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Parliamentary Parties Panel minutes: 2 June 2020 On this page COVID 19 and
considerations for May 2021 elections Minutes of the last meeting Update on Political
Finance Online Policy development grants – electoral formula Sponsorship and virtual
conferences Commission Update Report AOB First published: 17 June 2021 Last updated:
18 June 2021 Who was at the meeting Who was at the meeting Scottish National Party:
Scott Martin (SM), chair of meeting Conservative Party: Alan Mabbutt OBE (AM) Labour
Party: Andrew Whyte (AW) Plaid Cymru: Geraint Day (GD) Liberal Democrats: Kerry Buist
(KB) Electoral Commission: Craig Westwood, Director of Communications, Policy &
Research (CW) Louise Edwards, Director of Regulation (LE) Ailsa Irvine, Director of
Electoral Administration and Guidance (AI) Laura McLeod, Public Affairs Manager (LM)
Cabinet Office: Paul Docker (PD) Becca Crosier (BC) James Hairsnape (JH) Lizzie Jacob
(LJ) Association of s: Peter Stanyon (PS) Society of Local Authority Chief
Executives: Mark Heath (MH) COVID 19 and considerations for May 2021 elections SM
welcomed PS and MH to the meeting to discuss the May 2021 elections. PS noted the
challenge of the combination and number of elections due to take place in May 2021,
including the unknown future public health scenarios. He highlighted the ongoing
issue of by-elections, but noted concerns primarily related to the delivery of the
annual canvass during COVID 19. SM asked if the existing canvass framework was fit
for purpose. PH explained there were still uncertainties, even with canvass reform.
He noted the benefit of administrators being able to contact people by a variety of
different ways but also stated the challenges that would exist for any door knocking
exercise. AS agreed and highlighted the issue of local authorities potentially not
having sufficient staff due to other pressures. AS noted how reduced staffing levels
could impact on checking the permissibility of donations. GD highlighted that local
authorities were already under increased funding pressures and asked about any
concerns related to registration, particularly given the franchise changes in Wales.
PS and MH noted the funding pressures on local authorities regardless of the
pandemic. MH explained local authority staff had been redeployed in order to support
effective delivery of the canvass in the current circumstances. PD noted that MCLHG
were aware of funding and were in the process of considering if additional funding
could be provided, including relating to elections. SM explained the ongoing work in
Scotland to engage with stakeholders on possible scenarios related to postal and
proxy voting. AW highlighted the impact on parties spending if elections happen with
some social distancing measures in place and gave the examples of more print
material, more campaigning by phone. He asked if the spending limit could be looked
at. PD explained no decision had been taken and noted the need to understand the
potential impact on parties campaigning, and welcomed any input or feedback from
parties. GD explained the ICO had written to all parties regarding the tightening of
the rules on phone canvassing and highlighted the restrictive impact this would have.
AS agreed. PS raised the issue of postal voting and explained the need for approaches
to consider the supply chain and give advanced notice so administrators/ROs could be
properly resourced. AI explained the UK, Scottish and Welsh governments were
currently considering approaches. She noted that the combination of elections will
likely place strain on key suppliers and the systems, and explained that if the
elections take place within current legal framework, a higher number of postal votes
would be likely. PD explained the ongoing work to talk to suppliers, including
understanding the impact of the increased postal voting by voters. He also noted the
need to consider franchise changes in Scotland in Wales. AI explained the Commission
had done some early scenario modelling to understand any potential challenges and

what different situations on polling day might look like, particularly considering how to support local authorities, parties and campaigners, agents and tellers. MH noted that discussions were at early stages regarding premises and finding polling station staff. He highlighted that not all usual options would be practical or possible. PD explained that workshops were planned to consider processes and noted the importance of working with parties and stakeholders to understand issues. Minutes of the last meeting and actions arising (PPP 4/02/2020) The minutes were agreed. AM highlighted the word take was missing from point 3.2. LM agreed to update. LE agreed to consider how the case update could be distributed routinely by email to a parties distribution list. Update on Political Finance Online LE updated on the continued progress with the system. She detailed that as part of ongoing project assurance, and following legal review of the Financial Reporting user stories, the same validation of registration user stories had found no issues. Current legal engagement was on PDF templates for offline functionality, as well as email template correspondence. She explained the Commission had recently emailed parties for feedback on a proposal: adding an additional step to the existing process whereby each incoming accounting officer will be required to make a declaration either online or by signing a physical offline form. She welcomed any feedback from parties. KB and AW agreed to send over considered feedback by the deadline. AW noted that the Labour Party already produces job descriptions for all officer roles within the party, including chair and treasurer, which include the relevant legal responsibilities. Policy development grants – electoral formula SM raised the issue with the electoral formula and the impact of the delay to publication of the statistics by ONS. He raised simplification of the scheme and suggested linking it to the data used for the boundary reviews. LE explained that despite the delay of publication of data, the Commission wanted to provide assurance and pay an estimated amount to parties. She agreed on the need to find opportunities to try and simplify the scheme. JH agreed on the principle of simplifying the scheme but explained the Cabinet Office had no current plans to do so. Sponsorship and virtual conferences AM explained that given parties are having to virtual conferences, it would be useful if the Commission gave consideration to how PPERA might apply to online conferences hosted by zoom. He gave the example of adverts and noted the need to support parties on consideration of key issues and how to return appropriately. LE explained the Commission's legal and guidance teams were currently considering the question on how the PPERA provisions on conference stands should be interpreted in relation to virtual conferences, and in the context of social distancing measures. She welcomed any further information from the parties on potential plans, to enable the Commission to respond as helpfully as possible. GD asked for any guidance to be available as soon as possible to help inform planning. Commission Update Report AM noted the broad statement on voter confidence from the Commission's report on the 2019 Parliamentary general election and asked whether this could be a reaction to digital campaigning rather than the view of the ordinary voter. CW explained the trends had shown increasing concerns related to the use of campaigning or the media. He referenced the significant one in five people who were not confident in the way the last election had been run. Any other business SM raised his ongoing concerns with the data used in the Commission's candidate spending tool. LE acknowledged the concerns and offered to provide further information to demonstrate the accuracy of the data and how the filters work. SM agreed. Commission actions Status Provide advice to members on online party conferences and events. Complete: Louise to provide detail at meeting To provide further detail to SM on candidate spending tool Complete To use the September meeting to discuss the

Commission's next five year corporate plan with parties Ongoing: Bob to provide update at meeting. To consider how the case update could be distributed routinely by email to a parties distribution list. Ongoing Related content Party panels Find out about the different party panels, and read the minutes of past meetings Parliamentary Parties Panel minutes: 3 February 2020 Parliamentary Parties Panel minutes: 3 September 2019 Party registration decisions View our decisions on political party names, descriptions and emblems