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Minutes of the last meeting Commission Update Report AOB First published: 18 June

2021 Last updated: 18 June 2021 Who was at the meeting Who was at the meeting Labour

Party: Andrew Whyte (AW), chair of meeting Scottish National Party: Scott Martin (SM)

Conservative Party: Catherine Latham (CL) 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) Clara Cole, Head

of Regulatory Support (CC) Laura McLeod, Public Affairs Manager (LM) Cabinet Office:

Paul Docker (PD) Becca Crosier (BC) Tom McGee (TM) Chris Watts (CWA) Preparations and

considerations for May 2021 AW welcomed CL to her first meeting. He invited PD to

give an overview of the stakeholder workshops held by the Cabinet Office to

understand processes and consider key issues for the May 2021 elections. He explained

the workshops were productive and allowed for in depth discussions with suppliers and

organisations to establish what may be possible within the existing legislative

framework. He noted the need for arrangements to ensure the elections are run safely

and effectively, and gave the examples of social distancing measures and the need for

absent voting options for those who wouldn't be able to attend polling stations. He

highlighted the four nation approach to the ongoing work. AI provided an overview of

the work underway to prepare for the May elections. She noted the recent Electoral

Coordination and Advisory Board (ECAB) meeting to discuss the upcoming plans to

ensure the polls can be delivered safely and effectively. She highlighted the support

and guidance the Commission will continue to provide to electoral administrators and

explained the topics the guidance will cover. AI explained the Commission was in the

process of establishing a set of objectives for delivering successful elections in

the current public health environment. She noted the objectives would be used to

assess any proposed policy changes, identify and manage risks, and to evaluate the

success of the elections. AW welcomed the objectives and asked if they would be

consulted on. AI explained consultation would happen imminently and welcomed input

from members. LE introduced CC as the new Head of Regulatory Support at the

Commission. CC noted her focus was to provide helpful support to parties and

candidates, and explained parties could expect upcoming guidance on; the legislative

changes relating to expenditure, as a result of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act

2018; and highlighted the plans to integrate the substance of the Commission's Codes

of Practice into guidance for the May 2021 elections. AW raised the issue of postal

voting and explained the need to consider voters who need to shield or have

circumstances that prevent them from attending a polling station. He asked if the

Commission had any plans on postal voting, specifically. AI noted the ongoing work

with the sector to understand capacity of key suppliers and the system. She

highlighted the request the Commission had received in July from Scottish Government

to carry out of public opinion work in Scotland to understand attitudes towards

voting in the context of Covid- 19. She noted the finding that most voters are keen

to continue voting in-person despite the public health challenges. She explained the

resources the Commission had already for local authorities to share with their

residents, highlighting that: polling stations will be safe places to vote; there are

a range of voting options; and those who would prefer to vote by post should apply

early. KB asked about the implications of local lockdowns on the declaration process

and if it would be possible for poll cards to contain advice to voters on how to stay

