



## Meeting of the Electoral Commission

9.30am Thursday 10 May 2001 at Dolphyn Court

Present: Sam Younger, Chairman  
Pamela Gordon  
Glyn Mathias  
Sir Neil McIntosh  
Karamjit Singh  
Archie Gall, LGCE (for item 3.2)  
Brian Nash, DETR (for item 3.2)  
Maggie Crosby, DETR (for item 3.2)  
Roger Creedon  
Peter Hodgman  
Anne Hinds  
Chris Welford  
Nicole Smith  
Rael Zackon  
Katie Kerr, Secretary

**Apologies:** Professor Graham Zellick

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

### 1 **Minutes of the last meeting**

- 3.1.1 Replace 'The journalist was persuaded ...' with 'The journalist decided ...'
- 3.2.1 Replace 'The floor above the Commission is free ...' with 'The floor above the Commission may become free ...'
- 3.2.2 Remove bullet indicator and replace 'Head of Scotland Office's Election Section.' with 'Deputy Secretary of State for Scotland.'

### 2 **Matters Arising**

- 1.2 The press briefing, presentation and reception had gone ahead in Wales. Attendance was lower than expected probably due to the General Election having been called.

### 3 **Transfer of LGCE/DETR functions (EC42/01 and EC42a/01)**

- 3.1 All the project sub-groups have now met. The option of accommodation at Charing Cross was being pursued but another bid had been made for the property. [Secretary's note: The property in Charing Cross is not now available to the Commission]
- 3.2 Archie Gall (LGCE) gave a presentation to the meeting that demonstrated the effect of the transfer of functions from the LGCE and DETR to the Electoral Commission. A broad discussion occurred. SY thanked Archie Gall (LGCE), Brian Nash (DETR) and Maggie Crosby (DETR) for their contribution.
- 3.3 ***The Commissioners agreed that further discussion on the transfer of LGCE and DETR functions would be delegated to the Project Board and should return to Commissioners only for decision as appropriate. The draft of the Commission's formal response to the draft order circulated by the DETR would be the subject of a paper by RC at a Commission meeting.*** It was expected that detailed discussions between the organisations would be undertaken in advance of this.

### 4 **Directors' Reports**

#### 4.1 **Director of Registration and Compliance**

- 4.1.1 Note circulated to the meeting.
- 4.1.2 The quarterly donation reports have been put on the website. Issues that have been identified will be circulated to Treasurers. Nine parties failed to meet the deadline for returns. Six parties have yet to submit their return despite the issue of a written reminder. The options for the action to be taken by the Commission to encourage compliance were discussed. The Commissioners agreed that it was inappropriate to wait until near the end of the General Election campaign to take action. ***In the event that the returns have not been received by 22 May 2001 CW is to provide a paper to the Commission meeting with a view to taking action to fine these parties which have failed to comply. The paper will detail the parties that have not sent a return and any contact that has been made with them in respect of the return.*** The option of publishing a list of nil returns on the website will be considered.
- 4.1.3 CW reported that one party whose application to register had not been completed in time for the local elections had requested return of the registration fee. After careful consideration the request had been refused. Another party had submitted the application after the deadline

but dated all the documentation as if it had been submitted during the previous month.

4.1.4 CW had met with the Auditing Practice Board. The Institute of Chartered Accountants England and Wales has agreed to chair a meeting of the auditors for the major parties. The Liberal Democrats and Conservatives have agreed to attend the meeting; a response is awaited from UUP and Labour. The SNP have indicated that they do not wish to come to London.

## 4.2 Legal Services

4.2.1 Progress is being made towards placing further guidance about donations and campaign expenditure on the website based on issues raised by the parties but generalised for universal application.

4.2.2 The trigger date for weekly donation reports would be the date of the PM's announcement of the election on May 8<sup>th</sup>, since this clearly signalled The Queen's intention to dissolve Parliament.

## 4.3 Media and Public Affairs

4.3.1 The website activity was high on Friday when the register of donations was made available. The press cuttings indicated that the Electoral Commission received coverage on pages 5-6 of all the broadsheets (except the FT) and the Daily Mail.

4.3.2 The press cuttings service with CIS is being terminated. A tender process has resulted in a contract for 12 months being given to International Press Cuttings. The contract will be revisited in respect of the needs of the enlarged Electoral Commission.

4.3.3 Notice of termination of the DeHaviland service has been issued. Media disk will be used instead. The LGCE use Media disk. Costs increase when more than one person/terminal is granted access.

4.3.4 An information leaflet about the Electoral Commission for Electoral Returning Officers will be issued during the week commencing 14 May.

4.3.5 It is hoped that Commissioners and Directors will meet with local press during constituency visits for a round table discussion. The press office are preparing lists of local press contacts and are happy to provide a press notice on request. Media training is being provided for Commissioners on Friday 18 May. ***Commissioners who wish to receive training in this area were asked to contact AH direct.***

4.3.6 The adverts aimed at raising awareness of the need for some organisations to register as a 3<sup>rd</sup> party had begun to appear in the national press. On the advice of COI it was not considered appropriate to publish in the ethnic press on this occasion.

4.3.7 AH reported that there was strong support for an internal communication mechanism such as an intranet. In the interim information relating to Media and Public Affairs was being made accessible on the shared drive.

