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On this page RNIB - Turned Out report DCMS consultation on data protection – DCMS/Cabinet Office Minutes of the last meeting and actions arising (PPP 7/9/2021) Political Finance Online project Commission guidance and query on advice consistency Electoral Commission update report AOB First published: 4 February 2022 Last updated: 9 February 2022 Who was at the meeting Who was at the meeting Liberal Democrats: Kerry Buist (KB), chair of meeting Labour Party: Andrew Whyte (AW) Scottish National Party: Scott Martin (SM) Conservative Party: Catherine Latham (CL) Plaid Cymru: Geraint Day (GD) Carl Harris (CH) Alba Party: Chris McEleny (CM) Electoral Commission: Craig Westwood, Director of Communications, Policy and Research (CW) Louise Edwards, Director of Regulation (LE) Alex White, Senior Communications Officer (AMW) Cabinet Office: Paul Docker (PD) Becca Crosier (BC) Elizabeth Jacobs (EJ) Present for agenda item 1: RNIB: Amy Craddock (AC) Present for agenda item 2: Electoral Commission: Kate Engles (KE), Policy Manager Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport: Robin Edwards (RE) Sarah Goulsbra (SG) Bilal Toure (BT) Simon Weakley (SM) Mark Hicks (MH) Cabinet Office: Elizabeth Homans (EH) Rose Ashley (RA) Apologies: Alan Mabbutt (Conservative Party) RNIB - Turned Out report AC gave an overview of RNIB's Turned Out report, noting recommendations on the accessibility of information provided to voters by political parties at elections. She explained that blind and partially sighted voters may not be able to fully participate in elections if they cannot access information about policies and candidates, and that there are implications in their ability to vote independently if they need to rely on others to tell them about their voting options. AC suggested that parties should prioritise providing information in an accessible format, such as large print, braille or audio versions of manifestos and candidate information, and also highlighted that RNIB provided a braille transcription service. She noted the report's conclusion that failure to provide information in an accessible format could be a breach of the Equality Act. AC also explained that access to information from parties is only one area of concern and that information provided by local authorities is also often not accessible. She also highlighted the importance of an audio and tactile option at polling stations. KB asked how much the RNIB's braille transcription cost and what the turnaround times were, noting the short period of time parties often have to produce election material. AC explained this was free service for individuals but suggested organisations should get in touch for further information. CW thanked AC for her presentation, and asked the parties whether it would be helpful for the Commission to distil best practice to be shared with those party staff who were responsible for this area of work. GD suggested it would be helpful to have clarity on what parties are legally required to provide and in what format. LE noted that the Commission would, if the parties indicated it would be helpful, look at what it could do to encourage best practice from the point of view of supporting improvements to the democratic process, rather than this being an electoral law obligation. SM asked whether work was being done on making ballot papers easier to fill out for those with accessibility requirements. AC explained RNIB have been working with Cabinet Office on this, and PD confirmed they had further meetings planned with accessibility partners. DCMS consultation on data protection – DCMS/Cabinet Office RE gave an overview of the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport consultation on data protection, which includes proposals around the use of personal data by political parties. He noted that the department was seeking views on whether existing data protection laws needed clarifying, and asked whether the parties had any feedback. KB

noted that the parties had not been contacted about the consultation until few days before the consultation closed in November. CL noted that the Conservative Party's data protection team would have been in touch directly. RE apologised that the parties had not been informed, and noted that they could continue to share views via email after the meeting. CH asked if there was a timetable for any legislative change, noting that the party was currently working to update their processes in line with ICO guidance but that they would need to take into account any changes prompted by the consultation. RE explained that responses were being worked through, with any recommendations put to Ministers in the New Year. He noted any legislative changes would be after summer 2022, and would also require an implementation period. SM asked whether any changes would take account of the EU's e-privacy directive, if political messaging would be covered in future legislation, and there had been consideration given to a soft opt-out option to political marketing. SG confirmed the consultation document covered these issues. Minutes of the last meeting and actions arising (PPP 7/9/2021) Regarding the actions, KB noted that she was still to arrange a meeting with the NPCC. The minutes were agreed. Elections Bill - Cabinet Office BC gave an update on the Bill's progress through Parliament. She noted that the Bill had been amended to include provisions relating