

Confirmed on 10 March 2005

Minutes of the meeting of the Electoral Commission held on 10 February 2005 in Belfast

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

In attendance: Peter Wardle (PW)
Jacqui Dixon (JD)
Kay Jenkins (KJ)
Seamus Magee (SM)
Angela Salt (AS)
Kate Sullivan (KBS)
Chris Welford (CW)

PG left the room while the decision was taken on item 2.

1. Minutes of the meeting of 20 January 2005.

1.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 20 January 2005, from paragraph 6 onwards, were agreed subject to the following amendments:

Paragraph 6.4: after 'amendments to the guidance' add 'should be considered further'.

Paragraph 7.1: add before semi-colon '(referred to as a comparator)'.

Paragraph 7.2: add reference to appeal mechanism.

Paragraph 13.1: add after 'more changes' the words 'at the same time as the move to STV for local elections'.

1.2 SY reported on his discussion with the Treasurers of the three main parties. It was agreed that no additions should be made to the current disclosure obligations, except in the context of a wider review of the regulatory framework for parties.

1.3 SY and PG are to give evidence to the ODPM Select Committee inquiry on ward boundaries.

2. FER direction

- 2.1 JD presented the report and the draft direction, which gave effect to the decision of the Commission to carry out four further electoral reviews in the districts of Dacorum, Newark and Sherwood, South Holland and Taunton Deane.
- 2.2 **The Commissioners approved the issue of a direction to the Boundary Committee in the terms set out in the Appendix to the report, and authorised the affixation of the Commission's corporate seal to the direction.**

3. Equality Scheme

- 3.1 The Commissioners received a presentation from Denise Wheatley on the requirements of section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.
- 3.2 The Commissioners considered the report on the responses to the Phase 1 consultation on the Equality Scheme, and noted that, pending the audit of the draft scheme by the Equality Commission, work would proceed on merging this with the Race Equality Scheme.
- 3.3 **The Commissioners noted the requirements of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, and the responses to the consultation on the draft Equality Scheme.**

4. Application for registration: None of the Above

- 4.1 KJ advised that an order had been made and would come into force on 19 February 2005. The applicant had been advised that the Commission would make a decision on the application for registration by the end of February.
- 4.2 On the application for registration, SY advised that Commissioners would be contacted by e-mail, and asked that each Commissioner respond by e-mail with their decision.
- 4.3 **The Commissioners noted the making of the order, and agreed the arrangements for determining the application for registration.**

5. Iraqi out-of-country elections 2005

- 5.1 SY circulated the preliminary assessment report from IMIE, and advised that Jane Harris had produced a report on behalf of the Commission.

- 5.2 SY reported that the Iraqi Electoral Commission were keen for further support, but it was considered undesirable for further work to be led by countries of the coalition. There would be meetings of the Steering Committee in respect of further elections, and the Commission should make someone available to cover those meetings and offer accommodation in London for meetings. Although the process might serve as a model for approaching other post-conflict elections, it was important that the possibility of reverting to more established models of election observation should be kept firmly in mind at each stage of the IMIE's work.
- 5.3 **The Commissioners noted the report, and the proposals for future Commission involvement.**

6. Breach of PPERA: [REDACTED]

6.1 [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

- 6.3 **The Commissioners noted the outcome of the discussions between the Commission and the CPS, and agreed in this instance to advise [REDACTED] of the breach of PPERA but to take no further enforcement action.**

7. Statement of accounts: BNP

- 7.1 PW presented the report, and advised the Commissioners that although the BNP were the only party in the £250,000 category to submit so late, it was the party's first breach of the requirements for submitting statements of accounts.
- 7.2 The Commissioners accepted the proposal that the party representatives be asked to attend a meeting with PW and CW to explain the reasons for the delay, leaving the option of penalties available depending on the outcome of the meeting. The accounts should be published on the Commission website without delay this week.

- 7.3 AS outlined the proposals for media handling, and the need to explain the context in which this decision has been taken, and the dilemmas as they apply to the Commission.
- 7.4 **The Commissioners approved the proposal that the BNP be asked to attend a meeting with the Commission to explain the reasons for delay in submitting the statement of accounts for 2003, and noted the arrangements for media handling.**

8. Statutory consultation: designation of returning officers in Scotland

- 8.1 KJ advised that a consultation request was expected concerning the designation of returning officers consequent on the reduction of numbers of UK Parliamentary constituencies in Scotland. The order had not yet been received; however a response would be required before the Commission meeting on 10 March. It was rather proposed that SY and NM should be authorised to agree the response to the consultation.
- 8.2 **The Commissioners authorised SY and NM to agree the Commission's response to the statutory consultation on designation of returning officers in Scotland.**

9. Items for information

- 9.1 The Commissioners received the following items for information:
- i) New Initiatives Fund
 - ii) Communication update:
 - The registration campaign advertisement had been first screened on Monday 7 February.
 - Interest in service voter registration continues
 - Youth engagement work of the Commission launched
 - PW interview in the Guardian
 - Communications directorate year planner circulated
 - Commissioners and Deputy Commissioners to receive a monthly mailshot outlining activities
 - Consideration as to how the Commission could make available politically neutral information during an General Election campaign
 - iii) NI issues:
 - Local elections will be held in May 2005
 - NIO is likely to ask Commission to report on NI local elections

- Reinstatement of electors onto the register
- PriceWaterhouseCooper report on rolling registration
- Individual registration in relation to communal establishments
- NI voter awareness campaign on individual and rolling registration
- The Government's intention to repeal the disapplication of Part IV PPERA in 2007
- Implications of the suspension of the Assembly on encouraging voter registration and turnout

iv) Code of Conduct on handling postal votes:

GM referred to the PPP meeting held on 8 February and to the agreement reached on the Code of Conduct. A redraft would be sent to the parties, and the final draft to Commissioners.

v) Speaker's Committee meeting on 2 February 2005:

SY reported that this was a satisfactory meeting. The Committee was particularly anxious to see the Commission setting priorities, targets, and measuring outcomes. The terms of reference for the Speaker's Committee review of the Commission were still awaited.

vi) European Parliamentary Election report Vol II:

A PDF version needed to be available before Easter. The draft would be circulated to Commissioners; approval would have to be by correspondence.

vii) Schedule of meetings and events 2005/6

There will be an additional meeting on 13 April 2005 from 11am to 4.30pm to consider regulatory matters.