Parliamentary Parties Panel minutes: 4 September 2018 | Electoral Commission Parliamentary Parties Panel minutes: 4 September 2018 You are in the Party panels section Home How we make decisions Party panels On this page Democracy Club presentation Minutes of the last meeting and actions arising (ECPPP 05/06/2018) Digital Campaigning report Electoral Observers consultation Codes of practice on election spending PFR Online and Modern Guidance projects Any other business Actions First published: 4 September 2018 Last updated: 2 September 2019 Who was at the meeting Who was at the meeting Labour: Andrew Whyte (AW), Chair of meeting Scottish National Party: Scott Martin (SM) Conservative Party: Paul Bolton (PB) Megan Tucker (MT) Liberal Democrats: Darren Briddock (DB) Natalia Villazan (NV) Plaid Cymru: Geraint Day (GD) Democracy Club (for item 1): Joe Mitchell (JM) Sym Roe (SR) Electoral Commission: Craig Westwood, Director of Communications & Research (CW) Bob Posner, Director of Political Finance and Regulation & Legal Counsel (BP) Ellen Wilkie, Communications Officer (EW) Democracy Club presentation JM made a presentation introducing the PPP to the Democracy Club and their work. He requested three key actions for the panel: for them to make candidate data available to Democracy Club, to tell candidates about it and to inform the Democracy Club about the needs of political parties and candidates. DB raised concerns about whether this would be considered election spending. BP explained that it possibly would, but queried whether there would necessarily be a tangible cost and said that providing information is important. SM suggested that if the same opportunity was available to all candidates then it does not favour any candidate, in line with Electoral Commission hustings advice. DB raised concerns about the handling of data in light of GDPR. SR clarified that Democracy Club uses public open data and that candidates are invited to provide their own data. AW advised Democracy Club to seek advice from the Information Commissioner's Office. PB asked whether Democracy Club had contacted Electoral Registration Officers directly for this information. SR responded that they had but had seen varied success rates. DB and AW asked about the moderation and accuracy of crowdsourced data. SR explained the cross checking process. AW thanked Democracy Club for their presentation. Minutes of the last meeting and actions arising (ECPPP 05/06/2018) GD pointed out an error in the previous meeting minutes. CW responded that they would be corrected. NV requested that the minutes be circulated earlier. CW suggested that the minutes be circulated to the chair and panel at the same time. This was agreed. AW asked when a meeting would be set up to review the progress of the new PFR online system. BP responded that Carol Sweetenham would arrange the meeting and it was agreed that it should be on the same day as the planned guidance meeting for the convenience of those not based in London. Digital Campaigning report BP gave an update to the group on the Commission's recently published digital campaigning report. He explained that the Commission was now waiting to see how the government responds, and noted that the Cabinet Office are currently consulting on the possibility of requiring imprints on digital campaigning material. BP encouraged panel members to respond to the consultation. AW requested further information about revised spending categories. BP stated that the codes of practice provide further definition but legislative change would be required for anything further. AW responded that Labour is not opposed to transparency of finances, but noted that the guidance needs to work. DB asked BP what would take place if legislation is not changed. BP responded that the codes of practice will help. SM suggested the requirements for digital materials could be different from printed ones, noting that on printed materials this could be a P.O. Box, which is unlikely to be suitable for digital campaign materials. The panel discussed whether

having correct WHOIS data for a website domain should be sufficient when the purpose of the imprint is traceability. AW added that the medium should fit the channel so on digital materials it could be a website. CW responded that questions of what form an imprint might take were covered in the Cabinet Office consultation. AW asked whether the Commission had been in contact with social media platforms in light of the report. BP explained that the Commission continued to be in dialogue with social media companies, but noted that he was unsure how far they would be voluntarily willing to go. Electoral Observers consultation CW drew the panel's attention to the Commission's consultation on electoral observers and encouraged them to respond. SM raised a concern that some elements of the revised scheme seemed to apply equally to international observers and to UK residents, which he argued was not appropriate. He added that electoral observation should not be used by parties as a method of getting more supporters into the count. He gave the example of the need for strict political impartiality during leisure time, which is appropriate for international observers but not for national observers who have a vote in the election. Codes of practice on election spending BP referred to an update given at a previous meeting on the codes of practice and stated that the panel's feedback had been incorporated, but the themes were the same. He added that the drafts should now read better and offer more clarity, and that the Commission would appreciate consultation responses from panel members. AW asked whether the drafting takes into account the recent Supreme Court ruling. BP confirmed that it did. GD stated that translation costs should be exempt from spending rules. SM added that creation of easy read manifestos should also be exempt to encourage parties to create them. Other panel members added that braille versions and a person to sign for a deaf candidate should be exempted also. BP responded that in principle the Commission supported this. DB asked whether there was any possibility of raising the candidate spending limit. AW added that the distinction between the long and short campaign could be removed. BP noted that these may be points panel members want to raise in their consultation responses to the draft codes. Following the consultation the Commission currently plan to submit the Codes, and highlight any key submissions received to the Cabinet Office minister. They can take forward changes in the law. AW confirmed that panel members would respond to the consultation. PFR Online and Modern Guidance projects BP updated the panel that the projects are moving forward. He added that they were challenging but that it is important that they happen. DB asked whether a date had been decided for the new PFR online system. BP responded that the Commission has set a presently realistic goal for it to be working by the end of next summer. PB suggested that it would be optimal for the new system to be working for Quarter 1. The panel agreed. Any other business AW stated that the panel is collectively concerned about the Commission's firmer regulatory and enforcement approach. He stated that for example it appears that the Commission has changed its approach on regulation of late reporting. He added that it was important the panel was consulted in advance of any internal policy changes. BP agreed that the Commission has become more firm in its regulatory approach, and indicated this is likely to continue. He added that there is a view that more could be done by parties to invest in internal governance to assist themselves and panel members to enable regulatory compliance. The panel responded that the parties are voluntary organisations often reliant on volunteers to complete financial reporting, and that action by the Commission can be off-putting to volunteers. BP and SM discussed an instance where a compliance warning had been issued incorrectly by the Commission. BP assured that this was an isolated case and was not in line with usual practice. BP stated that the rules had been in place a

long time and he believed the Commission's approach is proportionate. However, he stated that he did not underestimate the challenge parties face. Actions Action Owner Status Set up meeting to demo progress of PFR system, to immediately follow or precede the next PPP meeting CS Complete CS has arranged for 4 December Related content Party registration decisions View our decisions on political party names, descriptions and emblems View current applications View the political party names, descriptions and emblems which we are currently considering as part of our assessment process Donations and loans Find out about donations and loans to a political party, individual or other organisation Registers of unincorporated associations Download and view the registers of unincorporated associations