

Scottish Parliament Political Parties Panel Meeting Minutes: 15 September 2021 | Electoral Commission Search Scottish Parliament Political Parties Panel Meeting Minutes: 15 September 2021 You are in the Party panels section Home How we make decisions Party panels On this page Report on 2021 Scottish Parliament elections Preparations for Scottish Council elections 2022 UK Elections Bill Updates (not related to Scottish local government election 2022) Dates of Future Meetings First published: 5 November 2021 Last updated: 26 November 2021 Attendees Attendees Paul Moat, Scottish Liberal Democrats (Chair) James Kelly, Scottish Labour Party Matt Edmonds, Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party John Hardy, Scottish Green Party Scott Martin, Scottish National Party Colin Wilson, Boundaries Scotland Maria McCann, Scottish Government Iain Hockenhull, Scottish Government James Newman, Scottish Government Hannah Rutherford, Scottish Government Gillian Cruickshank, Scottish Government Chris Highcock, Electoral Management Board for Scotland Pete Wildman, Scottish Assessors Association (Chair of Electoral Registration Committee and EMB Member) Helena Brice, Office of the Secretary of State for Scotland Rachel Winham, Royal Mail Scott Forsyth, Royal Mail The Electoral Commission: Dame Susan Bruce, Electoral Commissioner Alasdair Morgan, Electoral Commissioner Alex Attwood, Electoral Commissioner Andy O'Neill, head of Electoral Commission, Scotland Sarah Mackie, Manager, Electoral Commission, Scotland Martin McKeown, Senior Adviser, Elections and s, Scotland Catherine Heggie, Partnerships and Information Officer, Scotland Lindsey Hamilton, Business Support Officer, Scotland (Minutes) Apologies Malcolm Burr, Electoral Management Board for Scotland Isabel Drummond-Murray, Boundaries Scotland Hannah Standring, Office of the Secretary of State for Scotland Kate Crawford, Renfrewshire Valuation Joint Board Welcome and introductions Paul Moat welcomed those present. Minutes of the last meeting and matters arising It was noted Rachel Palma Randle was not present at the previous meeting and the Chair asked for a correction to the minutes of the previous meeting held on 19 May 2021. Matters arising (a) Item 3.4 candidate acceptance forms were currently designed for paper not electronic usage. (b) Item 3.8 The EMB would look at the idea of hosting results for Scottish Parliament and Council elections on their website. Report on 2021 Scottish Parliament elections Sarah Mackie (SM) highlighted the main findings and recommendations in the Commission's report on the Scottish Parliament election 2021. The Electoral Commission should have powers to compel social media companies to provide information from campaigners, voters were satisfied the election had been well-run despite Returning Officers (ROs) facing significant staffing challenges due to the impact of COVID. There was an over reliance on a small pool of companies supplying services to people who run elections. The small numbers of newly enfranchised voters in Scotland made it difficult to get good quality data but there would be census data coming down the line. Parties and candidates had been able to campaign although some of their usual practices (e.g. face to face campaigning) were curtailed by the impact of the pandemic. The household notification write-out undertaken by Electoral Registration Officers (ERO) in February improved the completeness and accuracy of the register ahead of the election and helped to manage the predicted surge in postal vote applications. This was really good work and would be good to see this happen again but EROs would need to be resourced if they were to do this at future elections. Maria McCann (MMcC) agreed the HNL had been helpful but was a costly exercise and Pete Wildman (PW) said it may come down to the availability of local funding which would make it harder to achieve a national write-out. The matter would be considered further. Preparations for Scottish Council elections 2022 Legislation (MMcC) said it was expected the SSIs required for the local government

elections would all have been laid by the end of the week. She thanked all for their feedback as they had been developed. Scott Martin (SM) asked if the candidate expenses limits could be the subject of a wider review to make them more appropriate to the Scottish system. MMcC said Scottish Government would consider this after the May polls. Guidance Martin McKeown (MMcK) indicated that the Electoral Commission's core guidance was being drafted and will reflect the forthcoming legislative changes. The revised guidance will be published before the end of the year. Co-ordination by EMB Chris Highcock (CHi) informed the PPP of work associated with the e-Count project was on-going. The co-ordination of the election would be effected through directions from the Convener of the EMB. The directions were currently being developed and were building on those issued for the 2021 election. General support for Returning Officers (ROs) and Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) would likely be through a joint seminar with the Electoral Commission