

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE ELECTORAL COMMISSION HELD
ON 14 NOVEMBER 2003**

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

In attendance: Roger Creedon (RC)
Nicole Smith (NS)
Chris Welford
Roger Gough (RG)
Kate Sullivan (KBS)
Doug Stewart (DS)
Andy O'Neill (AON)

Apologies Karamjit Singh

1. Minutes of Meeting of 29 September 2003

1.1 The minutes of the meeting of the Electoral Commission held of 29 September 2003 were agreed, subject to the following amendment:

Paragraph 10.1: Insert after local authorities the words 'affecting unitary authorities'.

1.2 The following matters arising were noted:

Paragraph 3.3: accessible formats for the executive summaries of both the Scottish Elections 2003 and Welsh National Assembly Statutory Reports had been provided (Braille and audio).

Discussions were ongoing with regard to the Commission's house style and point size of publications generally.

1.3 It was noted that the annual report and accounts would be published in the week beginning 24th November 2003.

1.4 With regard to paragraph 3.6, SY would attend cabinet committee on 19 November.

1.5 It was noted that the Commission would give oral evidence to the Scottish Affairs Committee on 19th November.

1.6 With regard to paragraph 7.5 it was noted that meetings with the 3 regional RROs in the North West and North East regional assembly areas would take place on 18th December.

- 1.7 With regard to paragraph 13.3 it was noted that the response to the Lord Chancellor's request on the distribution of MEP seats within the electoral regions of the UK had been sent on 31 October.

2. Minutes of Meeting of the Electoral Commission on 31 October 2003

- 2.1 Minutes of the meeting of the Electoral Commission held on 31 October 2003 were agreed.
- 2.2 With regard to paragraph 14 Electoral Pilots 2004: Swindon, it was noted that another vacancy had occurred within the council area and an amended electoral pilot application would be submitted to ODPM by Swindon on which the Commission would be asked to comment at the next meeting.
- 2.3 It was agreed that the Commission should consider a policy with regard to responding to handling applications for e-pilots at by-elections
- 2.4 With regard to paragraph 17.2, it was noted that the training contract for the European Parliament 2004 elections had been awarded to SOLACE Enterprises and partners.

3. Reporting on the European Parliamentary Elections 2004

- 3.1 NS presented the paper, which sought Commissioners views on the development of the Commission's statutory report on the European Parliamentary election 2004.
- 3.2 The Commissioners noted the requirement for the Commission to report on the administration of the European Parliamentary election and the separate requirement to report on the three regional European Parliamentary electoral pilot schemes by no later than 13 September. The report outlined the current approach the Commission had taken to preparing statutory reports on elections including the objectives to be delivered via the reports. NS outlined an alternative approach to that currently used, which developed a more thematic and consultative approach prior to producing the final report. In summary, the alternative approach involved:-
 - Organising a series of five seminars in the months immediately following the election, focusing on key themes – electoral management; party campaigns; the role of the media; public attitudes; and accessibility
 - Discussion at each seminar to be triggered by one or more papers commissioned from key experts (academics or others). One of these papers would be based on opinion polling commissioned by the Electoral Commission.
 - Using other EU countries as a benchmark for UK performance, involving experts from other EU countries in all seminars.
 - The published report would consist of the expert papers revised in the light of the seminar discussions, together with an introduction from the Commission and a summary of the election results. The report could also include the campaign expenditure returns, if publication was deferred until 2005.

Commissioners welcomed the alternative approach whilst not, at this time, wishing to reduce their flexibility in final decisions as to the format of the report following the proposed seminars.

3.3 The Commissioners agreed the objectives contained within the report concerning the reporting of the European Parliamentary Elections 2004 and, in principle, the reporting approach outlined which departed from the current Commission model in favour of a more thematic and consultative approach.

