

Confirmed on 7 September 2005.

Minutes of the meeting of the Electoral Commission held on 28 July 2005, held in London.

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

In attendance:

Peter Wardle (PW)	Chris Welford (CW)
Kate Sullivan (KBS)	Lisa Watch (LW)
Jennifer Gaughan (JG)	Tabitha Cunliffe (TC)
Alison Wildig (AW)	Doug Stewart (DS)
Steve Evison (SE)	Michael Harold (MH)
Rael Zackon (RZ)	Angela Salt (AS)
Shane Beadle (SB)	Heulyn Gwyn (HG)
Archie Gall (AG)	Mark Williams (MW)
Patricia Peña (PP)	

Apologies: Glyn Mathias

- 1. Periodic electoral review evaluation: consultation (EC 104/05)**
 - 1.1 Final comments on the report were requested. It was agreed that the open-ended nature of the paper means that draft recommendations would be needed initially, in order to test that the chosen direction is right.
 - 1.2 Textual amendments were agreed and the paper will be cleared for publication by the Project Board.
 - 1.3 **The Commissioners agreed the report, subject to the amendments discussed and to final approval by the Project Board.**

- 2. Annual Report 2004/5 (EC105/05)**
 - 2.1 JG presented the report. General comments and amendments to the report were discussed, with a view to final approval of the report after

the summer recess (September). The Commissioners suggested that the executive summary could be retitled 'Key points'.

2.2 The Commissioners requested further amendments to the Annual Report 2004/5, and asked that a further draft be circulated to Commissioners for approval following amendments.

3. Parish Reviews (EC106/05)

3.1 AG presented the report and advised that there were over 100 cases on file received since 2002, consisting of a varied selection of proposals for new or altered parish electoral arrangements, consequential changes to district and county electoral areas and requests for consent. .

3.2 The main area of concern was how the Commission should address the 50 plus known cases where, in the Commission's view, local authorities had made invalid parish electoral arrangement Orders.. It was questionable whether the public interest would be served by challenging any of the invalid Orders. A more pragmatic approach would be to regularise the Orders as and when the Boundary Committee undertook electoral reviews of the relevant district.

3.3 RZ agreed that challenging the Orders would not be beneficial to the Commission. He observed that, in some cases, the Orders did not reflect the outcome of local consultations among residents.;

3.5 The Commissioners agreed that regularisation of invalid Orders should be undertaken as and when the opportunity arose during electoral reviews. The Commissioners approved the process set out in the report for handling parish reviews.

4. Better Governance for Wales: White Paper

4.1 HG gave a presentation that provided an overview of the response to the White Paper. The deadline for this response is 16 September 2005.

4.2 HG highlighted 2 main areas for inclusion in the Commission's response:

- The proposed change to the electoral system of 1 vote per elector instead of the current 2; and
- The removal of dual candidacy.

- 4.3 HG had contacted all political parties and awaited their response by 11 August. It was agreed that whilst the Commission may not be in a position to favour one option over another, it may still be able to provide information which would inform the debate.
- 4.4 **The Commissioners agreed that a draft response, incorporating the outcomes of the consultation, should be submitted to the next meeting on 7 September 2005.**

5. Electoral Administration Bill (EC107/05)

- 5.1 PW reported that the Bill is now expected to be introduced in the first week of October. The Government has recently proposed pilots of gathering personal identifiers. The Government considered that cross party support is necessary on this issue. If the Bill receives Royal Assent in May or June next year, the annual canvass for 2006 may pilot new forms of data collection. Election pilots would follow this, paving the way for a potential UK Parliamentary general election in 2009 in which electors' signatures would be required at the polling station and for postal vote applications.
- 5.2 It was confirmed that date of birth would be a detail recorded on registration. Government will face questions on tackling fraud, non-registration and signature-based pilots. The practical implications of the collection of personal identifiers will be considered, although no timeline has as yet either been provided or proposed.
- 5.3 A key concern for the Government is the adverse affect that the gathering of personal data may have on registration rates. It was confirmed that pilots would also test strategies and initiatives to counteract any negative impacts which the transition to a system of registration based on the collection and use of individual identifiers might have.
- 5.4 Urgent work is needed over the summer recess period on:
- developing strategies to address possible falls in registration rates, such a carry over; and
 - planning and implementing the pilot schemes.
- 5.5 **The Commissioners noted the current position, and the areas of concern highlighted.**

6. Appointment of Deputy Commissioners

- 6.1 PP presented the report and outlined the planning and timeframes for putting the recommendations into effect.

- 6.2 SY noted that the Speaker must agree the number of Deputy Commissioners. This will not be confirmed until the Order transferring parliamentary boundary commission functions has been made.
- 6.3 PW suggested that an 'in principle' agreement could be reached during discussions with the Speaker.
- 6.4 PP reported that this had been discussed with DCA and the Lord Chancellor would be copied into the response to the Speaker.
- 6.5 **The Commissioners noted the report and the recommendations, and agreed the proposed arrangements.**
7. **Quarterly financial & performance management report to 30 June 2005** (EC108/05)
- 7.1 PW commented that although some of the percentage variations shown against individual resource types looked large, the aggregate variation was not of great concern at this stage in the year. He said that he would recommend in-depth consideration by both senior managers and Commissioners at the six-month stage.
- 7.2 **The Commissioners welcomed and noted the report.**
8. **Communications (oral report)**
- 8.1 TC introduced LW as the new Public Affairs Manager in the Communications Directorate.