

Scottish Parliament Political Parties Panel Minutes: 22 January 2020 | Electoral Commission    Search    Scottish Parliament Political Parties

Panel Minutes: 22 January 2020    You are in the Party panels section Home    How we make decisions Party panels On this page Minutes of previous meeting Feedback on the UK Parliamentary General Election Scottish Government update Scotland Office update Scotland Boundary Commission update EMB update All Scotland polling scheme Electoral Commission update Date of next meeting Action items First published: 19 June 2020 Last updated: 6 July 2020 Meeting overview: Date: 22 January 2020 Time: 2pm Who was at the meeting Who was at the meeting Scottish Green Party: John Hardy (Chair) Scottish Liberal Democrats: Paul Moat Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party: Matt Edmonds Scottish National Party: Scott Martin Scottish Labour Party: Michael Sharpe Scottish Boundary Commission: Isabel Drummond-Murray Scottish Government: James Newman Electoral Management Board for Scotland: Chris Highcock Scottish Assessors Association: Pete Wildman, Chair of the Electoral Registration Committee Scotland Office: Craig Chalcraft The Electoral Commission: Dame Susan Bruce, Electoral Commissioner, Scotland Andy O'Neill, Head of the Electoral Commission, Scotland Martin McKeown, Senior Adviser, Elections & s Mette Christensen, Senior Policy Advisor Lindsey Hamilton, Business Support Officer (Minutes) Apologies for absence: Kate Crawford, Scottish Assessors Association Alasdair Morgan, Electoral Commissioner Maria McCann, Scottish Government Introduction: The Chairperson John Hardy (JH) welcomed those present to the meeting and introductions were made. Andy O'Neill (AON) intimated apologies from those unable to attend. Minutes of previous meeting The minutes from the previous meeting held on 7 June 2019 were approved. There were no action points outstanding. Feedback on the UK Parliamentary General Election The PPP discussed the conduct of the UK Parliamentary election held in December 2019. The aim was to identify areas where improvements might be made. The following areas were highlighted: Chris Highcock (CH) confirmed the recommendations the EMB made to Returning Officers with a view to achieving consistency in delivery and certainty for voters around e.g. dates for the publication of the notice of poll, issue of poll cards and postal votes; Scott Martin (SM) noted that the Early Parliamentary General Election Act 2019 had been amended to avoid any specific issues related to the St Andrew's Day Bank holiday in Scotland; (SM) commented that if the UK Parliamentary election had been held a week earlier, no delay to the publication of the electoral register would have been required. Pete Wildman (PW) replied that software very much drove what could be produced ahead of elections and this was a body of work to look at. Action 4.1 (SM) confirmed he would provide (PW) with information on this. CH noted that candidate meetings hosted by ROs had fewer attendees but felt this was due to experienced election agents. PW noted not as many calls had been received following the distribution of postal vote rejection notices after the election. CH advised that he had fed back from Police Scotland that their offer to hold security briefings for candidates had low uptake and this might have been because the offer was not made early enough. Permission from candidates had to be sought through ROs and it was suggested a form could be included in the nomination pack. The parties agreed this was a good idea. Action 4.2 AON advised that the Commission would look at including such a form in Nomination Packs for future elections if there was a demand for it; Matt Edmonds (ME) reported issues with delivery of election communication but said they would raise directly with Royal Mail. This was probably due to the level of mail already being handled at that time of year; SM advised that the Electoral Commission candidate spending form did not clarify a donation is over £50 (i.e. £50.01) and said some councils had been issuing old-style returns. SM agreed to email

