

Confirmed on 8 December 2005

Minutes of the meeting of the Electoral Commission held on 24 November 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)
Roger Gough (RG)
Angela Salt (AS)
Nicole Smith (NS)
Kate Sullivan (KBS)
Archie Gall (AG)
Andy O'Neill (AO'N)
Peter Quirk (PQ)
Karen Quaintmere (KQ)

David Reeson, Miranda Cannon, Debbie Pearce (KPMG)

1. Delivering 21st century elections (EC148/05)

1.1 KBS introduced the discussion, and referred to the summary progress report circulated in the background papers. The purpose of the first part of the discussion was to assist in the development of a vision for quality electoral services and the second part was concerned with a framework for development in electoral services over the next five years.

1.2 PG reported on the initial seminar held with key stakeholders in Birmingham, which launched the project which KPMG have been engaged to deliver. The issues arising from the subsequent discussion at the seminar were:

- General support for the concept
- Abiding concern about resources, which was an inhibitor to doing more, and doing more effectively
- Problem of securing engagement while the electoral administrators are delivering the service

- Concern from political parties about lack of consistency of approach by Returning Officers
 - Any benchmarking exercise would have to be sensitive to differences in type and size of local authorities
 - Need to engage local authority elected members, not only through national associations
- 1.3 The KPMG representatives led the Commissioners' discussion on the possible content of a vision statement, and the role, needs and expectations of the key stakeholders in the process. PQ outlined the consultation process, which included workshops at the end of November and beginning of December, an electronic survey of electoral administrators, one-to-one discussions with key organisations, and possibly the use of local authority citizens' panels.
- 1.4 In relation to the second topic for discussion, KBS outlined progress against current training strategy, and introduced a discussion as to how the Commission could meet needs in the future. The Commission had produced a large amount of training materials, but it was not always possible to assess what the impact was. The event guidance materials had been very well-received and the Commission will continue to improve this product, producing a copy version at least until the next General Election.
- 1.5 Event briefings should also continue, as this was an effective means of bringing together key providers in the process. The essential requirements for support were in the areas of project planning, risk management and contract management. As much as possible should be produced electronically. It was recognised that training materials could have a limited shelf-life due to changes in the electoral process. The Commissioners supported the approach of life cycle support and development, noting that this would require a different level of resourcing than currently provided, but the Commission should continue to develop and resource it.
- 1.5 The Commissioners noted the issues in relation to the future vision for electoral services and training in the future, and noted the arrangements for consultation with stakeholders.**

2. Corporate Plan and budget estimates 2006/7

- 2.1 PW presented the draft Corporate Plan, and outlined the changes in format. He advised the Commissioners that the meeting of the Speaker's Committee would be held on 13 December 2005. The Commissioners welcomed the change of approach. The Commissioners discussed possible amendments to the text of the Plan. The Commission would seek the agreement of the Speaker's Committee in principle to the Corporate Plan, with the amendments discussed.

- 2.2 RG presented the budget estimates for 2006/7. The aim was to bring the Corporate Plan and the budget estimates closer together. HM Treasury had seen an early draft of the Corporate Plan and were generally satisfied with the format. RG gave a presentation on the resource implications of the Corporate Plan. He explained that £845,000 of savings had been made, which had been reallocated for accommodation costs over two years. The highest additional cost shown in the estimates related to pilot schemes for the elections in 2006; it was noted that a more accurate figure would be available once the Government has determined the pilot scheme applications. The Commissioners considered that the costs of pilot scheme evaluation should be built into the core budget. The estimates did not include the costs of implementing the Electoral Administration Bill, or the costs of transfer of Parliamentary Boundary functions.
- 2.3 The Commissioners noted the five year projection. The larger increase estimated in 2007/8 was due to provision for the rent of the ground floor of Trevelyan House as well as an inflationary increase.
- 2.4 **The Commissioners approved the draft Corporate Plan, subject to the amendments discussed. The Commissioners agreed the budget estimates for 2006/7, subject to the adjusted figures for pilot evaluation being included as a core cost. The Commissioners agreed that a separate note on the financial consequences of the Electoral Administration Bill and the transfer of Parliamentary Boundary functions should be prepared.**

3. Electoral Administration Bill

- 3.1 NS circulated a summary briefing note on the debate in the Standing Committee. AS outlined the arrangements for communication with members of the House of Lords.
- 3.2 The Commissioners noted that the issues arising from the proposal for signatures in polling stations had not been raised in the debates so far. There was a meeting of ELF in December at which this matter needed to be raised. AS would consider options for airing this matter, as well as the transitional arrangements.
- 3.3 **The Commissioners noted the current position.**

4. Parliamentary boundary functions

- 4.1 NS referred to the review of Scottish Parliamentary boundaries which had to take place immediately after the 2007 elections in Scotland, and the recent meeting with members of the existing Scottish Parliamentary

Boundary Commission. NM stated that decisions on Scottish Parliamentary boundaries were reserved to the UK Government, and therefore it was logical to place the function with the Electoral Commission. The Commission was already part of the Scottish electoral scene and was involved in Scottish election issues.

- 4.2 There would be no further planning work done within the Commission until after the meeting of the Speaker's Committee on 13 December. NS stated that proposals for policy reviews in 2006/7 included a review of the legal framework for Parliamentary boundary work. The draft programme of Commission policy reviews would be circulated to Commissioners once the Commission's budget had been agreed by the Speaker's Committee. The intention was to put the programme to the PPP and the devolved political party meetings early in 2006 for agreement.
- 4.3 **The Commissioners noted the current position. The Commissioners confirmed the existing view that the Commission should neither press for transfer of the Parliamentary boundary functions nor resist it, but should seek to ensure that decisions on timing were taken with sufficient regard for the lead-in time required.**