

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE ELECTORAL COMMISSION HELD
IN CARDIFF ON 14 NOVEMBER 2002**

Present: Sam Younger (SY) (Chair)
Pamela Gordon (PG)
Glyn Mathias (GM)
Sir Neil McIntosh (NM)
Karamjit Singh (KS)
Professor Graham Zellick (GZ)

In attendance: Roger Creedon (RC)
Jacqui Dixon (JD)
Nicole Smith (NS)
Anne Hinds (AH)
Chris Welford (CW)
Doug Stewart (DS)
Stephen Judson (SJ)

1. Minutes of meeting held on 11 September 2002.

1.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 11 September 2002 were agreed.

**2. Minutes of the meeting of the Remuneration Committee held on 11
September 2002.**

2.1 The minutes of the Remuneration Committee held on 11 September
2002 were agreed.

3. Minutes of the meeting held on 4 October 2002.

3.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 4 October 2002 were agreed,
subject to replacing the reference in paragraph 15 to the NOI with
'Electoral Office for Northern Ireland'.

**4. Minutes of the Business Planning meeting held on 11 – 13 October
2002.**

4.1 The minutes of the Business Planning meeting held on 11 – 13
October 2002 were agreed.

- 4.2 SY reported that he and RC had presented the Speakers Committee with a note (copied to Commissioners) setting out the in-year and future pressures and had emphasised the implications for the budget. NS advised that the Policy Unit had produced a briefing note on the Queen's Speech and the work which the Commission would be undertaking on the draft Bills.

5. Minutes of the meeting held on 28 October 2002.

- 5.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 28 October 2002 were agreed, subject to the following amendments:
- i) The first sentence of paragraph 3.2 should be amended to read:

 'GZ advised the meeting that he knew Patricia Hewitt MP, who had made representations on the Boundary Committee recommendations, and Lord Janner who was the former MP for Leicester West constituency'.
 - ii) Paragraph 6.7 should be renumbered 6.6.
- 5.2 SY reported that a further letter had been received from Patricia Hewitt. He also advised the meeting that the Speaker was content with the response on overseas travel and had confirmed that he regarded travel on behalf of CPA as being as much a duty of membership of the House as travel on behalf of organisations established by treaty.

6. Directors reports.

- 6.1 The Directors reports were presented; comments on the reports are set out below:

6.2 Media and Public Affairs

The Commissioners thanked Graham Turner and Alison Bell for their work on implementing the new website which went 'live' on 11 November 2002.

AH circulated the plan for the Spring Voter Awareness Campaign.

6.3 Policy

JD advised that at the next meeting, the Commissioners would be asked to consider 80 applications from local authorities for pilots. The Commissioners requested that they receive only a schedule and summary of applications, and that the detailed applications be available if required.

6.4 Registration and Compliance

In response to a query, RC confirmed that Volume 2 of the report on the General Election 2001, to be published in the last week of November, identifies candidates who had overspent. The individuals concerned had been advised to that effect. A line would be needed for MPA on why the Commission had not taken enforcement action.

6.5 The Commissioners accepted the reports.

7. Devolved offices report.

7.1 The Commissioners received the report on the devolved offices. JD reported that progress was being made on the refurbishment of the new office accommodation in Belfast but that it would not be ready in time for the Commission meeting in January 2003.

7.2 The Commissioners accepted the report.

8. Commissioners points

8.1 RC reported on LASER. ODPM had held further discussions with IdeA on the project and had identified a number of other issues which needed to be resolved before funds could be released. The aim was for these issues to be cleared within the next few weeks so that Ministers could be asked before Christmas to decide whether the project in its present form should proceed. It seems likely that there will continue to be difficulties unless the Commission takes a more central role.

8.2 RC also reported that the Annual Report for 2001/2 had been laid before Parliament and published following NAO sign-off of the accounts.

8.3 JD advised on the arrangements for the PPP meeting on 19 November; PG,KS and GZ would be attending.

9. New Initiatives Fund.

9.1 NS presented the report. The Commissioners were asked to consider five applications for grant funding. Six applications had been received; however the officer review group had agreed that more information was required in respect of one of the applications.

9.2 The Commissioners reaffirmed that grants should not exceed two years funding. A form of words was also agreed for inclusion in the information pack regarding the funding of commercial organisations

and activities. Further advice would be provided on grant funding for local authorities and Government bodies.

9.3 The Commissioners approved the following grants:

002 – Queens University for Northern Ireland website - £12,200 subject to the conditions set out in the report

004A – Hansard Society for MPs in Schools project - £5000 over two financial years (£2500 in each year), subject to satisfactory resolution of the evaluation criteria and methodology and confirmation that the project would be implemented UK-wide.

