

Scottish Parliament Political Parties Panel Meeting minutes: 20 January 2022 | Electoral Commission Search Scottish Parliament Political Parties Panel Meeting minutes: 20 January 2022 You are in the Party panels section Home How we make decisions Party panels On this page Preparations for Scottish Council elections 2022 Updates (not related to Scottish Council elections 2022 at item 4) Dates of future meetings First published: 8 April 2022 Last updated: 8 April 2022 Attendees and apologies Who was at the meeting Matt Edmonds, Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party (Chair) Scott Martin, Scottish National Party Paul Moat, Scottish Liberal Democrats John Hardy, Scottish Green Party James Kelly, Scottish Labour Party Maria McCann, Scottish Government Iain Hockenhull, Scottish Government James Newman, Scottish Government Gill Cruickshank, Scottish Government Chris Highcock, Secretary, Electoral Management Board for Scotland Jim Doig, Scottish Assessors Association (Vice Chair of Electoral Registration Committee and EMB Member Hannah Standring, Office of the Secretary of State for Scotland Rachel Winham, Royal Mail Scott Forsyth, Royal Mail Superintendent Darren Faulds, Police Scotland Sergeant Gary Kelly, Police Scotland Katy Radford, Electoral Commission, Northern Ireland Alasdair Morgan, Electoral Commissioner Andy O'Neill, Head of Electoral Commission, Scotland Sarah Mackie, Manager, Electoral Commission, Scotland Martin McKeown, Senior Adviser, Elections & s, Scotland Catherine Heggie, Partnerships & Information Officer, Scotland Lindsey Hamilton, Business Support Officer, Scotland (Minutes) Apologies Dame Susan Bruce, Electoral Commissioner; Pete Wildman, Scottish Assessors Association (Chair of Electoral Registration Committee and EMB member) and Malcolm Burr, Convener The Electoral Management Board for Scotland Welcome and introductions Matt Edmonds welcomed those present and apologies were noted. Minutes of the last meeting and matters arising The minutes of the last meeting held on 10 November 2021 were approved and there were no matters arising. Preparations for Scottish Council elections 2022 Legislation Maria McCann (MMcC) reported all SSIs relevant to the 5 May elections had been laid although two were still to come into force. James Kelly (JK) asked if consideration had been given to a Freepost mailer for candidates at Scottish Council elections. (MMcC) said there was no objection in principle since the funding for these elections was met by local government but would require legislation and though not time to get this done for the upcoming elections, it could be revisited for the future. Electoral Commission Guidance Martin McKeown (MMcK) said the Electoral Commission had published their candidate and agents guidance for the May polls. He had also written to all existing councillors in Scotland to highlight the publication of the guidance and to point them, in particular, to some of the key changes they needed to be aware of. A letter for prospective candidates to be used by Returning Officers had also been issued. Events for ROs/EROs and Police Scotland (MMcK) said arrangements for a joint event between the Electoral Commission and the Electoral Management Board for Scotland were being finalised. This would be held on 27 January and was an opportunity for Returning Officers and Electoral Registration Officers to discuss issues around the planning for the May polls. On 10 February, there would be a briefing for Police Scotland divisional Single Points of Contact (SPOCs). He introduced Superintendent Darren Faulds and Sergeant Gary Kelly, both of Police Scotland to the Panel. EMB Update Chris Highcock (CH) said the EMB had issued a range of directions to EROs and ROs which gave consistency in the key voter facing elements of the election, such as the dates poll cards would be distributed, use of same colour of ballot paper, official marks. SIENNA and the number of issues of postal votes. The directions had been circulated to the Panel. He said all counts would be under way by 9:30 am on Friday 6 May 2022, though boxes could be opened from