safe. She noted there could be challenges doing so, given the different elections taking place in Scotland and Wales. PD noted that for polling cards, due to space and the criteria in law, any additional safety information would need to be in an accompanying letter. PD explained the conversations with electoral administrators on the declaration of results, including in local lockdown areas, had concluded this would be possible and feasible with adequate support and guidance. PD explained the important role emergency proxy votes could play if a person is required to isolate on polling day, and noted the proposal was being considered and details worked through. AI noted local authorities would shortly be carrying out a review of polling stations, exploring factors such as size and capacity for adequate social distancing, as well as venues ability and willingness to close for polling day. Imprints Consultation CWA gave an overview of the digital imprints proposals for online political campaigning. He noted the complexity of the issues, and welcomed input to the consultation from members and parties by the 4 November. He highlighted the scope of the regime and distinction between paid for and non- paid for content. He noted the inclusion of a question in the consultation on whether the regime should be expanded to cover wider forms of online political advertising. He welcomed any questions from the members. BC noted the need to balance the proposals being robust, but also practicable and deliverable. CL asked what is defined as 'practical' on where you can put an imprint. CWA explained if an image was detachable would expect an imprint. He noted the feedback from social media companies had been that imprints could potentially impose costs on them depending on the requirements. CWA explained more generally, the need for transparency was paramount, but it was important requirements were not burdensome. GD welcomed the consultation, noting he would respond. He raised the issue of imprints and use of PO Box addresses. He noted the need to consider the number of candidates who would not have an office address to use, and asked about the use of the Head Office address of the relevant party, rather than a PO Box. CWA noted previous discussions with the Commission on addresses in the context of the debate on intimidation of candidates. He highlighted the difficulties with PO Boxes, and the being able to legally serve papers on someone at a PO Box, specifically for the Commission in duties to enforce spending rules. CWA explained that party headquarter addresses could be used, if there was no local head office. He agreed to take this away and consider in greater detail. SM highlighted how the name and address of printers on leaflets can support transparency with the audit trail, and noted the debate of online imprints had different considerations of how could ensure transparency. He welcomed the consultation and highlighted the need to consider the workability of the proposals, specifically noting the need for flexibility in legislation and guidance to ensure imprint requirements are practicable and fit for the future. He noted the lessons learnt from introduction of an imprint requirement at the 2014 Scottish Independence Referendum and the current consultation by Scottish Government on imprints to cover paid and unpaid material by registered and unregistered campaigners. Minutes of the last meeting and actions arising (PPP 1/09/2020) The Minutes were agreed. LE updated on the publication of guidance for online party conferences and events. She noted the FAQ page on the Commission's website that explained how these events interact with PPERA party funding rules. She confirmed for digital conferences this year, the non- donation level which would apply would be the fair market rate available for a stand. SM raised an issue relating to the action on the candidate spending tool. He noted the minutes did not reflect the range of points he raised, as his concerns did not related only to the filter. LE explained there was no plan to revisit the tool. LM

agreed to update the minutes. BP updated on the forthcoming meeting with the parties to discuss the Commission's next five year Corporate Plan and explained this was a welcome opportunity to get parties input. AW asked for a substantive paper to be circulated in advance, which BP agreed to. BP updated on upcoming changes to Commission board, notably the end of Sir John Holmes term as Chair of the Commission on 31 December 2020. LE agreed to follow up the ongoing action on how the case update could be distributed routinely by email to a parties distribution list. Commission Update Report There was no discussion or questions asked on the paper. AW raised the background paper from the Cabinet Office on the Coronavirus SI, and confirmed there was no further questions from parties. Any other business SM raised the publication of the spending returns from the 2019 UK Parliamentary general election. LE explained that owing to Covid-19 not all parties and campaigners were able to deliver returns by the deadline, so publication would be in batches. SM asked about the time taken for the Commission to upload and publish the returns. LE noted the duty on the Commission to publish the returns as soon as practicable once they have been received. TM highlighted the three areas where the Cabinet Office would seek input from parties in the coming weeks: on the campaign finance framework; on the campaign spending limits and on notional spending. The date of the next meeting was confirmed, Tuesday 1 December 2020. Commission actions Status To use the a meeting to discuss the Commission's next five year corporate plan with parties Ongoing: Craig to provide update at meeting on revised timetable To consider how the case update could be distributed routinely by email to a parties distribution list. Ongoing: Louise to update at meeting on arrangements to provide update To update paragraph 5.1 in previous minutes to reflect wider points on candidate spending tool from SM. Complete Cabinet Office actions Status To consider use of party headquarters addresses on imprints Ongoing Related content Party panels Find out about the different party panels, and read the minutes of past meetings Parliamentary Parties Panel minutes: 2 June 2020 Parliamentary Parties Panel minutes: 3 February 2020 Party registration decisions View our decisions on political party names, descriptions and emblems