

Minutes: Wales Assembly Parties Panel 29 March 2018 | Electoral Commission Search  
Minutes: Wales Assembly Parties Panel 29 March 2018 First published: 26 November  
2019 Last updated: 27 January 2020 Minutes of the Wales Assembly Parties Panel Date:  
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.