in January to support general planning, consistency in adjudication classification of rejected ballots (particularly where multiple first preferences were given) and consistency in printing documents so there would be a standard postal vote pack across Scotland. EMB would provide general support and promote best practice across ROs and EROs. There would also be training in e-counting provided. E-Counting James Newman (JN) indicated there was currently an intensive period of in-person testing of the software and hardware at Silvan House, Edinburgh. The next phase would engage more intensively with councils on issues around the delivery; demonstration training, equipment set-up and so on. PPP members would be invited to a demonstration of the e-counting project and indicated that bulletins were now being produced and published on the EMB website. PPP members could be included on the circulation list or obtain them direct from the EMB website. (SM) asked for copies of the sample reports that were going to come out of the system post results. (MMcC) said the style of reports had been amended based on comments from users of the reports. (SM) said reports were primarily for the electorate and candidates and the views of recipients should be sought. The reports were still under development and therefore an opportunity for revision remained. She would speak to the e-count team. Registration and Absent Voting Pete Wildman (PW) indicated that following the election in May, absent voting remained high as most people had applied for a permanent postal vote. Common dates for PV issue, recommended second interim update dates to establish consistency would likely form part of the direction from the EMB. The postal voting deadline for the 2022 election would return to the normal schedule of D-11. Public Awareness and Partnership Activity Catherine Heggie (CHe) said the Electoral Commission will be running their 'Got 5' registration campaign ahead of the council elections, which would target young people, recent movers, and those living in rented accommodation. The Electoral Commission will also be running a specific voter information campaign on how to vote using STV, and will be building on partnership work carried out ahead of the Scottish Parliament election to target a number of under-registered groups. The Electoral Commission is currently scheduling meetings with organisations to plan activity, including engagement with schools. Equality Data Project Gillian Cruickshank (GC) and Hannah Rutherford (HR) Indicated to the PPP that due to the absence of complete and accurate data on protected characteristics made it impossible to understand diversity fully. It was proposed that a survey be undertaken of candidates issued at the point of nominations. Completing the survey was voluntary and the plan was to trial the survey at the local government elections and if found to be useful to repeat at future elections. (GC) assured the panel that data protection laws would be fully adhered to. (SM) said that parties may have a monitoring form of their own and it may be useful to have early

sight of theirs as it could help with consistency. The paper was to be published in October but they could share an early draft of the form. UK Elections Bill Cabinet Office & the Office of the Secretary of State for Scotland written update indicated that the UK Parliament Elections Bill was introduced on 5 July 2021. Parliamentary scrutiny of the Elections Bill had begun with Second Reading in the House of Commons on 7 September. The Bill introduced a number of measures which apply to UK Parliamentary elections, local elections in England and PCC elections. These were: A requirement for voters to show photographic identification to vote in a polling station Changes to integrity of the absent ballot process by increasing protection on postal and proxy voting Removing the 15 year limit on voting rights of British citizens overseas Changes to access to voting for electors with disabilities; and Revising the franchise to reflect the new relationship with the European Union. The Bill also introduced a number of changes intended to apply to all polls, across the UK. These were in relation to: laws on intimidation and undue influence laws surrounding political finance 'Imprint' requirement to digital political campaigning; and Parliamentary accountability of the Electoral Commission The Cabinet Office had involved devolved governments in the development of the Bill and shared draft clauses. Chloe Smith, Minister for the Constitution and Devolution had regularly met with her counterpart in Scotland both bilaterally and through the Inter Ministerial Group for Elections and Registration to discuss matters relating to elections and specifically the Bill. Ian Hockenhull (IH) indicated that Scottish Government had issued a request for comments on the proposed Legislative Consent Motion (LCM) to Scottish stakeholders in July and were grateful for the comments received. It was likely that Scottish Ministers would recommend that the Scottish Parliament reject the proposed LCM and it would seek to consider the proposed changes and