#### 4.4 **Strategic Planning and Resources**

4.4.1 Representatives of the NAO have been on site. They will audit the accounts and undertake a study of the efficient, effective and economic use of resources. They have not yet decided the period to which the first study will relate or what area it would concentrate on. RC reported that they had not indicated that they had found anything particularly adverse to date.

4.4.2 HM Treasury have indicated that they will be taking a closer look at funding requests from the Commission in future. Work to build a constructive working relationship has begun.

4.4.3 The first illegal donation has been received by the Commission and forwarded to the Consolidated Fund. The donation of £400 had been given to the Labour Party.

#### 4.5 **Policy**

4.5.1 In a PQ Ann Widdecombe had requested details of how the S13 spending (on voter education) would be split. The reply given stated that plans were not currently in place but when the plan was formulated it would be published. A paper will be prepared for the meeting of the Speaker's Committee in July.

4.5.2 The specification for the research into e-voting sponsored by LGA, SOLACE and others was ambitious in that it requested proposals by Christmas this year. It has been accepted that it is appropriate to review the timescale. The research will be in 2 phases. The first stage will be a review of what occurs elsewhere and the second will involve identification of what would be appropriate for the UK.

4.5.3 Baroness Jay has stated that the Labour Party Manifesto will include a pledge to research legislative provision for all women short lists. The situation will be monitored, as the Electoral Commission may be the body identified to oversee the operation of any such system.

### 5 **Review of the General Election 2001 (EC43/01 and EC44/01)**

5.1 Those individuals participating in constituency visits will be provided with individual itineraries. Concerns should be raised with NS once the itineraries have been received. The key focuses of the visits will be on

speaking to EROs, the candidates and local press and media where roundtable events are being organised.

- 5.2 The questionnaire for completion by electoral administrators has been drafted in consultation with AEA, SAA, SOLACE and Denis Stanley. It will be distributed during by e-mail this week and hard copy next week. The option of completing the document on-line is available.
- 5.3 ***Commissioners endorsed the decision to hold seminars for Electoral Administrators in Scotland and Wales to obtain feedback after the election.***
- 5.4 A draft of the questionnaires for the political party agents and political party candidates was circulated prior to the meeting. ***NS welcomed comments on the draft questionnaire by Tuesday 15 February.*** Distribution will be to 20% of agents in the 17 parties with elected members and one each to the other registered parties. The questionnaires are to be sent to party agents but may be filled out in conjunction with the candidates. The political parties have agreed to assist with the distribution of the questionnaires. There is no obligation to respond. Reducing the minimum response required to tick boxes encourages return of the questionnaires.
- 5.5 The Act prevents the Commission offering financial assistance to those to whom it provides advice. Therefore, the freephone number has been replaced with a standard rate line. The impact of this is not expected to be great as the helpline is for individuals working in this area who will not be meeting the telephone bill themselves. The EROs have been informed of the number. The number was included in the Notes for Editors section of the Home Office press notice regarding access to postal votes on request.
- 5.6.1 Following a tender process, conducted within the tight timescale available, MORI were selected to undertake the Public Opinion research. The research has commenced. ***Although the questionnaire is in use concerns relating to the questions used in the questionnaire should be raised with NS because they may be relevant to the post election survey.***
- 5.6.2 *Bob Worcester of MORI will provide feedback to the meeting on 22 May that will be of value prior to the constituency visits.* A detailed report will be written prior to the election. The post election data will be presented on 14 June and the full report will be available on 18 June 2001. There will be 2 weeks available to incorporate this information into the Commission's 1<sup>st</sup> report.
- 5.6.3 Question 1 'How do you intend to vote at the General Election on June 7<sup>th</sup>' is included at the request of MORI to ensure that the demographic split is broadly representative and clarify tactical voting questions.

This information would not be included in a published report. The Electoral Commission will not be mentioned as the sponsor of the poll.

- 5.6.4 Some questions are worded according to how MORI have asked in the past to allow comparison of data.
- 5.7 ***The draft of the 1<sup>st</sup> chapter of the report will be available for discussion at the next meeting. NS should be informed of issues that it might be appropriate to highlight in the report.***
- 5.8 SY to notify Dr David Butler that all the Commissioners except GZ will attend the seminar at Nuffield.

## **6 Policy Development Grants (EC47/2001)**

- 6.1 ***The Commissioners decided to consult on the basis of option C*** (distribution on the basis of flat rate plus weighted vote shares averaged for Labour, Conservatives and Liberal Democrats and for UUP, SDLP and DUP). The distribution mechanism will need to be revisited if there is a dramatic change in the allocation of the seats at Westminster following the General Election.
- 6.2 The illustration of the figures used for the consultation will be clearly marked as such until vote share figures can be accurately determined. The consultation document will incorporate an undertaking to provide an accurate illustration based on the results of the General Election as soon as these are available.
- 6.3 The consultation will encompass the 8 parties at present eligible for a grant. If, as a result of the general election, the list of eligible parties changes, there will need to be a further round of consultation.
- 6.4 The consultation period will end on 21 June 2001 so the matter can be discussed at the Parliamentary Parties Panel on 26 June 2001. The Home Office has indicated that it wishes to make the Order prior to the summer recess.

## **7 Any Other Business**

- 7.1 SY reported that the Commission had successfully hosted its first visit from a foreign delegation, the National Election Commission of South Korea.

## **8 Date of the next meeting**

- 8.1 1 pm on Tuesday 22<sup>nd</sup> of May at Trevelyan House, to be followed by drinks with the staff