

Scottish Parliament Political Parties Panel meeting minutes: 9 November 2022 | Electoral Commission Search Scottish Parliament Political Parties Panel meeting minutes: 9 November 2022 You are in the Party panels section Home How we make decisions Party panels On this page Welcome and introductions Matters arising Scottish Boundary Commissions update Report on the Scottish council elections 2022 Elections Act implementation Scotland Office/DLUHC update Scottish Government update Royal Mail update Electoral Management update Electoral Commission update AOCB First published: 10 March 2023 Last updated: 10 March 2023 About the meeting Wednesday 9 November 2022 (Hybrid) Attendees: Attendees Scott Martin, Scottish National Party (Chair) Matt Edmonds, Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party Pete Morrison, Scottish Green Party Maria McCann, Scottish Government Malcolm Burr, Convener, Electoral Management Board for Scotland Chris Highcock, Secretary, Electoral Management Board for Scotland Pete Wildman, Scottish Assessors Association (Chair of Electoral Registration Committee and EMB Member) Rachel Winham, Royal Mail Scott Forsyth, Royal Mail Hannah Standring, Scotland Office Andrei Vitaliev, Scotland Office Paul Docker, DLUHC Jeanne Delebarre, DLUHC Donald Mackinnon, DLUHC James Lee, DLUHC Isabel Drummond-Murray, Boundary Commissions for Scotland Dame Susan Bruce, Electoral Commissioner Roseanna Cunningham, Electoral Commissioner Louise Edwards, Director of Regulation, Electoral Commission Andy O'Neill, Head of Electoral Commission, Scotland Sarah Mackie, Manager, Electoral Commission, Scotland Catherine Heggie, Partnerships and Information Officer Lindsey Hamilton, Business Support Officer (Minutes) Apologies Paul Moat, Scottish Liberal Democrats, John Hardy, Scottish Green Party and James Kelly, Scottish Labour Party

Welcome and introductions Scott Martin (SXM) welcomed those present and introductions were made. Sue Bruce (SB) informed the panel that Roseanna Cunningham and Chris Ruane had joined the Electoral Commission as the Nominated Commissioner for the Scottish National Party and Nominated Commissioner for the Labour Party, respectively. Sal Naseem had also been appointed as an adviser to the board. Matters arising (SXM) requested a minor correction be made to the previous minutes and for the survey of Returning Officers on e-counting at the May 2022 elections mentioned by James Newman at the last meeting to be circulated to the panel. Action: 1. EC correct minute 2. SG to circulate survey of Returning Officers on e-counting The minutes of 16 May 2022 were approved. Agenda Item 7. was moved up the agenda as Isabel Drummond-Murray had to leave early. Scottish Boundary Commissions update Isabel Drummond-Murray (I-DM) said the first of three consultations on the Westminster boundaries had begun (ending on 5 December 2022) and encouraged participation. I-DM indicated that the Second Review of the constituencies and regions of the Scottish Parliament commenced on 1 September 2022 using election data from that date. The Commission expected to publish its provisional proposals for consultation in spring 2023. They aimed to submit a report to Scottish Ministers by 1 May 2025. If subsequently approved by the Scottish Parliament, the new boundaries would be effective at the next Scottish Parliament election, expected in May 2026. Report on the Scottish council elections 2022 Sarah Mackie (SM) gave an overview of the findings of the report which had been circulated to the panel on 21 September 2022. She said that, in general, the elections had been well run with high levels of voter satisfaction but said there was work to take forward regarding spoiled ballot figures, candidate abuse, staffing and accessibility. Others contributed to the discussion highlighting areas where the administration of the elections had been well delivered and areas where opportunities for improvement existed. SXM said the recording of rejection of ballot papers required a more developed approach, more suited to STV and should be reviewed. He

