

## **Meeting of the Commissioners – 12 February 2001**

**Time:** 12.30pm

**Location:** Board Room, Trevelyan House

**Attendance:** Sam Younger, Chairman  
Pamela Gordon, Commissioner  
Glyn Mathias, Commissioner  
Sir Neil McIntosh, Commissioner  
Karamjit Singh CBE, Commissioner  
Professor Graham Zellick, Commissioner  
Roger Creedon, Chief Executive  
Peter Hodgman, Deputy Chief Executive  
Katie Kerr, Secretary  
Anne Hinds, Head of Press and Publicity (for item 4)  
Carla Andrewes, Strategic Planning and Finance Manager (for item 5)

### **1 Apologies:**

1.1 None

### **2 Matters arising from the minutes of the previous meeting**

#### **2.1 Corrections/Clarification**

Numbering refers to previous minutes

3.5.3 Guidance on Broadcasts to be available in 16 March 2001. RZ has recommended that Anne Sloman be asked to repeat her letter after 16 February when the Commission will be empowered to respond. The new arrangements would take effect from 16 March. Commissioners indicated that they were not currently minded to offer any views.

3.4.7 Date of LGCE presentation was agreed at the meeting as 22.2.01. [Secretary's note: Professor Malcolm Grant, LGCE Chairman, and Barbara Stephens, LGCE CEO will attend the meeting on 22.3.01]

9.1 PH and CA are not required to attend the Speaker's Committee meeting on 14.2.01

Date in the title of the summary should be 29 January not 11 January

#### **2.2 Actions arising from the last minutes**

2.2.1 Replies awaited from the Presiding Officers of the devolved legislatures regarding hosting a reception for members of those bodies.

2.2.2 SY confirmed that the Speaker had offered the use of his apartments for the reception. The Commissioners agreed that the reception will be held on 15 March at 6.30 to 7.30pm. The invitation list should include the party treasurers, Anne Sloman, key academics, representatives of SOLACE and AEA. The guest list will be circulated to all Commissioners with a request for other suggestions.

### **3 Progress report on establishing the Commission**

#### **3.1 Logo**

3.1.1 A logo and address style had now been adopted. Members were shown samples.

## **3.2 Registrations**

3.2.1 RC reported that the database was stable and all the data from existing registered parties had been entered. Parties had been given the opportunity to change the address of accounting units if they did not wish to have a home address made publicly available.

3.2.2 The Commissioners were advised that the new website, including the registers, would go live on Friday 16 February when the old site will be closed. The Website will be up dated weekly to reflect changes to the registers.

3.2.3 107 Parties have registered including 4 who missed the deadline but have now submitted the required information so can be added on 16 February. Twenty-four parties have not responded. All the registered parties have been a copy of their register entry to check their details and a PIN to provide a security check when submitting amendments to the register.

3.2.4 The forms for registration will be available on the website from 16.2.01

3.2.5 The issue of publicising the need for new parties to register if they wish to field candidates at relevant elections was raised. New parties need to submit an acceptable financial scheme before they can be registered. If the guidance is followed there will be no difficulty but otherwise delays could occur. If necessary to meet deadlines for parties to field a candidate at an election the Commission could propose an amendment to the scheme. The guidance note issued with the registration documents provides a template. The importance of not accepting a flawed scheme as this would set a precedent was noted.

3.2.6 It was agreed that budgetary constraints meant that a wide advertising campaign could not be undertaken but other means of bring this to would be through articles in the Local Government Chronicle and other publications.

## **3.3 Recruitment**

3.3.1 The current recruitment schedule was circulated and the progress on staffing the Commission was noted.

## **3.3 IT**

3.3.1 KS reported that the project board meets weekly. Good progress was being made and problems were being resolved quickly and that confidential information will not be accessible through the website. Access to the database will be restricted to the Registrations team although the other staff will be given access to the details available on the public website through their terminals.

3.3.2 Disaster recovery plans for the system were to be developed.

## **3.4 5 year plan and financial estimates**

3.4.1 The Commissioners extended their congratulations to PH and CA on the 5 year plan and estimates submitted to the members of the Speaker's Committee. Minor drafting changes had been made to the document and the revised estimates submitted included figures relating to relocation agreed with the LGCE.

## **3.5 Legislation**

3.5.1 The provisions relating to exempting on Northern Ireland parties from the donation controls are to be debated in the House of Lords on 15/2/01. [Secretary's note: the provisions were

passed]

### **3.6 Grants to meet start up costs**

- 3.6.1 Parties have been advised of their allocation. Two changes were made to the scheme:
- Only 90% of the funds will be released up front until the numbers of claimants is known
  - In line with England and Wales parties with seats at Scottish Community Council level will be eligible. In practice this will not have any effect.

### **3.7 Co-location/Merger with LGCE**

- 3.7.1 RC and KK attended a meeting to discuss staffing levels with Barbara Stephens, CEO of the LGCE, and Valerie Burns, Personal Manager, LGCE. Work would be taken forward to develop an organisation structure, with job descriptions, for the enlarged Commission.

