

Confirmed on 13 July 2005

Minutes of the meeting of the Electoral Commission held on 9 June 2005, held in Stirling.

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

In attendance: Jacqui Dixon (JD)
Kay Jenkins (KJ)
Angela Salt (AS)
Chris Welford (CW)
Andy O'Neill (AO'N)

Mr Keith Yates, Chief Executive of Stirling Council, gave a presentation on community participation and engagement.

1. Minutes of the meeting of 12 May 2005 (EC91/05)

1.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 12 May 2005 were agreed, subject to:

Paragraph 8.2: add to 4th bullet point 'in some places'.

Paragraph 8.2: in 9th bullet point, replace '3000' with '300'.

2. Minutes of the meeting of 26 May 2005 (EC92/05)

2.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 26 May 2005 were agreed, subject to:

Paragraph 1.3: 1st bullet point should read 'The need for consistency in multiple full names'.

Paragraph 3.1: add to 6th bullet point 'of returning postal vote applications and ballot papers'.

Paragraph 4.3: 1st bullet point should read 'The method of collecting information for individual registration'.

Paragraph 7.4: add thanks to SP and CM for the presentation.

- 2.2 SY stated that although no referendum was now imminent, the Commission will work towards producing a referendum plan and budget, and this would be the subject of a longer discussion in July or September. The question of how much expenditure the Commission could incur prior to the announcement of a referendum would be an issue for discussion with the Speaker's Committee. There would be discussion with the political parties when the plan had been produced.

3. Response to DCA: electoral administration policy paper (EC93/05)

- 3.1 KJ presented the paper which focussed on areas of difference of view between the Commission and the DCA. Discussions were taking place on a daily basis and progress had been made in obtaining mutual understanding on some of the issues. The following comments were made on the proposed responses:

3.1.1 Change of date for last registration

- Restatement of principle that the Commission is seeking harmonisation of timetables or consistent deadlines of eleven days.
- Refer DCA to recommendations in 'Securing the Vote'
- Resourcing to be made a general point on implementation

3.1.2 Allowing voters to apply for a postal vote at the same time as registering to vote

- Convenience to voters should be paramount
- This is linked to recommendation on acknowledgement of applications for postal votes
- The 'ticked boxes' on forms will become an issue after initial registration
- Need to look at form design with DCA

3.1.3 Offences

- DCA had misunderstood the Commission's recommendation on the provision of information during registration; this had been resolved.
- RZ had produced a paper in relation to 'undue influence' which had resulted in the DCA agreeing to the Commission's recommendation
- The comments should remain as drafted but DCA will agree

3.1.4 *Individual registration*

- The Commission had convened a meeting involving DCA and Denis Stanley, who would give a briefing on the experience of individual registration in Northern Ireland
- Emphasise the integrity of the register, greater public confidence in the process and elimination of identity theft
- Should be an opportunity to publicise suggestions for improving student registration
- Interim measures are unlikely to work and could be counter-productive. The Commission should oppose the introduction of these for May 2006 for metropolitan and London Borough elections
- Questions on page 9 should be deleted and the section redrafted

3.1.5 *Administrative effectiveness*

- Refer to resourcing statements in 'Securing the Vote' and to the review of the role of returning officers
- Highlighting resourcing requirements in final paragraph

3.2 AS proposed that the DCA would be advised that the response from the Commission would be made public, as there would be media interest. The final version would be published on the Commission website, and e-mailed to Commissioners.

3.3 The Commissioners thanked TH for his work on producing the response to the consultation.

3.4 **The Commissioners approved the draft response, subject to the comments and amendments discussed, and authorised KJ to finalise the response.**

4. Electoral Administration Bill

4.1 KJ advised that the Bill had been drafted, and considerable work had been done with the DCA on the draft clauses. The Bill or a summary should be made available for the Business Planning meeting in Chepstow. KJ outlined the progress being made. The clause on absent voting was not yet available; however, powers of deregistration had been included.

- 4.2 The Commission was content with the draft produced by the DCA, which would permit up to five alternative descriptions on nomination and ballot papers. The descriptions would be subject to the same restrictions as party names, and new provisions would require that names should not mislead the voter.
- 4.3 The Commissioners discussed handling and briefing arrangements, to include:
- Briefings for MPs and Opposition spokespeople before the summer recess
 - Briefing meetings in the autumn
 - Commission telephone line for enquiries
 - Engagement of key stakeholders such as AEA and LGA and political parties
- 4.4 **The Commissioners noted the position, and asked that a timetable for briefing arrangements with key targets and platforms should be produced.**

5. European Parliamentary Election 2004: campaign expenditure (EC94/05)

- 5.1 CW presented the report. The Commissioners agreed that the report was more focussed and could be used as a template for future reports. The Commissioners indicated a number of issues of clarification to be included. The Commissioners agreed that there should be a proper production of the report; AS would recommend the type of hard copy which would be most appropriate for the audience and numbers.
- 5.2 **The Commissioners approved the report, subject to the amendments and clarifications discussed, and authorised SY to sign off the final document.**

6. A code for the future: consultation by Standards Board for England (EC95/05)

- 6.1 CW presented the report, which set out a draft response to the consultation paper. The Board was keen for the Commission to respond; the aim was to achieve consistency of approach between the two organisations.
- 6.2 The Commissioners discussed the following changes to the draft responses:
- Q10: it should be made clear that a distinction should be made between 'inappropriate political purposes' when a member was engaged on Council business and when they were not.

Q11: a response to Q11 should be included.

Q27: the response should recognise that usually there would be no necessity to register a refusal of a gift or hospitality. However, there would be some occasions when it would be appropriate to register a refusal of a gift or hospitality, for example, when an offer was made during a tendering process.

Q28: it should be made clear that the reporting should be completed on an annual basis.

Q29: the current threshold of donations to candidates should be added.

- 6.3 **The Commissioners approved the draft response, subject to the amendments and additions discussed, and authorised PW to sign off the final version of the response.**

7. General Election 2005

- 7.1 Five seminars had been held, which had been valuable in gathering useful material. The Commissioners noted the differences in the dynamics between the seminars, especially between those held in the devolved areas and those held in England. The Commission was a facilitator in developing relationships between key stakeholders; more thought should be given to how this could be achieved in England. A summary of the key themes of the seminars would be put on the Commission's website.
- 7.2 KJ stated that the collection of election results data from the constituencies in England had had a disappointing response; however the remainder of the research was progressing. The turnout report would be ready before the party conferences, and the campaign/media analysis and accessibility was planned for October. Electoral administration issues had largely been dealt with as part of 'Securing the Vote'; any remaining issues would be picked up as part of the remaining themed reporting.
- 7.3 **The Commissioners noted the report.**

8. Matters for information

- 8.1 The Commissioners received the following items for information:
- i) Minutes of the meeting of the Audit Committee of 9 March 2005 (EC96/05)
 - ii) Registration of political and third parties (EC97/05)

8.2 AS gave an update on the following communications matters:

- NIF meeting to be held on 13 June 2005
- The referendum count in Paris
- The imminent appointment of the Public Affairs Manager
- A review of PR and advertisement suppliers

8.3 The Commissioners thanked AO'N and the staff in the Edinburgh office for the excellent arrangements made for 8 and 9 June, and recorded their thanks to Keith Yates, Chief Executive of Stirling Council, for his presentation to the meeting.