suggested that where someone marks multiple 'X's on the ballot paper for the same party candidates, a solution could be a fraction of the person's vote should be attributed to each of the candidates they had indicated a preference for. Elections Act implementation Code of Practice for campaigners - SM said the Electoral Commission was currently reviewing and updating the code of conduct for campaigners for reserved elections to ensure it reflected the new offences in the Elections Act 2022 which included prohibiting campaigners from handling postal votes and safeguarding the secrecy of postal voting. Some minimal changes were planned to the code for devolved elections in Scotland and Wales so that the reserved and devolved versions were as similar as possible. She asked that parties nominate someone from the team with whom they can liaise during this review process. It was expected to formally consult the Panel on a revised code early next year and to have the updated code ready in the autumn of 2023. Digital Imprint Guidance - SM encouraged responses to a consultation on digital imprint guidance which had commenced on 31 October and due to close on 19 December. The Code for non-party campaigners would also be reviewed and consulted on at the same time. Feedback from a round table event would be available at the end of November. Changes to notional spending for reserved elections would come into force from 23 November when all new parties would be obliged to provide a statement of existing assets and liabilities. Party Finance and Regulation (PFR) would be updated accordingly, and a new form issued. Public Awareness - Catherine Heggie (CHe) said the Electoral Commission would soon be publishing guidance for Electoral Registration Officers on processing Voter Authority Certificates and was working on guidance for Returning Officers and candidates. The Electoral Commission would be launching a public awareness campaign in England in January ahead of the May 2023 local elections, which would be rolled out in Scotland ahead of the next UK Parliament general election. The campaign would target voters who already had ID through a mass advertising campaign. The Commission would also be working with charities and other partners to raise awareness amongst groups who needed additional support to prepare for the change. Scotland Office/DLUHC update Consultation on the draft Strategy and Policy Statement - Hannah Standing (HS) said the Consultation on the draft Strategy and Policy statement would close on 5 December 2022 and hoped all would look at it. Jeanne Delebarre (JD) said the Consultation on the draft Strategy and Policy statement had been shared with the UK Parliament and following the consultation, the draft Statement would be subject to the approval of the UK Parliament. She said the statement would not contain provisions relating to the Commissions functions which were within competence of the Scottish Parliament or Senedd Cymru. The Act required the Secretary of State to consider the views of the Electoral Commission, the Speakers Committee on the Electoral Commission (Speaker's Committee) and the Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee via a statutory consultation before submitting the draft Statement for the approval of the UK Parliament. The DLHUC Select Committee and Electoral Commission had been asked to provide their views by 5 December 2022. Scottish Government update Maria McCann (MMcC) thanked everyone for their feedback on the electoral reform topics shared by the Minister at a previous meeting and said the pre-consultation was going well. They had hoped to launch the consultation by the time of this meeting, however, that had proved not to be the case but would launch the consultation before Christmas. She said the role of the group was fundamental and hoped that a focused discussion could be held at the next meeting. The consultation period would be at least 14 weeks. Royal Mail update Rachel Winham (RW) indicated to the Panel that Royal Mail in relation to by-elections was working with local authorities, Returning Officers and

Electoral Registration Officers to manage their way around recent and forthcoming strike action, and to date, had been successful. Electoral Management update Chris Highcock (CHi) said the EMB review of the 5 May 2022 elections had found that less experienced parties and candidates had difficulty in completing the home address form. The EMB would work with the Electoral Commission and parties to increase understanding of how nomination forms should be completed, as well as when and how they should be submitted. They would, working with the Electoral Commission, look at how to reduce rejected ballot rates through public awareness. Also, they intended to review how to maintain a resilient and robust pool of staff who worked on the election. CHi was asked and agreed to share the EMBs review of the elections document. Pete Wildman (PW) said the annual canvass was progressing smoothly and new registers would be published by 1 December. The EROs would review their handling of the canvass post 1 December. SXM requested that any learning points be shared. The Voter Authentication Certificate, relevant to reserved elections in Scotland, would launch in January 2023, and EROs would work with DLHUC colleagues to ensure the system was live and workable. Scottish Government and UK Government rules around absent voters would likely diverge in Scotland and consideration needed to be given on how to handle that in the interests of the voter. Electoral Commission update CHe updated the Panel on plans for the Welcome to your Vote Week 2023, which would take place from 30 January to 5 February. The Commission would be providing resources and working with education partners to encourage schools to sign up to get involved and organise democratic education lessons and events. CHe encouraged panel members to raise awareness of the campaign. Louise Edwards (LE) said the process to revamp the now 10-12-year-old Political Finance online system had not gone as planned and the Commission was no longer satisfied this was value for money. The new approach adopted an off the shelf product, it would be easier, quicker and more compatible with what the parties use. In the meantime, investment in the current system would increase capacity and give parties and candidates a better experience until the new system was built. SXM noted that parties' input on the development of the system had been captured. LE to consider how best to share that with parties. Sue Bruce (SB) said the Audit Committee of the Electoral Commission was working with the team and the key emphasis was sustaining the current system until the new one was available. Dates of future meetings Andy O'Neill (AON) suggested the panel meet for two meetings in 2023; one late February/early March and one in October but these could be moved/expanded upon to suit events. AOCB AON informed the Panel that Kelsey Gillies had been appointed to take up the post of Senior Officer, Regulation and Campaigns, Scotland from next week and would be engaging with the parties thereafter.