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Meeting of the Electoral Commission

10.15 am Thursday 14th June 2001 at Trevelyan House

Present: Sam Younger, Chairman
Pamela Gordon
Glyn Mathias
Sir Neil McIntosh
Karamjit Singh
Professor Graham Zellick
Roger Creedon
Peter Hodgman
Anne Hinds
Chris Welford
Nicole Smith
Rael Zackon
Katie Kerr, Secretary

Note: Sections appearing in ***italic bold*** denote action points or decisions

1 Minutes of the last meeting

1.1 Agreed

2 Matters Arising

3.1 Commissioners asked to be notified of different dates of LGCE meetings, as those given previously were not convenient. Commissioners emphasised that they were genuinely interested in attending the events.

5.2 The review of Party Election Broadcasts will occur as soon as practicable.

6.5 Details of the post-election meetings of electoral administrators were circulated

8.2 The letter to Andrew Tyrie relating to severance pay for Special Advisors had been sent and placed in the public domain.

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Requests for a media interviews on the topic were declined because highlighting the issue during the election campaign could have opened the Commission to the accusation of intervening in party politics. The Cabinet Office has indicated that it will change the employment contracts for Special Advisors for the current round of appointments. Details of any changes are not known.

3 Directors' Reports

3.1 Strategic Planning and Resources

3.1.1 NM asked for an update on the accommodation for the local office in Scotland to be provided at a later date.

3.1.2 The Commissioners thanked the team for the work that was done in establishing the organisation properly including the issue of start-up cost grants to parties. That groundwork had provided an essential basis for the broadly good relations with the parties during the election campaign.

3.2 Legal Services

3.2.1 A better understanding of the relationship between controls on donations and the DTI's provisions relating to shareholder approval is being developed.

3.3 Policy

3.3.1 A letter from Dr David Butler relating to the seminar at Nuffield was circulated to Commissioners

3.3.2 883 calls had been taken on the help line. A breakdown by subject was provided (table 1 refers). Some of the call had been abusive and NS wished to thank the team for their handling of sometimes stressful situations. The feedback from professional users of the service was good. In addition the team dealt with correspondence and e-mails.

3.4 Registrations and Compliance

3.4.1 The last weekly donation reports relating to this election campaign will be published on the website on Friday 15 June 2001. The reports include Paul Getty's £5,000,000 donation to the Conservative Party.

3.4.2 The Commissioners thanked the Registrations and Compliance Team for fielding late applications for registration to meet the deadlines set by the election timetable.

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3.5 Media and Public Affairs

3.5.1 An analysis of staffing needs has been conducted with regard to the transfer of voter awareness work from the Home Office.

3.5.2 A brainstorming session about the website is scheduled to occur.

3.5.3 SY thanked the team for their handling of the media. The impression was that calls had been returned and the responses given helpful.

3.6 Chief Executive

3.6.1 A list of forthcoming business for the Commission in the next 12 to 18 months was circulated (EC58/01). The document was for consideration at the next meeting.

3.6.2 Responsibility for elections had been transferred from the Home Office to the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (DTLR). Nick Raynsford is the responsible Minister. SY has invited Nick Raynsford to a briefing about the Commission and the report on the General Election prior to publication of the report.

4 Commissioners' points

4.1 Visit of the Latin American Ambassadors

4.1.1 A delegation of Ambassadors representing Latin American countries visited the Commission on 5th June. They had expressed an interest in devolution but showed a more general interest in the role of the Commission. There was evidence of electronic voting methods being used successfully in Latin America and it was recommended that it may be appropriate to develop links to discuss this further. ***The Foreign and Commonwealth Office will be asked to provide a briefing on the use of electronic voting in Latin America.*** NS was thanked for her role in organising the visit.

5 Review of the General Election 2001

5.1 Update on the Project Plan (EC54/01)

5.1.1 The feasibility of publishing the interim results on the website was discussed. The information has been collated by ITN from their own results and those of the BBC and Press Association. Unfortunately, 190 of the 659 results provided by the organisations do not match. No public commitment was made to publish interim results. The information is available elsewhere. The effort required to resolve the discrepancies would be considerable. ***The Commissioners decided that the interim results would not be published.***

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5.1.2 Work to collect official returns from the Acting Returning Officers continues. 200 of the 659 returns have been received and reminders are being sent. The rate of spontaneous return is better than that achieved for the nominations. Return rates should improve once the Commission takes on responsibility for issuing the guidance to the Electoral Administrators because the requirement to provide the Commission can be incorporated.

5.2 Draft of Report (EC55/01)

5.2.1 The draft was the subject of an extensive, detailed discussion. SY reminded those present that the discussion built on that of the Commissioners held the night before.

