

William Wragg MP
Chair, Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee
House of Commons
London SW1A 0AA

24 October 2022

Dear Mr Wragg

Re: Work to replace the Commission's online political finance system

I am writing to update you on the Commission's work to replace our online political finance system. This follows a written update provided to your committee in March, to inform your report into the work of the Electoral Commission.

I have taken the decision to halt the Commission's work on the new online system. Unfortunately, it has become clear that the project cannot achieve its aims in its current form and that the system under development would require ongoing and costly support. Given the sums of money involved, it is more cost effective to stop the project, cease work on a new bespoke system and take a new approach. We have discussed this with the National Audit Office and are satisfied that this is consistent with the principles of Managing Public Money.

I take seriously the Commission's commitment to achieving value for money and regret that the full benefits have not been realised from the investments made. I also regret that we had not anticipated this outcome when we updated you on the system in March. We reached the decision this month after reviewing progress to date, including technical challenges facing the project, and input from digital and technology specialists.

I want to reassure you that the work done to date will not be wasted. Our analysis of stakeholder needs, as well as design work on the system and many of the underlying processes can be used to procure and customise the new software product. We will continue to seek specialist advice and input to ensure the approach we take is fit for purpose and makes best use of public funds. We are undertaking a comprehensive review of the lessons learnt from the closure of this project, which will be used to inform the new approach to replacing the system.

We remain committed to replacing the current system with something which is more user-friendly. We have decided to do this by purchasing and customising an off-the-shelf software product, rather than developing a new bespoke system. This approach will bring this project into line with the Commission's new digital strategy, which is to procure systems already available on the market where possible, rather than develop our own bespoke solutions. We have taken early advice on the solutions available and believe these will better meet the needs of our stakeholders.

For the parties and campaigners using the existing online political finance system, recent advances in our wider IT provision have meant that we have been able to make changes that will deliver a better experience while we plan our next steps. The system is now more stable and has been updated to reflect new legislation. We will continue to work with parties and campaigners as we take forward the next steps.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Shaun McNally', written in a cursive style.

Shaun McNally CBE
Chief Executive