8:00 am onwards. There was a new approved scripts for the declaration so the same wording would be used by each Returning Officer. In regard to COVID, the same baseline measures as last year would be applied. There had been positive feedback from Public Health Scotland that (as far as they were aware) no case had been linked to any electoral event. Police Scotland Superintendent Darren Faulds (DF) said planning had commenced for the role Police Scotland would play in the forthcoming Scottish Council elections. The strategic intention was being developed; the approach would be fluid due to COVID and current threat assessment. Police Scotland would work with Returning Officers, the EMB and the Electoral Commission to ensure safe delivery of the event. Noting the recent death of an MP, he said security of candidates, count attendees, and supporters was paramount and though the threat was very low, there was potential for public disorder which would be monitored through local intelligence. There would be a policing footprint on the day and candidate personal safety advice included in the candidate packs provided by Returning Officers to signpost what to look for and where to get more information. There was a request from Paul Moat that this information be distributed before nominations open. Scott Martin (SM) had previously been told he had to report potential electoral offences in person and asked, given the specialist nature of any likely offence, if direct telephone numbers could be provided to parties to enable faster reporting. (DF) explained they were tied by reporting guidelines from Crown Office, each case being assessed and prioritised but he would be happy to discuss further if (SM) wished. E-Counting Project James Newman (JN) said the system had been thoroughly tested and signed off by council colleagues and used at three recent by-elections. Reports indicated the system worked well and there were no issues. The next phase was around logistics, delivery and training. He said that wards would be counted in sequences with councils and Fujitsu was working on design and layout plans. There was a series of in person events planned for Aberdeen, Paisley and Edinburgh and there were online and e-learning materials too. Public awareness and partnership activity Catherine Heggie (CHe) outlined the two aims of the Electoral Commission's awareness campaign; encouraging people to register to vote ahead of the deadline, and ensuring that voters can cast their vote with confidence. The Commission's 'Got 5?' registration campaign would run across TV, radio, video on demand and other channels, and target under-registered groups. The Commission would be running 'Welcome to Your Vote' week with education partners to encourage schools and youth organisations to run political literacy sessions. New learning resources would be launched online and circulated as soon as possible. A voter information booklet (available in BSL, Easy read and various languages) would be sent to all households in the week beginning 28 March. There would be a video which explains voting using STV, which will be promoted through a paid digital advertising campaign. There would be a guide produced with RNIB Scotland and Sight Scotland to let blind and visually impaired voters know what to expect at the polling place. The Commission would also be running an awareness day on 10 March to encourage qualifying foreign citizens to register to vote. UK Elections Bill Hannah Standring (HS) confirmed that responsibility for this Bill had now been moved from Cabinet Office to the Department for Levelling Up. The Bill had completed its progress through the House of Commons (17 January) and had its First Reading in the house of Lords the following day. The Second Reading remained to be scheduled. The Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee of the Scottish Parliament had published its report on the Legislative Consent Memorandum (LCM) on the elections Bill which noted that the Scottish Government did not intend to lodge an LCM and the majority of the Committee considered that legislative consent

should not be provided to the provisions in the Bill. Updates (not related to Scottish Council elections 2022 at item 4) Scottish Government Nothing further to add. Scotland Office/Cabinet Office (HS) said the Dissolution of Parliaments Bill was coming up to Committee Stage in the Lords next week. Boundaries Scotland As there was no representative in attendance, a written update would be requested and circulated around the members. Boundary Commission for Scotland Isabel Drummond-Murray was not present but the Chair suggested and it was agreed that she be approached to provide a written update to circulate. Royal Mail Rachel Winham (RW) said they were well into planning, having made contact with all local authorities, checking response envelopes for postal votes. They were aware of the ever changing COVID situation and staffing issues and the need to work closely with local authorities. They would attend the EMB meeting on 24 January and would meet with Pete Wildman, Chris Highcock and Jim Doig on a weekly basis. Election mail would be made a priority and closely scrutinised. Electoral Management Board for Scotland The UK Elections Bill had been noted earlier and the Panel informed that the EMB/SAA in relation to subsequent implementation of its provisions was inputting advice to civil service colleagues as part of an expert panel. Jim Doig (JD) said the refresh exercise for postal votes had just started. EROs would be sending out a Household Notification Letter (HNL) towards the end of January though a couple would not be taking part due to funding issues. The SAA had agreed to undertake a TV advert similar to last year. (SM) asked if data was available on the update-action arising in different areas and asked if there would be a quantifiable way to show the effect of the HNL. (SMa) said inline registration made it easier to track but with GDPR, people could opt out of being tracked. (JD) said HNL more for awareness to let people know who is registered at that house, if HNL incorrect, should generate hits. (JD) should be able to track through the digital service. EROs had just finished the annual canvass (published 1 December) so should be up to date and accurate and therefore did not anticipate a large number of changes. Postal vote refresh of all authorities had commenced across Scotland in the week beginning 10 January. The Electoral Commission (MMcK) advised that the Commission intended to publish the returns for parties that spent over £250K at the Scottish Parliament election in early February. At the same time the Commission will publish data (in excel format) collected from candidates via the spending returns submitted to Returning Officers. The Performance Standards for Returning Officers were currently under review with the intention of consulting on revised standards in the coming months. In regard to Policy Development Grants, an Order had been laid in the UK Parliament on 17 January. The Order added Alba Party to the list of parties entitled to share the Grant and would come into effect on 6 February. Parliamentarians would have until 25 February to pray against the Order. They would know for certain by 25 February that they could rely on the Order to calculate this year's grants. Finally he reminded the panel that the Electoral Commission's deadline for registering a new party, amending an existing party name or adding/amending an existing emblem to be included on ballot papers for the elections taking place on 5 May 2022 was by 5pm on Friday 21 January 2022. (SMa) said that Bob Posner, the Commission's Chief Executive would retire at the end of March and his replacement, Shaun McNally, would be in post at the beginning of April. There would be future opportunities to meet him at the PPP and in other forums. (SMa) said that in the last year, the Commission had undertaken work around public attitudes to the modernisation of the electoral system. Findings had shown people wanted some developments to modernise but did not want to lose the feeling of it being special and important. The Commission now intended to canvass opinion amongst stakeholders exploring what

modernisation of the electoral process could mean to them. The Commission would get in touch with parties to invite participation Dates of future meetings 2022 8 March* 16 May Pre-meeting 10:30am and meeting proper at 11am except for *8 March 2:30pm pre-meeting and 3pm meeting