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On this page Update on preparations and considerations for May 2021 Minutes of the last meeting and actions arising (PPP 1/12/2020) Commission Update Report AOB First published: 18 June 2021 Last updated: 18 June 2021 Who was at the meeting Who was at the meeting Conservative Party: Alan Mabbutt OBE (AM), chair of meeting Catherine Latham (CL) Liberal Democrats: Kerry Buist (KB) Labour Party: Andrew Whyte (AW) Scottish National Party: Scott Martin (SM) Plaid Cymru: Geraint Day (GD) Electoral Commission: Ailsa Irvine, Director of Electoral Administration and Guidance (AI) Louise Edwards, Director of Regulation (LE) Bob Posner, Chief Executive (BP) Binnie Goh, Legal Counsel (BG) Laura McLeod, Public Affairs Manager (LM) Cabinet Office: Becca Crosier (BC) Paul Docker (PD) James Hairsnape (JH) Update on preparations and considerations for May 2021 BC provided an overview of ongoing preparations for the upcoming elections, including ensuring returning officers had the necessary support to deliver well run elections in the ever changing public health environment. She noted the UK Government's commitment to providing clarity and ensuring the polls could take place safely and effectively. She also highlighted the recent letter from the Minister for the Constitution and Devolution to parties to set out the latest position and provide advice on campaigning– that in order to reduce the transmission of Covid-19 infection, door to door campaigning would not during the national lockdown be considered an essential or necessary activity. PD also provided an update on potential changes to the nomination process. He highlighted however that changes to allow for forms to be submitted electronically required primary legislation, so would not be possible ahead of the elections. He explained that the ongoing work with the Department for Health and Social Care that focussed on ensuring any proposals for candidate nomination forms would balance the need to collect a certain number of signatures to demonstrate local support with the need to protect public health. PD explained the approach would involve considering how the proposals worked proportionately for nominations for Police and Crime Commissioner and Mayoral elections, where there are large geographical areas and electorates. AM welcomed insight on the potential changes to the nomination process and noted they seemed sensible. KB agreed but highlighted that confirmation of the process would be welcome as soon as possible. AW asked for further detail about nominations process for Police and Commissioners elections, given they are not mapped by local authority areas. PD committed to providing confirmation as soon as possible. GD suggested it would be simpler to have a set number. LE explained that the Commission would update its guidance as soon as the nominations process had been confirmed. She highlighted the Commission's live FAQ page for parties and campaigners would be updated quickly. She noted the Commission's survey of parties, candidates and campaigners had been useful in providing information from a range of parties on their plans to use leaflets and door to door campaigning, if permitted under public health guidance. AI noted all of the Commission's electoral administration guidance had been published, and would be updated to reflect any final changes to the process from the UK Government. She explained that colleagues were continuing working with local authorities to support them in ongoing preparations. She noted the findings from the Commission's recent survey of Returning Officers, and explained around a third had expressed concerns regarding staffing polling stations. AM noted that a number of polling station staff are volunteers. He asked about the possibility of changing payments to staff to be tax free in order to incentivise more volunteers. BC explained this would require a change to tax laws. PD raised tellers and observation

of the count. He highlighted the need for social distancing measures to ensure both could take place safely and provide transparency of the process. He noted Returning Officers would have to make their own decisions to ensure the count and verification could be delivered effectively while maintaining social distancing. AM noted it would be worth considering tellers being required to wear masks outside polling stations, as they would in supermarkets or other venues. KB noted that many traditional polling venues had become vaccine centres and asked if there were any provisions if polling stations could not be identified. AI noted many local authorities had been able to find suitable venues, but explained that the Commission's ongoing work would focus on supporting local authorities to ensure they had enough venues for polling day and the count. AW raised the need for clear guidance for Returning Officers to do informal checks of nomination papers remotely. AI confirmed the Commission's guidance made clear returning officers should encourage parties and campaigners to scan and email the forms for checking to reduce face to face contact. AW highlighted the potential benefits of encouraging payment of deposits by bank transfer over cash. AI agreed to make this more explicit in the Commission's guidance. Minutes of the last meeting and actions arising (PPP 1/12/2020) The Minutes were agreed. KB noted she had been in touch with the NPCC and would get a meeting arranged with the parties in due course. Commission Update Report There was no discussion or questions asked on the paper. Any other business SM asked for an update on PF Online and asked when parties could expect to input in the development process for uploading and publishing donations into the system so it could take into account parties processes and asked, specifically, if there would be a facility to allow accounting units to update their financial schemes. LE noted the project was still on track and training for the parties was scheduled for the summer. She agreed to take the query away on donations and to provide further detail. AM asked about the Commission's press releases on the spending returns from the 2019 parliamentary general election. LE confirmed that the Commission had published the spending returns in batches as not all parties and campaigners were able to deliver by the deadline. She noted there was one still outstanding. SM asked if there would a final press release issued once all spending returns had been published. LE agreed to consider whether this might be possible. AM asked if Hackney Council had suffered a recent cyber-attack. PD explained the matter was being dealt with, with the support of the National Cyber Security Centre and external experts. JH noted Cabinet Office would be in touch with parties shortly to consult on potential policy proposals relating to campaigning, imprints and intimidation for inclusion in the forthcoming Bill. The date of the next meeting was confirmed, Tuesday 1 June 2021. Commission actions Status To update guidance resources for Returning Officers to encourage payments of nomination deposits by bank transfer over cash. Complete To provide further detail on status of Political Finance Online project relating to donation reporting. Complete Cabinet Office actions Status To make contact with parties to discuss Electoral Integrity Bill Related content Party panels Find out about the different party panels, and read the minutes of past meetings Parliamentary Parties Panel minutes: 1 December 2020 Parliamentary Parties Panel minutes: 1 September 2020 Electoral Commission Parliamentary Parties Panel minutes Parliamentary Parties Panel minutes: 2 June 2020