the Electoral Commission on issues with the form. It was agreed that any actions for improvement be fed back and considered by relevant bodies. Scottish Government update James Newman (JN) provided updates on:- the passage of the Scottish Elections (Franchise and Representation) Bill including amendments accepted at Stage 2; the passage of the Scottish Elections (Reform) Bill which will have its Stage 1 debate on 6 February 2020; the imminent Royal Assent of the Referendums (Scotland) Act 2020; The laying of the Regulations in relation to canvass reform in Scotland, including regulations to facilitate data testing by EROs; Progress of the procurement exercise in relation to the e-counting solution for the 2022 Scottish Council elections. Scott Martin (SM) indicated that it looked as if the election return provisions of the Scottish Elections (Reform) Bill had been drafted on the basis that the election expenses section in the Local Electoral Administration and Registration Services Act 2006 had been commenced, when it hadn't. SM asked JN what the intentions were in relation to that. Noted. Action 5.1 (SM) confirmed he would email (JN) with further details on this. Scotland Office update Craig Chalcraft (CC) reported on the UK Government's legislative programme which includes various elements related to electoral law, including plans to repeal the Fixed Term Parliaments Act was being progressed and introduce an ID requirement for elections under the remit of the UK Parliament. Noted. Scottish Boundary Commission update Isabel Drummond-Murray (ID-M) updated on the boundary provisions in the Scottish Elections (Reform) Bill. These included number of councillors per ward which she and (SM) discussed. She commented that the proposal for 5 year electoral terms has implications for review scheduling. Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland were currently conducting a review of the Scottish Parliament constituency boundary between Glasgow Provan and Coatbridge and Chryston constituencies and the Scottish Parliament region boundary between Glasgow and Central Scotland regions at Cardowan by Stepps. (ID-M) reported it would go to the minister in the next couple of months. The proposed changes will allow the SP constituency and regional boundaries to be aligned with the council area boundary in time for the next Scottish Parliament elections in May 2021. Noted. EMB Update (PW) said the increase in the electorate was welcome but brought challenges and lessons learned included taking steps to ensure software could handle the increase. He reported the 5 year postal vote signature refresh had commenced on 20 January. Under the new canvass rules there would be only one communication to households where there were no changes and work was ongoing to allow foreign nationals to be able to register. CH reported the focus had been on the results rather than process. Referendum Bill – draft guidance for electoral administration was to begin shortly. Polling place and polling district reviews in the last 18 months. There were a few by-elections upcoming including Clackmannanshire and Dumfries and Galloway. The tender for e-counting had taken effort and mental space, particularly local government. Ensure in good position – potential change 2021 SP elections – complexity and constituency and regional element. Starting to work on comments. Matt Edmonds (ME) asked if the ready reckoner spreadsheet could be updated as the existing one was running out. Action 8.1 (CH) confirmed he would supply a new one. All Scotland polling scheme SM spoke to his papers which related to the potential development of an all Scotland Polling Scheme. (CH) and (PW) said they would discuss a bit more with relevant agencies to consider how to put in place and said there would be a bit of work involved in setting up, hosting and maintaining it. The other political parties felt it would be useful as discrepancies between Scottish Parliament, UK Parliament and local government boundaries exist. Action 9.1 (SM) would provide drafts of what it could look like. Electoral Commission update Andy

O'Neill (AON) said the Electoral Commission had been planning for 2021 Scottish Parliament elections. He referenced links to 4 reports which had been circulated prior to the meeting, in particular that of ballot paper ordering at Scottish council elections. He said concerns had been received from disability organisations and there was a desire for consistency of approach. Scottish Government had been looking at the merits of piloting ballot paper ordering and the Electoral Commission was ready to be asked to do something if required. Martin McKeown (MMcK) provided an update on progress made by the Commission to develop Codes of Practice on spending for candidates and political parties. Codes for elections under the remit of UK Parliament were submitted to the Cabinet Office and the Commission was considering feedback received. A consultation exercise on Codes for devolved Welsh elections was due to close shortly. Draft Codes for devolved Scottish elections will be drafted and a consultation commenced in due course. The intention is to have Codes in place for the 2021 Scottish Parliamentary elections and the Electoral Commission will work with Scottish Government to achieve this aim. SM suggested it might be possible to combine the candidate and party Codes. Mette Christensen (MC) advised that the Electoral Commission is looking at ways to improve the way that spending is reported at elections and referendums. This is following the recommendations for changes to the reporting rules that the Commission made in their Digital Campaigning report. The parties agreed that Commission staff could speak to them later this year in order to get their input on the recommendations. MMcK further provided an update on progress to redevelop the Commission's online portal to improve the user experience. The intention is to roll out the new system by January 2021. Training will be provided to users after summer 2020. MMcK provided an update on the publication of revised performance standards for electoral registration officers in Great Britain. The consultation closes on 31 March 2020. PPP members had been issued with a copy of the consultation documentation. Dates for meetings in 2020/21 Action 11 AON advised a list of dates would be circulated. Action items Action Items Owner(s) Deadline 4.1 Scott Martin ASAP 4.2 Andy O'Neill ASAP 5.1 Scott Martin ASAP 8.1 Chris Highcock ASAP 9.1 Scott Martin ASAP 11 Andy O'Neill ASAP