

Board minutes: 13 February 2019 | Electoral Commission Search

Board minutes: 13 February 2019 You are in the Electoral Commission Board section Home How we make decisions Electoral Commission Board On this page Who was at the meeting Apologies and introductions Declarations of interest Minutes of the Commission Board meeting of 5 December 2018 Business Plan and Main Estimate 2019/20 Governance update Remuneration and Human Resources Committee Chief Executive's update Forward plan of board business 2018-2020 Action tracker Chair and Chief Executive's meeting and meetings in devolved legislatures First published: 7 June 2019 Last updated: 12 August 2019 Meeting overview Date: Wednesday 13 February 2019 Time: 9:30am to 1pm Location: Boothroyd Room, 3 Bunhill Row, London Date of next scheduled meeting: Wednesday 13 March Who was at the meeting Who was at the meeting John Holmes, Chair Alasdair Morgan Alastair Ross Anna Carragher Joan Walley Rob Vincent Sarah Chambers Stephen Gilbert Sue Bruce Bob Posner, Chief Executive Ailsa Irvine, Director, Electoral Administration and Guidance Louise Edwards, Director, Political Finance and Regulation Craig Westwood, Director, Communications and Research Kieran Rix, Director, Finance and Corporate Services Louise Footner, Head of Legal David Bailey, Head of Strategic Planning and Performance Petra Crees, Planning, Performance and Governance Manager David Meek, Senior Adviser, Governance Apologies and introductions Apologies from Elan Closs Stephens were noted. The chair welcomed the new Commissioners following receipt of their Royal Warrants. The board welcomed BP as interim Chief Executive following his appointment. Declarations of interest Alastair Ross is a senior consultant, Weber Shandwick Northern Ireland (remunerated), is a board member, Probation Board Northern Ireland (remunerated), and was previously consultant, Leonard Cheshire, Northern Ireland (remunerated). Joan Walley is non-executive director, Combined NHS Trust (remunerated), honorary chairman, Aldersgate Group (pro bono), honorary chairman, Burslem Regeneration Trust (pro bono), Council of Fellows member, Keele University (pro bono), and a member of the City Learning Trust (pro bono). Stephen Gilbert is Member, House of Lords (remunerated), chair of the Communications Select Committee, and principal, Stephen Gilbert Consulting (remunerated). Sarah Chambers is Trustee of Greenhouse Sports (pro bono). Minutes of the Commission Board meeting of 5 December 2018 (EC 1/19, 2/19, 3/19, 4/19) The minutes of the Commission Board meeting on 5 December 2018 were agreed after correcting an error in 6.5. The record of the Commission informal session of 5 December 2018 was noted. The draft minutes of the Audit Committee meeting on 4 December 2018 were noted. The draft minutes of the Remuneration and Human Resources Committee meeting on 5 December 2018 were noted. Business Plan and Main Estimate 2019/20 (EC 5/19, 6/19) Bob Posner introduced the paper, and explained that the Commission was required to submit a Business Plan to the Speaker's Committee in support of its annual application for funding (the Main Estimate). The proposed growth represented an increase compared to the expected spend for the 2019/20 plan year, and compared to 2018/19, but the total proposed spend was within the range of the five-year plan, as some of the spending had been brought forward from future years. The board asked for more details of the impacts to support the investment sought, including what would happen if our proposed increases were not accepted, and of efficiency savings. A commissioner suggested re-evaluating the long-term areas of spending, such as policy development grants, to determine if best value had been received from such spending. Each director outlined the expected impact of increased funding in their area, and addressed how these impacts were measured. The board heard that investments in political finance and regulation would streamline some processes and reduce the burden on that team, as well as on the parties and campaigners who

