

Parliamentary Parties Panel minutes: 1 December 2015 | Electoral Commission Search

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Strategic Review EU Referendum Bill Transition to IER Enforcement Policy Consultation Commission Update Report Any other business Date of the next meeting Actions First

published: 1 December 2015 Last updated: 2 September 2019 Who was at the meeting Who

was at the meeting Conservative Party (Chair): Andrew Stedman (AS) Daisy Woods (DW)

Labour: Margaret Lynch (ML) Mike Creighton (MC) Liberal Democrats: Darren Briddock

(DB) Plaid Cymru: Geraint Day (GD) Scottish National Party: Scott Martin, Scottish

National Party (SM) Electoral Commission: Claire Bassett, Chief Executive (CB) Alex

Robertson, Director of Communication (AR) Bob Posner, Director of Party & Election

Finance and Legal Counsel (BP) Lisa Camps, Communications Officer (LC) Minutes, and

actions of the meeting and matters arising (ECPPP 01/09/2015) The minutes from

01/09/2015 were agreed with no clarifications sought or noted. There were no other

matters arising from the minutes. Strategic Review CB explained that, as part of her

role, she will be conducting a strategic review of the role of the Commission and its

remit. PPP members were asked to consider what they want from the Commission going

forward so that this can be discussed at the group's next meeting. MC suggested

consideration might want to be given to the role of the Commission in the

administration of elections, specifically around the Commission having more power to

intervene. AS suggested that the Commission might want to consider looking at gaining

more statutory powers over local authorities, especially where they might be

underperforming. He cited electoral registration as a particular area where this

might be effective. CB replied that these are good indications of the kind of

conversations the Commission is looking to have, but added that we do need to be

mindful that any changes will need buy-in from Parliament. EU Referendum Bill AR

updated that, following a likely amendment to the Bill, the Commission will now be

able to designate on one side of the campaign only if appropriate. AR explained that,

once the Bill becomes an Act and provisions are commenced by order, an initial

tranche of guidance will be published. On the voting age for the referendum, AR

reported that there are a lot of measures that will need to be carried out to

effectively enact votes at 16, including secondary legislation and changes to the

Government Digital Service registration system. He added that, when the referendum

date is known, the Commission will be issuing an assessment of how much of the

preparation has taken place and what will still need to be done. ML asked if the

timescale was longer for the Scottish Independence Referendum and AR replied that it

was a lot longer. MC asked if there are any legal problems around 16 year olds

registering to vote, and BP responded that there are sensitivities around holding

data on 16 year olds, but that measures were put in place at the Scottish

Independence Referendum to manage this. Transition to IER GD noted a lot of awareness

raising usually takes place in universities but not as much seems to be targeted at

young people that aren't in education. AR responded that the main way to remind

people to register is through Electoral Registration Officers and that their activity

is aimed at everyone. Then, in addition, the Commission runs campaigns targeted at

those groups that have been found to be typically under-registered, of which students

are one. Enforcement Policy Consultation BP explained that the Enforcement Policy

came in in 2010 and that, now five years have passed, it is felt that it's time to

revisit the policy through consultation. He added that there will be a focus on

targeting resources most effectively, and gave as an example the fact the team

currently spend a lot of time reminding people to meet requirements, whereas this time might be more effectively spent on more substantive areas of work. He explained that, if appropriate, the revised Policy will be brought in before the polls in May 2016. AS commented that cases can take quite a long time to be resolved and that this can prolong the period of worry for the party volunteers involved. BP responded that, although the team need to be thorough, he is hoping to streamline the process on more straightforward matters. MC asked if the Commission will be looking at the impact of other legislation on its Enforcement Policy. BP responded that there are sometimes overlapping regulatory regimes and the Commission is mindful of this. Commission Update Report ML asked if the Commission is happy that everything is in place to ensure the register is complete and accurate, and added that she is concerned that the register could 'erode' over time. BP responded that all statutory duties on local authorities / EROs remain and that the canvass will still take place. He added that the Commission has a responsibility to monitor performance to seek to ensure that EROs work effectively, particularly as local authority resources get tighter. AR commented that, now the transition to IER is complete, the Commission now has the opportunity to make registration better, and cited the use of behavioural insights and the sharing of best practice across local authorities as ways in which this might be done. ML mentioned that the issue of CORE had been raised again recently, and wondered how much longer local authorities could continue to compile separate registers. AS reported that parties have been discussing a standard data format for the register and that he and others will be meeting with Paul Avery at the Cabinet Office to discuss it. BP explained that the Commission are planning to make updates to PEF online as it can currently be difficult to use. He added that the Commission also want to introduce online guidance and forms, but that the project would require funding. DB responded that, on the spreadsheet version of the form, there are four dates required for every transaction, and that two of them (incurred date and invoice date) aren't actually required in statute. He also added that there are different fields in the spreadsheet to those on PEF Online. BP responded that this can be looked into. AS commented that he was disappointed to see that Commission had said in July in its post elections report that there should be full compliance now that PPERA had been around for 15 years, considering that accounting units are run by volunteers with limited terms. BP replied that the Commission does recognise that there are occasions where compliance might be more challenging. Members asked about the online consultation on new party registration applications. BP explained that there is currently a pilot whereby new applications are put online and people can then comment. BP agreed to circulate the details of how members could get involved with the consultation. Any other business ML explained that there is a difficulty around banker's drafts from the Cooperative Bank being accepted as payment for election deposits, and asked if the Commission had looked into enabling electronic transfers. BP replied that he would feed this back to the Electoral Administration team. AS commented that problems are posed by the fact that letters from local authorities confirming that someone will be added to the register don't confirm when they will be added, which causes challenges around the permissibility of donations. AR responded that the template letter has been changed so that the date will now be included. Date of the next meeting The date of the next meeting is 8 March 2016 – SNP to Chair

Actions Action Owner Status Commission to circulate details of the Party Registration Consultation to members BP Email sent 3 December 2015 Related content Party registration decisions View our decisions on political party names, descriptions and emblems View current applications View the political party names, descriptions and

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