

Confirmed on 10 March 2005

## Minutes of the meeting of the Electoral Commission held on 16 February 2005, in London.

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)  
Angela Salt (AS)  
Kate Sullivan (KBS)  
Rael Zackon (RZ)  
Tom Hawthorn (TH)  
Mike Harold (MH)  
Sarah Johnstone (SJ)  
Will Reburn (WR)

### **1. ODPM Select Committee Inquiry: ward boundaries**

- 1.1 PG presented the draft written evidence and advised that this version took account of the substantive points raised by the Boundary Committee. SJ had also received some drafting and editing points. The date for attending the Select Committee had not been confirmed but it was believed that it would be 7 March.
- 1.2 The Commissioners noted that the phrasing of the questions in paragraph 73 should be changed, and some of the questions should be rephrased. In paragraph 53, reference to section 71 of the Race Relations Act should be amended.
- 1.3 **The Commissioners agreed that PW should coordinate the final draft of the written evidence for approval by PG on 21 February 2005.**

### **2. Foundation Model of Voting**

- 2.1 PW began the discussion, noting that the Commission needed to ensure that its arguments for a new voting model would need to be clearly spelled out, particularly in relation to those aspects of the

system where there appeared to be strong views within the government. The Commissioners agreed that publication during an election period could lead to voter confusion, and it would be wiser to defer publication until after the next election period.

- 2.2 TH presented the report which was based on the underlying principles set out in 'Delivering Democracy?'. There was a brief outline of responses, and options for more detailed consideration. Additional questions had been raised concerning consistency of the voting system across the UK, and future multi-channel elections.
- 2.3 The Commissioners recognised that the emergence of voting systems is dynamic and suggested that two models were required – a longer-term future model which was aspirational but not prescriptive, and a transitional model, which recognised the opportunities presented by possible developments in matters such as the National register and individual registration in moving forward. Voters wanted choice, but not only in processes: a linked question was how to persuade reluctant voters to vote.
- 2.4 The Commissioners discussed in more detail the following issues:
- The pre-requirement for individual registration
  - Identification of voter at a polling station
  - The differences in how local authorities promote postal voting on demand
  - Security requirements for sending ballot papers to all voters
  - Extended voting
  - Use of polling stations for voting in person and delivering postal vote
  - Location and number of polling stations and delivery points
  - Deferred counting
  - The resources available to local authorities
  - The lack of national IT standards for electronic voting
  - Access issues, especially for disabled voters
- 2.5 The Commissioners also discussed the variations in voting systems across the UK, and the need to avoid voter confusion. There was general agreement that whilst there should, in principle, be no variations in process in UK-wide elections, it was important to recognise the particular differences in Northern Ireland in relation to voter identity.
- 2.6 AS referred to the suggested handling arrangements, and the possible deferment of publication; details of plans for deferment should be made public after discussions with Government officials.
- 2.7 **The Commissioners noted the issues raised in the discussion and agreed on the next steps for the project. The Commissioners**

**invited TH to bring forward further issues as necessary at the Commission meeting on 10 March 2005, before the discussion planned for 21 March 2005.**

### **3. Items for information**

3.1 The Commissioners received the following items for information:

- Birmingham electoral petitions: the Commission had been invited to observe the proceedings. The Electoral Reform Society would have a representative at the hearings, and it was suggested that he be invited to a future Commission meeting to discuss the implications and outcome of the hearings.
- About My Vote website: AS reported that registered parties would be advised in writing of the proposal to provide a link to their websites, and asked to give the necessary information. Clear disclaimers about the information in party websites would be published. GM highlighted the need to ensure that voters outside England were directed to the correct information.