

Confirmed on 9 June 2005

## Minutes of the meeting of the Electoral Commission held on 12 May 2005, in London.

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)  
Kay Jenkins (KJ)  
Angela Salt (AS)  
Chris Welford (CW)  
Rael Zackon (RZ)  
Liz Sandwith (LS)  
John Quin (JQ)  
Tom Hawthorn (TH)  
Mike Harold (MH)

### 1. Minutes of the meeting of 13 April 2005.

- 1.1 The minutes of the meeting of the Electoral Commission held on 13 April 2005, were agreed, subject to typographical corrections.

### 2. Minutes of the meeting of 14 April 2005.

- 2.1 The minutes of the meeting of the Electoral Commission held on 14 April 2005, were agreed, subject to the following amendments:

Paragraph 3.1: after 'agreed to', add 'pursue the establishment of'.

Paragraph 6.1.5: add 'where there is more than one directorate with an interest in a particular matter'.

### 3. Minutes of the meeting of 28 April 2005.

- 3.1 The minutes of the meeting of the Electoral Commission held on 28 April 2005, were agreed, subject to the following amendments:

Paragraph 2.2: add at end of paragraph 'The Audit Committee also had an interest in the nature of the expenditure'.

Paragraph 2.4: The last line should read 'The Commissioners agreed that they would express a view on each individual case.'

#### 4. Minutes of the Remuneration Committee of 21 March 2005.

- 4.1 The minutes of the meeting of the Remuneration Committee held on 21 March 2005 were agreed.

#### 5. Further Electoral Reviews: direction.

- 5.1 JD presented the report, which reflected the decision taken by the Commissioners at the meeting on 28 April 2005, to approve Further Electoral Reviews for the following areas:

Borough of Barrow-in-Furness  
District of Basingstoke and Deane  
Borough of Castle Morpeth  
Borough of Crewe and Nantwich  
District of East Northamptonshire  
District of Mendip  
District of North Wiltshire  
District of South Lakeland  
District of Wansbeck  
District of Welwyn Hatfield  
District of West Wiltshire

- 5.2 **The Commissioners approved the issue of a direction to the Boundary Committee in the terms set out in the Appendix to the report, and authorised the affixation of the Commission's corporate seal to the direction.**

#### 6. European Parliamentary Election 2004 campaign expenditure

- 6.1 CW presented the report. There was no time limit for producing the report. The Commissioners were concerned about the timing of publication, particularly in relation to the Foundation Model. The Commissioners requested amendments to the format of presentation of the tables, to reflect political realities. The Commissioners considered that the report should set out information, and avoid comment. Where there had been a lack of compliance, the report should state what action was being taken.

**6.2 The Commissioners requested that the report be redrafted, and considered further at the next meeting on 28 May 2005.**

## 7. Audit Review.

- 7.1 NM presented the report, and welcomed LS and JQ to the meeting. This was the first report to the Commissioners from the Audit Committee, and it was an opportunity for JQ to attend a meeting, to assist in understanding how the Commission works. The Audit Committee was well served by Commission staff and by LS, who produced a high standard of work. NM explained that the members of the Audit Committee held a private meeting with LS and the external auditors before each committee meeting, which was an opportunity to discuss sensitive issues.
- 7.2 NM stated that the Committee was now content with the terms of reference. There was a programme of work for each year; one outstanding matter was the IT Strategy.
- 7.3 JQ stated that financial control was not usually critical to start-up operations, and this had been the case with the Commission. It had been difficult to assess the resources and the controls required, and the focus had been on getting the business going. LS had played a vital role in highlighting key issues. JQ was content with the new terms of reference, and with the framework of financial control.
- 7.4 LS stated that the support of the Audit Committee was invaluable to her in her work. The control framework, risk management and governance had moved forward significantly.
- 7.5 PW stated that RG now had to take a radical look at the underlying infrastructure, including information, human resources, financial systems and space. There was a risk in moving forward on an inadequate framework. There was concern about the external audit function, which was a monopoly supplier; the VFM report on training was now six months late. There was no annual action plan for the NAO; it was intended to move towards a more rigorous relationship with the external auditor.
- 7.6 SY recorded the Commission's thanks to the members of the Audit Committee, and to LS.
- 7.7 The Commissioners noted the report.**

## 8. General Election 2005.

8.1 KBS provided an update on the administration of the General Election 2005, and drew attention to four additional recommendations for legislative change, relating to:

- RO ability to correct errors
- Collection of postal votes from polling stations before close of poll
- Unissued postal ballots
- Verification of postal votes, to be sorted face down

Further technical issues should be included in the Foundation Model report; there should be no need to report separately on the administration of the election. There would be separate reports on media and campaign analysis, and access to polling stations. These reports would include other administrative matters, and would be published as and when ready. SY stated that the Commission had also to take account of issues raised at the post-election seminars.

