracy of the election and count processes and that additional time and

expense will be incurred in their collection and compliance. It is further suggested that specific comment on the individual measures proposed be delegated to the Chief Executive, after consultation with the Chairman of the Panel.

6. RECOMMENDATION

6.1 It is

RECOMMENDED

that the Panel endorse the general comments on the Commission's consultation paper as set out in paragraph 4 above and authorise the Chief Executive to respond on the detailed measures after consultation with the Chairman.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Electoral Registration Indicators Data Submission 2007/08 published by the Electoral Commission

Developing Performance Indicators for Elections and Referendums published by the Electoral Commission.

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