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First published: 18 June 2020 Last updated: 21 June 2021 Meeting overview Date:

Wednesday 22 January 2020 Time: 9:30am to 12:35pm Location: Boothroyd Room, 3 Bunhill

Row, London Date of next scheduled meeting: Wednesday 26 February Who was at the

meeting Who was at the meeting John Holmes, Chair Alasdair Morgan Alastair Ross Anna

Carragher Elan Closs Stephens Joan Walley Rob Vincent Sarah Chambers Stephen Gilbert

Sue Bruce (Videoconference) Bob Posner, Chief Executive Craig Westwood, Director,

Communications, Policy and Research Kieran Rix, Director, Finance and Corporate

Services Louise Edwards, Director, Regulation Ailsa Irvine, Director, Electoral

Administration and Guidance Amanda Kelly, General Counsel David Bailey, Head of

Strategic Planning and Performance David Meek, Senior Adviser, Governance Petra

Cress, Head of Planning, Performance and Governance Shumina Faruk, Project Support

Officer Tom Hawthorn, Head of Policy (for items 5 and 6) Charlene Hannon, Head of

Guidance (for items 5, 6 and 7) Katy Knock, Policy Manager (for items 5 and 6) Phil

Thompson, Head of Research (for items 5 and 6) Kate Engels, Policy Manager (for items

5 and 6) Carol Sweetenham, Head of Projects (for item 7) Niki Nixon, Head of External

Communications (for items 5, 6 and 7) Apologies and introductions No apologies.

Declarations of interest No new declarations of interest. Annual declaration of

interests (EC 1/20) Action: Two members of the Board to consider, with the Chair,

which of their more peripheral interests might need to be declared. Resolved: That

the paper be agreed. Minutes of the Commission Board meeting of 4 December 2019 (EC

2/20) Action: The Board requested that the minutes be amended to reflect the

discussion at the previous meeting regarding observing on election day. Resolved:

That the minutes of the Commission Board meeting on 4 December 2019, subject to

amendment above, be agreed. Reflections on 2019 United Kingdom Parliamentary General

Election and related matters (oral update) The Director of Electoral Administration

and Guidance updated the Board on the work undertaken following the December

election. The Commission was still collecting data from a range of sources, including

a survey of candidates, a public opinion survey, and a survey of electoral

administrators. Early dialogue with a range of stakeholders from across the electoral

community had highlighted a good deal of consistency between what the Commission

found from its review of the data and their reflections on the polls. The Board

considered the challenges that arose from a high number of registration applications

being made close to the deadline. The number of duplicate applications was reported

anecdotally as being at similar levels to the 2017 UK General Parliamentary Election,

although the data on this was not yet clear. The pressure of managing these

registration applications was a significant risk to the successful administration of

the polls, with the potential to impact on voters' experience. The Head of Policy

outlined the initial findings of the Commission's post-poll research. The public view

was that the election was well run overall, despite significant pressures on those

running the polls. There were risks to the successful delivery of the election, and

evidence that small numbers of voters did not receive the quality of service they had

a right to expect. There were for example some localised errors with poll cards, some of which could be largely attributed to pressures with supplier capacity. Concerns had been expressed in Northern Ireland, following claims by whistleblowers. These were being fully looked into. The Commission had received a number of contacts from overseas electors who were unable to return their postal votes in time for them to be counted. Our research found some public concerns in relation to whether some campaign materials were truthful and accurate. This included labelling of material and social media accounts, candidate material looking like local news, and transparency of third-party campaigning, given the significantly increased numbers of third party campaigners at this election. This was the first General Election where there were greater transparency measures in place on social media platforms, but these were still not at the level we would like. There was also inconsistency in the levels of transparency of different social media companies. The Director of Regulation noted that the work of the election was far from over from the regulatory point of view. Spending returns would not be submitted for some time yet but in the meantime we had already spoken to some parties and third-party campaigners, and would continue to take proactive steps to assist them in their preparation of these reports. We had found the data provided by social media companies regarding spending on their platforms useful with this work. The Director of Regulation described the work of the Election Cell, set up by the Cabinet Office, in which the Commission participated during the election period. This cell included organisations from Whitehall, the police, and other regulators. We had found our participation had been positive for the election and for stakeholder engagement. We had provided feedback to the Cabinet Office on suggested improvements to enhance the effectiveness of any such election cell around future electoral events. The Head of Policy noted the information so far received regarding intimidation of candidates. The Board considered the evidence about intimidation and recognised that establishing an effective baseline for data was difficult. Research suggested that the vast majority of intimidation was online. Intimidation was not widespread across the country, but where it did occur, it was quite serious. The Board sought to understand how far instances of intimidation were concentrated on particular social media platforms; there was not clear data on this at this stage, but as this becomes clearer the Board encouraged the Commission to share these findings. The Board discussed some specific instances in Northern Ireland. The Board reflected on its decision not to observe at polling stations on election day, which had been a pity. The Chief Executive noted that in the context of the then prevalent high security risks, the fact that nothing happened to cause concern was a good outcome. However, it was to be hoped that more normal conditions would return for future elections. The Board discussed the pressures on electoral administrators, and whether, and if so how, these pressures could be addressed. The Board sought clarity, for example, on whether the election timetable could be adjusted to reflect changes in the demands placed on administrators since the introduction of online electoral registration. The Head of Policy confirmed that any such changes would require changes to primary legislation. The Chair suggested that we should also focus on promoting improvements to the underlying system, such as progress on a look-up tool and wider registration modernisation. The Board noted the UK government's anticipated changes to the Fixed Term Parliament Act. One consequence might in fact be a shorter administration period prior to elections, as had been the case before the act. The nature of post-poll reporting this time was being considered. Reports needed to be published before the May polls. There were opportunities to bring out important messages about future polls, as well as the

