

Draft Minutes – as at 29/4/02

Minutes of the Commissioners' Meeting held on 11 April 2002

9.30 am at Church House

Present: Sam Younger (Chair)
Pamela Gordon
Glyn Mathias
Sir Neil McIntosh
Karamjit Singh
Professor Graham Zellick

In attendance: Roger Creedon
Nicole Smith
Rael Zackon
Maggie Crosby (for item 11)
Ann Devine (for item 11)
Derek Little (for item 11)
Martine Padwell (for item 11)
Katie Kerr (Secretary)

1 Minutes of the last meeting

- 1.1 Minutes of the meeting held on 14 March 2002 were agreed.
- 1.2 The minutes of the Commissioners' private meeting [Item 2] were agreed.

2 Matters Arising

- 2.1 3.1.3. The workshop relating to the LASER project will be held on 12 April 2002
- 2.2 3.5.2 An indication of DTLR's intentions relating to paid time off for Councillors is awaited. The Commission will place advice on how to comply on the website.
- 2.3 4.3.3 Sinn Fein have stated that they raised the matter of policy development grants with the Prime Minister. Any change to the eligibility criteria would require primary legislation. The eligibility criteria will be considered as part of the Commission's review of the scheme for distribution of the policy development grant
- 2.4 10.4 The young people's attitudes to voting and the members of ethnic minorities' attitude to voting report are unlikely to be available for publication by 6 May. The reports were not written by the Commission. ***The Commissioners agreed that it was more appropriate to launch the Commission's branding using another document.***

Draft Minutes – as at 29/4/02

3 Directors' Reports

3.1 Registrations and Compliance

3.1.1 The Scottish Socialist Party have admitted that they failed to report a donation made by Tommy Sheridan in their quarterly report. Mr Sheridan should also have reported the donation. The matter is being pursued and NM is being kept informed.

3.2 Policy

3.2.1 NOP are to conduct opinion polls at the local elections including some pilot areas. The intention is to conduct the survey annually so trends can be identified over time. The draft questionnaire was circulated. All comments to Ben Marshall, Research and Information Officer, by Wednesday 17 April. Northern Ireland has not been included and this will be taken forward separately in consultation with Seamus Magee.

3.2.2. DTLR Ministers responded to a Parliamentary Question relating to Mayoral Referendums, specifically the wording of the question and the 28 day period during which the local authority cannot publish material on the issue. ***The Commissioners reiterated their commitment to work with DTLR to take the matter forward. The Commissioners agreed that the Commission should place advertisements in the local papers at a cost of £25,000 in the areas where referendums were being conducted on 2 May 2002.*** The draft advertisement would be circulated to the Commissioners for comment.

3.2.3 An agenda for the seminar on 18 June about voter turnout will be circulated.

3.3 Strategic Planning & Resources

3.3.1 Chris Welford is acting as the Director of Finance in addition to his normal role. Temporary staff are being used to cover vacancies. The team are concentrating on closing the accounts for 2001/2 and laying the estimates for this year within HM Treasury's tight timescale.

3.3.2 The accommodation changes at Trevelyan House continue. An office suitable for permanent occupation by the Northern Ireland team has been located.

4 Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland Offices' Report

4.1 The Heads of Office have been asked to draft business plans based on the Commission's Corporate Plan.

5 Commissioners' Points

Draft Minutes – as at 29/4/02

- 5.1 KS and Tom Hawthorne attended a conference on e-democracy.
- 5.2 KS spoke at a British Council Conference on standards in Public Life.
- 5.3 SY discussed the possibility of co-hosting a cross-party seminar at the House of Commons on electoral matters with Sir Patrick Cormack, the editor of the House magazine. The seminar would be in late June/July. [Secretary's note: the date has been set as October 23rd]

6 Highlight Report [EC26/02]

- 6.1 NS reported that staffing pressures had reduced.
- 6.2 RC will lead the review of state funding. Seamus Magee will manage the review of the nomination process. Andy O'Neill will manage the review of the format of ballot papers including the possibility of an abstention vote.
- 6.3 The programme manager is to meet with the project manager and sponsor for the absent voting review before the project meeting on 15 May. Seamus Magee is to undertake a separate review of absent voting in Northern Ireland.
- 6.4 Jane Marshall has been appointed to the Referendums Team. An offer has been made to a potential manager for the project. The co-ordinator role remains vacant. The post may be filled by consultancy or a local government secondee.

