

Draft as at 30 September 2003

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE ELECTORAL COMMISSION HELD ON 29 SEPTEMBER 2003.

Present: Sam Younger (SY) (Chair)
Pamela Gordon (PG)
Karamjit Singh (KS)
Sir Neil McIntosh (NM)

In attendance: Roger Creedon (RC)
Jacqui Dixon (JD)
Nicole Smith (NS)
Chris Welford (CW)
Martine Padwell (MP) (for items 1 – 6 inclusive)

Boundary Committee: Archie Gall (AG) (for items 4 – 6 inclusive)

PG and AG did not take part in the decisions on items 4 and 5.

Implementation Team: Alice Cuninghame (AC) (for items 1 – 6 inclusive)
Ann Devine (AD) (for items 1 – 6 inclusive)

Apologies: Glyn Mathias
Professor Graham Zellick

1. Minutes of the Remuneration Committee on 2 September 2003.

1.1 The minutes of the meeting of the Remuneration Committee held on 2 September 2003 were agreed.

2. Minutes of the meeting of the Electoral Commission on 2 September 2003.

2.1 The minutes of the meeting of the Electoral Commission held on 2 September 2003 were agreed, subject to the following substantive amendments:

Paragraph 6.5: 'minor' in the first line of the last sentence should read 'narrow'.

2.2 The report (EC192/03) should be discussed at a future meeting. The paper should be amended to include examples of possible names.

3. Minutes of the meeting of the Electoral Commission on 11 September 2003.

3.1 The minutes of the meeting of the Electoral Commission held on 11 September 2003 were agreed, subject to minor typographical amendments.

- 3.2 KS reported that a useful meeting had been held with EONI on the report on Electoral Fraud. An announcement on elections for the Northern Ireland Assembly was expected; if an election is held in autumn 2003, the report would be published soon after the election.
- 3.3 NM expressed concern about accessibility to the statutory reports on the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly elections. RC agreed to explore options, including contact with Capability Scotland and the possibility of an audio-version on the Internet.
- 3.4 RC reported that the Annual Report would be laid before Parliament in October.
- 3.5 It was reported that a number of political parties in Northern Ireland had not submitted claims under the Reimbursement Scheme. The statutory cut-off date is 30 September 2003.
- 3.6 SY reported on his meeting with Peter Hain MP. SY has been invited to make a presentation to the committee.
- 3.7 RC reported that the Scottish Executive had requested comments on voting methods, and PR in particular, by mid-October. SY proposed that the response from the Commission should set out the issues which had to be considered, without proposing solutions.

4. Periodic Electoral Review: City of Birmingham

- 4.1 AC presented the report which recommended that the Commission endorse the recommendations of the Boundary Committee in respect of the Aston and Perry Barr wards, having received further advice and information from the Boundary Committee. The evidence put forward did not support alternative arrangements, and the 17% variation would be unprecedented in a Metropolitan area.
- 4.2 **The Commissioners agreed to accept the recommendations, subject to the modification set out in the report and agreed on behalf of the Boundary Committee, and subject to the agreement of GM and GZ.**

5. Periodic Electoral Review: Borough of Dudley

- 5.1 AD presented the report which referred to the further advice and information received from the Boundary Committee. The Commissioners drew attention to the comments in paragraph 15 of the Boundary Committee report of 5 September 2003, and in the letter from the Boundary Committee to the secretary to the Commission dated 5 September 2003, concerning the quality and content of the evidence. The Commissioners requested AG to check the correspondence and to produce a note before SY consults GM and GZ on this report.
- 5.2 **The Commissioners agreed to accept the recommendations of the Boundary Committee, subject to AG producing a note on the content and quality of the evidence received, and to the agreement of GM and GZ.**

6. Electoral Change Orders

6.1 The Commissioners considered the draft Electoral Change Orders for:

- City of Coventry
- City of Liverpool
- Borough of Sandwell
- Borough of Solihull
- Borough of Stockton-on-Tees
- Borough of Walsall
- Borough of Wolverhampton

6.2 AC advised Commissioners that there was a minor amendment to Schedule 3 of the order relating to Stockton-on-Tees.

6.3 **The Commissioners agreed the Electoral Change Orders for:**

- **City of Coventry**
- **City of Liverpool**
- **Borough of Sandwell**
- **Borough of Solihull**
- **Borough of Stockton-on-Tees as amended**
- **Borough of Walsall**
- **Borough of Wolverhampton**

7. Role of the Commission at Regional Referendums

7.1 NS and DS presented the report. SY advised that in future the Referendums Programme Board would be staff-driven; SY and NM would receive the papers and would be able to comment on them. The Commissioners would receive a summary report on a monthly basis.