used the system. The move to fully digital guidance would improve its usability, which should result in a reduction in queries. In general we had moved away from a reactive regulatory approach, towards a proactive approach, and were working more closely with political parties. The board heard about developments in our investigative approach, and our responses to government priorities. In relation to canvass reform, the proposed changes should deliver significant savings to local government and the investment would allow us to deliver our implementation functions effectively. The board considered the legislative agenda of the devolved legislatures, to which extra resource would enable us to respond appropriately. The board also heard that the new website would merge with the Your Vote Matters website, bringing benefits through overall savings in the costs of supporting two separate websites. The largest element of the budget increase in Finance and Corporate Services (FCS) was due to a large increase in contributions across the civil service pension scheme. Investment in FCS also involved bringing forward planned investment in corporate systems to drive improvements in governance and performance management to support greater impact across the Commission. The board believed that addressing the challenges of the digital agenda was key to what we were proposing, and should be emphasised in our presentation of the planned changes. The board noted that this would address voters' expectations and that there were benefits that would accrue to the voter from this work. Action: The board endorsed the Business Plan and the request for more funds, subject to the draft Business Plan and covering letter being updated to include the information raised above before they were sent to the Speaker's Committee. Board members should be sent an information note reflecting the discussed efficiencies, value for money, and impacts. Resolved: That the proposed Business Plan and Main Estimate, with the change noted above, be submitted to the Speaker's Committee. Governance update (EC 7/19) David Bailey introduced the item, explained that this was part of the annual review of the Corporate Governance Framework and included some technical updates. The board would discuss more substantive updates at future meetings, such as the board effectiveness review in April. Action: The board requested that the second-to-last sentence in G11, about the role of the Independent Adviser to the Audit Committee, be deleted. Resolved: That the proposed changes to the Corporate Governance Framework, with the change noted above, be adopted. Appointment of a Commissioner to a vacancy on the Remuneration and Human Resources Committee The Chair explained that the Remuneration and Human Resources Committee needed a new commissioner after the end of Bridget Prentice's term. The chair nominated Joan Walley. Resolved: That Joan Walley be appointed as a member of the Remuneration and Human Resources Committee for a term of three years. Chief Executive's update (EC 8/19) The board received an update on the contingency plans for unscheduled electoral events. The board received an update on the registration of new political parties, and the investigation work that arose from the 2017 UK General Parliamentary Elections. The board was updated on progress in preparing for the scheduled May polls, including updated guidance to reflect legislative changes, and the planned ID trials. The board heard about the more proactive approach that the communications team had led on in response to recent inaccurate criticisms. The board also heard about the progress with the updated website project, including the steps being taken to ensure that web content is accessible. The board was told about progress made by the equality and diversity group, including the mentoring schemes and management training that has been offered. The board received an update on litigation. The board acknowledged with thanks the great work that Louise Footner had done for the Commission over her 13 years of

service, as this was her last meeting. Anna Carragher updated the board on the UK Government's potential further delay to holding Northern Ireland Assembly elections, despite recent lack of progress on re-establishing the devolved government. The board discussed their general position that due polls should not be delayed and endorsed that this should be communicated to the Government in relation to the Assembly elections and (as needed) be openly said by the Commission. The chair restated our position on the approach to retrospective transparency for donations in Northern Ireland. Sarah Chambers left the meeting at this point. Action: Craig Westwood to provide Commissioners with some referendum related background reading for their information. Resolved: That the paper be noted Performance and finance report quarter three 2018/19 (EC 9/19) Bob Posner introduced the paper, and summarised Commission performance in quarter three (October – December 2018) against our key performance measures and key milestones. Petra Crees highlighted the key achievements, such as preparation of guidance, the new observers' code of practice, and devolved accountability work. Responses were provided to Board queries on detailed points. Resolved: That the paper be noted. Forward plan of board business 2018-2020 (EC 11/19) Resolved: That the paper be noted. Action tracker (EC 12/19) Resolved: That the paper be noted. Chair and Chief Executive's meeting and meetings in devolved legislatures (EC 13/19) Action, That the introductory meeting between Alastair Ross and Anna Carragher and Ann Watt on 1 February be removed from the list, as it had not yet taken place. Resolved: That the paper, with amendment, be noted. Related content Register to vote All you need to register to vote is 5 minutes and your National Insurance number. Our Commissioners Donations and loans Find out about donations and loans to a political party, individual or other organisation Our Executive Team Meet our Executive Team, and find out more about them