

Parliamentary Parties Panel minutes: 23 February 2016 | Electoral Commission Search

Parliamentary Parties Panel minutes: 23 February 2016

You are in the Party panels section Home How we make decisions Party panels On this page Minutes, and actions of the meeting and matters arising (ECPPP 01/12/2015) May 2016 polls EU Referendum Strategic Review Commission update report Date of the next meeting Actions First published: 23 February 2016 Last updated: 2 September 2019 Who was at the meeting Who was at the meeting Conservative Party: Andrew Stedman (AS) Labour: Margaret Lynch (ML) Mike Creighton (MC) Liberal Democrats: Darren Briddock (DB) Scottish National Party (Chair): Scott Martin (SM) Electoral Commission: Claire Bassett, Chief Executive (CB) Alex Robertson, Director of Communication (AR) Bob Posner, Director of Party and Election Finance (BP) Katy Thomas (KT), Planning and Performance Manager Karim Aziz, Deputy Head of Media and Public Affairs (KA) Minutes, and actions of the meeting and matters arising (ECPPP 01/12/2015) The minutes from 01/12/2015 were agreed. BP noted that the recently launched online consultation on new party registration applications had not generated a large number of responses from other political parties or members of the public. PPP members all said that it was a useful page on the website. DB suggested adding a link to PEF Online to the page as it was hard to find on the website. Action: Commission to look into whether it is practical / cost effective to put a link on PEF Online. It was noted that in any event all members of the PPP should be receiving (and if not can register to receive) email alerts when new party registration applications go onto the website. DB said that a new set of XML spreadsheets for parties to record spending would be available soon. Action: Commission to confirm dates that the spreadsheet would be available for parties to start using. Members of the PPP queried why they had to report the 'incurred date' for a transaction and not just the date that an invoice is paid. BP said that he thought the form reflected a legal requirement. Action: Commission to clarify what 'incurred date' means and clarify whether it is a requirement in the legislation. May 2016 polls DB asked what the Commission was doing to encourage expats to register to vote. AR confirmed that nothing for the May 16 polls as they're not eligible to take part, but a lot of work is being undertaken ahead of the EU Referendum including an online campaign and engaging with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and embassies. AR noted that the Commission worked closely with them to promote 'Overseas Voter Registration Day' on 4 February. MC noted the recent Law Commission report addressed areas of the law that are not certain. BP confirmed that so far, the Commission had not seen anything that would mean the Commission needs to change its guidance. BP drew the group's attention to section 1.9 of the Commission's update report and over-lapping regulated periods (elections in May 2016 and the EU Referendum in June) and informed the panel that the Commission would be issuing guidance about this in early March. AS mentioned that when using the Commission's guidance and tried to click to open an expert papers on 'valuing donations in kind' or 'sponsorship' they didn't appear to be there. Action: Commission to look into this. ML mentioned that in the Commission's Police and Crime Commissioner guidance, there are no names for the Police Area Returning Officers (PAROs) or direct email addresses for them. Action: Commission to provide list of PAROs and contact addresses. ML asked about the publication of the 1 December registers. AR informed the panel that the Commission would be publishing its analysis on 24 February. DB, AS and ML all commented that the additions and deletions to the registers after 1 December make it harder to undertake compliance checks. SM agreed with the points made. CB acknowledged that it's an imperfect situation. EU Referendum AR confirmed the dates for the designation application process at the EU Referendum

and the regulatory period, subject to parliamentary approval. DB asked if the 'working together rules' would be the same as at the Scottish Independence Referendum. BP confirmed that this would be the case and that there would also be pre-poll reporting. SM commented that when the Scottish National Party registered as a campaigner at the EU Referendum, a letter was sent to the 'responsible person' about their pre-poll reporting requirements. This does not apply to political parties as they are required to report donations over £7,500 on a quarterly basis. Action: Commission to look at amending registration letters that go to political parties so they do not reference pre-poll reporting at the EU Referendum. DB asked what the Electoral Commission will do if it appears that campaigners have 'over stepped' the mark. DB said he didn't want a situation where debate is 'stifled'. AR said that it's important to learn the lessons from the Scottish Independence Referendum where the police took any allegations of a breach in the rules seriously. The panel and the Commission felt that it would be a good idea to publicise that campaigners had signed up to the Commission's Code of Conduct. Action: Commission to consider whether it will ask designated lead campaigners to sign up to its Code of Conduct. Strategic Review CB informed the panel that the timing of the EU Referendum means that the strategic review will slow down now and ramp up over the summer. The panel then took part in a roundtable discussion about the review. The discussion focused around the development of a single, national register; greater powers for the Electoral Commission over Local Authorities; review of campaign rules in light of changes in the cost of and how social media is used and changes to wider campaigner rules. Commission update report MC asked to what extent the Commission had considered political parties' ability to absorb cuts in Policy Development Grants (PDGs). BP referenced the short notice period it had to develop a formula for the reduction in PDGs and informed the panel that the Electoral Commission Board will want to consider again in future. MC noted that the Labour Party was opposed to the reduction in PDGs. BP confirmed that the Commission would look at the standardisation of accounts in the second half of this year. SM asked if it was just for parties over £250k or would it be for accounting units with income / expenditure over £250k too. BP confirmed it would likely be for both. DB said it would be helpful if the Commission could consult with the auditors that parties use. BP confirmed that the Commission would and that this would be a key part of the process. AS also said that the Commission should be mindful that a lot of accounting units have volunteers who are responsible for reporting requirements. Date of the next meeting The next PPP meeting will take place on Tuesday 5 July at 11am – Labour to chair. Actions Actions from February 2016 PPP meeting Action Owner Status EC to look into whether to put a link on PEF Online to page on website where people can review party registration requests BP Information provided 3 March EC to confirm date that XML spreadsheet to record spending would be available for parties BP Information provided 3 March EC to confirm what 'incurred date' for reporting spending means and whether it is a legislative requirement BP Information sent 21 March EC to look into whether there are expert papers on valuing donations in kind and sponsorship KA Sent 3 March EC to provide a list of PARO names and contact details KA Sent 3 March EC to look at amending the letters that go to political parties that register at EU Referendum so they don't mention pre-poll reporting requirement BP Change to letters made 3 March, info sent 21 March EC to confirm that it will consider whether to ask designated lead campaigners to sign up to Code of Conduct and publicise it BP Information provided 3 March Related content Party registration decisions View our decisions on political party names, descriptions and emblems View current applications View the political party names,

descriptions and emblems which we are currently considering as part of our assessment process Donations and loans Find out about donations and loans to a political party, individual or other organisation Registers of unincorporated associations Download and view the registers of unincorporated associations