

Minutes of the meeting of the Electoral Commission held on 11 August 2004 in London.

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

In attendance: Roger Creedon (RC)
Jacqui Dixon (JD)
Nicole Smith (NS)
Kate Sullivan (KBS)
Karen Quaintmere (KQ)

1. Improving electoral services

- 1.1 NS summarised the issue as being about how the Commission engages with local authorities in terms of the powers the Commission should have. As there is now only one regional referendum, there is an opportunity to engage now rather than later, and on practical aspects.
- 1.2 The Commissioners were generally supportive of the direction of the final report from Vantagepoint Consultant, but favoured a less ambitious approach, looking at the model of how electoral services could be delivered across the UK. It was recognised that it would not be easy to engage elected members on this matter, and although electoral administrators wanted to use the performance culture as a lever for funding, the emphasis was turning against targets. The recommendations in the report were based on relationships and this was the area where the Commission could build on its strengths.
- 1.3 The Commission's strengths were in networking and building relationships, which could include mentoring, exchanges of staff and championing examples of good practice by, for example, supporting awards. The objective should be to improve performance in electoral services by working on relationships, especially with groups who do not yet see the Commission as a major player.
- 1.4 In respect of the recommendations in the final report, the following comments were made:

1.4.1 A. Establishing a joint vision and objectives

The Commission will actively continue to develop this, but will not publish it as a major piece of work.

1.4.2 B. Communicating and promoting the vision

A digest of the key messages would be useful when reconvening the RRO group.

The Commissioners discussed the opportunities in England for regionalisation of the Commission's role, to enhance capacity locally. The arguments for a regional structure in England covered other Commission functions, such as Outreach.

NS suggested that Local Democracy Week could be an opportunity to promote an award.

1.4.3 C. Developing and promoting good practice

It was suggested that the Commission could work more closely with IdEA, with a link to wider social inclusion and member engagement. It was recognised that the Commission did have good relationships with some local government groups, but we needed to target the most influential groups in the local government context, particularly members and senior managers. It was suggested that there may be a role for the Deputy Commissioners here. It was noted that there was no Commissioner linked to the practice work, and this could be a role for a new Commissioner.

1.4.4 D. Supporting delivery staff

It was noted that work was being carried out in this area, but there was a resourcing issue. The work was opportunity-led, rather than programmed.

1.4.5 E. Measuring and rewarding performance

The Commission could go no further without legal powers, but could encourage more participation in current initiatives. The LGA were setting up an electoral matters group.

1.4.6 F. Clarifying role and responsibilities

The need to clarify for stakeholders the respective roles of the Commission, ODPM and DCA had been highlighted in other contexts. NS suggested that at least a protocol was required stating who was responsible for the relevant functions.

1.4.7 G. Influencing and engaging

This set of recommendations was linked to Public affairs issues. The development of model LPSAs would need to reflect the different types of local authorities.

- 1.5 SY outlined the next stage, which would need to consider the priorities for resources and develop thinking on a regional network, and to float the ideas with the Speaker's Committee in due course. This would need to be built into the corporate planning process. NS stated that it would be ideal if a regional network was in place before a national referendum. She also indicated that about half of the recommendations could be put in place within existing resources. The overall theme was to do less and communicate more.
- 1.6 The Commissioners requested that the corporate planning papers to be considered at the strategic planning meeting in November, should reflect the issues identified in the report and the discussion
- 1.6 **The Commissioners noted the draft report and recommendations, and agreed that further work should be undertaken on developing the ideas for a regional network, to be considered at a future meeting. The issues identified in the report and the discussion should be reflected in the corporate planning papers to be considered by Commissioners in November.**