

Commissioners' Meeting, Thursday 22 March 2001

Present: Sam Younger, Chairman
Pamela Gordon
Glyn Mathias
Sir Neil McIntosh
Karamjit Singh
Professor Graham Zellick
Professor Malcolm Grant (LGCE), for items 3 & 4
Barbara Stephens (LGCE), for items 3 & 4
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 Minutes of 8 March 2001 – Points of accuracy

9.7 Press cutting service now covers ethnic minority press

2 Matters arising

- Item 2 As no earlier date has been made available the reception in Wales will be held on 8 May
- Item 3.6 The Labour Party have not come back on the Commission's response regarding political party broadcasts. The Green Party for England and Wales have complained that the rules adopted by the broadcasters for election broadcasts discriminate against them.
- Item 4.3 The letter regarding the common accounting year has not yet been sent to the political parties
- Item 5.2 Labour Party have stated that they would like the campaign expenditure issue relating to the hire of party stands to be resolved prior to the annual conference season

3 **Presentation on LGCE by Professor Malcolm Grant and Barbara Stephens**

- 3.1 Background papers were distributed and MG invited the Electoral Commissioners and the staff of the Commission to visit the LGCE. *It was agreed that a forthcoming Electoral Commission Meeting would be held at Dolphyn Court.* MG spoke about the LGCE and was thanked by SY.
- 3.2 The issues for the LGCE were to hand over a 'going concern' on the transfer of functions to the Electoral Commission and to minimise disruption to the programme of periodic electoral reviews.
- 3.3 Hilary Armstrong announced the date of transfer as 1 April 2002 in the House of Commons on 20 March 2001. From the date of transfer the Electoral Commission will be required to deal with the representations from the public on reviews and to make the orders, which is work currently undertaken by the DETR.
- 3.4 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.
- 3.5 The use of geographical information systems (GIS) in England is limited by accuracy of the electoral information but a secondment of a member Ordnance Survey staff to the LGCE is working on this issue. In Scotland GIS is used but the situation is different as there are no parish councils that are used by the LGCE as building blocks in the parts of England where they exist.

4 **Co-location options appraisal (EC27/01)**

- 4.1 The revised paper is a joint one and was acknowledged to reflect Electoral Commission and LGCE concerns. The work of staff involved in preparing it was acknowledged particularly PH and Patricia Pena of the LGCE. The option of 1 July has been changed to 1 September and the corresponding financial figures have been amended.
- 4.2 Option 2c(ii) is not certain to be available, as accommodation within Trevelyan House may not become free. The Health Development Agency is due to complete an options appraisal prior to the summer.
- 4.3 The LGCE have received legal advice that indicated that co-location on or after 1/4/02 may complicate the transfer of staff under TUPE so considered this option high risk. *The legal advice is to be copied to the Electoral*

Commission.

- 4.4 ***Following discussion the case for a single central London location was unanimously endorsed. Options 1, 3 and 4 were therefore rejected. Option 2 was approved, and it was acknowledged that the difference in financial cost between options 2a, 2b and 2c(i) were relatively marginal and the decision should be driven by operational considerations***
- 4.6 The following points were acknowledged:
- While it would be convenient for the Electoral Commission, which is in the process of starting up, to delay moving to alternative accommodation the LGCE's work programme and the need to mould a single organisation would benefit from an early move
 - The date of co-location may be determined by the availability of accommodation
 - If the General Election is not called on 3 May 2001 it will be necessary to revisit the options
- 4.7 The LGCE have released Patricia Pena full time to the project and Rachael Henry, the Finance and Facilities Manager will be available to work on acquisition of the property.
- 4.8 ***Agreed a target date at the beginning of 2002 for co-location and for the project board to report on accommodation issues to the Commissioners' meeting on 10 May 2001.*** Sub-groups of the Project Board will pursue other aspects of the merger including opening communication between the separate groups of staff.

