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matrix and succession planning Improvements to registration and voting: increasing

resilience and participation Embedding and advancing equality, diversity and

inclusion in the Electoral Commission First published: 24 February 2023 Last updated:

25 February 2023 None Date: Tuesday 17 January 2023 Location: Bunhill Row, London,

and by Video conference Date of next scheduled Board meeting: Friday 17 February 2023

Who was at the meeting Who was at the meeting John Pullinger Chair Rob Vincent Sue

Bruce Alex Attwood Sarah Chambers Stephen Gilbert Roseanna Cunningham Chris Ruane

Katy Radford Elan Closs Stephens In attendance: Shaun McNally Chief Executive Kieran

Rix Director, Finance and Corporate Services Craig Westwood Director, Communications,

Policy and Research Ailsa Irvine Director, Electoral Administration and Guidance

Louise Edwards Director, Regulation Binnie Goh General Counsel Sal Naseem Independent

Adviser to the Commission Board on Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Matt

Pledger Senior Adviser, Governance Zena Khan Senior Adviser, Governance Adrian Green

Regional Manager London and South West [item 1] Alexander Marks Regional Liaison

Officer Eastern [item 1] Amy Symons Improvement Manager [item 1] Elizabeth Gorst

Regional Liaison Officer South West and London [item 1] Gulderen Harwood Regional

Liaison Officer Midlands [item 1] Heather Bush Regional Manager Eastern [item 1]

Jenny Mitchelmore Business Support Officer [item 1] Kathryn Dunn Regional Liaison

Officer [North] [item 1] Margaret Lavery Regional Liaison Officer ([item 1] Melanie

Davidson Head of Support and Improvement [item 1] Peter Forrester Regional Manager

North [item 1] Mark Williams Policy Manager [item 10] Tom Hawthorn Head of Policy

[item 10] Suzanne Miller Senior Adviser, Policy [item 10] Carol Sweetenham Head of

Projects [item 11] Welcomes and apologies The Chair welcomed all to the meeting and

noted that there were no apologies for absence. The Board noted with sadness that

over the New Year our colleague Mark Nicholls, a Senior Advisor in the Regulatory

Support Team, passed away following a short illness. Mark first joined the Commission

in 2007 as Senior Political Parties Liaison Officer in the Scotland team. He was

already well known to his colleagues through his work with the Scottish Executive on

e-counting for the 2007 Scottish elections and developed good relationships with

political parties across Scotland. Mark was an integral part of the Scotland team

until the end of 2010, when he went off to work in electoral registration, showing

his continued interest in and commitment to all things 'democracy'. The relationships

Mark built across the electoral community, including but not limited to the

Commission, over his career were strong, and for many he was a friend as well as a

colleague. As well as being highly expert and professional, he was always warm and

friendly and had a fantastic sense of humour. Everyone he worked with across the

Commission have good memories and stories of their time working with him. Mark will

be very much missed. The Board welcomed the Regional Teams who outlined their work,

explaining that they were one of two parts of the Support and Improvement team, with

their focus being on supporting and challenging 311 local authorities across the 9

regions of England. The Board noted that the Regional Managers were the first point

of contact with a range of stakeholders including Returning Officers across England.

Members of the team explained how they were proactive in their engagement and how

they use the performance standards frameworks to inform and frame their interactions

with local authorities. The Board thanked the team for their time and updates.

Declarations of interests The Board noted an updated declarations of interests from:

Commissioner Alex Attwood: Declaration of financial interest: undertaking research on general policing issues which come before the Northern Ireland Policing Board (NIPB) and its committees in connection with the role of a member of the NIPB. Member of the Electoral Commission for Ireland (“An Coimisiún”) The Board noted that Commissioners, the Executive Team and Independent Advisers declarations of interests were recently updated, and that these registers would be published on the external website shortly.

Minutes (EC 167/23) Resolved: That the Board agreed the minutes of the Board meeting 23 November 2022, subject to minor amendments.

Matters arising: That the Board noted that the Director, Regulation would circulate information to the Independent Adviser to the Audit and Risk Committee, regarding the closed project to redevelop Political Finance Online.

Commission Board action tracker (EC 168/23) The Board requested that the open actions include detail as to progress on each item. The Board noted that the note covering actions with progress, taken at the Belfast Board Away Day, was still to be circulated to commissioners and attendees for information. The Board requested that the ‘Write Off’ report be periodically circulated for information to commissioners.

Resolved: That the Board noted the progress against actions.