4. Electoral Pilots 2004: Commission's response to Government consultation paper

- 4.1 KBS presented the paper, which provided a draft response to the Government's consultation paper on the arrangements for and form of electoral pilot schemes in June 2004 at the European Parliamentary Elections.
- 4.2 The Government had previously announced its' intention to conduct electoral pilot schemes at the European Parliamentary elections in June 2004. The intention was to hold region-wide pilot schemes including regions with combined local elections. The Commission's draft response to the consultation paper, drew upon the Commission's experience with pilot programmes since 2001 and set out its' concerns with regard to the time-table and management implications for local authorities. The response also included detailed suggestions on the form of the pilots based on the Commission's recommendations contained in *Modernising Elections and The shape of elections to come*.
- 4.3 Commissioners discussed the draft response at length and made a number of suggested amendments.
- 4.4 **The Commissioners approved the draft response, subject to Commissioner comments agreed at the meeting being included and final approval being given to SY following changes being made.**

5. Marked Registers: Public Opinion Research

- 5.1 NS presented a paper, which provided Commissioners with the opportunity to comment on the draft survey questions designed to measure public opinion concerning the availability of marked registers.
- 5.2 **The Commissioners discussed the paper and made a number of suggested amendments and comments on the paper.**

6. European Parliamentary and Combined Local Elections in 2004: the location of electoral pilot schemes

- 6.1 KBS presented a paper updating Commissioners on the consultation process currently being undertaken by the Commission to assist it in recommending up to three regions to conduct pilot schemes at the June 2004 European Parliamentary Elections.

- 6.2 A presentation was made to the Commissioners and additional information provided on the cases for and against the selection of individual electoral regions. Papers summarising consultation issues were tabled.
- 6.3 **The Commissioners agreed not to exclude any eligible electoral region from further consideration as a potential electoral pilot area at this stage and agreed that a decision on the selection of electoral regions to be recommended as pilot areas in June 2004 be taken at it's meeting on 28 November 2003 in Belfast. A selection of consultation responses would be circulated to Commissioners on Monday 17 November 2003.**

7. Welsh Assembly Government Proposal to Postpone Date of 2004 Local Elections in Wales

- 7.1 KBS presented a paper prepared by Kay Jenkins seeking Commissioners consideration of a draft response to the Welsh Assembly Governments' proposal to postpone the date of the local government elections in Wales in 2004. The paper set out the background to the current consultation exercise. As the issue of combination and all-postal pilots had been linked by the Welsh Assembly Government and by the Secretary of State for Wales in press releases and media coverage, it was noted that, the Commission's response to the Welsh Assembly Government Consultation and the Commission's decision on electoral pilot locations were issues which needed to be handled sensitively.
- 7.2 **Commissioners made a number of suggested amendments to the draft response and agreed they be incorporated prior to final approval of the response being made by GM.**

8. Regional referendums: central and local government spending

- 8.1 DS presented the report which provided Commissioners with information concerning the Government's publicity campaigns relating to elected regional assemblies; a summary of the rules regarding spending by central and local government on referendum issues; and a proposed draft Commission response to the Government's proposed campaign explaining to voters the issues around the referendums on regional assemblies and the associated local government changes expected to be made next Autumn.
- 8.2 **The Commissioners agreed that the Chairman raise this matter when he meets the Minister for Local and Regional Government and agreed to decide what further action should be taken after this meeting.**

9. Update on Donations reporting

- 9.1 CW updated Commissioners with regard to a number of issues currently arising concerning the question of late reporting of donations.
- 9.2 The Commissioners had agreed to begin an investigation into the Labour Party's procedures for recording and reporting donations in order to be satisfied that all reasonable steps had been taken and due diligence exercised to ensure compliance. The Conservative Party would be invited to

meet with SY and CW to discuss the circumstances surrounding their failure to comply with the legal requirements concerning donation reporting.

10. Information items

- 10.1 The Commissioners received, for information, the schedule of meetings and events for 2003/2004 as at 1 November 2003. In receiving this report, it was noted that SY would talk to JD concerning future Commission meetings in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and England in the coming months.