5 Reports on Elections (EC22/01)

- 5.1 Factors to consider are:
- What is to be achieved
 - The timetable
 - The output
- 5.2 The paper proposed a 2 stage reporting process. David Butler has suggested that the Commission publish the definitive results promptly after the election in addition to the other reports. It would be necessary to have good communication with the electoral administrators to ensure that they provided the necessary information. The use of nomination forms to produce a document to which the figures can be added would enable a quick turn around.
- 5.3 ***The proposals in the paper and the production of authoritative results were agreed. NS to provide the Commission meeting on 3 April 2001 with a report on what the Electoral Policy Team and Commissioners need to be doing during the Election campaign as part of a coherent programme with objectives to focus on and a statement of what the Commission will and will not be doing.***

6 Campaign expenditure issues (EC23/01)

6.1 *The frequently asked questions will be published on the website and sent under cover of a letter to all the political parties. The Commissioners acknowledged Shena Clarke's work in preparing the summary.*

7 Travel and Subsistence Policy (EC25/01)

7.1 The use of first class travel was discussed. *It was agreed that first class travel would not be used as a matter of course but only when it was justified by the nature of the journey e.g. long duration or peak time travel. The policy was agreed.*

8 Quorum

8.1 *The recommendations in the paper were agreed subject to the following amendments:*

- When 7 Commissioners are in post the quorum will be 4 not 5
- 3 b) when the Chairman is unavailable the Commissioners present can nominate one of their number to act as Chairman for the meeting
- 4.1 should read 'The quorum is not specifically defined in the legislation.'

9 Any Other business

9.1 *A draft of the Commission's position on the election date was discussed and approved subject to a number of amendments (copy of amended paper attached)*

9.2 NM reported that he met separately with the SNP and Scottish Green Party. Both were supportive of the Electoral Commission particularly in relation to the representation amongst Commissioners at sub UK national level. Concerns were raised regarding the allocation of the grants to meet start up costs because they were not based on the vote at the Scottish Parliament Elections and in the case of the Scottish Green Party because they were excluded due to the decision taken by the previous Registrar of Political Parties not to register them. The parties argued that policy development grants be allocated on a different system and asked that the fact that the next elections will be for the devolved legislatures be taken into account. Under the legislation, only parties represented at Westminster will be eligible for the policy development grants.

9.3 The AEA course for electoral administrators attended by SY, KS and GM was helpful. PG and NM were to attend a course for experienced Returning Officers shortly.

- 9.4 19 new applications for registration as political parties had been received and 8 have been approved. Some applications have been referred back due to problems with the financial scheme, although a model scheme for small parties has been provided in the guidance. ***Registered 3rd parties will be included in future reports on registration.***
- 9.5 KS reported that the session targeting ethnic minority media had been successful and resulted in interviews with the Asian Voice and Sunrise Radio. ***AH to establish lunches for the press who indicate that they would like to know more about the Commission.***
- 9.6 The IT was working well. The date for handing over to the in-house team was to be the end of April but this would be extended so Anite were present for the Election if it occurred on 3 May 2001. The transfer will need to be carefully planned.
- 9.7 GM has met with the Chairman of the Local Government Boundary Commission for Wales. The option of sharing their accommodation does not look likely but the situation will be kept under review.
- 9.8 ***It was decided that it was appropriate to use the Central Office of Information to place the adverts to be run by the Commission during the Election campaign.*** Although the Commission was independent of government it was possible to ask the COI to run adverts on behalf of the Commission that did not include then COI branding which would be cheaper than direct resourcing the advertisements.
- 9.9 **Imprints**
- 9.9.1 The issue of imprints on election material was discussed. ***Commissioners endorsed the view expressed in the Chairman's letter to the Home Secretary.***
- 9.9.2 ***A letter should be sent to all the political parties and 3rd parties regarding this matter once clarification is received.***

10 Date of the next meeting

Tuesday 3 April 2001 at 2.30pm at the LGCE's premises, Dolphyn Court, 10-11 Great Turnstile, London WC1V 7JU. The meeting will be preceded by a tour of the premises and a lunch at 1.30pm.