7. Best Value Report [EC27/02]

- 7.1 The executive summary was circulated.
- 7.2 ***The Commissioners congratulated Jackie Stoneman for her work on this project which has produced a document containing a wealth of information for use by local authorities.*** The document had been developed in association with the Audit Commission. ***The Commissioners authorised amendments to be included when new material is available.***
- 7.3 The information will be used to develop interactive software for benchmarking against standard indicators. The indicators have been agreed with the Audit Commission. The information provided by Electoral Services Sections will form a national database.
- 7.4 The report was discussed and some amendments proposed. The document relates to England and Wales. Andy O'Neill will consult the Auditor General for Scotland with a view to producing a similar document for Scotland. ***The Commissioners agreed the draft subject to minor amendments. SY to agree amended draft prior to publication on the website.***

Draft Minutes – as at 29/4/02

7.5 ***The Commissioners agreed that the possibility of publishing the document jointly with the Audit Commission should be pursued.*** The document could have a foreword from the Audit Commission and one from SY. The launch arrangements may include AEA, SOLACE and LGA and a summer conference hosted by the Commission. A journal item may also be appropriate relating to Best Practice in Electoral Services.

8 Telephone Registration [EC29/02]

8.1 ***The Commissioners thanked Mark Williams for his work in producing this report.*** Some amendments were necessary to remove any impression that the Commission was endorsing a commercial product.

8.2 ***The Commissioners agreed that the report should be published as an information paper.*** The paper would be distributed to all local authorities by e-mail with an executive summary circulated in hard copy with a circular. SY to approve amended draft prior to publication.

9 Combined Electoral Polls and Referendums Vote [EC30/02]

9.1 ***The Commissioners thanked Stephen Judson for the paper.***

9.2 ***The Commissioners agreed that they would not write to the Government to support the electoral administrators' position at this time.***

9.3 The referendums team will commence research into the issue of combining a referendum with elections and report to the June Commission meeting. The research will cover Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland as well.

10 Conference Stands

10.1 The Commissioners discussed the matter. ***They agreed that a single limit of £12,000 would be appropriate in relation to all party conferences irrespective of location. The Commissioners agreed it was appropriate to indicate the fee should be in relation to a "bona fide" stand. Further that any sign of abuse may trigger an investigation and a review of the current limit.***

10.2 The views of the political parties will be sought before implementation.

11 Consideration of Periodic Electoral Reviews (EC 28/02)

11.1 Two versions of the timetable of reviews were circulated. A wide ranging discussion took place.

Draft Minutes – as at 29/4/02

11.2 ***The Commissioners agreed that a lead Commissioner would be identified for each review. All Commissioners will receive a report containing the Boundary Committee's final recommendations on publication and a copy of all representations. The lead Commissioner will receive copies of all representations and will review the draft paper produced by the Implementation Team for the Commission meeting. The Commissioners will discuss the reviews only with the Implementation Team.***

11.3 The Commissioners requested the legal aspects of the order making process be clarified.

12 Branding

12.1 Gillian Wallace and Tess Daley of Enterprise IG presented the revised branding to the Commissioners. ***The Commissioners agreed the branding subject to minor amendments.***

13 Any Other Business

13.1 Comments on the outline of the annual reports for the Electoral Commission and LGCE should be passed to RC.

14 Date of the Next Meeting

14.1 The next meeting will be held at 10.30 a.m. on 29th April 2002 at Mary Sumner House, 28 Tufton Street to consider PER recommendations in respect of Buckinghamshire, Warrington and Halton

14.2 The next formal meeting of the meeting of the Commission will be at 9.30am on Thursday 9th May at the Commission's Office in Scotland, 28 Thistle Street, Edinburgh. Overnight accommodation will be provided at the Crown Plaza Hotel. The Commissioners will meet the previous evening at 7.30 for 8pm at the George.