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Meeting of the Electoral Commission

3.30 pm Tuesday 24 July 2001 at Trevelyan House

In the presence of all the Commission staff prior to the meeting SY, on behalf of the Commissioners thanked staff for the significant achievement represented by that day's publication of 'Election 2001: The Official Results'.

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

Apologies: Rael Zackon

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

1 Chief Executive

1.1 SY congratulated RC on his appointment as Chief Executive of the Commission.

2 Minutes of the last meeting

2.1 Any items to be notified to the Secretary by 27 July 2001

3 Matters Arising

3.1 2.1 **Party Political Broadcasting Review** - the draft terms of reference would shortly be circulated to interested parties. ***The issue of how Commissioners were to be kept abreast of this and other reviews would be addressed in a papers from Nicole Smith at the next meeting.***

3.2 2.4 **LGCE transfer** - The HDA have indicated they will be leaving Trevelyan House probably in early 2002. There may be interest in the accommodation from the landlords, the Office of Government Commerce, who also occupy accommodation in the building.

3.3 2.7.1 **DTLR** - SY and RC met Nick Raynsford on 23 July. Full copies of the Commissions' report will be provided to him, Stephen Byers and Alan Whitehead. Commissioners are invited to attend a meeting with the Minister

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at Trevelyan House, to be scheduled in the autumn. RC and NS meet with DTLR officials on a regular basis.

3.4 8.2 ***The Commissioners endorsed the joint Electoral Commission and Hansard Society proposals for Focus Groups.*** The composition of the groups and methodology for looking at specific sectors of the population e.g. ethnic groups will be addressed separately.

3.5 3.3.2 The project board for the IdEA's e-voting project had decided that the new submission from the University of Essex and De Monfort was not suitable. The board will meet on 27 July to consider the way forward. The results of the research section of the project will not be available until Spring 2002 so cannot be tested in electoral pilots at the May 2002 local elections.

4 Directors' Reports

4.1 Strategic Planning and Resources

4.1.1 The Electoral Commission is working with ACAS to develop a Staff Forum. The process is staff driven and flows from discussions at the staff meeting held in May. ACAS are aware of the transfer of the LGCE functions and staff. Commissioners expressed their concern that staff representation at the Commission should be developed in a way that would not conflict with the arrangements for incoming LGCE staff. ***The Commissioners will be informed of the details of the Staff Forum when the working group completes its work in October.***

4.2 Registrations and Compliance

4.2.1.1 All MPs and MEPs have been offered free BAA parking passes for use when undertaking Parliamentary duties. Some have objected to declaring the passes on the basis that Parliamentary duties are distinct from their political activities. A letter from the Speaker regarding this matter was circulated to the Commissioners. The matter should be resolved prior to the end of the summer recess.

4.2.1.2 Concerns had been raised regarding the need to complete forms to declare a donation. RC stated that it had been decided that the completion of the forms was not necessary and letters would be accepted.

4.2.1.3 A similar question has arisen regarding the payment of salaries by employers to local Councillors while they work full-time on Council business. ***The Commissioners agreed that they would not wish to act in a way that could deter individuals from participating.***

4.2.2 The Federation of Labour Groups have stated that they will not seek to register the Labour Party rose in Northern Ireland.

4.2.3 The Liverpool Co-operative Alliance, a group of political parties, have complained to the Commission regarding the conduct of the recent elections by Liverpool Electoral Office.

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- 4.2.4 The Metropolitan Police have asked for a meeting to discuss a protocol for handling prosecutions.

4.3 Media and Public Affairs

- 4.3.1 A lot of requests for media interviews on the basis of the launch of the report have been received. AH thanked the Commissioners for responding to these.
- 4.3.2 A million more campaign leaflets for rolling registration have been ordered. The web pages relating to rolling registration and absent voting will be transferred to the Commission web site at the end of the week.
- 4.3.3 AH reported that the COI had stated that they could not conduct a branding exercise for £50,000. The 3 companies who tendered for producing the leaflets had indicated that they could undertake the exercise for this cost. Formal tenders will be sought. ***A paper will be presented to the Project Board in the autumn regarding the re-launch in April 2002 of the Commission including the Boundary Committee as a semi-autonomous body.***

5 Commissioners' Points

- 5.1 GM and CW are meeting the General Secretaries of the local parties in Wales
- 5.2 SY and NS had attended a conference of Electoral Officers in Canada.

6 Policy Development Grants (EC63/01)

- 6.1 A further consultation document was to be sent to the parties setting out the arguments put forward in the first consultation. A decision on the scheme to be put to the Secretary of State would be made at the September Commissioners' meeting.

