

# Electoral Commission

## **Commissioners' Meeting 22 February 2001**

**Present:** Sam Younger, Chairman  
Professor Graham Zellick, Commissioner  
Sir Neil McIntosh, Commissioner  
Pamela Gordon, Commissioner  
Roger Creedon, Interim Chief Executive  
Rael Zackon, Head of Legal Services  
Peter Hodgman, Interim Deputy Chief Executive  
Katie Kerr, Secretary

**Apologies:** Karamjit Singh, Commissioner  
Glyn Mathias, Commissioner

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

### **1 Minutes of meeting of 12/2/01**

- 1.1 Date should read 12 February
- 1.2 Section 3.5.3 should be 16 March 2001 not May 2001
- 1.3 Section 3.4.7 should refer to Professor Malcolm Grant

### **2 Matters arising**

- 2.1 Section 2.2.1 a response had been received from the Presiding Officer of the Scottish Parliament but was awaited from the Northern Ireland and Welsh Assemblies
- 2.2 Section 8.2 David Monks is unable to attend on 7 March. An alternative date is sought possibly after the reception on 15 March.

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

- 3.1 A preliminary meeting was held on 22 February with the Parliamentary Parties to agree the arrangements for future meetings of the Parliamentary Parties Panel. The Panel would meet quarterly, at the Commission's premises. The Commission will provide secretariat and the meetings will be private until the Panel invite the Chairman of the Electoral Commission and Commissioners to

join the meeting. The next meeting will be in mid-May. In discussion of the following issues were raised:

- Political Party Broadcasts
- Campaign expenditure, especially the difficulty of volunteer party workers implementing the controls
- Commission's procedure for dealing with allegations
- Policy development grants
- Applications for grants to meet start up costs
- Common accounting year
- Audit standards
- Dissemination of advice given to one party to the others Informing potential 3<sup>rd</sup> parties of the need to register

3.2 5 year plan and financial estimates were agreed at the Speaker's Committee on 14 February

3.3 ***Website was up and running on 16 February 2001 – Commissioners extended their congratulations to the staff involved.*** More forms and explanatory notes will be available

3.4 ***Commissioners warmly endorsed Roger Creedon's decision to award bonuses to staff from the project team, in recognition of their work***

3.5 Forms for applying for grants to meet start up costs dispatched to the parties today

3.6 39 forms for registering a new party and 2 forms for registering as a 3<sup>rd</sup> party have been dispatched.

3.7 Recruitment schedule circulated

3.8 Press information circulated. ***The press cuttings service to be extended to cover the Local Government Chronicle Action: Anne Hinds***

3.9 Project Board regarding the transfer of LGCE's functions is to meet on 23/2/01. The Options Appraisal of accommodation options with additional input from the Electoral Commission to be considered at the next Electoral Commissioners' meeting prior to the meeting with Professor Malcolm Grant on 22/3/01. ***Commissioners endorsed the provision of additional resources to meet the workload associated with the project and the on-going work of establishing the Commission.***

3.10 It was noted that many issues relating to the transfer of functions would need consideration by the Electoral Commission in addition to that of possible co-location; a timetable would need to be prepared.

#### **4 Procedure for dealing with allegations (EC14/01)**

4.1 The paper was fully discussed. Points raised included

- Section 7 the need to make an appropriate statement at the conclusion of discussions
- Section 10 anonymous complaints if supported by evidence or repeated may justify further action and some incidents may be too small to justify action being taken. There is a need to consider quick response to cases which are outside the jurisdiction of the Commission or are manifestly unfounded
- Annex A the timescales involved appear lenient and may be influenced by other circumstances e.g. changes to registered details may not justify action but a late a donation report in the run up to an election may do so.
- Annex B consideration to be given to tightening the deadlines for issuing reminders and requesting a response.
- The Commission will need to be able to explain what action was taken to encourage compliance, but a system for issuing reminders should not be permanent
- The system should imply the use of discretion without undermining the effectiveness of the controls and be implemented on the basis that the new regime will be reviewed
- The role of the Commissioners needs to be further defined
- A quarterly report on allegations should be presented to the Commissioners

*It was agreed that a revised paper should come forward to the next Commissioners' meeting* **Action: RC**

## **5 Guidance Notes (EC15/01)**

**5.1** *The Guidance Notes were approved for posting on the Commission's website*

**5.2** Commissioners wished to be involved in approving advice given to parties. *It was agreed that routine enquiries should be delegated to the Chief Executive. It was further agreed that additions to the advice posted on the website should be subject to consultation with Graham Zellick (or in his absence Sam Younger) on behalf of the Commissioners and such additions routinely tabled at the next available Commissioners' meeting.*

## **6 Any other business**

**6.1** The Speaker's reception will occur at 6.30-7.30 pm on 15 March 2001. GZ asked if it was possible for the time to be 6pm. Commissioners were asked for proposals for the guest list specifically academics and leading journalists such as political editors.

**6.1.1** The following suggestions were made:

- Secretary of State for Wales

- Secretary of State for Northern Ireland
  - Lord Neill's successor
  - LGA Independent Group
  - The main day to day contacts within the 3 major political parties
- 6.2 NM underlined the need to consult with the Returning Officers and others who are not covered by SOLACE and AEA. COSLA provides a possible forum. It was acknowledged that RC was already doing work in this area.
- 6.3 The Home Office press release on the introduction of the rolling register had been previously circulated.

**7 Date of the next meeting**

- 7.1 Thursday 8 March at 10am