## **4 Details of press launch and points on handling the media**

- 4.1 The following items were circulated for information:
- Press pack including details of the grants to meet start up costs
  - SY's media update
  - Briefing paper on the Commission's enforcement powers (EC13/01)
  - Briefing paper on referendums
- 4.2 SY asked that the Commissioners note issues raised in their discussions with the media to allow this information to be disseminated to others
- 4.3 RC confirmed that the Neill report recommended the Electoral Commission take a role in the running of referendums.
- 4.4 Elizabeth Filkin, Commissioner for Parliamentary Standards, to be asked to provide details of what prompts an investigation and how it is handled

**Note:** Meeting broke for press launch, interviews of individual Commissioners and lunch

## **5 Current year expenditure (EC11/2001)**

- 5.1 The Commissioners noted a projected under-spend of £500,000. CA confirmed that outstanding invoices were being chased and that there would be some end of year flexibility where the Commission can demonstrate that the money will be required for a specific project.
- 5.3 The need to take out journal subscriptions and incur costs of a similar nature prior to the end of the financial year was identified.

## **6 Staffing of Regional Offices (EC12/2001)**

- 6.1 The staffing levels were agreed for planning purposes. The role of the regional offices will encompass policy as well as registration and a link to the Electoral Policy Section will be essential.
- 6.2 It was agreed to advertise the Head of Regional Offices posts at the upper end of the pay scale. The post will be advertised soon to allow for the lead in time and so the individuals selected can be involved in the recruitment of the other staff and the opening of the office.
- 6.3 The posts will be advertised jointly nationally and individually within the regions. A need for a Welsh translation was recognised.

**7 Briefing on enforcement powers (EC13/2001)**

- 7.1 Paper circulated prior to press launch.
- 7.2 Commissioners were asked to make suggestions for topics for similar briefings. A paper on dealing with allegations will be prepared for the meeting on 22/2/01.

**8 Any other business**

- 8.1 Referendums briefing circulated prior to press launch. It was agreed that a contingency plan for running a referendum is required in due course. The views of Returning Officers will be sought.
- 8.2 It was agreed that David Monks, SOLACE, and George Smith, AEA, should be invited to dinner with the Commissioners on 7 March 2001.
- 8.3 Issues that may be raised at the Speaker's Committee meeting were discussed.
- 8.4 NM recommended that thought should be given to the scope of the report on the election so that arrangements to record data can be made. A meeting with representatives from SOLACE and AEA was proposed and it was agreed that a paper should be made available for a subsequent Commissioners' meeting. RC confirmed that he was talking to the Home Office regarding this matter and that it would be possible to send a circular to Returning Officers to ask them to record the desired information.

**10 Date of the next meeting**

- 10.1 2pm Thursday 22 February 2001, the meeting will be preceded by a meeting with the party treasurers at 11.30am to discuss the political parties panel and other matters. Lunch will be provided.

### Outstanding action points from meeting on 18.12.00

7	<p>Comments on the Control and Reporting of Donations documentation to RC/PH.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• RC/PH to expand fundraising dinner example to include need to check the purchaser is a permissible donor</li> <li>• RC to review with DTI and LGA how to inform Companies and Independents respectively of the requirements</li> </ul> <p>RC/PH to review the order of the questions</p>	Comments prior to 11/1/01, document published 2/01
8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NM to e-mail RC comments regarding guidance on campaign expenditure by mid January.</li> <li>• RC to consult parties on the guidance on campaign expenditure prior to Christmas</li> <li>• RC to report back to Commissioners with views of the parties on assistance grants</li> </ul>	29.1.00 letters consulting the parties sent 20/12/01

### Outstanding action points from meeting on 11.1.01

2	RC/PH to liaise with CBI, IoD and LGA Independent Group to provide articles for in house publications to raise awareness of the Commission and the control and reporting of donations	16.2.01
6	Campaign Expenditure – RC to advise parties that no code could be in place for a Spring General Election due to lack of time but consultation with the Political Parties should commence before this date	On-going
8	RC to expand current guide (Q&A) for parties in particular with regard to notional expenditure	12.2.01

### Outstanding action points from meeting on 29.1.01

3	Representative from LGCE be invited to address a Commissioners about the role of the LGCE	22/3/01
7	The position related to the liability of Commissioners is to be checked	8/3/01
8	SY to write to the Broadcasters after the commencement order was laid acknowledging the timetable and proposing resuming discussion once other parties had been consulted	22/2/01
10	NM and GM to establish links with the Scottish and Welsh Boundary Commissions and SY/KS/RC to go to Northern Ireland for a similar purpose	8/3/01

### Action points from meeting on 12.2.01

1	Advertise need to register parties in advance of standing candidates at the next election	6/4/01
2	Elizabeth Filkin to be asked to provide details of what prompts an investigation	22/2/01
3	Initiation of the recruitment of the Head of the Regional Offices	31/3/01
4	Commissioners to disseminate information about issues raised during media interviews	On-going
5	Commissioners to make suggestions for topics for future briefing papers	On-going
6	Put in place arrangements for developing a contingency plan for a national referendum	31/5/01
7	Paper on the scope and production of a report on the next election to be presented at a Commissioners' meeting	22/3/01