

Minutes of the meeting of the Electoral Commission held on Thursday 11 September 2008, London

Present: Max Caller (MC)
Ian Kelsall (IK)
John McCormick (JM)
Karamjit Singh (KS) **Chair**

Peter Wardle (PW)
Clare Ettinghausen (CE)
Carolyn Hughes (CH)
Lisa Klein (LK)
Stephen Rooney (SR)

Bob Posner (BP)
Vera Markos (VM)
Carole Scrivener (CS) (Minutes)
Tom Hawthorn (TH) – Items 1 - 7
Dan Markson (DM) – Items 2, 3
Seamus Magee (SM) – Item 4
Katy Bere (KB)– Items 6, 7
Archie Gall (AG)– Items 8, 9
Ann Devine (AD) – Item 8
Elizabeth Morrow (EM)– Item 8
Joleen Bull (JB)– Item 8
Julie Humphreys (JH) – Item 10

Apologies: Sam Younger, Henrietta Campbell, Andrew Scallan

1 Minutes

- 1.1 The Commission agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 6 August 2008 (EC75/08).

2 Response to the Ministry of Justice consultation on weekend voting (EC76/08)

- 2.1 DM presented the proposed response to the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) consultation on whether polling days should be moved from the traditional Thursday to the weekend.
- 2.2 The Commission supported the following recommendations:
 - Polling days should not at present be moved to the weekend.
 - Repeat the position taken on advance voting in polling station, in response to the Gould report.
- 2.3 The Commission requested revision of the third recommendation. Instead of focusing on individual registration and the use of resources, this aspect of the response should be broadened to emphasise the need for a more strategic approach to the modernisation of elections administration. There should in particular be a reference back to the Commission's own agenda for change, set out at paragraph 2.12 of the August 2008 report *Electoral Administration in the United Kingdom*.
- 2.4 The Commission agreed that SY would sign off the final version.

3 Response to the Department for Communities and Local Government consultation on local government referendum question (EC77/08)

- 3.1 DM presented a draft response to the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) consultation on the intelligibility of the draft local government governance questions to be included in the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health (Executive Arrangements) (Amendments, Repeals and Revocations) Order 2008.
- 3.2 The Commission noted that user testing had informed the draft response.
- 3.3 The Commission was concerned that certain terminology suggested in the revised question would not be understood easily by voters. The Commission agreed the response subject to changing the references to "a council member, who is chosen by elected council members", to "a councillor, who is chosen by elected councillors" – provided that there was no strong evidence against this approach in the results of the user testing, which were not available at the meeting.

- 3.4 The Commission agreed that SY would sign off the final version of the response. They also requested that the commentary on the DCLG's proposed question should be presented more clearly, perhaps using colour.

- 4 Response to the Northern Ireland Office consultation on improving the administration of elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly (EC78/08)
 - 4.1 SM reported on the proposed response to the Northern Ireland Office's (NIO) consultation *Improving the administration of elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly*.
 - 4.2 The Commission asked for further work to be done on the response to the sections covering MLA vacancies, MEP replacements, nominations, deposits, Polling Agents and the provision of information by Presiding Officers. They were content with the recommended response to the sections covering suspension of the count, sub-agents, period taken for nominations, multiple voting and party emblems.
 - 4.3 The Commission agreed that a revised paper be circulated to Commissioners for final review.

- 5 Consultation on performance standards for Returning Officers (EC79/08)
 - 5.1 TH presented the key issues relating to the consultation paper seeking views on a series of draft performance standards for Returning Officers in Great Britain. The paper is due to be published at the end of September 2008.
 - 5.2 The Commission discussed the merits of reviewing the standards to ensure they adequately covered the personal role of the Returning Officer.
 - 5.3 The Commission agreed the consultation paper subject to the outcome of further work on this issue.

- 6 Making your mark: designing for democracy – project summary (EC80/08)
 - 6.1 KB briefed the Commission on the 'Making your mark' project.
 - 6.2 The Commission agreed the approach outlined to this project.
 - 6.3 The Commission requested an update on the project in early 2009.

- 7 The Crewe & Nantwich, Henley, Haltemprice & Howden and Glasgow East by-elections (EC81/08)
 - 7.1 KB presented the report on the UK parliamentary by-elections in Crewe & Nantwich, Henley, Haltemprice & Howden and Glasgow East.
 - 7.2 Commissioners queried the reference in chapter 8 of the report which outlined potential differences in practices for declaring results at the by-election counts, and asked that further consideration be given to whether this was sufficiently noteworthy to merit inclusion in the final report.
 - 7.3 The Commission agreed the report on the administration of the by-elections for publication on 7 October 2008 subject to re-drafting of the section relating to the declaration of results.
- 8 Recommendations on the Boundary Committee for England's proposals following their electoral review of Isle of Wight (EC82/08)
 - 8.1 BP presented the paper on the Boundary Committee for England's (BCFE) final recommendations for electoral arrangements for Isle of Wight, the conduct of the review and the written representations received during the six weeks after those final recommendations were published.
 - 8.2 The BCFE report and Appendices on clarifications of final recommendations, electoral variances greater than 10% and names of proposed electoral divisions were circulated at the meeting.
 - 8.3 It was agreed that SY would approach the Commissioners after the meeting in order to seek their views and final decision on the recommendations as set out in Item 2.1 of the paper.
- 9 Presentation of proposals for Devon, Norfolk and Suffolk and update on Cornwall
 - 9.1 MC presented the draft proposals on the structural reviews for Devon, Norfolk and Suffolk.
 - 9.2 The Commission noted the proposals and discussed handling and risk management.
 - 9.3 The Commission noted its appreciation of the efforts of AG and his team in meeting the tight timeframes.

10 PEF update (EC83/08)

- 10.1 The Commission received and noted an update from JH on current PEF activities and performance during the month of August 2008.