

Confirmed on 9 December 2004

Minutes of the meeting of The Electoral Commission held on 25 November 2004

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

In attendance: Roger Creedon (RC)
Jacqui Dixon (JD)
Archie Gall (AG)
Nicole Smith (NS)
Rael Zackon (RZ)
Seamus Magee (SM)
Ros Baston (RB)
Tom Hawthorn (TH)
Linda Everett (LE)

Implementation Team: Ann Devine (AD) (for items 6 & 7)
Bill Pickles (BP) (for items 6 & 7)

PG and AG left the meeting while a decision was taken on item 6.

1. Equality Scheme

- 1.1 SM gave a presentation outlining the key requirements of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 in relation to the publication of an Equality Scheme. The Commission was designated under the Act in July 2004, and must publish an Equality Scheme by February 2005. The timetable included a period of consultation on the draft scheme. Commissioners were invited to send any drafting points to SM.
- 1.2 KS and JD referred to Government proposals to create a Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission to cover the whole of the UK, and the need to integrate the Race Equality Scheme with this draft scheme. The Commissioners agreed that the Commission should have one scheme covering all the required aspects of equal access. It was essential that equal access should be an integral part of the Commission's business processes.
- 1.3 The equality scheme would apply to all Commission policies, not only those, not only those relating to Northern Ireland. Where the

Commission has made recommendations to Government, it would be the Government's responsibility to screen the policies and assess impact.

- 1.4 **The Commissioners agreed that the Equality Scheme adopted by the Commission should incorporate all equal access requirements and should apply across the UK. The Commissioners approved the draft scheme for consultation within Northern Ireland, subject to drafting amendments.**

2. Registration campaign: Spring 2005

- 2.1 BL presented the report, and outlined the objectives, timetable and budget for the Spring campaign. A high profile campaign targeting the whole population would be run in England, where county council elections would be held, but the campaign across England, Wales and Scotland would be targeted at home-movers and students.
- 2.2 The Commissioners agreed that a Spring campaign should have a dual role of raising both awareness and registration. Elections were held in some part of the UK almost every year, and the Commission should develop a planned and regular awareness campaign cycle based on an assessment of value and performance of each campaign, and not contingent on the random selection of a date for a General Election.
- 2.3 **The Commissioners agreed the strategy and associated costs, with the extension of the TV campaign to Wales and Scotland.**

3. Draft statutory report on the European Parliament elections 2004

- 3.1 NS presented the report, and circulated the appendices and tables. The Commissioners congratulated NS on her excellent work in producing the draft report. Commissioners were invited to send textual amendments to NS.
- 3.2 Amendments were suggested on the following issues:
 - Add into figures the proportion of voters who did not vote for any of the elected parties
 - The eligibility criteria in different countries
 - Complications arising from combined elections
 - The role of tellers
 - Disability access
 - Media coverage in the UK
 - Training programmes
 - The Commission's position on the number of pilots
 - Development of the role of Regional Returning Officers

- References to D-Day commemorations
 - The plan for a further report
 - Closed and open list systems
- 3.3 NS stated that the outsourcing of project management for evaluation work had not been as successful as originally hoped; it was not an efficient use of resources and would not be used again. The Commissioners felt there was a need to expose that argument to the Speaker's Committee, as increasing staff numbers to carry out such work was not increasing the overall expenditure.
- 3.4 The Commissioners agreed to publish an electronic version of the report as planned in December, with distribution of the printed version in January 2005.
- 3.5 **The Commissioners approved the draft report, subject to the amendments discussed, and authorised SY to agree the final version.**

4. Foundation model of voting: PID

- 4.1 TH presented the report and the draft PID. He highlighted the substantial number of events planned, and indicated that he would like wherever possible to have a Commissioner attend each event.
- 4.2 The Commissioners raised the following matters:
- Means of eliciting comments on behalf of voters, including the possible use of NACAB and NCVS
 - Testing of ideas through focus groups towards the end of the process
 - Reflecting in the PID the fact that we already know a good deal about public concerns from previous research
 - Limiting the involvement of Returning Officers to those with experience of postal voting pilots
 - The inclusion of AEA representatives from Wales and Scotland on the reference body
 - Publication of the terms of reference
 - The means of keeping Government officials informed
- 4.3 An additional Commission meeting had been agreed for 21 March 2005 to consider the report.
- 4.4 **The Commissioners approved the Project Initiation Document, subject to the amendments discussed.**

