

Confirmed on 10 November 2005.

## Minutes of the meeting of the Electoral Commission held on 13 October 2005 in Derry.

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

In attendance: Peter Wardle (PW)  
Jacqui Dixon (JD)  
Roger Gough (RG)  
Angela Salt (AS)  
Nicole Smith (NS)  
Chris Welford (CW)  
Rael Zackon (RZ)  
Seamus Magee (SM)

### 1. Minutes of the meeting of 7 September 2005 (EC132/05)

1.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 7 September 2005 were agreed.

### 2. Minutes of the meeting of 29 September 2005 (EC133/05)

2.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 29 September 2005 were agreed, subject to minor amendments.

### 3. Report on the Northern Ireland combined elections 2005 (EC134/05)

3.1 SM gave a presentation highlighting the key points arising from the draft report on the May 2005 combined election in Northern Ireland. It was planned to launch the report on 12 December 2005, in Belfast, with a press launch and a stakeholder event at Stormont. This was the first independent report covering all aspects of a combined election.

3.2 The Commissioners thanked SM for the report, which was a substantial piece of work. Commissioners were asked to send comments to SM as quickly as possible, as the report had to be finalised by 17 October if

publication dates were to be met. The Commissioners discussed the key issues from the report, particularly:

- Turnout, especially among younger voters
- Accuracy of the register
- Greater confidence in the process due to the electoral fraud legislation
- The presence of polling agents in polling stations
- Polling stations as neutral venues
- The relationship between the EONI and the local authorities, and whether the EONI should be able to direct Deputy Returning Officers
- The proposed review of postal voting in Northern Ireland
- Timing of counts, and publication of results

3.3 The Commissioners asked NS and SM to look again at the sections relating in particular to:

- comments on political party campaigns
- management of the communication of results
- the recommendations, and to whom they are aimed

3.4 The Commissioners also discussed how to make to draft report available on a confidential basis to the Arbuthnott Commission, and for the interviews for the Chief Electoral Officer post in Northern Ireland.

3.5 **The Commissioners agreed the report, subject to SY and KS approving the amendments requested, and authorised SY to approve the final version of the report.**

#### 4. NIO consultation paper: political donations in Northern Ireland (EC135/05)

4.1 KS and SM presented the paper, and outlined the current position of the political parties in Northern Ireland to the options set out in the consultation paper. CW reported details of his meeting with the Standards in Public Offices Commission in Dublin; the key issues arising from this meeting were that in the Republic of Ireland (ROI), the names and addresses of individuals were made public, and that the electoral registers in the ROI represented approximately 130% of the population and were therefore inaccurate.

4.2 The Commissioners had concerns about the NIO's proposed Option 2 and the difficulties the Commission would have in operating such a system. The Commission's preference was for a transparent system, mirroring the framework operating in the rest of the UK. However, if the Government decided to implement Option 2, the Commissioners

agreed that any legislation would have to be prescriptive about how the process should be managed by the Commission. These concerns would have to be set out clearly in the Commission's response to the NIO.

- 4.3 **The Commissioners agreed the response, subject to the amendments discussed, and authorised SY, in consultation with KS, to approve the final response.**

## 5. NIO consultation paper: electoral registration in Northern Ireland (EC136/05)

- 5.1 NS presented the report. SM reported that the political parties in Northern Ireland were largely in agreement with the approach.
- 5.2 **The Commissioners agreed the response to the consultation paper.**

## 6. Electoral Administration Bill

- 6.1 The Electoral Administration Bill had been received, and copies had been circulated. The Commissioners discussed the approach to responding to the Governments proposals and to amendments. PW was asked to arrange regular meetings with the Minister of State, Harriet Harman. As advised Commissioners of meetings with Geoff Hoon and Hilary Armstrong scheduled with the next two weeks.
- 6.2 The Commissioners asked that they be provided with bullet-point progress reports, and with copies of press releases and other articles from stakeholders.

## 7. Matters for information

7. The Commissioners received the following items for information:

- i) Registration of political and third parties (EC137/05)
- ii) AS reported on the Commission's attendance at the party political conferences
- iii) JD reported that the Equality Commission of Northern Ireland had approved the Commission's Equality Scheme on 14 September 2005.
- iv) NS advised that the Commission would be producing a joint prospectus for the 2006 pilots with the DCA.