8.2 The key issues highlighted were:

- Registration closed too early
- The nomination process went reasonably well
- Widespread reporting of problems with the process of issuing postal votes, because the process prescribed by law no longer matches the administrative process
- Dispatch of postal votes by Royal Mail was good, but dispatch of polling cards and polling information was not good in some places
- Counts went well, except for Harlow and Crawley
- There were as yet no electoral petitions
- Training, briefing and support services were well received; only one additional circular had to be issued (after the Birmingham decision)
- Call logging system was very useful; this would be built into future training
- Low incidence of alleged fraud; allegations concerning approximately 1000 votes were being investigated by the police. This figure includes allegations concerning 300 votes in Bradford and 300 in Kirklees
- The role played by ACPO was invaluable
- Capacity issues for smaller authorities where there was a combined election
- Some queries relating to dual nationality, and eligibility to vote in Parliamentary elections

8.3 KJ advised that the covering letter to the Foundation Model report should make it clear that the report covered the Commission's

obligations under sections 5 and 6 of PPERA. The Commission would also acknowledge the availability of additional government money for local authorities to deal with postal voting. Most local authorities felt that they had been provided with adequate resources through the new fees and charges arrangements.

8.4 AS outlined the arrangements made throughout the election period for communication with the media. The top-line results were:

- Over 30,000 calls and e-mails
- Over half million visits to Commission websites
- Over 2000 media calls
- 150 workshops for nearly 3000 young people
- 3500 press cuttings
- 150 interviews
- 50 press releases

8.5 KJ referred to the two further reports on turnout and public perception. The MORI poll was taken in the weekend before the election; the results will be included in the report on turnout and participation. KJ highlighted some comparisons with 2001, which showed that whilst turnout was increased, the numbers of young people voting had decreased. There was a high turnout in postal voting; the figures would be available soon. The full report on turnout would be produced in September.

8.6 SY thanked all those involved during the election period, and particularly staff in Electoral Administration and the devolved offices, the Communications team, and the Outreach and Campaigns teams.

8.7 **The Commissioners noted the report, and agreed to the inclusion of the additional four recommendations in the Foundation Model report.**

## 9. Foundation model of voting.

9.1 The Commissioners reviewed the latest draft, which was significantly closer to what was required. A number of clarifications and amendments were proposed. The key amendments were:

### *Registering to vote*

9.1.1 There should be an initial move to individual registration. Once individual registration is in place, there should be annual confirmation of details, and provision for limited carryover.

9.1.2 The last date for registration should be the close of nominations, for all elections.

- 9.1.3 On-line registration would be for confirmation only, until there is a secure system which permits initial registration online.
- 9.1.4 Only local RO should be able to add to, or delete from, the register.

*Voting in polling station*

- 9.1.5 There should be an additional question which could be asked to confirm identity in the polling station.
- 9.1.6 People who have difficulties accessing their polling station should be able to vote in an alternative polling station

*Postal voting*

- 9.1.7 The recommendation relating to the redirection of postal votes should be removed.
- 9.1.8 All application for postal votes should be acknowledged.
- 9.1.9 Establish central clearing house for postal voting applications and registrations applications
- 9.1.10 New offence of fraudulently requesting a postal vote
- 9.1.11 Powers and obligations of ROs will be covered in report on role of ROs
- 9.1.12 The information on the ballot pack must be prescribed, although the text may not be.

*Implementation*

- 9.1.13 Most of the recommendations could be, and needs to be, in place for 2006, and where applicable, included in any referendum order. The changes in registration should be in place for 2007. The legislation therefore needs to be in place by January 2006.
- 9.2 The Commissioners agreed that there should be an executive summary, and a covering letter, to signed off by SY and PW. The Commissioners discussed the timetable for the launch of the report, bearing in mind that the Queen's Speech was on Tuesday 17 May, and that it had been indicated that the Lord Chancellor would be making a statement on 13 May. The Commissioners agreed that a decision could be taken once it was clear what timetable the Government were working to.
- 9.3 **The Commissioners agreed further amendments to the draft report, and authorised SY and PW to sign off the executive summary and the covering letter.**

## 10. Matters for information.

10.1 The Commissioners noted the following matters for information:

- The meeting scheduled for 11 August has been cancelled
- There will be an additional Audit Committee meeting on 9 August at 10.30am
- The Boundary Committee report on electoral reviews will be deferred to the next meeting.

10.2 The Commissioners agreed that with effect from the end of May, the formal business of the Commission would be discussed only at the meetings in the middle of the month.