

Confirmed on 13 October 2005

Minutes of the meeting of the Electoral Commission held on 29 September 2005.

Present: Sam Younger (SY) (Chair)
Pamela Gordon (PG)
Glyn Mathias (GM)
Sir Neil McIntosh (NM)

In attendance: Peter Wardle (PW)
Jacqui Dixon (JD)
Roger Gough
Angela Salt (AS)
Kate Sullivan (KBS)
Nicole Smith (NS)
Rael Zackon (RZ)
Doug Stewart (DS)
Mike Harold (MH)
Heather Gentry (HG)
Ann Devine (AD) (for item 1)

Apologies: Karamjit Singh

1. Electoral change amendment orders

1.1 AD presented a report recommending the approval of electoral change amendment orders in respect of:

- i) District of Craven (EC122/05)
- ii) City of Nottingham (EC123/05)
- iii) Borough of Oldham EC124/05)
- iv) District of Stroud (EC125/05)
- v) Borough of Wigan (EC126/05)

1.2 **The Commissioners approved the electoral change orders and authorised the affixation of the Commission's seal to the orders.**

2. Community-based public awareness review (EC121/05)

- 2.1 HG presented the report, which highlighted both the positive feedback from stakeholders and the learning points from the current activities. The recommendation was that CBPAA should continue but the method of delivery should change. GM stated that both NIF and Outreach had been successful in the terms in which they had been established. However, resources could be better used with the Commission taking a more strategic, leader/facilitator role. The report indicated the staffing and structural issues which needed to be put in place to achieve the objectives. Commissioners would be provided with more details as part of the communication strategy.
- 2.2 AS added that the majority of s13 funding was used on advertising for a mass audience, but it was recognised that some audiences were not best addressed by advertising and more effective ways were required to address the needs of these groups. The new approach would be more flexible, with options for direct delivery but focussing on partnership working, and was felt to be the best approach to deliver the strategic objectives.
- 2.3 The Commissioners approved the proposed approach, and highlighted the following issues:
- consideration of areas of deprivation to be added to the definition of hard-to-reach groups
 - The role of the devolved offices
 - The management of the transition to the new arrangements
 - The need to provide the Speaker's Committee with the rationale for the split of s13 money between advertising and CBPAA
 - Commissioner involvement in the process
- 2.4 NM advised that the Audit Committee had received the draft brief of the VFM study of s13 expenditure. The brief would be circulated for information.
- 2.5 The Commissioners thanked HG for producing such a clear report.
- 2.6 **The Commissioners agreed the recommendations.**

3. Electoral register: response to DCA (EC128/05)

- 3.1 MH presented the report, which set out a draft response to the consultation. The draft response extended the current position taken by

the Commission, on access to the full register, in particular in relation to the availability of the register for research purposes and the use of the full register for other elections, for example, local referendums in Scotland.

3.2 The following points were raised in the discussion:

- the proposals in relation to security and law enforcement were an extension of the, currently limited, non-election purposes for which the register might be used
- it was for the Government to consider safeguards on use for non-electoral purposes
- the use of the full register for other elections had been raised by the PPP
- the reference to the definition of 'electoral purposes' should be amended to ensure consistency with the approach to this issue taken in the Commission's report 'The marked register'.

3.3 The Commissioners asked that the response should only note the proposals in relation to security and law enforcement.

3.4 **The Commissioners agreed the draft response, subject to the drafting amendments discussed, and authorised SY to sign off the final version of the response.**

4. North East regional referendum: draft statutory report (EC128/05)

4.1 NS introduced the report; two reports had been prepared, a short statutory report, (with full Commission papers available on the Commission's website) and a longer internal report. It was intended to publish the statutory report on 4 November 2005. The report highlighted key issues for the future, for example the limits on expenditure, which needed to be resolved before the next referendum.

4.2 **The Commissioners agreed the report, subject to the amendments discussed, and authorised SY to sign off the final version for publication.**

5. Planning for Parliamentary Boundaries transfer (EC131/05)

5.1 DS and SH circulated the highlight report. The Commissioners discussed the timescale for the recruitment of Deputy Commissioners and the required lead-in time. The Commissioners had no strong view about taking on the functions, but if it was required, there had to be sufficient time to put new arrangements into place.

- 5.2 SY agreed that he should respond to the letter from the Minister of State, and copy the correspondence to the Speaker.
- 5.3 **The Commissioners noted the highlight report, and the timetabling issues.**

6. Electoral Administration Bill

- 6.1 NS advised that it was still anticipated that the draft Bill would be laid on 11 October. On 25 October there was likely to be a hearing before the Constitutional Affairs Committee. There would be the opportunity for submitting written evidence.
- 6.2 The Commissioners discussed the following issues:
- The proposals for locally-initiated pilots
 - The absence of quality control for pilots
 - The production of a parallel register
 - The possible implementation date in relation to the 2006 canvass
 - The missing items: donations by MPs and deregistration
 - The need to identify both costs for implementation of individual registration and operating costs
- 6.3 The Commissioners would be meeting the Lord Chancellor after this Commission meeting.
- 6.4 **The Commissioners noted the current situation.**

7. Matters for information

- 7.1 The Commissioners received the following items for information:
- Application for registration: Nationalist Alliance (EC130/05)
 - The arrangements for the next Commission meeting on 12/13 October in Derry.
- 7.2 AS reported on the feedback and internal debriefing from the party conferences attended so far.