

Minutes of the meeting of the Electoral Commission held on Thursday 13 September 2007, London

Present: Sam Younger (SY) (Chair)
Glyn Mathias (GM)
Sir Neil McIntosh (NM)
Karamjit Singh (KS)
Henrietta Campbell (HC)

In attendance: Peter Wardle (PW)
Carolyn Hughes
Stephen Rooney (SR)
Tom Hawthorn (TH) for item 1
Bob Posner (BP) for items 2, 3 and 4
Kate Sullivan (KBS) for items 2 and 3
Mark Williams (MW) for item 3
Tim Kershaw (TK) for item 3
Linda Hews (LH) for item 4
Phil Thompson (PT) for item 6
Karen Quaintmere (KQ) for item 6
Archie Gall (AG) for AoB item
Vera Markos (VM) minutes

Apologies were received from Max Caller, Clare Ettinghausen, Lisa Klein and Andrew Scallan.

1. Minutes of meeting of 9 August 2007 (EC130/07)
 - 1.1 The Commission agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 9 August 2007, subject to an amendment to paragraph 3.1 (ii).
 - 1.2 The Commission noted in relation to agenda item 2 (performance standards) that the first set of performance indicators for electoral registration and a financial information survey for electoral services were published on 10 September via a Commission circular (EC33/07) with a deadline of 18 January for receipt of electoral registration performance indicators data. The Commission presented the indicators and requirements at the AEA and Capita conferences, and has written to other key stakeholders notifying them of the publication of the indicators. The Performance Standards team undertook to

provide Commissioners with a briefing on the key messages which had been conveyed to stakeholders, particularly elected representatives.

- 1.3 The Commission requested an update at a future meeting on the planned timetable for publishing performance indicator data following its receipt in January 2008, particularly in view of the approaching 1 May elections.

2. Scottish Elections Review – update (EC131/07)

- 2.1 BP requested that further to a request from the Scottish Ministers the Commission require the production of copies of information stored in the electronic counting system for the Scottish Local Government elections held on 3 May 2007, as part of a review conducted at the request of the Scottish Executive.
- 2.2 The Commission agreed the recommendation.
- 2.3 PW noted that the publication date for the publication of the Scottish Elections Review report had been confirmed as 24 October.

3. 19 July 2007 UK Parliamentary by-elections report (EC132/07)

- 3.1 TK noted that the report covered the by-elections held in Ealing Southall and Sedgefield which, while being held to short timetables, were delivered successfully. The report is scheduled for publication in the week commencing 1 October.
- 3.2 TK further noted that these were the first by-elections to the UK Parliament to be held since the EAA came into force providing the Commission the power to report on UK Parliamentary by-elections under its own initiative. In September 2006 the Commission published a report on the Blaenau Gwent 'dual' by-elections following a request from the Welsh Assembly Government.
- 3.3 Specific points highlighted in the discussion include:
 - (i) urging the government to implement a standardised election timetable of 25 days (a previous recommendation of the Commission accepted by the government)
- 3.4 In relation to paragraphs 6.21 – 6.26 of the report BP advised that there was no legal restriction in the Commission referring to there having been allegations concerning secrecy issues on postal vote opening.
- 3.5 The Commission approved the report subject to drafting amendments as discussed and the insertion of an amended section 6.21 – 6.26.

3.6 The Commission further agreed to report on future UK Parliamentary by-elections as appropriate on a case by case basis.

4. Update on party and election finance compliance matters (EC133/07)

4.1 The Commission received an update on a number of regulatory issues and recommendations for action in relation to compliance programmes.

4.2 The Commission noted the update and agreed the recommendations for action. The PEF team agreed to review the approach to future updates on regulatory issues.

5. Inter-party talks on party funding update

5.1 PW reported that the inter-party talks scheduled for 3 September, at which the Commission was invited to discuss its work and future plans had been postponed. The meeting was now scheduled for 10 October. The Commission expected to be attending this meeting.

5.2 The Commission noted the update.

6. Evaluation of the English Offices (presentation of findings to date and opportunity to feed in views)

6.1 PT outlined the purpose of the evaluation, fieldwork details, activities to date and an analysis of the findings. Key findings include that stakeholders are supportive of the concept of regional offices; that their election support to-date has been well received and that the locations of the offices are not an issue for stakeholders. However, the need for greater clarity of the future role of the English Offices was identified for further development.

6.2 The Commission welcomed the presentation and was encouraged by the positive response from stakeholders both in relation to the support that has been provided to date and the geographic location of the offices.

6.3 The Commission discussion highlighted the differences between the Devolved Offices and the English Offices and considered the future role of the Commission's English Offices beyond electoral events. The Commission anticipated that the evaluation would provide a solid basis for further discussion with the Committee on Standards in Public Life of their recommendation for the establishment of statutory Regional Electoral Officers.

6.4 The Commission noted that the report would be presented at the 22 November Commission meeting.

7. AoB

- 7.1 AG presented a proposed response of the Commission and the Boundary Committee for England to the Department for Communities and Local Government's consultation paper on the implementation of new unitary authority structure, noting that the deadline for response was 27 September. AG stated that the Boundary Committee for England had discussed a response at its meeting on 6 September. AG further noted that the majority of the resource implications would impact on the budget for the 2008/09 financial year.
- 7.2 The Commission supported the response to the DCLG consultation on the implementation of new unitary authority structure and delegated the final approval of the response to Sam Younger and to Max Caller in his capacity as Chair of the Boundary Committee for England. PW asked that the draft be cleared with him before this, in view of the implications for the Commission's budget.
- 7.3 PW noted that the Commission (represented by Peter Wardle and Lisa Klein) had been requested to present the keynote international speech at the COGEL conference on 18 September.
- 7.4 The Commission agreed to send a letter to the Ministry of Justice outlining areas where the Commission believed the legislative framework for referendums would benefit from changes prior to referendum being held. The Commission further agreed to schedule a wider discussion of the issues involved in running a referendum.