to the use of first past the post for PCC elections and mayoral elections in England, as well as some minor technical drafting amendments. BC also highlighted that ministerial responsibility for elections policy had now transferred from Cabinet Office to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and that Kemi Badenoch MP was taking the Bill through the Commons. BC confirmed that the UK Government was still working towards the Bill receiving Royal Assent around May. Political Finance Online project CM asked for an update on the launch of Political Finance Online and plans to provide training, as at the last PPP meeting it was noted that the system would launch in January. KB noted that the Liberal Democrats, among other parties, had been given a first look at the system and been informed that the launch would take place further into 2022. LE reminded members of the difficulties the Commission had had with the external developer, and that bringing delivery in house had meant greater control over the project's development. She noted that technical issues had, however, slowed recent development which, while now resolved, meant the new system would not launch in January as planned. She confirmed the Commission would provide an updated timetable for launch, with a phased launch proposed for early 2022. LE acknowledged the parties' previous feedback on being kept up to date on the launch and future development updates. She said the Commission was looking at different training opportunities, both ahead of launch and also on a long-term basis, including the use of online training and videos. CM asked that the Commission avoid launching around the elections in Scotland and Wales in May 2022, and KB also highlighted the busy April period. LE noted this would be taken into account. CH asked whether a dummy 'sandbox' site would be available for the parties to use for testing. LE confirmed this would not be available for launch but that the Commission is considering it for longer term development. SM asked whether all existing data would be moved from the existing system, and whether it would be cleaned up to avoid duplication. LE explained that the level of data migration was still to be determined, and the Commission was considering whether any data needed to be deposited with the National Archives. She confirmed existing data would be cleaned, and that the new system would make it harder to duplicate entries. Commission guidance and query on advice consistency CL explained that the Conservative Party had received emails from the Commission about the party over-reporting aggregated donations, and that the Commission's advice had differed from

the party's interpretation of PPERA in relation to reporting thresholds for central parties and accounting units. KB also said the Liberal Democrats had been investigated for over-reporting aggregated donations. LE confirmed there had been no change in our interpretation of the reporting threshold but that she would raise with colleagues. CL also noted that some guidance was missing from the Commission's website. LE suggested this may be where guidance had been transferred to the new HTML format, but that if there were any specific pieces of guidance missing she would look into it. SM asked for the timetable for the completion of the guidance project. LE confirmed she would follow up on this. KB asked how quickly guidance relating to the Elections Bill would be provided, given the need to train volunteers and staff ahead of the next general election. LE said the Commission continued to recommend that the UK Government should consider the impact of the measures on all those involved in elections when planning for implementation. She added that the Commission was currently working through implementation guidance with Cabinet Office, and would ensure parties are kept up to date. BC agreed with this, noting that the Cabinet Office was thinking about how to support all those involved in elections. She suggested she could provide a further update on the timeline for implementation at the next PPP meeting in February. Electoral Commission update report The update report was noted. SM asked whether an online spending tool for the Scottish Parliament and Senedd election spending returns would be available. LE confirmed this would likely be in an Excel format, but that the data would be able to be filtered for usability. AOB PD confirmed that the provision to allow emergency proxy votes for Covid would be continued into and beyond the May 2022 elections, as government guidance on self-isolation remains in place. PD also confirmed that the changes introduced for the May 2021 elections relating to the number of subscribers required for nominations would not be carried forward to future elections. GD noted the changes to nominations for PCC had made it an easier process, and asked whether any research had been done on keeping this in place for PCC elections. PD noted that any permanent changes would need proper consideration, and that the changes made for May 2021 had been solely focused on meeting public health guidance to cut unnecessary contact and travel. SM asked whether the next meeting of the PPP would be held virtually. CW confirmed it would be. Commission actions Status Provide update on timetable for completion of the guidance project. Cabinet Office actions Status Provide a further update on the timeline for Election Bill implementation at the next PPP meeting.