

Minutes: Wales Assembly Parties Panel 18 June 2018 | Electoral Commission Search
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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