7.2 NS stated that the proposals in the report could be dealt with in the Conduct Order. The following points were raised in the discussion:

- The voter-centred approach was a strong argument for the approach being suggested
- Care needed to be taken as to whether this approach would set a precedent for other referendums
- Care also needed to be taken as to how the Regional Returning Officers were involved
- If the role of the CCO were delegated, SY also needed to be able to rescind the delegation
- If the correct process was an appointment, the terms of the appointment needed to specify the responsibilities
- There would be added value to ensuring consistency across the regions
- The Electoral Administrators and RROs wanted clear information on what was required of them
- The Commission would be in a better position to advise on the process for an all-postal vote

- Fees and charges needed to include the cost of voter information
- 7.3 The Commissioners agreed with the proposals for integrated voter information. However, after a detailed discussion on the role of the CCO, there was agreement that there was value in keeping this role within the Commission. There was an expectation that the Chair of the Commission would be the CCO. Discussion should take place with the Regional Returning Officers on their role, and the possibility of establishing a role of Deputy Counting Officer. PG referred to the different local government issues in each region, and in areas of each regions; these should be dealt with locally.
- 7.4 NM asked that the estimated cost of an integrated voter information service be provided for the Business Planning meeting in October.
- 7.5 **The Commissioners accepted the recommendation in respect of an integrated voter information service, subject to cost estimates being provided. The Commissioners agreed that the role of the Chief County Officer should not be relinquished.**

8. Referendums – designation

- 8.1 DS presented the report, and advised that the forms would be reformatted.
- 8.2 **The Commissioners approved the guidelines set out in Appendix C to the report.**

9. Referendums – Euro franchise

- 9.1 DS presented the report and advised that a Bill could be publishing this autumn including the franchise and the question.
- 9.2 **The Commissioners approved the policy statement set out in the report.**

10. Referendums - Euro referendum question

- 10.1 DS presented the report. PG pointed out that the statement that there would be no reorganisation of local authorities in each region was now incorrect, and that this should be drawn to the attention of the Minister.
- 10.2 NS invited the Commissioners to observe the focus groups being arranged to evaluate the question.
- 10.3 **The Commissioners agreed the recommendations set out in the report, subject to reserving the Commission's position on commenting on the Euro referendum question.**

11. Research Strategy

- 11.1 NS presented the paper, which proposed that the strategy should be approved in principle, prior to consideration of the resource implications at the Business Planning meeting in October.
- 11.2 The Commissioners acknowledged that research on electoral matters outside the Commission was reducing rather than expanding, and that there was a need for a research facility for the whole Commission. KS endorsed the view that a research resource should respond to the needs of the whole Commission, and asked that other directors be requested to identify their need for this resource.
- 11.3 **The Commissioners approved the strategy in principle, subject to being satisfied that the research resource would relate to all the Commission's work and responsibilities, and subject to consideration of the cost estimates at the Business Planning meeting in October 2003.**

12. Engaging the public – what politicians can do

- 12.1 NS presented the report, and stated that this research project had been agreed and funded in the current financial year. However it did need careful handling. The Commissioners agreed that the research should be undertaken but only after discussion with the Parliamentary Parties Panel and the LGA.
- 12.2 **The Commissioners requested that this matter be put on the agenda for the PPP meeting on 18 November and the LGA Liaison meeting on 11 December 2003, prior to any further action being taken.**

13. Distribution of electoral regions of UK MEPs

- 13.1 SY congratulated SJ on the report. SJ stated that a formal request had not been received from the Lord Chancellor.
- 13.2 The Commissioners asked that a summary should be prepared which would be a concise explanation of the methodology.
- 13.3 **The Commissioners agreed the recommendation set out in Appendix 1, and agreed that the final text should be approved by the Chair of the Commission upon receipt of the Lord Chancellor's formal request.**

14. Elections in Wales 2004.

- 14.1 SY stated that comments had been received from GM, who raised the question of whether the letter should go from the Commission's office in Cardiff, or from the Chair of the Commission. The Commissioners agreed that the letter should be sent from the Chair of the Commission.

14.2 **The Commissioners agreed the recommendation to send a letter from the Chair of the Commission to the Welsh Assembly Government commenting on the issues set out in the report.**

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

16. Parish Electoral Arrangements and Parish Orders.

16.1 The items were deferred to a future meeting.

17. Information items

17.1 The Commissioners received the following items for information:

- Consultation paper on 2004 pilots: final version
- Political advertising consultation paper
- Schedule of meetings and events