5.2.2 GM raised a concern regarding MORI's sample population used for the poll that appeared to include a high number of home owners, Daily Mail readers and retired people. The poll predicated a higher turnout than was achieved which was in line with other polls conducted early in the campaign. It was decided that an independent analysis of the sample was not required. ***NS to check with MORI for details of the validity of the sample.***

5.2.3 ***The Commissioners agreed the following key points:***

- ***The full results of the MORI poll would not be published in the report. The results will be launched separately on 3 July 2001. They will be made available on the Website and in hard copy on request.***
- ***The 'Agenda for the Future' section will be arranged into key priorities.***
- ***Turnout will be moved to the beginning of the Election Issues section.***

5.2.4 ***The draft will be revised to take account of the points raised and circulated to the Commissioners by Saturday 16 June. A draft of the Chairman's preface will be circulated. All comments should be directed to SY by Wednesday 20 June with a view to providing Andrew Nye, Press and Publications Manager, with the draft by the evening of Thursday 21 June.*** It is not necessary to proof the document as AN will undertake this task. Only minor amendments to the text will be possible after this date although this should allow for comments made at subsequent events, such as the seminar that is being held at Nuffield, to be taken into account.

5.3 At the end of the meeting those who had participated in the observation of the elections by visiting constituencies joined the Commissioners. The group broke into working groups that discussed examples of good and possible bad practice with regard to the conduct of elections as seen in the constituencies where they observed. Feedback from the group discussions was provided to the meeting.

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6 Transfer of LGCE Functions (EC57/01)

6.1 ***The Commissioners endorsed the paper and were content for the CEO's reply to cover the following issues:***

6.1.1 The provision relating to financial reporting on boundary matters to the DTLR should not go beyond the transfer of functions at April 2002.

6.1.2 It should be at the discretion of the Electoral Commission whether or not to accept guidance issued by the Secretary of State. Furthermore all guidance should be issued to the Electoral Commission and not direct to the Boundary Committee.

6.1.3 The Commission should have the power to ask the Committee to reconsider its recommendations without doing a whole or part review. All the Commission's powers in relation to considering the Committee's recommendations should be consistent

6.1.4 The provisions that give the Commission the power to make consequential changes are broad and consideration should be given to omitting powers that will not be exercised by the Commission.

7 Any Other Business

7.1 Boundary Committee for England

7.1.1 ***SY confirmed the Commissioners' decisions that PG would chair the Boundary Committee. There was no intention to increase the number of Electoral Commissioners at this time.*** A further Commissioner may be recruited when a need for additional skills or experience is identified.

7.1.2 The workload of the Committee will be similar to the LGCE for at least the first 2 years of operation. The Commissioners considered it appropriate to maintain the status of the body particularly in the eyes of the staff. The number of Deputy Commissioners will be the same as the number of members of the LGCE i.e. 6. ***Two or 3 of the current Members of the LGCE will be invited to become Deputy Commissioners to provide consistency.*** Although not specifically covered by the Commissioner for Public Appointments the appointment process for the Deputy Commissioners will broadly follow the guidance issued by Dame Rennie Fritchie's office.

7.1.3 ***SY is to write to the staff of the LGCE and EC to inform them of the decision.***

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7.1.4 ***SY will write to the DTLR requesting a continuance of the LGCE Head of Policy's secondment until the end of the current PER cycle.***

7.2 Future meetings

7.2.1 ***The Commissioners agreed that there was no longer a need to schedule formal meetings in addition to the one held on the second Thursday of the month.*** The Commissioners would meet informally on a monthly basis and if necessary formal business could be taken at this meeting.

7.2.2 The meeting provisionally scheduled for August will not be held.

7.2.3 ***The Commissioners agreed to meet at 3.30pm at Trevelyan House on Tuesday 24 July prior to the launch of the report at Politicos.***

7.3 DTLR draft Order on Referendums about Elected Mayors

7.3.1 The DTLR has sought the Commission's views on a draft order that includes provision for referendums on whether or not to have an elected Mayor. The Commission will be consulted on the question asked and receive returns relating to candidate expenses. It is assumed that a similar provision will be made in Scotland.

8 Date of the next meeting

8.1 11 am on 12th July 2001 in the Richard de Clare Suite at the Marriott Hotel in Cardiff. The meeting will be preceded by dinner at the hotel at 7.30 for 8pm on Wednesday 11th July and by a visit to the National Assembly for Wales for the start of business at 9am on Thursday 12th July.

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Voter registration	160
Nomination	102
Candidate	69
Proxy voting	28
Postal voting	158
Broadcasting	20
Third Party	13
Other	333
Total	883

Table 1: Help line calls, a breakdown by subject matter