

Minutes: Wales Assembly Parties Panel 18 June 2018 | Electoral Commission Search  
Minutes: Wales Assembly Parties Panel 18 June 2018 First published: 26 November  
2019 Last updated: 27 January 2020 Minutes: Wales Assembly Parties Panel 18 June 2018  
Date: Monday 18 June 2018 Who was at the meeting Who was at the meeting Political  
Parties David Costa, Welsh Labour (DC) Geraint Day, Plaid Cymru (GD) Richard  
Minshull, Welsh Conservatives (RM) Matthew Palmer, Welsh Liberal Democrats (MP)  
Association of s Rhys George, Association of s (RG) Electoral Commission Elan Closs  
Stephens (ECS) Rob Coombs (RC) Sarah Mackie (SMac) Bob Posner (BP) Rhydian Thomas  
(RT) Laura Ward (LW) Guests Scott Martin, Scottish National Party (SMar) Minutes:  
Wales Assembly Parties Panel 18 June 2018 Apologies A representative from UKIP was  
invited but did not attend. Minutes of the last meeting (29 March 2018) and action  
points The minutes of the previous meeting were accepted as a correct record. All  
actions from the previous meeting have been completed with the exception of attending  
the integrity seminar, for which a date has not yet been set. Action: Political  
parties to appoint representative to attend integrity seminar How will votes at 16  
change campaigning in Wales? ECS explained that it seems to be a priority of the  
electoral reform programme in Wales to extend the franchise to include 16 and 17 year  
olds. Scott Martin from the Scottish National Party and Sarah Mackie from the  
Commission's Scotland office have been invited to talk about their experiences with  
votes at 16 in Scotland. SMar is a solicitor at SNP and works on campaigning and  
ensuring compliance. He said that the messaging for 16 and 17 year olds, and the  
channels of communicating to them, are not much different to 18 year olds. There were  
technical issues with the register that made it difficult to identify 16 and 17 year  
olds. The electoral register does not include 14 and 15 year old attainers so it is  
not possible to identify 16 year olds as they become eligible to vote. 16 and 17 year  
olds can vote in Scottish Parliament elections and local elections in Scotland and  
there was cross party support to introduce this. At the independence referendum a  
register of young persons was created which was separate to the local government  
register. The only organisations entitled to the full merged register were the two  
designated organisations. At the Scottish Parliament elections there was a combined  
local government register which could only be obtained in the run up to the election.  
Political parties were able to obtain a copy of the register including 16 and 17 year  
olds, but had to manipulate the register to identify them. They were not able to  
identify 15 year old attainers. At the local elections in Scotland, candidates stood  
for election rather than political parties and so the party could not obtain a copy  
of the full register. Candidates in 354 wards would have had to request the register  
for their ward which would need to be compiled and compared. It is therefore  
difficult to engage with 16 and 17 year olds as it is not possible to identify them.  
They are essentially an anonymous elector until they turn 16. It would be useful to  
receive updates when voters turn 16, rather than those electors just being added on  
at election time. It is not possible to identify these electors early enough to  
contact them at an individual level. SMac explained that the Electoral Commission  
campaigns were run differently for the independence referendum and the Scottish  
Parliament and local elections due to the different legislation. The independence  
referendum was held in September. The introduction of Individual Electoral  
Registration (IER) meant that the canvass prior to the referendum was delayed. This  
meant that the register in use was still based on the household system of  
registration and many 15 year olds were picked up in this way, far more than have  
been identified since under IER. However, online registration will provide new  
opportunities to register young people. The register was therefore in a strong

position ahead of the Commission's public awareness campaign. When legislation lowering the voting age was introduced, there was much commentary saying this was done because young people would vote leave and the issue became highly politicised. As a result, a number of education directors refused to allow public awareness activities in their schools. Others allowed activity relating to registration but without any political discussion. Not all schools were consistent in whether they allowed both or one of the campaign groups to speak to young voters, which led to complaints that young people were being manipulated. 92% of 16 and 17 year olds were in school, 7% were employed and 1% were considered hard to reach. The Commission teamed up with Education Scotland, education directors, teacher representatives and school leaders to produce a briefing pack which supported parts of the curriculum and offered tips on balanced debates. Research conducted on those who had received education on the referendum showed that young people were more likely to feel confident about voting if they had engaged in political debate. Those who were just told about the referendum and registration had lower confidence levels. 