



Meeting of the Electoral Commissioners

2.30pm Tuesday 3 April 2001 at Dolphyn Court, the meeting was preceded by an opportunity to view the premises and meet representatives of the staff of the LGCE.

Present: Sam Younger, Chairman
Pamela Gordon
Glyn Mathias
Sir Neil McIntosh
Karamjit Singh
Professor Graham Zellick
Robin Gray (LGCE & Parliamentary Boundary Commission for England), for item 1
Roger Creedon
Anne Hinds
Peter Hodgman
Nicole Smith
Chris Welford
Rael Zackon
Katie Kerr, Secretary

Apologies: None

Note: Sections appearing in *italic bold* denote action points or decisions

1 Presentation on the role of the Parliamentary Boundary Commission for England by Robin Gray

- 1.1 SY thanked RG for agreeing to address the meeting. RG explained that he was a member of both the LGCE and the PBC. He was the first non-lawyer to be appointed to any of the PBCs. His appointment to the PBC was the result of the Quinquennial Review conducted by Robert Hazell. The review recommended merging the LGCE and PBC or at least their secretariats. When neither option was deemed possible without primary legislation the proposal of having a Commissioner in common was made.
- 1.2 The work of the PBC builds on the wards as determined by the LGCE. RG explained that the PBC differed from the LGCE in the following ways:
- The PBC does not have a rolling programme and recently started the 5th General Review
 - The PBC is restricted to using population figures as given at a particular date (2/2000) rather than predicted population figures

- Smaller membership than the LGCE, Chaired by the Speaker who does not attend, the Deputy Chair is a high court judge, 2nd member is a QC, Robin is the 3rd.
 - There is a legal requirement to hold a public meeting if certain groups e.g. political parties or a requisite number of electors raise an objection to the proposals
 - The PBC's secretariat is staffed by 15 secondees from Office of National Statistics
- 1.3 The 5th General review is due to be completed in 2006 and current progress is ahead of the timescale achieved in previous reviews because of the use of GIS and the work of 2 senior members of staff who were retained between the 4th review and this one. The staff produced the report on the 4th review, designed a training manual and undertook preparatory work including policy in advance of the commencement of the 5th review.

2 Minutes of 22 March 2001 – Points of accuracy

- 3.3 Hilary Armstrong's name was incorrectly spelt
- 3.4 Should read 'The Local Government Boundary Commission's role is to promote electoral equality but the Commissioners operate within varying statutory provisions. The Scots take a mathematical approach and the Welsh give greater weight to community identity issues. The LGCE start from a mathematical approach that can be varied in response to community issues. Reform of the role of Local Government is likely increasingly to raise the issue of council size. The LGCE promote councils putting forward their own proposals as the 1st stage of a review.'
- 4.2 Replace 2c with 2c(ii)
- 4.4 Replace 2c with 2c(i)

3 Matters arising

- 2 (Item 2) The Welsh Reception will occur on 8 May 2001. The presentation and reception in Northern Ireland held on 2 April went well and the opportunity to spend time with the Chief Electoral Officer, Dennis Stanley, and his staff was beneficial.
- 4 The Project Board has met and endorsed the establishment of sub-groups looking specifically at areas including HR, IT, Accommodation, Process and Communications. RC, PH, Barbara Stephens (LGCE) and Patricia Pena (LGCE) are to meet after the meeting to draw up a project plan with timescales, critical path and milestones including the need to report on progress to the Commission meeting on 10 May. RC and BS are to send a note to staff regarding the merger.

- 9.1 The only letter written regarding the date of the election was from RC to Rick Evans a Home Office Official. The note of the Commission's position on the election date remains valid.
- 9.2 The Scottish Green Party have issued a press release relating to their concern that they are excluded from claiming grants to meet start up cost because they were previously unable to register. The press release was copied to all present.
- 9.5 Regular opportunities for the media to visit the Commission would commence after the general election.
- 9.9 The issue of imprints will be resolved by primary legislation, the Election Publication Bill. The Bill will confer on the Home Secretary the power to reinstate the provision at a later date.

4 Directors' Reports

4.1 Registrations and Compliance

Summary circulated as attached

4.2 Legal Services

Work continues on answering questions on donation and expenditure questions and will feed into the Commission meetings as agreed. Other areas of work are being looked at including the Process subgroup of the LGCE project and legal aspects of policy. The Scottish Green party has asked about accepting funds from a foreign trust.

4.3 Strategic Planning and Resources

Team is in a state of flux as work on financial controls on parties is passed to CW and the new areas of work (HR, IT and Facilities) are acquired. The financial estimates have been published. The £500,000 start-up costs budgeted to be spent before the new financial year has not been claimed by the parties, therefore, the liability transfers to this year. Negotiations will occur with HM Treasury with regard to roll over from 2000/2001. The out-turn for the year 2000/1 will be in the region of £1,000,000 under budget.

4.4 Media and Public Affairs

A note on press enquiries and coverage was circulated with the papers. The Central Office of Information are unwilling to publish the adverts relating to 3rd parties without Cabinet Office approval of the text due to the Government's restrictions on publications during an election period but the Cabinet Office have indicated that there is unlikely to be a problem. The Home Office wish to take the lead in announcing the £12 million funding for the electronic register project and the Commission's press release will be

drafted accordingly. Folio Creative is working on developing a coherent brand for the Commission that can be adapted for the Regional Offices. Liaison with other teams will commence with a view to standardising branding across all publications.