legislate for Scottish elections as appropriate in the future. Updates (not related to Scottish local government election 2022) Scottish Government (MMcC) said Boundaries Scotland had submitted proposals for six islands reviews, subsequently Scottish Ministers had laid SIs in the Scottish Parliament which were subject to an affirmative instrument. She welcomed the Electoral Commission's report on the May 2021 elections and noted the recommendations. Scotland Office/Cabinet Office Helena Brice (HB) said the Elections Bill was due to go to committee on 16 September and the Dissolution and Calling of Parliament Bill finished its stages in the Commons and had its first reading in the House of Lords today. Boundaries Scotland Colin Wilson (CW) On 14 May 2021, the Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland was re-named Boundaries Scotland. This was to reflect its added responsibilities for reviews of Scottish Parliament boundaries. In late May, early June the Commission submitted its final proposals for the electoral reviews of the six council areas with inhabited islands (Na h-Eileanan an Iar), Orkney Islands, Shetland Islands, Argyll and Bute, Highland and North Ayrshire Council areas). Boundary Commission for Scotland For the 2023 Review of UK Parliament Constituencies, the Commission was looking to consult on its initial proposals in mid-October 2021 for an 8 week period. They hoped to confirm this in the next few weeks. The 2023 Review will recommend 57 constituencies in Scotland, two less than at present. Boundary Commission for England have concluded their initial consultation stage. Wales began their consultation on the 8th September and Northern Ireland will consult probably late October. Royal Mail Rachel Winham (RW) said the weekly calls with Pete Wildman and Chris Highcock (CH) had worked well during the May 2021 elections and asked if there was anything the parties/panel wished them to be aware of or to do. She confirmed Royal Mail would be working in Scotland on Good Friday in 2022. Electoral Management Board for Scotland (CHi) said

there had been good co-operation with Royal Mail which they hoped to repeat next year. The last by election (currently scheduled) would take place in Falkirk on 14 October as once within 6 months of the ordinary election of councillors, any vacancies occurring would likely not be filled unless a 1/3rd of the council was vacant. An issue of comment at the Scottish Parliament election in May was the level of scrutiny possible, given the context of the pandemic and the intention in May 2022 was to provide a good sight of the electronic counting process, particularly the Box opening process. The EMB intended to discuss with Public Health Scotland the public health context going forward to facilitate election planning to ensure the delivery of the elections with a trusted result but also maintain safety. Pete Wildman (PW) was keen to repeat this year's effective engagement with Royal Mail. The canvass was on-going and similar response rates to last year were being experienced. It was hoped door-to-door visits would be possible. (SM) asked (PW) about monthly updates, whether they would receive a complete set for each month and when they would know all were in. The Electoral Commission Alex Attwood, Electoral Commissioner representing smaller parties said he was available and keen to speak with smaller parties if they felt it added value. He sought to ensure the views of the smaller parties were known by the Chair of the Electoral Commission and the wider Board. Sue Bruce (SB) said the Scottish Parliament election report brought forward by the Electoral Commission reflected our roles and the co-operation between us all. She welcomed the positive response of the panel to the report. She informed the panel that a new Commissioner, Katy Radford had been appointed as the Commissioner with responsibilities in Northern Ireland. She also informed the PPP that the Chief Executive of the Electoral Commission had indicated his intention to retire in the first half of 2022. The Presiding Officer had been notified and appropriate plans for recruitment would be put in place. Martin McKeown (MMcK) said the online party stakeholder survey aimed at people we regulate would be launched over the next few days. The aim was to assist us in better understanding our strengths and weaknesses in how we engage with those we regulate. Feedback was welcomed and he asked that the parties circulate the link to anyone they thought should have it. As discussed at various PPP meetings, PF online was being redesigned with the launch expected in January 2022. A number of demonstrations of the new system would be arranged prior to launch. Dates of Future Meetings Andy O'Neill (AON) confirmed the next meeting would be virtual on 10 November but would write seeking the views of the Panel as to whether they would prefer to maintain virtual meetings, move back to all in-person meetings or establish a hybrid approach. 2021 10 November 2022 20 January *8 March 16 May Pre-meeting 10:30 and meeting proper at 11:00 am except for *8 March which will be 2:30 pre-meeting and 3:00pm meeting