75% of 16 and 17 year olds claimed to have voted in the referendum, compared to 54% of 18-25 year olds. Studies in Austria have shown that if 16 and 17 year olds are able to vote, they are more likely to vote in their first eligible election and are more likely to continue to vote at subsequent elections. For the Scottish Parliament election in May 2016, public awareness activity was undertaken at the 2015 canvass with disappointing results. Feedback showed that young people felt that the elections were too far away at nine months. Activity closer to polling day is far more beneficial for this group. A 'Ready to Vote' campaign was held in 2016 and 2017. Activity was coordinated on a specified date in March. Toolkits were provided for schools which included information on how to run registration sessions, frequently asked questions, sample discussion sessions, social media resources and posters. Some classes have a mix of pupils who will be able to vote on polling day and those not yet old enough. Those who would be 16 by polling day were encouraged to bring their NI number to register at the school sessions. 84% of secondary schools in Scotland took part and these were listed on a website, which encouraged participation. There is a Modern Studies subject in Scotland which is a mix of media and politics. However this is an optional class so thought needs to be given to what other classes public awareness activity can be taught in. The activity is more effective if held in the run up to the elections. However this is inevitably during the run up to exams. Schools are therefore encouraged to run the sessions at other times and focus on registration. At the 2017 local elections in Scotland, turnout for 16 and 17 year olds was lower than at the referendum and Scottish Parliament elections. Turnout for this group was 51% which was the same as 18-25 year olds. Young people's motivation for voting differs from other age groups. All other age groups cite civic duty as their main motivation for voting. 16 and 17 year olds cite their main reason for voting as 'to express a view' or 'to make a change'. They are twice as likely to give these reasons as older groups. RG said that schools in Wales should be encouraged to undertake these schemes and suggested this was achievable given the current relationships with relevant stakeholders. RT said that there will be pressure to run public awareness campaigns during the canvass but experiences in Scotland raise questions about the usefulness of the annual canvass compared to a mini canvass in the run up to an election. Arising from a question about automatic registration, DC said that he understood that 16 and 17 year olds would have to be told that they had been registered and given an opportunity to become an anonymous elector. DC said that he had concerns over any restrictions which would make it more difficult for political parties to talk to 16

and 17 year olds. He thought that politicians speaking directly to 16 and 17 year olds and asking for their support would have more impact on their turn-out than being taught about elections in general in school. SMac said that more work is needed regarding young people in care. In Scotland they worked with organisations that worked with young people in the care system. They are more likely to move house suddenly and frequently and some are placed in another local authority area. The referendum proxy qualification definition was wide but it is more difficult to qualify for an emergency proxy at other electoral events. Young people in Scotland suffering with their mental health are often placed in accommodation in Newcastle and it was questionable as to whether they could register by way of a local connection. The Commission worked with the Army Family Foundation to contact children of service voters. There were a number of Scottish regiments and their families billeted in England. GD asked what documentation is needed for 16 and 17 year olds to register to vote. SMac said that a small number of this group do not yet have their National Insurance number and that these electors are checked against school registers. GD asked how automatic registration of 16 and 17 year olds is compatible with IER. He was also concerned about the possibility of divergence if there are two systems and two registers. People will think that they are registered to vote in all elections if they voted in an election last year, but may not be on the Parliamentary register. SMac said that family and friends have a strong influence on young people's propensity to vote. 95% of 16 and 17 year olds who voted said that their parents voted. Of those who didn't vote, 50% said that their parents voted. However, parents do not appear to influence how young people vote. 16 and 17 year olds are more likely than other groups to disagree with the statement 'I had enough information to make an informed decision'. Those who said they had sufficient information said that they got their information from social media. Young people are less likely to read candidate leaflets and the Electoral Commission leaflets. The Commission produce a digital information pack which can be used to target young voters. TV is still the biggest driver for turnout. DC said that following the reduction in the voting age to 18 in 1970, he had been a first time voter in 1974. He wondered if there was any research on how that experience had affected the later voting behaviour of those who were 18 in 1970-74. SMar said that there is a similar boost in turnout when electronic voting is introduced for the first time. RT suggested that early planning is key and that this will be raised with Welsh Government and WECB at an early stage. Action: Extension of the franchise to 16 and 17 year olds and experiences in Scotland to be discussed by the Wales Electoral Coordination Board (WECB) Updates from the Commission