

Confirmed on 8 December 2005

## Minutes of the meeting of the Electoral Commission held on 10 November 2005, in London.

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

In attendance: Jacqui Dixon (JD)  
Roger Gough (RG)  
Angela Salt (AS)  
Nicole Smith (NS)  
Chris Welford (CW)  
Kate Sullivan (KBS)  
Patricia Pena (PP)  
Doug Stewart (DS)  
Mike Harold (MH)  
Emma Fisher (EF)  
Lisa Watch (LW)

Apologies: Karamjit Singh

### 1. Minutes of the meeting of 13 October 2005 (EC140/05)

1.1 The minutes of the meeting of the Electoral Commission held on 13 October 2005 were agreed, subject to minor amendments.

### 2. Minutes of the meeting of 27 October 2005 (EC141/05)

2.1 The minutes of the meeting of the Electoral Commission held on 27 October 2005 were agreed, subject to amendments, including:

- i) deletion of sixth bullet point in paragraph 1.1
- ii) clarification that paragraph 3.3.3 referred to the 'four-month rule'.
- iii) Paragraph 3.3.6 reference was to local campaigns.

### 3. Financial report for the six months ended 30 September 2005 (EC142/05)

- 3.1 RG presented the report for the six months to 30 September 2005. The Commission's financial management continued to improve. The Commission had now reached a stable point in its spending and staffing levels. The underspend was at the lowest point on record; PDGs and other campaigns would reduce the underspend, some of which would be used to fund the accommodation work required. The office moves would begin in January 2006.
- 3.2 The Commissioners considered that a short explanation of the funding and expenditure of the Commission was required, and asked RG to develop a statement to explain concisely the Commission's resource allocation and staffing levels, by Directorate and activity.
- 3.3 **The Commissioners noted the report, and requested RG to provide an explanatory statement on expenditure and staffing levels, and a summary of expenditure by directorate to include staff costs.**

### 4. Performance review: Quarter 2 2005/6 (EC143/05)

- 4.1 RG presented the report. NS drew the Commissioners' attention to the issues concerning the transfer of Parliamentary Boundary functions. Preparatory work in relation to the transfer of functions was continuing until such time as a clear indication was received from the Government that the transfer would not take place before the next round of reviews.
- 4.2 Attention was also drawn to the staff vacancy level of 23%. RG stated that this represented a peak in recruitment, and outlined the reasons for the current level of vacancies. Most staff leave the Commission for the right reasons; the structure is relatively flat and there is a predominance of specialists in the organisation.
- 4.3 CW referred to the implementation of on-line statutory returns. The implementation would be phased, with e-enabled returns by 31 March 2006, and the final phases being completed by 31 December 2006.
- 4.4 SY stated that, for future reports, it would be useful to have comparable indicators for previous quarters and previous years. RG stated that as from 1 April 2006, the information would be available on the Commission's website with the budget information.
- 4.5 **The Commissioners noted the report, and requested that comparative information be provided in future reports.**

## 5. May 2006 electoral pilot scheme evaluation (EC145/05)

5.1 TH advised the Commissioners that the DCA had issued the prospectus for the May 2006 pilot schemes for England. The report included the Commissions' evaluation project brief. The DCA intended to limit the number of pilot schemes. The schemes would have to show learning value. The Commission would be consulted during December and it was intended to ask for views on the pilot applications at the Commission meeting on 8 December.

5.2 The Commissioners discussed the following issues arising from the report:

### 5.2.1 *Role of Commissioners and Deputy Commissioners*

The Commissioners and Deputy Commissioners would be the high-level liaison point for the local authorities. Staff would carry out the information gathering. Technical consultants would be used to evaluate e-voting/counting pilots. It had been noted that there may be some logistical issues on polling day related to the number of pilots.

### 5.2.2 *Evaluation reports*

NS stated that there would be no overarching evaluation report. There would be an in-depth report on each pilot, with a summary of lessons learned from each set of similar pilots, and recommendations for roll-out, if appropriate.

### 5.2.3 *Take-up and types of pilots*

There had been expressions of interest from 45 local authorities to date. A significant number in London were electronic counting pilots. Six related to early or mobile voting. SY also referred to the pilot on regional support for local authorities with elections in 2006. The Local Government Network was interested in regional structures for evaluating elections, which may provide added value.

5.3 **The Commissioners noted the report and agreed the proposed Project Brief.**

## 6. Electoral Administration Bill

6.1 The Commissioners reviewed the following amendments discussed in the Select Committee:

### 6.1.1 *Deceased candidates*

It was felt that the Government's response met the most urgent requirement to avoid discrimination against parties.

#### 6.1.2 *Service voters*

The results of the MOD's review will be published in February 2006. The DCA would consult the Commission on the findings and proposals. The Commissioners discussed whether to wait for the outcome of the review, or to initiate discussion of the issues in January 2006. The Commissioners agreed that a round table meeting of key interested parties should be convened with a view to identifying consensus on a way forward. An information briefing note should be prepared by the Commission, setting out the issues.

#### 6.1.3 *Signatures in polling stations*

No debate had taken place on this proposal so far. There was a need to focus more on this clause, and raise awareness of the practical and logistical issues which would arise.

#### *General issues*

6.2 The Commissioners discussed the briefing note which had been prepared, and identified the need for amendments to the note, in particular in relation to:

- The translation of independent candidate descriptions into Welsh
- The right of access for the Commission to all parts of the election process
- Imprints, where publicity material is published in behalf of a group of candidates
- The use of PO box information
- Funding implications for local authorities

6.3 The Commissioners discussed the Commission's approach to dealing with amendments, and agreed that a judgement should be made on each amendment as to whether and how a response should be given by the Commission. AS outlined the arrangements for contacting members of the Select Committee, and for briefing the media.

6.4 **The Commissioners noted the current position, and agreed the briefing note, subject to the amendments discussed.**

## 7. Regulatory Services: update on current issues (EC144/05)

7.1 PP represented the report, and highlighted the key issues arising from the report. The Commissioners' attention was drawn in particular to:

- The impact on Regulatory Services work of the Electoral Administration Bill
- The comprehensive remedial measures put in place in relation to the failure of parties to comply with the law
- The current position on deregistration
- The use of national funds to support local campaigns
- The action being taken on outstanding campaign returns
- The intended publication of the revised compliance and enforcement strategy document in January 2006
- The intention to publish the General Election 2005 campaign spending report on 31 January 2006
- The timetable for enabling electronic submission of returns

7.2 The Commissioners would, in the future, be provided with quarterly update reports.

7.3 **The Commissioners noted the report.**

## 8. Matters for information

8.1 The Commissioners received the following items for information:

- Audit Committee minutes of 9 August 2005 (EC147/05)
- The stakeholder reception on 7 December 2005
- The cost and funding of parish elections
- PG's meeting with David Milliband in relation to restructuring of local government in England
- PG's meeting with Caroline Spellman MP, in relation to the PER evaluation
- The draft regulations for the May 2006 elections had not yet been received; this would impact on a range of work, in particular the Code of Conduct on Postal Voting
- The two election petitions in respect of Birmingham Sparkbrook had been withdrawn, but the petition relating to the re-run Aston election was continuing

8.2 AS updated the Commissioners on the following matters:

- The large number of PQs recently received
- The registration campaign in Northern Ireland
- The appointment of the Head of Communications