Chief Executive’s update (EC 169/23) The Chief Executive reported that the team was undertaking engagement work with a range of Parliamentary Committees, including in relation to the Strategy and Policy Statement (SPS). Engagement has also been undertaken with non-party campaigners. The Director, Regulation reported to the Board that consultations arising from Elections Act provisions have proceeded well, with strong engagement from stakeholders. A consultation on statutory guidance for digital imprints closed before Christmas, and a consultation on a Code of Practice for third party campaigners closes on 20 January 2023. Reports will be drafted following the consultations. The Director, Regulation reported that both projects are on track for delivery to the Department of Levelling Up and Housing officials in the agreed timeframes. The Director, Electoral Administration and Guidance updated the Board on progress with the implementation of voter ID and the new accessibility provisions which come into effect from the May 2023 elections, and in preparations for the subsequent tranches of changes arising from the Elections Act 2022. On devolved electoral reform and the Welsh and Scottish Government consultations, the first has been responded to and work is being undertaken on developing a response to the second for a mid-March deadline. The Director of Communications, Policy and Research provided the Board an update on the voter ID campaign, which was launched the previous Monday, including on the advertising channels being used and the civil society partnership activity to reach key at risk demographic groups. The Board welcomed the quality of the materials published and the initial response to the campaign. The Board noted that the Commission was cautious in engaging with influencers due to risks around past and future political activity of the individual. The Board noted that there were a range of online post forums used which provided opportunities to engage. The Board welcomed the extension to include Commissioners’ engagement in the meetings of note section in the Chief Executive’s update and requested that further detail be provided. The Board noted the continued concern regarding the SPS and that the Executive Team was in regular contact with officials in the relevant Government Department. The Board further noted that the Chair has stated the position of the Commission in writing.

Resolved: That the Board agreed that Chris Ruane be the linked Commissioner for electoral registration.

Resolved: That the Board noted the Chief Executive’s report.

Forward Plan of Board business

2022/23 and 2023/24 (EC 170/23) Resolved: That the Board noted the Forward Plan of Board business 2022/23 and 2023/24. Board effectiveness review 2022/23 (EC 171/23) The Board noted responses from members of the Board to the questionnaire to internally assess the effectiveness of the Board. The responses indicated that there were strengths in oversight and strategic functions. It also identified opportunities to up skill in the areas of risk as well as opportunities for Commissioners to use their current skills to assist the work of the Commission. Members of the Board welcomed opportunities to discuss issues in a semi formal forum, such as the pre meeting Commissioners' dinner which could be developed. As part of the process to articulate the 'one team' theme, the Board explored opportunities for Commissioners to work more closely with staff. The Board noted that the effectiveness review was an internal Board exercise and that the views of the Executive Team and staff were not sought regarding the effectiveness of the Board on this occasion. The Board noted that there would be a full external review in the next financial year which would undertake a 360 degree analysis of the effectiveness of the Board. Resolved: That the Board noted the report and agreed to the proposed recommendations and actions arising from the Board effectiveness review 2022/23.

Main Estimate 2023/24 budgets (EC 172/23) The Director, Finance and Corporate Services introduced this item reporting to the Board that although the Board and the Executive Team agreed the Main Estimate 2023/24 in September 2022 to enable submission to the Senedd and Scottish Parliament, for audit purposes there was a requirement for the Board to formally agree the Main Estimate 2023/24 for submission to the Speaker's Committee. Resolved: That the Board formally agreed the Main Estimate 2023/24.

Board skills matrix and succession planning (EC 173/23) The General Counsel introduced this item reporting to the Board that there had been a shift in the skills matrix demonstrating a greater knowledge and interest in a range of areas from the previous survey undertaken. However, the skills matrix survey also identified a knowledge and interest gap in the areas of audit and risk. The Board discussed whether the skills matrix had identified and measured the right skills. The Board noted that as the induction process was developed, Commissioners should obtain a more in depth understanding of the Commission. Resolved: That the Board noted the results of the skills matrix audit.

Improvements to registration and voting: increasing resilience and participation (EC 174/23) The Director, Electoral Administration and Guidance and the Policy Manager reported to the Board on the work being undertaken to develop feasibility studies of advance voting, mobile voting, voting anywhere and voting hubs. The Board noted that the team were thinking creatively to identify potential options for modernising the voting experience. The Board discussed that there were certain groups who were underrepresented on the electoral register, such as young people and recent movers. The team reported that there were discussions being undertaken with agencies such as the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency, to refresh our understanding of how data sharing could work to support improvements to electoral registration. The Board further explored the potential benefits of automatic registration and noted that this was an area that the Welsh Government was already actively considering. The Board noted that in addition to the resilience of voting processes, the transparency of how these work, including in relation to the counting of votes, is another important consideration. Resolved: That the Board should be recirculated the 2019 paper on modernising the electoral process and provided with a copy of the Welsh Government White Paper on electoral reform. Resolved: That the Board noted the update on progress with the project.

Embedding and advancing equality, diversity and inclusion in the Electoral Commission (EC 175/23) The General Counsel introduced the paper with the Independent Adviser to

the Commission Board on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI). The Chair thanked the Independent Adviser to the Commission Board on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion for his work on the paper. The Board noted that the objective of the paper was to provide added value to the EDI discussions within the Commission. The Board agreed that the report was insightful and welcomed that it was recommendation focused. Resolved: That the Board supported the recommendations in the report. Resolved: That the Board considered and agreed to appoint a group led by the Chief Executive and the Independent Adviser to the Commission Board on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion plus three other Commissioners to develop the recommendations and ensure delivery.