Update from the Chair, Elan Closs Stephens ECS said that there have been a number of significant meetings and departures since the previous meeting. There will be one new general Commissioner in the next few months and three new Commissioners who are nominated by the political parties. The SNP representative will continue as they have not yet exceeded their term in office. There will be new Commissioners nominated by the Conservative party and the Labour party and a third nominated by the smaller parties. These Commissioners contribute experience of electoral campaigning and practical knowledge of elections. Investigations over the past year, Bob Posner BP provided an update on investigations conducted by the Commission. There have been a number of major investigations relating to donations and spending in the last few years and there have been a number of high profile investigations relating to the EU referendum involving criminal offences, fines and court appearances. Organisations are established for campaigning at referendums which do not have the same long term infrastructure and reputations to protect like political parties. There has also been

a rise in digital campaigning and electoral rules were not written with this in mind, although they still apply. There has also been concern over covert campaigning rather than open campaigning. The Commission will be publishing a report on digital campaigning next month with a number of recommendations. The Information Commissioners Office is also looking at this issue in terms of data protection and their report will be published soon. Wales Electoral Coordination Board update LW explained that the latest WECB meeting was held in May. The Regional Returning Officer for Mid and West Wales, Mark James, provided an update on the Returning Officer / Electoral Registration Officer (RO/ERO) mentoring and induction scheme. There have been five new ROs/EROs since the scheme was launched in March 2018. Three have already been assigned mentors and the Electoral Commission have met with one to discuss the Commission's guidance and support available. WECB are looking to extend this scheme to new Electoral Services Managers next year. The Welsh Language Legislation Advisory Group (WLLAG) launched the Electoral Glossary of Terms at the meeting. The Electoral Commission, in collaboration with others, has created a database of electoral terms and will provide a useful resource to ensure consistency across Wales and reduce duplication of work. WLLAG will next look at voter facing forms and is working with Cabinet Office on this. The Llywydd, Elin Jones AM, will be invited to the next meeting which is likely to focus on the proposed electoral reform in Wales. Seminars RT said that the Commission is hosting a series of seminars this year on democracy in Wales. The first seminar was held in February, with the Cabinet Secretary Alun Davies AM speaking on local government electoral reform. The second seminar in August will be held during the Eisteddfod, and will focus on young people in politics with Commissioner Elan Closs Stephens, the Llywydd Elin Jones AM and a panel of young people. The third seminar will be in North Wales in October looking at women's participation in Welsh politics, tying in with the centenary of women's suffrage this year. Action: Circulate details of upcoming seminars to WAPP members for them to attend and to help promote the events Delivering Modern Guidance RC explained that the Commission has now appointed a supplier for the redevelopment of the corporate website and that the modernising guidance project will be delivered as part of this, with the aim to publish the first tranche of guidance in spring 2019. RC thanked WAPP members who had contributed to the discussion so far. PFR Online replacement RC said that work has now begun on the PFR Online replacement project and Carol Sweetenham will be in touch to arrange user testing. The supplier AuraQ have offered to demonstrate the system at a future WAPP meeting. BP added that a key success measure for this project is whether the users like it, so input at this early development stage would be very useful. Observer scheme project LW explained that the Commission is currently reviewing its statutory electoral observer scheme. The Political Parties Elections and Referendums Act 2000 allows observers to witness activity in polling stations, postal vote issue and opening sessions and the count. The scheme has been operating for 10 years and the project will be considering lessons learned and international comparisons. A consultation will be held over the summer and the political parties will be invited to respond. Voter identification pilot scheme – evaluation RC said that he had circulated details of the voter ID pilots ahead of the local elections in May. The Commission will evaluate the pilots and publish a report of the findings. CSPL review – intimidation of candidates RC explained that in September 2017 the Electoral Commission submitted evidence to the inquiry conducted by the Committee on Standards in Public Life (CSPL) on intimidation of Parliamentary candidates. The CSPL report recommended that political parties should develop a code of conduct on intimidating behaviour during election campaigns