statutory duty to fulfil. The Board noted that the Commission had prepared well for the polls, the election had been seen as well run overall, and the outcome was trusted and had not been called into question. The Director of Electoral Administration and Guidance noted the different challenges that arose when there were combined polls, as in May 2020, rather than a stand-alone election. Government policy priorities following the UK Parliamentary General Election (EC 3/20) The Director of Communications, Policy, and Research advised the Board of the areas where the UK government had announced its priorities for policy and regulatory changes that would affect the work of the Commission. There was still uncertainty about the level of ambition and timetabling in some areas. Nevertheless, it was clear that the volume of proposed changes had significant implications for the Commission's work over the term of the Parliament, although much of this was already reflected in our existing planning. The Board considered some of the specific government policy priorities, including changes to the frequency of reapplying for postal votes, and the implications of the proposed Constitution, Democracy and Rights Commission. The Board reflected on how these would be addressed in our corporate plan. The Director of Communications, Policy, and Research confirmed that the Commission would continue to make the case for its policy priorities even when these were not currently priorities for the UK's governments. The Board considered other areas where the UK government might make policy changes, such as on overseas voters. We should be ready to press for innovative solutions in such circumstances. The Board reflected on the impending final report from the Law Commission regarding electoral law reform, which would require a response from the government. Resolved: That the paper be agreed. Corporate plan and budget 2020/25 (EC 4/20 and 5/20) The Chief Executive outlined the approach that we had taken to meet our obligation to produce a corporate plan for consideration by the Speaker's Committee following a UK Parliamentary General Election. Due to time constraints, we would prepare a holding interim corporate plan for the Speaker's Committee, and request permission to prepare a more comprehensively considered corporate plan for 2021. This paper reflected the discussion from the December 2019 Commission Board meeting. The main estimate included a proposed increase in our core budget, which was in line with the increase to the Cabinet Office. The Director of Finance and Corporate Services went through the proposed budget figures in detail. More than half of the proposed increase was due to accounting changes around leasing of office accommodation which were not adjustable. The number and importance of scheduled electoral events in 2020 and 2021 impacted the proposed events budget. There was also ongoing regulatory work from the European Parliamentary Election and UK Parliamentary General Election, together with the need to work with governments on their declared electoral priorities. The Board emphasised the need for the cover letter to the Speaker's Committee in support of the corporate plan to set out clearly the reasons behind the request for a modest increase to the core budget, including the extent to which this was driven by work in support of the programmes of governments. We should also emphasise the discipline and rigour we brought to our budget management and planning, and avoid any impression of self-congratulation. Resolved: That the interim Corporate Plan 2020/2025 and budget as set out in the Annex to this item be approved That the attached Main Estimate 2020/2021 (with Parliamentary Control Totals set out in Table 4 of the document), that embodies those budgets, and the Corporate Plan 2020/2025 for submission to Speaker's Committee be agreed That delegate authority for the Chief Executive as Accounting Officer, working with the Chair, to amend the Corporate Plan and Main Estimate in non-major ways to reflect unforeseen developments between approval by the Board and submission

to the Speaker's Committee be agreed Corporate plan 2021/26 The Chief Executive reminded the Board that this corporate plan would be the first time we would be reporting to three parliaments: Westminster, the Scottish Parliament, and the Senedd. Their different budget cycles needed to be taken into account. The Head of Planning, Performance and Governance explained the timetable for the production of a comprehensive corporate plan. To develop the 2021/26 corporate plan, the Commission would create a strategy map that shows how all elements of the plan interconnect in a logical way, and relate performance reporting closely to that. The narrative plan would then be written from the strategy map, which translates the strategy map into a story everyone can readily understand. There would also be early and close engagement with key stakeholders. The Head of Strategic Planning and Performance confirmed the deadlines for the preparation of this plan. Although Speaker's Committee would not look at the corporate plan until February/March 2021, we had to work to a September 2020 deadline to meet the timeline set by the devolved administrations. The Director of Finance and Corporate Services noted that the Scottish and Welsh parliaments would contribute proportional funding to the Commission, and would expect visibility on what they had funded. The Board supported early discussions with stakeholders about the strategy, considered the merits of using focus groups to complement the research knowledge base, and encouraged engagement with groups, including young people, with whom we usually had less contact. Resolved: That the paper be agreed. Forward plan of Board business (EC 6/20) Resolved: That the paper be noted. Action tracker (EC 7/20) Resolved: That the paper be noted. Chair and Chief Executive's meetings and meetings of note in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland (EC 8/20) Resolved: That the paper be noted.