4.5 Policy

Currently working on mapping what other organisations are doing in this field e.g. the Hansard Society. Visits to South Oxfordshire and Westminster electoral administrators have proved useful. NS attended a CREST conference 'the Crisis of Democracy' where the topic of low turnout was discussed and the Net Election Debate that highlighted the possibilities of campaigning on the net.

4.6 CEO

RC reported that issues for the medium and longer term were now being considered as the Senior Management Team was in place.

5 Preparation for Election

5.1 Not taken

6 Review of General Election 2001

- **Update on Project Plan – EC 28 / 01**
- **Proposed Research and Consultation Strategy – EC 29 / 01**

6.1 *After discussion the project and report framework was agreed.*

6.2 The delay in the local elections will allow additional time for liaison with AEA/SOLACE/COSLA and others to obtain their support. Rallings and Thrasher have agreed to undertake statistical work for the Commission.

6.3 The Commission's help line will be for everyone except the general public. The number will be published to electoral administrators and the political parties. The number of calls cannot be predicted, as the Home Office do not have the information. It is hoped to provide a responsive and open service, maintaining the good feedback on service levels already achieved. The AEA have agreed to provide a source of advice over the period.

6.4 In future the Commission will run the public help line but as it involves a 24 hour call centre expected to receive 30,000 calls it is not possible to take on this responsibility at this time. The Home Office will promote their call centre in the national press principally in respect of absent voting and the rolling register. The call centre staff work to a script and will refer to the Commission if necessary. *A member of staff will visit the public call centre.*

- 6.5 A set of Frequently Asked Questions has been collated and will be circulated to Commissioners. Some basic FAQs will be placed on the web-site.
- 6.6 Information for the report will be gathered from key stakeholders by questionnaires and letters to those whose roles are specific e.g. Royal Mail. Some research will be undertaken in advance to ensure the appropriate issues are covered.
- 6.7 Discussion of the format of post election reports occurred including the authoritative results. The possibility of producing the report prior to the summer recess relies on preparation in advance of the election without pre-judging the issues. *It was agreed that an outline of the report would be produced for discussion at the next meeting.*
- 6.8 The proposals for media monitoring and the need for this to be seen as fair were discussed. The possibility of using alternative research methods e.g. conference/seminars were raised. The Commissioners agreed that the analysis published should be from methodology recognised as independent and credible and include electors as well as the other stakeholders.

6.9 Role of the Commissioners during the Election Campaign – EC 30 / 01

The Commissioners and members of the senior staff will observe the elections. *It was agreed that the NS would link individuals to specific geographical areas, other than their own constituency, where they would develop links with the electoral administrators and others and staff briefings etc.* The geographical spread will cover differing areas of population and specific circumstances e.g. where there is a Westminster election at the same time as an election to the Scottish Parliament. To maintain independence they would need to talk to all candidates and may use exposure to local media to promote the role of the Commission. The value will be to see the issues raised and sharing this information with others at the Commission.

7 Report on a visit to the Indian Electoral Commission

- 7.1 Deferred to 12 April 2001.

8 Commissioners' Liability – EC31/01

- 8.1 *It was agreed that the general approach appeared appropriate but the Secretary to the Speaker's Committee would be consulted on this issue specifically with regard to the wording to be used.*

9 Code of Practice for Commissioners – EC32/01

9.1 ***It was agreed that a revised draft be circulated to the Commissioners prior to the next meeting.*** The revisions should include to the following amendments:

- Inclusion of reference to an external member in the terms of reference of the Audit Committee
- Section on Personal Liability to await the outcome of Section 8 above
- The Code of Conduct for Staff of the Electoral Commission should include a cross reference to the Commission's Equal Opportunities Policy
- Minor drafting points to be raised with the Secretary after the meeting

9.2 A summary of the Code will be published on the website.

9.3 ***The Commissioners agreed to let the Secretary have details for an entry in a register of interests and a list of hospitality and/or gifts received since their formal appointment on 19 January 2001.***

10 Any other business

10.1 In view of the change in the date of the local elections the Parliamentary Parties Panel meeting scheduled for 22 May was cancelled and the parties will be offered an alternative date at the end of this month.

10.2 As the General Election will not be held on 3 May 2001 the following Commission meetings were cancelled:

- Tuesday 17 April 2001
- Tuesday 1 May 2001

10.3 In view of the possibility of a General Election being held on 7 June the following additional meetings were provisionally agreed:

- 2.30pm Tuesday 15 May 2001
- 2.30pm Tuesday 22 May 2001
- 11am Wednesday 30 May 2001
- 12.30pm Tuesday 5 June 2001

10.4 The resolution relating to the remuneration of the Commissioners has been passed and the mechanism for making payment is in place.

10.5 ***The advertisements advising 3rd parties of the need to register will be published when the general election is announced.***

10.6 The Commissioners were asked to note the changes to the organisational structure including the revised job titles.

10.7 Commissioners gave their assent to a proposed accommodation move that would enable the Media and Public Affairs Team to have an office and the HR

Manager to have an office for single occupancy providing a greater degree of confidentiality.

11 **Date of the next meeting**

- 11.1 9.30am Thursday 12 April 2001 in the Boardroom at Trevelyan House, the meeting will be preceded by a dinner for the Commissioners and CEO at 7.30 for 8pm on Wednesday 11 April in the Clarence Room at the Crown Plaza London – St James, Buckingham Gate, London SW1E 6AF.