by December 2018. DC said that the Welsh Labour party have general rules of behaviour that would comply with the current requirements. GD said that the report states that the code should be jointly enforced by the political parties and that there had been a slight misreading of this leading to concern that the parties would be enforcing each other. RM said that the Welsh Conservative party already has a system in place for dealing with matters such as this. RC said that the main political parties in Wales currently have an informal system in place for dealing with complaints during election periods and that this has worked well. ECS suggested that political parties should highlight the standards expected of members before each election. GD suggested that candidate nomination packs could include a letter from the Commission stating the standards that the parties have agreed to. Welsh Government Green Paper RC highlighted that Welsh Government are currently consulting on their Green Paper – Strengthening Local Government: Delivering for People. The Commission has responded to two questions within the consultation relating to electoral reviews and the possibility of the local government elections being brought forward to June 2021, identifying possible confusion to voters, electoral administrators, parties and campaigners. AEA Wales update RG said that there was an AEA roundtable event in May with the new AEA Chief Executive, Peter Stanyon, and the new Deputy, Laura Lock. This was encouraging with acknowledgement of the significant electoral reform programme in Wales. Electoral administrators are engaging with the Welsh Government workshops on local government reform. Administrators are pleased that Welsh Government are engaging with them and consulting with them as they move into the stage of drafting Bills. AEA Wales responded to the Welsh Government's consultation on electoral reform and the Green Paper. They are strongly opposed to moving the date of the local elections as there is no benefit of this to voters but poses risks to the administration of the elections. Peter Stanyon published his letter to the Minister Chloe Smith MP following the May 2018 local elections in England, which restated recommendations from previous AEA reports and highlighted actions taken by administrators in the voter ID pilot areas. Dates of forthcoming meetings 2018  
Action: Electoral Commission to circulate potential dates for future meetings Any other business No issues raised

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Thursday 29 March 2018 Who was at the meeting Who was at the meeting Political  
Parties Geraint Day, Plaid Cymru Craig Williams, Welsh Conservatives Louise Magee,  
Welsh Labour Association of s (AEA) Rhys George, Chair AEA Wales Electoral Commission  
Elan Closs Stephens, Electoral Commissioner Rhydian Thomas, Head of Electoral  
Commission Wales Robert Coombs, Senior Political Parties Liaison Officer Laura Ward,  
Advisor Denise Bottom, Senior Advisor, Guidance team (Item 3) Minutes from meeting 29  
March 2018 Apologies Apologies were received from Colin Everett, Richard Minshull,  
Welsh Conservatives (Craig Williams attended as deputy) and Matthew Palmer, Welsh  
Liberal Democrats. A representative from UKIP was invited but did not attend. Minutes  
of the last meeting - 18 July 2017 The minutes of the previous meeting were accepted  
as a correct record. RC said that an integrity seminar was held in September 2017.  
Another is scheduled later this year and it would be useful if a representative from  
WAPP would attend. Action: Electoral Commission to invite a representative from WAPP  
to attend the next integrity seminar Codes of Practice – Denise Bottom (Senior  
Advisor, Guidance team) DB explained that she had written to WAPP members in January  
2018 detailing the plans for a Code of Practice and requesting comments by 28  
February. With regard to spending returns, the Political Parties, Elections and  
Referendums Act 2000, lists a number of headings for categories of expenditure. The  
Electoral Commission have powers to give clarity as to what constitutes spending  
under these categories. Currently digital spending fits into the existing headings  
but the Commission is interested in comments on this issue. The code will give  
increased clarity on what should be declared and where in the spending returns, and  
will seek to improve transparency and voter trust in the returns. It will also make  
comparisons between returns easier. There will be greater clarity on what constitutes  
candidate expenditure and what should be classed as party spending. The Commission is  
currently drafting the code relating to UK Parliamentary general elections and are  
seeking feedback. There will be a larger consultation on the code later in the year.  
The code will go through Parliament and will constitute more than guidance. RT said  
that there have been talks with Welsh Government about producing similar codes for  
National Assembly for Wales elections and local government elections. LM said that  
she welcomed additional guidance and would like consistency across elections to  
reduce the risk of errors. CW said that he would discuss this further with colleagues  
and provide feedback. RT said that the Assembly Commission's consultation on  
electoral reform asks whether there should be an exemption for Welsh/ translation  
costs in spending limits. The Commission has suggested that this should be the case  
for candidates and political parties as it currently is for non-party campaigners.  
There is also a similar proposal relating to costs associated with disabilities.  
Delivering Modern Guidance Project and PFR Reloaded (PEF Online) Project Modern  
Guidance Project RC explained that the Commission is currently looking to improve how  
guidance is displayed to users. After a number of user testing group sessions it has  
been decided to move away from the current PDF based system to a web based system.  
