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take account of postal strikes when sending out ballots and contact Royal Mail locally to emphasise the importance of postal ballots. AI said that the Commission's regional teams were already speaking to local authorities with by-elections about this issue, and considering any other actions that could be taken. PD said that DLUHC were discussing this issue with Royal Mail. Published guidance for candidates and agents AM welcomed the publication of guidance highlighting changes introduced by the Elections Act. LE said that the Commission was planning to build some consultation into the process for publication of guidance next year, and would welcome any lessons learned. AM raised the difference between guidance published as HTML and as a PDF, asking whether PDFs could be linked. LE said that the HTML guidance can be downloaded as a PDF, though the PDF would not automatically update as the guidance on the website was updated. She explained that the move to publishing guidance in HTML format aims to make it more accessible, in line with recent regulations on the accessibility of public websites. She also noted practical reasons for the move, as PDFs are not user-friendly on phone screens, can be difficult to navigate, and limit accessibility to people with vision impairments. She said that although some older PDFs remain and some forms would not change format, more guidance would be made available as HTML at each election. SM said that some PDFs appear in different versions, and asked whether PDFs generated from HTMLs would have accessibility features. LE said that the website was still relatively new and that the Commission would update any broken links identified. AM asked for details of how many people download guidance as PDFs, as it is possible that some people may find HTML more difficult. LE said that she would look into stats on this. Electoral Commission Update Report – paper for information and any issues arising AM said that parties were working through Q4 reports, including aggregation of donations. He noted that parties were surprised by the guidance on aggregation, as they were previously operating with more transparency than is demanded in the guidance. He asked whether the Commission could make clear that over-reporting would not be penalised. JB asked about aggregation of donations for a central office. If a central party received multiple donations from the same donor, some of which breach the reporting threshold and some don't, the law says only to report the ones above the threshold, which he noted appears less transparent. AM said that KB had raised an issue about cut-off dates raised by recent enforcement by the Commission. He noted that for enforcement going back some years, it was difficult to identify who was responsible, or whether they were still a member of the party. LE said that she will take these points away. She said that guidance on aggregation reflected the law, but that the Commission was looking at aggregation for accounting units and would report at a future PPP. Any other business PD said that a recent accessibility working group meeting had featured Northern Ireland's Chief Electoral Officer Virginia McVea, who had outlined accessibility measures taken at the last NI election, including a telephone helpline listing the candidates on the ballot paper in order to assist blind and partially sighted voters. He suggested that parties could learn lessons and build on this, but that DLUHC recognised the challenges of multiple elections and sets of candidates. AM said that parties were looking for ways to make information about candidates more accessible, but asked for reassurance about whether this would affect candidates' spending returns. JB asked about gifts in kind regarding prizes for auctions. He asked whether if someone plans to purchase and donate a holiday for an auction prize but don't do so until the time of the auction, whether the value should be calculated when the person offers it, or when they actually buy the prize. LE said that the Commission will look at these issues. The next meeting was agreed for Tuesday 6 June

2023. Commission actions Status Share the polling station handbook with parties.
Consider issue of gifts in kind regarding prizes for auctions.