

Parliamentary Parties Panel minutes: 3 September 2019 | Electoral Commission Search

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She stated the Commission is confident this could deter offences from being committed, such as by parties that persistently ignore the regulatory regime, or campaigners who do not intend to be part of the regulatory regime for long and do not have a long term incentive to comply. LE explained that in the few cases where such parties and campaigners break the law, they disrupt the level playing field for voters and for other parties and campaigners. GD asked if the new Enforcement policy would apply at referendums; LE confirmed that it would. LE offered PPP members the opportunity to meet once the consultation opens. SM asked if the consultation on prosecutions covered England, Wales and Northern Ireland only; LE confirmed the Commission did not have the power to prosecute in Scotland but the consultation was open to all to respond. AW asked if the parties could raise other issues within the consultation; LE confirmed the Commission is happy to receive wider comments as part of parties' feedback. Accuracy and Completeness 2018: report CW explained the Commission's next accuracy and completeness study will be published in the coming month. He explained the meanings of both accuracy, 'there are no false entries on the electoral registers' . And completeness, 'every person who is entitled to have an entry on an electoral register is registered' . Commission Update Report CW highlighted the publication of feasibility studies, conducted to explore options to modernise electoral registration in the UK, noting the interest in the studies from parties and campaigning groups. AS asked if GDPR issues had been considered; CW confirmed this had come up. AW asked if the voter registration site could include an upfront statement that outlined to voters that parties had access to their data; CW

stated this might be possible but would need to be explored with the Cabinet Office. AS suggested a common data format be established, between registers. Regarding policy development grants, CW explained the Commission is currently reviewing the scheme to make recommendations to the Secretary of State ahead of the 2020-21 allocation in March. He outlined the two current issues which needed to be addressed: the eligibility of the Independent Group for Change, and the impact of the UK's exit from the EU. AS asked if members had to be elected in the party name to qualify for the grants; LE confirmed this was not the case, noting the example of UKIP eligibility as a result of a defection prior to the 2015 general election. SM suggested the formula should be reviewed more fully if the Independent Group for Change would qualify for the same money as the other major parties. He also recommended that the legislation be changed so as not to have to include the names of eligible parties; CW confirmed this had been proposed to the Cabinet Office but not taken forward at the current time. AW asked for an update on the PFR Online project. LE outlined the project team is currently in major development phase and the project is well advanced on the registration side. AW reiterated the PPP's preference for this to be launched at the start of their financial (i.e. calendar) year and asked if 2020 was going to be viable. LE offered to send a more granular timetable to PPP. AS asked if technical issues are going to be accounted for when considering imposing penalties. LE confirmed if it was a technical issue that was be a reasonable excuse, the Commission would not penalise. CW raised the background paper and asked if the PPP were content with new format of not including updates in the paper on substantive agenda items. SM highlighted he would prefer to have agenda items included in the paper as this is helpful when paperwork is shared with the SNP's Chief Executive. AS asked if publication dates could be added into the paper. LE agreed to include indicative dates, noting that dates can be subject to change Any other business GD asked about the status of the Commission's guidance for parties and campaigners at a UK parliamentary general election. LE confirmed that, should an election be called, the Commission's guidance be published quickly. SM asked if the Commission is thinking of adding anything new; LE confirmed that nothing substantive would be added. She noted that the Commission would reopen its phone lines advice service for parties, candidates and campaigners. GD highlighted he already had contact from many candidates and agents. AS, AW and GD asked to be notified when any new guidance is published. LE agreed and suggested parties send over any questions they had in the interim. AS suggested it would be helpful for a summary page to be inserted at the front of the Commission's guidance that includes key dates, formulas for calculating spend and deadlines for reporting, noting that he would send a sample of an internally prepared document. LE agreed to explore the possibility of this. LE explained the Commission will shortly begin its review of the registered descriptions on the registers of political parties in Great Britain. She explained affected parties would receive a letter. Parties are given 10 working days to submit representations before a final decision is taken. AW raised the PPP felt a gap due to the officials no longer attending the electoral integrity roundtables. He highlighted it was a useful forum for SPOC engagement. SM noted in the past the PPP received a case update before meetings. LE and CW offered to take this away and report back. Commission action Status To circulate proposed agenda for 3 December meeting, with party chairs/and or treasurers, alongside commissioner representatives. Ongoing: proposed new meeting date to be identified To invite a representative from the Association of s to attend the PPP meeting once a year, preferably the June meeting. Ongoing: Update to be provided at meeting Provide a timetable on PFR online project.

Completed: Email with timetable received from Majella La Praik. Provide an update on the modern guidance project Completed: Circulated with minutes To include publication dates in the background paper. Completed: included in February meeting's background paper To notify the PPP when any new guidance is published, should an election be called. Completed To consider the Commission's role in PPP engagement with police SPOCs on electoral integrity Ongoing: update to be provided at meeting