There will be a simpler user journey based on who the user is, where they are from  
and which electoral event they are interested in. The comprehensiveness of the  
guidance will remain but it will be easier to navigate and find the relevant  
information. There will be an ability to toggle between Welsh and versions of the  
guidance. There will be a consistent spine of guidance with additional information  
depending on the type of election. The new system will be implemented in phases

starting in January 2019 in tandem with the redevelopment of the website. Meanwhile the consulting phase will continue so that users stay involved in the process. Voluntary user accounts will be available with the ability to receive alerts if there are changes to the guidance. GD said that user accounts would be useful, especially if by entering your location you could access contact details for the relevant Returning Officer and deadlines for nomination papers and returns. PFR Reloaded RC said that the current PEF Online system has become quite dated and so the Commission are developing a new system which can be used to upload spending returns, party registration details and annual renewals. Political parties will be encouraged to make greater use of the system. User groups will be established to test the new system and WAPP members will be invited to participate. Action: Invite WAPP members to participate in user testing groups for PFR Reloaded Updates from the Electoral Commission Electoral Commission Seminar – 14 February RC said that the Commission held the first in a series of seminars in February. The Cabinet Secretary for Local Government and Public Services, Alun Davies AM provided his vision for reform following the consultation and oral statement. The seminar was attended by a variety of stakeholders, including Returning Officers, Electoral Services Managers, Welsh Local Government Association and Assembly Members. They were able to take part in a question and answer session to address their thoughts on the proposals. The Cabinet Secretary's speech was recorded and is available to view on the Electoral Commission's YouTube channel and Twitter account. Assembly Commission consultation on electoral reform RC reported that following the work of the expert panel on electoral reform chaired by Professor Laura McCallister, the Assembly Commission published its consultation on Assembly electoral reform on 12 February. The Commission has drafted a response to the consultation which will be circulated to WAPP members. Action: Circulate Electoral Commission's response to the Assembly Commission's consultation on electoral reform GD asked about the pilots being conducted at the May 2018 local elections in England and whether the Commission would be reporting on these. RT confirmed that the Commission would be reporting on the pilots. Action: Circulate details on pilots being held at the May 2018 local elections Wales Electoral Coordination Board meeting – 5 March LW provided an update from the Wales Electoral Coordination Board (WECB) meeting on 5 March 2018. The meeting was attended by the Cabinet Secretary for Local Government and Public Services, Alun Davies AM, who spoke about the plans for local government electoral reform in Wales. Welsh Government hope to publish a Bill in late autumn with possible Royal Assent in November 2019. The priority was to look at the franchise including lowering the minimum voting age, prisoner voting rights, and non-UK nationals resident in Wales. Other issues that would then be considered included voting on different days or at weekends, electronic counting, and the creation of a single electronic register. The meeting was also attended by Anna Daniel from the Assembly Commission who spoke about their consultation on creating a Parliament for Wales. The Assembly Commission launched the consultation on 12 February with a closing date of 6 April. The consultation is based on the recommendations made by the Expert Panel on electoral reform in December 2017. The WECB will respond to the consultation including a timeline of when legislation would need to be in place ahead of the 2021 National Assembly for Wales elections. WECB identified the need to support new Returning Officers (ROs) and Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) and has launched an induction and mentoring scheme in response. Each new RO will be contacted by WECB and the Electoral Commission and issued with a guide highlighting the main roles and responsibilities, key contacts and opportunities for training and support. They will be assigned a mentor who will

be an experienced RO in Wales and offered a meeting with Rhydian Thomas from the Electoral Commission and Mark James, RO for Carmarthenshire. The Board amended its terms of reference to differentiate between members and advisors. Regional Returning Officers (RROs) and AEA representatives will constitute members whilst Electoral Commission, Welsh Government, UK Government and National Assembly for Wales representatives will constitute advisors. The terms of reference were also amended to require RROs to designate a deputy to attend in their place when necessary and to add mentoring and support of new ROs and Electoral Services Managers to the objectives of the Board. The Board agreed their forward work programme for 2018 which includes: Managing the coordination of elections that may be called Work associated with the National Assembly for Wales and local government electoral reform Mentoring and training of Returning Officers Welsh language issues relating to elections and electoral registration Capacity and succession planning Performance standards for Returning Officers and Electoral Registration Officers Guidance on social media Election accounting RT suggested that a representative from WAPP could attend a future WECB meeting Action: Electoral Commission to invite representative from Wales Assembly Parties Panel to attend a future Wales Electoral Coordination Board meeting. AEA update – Rhys George (Chair, AEA Wales) RG said that there had been some senior leadership changes in AEA nationally. John Turner has retired and Peter Stanyon has been appointed as the Chief Executive. Laura Lock is the new Deputy Chief Executive. The AEA national conference was held in February. There was much discussion about electoral reform in Wales with Frank Cuthbert from Welsh Government delivering the keynote speech. The AEA Wales branch meeting was held on 27 March and focussed on preparations for the introduction of the General Data Protection Regulation 2018. AEA Wales will submit a limited response to the Assembly Commission's consultation. The response will focus on technical and operational activities that need to be considered regarding the franchise and electoral registration. Dates of forthcoming meetings 2018 The next meeting is scheduled for 6 June 2018. Action: Electoral Commission to circulate dates for autumn meeting CW suggested that it would be beneficial to invite someone from Scotland to discuss votes at 16. Action: Invite representative from Scotland to the June meeting to discuss the lowering of the voting age. Any other business No issues raised.