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On this page Introduction from John Pullinger Minutes of the last meeting and actions

arising (PPP 1/6/2021) Elections Bill and RNIB's Turned Out report Update on

Political Finance Online Electoral Commission update report AOB First published: 10

December 2021 Last updated: 10 December 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: Alan Mabbutt OBE (AM) Megan Tucker (MT) Liberal

Democrats: Kerry Buist (KB) Plaid Cymru: Geraint Day (GD) Alba Party: Chris McEleny

(CM) Electoral Commission: John Pullinger, Chair (JP) Alex Attwood, Commissioner for

the smaller parties (AA) Ailsa Irvine, Director of Electoral Administration and

Guidance (AI) 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)

Introduction from John Pullinger On behalf of the PPP, AW congratulated JP on his

appointment as Chair of the Commission. JP gave an overview of his work in the role

so far, noting that building relationships with the Commission's key stakeholders was

an important priority. He said that he had been keen to meet the Westminster PPP

members, and while the nature of the Commission's regulatory role meant the parties

may not always agree with its decisions, the Commission was keen to support them and

understand any concerns they had. AW asked whether anything had surprised JP in his

first few months. JP said that he was impressed with how well the electoral system

worked for the May elections, despite the complexity of the polls. He noted the

passion and commitment of parties and campaigners, in particular, but added that

there was a need to ensure all parts of the system – including regulatory and

enforcement authorities – worked well together to meet any future challenges. AW also

welcomed AA to his first Westminster PPP meeting and invited him to introduce

himself. AA noted his background in Northern Ireland politics, and explained that in

his role as Commissioner nominated by smaller parties, he is keen to have ongoing

discussions with the smaller parties so that he can better reflect their perspective.

Minutes of the last meeting and actions arising (PPP 1/6/2021) AW noted he would

follow-up on an action from the June meeting, to share with the Commission details of

ROs which had not accepted bank transfers ahead of the May elections. LE confirmed

that the Commission plans to publish a spending tool for May's parliamentary

elections, similar to that published following the 2019 UKPGE, and that the

Commission continues to consider how best to make parties aware of guidance changes

as part of its broader regulatory support strategy. KB explained that she and LE

would discuss separately how to facilitate efforts for the parties to meet with the

NPCC to discuss how case updates could be distributed to parties. AW also noted the

parties would welcome the return of electoral integrity roundtables. The minutes were

agreed. Elections Bill – Cabinet Office BC noted that Second Reading of the Elections

Bill was taking place in the House of Commons later that day, and that it would move

reasonably quickly to Committee Stage if it passed Second Reading. She thanked the

PPP members for their input on the Bill's provisions to date. KB asked when the Bill

would be on the statute books, so parties could plan for implementation. BC explained

the working assumption was by the end of the Parliamentary session in May 2022. AW

raised those provisions in the Bill which may have a bigger impact on electoral

administrators, and asked whether there were any indications as to the lead-in times

for implementation. BC explained implementation timelines were currently being worked

through, but that the intention was to adhere to the Gould principle, which

recommends legislation should be in place six months before polling day. BC added that Ministers aimed to implement the Bill's provisions by the end of this Parliament, and would work with the electoral community and the Electoral Commission to achieve this. AW suggested keeping the Elections Bill as a standing agenda item for future PPP meetings. BC agreed and also offered to pick up any issues outside of PPP meetings where helpful, given the PPP meetings may not align with parliamentary progress on the Bill. CW confirmed the Commission would be happy with the Bill as a standing agenda item, and set out the role of the Commission in relation to implementation of the measures. He noted that work had already begun to consider how the Commission's public awareness work might be best focused. and RNIB's Turned Out report - Cabinet Office PD provided an overview of RNIB's Turned Out report on the May 2021 elections, noting its recommendations around access to information provided to voters by political parties and local authorities. He explained there was more for the electoral community to do on this, and encouraged parties to consider the recommendations. AW suggested he would share the report with his party's elections team, and noted there were also recommendations for electoral administrators and local authorities. AI highlighted the key findings from the Commission's post-poll research, due to be published as part of its election reporting in the week commencing 13 September, noting that while there was a high level of voter satisfaction generally, this was lower among voters with disabilities. She agreed that there was more the electoral community could do to improve accessibility at elections, and confirmed that the Commission was looking at how this could be reflected in guidance and performance standards, in line with considering the changes in the Elections Bill around accessibility. AW suggested inviting RNIB to the next PPP meeting to discuss their report in further detail. PD agreed, and offered to put someone in touch to arrange this. Update on Political Finance Online – Electoral Commission LE set out the background to the Political Finance Online project, noting that the parties were aware that the Commission had brought development in-house in early 2021 after being let down by an external developer. She explained that this had been challenging, but that it also meant there was more flexibility over how the new system was being built. LE noted that the parties had previously expressed a strong preference for the new system to launch in January, at the start of their financial years, so the Commission is now working towards a January 2022 launch for the party side of the new system which would allow parties to meet their registration and finance obligations. She confirmed the parties would be contacted imminently and invited to give feedback on the system ahead of launch, so that feedback could be taken on board. LE also explained that further functionality would be added to the system in future releases of the software and that the Commission was looking to best practice elsewhere on how to keep parties updated on this, such as the GOV.UK roadmap. Electoral Commission update report The update report was noted with no questions or discussion. AOB Electoral Commission Chief Executive AW asked whether there were any plans for transitional arrangements for the role of Commission Chief Executive ahead of Bob Posner's retirement in spring 2022. JP confirmed that work on recruitment was underway and that there would be a smooth handover to the new Chief Executive. In-person PPP meetings KB asked whether there were any plans to return to in-person PPP meetings. AI explained that the Commission was happy to keep this under review and explore in-person or hybrid options for future meetings. PD noted he was happy to discuss with the Commission the best use of Cabinet Office and Commission meeting rooms for future PPP meetings. The PPP agreed that the next meeting would be held virtually. Next meeting The date of the next meeting was confirmed, Tuesday 7

December 2021. Commission actions Status Louise Edwards to discuss with Kerry Buist how to facilitate a meeting between NPCC and the parties. Add Elections Bill as a standing agenda item for future PPP meetings. Liaise with Cabinet Office on inviting RNIB to the next PPP meeting to discuss Turned Out report in further detail.