

Confirmed on 9 June 2005.

Minutes of the meeting of the Electoral Commission held on 26 May 2005, in London.

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

In attendance: Peter Wardle (PW)
Jacqui Dixon (JD)
Archie Gall (AG)
Angela Salt (AS)
Chris Welford (CW)
Tom Hawthorn (TH)
Paul Allen (PA)
Mark Williams (MW)
Doug Stewart (DS)
Tim Atkinson (TA)
Simon Partlett (SP)
Chris Morgan (CM)
John Quin (JQ)

1. CORE project: proposals for electoral data import/export formats (EC87/05)

- 1.1 TH presented the report. The ODPM had commissioned a study as the basis for moving the project forward. The consultation earlier in 2005 had not been well-timed and consequently there were gaps in the response. The report set out the areas of concern where the Commission departed from the recommendations.
- 1.2 The Commissioners recognised that the ownership of the data would be a clear change in the role of the Commission. The timing was critical with the system being live in 2006, at the same time as individual registration. The Commissioners noted that the standards as proposed do not anticipate individual registration, but the addition of new identifiers in future would result in additional standards being required. The template should provide for all the data needed in the longer term.

1.3 The issues raised were:

- The need consistency in multiple full names
- Numbering needs to be able to be developed into unique identity numbers
- Common codes for local authorities which would enable transfer of areas between local authorities
- Limited franchise for second home owners
- Addresses should meet BS7666 standards; the three main political parties supported this view
- Compliance with the Welsh Language Act
- Compliance with international standards for overseas voter lists

1.4 The Commissioners noted that a separate discussion with the ODPM was required on the ownership of standards.

1.5 **The Commissioners approved the draft response, subject to the amendments discussed.**

2. Application for registration: The Non Political Party (EC86/05)

2.1 CW presented the report. The Commissioners considered that there were no grounds for refusal of the application, which should be approved.

2.2 The Commissioners noted that this application highlighted the need for changes in the legislation, to give control over the wording on the ballot paper. The Commissioners requested a paper on this matter for the meeting on 9 June, and then for discussion at the PPP meeting on 14 June.

2.3 **The application for the registration of The Non Political Party be approved.**

3. General Election 2005

3.1 SY stated that three post-election seminars had been held, and two more were being held. The following issues had been highlighted in the seminars held so far:

- The need for effective national standards
- Improvements in resourcing of local authorities
- Insurance for Returning Officers
- The disproportionate cost of the last Royal Mail sweep for postal votes

- The lack of trust in the voting process, which reflected in the attitude of customers contacting local authorities
- Code on handling postal ballots has been useful, but political parties should not be involved in the process of returning postal vote applications and ballot papers

3.2 The Commissioners noted the issues which had been raised in the seminars held so far.

4. Electoral Administration Reform Bill

4.1 SY referred to the publication of 'Securing the Vote', and congratulated TH on producing such a high quality report, and AS and the Press Team for the promotion of the report. AS outlined how the timetable for publication and promotion had been agreed, and reported on the level of coverage achieved.

4.2 PG reported on the ELF meeting, at which John Sills from DCA had outlined the policy paper, which had just been published. Responses were required by 10 June, and a report would be on the agenda for the meeting on 9 June. Most Regional Returning Officers had attended the meeting. The main topics of discussion were resourcing of local authorities and the setting and monitoring of national standards. There would be a further meeting in July.

4.3 The areas where there was no consensus with the DCA were:

- The method of collecting information for individual registration
- The definition of 'undue influence'
- Close of nominations/registration

PW would write to John Sills to clarify issues, and set out the Commission's arguments in favour of its recommendations.

4.4 The timetable for the Bill envisaged introduction in the week beginning 27 June, with second reading before the summer recess, and the Committee stage in the autumn. Royal Assent would be given in December or January. Copies of the draft clauses would be circulated as they arrived.

4.5 The Commissioners noted the current arrangements.

5. Designation (EC88/05)

- 5.1 DS presented the report and outlined the issues and potential changes from the process used for the North East Regional Referendum. The issues highlighted were:
- The adequacy or otherwise of the timetable
 - Providing applicants with the opportunity to make representations by scheduling a day into the timetable
 - The tests of adequacy and 'best represents'
 - Recording responses and information
 - Publication of the core documents
 - The need for additional powers in the primary legislation
 - The need to ask for more information, including previous experience and regional structures
- 5.2 The Commissioners agreed that there should be further consideration of the criteria and the questions, and asked PW and AS to come back with comments on the process.
- 5.3 **The Commissioners noted the report, and requested further advice on the proposed process for designation.**

6. The European Union Bill: referendum question (EC90/05)

- 6.1 DS presented the report and advised the Commissioners that the Commission was required to comment again, although the draft question had not changed. There were two issues to be considered:
- The use of the word 'approve' and the need for a further statement on the Commission's views
 - The explanation of the comment on the title of the treaty
- The Commissioners noted that the issue of the Welsh translation had not been dealt with, as recommended by the Commission.
- 6.2 The Commissioners concluded that the same statement as last time should be issued, and further explanations should be held against possible enquiries. SY would respond accordingly to the Foreign Secretary, noting that there had been no change to the question. A press release would be issued on Friday 27 May, before the French referendum had been held.
- 6.3 **The Commissioners agreed that, in view of the fact that the draft referendum question had not changed, the same statement should be issued as before.**

7. Electoral Reviews: Boundary Committee report 2004/5 (EC81/05)

- 7.1 PG and AG introduced the report, which dealt with the Boundary Committee's activities over 2004/5. The information in the report was produced using comparisons with previous years, and the results of the stakeholder survey. Multi-member divisions and wards, and coterminosity had been important features in the evaluation. The report would be published on the Boundary Committee website.
- 7.2 SP and CM gave a presentation of the report. The Commissioners noted the very high ratings for responsiveness, accessibility and politeness of Boundary Committee staff. NM suggested that the Commission should consider whether it, as well as the Boundary Committee, had been instrumental in any changes, in particular in County Council divisions.
- 7.3 The report also highlighted concerns about communication from local authorities to interested parties, and noted that this was best addressed in the PER evaluation report. For the FERs, there had been direct communication from the Boundary Committee to the parishes.
- 7.4 **The Commissioners welcomed the report and noted its contents, and thanked CM and SP for their presentation.**

8. Matters for information

- 8.1 The Commissioners noted the following items for information:
- Registration of political and third parties (EC89/05)
 - Papers and agendas for ELF meetings would be circulated to Commissioners
 - The transfer for functions from ODPM to DCA. There was no information on Ministers views on future electoral pilots.