7 Audit Committee (EC64/01)

- 7.1 ***SY reported that NM had agreed to chair the Committee and KS would be a member of the Committee.***
- 7.2 PH explained that the external representation on the Committee had to be an External Adviser rather than an External Member. The Adviser will need to be politically impartial. ***The Commissioners agreed that the Public Appointments Unit of the Cabinet Office should be approached to suggest possible candidates for the appointment as the External Advisor. NM, or SY in his absence, will at least speak to the proposed candidate by telephone prior to the appointment being finalised.***
- 7.3 ***The Constitution was agreed subject to the inclusion a reference to the quorum in the 'Membership and attendance' section. Meetings of the Committee will be quorate when the 2 Commissioners are present or when a Commissioner and the External Advisor are present.***

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- 7.4 The proposed internal auditor for the Commission is to attend a meeting next week. She is the LGCE's internal auditor.
- 7.5 Auditors from the National Audit Office are at the Commission from today conducting an audit in respect of the Commission's finances for the period to 31 March 2001.
- 8 **Five year plan – progress against targets April to June 2001** (EC65/01)
- 8.1 ***It was agreed that the information was valuable.*** To maintain continuity the format will be used for to report the full year's achievement against targets.
- 8.2 The 5 year plans are presented to the Speaker's Committee and are not widely published. The Annual Report will be published each Autumn for wider circulation. The annual report will include a summary of the 5 year plan.
- 8.3 A draft of an update of the current 5 year plan will be available for discussion at the Commission meeting in September prior to the meeting of the Speaker's Committee in October. It is anticipated that in October the Speaker's Committee will wish to see the Commission's plans for spending the £1,500,000 available for voter education during 2001/2. The voter education strategy for this financial year is a continuation of that transferred from the Home Office which is outsourced to the COI.
- 8.4 The October planning weekend will feed into a draft of the 5 year plan for the period commencing 1 April 2002. The draft of this report will be presented to the Speaker's Committee in January.
- 9 **Regional Offices Project Plan** (EC67/01)
- 9.1 ***The Commissioners noted that some of the risks listed in the paper were inappropriate as they had not asked that the offices should open simultaneously on 1 November. The Commissioners indicated that they were content as long as the Commission established a presence in each area before the end of the calendar year.*** They considered the presence of an individual more important than having an office property identified.
- 9.2 ***The Commissioners agreed that the staff complement should not be assumed to be the same for each office. They endorsed the proposal that staffing should be built up over time once informed consideration can be given to need.*** There may be the opportunity for staff in the regional offices to take on tasks that would otherwise result in additional staff recruited in London.
- 9.3 ***An early plenary will be held to consider launch arrangements appropriate to the office in each area.***
- 10 **Electoral Pilot Schemes** (EC68/01)

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- 10.1 The schemes will operate for the local authority elections in England in May 2002. The Local Government Association have been consulted regarding the proposals.
- 10.2 **Commissioners endorsed the proposal that the Commission should not co-sponsor any of the pilot schemes but offer support to all successful bidders.** The Commission will be able to participate in the selection of the schemes and will evaluate the results. The extent of support offered must be within the capacity of the Commission. Assistance will be offered in the form of Electoral Policy Team staff on part-time secondments on a consultancy basis.
- 10.3 **Commissioners agreed that the types of scheme that are a priority for the Commission and DTLR are:**
- **Electronic voting and telephone voting**
 - **Wider use of all postal voting**
 - **Schemes that involve explaining voting**
 - **Extended hours**
- 10.4 No funding is available. The authorities fund pilot schemes themselves with private sector backing where this can be obtained. Huntingdon are seeking funding from HM Treasury's 'Invest to Save' fund for a mobile 'phone pilot. The LGA wish to propose government funding to establish a pot to fund pilot schemes. **Consideration will be given to approaching Nick Raynsford or the Office of the E-Envoy for seed funding.** The DTLR fund local authorities so may be more willing than the Home Office to consider funding pilots particularly as the willingness of local authorities to participate may diminish.
- 10.5 Successful bids are usually from authorities with safe seats. Pilots in areas where seats are hard fought would be beneficial.

11 Any other business

- 11.1 The voter awareness activity schedule will be included in the voter education papers for the September meeting.
- 11.2 This year's budget for grants to meet start up costs is £200,000. Because parties did not claim as expected in the last financial year, the potential level of exposure this year is £500,000. There may be claims towards the end of the year due to the introduction of the accounting provisions. **Parties will be asked to give the Commission details of their intended claims.** An underspend may result from LGCE co-locating with the Commission at Trevelyan House as fit out costs will be low. An underspend is acceptable providing it can be accounted for. If necessary an arranged parliamentary question could be used to flag an anticipated underspend.
- 11.3 PG and GM will attend the next meeting of the Parliamentary Parties Panel at 11am on Tuesday 11 September at Trevelyan House. If available KS will also attend.

12 Date of the Next Meeting

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- 12.1 9 am Thursday 13th September 2001 at National Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh. Sir David Steel has indicated that he will attend for lunch at the Witchery Restaurant at 12.30pm. The Commissioners will meet for dinner on Wednesday 12th September 7.30 for 8 pm at Apex International Hotel, the Grassmarket, Edinburgh.

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