

Minutes of the meeting of the Electoral Commission held on Tuesday 10 July 2007, London

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

In attendance: Peter Wardle (PW)
Clare Ettinghausen (CE)
Lisa Klein (LK)
Stephen Rooney (SR)
Andrew Scallan (AS)
Carolyn Hughes (CH)
Linda Hews (LH) for item 3
Malcolm Rawlings (MR) for item 4
Mark Williams (MW) for item 4
Paul Allen (PA) for item 4
Bob Posner (BP) for item 6
Nina Ziaullah (NZ) for item 5
Vera Markos (VM) minutes

1. Minutes of the meeting of 7 June 2007 (EC119/07)
 - 1.1 The Commission agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 7 June 2007.
 - 1.2 The Commission noted in relation to agenda item 2 that the elections reports were on track for scheduled publication on 19 July and that the electoral pilot schemes report was being considered under agenda item 4. The Commission further noted that the revised Race Equality Scheme had been sent to the CRE in late June.
2. Minutes of the meeting of 27 June 2007 (EC120/07)
 - 2.1 The Commission agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 27 June 2007, subject to an amendment to item 3 and an inclusion recording Pamela Gordon's contribution to the Commission.
 - 2.2 In relation to item 1 (response to the Ministry of Justice on distribution of MEP seats) the response was distributed to Commission attendees and SY asked Commissioners to provide any comments by 16 July.

3. Party and Election Finance – enforcement decision
(EC121/07)

- 3.1 The Commission considered the paper and agreed to the recommendations outlined in the paper.
- 3.2 The Commission also received an update of other ongoing party and election finance issues.

4. Electoral pilot schemes (EC122/07)

- 4.1 The Commission considered each of the five reports summarising findings from the evaluation of the 12 electoral pilot schemes individually.
- 4.2 Signing for ballot papers in polling stations
- MW introduced the report and noted that signing for ballot papers in polling stations had been the subject of limited piloting in the 2006 elections. There was limited additional learning captured from the four pilot areas in 2007 compared to 2006.
 - The Commission discussion included whether there are alternative ways in improving security in polling stations. It was requested that the report make more reference to the benefits that the introduction of individual registration would bring to polling station security.
- 4.3 Advance voting
- MW introduced the report and noted that advance voting had been piloted in previous years. This year five authorities participated in the scheme. MW concluded that whilst the scheme offers benefits to some people, overall take-up of advance voting remains low and there was very little new learning from the pilot in 2007.
 - The Commission discussion included consideration of how this option fitted into the wider government modernisation strategy, the cost benefit of this option and whether if implemented it would be mandatory or discretionary for Authority take-up.
 - The Commission agreed to recommend that the evidence following piloting does not provide a great return on the investment.
- 4.4 Electronic counting
- MW introduced the report and noted that these pilot schemes had concluded with mixed results, with some areas abandoning e-counts. Overall though, evidence demonstrates that had current best practice been applied these pilot schemes could have been more effective when coupled with an effective framework and substantial testing of equipment.

- The Commission considered how learning from electronic counting pilots could best be applied to future elections, notably local elections in Wales and the GLA elections in 2008, and the risks in continuing small-scale pilots given the organisational capacity within smaller local authorities to undertake rigorous procurement processes.
- The Commission concluded that electronic counting pilots to date have provided enough evidence without the need for further small-scale piloting should electronic counting be adopted for future use within the framework of wider electoral modernisation strategy.

4.5 Electronic voting

- MW introduced the report and noted that although broadly successful owing to tight timescales there were unnecessary levels of risk associated with the pilot.
- The Commission raised concern over the insufficient amount of time allowed for testing and quality assurance of the systems and discussed the different risks posed by supervised voting compared with a remote and non-supervised environment.

4.6 Overview report

- The Commission discussed the overview report in light of comments and conclusions drawn from the above discussions.

4.7 The Commission agreed to delegate sign-off of the reports to the Chairman and Chief Executive.

5. Debrief on public awareness campaigns in Northern Ireland, England and Wales

5.1 NZ presented an overview of the public awareness campaigns 2006-07 and their effectiveness. NZ noted that an external evaluation of the Scotland public awareness campaign was being undertaken.

5.2 The Commission noted the presentation and agreed to revisit key issues highlighted in the presentation at its next meeting on 9 August.

6. Access to Scottish ballot papers

6.1 The Commission noted and endorsed the key points in the Commission's response to the Scotland Office on the draft Order enabling access to the Scottish parliamentary ballot papers.

6.2 BP informed the Commission of progress towards an Order enabling access to the Scottish local government ballot papers.

7. AoB

- 7.1 PW provided an update on the CORE keeper situation and the ongoing discussions with the Ministry of Justice.
- 7.2 The Commission noted that a request had been received from Rita Donaghy, Interim Chair of the Committee on Standards in Public Life, for a meeting with the CSPL once a response from Government has been published. The Commission has welcomed a meeting following the Government response.
- 7.4 AS circulated a paper updating the Commission on the work in relation to performance standards. The Commission also noted preparations for the by-elections in Ealing Southall and Sedgefield.