

Minutes of the Wales Political Parties Panel held on Thursday, 12 February 2009 at The Electoral Commission's Wales Office

**Present: Political Parties**

Joanne Foster, Chief Executive, Liberal Democrats  
Matt Lane, Director, Welsh Conservatives  
Chris Roberts, General Secretary, Welsh Labour  
Gwenllian Lansdown, Chief Executive, Plaid Cymru

**Present: The Electoral Commission**

Ian Kelsall, Electoral Commissioner and Chair  
Kay Jenkins, Head of Wales Office  
David Beacock, Political [Parties](#) Liaison Officer, Wales Office  
Pete Menzies, Business Quality Manager, London Office  
Mark Old, PEF Consultant, London Office

**Present: External**

Bev Edwards, Wales Extremism and Counter Terrorism Unit  
Terry Stevens, Wales Extremism and Counter Terrorism Unit

**1 Welcome / Apologies for absence**

1.1 Apologies were received from Ian Walton, Liberal Democrats.

**2 Minutes of the last meeting**

2.1 The minutes were agreed as a correct record.

**3 Matters arising**

3.1 KJ updated the meeting on the consultation on the draft performance standards for returning officers (ROs), which closed in mid December 2008. The final standards will be published in March 2009, to be applied to the European Parliamentary elections in May.

3.2 DB reported on the progress of the project to standardise statements of accounts. Price Waterhouse Coopers had completed the draft guidance which the political parties at Westminster were being consulted on. The first guidance should be published before the end of quarter one of 2009.

- 3.3 DB reported that the Commission's guidance review project was ongoing, with continued consultation with the political parties.

#### **4 Local elections 2008: Commission analysis of campaign expenditure**

- 4.1 Copies of the report were circulated whilst KJ and DB led a discussion on its findings.
- 4.2 PPP members agreed that the report was of interest and a very useful document. DB outlined that it would be available on the Commission's website within the next month.

#### **5 Ministry of Justice consultation on the Publication of candidates' addresses at UK Parliamentary elections**

- 5.1 KJ reported that no decision had yet been made by the MOJ on this issue, and outlined the Commission's published response to the consultation.
- 5.2 CR registered concern that candidates may currently be able to provide inaccurate residency information on ballot papers. CR also highlighted the issue of the safety of candidates who may have held or still hold politically sensitive positions and the vulnerability that publishing their address causes.
- 5.3 GL agreed that candidates could often feel vulnerable but was also concerned that transparency in the system and access to elected officials be maintained. There was a balance to be struck. The example of a candidate using a PO Box was highlighted.
- 5.4 ML felt that further clarity was required regarding the offence of making a false statement on a ballot paper.
- 5.5 JF echoed GL's sentiments and also registered concern that ROs may have verification duties placed upon them which would be neither desirable nor practical.

#### **6 Planning for the European Parliamentary elections in 2009**

- 6.1 **Commission guidance and support** – DB informed the meeting of the guidance documents made available to parties, candidates and agents for the European elections, and the plans for their distribution.
- 6.2 **Approach to compliance and expenditure monitoring** – DB outlined the Commission's plans to conduct desk-based campaign monitoring exercises in conjunction with electoral

observations, and to look at post-election returns submitted by parties and independent candidates.

- 6.3 **Electoral administration issues** – KJ highlighted the greater degree of coordination for the European Parliamentary elections across the UK. In Wales, a more coordinated approach was being spearheaded by the RRO, supported by the Commission, and the outcome should achieve more consistency for voters, parties and candidates.
- 6.4 ML enquired as to the procedure agreed upon for the count. The Panel noted with regret that, despite the views of all involved in Wales, the local count areas would be existing parliamentary constituencies rather than the constituencies used for the Assembly elections in 2007. Results could be expected from nine o'clock on the Sunday evening, after polls closed across Europe.
- 6.5 **Commission report on the elections** - the Commission would be reporting on a UK-wide basis on the elections, highlighting any significant issues from each electoral region. The intention was to publish the report in October, which would enable the findings of external research and the performance standards to be included.
- 6.6 KJ updated the meeting on the Commission's public awareness campaign, which will again focus on the deadline for registering to vote. Briefing sessions will be held with regional newspapers across Wales regarding the electoral system.

## **7 Political party offices and conference security issues**

- 7.1 GL outlined some security issues that Plaid Cymru and its staff members have faced and welcomed the opportunity to discuss these with representatives from the Wales Extremism and Counter Terrorism Unit. ML and JF added their concerns about the unsocial hours that party members work, the relatively young age of much of their staff and the status of political parties as a beacon to groups of politically motivated people.
- 7.2 Bev Edwards gave a short presentation on what his unit could offer the parties and a discussion was held on the particular issues that political parties face.
- 7.3 Contact details and information materials were left with DB who agreed to circulate to the parties on request.

## **8 Update on individual electoral registration and the CORE project**

- 8.1 A briefing was circulated and the Commission's position on the issue was summarised by KJ. A brief discussion was held on the key issues surrounding the project such as likely implementation dates and the requirement for scrutiny of the Commission should it adopt the role of 'CORE-keeper'.
- 8.2 KJ updated the meeting on the progress of the PPE Bill and some of the ramifications of tabled amendments. A brief discussion was held on the issue of dual reporting at the National Assembly for Wales. Further discussions would take place once the PPE Bill had been passed.

**9 Demonstration of the Electoral Commission's new registration database – presentation by Mark Old and Pete Menzies**

- 9.1 PM and MO conducted a presentation of the new database.
- 9.2 Party members welcomed the new system but registered concern that if accounting units were able to submit their statements of accounts online, then the central party may lose control over the submissions, potentially leading to a decrease in the quality of the information provided and further follow-up work for both the Commission and the parties.
- 9.3 PM acknowledged the concerns and outlined that they were included in the ongoing development of the system and would be addressed in due course. An appeal was made for further such issues to be forwarded to PM.

**10 Any other business**

- 10.1 ML requested an update on the local government boundary review which had recently been announced. There was concern about the timetable of the review and its potential impact on the next local elections in 2012, particularly with regard to candidate selections. The Panel agreed to invite Edward Lewis of the Boundary Commission in Wales to the next meeting of the PPP to discuss.

**11 Date of next meeting**

- 11.1 It was agreed that the next meeting of the Wales PPP would be 16 June 2009.