5. Consultation response: variation of candidates expenditure

- 5.1 LE presented the report which dealt with the ODPM's proposals for increasing candidates expenditure for elections in the City of London. The Commission was not able to make a recommendation for an increase above inflation. The Commissioners asked that the preamble to the standard response letter should be amended to one paragraph setting out the status of the response.
- 5.2 RC reported that the Government had now formally asked the Commission to recommend an increase above the rate of inflation for the candidate expenses limits which will apply at the next General Election. This would need to take account of the inclusion of notional expenditure but not, at this stage, the rebalancing between local and national spending recommended in the report on party funding. Proposals would be brought to the meeting on 6 January 2005.
- 5.3 **The Commissioners agreed the draft response, subject to the textual amendments discussed.**

6. Periodic electoral review: county of Suffolk

- 6.1 BP presented the report, and drew the attention of Commissioners to the response from the Boundary Committee to the request for further advice and information. AG stated that the Boundary Committee found the evidence and representations persuasive; however the effect of transferring Ringsfield and Weston parishes would be to isolate the remaining areas to the south and east of the proposed Bungay division, and therefore create an awkward division. The issue was whether the remaining parishes should also be transferred. PG stated that, although this was a matter for the Commission to decide upon, there had been no consultation on this proposal and it was an open question whether silence from the south and east parishes in Bungay could be taken as consent to the Boundary Committee's recommendations.
- 6.2 The Commissioners noted that in past reviews, changes had been rejected on the grounds on the impact on other areas. There was concern about making substantial changes without further consultation, particularly as these issues had not been raised during the review, and there was no evidence of support or community identity in relation to parishes other than Ringsfield and Weston.
- 6.3 **The Commissioners agreed to accept the recommendations of the Boundary Committee, subject to the modification set out in paragraph 114 of the Implementation Team report and to the modification of the proposed division name of Abbygate to Tower, and with the clarifications set out in Appendix B.**

7. Electoral change amendment order: borough of Basingstoke and Deane

- 7.1 AD presented the report, which outlined the need for an amendment order to be made.
- 7.2 **The Commissioners approved the electoral change amendment order for the borough of Basingstoke and Deane, and authorised the affixation of the Commission's seal to the order.**

8. Application of registration of party name: None of the Above

- 8.1 LE presented the report, and advised that the application met all the criteria for registration.
- 8.2 RC advised that he had spoken to a DCA official regarding the use of Secretary of State powers to prohibit particular words or expressions. Although a review of the present Order might be undertaken, it would be sometime before a new Order could be laid if Ministers were minded to do so. RC also referred to the questions raised at the recent meeting of the Parliamentary Parties Panel concerning the registration of the Conservative Democratic Alliance.
- 8.3 The Commissioners were concerned about the public understanding of the situation, and agreed that it should be put on record to Ministers that the Commission is concerned about the registration of this party as it is likely to mislead voters into believing that they are not voting for a registered party.
- 8.4 The Commissioners asked RZ for written advice on the law relating to the Commission's powers in determining this application. The matter would be deferred to the next meeting for legal advice to be prepared, together with a draft press statement.
- 8.5 **The Commissioners agreed to defer this matter to 9 December, to enable legal advice to be prepared.**

9. Minutes of the meeting of 28 October 2004

- 9.1 The Commissioners agreed the minutes of the meeting of 28 October, subject to a minor amendment to paragraph 4.2 to make it clear that the issue of variances in electoral equality had been raised by the Implementation Team and not in representations.

10. Items for information

- 10.1 The Commissioners noted the following items for information:
- Timetable for Government announcements on Delivering Democracy? and Voting for Change
 - The extension of disapplication of Part IV of PPERA in Northern Ireland for a further two years
- 10.2 The Commissioners congratulated the staff on a successful assessment for IIP status.
- 10.3 The Commissioners thanked RC for all his work and support in creating the Commission, and establishing it as an effective organisation, and wished him well on his retirement.