004B – Hansard Society for Yvote Online - £10,500 (£2,100 in 2002/3 and £8400 in 2003/4), subject to satisfactory resolution of the evaluation criteria and methodology.

005A – Hansard Society for Mock Scottish Elections - £11,000 (£7000 in 2002/3 and £4000 in 2003/4) subject to clarification of the overheads being charged.

005B – Hansard Society for AMs in Schools project - £19,000 (£1500 in 2002/3 and £17500 on 2003/4, subject to the conditions set out in the report.

9.4 The Commissioners refused the following applications for the reasons set out in the report:

003A – Hansard Society for establishing foundation

003B – Hansard Society for Parliament on Wheels. (However the Commissioners agreed that a further application could be made once more specific plans were in place.)

003C – Hansard Society for Coordination programme

006 – Spin-Off Magazine

9.5 The Commissioners deferred consideration of the following application until after finalisation of the Commission's Outreach Strategy:

003C – Hansard Society for Coordination Programme

10. Observers at elections in the UK.

10.1 SJ presented the report, which recommended that observers should be allowed access to polling stations and that there should be controls regulating such access. The legislative imperative would be to lift the restrictions on observers in the current legislation.

- 10.2 A limited consultation process was agreed which would meet the target of mid-December. It was proposed to hold a meeting with key stakeholders.
- 10.3 The Commissioners agreed that the process of accreditation of UK based observers needed to be transparent and that a code of practice and a means of withdrawing accreditation, would be required. For international observers, the list produced by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office should be accepted. However it was recognised that, in the polling stations and at the count, the Returning Officer needed to be able to exercise discretion.
- 10.3 **The Commissioners agreed the recommendations set out in the report.**

11. Party Political Broadcasting review.

- 11.1 GZ and SJ presented the final report and recommendations on the party political broadcasting review. It was hoped to be able to publish the report in mid-December. The required legislative changes needed to be identified.
- 11.2 KS raised the question as to whether the Commission should be involved in the Broadcasting Liaison Group. The Commissioners agreed with the view that the Commission should have observer status. GM expressed concern about the numbers of PPBs if the parties were given a total time allocation; he felt that parties ought to be able to opt for shorter PPBs but lose time. PG thought that the recommendation in the report was a good compromise.
- 11.3 SY and GZ intended to meet the Minister with responsibility for broadcasting, Kim Howells, together with Tessa Jowell. It was agreed to issue a press notice in advance, with a press release and interview offers in mid-December.
- 11.4 The Commissioners thanked GZ and SJ for their work on the review and the report.
- 11.5 **The Commissioners agreed the recommendations contained in the report and the arrangements for publication and publicity.**

12. Public Awareness Strategy.

- 12.1 AH and NS presented the report and the revised public awareness strategy, which reflected the discussion at the Business Planning weekend held on 11 – 13 October 2002. The strategy reflected the long-term approach for hard-to-reach groups, with the immediate need

for publicity close to elections. SY stated that the strategy would be a key element of the discussion with the Speakers Committee.

12.2 The Commissioners approved the report and the revised public awareness strategy, as the basis for further action.

13. Regional Government Referendum Question.

13.1 DS presented the question guidelines, the draft question and the preamble as appears in the Bill now published. The Commissioners thanked DS and NS for their paper.

13.2 The Commissioners welcomed the approach which was being proposed. There was general agreement that whilst the question was neat and intelligible, the preamble needed to be better worded. In particular, a more simple way to describe the tiers of local government would aid understanding. The Commissioners agreed that the Commission should not offer an alternative wording but would if asked by the Government.

13.3 A draft of the response to Government would be sent to Commissioners on or before Monday 18 November, prior to the Commission meeting on 19 November.

13.4 The Commissioners agreed to consider the matter further at their meeting on 19 November.

14. Complaint against the Labour Party in Scotland.

14.1 CW presented the report which informed the Commissioners about the current situation and outcome of discussions with the Labour Party in Scotland.

14.2 CW stated that it did not appear that there had been any deliberate breach of PPERA, but was unable to make a formal recommendation at this time. A more detailed examination of the situation was required. The party were now aware that their procedures were not acceptable under PPERA.

14.3 Concern was expressed about the time needed to complete the review. The Commissioners felt that the matter could not go beyond the meeting on 12 December.

14.4 PG suggested that there may be a need to reissue advice to all parties; there was now evidence that the requirements of PPERA were not understood at local branch level. SY proposed advising the PPP meeting on 19 November in general terms, with the possibility of running a seminar or similar event in February to engage a wider audience. A statement on the particular case should be issued in December.

14.3 The Commissioners agreed the recommendations set out in the report.

15. Information items.

15.1 The Commissioners received the following items for information:

Schedule of meetings and events