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and the need to make sure elections are open to all would affect parties. CW asked whether any issues raised surprised the Panel and whether they had anything they wished to take forward. BP said recommendations in the report are challenging to take forward but that it is important to find a way to improve on these issues. DA raised the intimidation of candidates and noted that prior to the June 2017 general election the focus was on the potential for physical attacks after the murder of Jo Cox, while the focus now seems to be on social media harassment. DB agreed that candidates were more likely to be harassed than face physical violence. JS suggested the next SPOC conference could cover intimidation. DA agreed, saying usual focus at the conferences is on electoral offences rather than civil offenses that occur in relation to elections but not usually counted as 'electoral'. DB said it was particularly useful that the report recommended allowing all candidates to keep home addresses private as current requirement at some elections to make addresses public deters people from standing. BP reminded the Panel that some of the recommendations would require legislation. Election integrity preparation for elections in 2018 AI reminded the Panel that May 2018 will see local elections across parts of England, including a series of pilots looking at voter ID and postal voting. Ahead of these elections, the Commission is looking at electoral fraud as part of its risk assessment work, taking into account available data and information which may indicate a higher risk of fraud – for example, the closeness of the contest and past allegations of fraud. AI said this work will help identify areas where closer liaison with Returning Officers (ROs) is needed. AI also indicated that the Commission is keen to be able to escalate local issues to the national parties where needed as has been the case at recent elections, and proposed discussing any electoral fraud concerns or issues in more detail in the New Year with the Panel, either collectively or individually. DB said guidance for ROs on running postal vote counts should be updated. He said in many areas postal vote agents from the parties are kept so far away from the counting and scanning of ballot packs that they cannot do their job of confirming that the process is being conducted correctly. AI suggested a reminder could be sent to ROs through the Commission's Electoral Administration Bulletin about the role party agents have in the process. DB suggested that agents being kept away from the process increases a perception that fraud is or could be occurring, while pointing out that the perception of fraud is worse than the actual number incidents of fraud. AI requested that parties contact the Commission at the point any issues arise so that follow up with local authorities can be carried out in a timely way. DB asked for a list of the areas involved in pilots in May so local campaigners can be informed and local campaign material can also include information for voters on what to expect. AI responded that Gosport, Bromley, Woking and Watford have been announced as taking part in voter ID pilots and Tower Hamlets is expected to host a postal voting pilot but Cabinet Office is best placed to provide further information. Recent investigation announcements DA asked for an update on recent investigations and whether the outcomes could result in recommendations for changes in the rules. BP reminded the Panel that it was inappropriate for the Commission to comment on ongoing investigations. He noted the work being undertaken will influence the Commission's thinking going forward and if a decision is made that rules should be changed as a result the Panel's views would be important. JS raised social media campaigning and its important role as a communication and campaigning tool. BP responded that campaigning is an important part of our democracy and should continue on social media. He said the Commission will work with the Panel on this issue as thinking evolves and that it is important to remember the ICO's role in digital campaigning

regulation. AS asked whether the Commission expects to conclude its investigations by the middle of 2018. BP said the time taken to conclude investigations cannot be predicted but the Commission will gain experience through ongoing regulatory work and may have recommendations based on that experience next year. SM asked about working together rules for referendums and whether there were plans to clarify or reform them. BP suggested it may be that Parliament needs to clarify the rules in legislation. SM asked whether the Commission would be responding to the UCL Commission on Referendums. BP explained that the Commission is in contact with them and would be providing them with reference information. Commission update report DA asked about the Plymouth election report and AS asked whether the Commission has done work to assess the resourcing of ROs and EROs. AI said there is clearly a challenge in this area, with experienced people leaving elections along with a general pressure on local authority resources, and the Commission is starting a piece of work with SOLACE and the AEA looking at how to address this risk. DA raised the elections for everyone report. AI said the Commission is particularly proud of the work in this area, drawing on the actual experiences of voters with disabilities. Before the June election there was a lot of interest in accessibility of elections and it was right that the report looked at it in detail. DA raised the PFR report and agreed it is an anomaly the Commission has powers to regulate party finance but not candidates' which is for the police. Any other business The Panel agreed the next meeting would be held on 20 February 2018, chaired by the Conservatives. Subsequent meetings in 2018 will be on Tuesday 5 June 2018 (SNP chair); Tuesday 4 September 2018 (Labour chair); Tuesday 4 December 2018 (Lib Dems chair). SM asked for a list of future publication dates for PFR reporting. Actions Action Owner Status Circulate draft 2nd stage procurement requirements document. CS Complete Add intimidation of candidates to next SPOC conference. BP Complete SPOC seminar 9 February 2018 Electoral Administration Bulletin reminder for ROs about the role of party agents at postal vote counts. AI Complete Included on forward plan to go out closer to the polls Circulate a list of PFR publication dates. BP Complete 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