

Minutes of the meeting of the Electoral Commission held on Thursday 13 November 2008, Edinburgh

Present: Sam Younger (SY) Chair
Max Caller (MC)
Henrietta Campbell (HC)
John McCormick (JMcC)
Karamjit Singh (KS)

Peter Wardle (PW)
Clare Ettinghausen (CE) (via videoconference)
Carolyn Hughes (CH) (via videoconference)
Lisa Klein (LK) (via videoconference)
Stephen Rooney (SR)
Andrew Scallan (AS)

Vera Markos (VM) (minutes)
Gemma Rosenblatt (GR) – Item 2 (via video-conference)
Tom Hawthorn (TH) – Item 2 and 3 (via video-conference)
Karen Quaintmere (KQ) - Item 2 and 3 (video conference)
Mark Williams (MW) – item 3 (videoconference)
Clinton Proud (CP) – Item 6

Apologies: Ian Kelsall

1 Minutes (EC93/08)

1.1 The Commission agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 16 October 2008, subject to changes requested to paragraphs 3.3 and 6.2.

2 Accuracy and completeness of electoral registers in Great Britain: research programme (EC94/08)

2.1 AS outlined the proposed approach to a programme of research into electoral registers in GB and noted that the programme builds on research already undertaken into the accuracy and completeness of electoral registers. AS noted that a separate programme of research into the electoral register in Northern Ireland is underway owing to the differences in the electoral registration system. AS noted that the programme of work beyond 2009 is contingent on the outcome of the

first project that would look at a small sample of local area case studies on accuracy and completeness. The case studies enable and enhance understanding of how the Commission can provide support to Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) through the Commission's work on performance standards for EROs.

- 2.2 The Commission discussed the methodology planned for the case studies scheduled to begin in early 2009 using the December electoral registers. It was noted that research into electoral registers has not proved straightforward and that this first case studies project alone will not be able to address all the issues into accuracy and completeness of electoral registers.
- 2.3 The Commission was keen to involve a broad range of stakeholders (including ONS, academics, other organisations involved in maintaining registration systems) to support the research programme through advice and guidance. AS noted that a group of external advisers would be helpful to continuing such research.
- 2.4 The Commission approved the proposed approach and requested that it receive regular updates on the progress against the planned work programme.

3 Individual Electoral registration and CORE (EC95/08)

- 3.1 AS updated the Commission on recent developments relating to electoral registration in GB, including issues relating to individual electoral registration and CORE (the Co-ordinated Online Record of Electors). AS noted that the Government continued to press ahead with the development of CORE and had requested the Commission's thoughts on its acceptance of the role of CORE keeper.
- 3.2 The Commission considered whether the benefits identified for the establishment of a UK-wide database of electoral registration data remained valid. The benefits fall into two main categories;
 - donations to political parties – making it easier for political parties to check that individual donors are on the electoral register, and
 - adding further security to an electoral registration system based on IER and personal identifiers.
- 3.3 It concluded that a national electoral registration database would bring greater public confidence in the security and accuracy of electoral registers. There would need to be adequate safeguards to address real concerns about privacy and security of the data it holds; and must be capable of being delivered and maintained at a cost proportionate with the potential benefits.
- 3.3 The Commission concluded that the benefits of a national database could only be realised once both personal voter identifiers and individual electoral registration were introduced. Without these

preconditions there would be little or no benefit to setting up a national electoral registration database.

- 3.4 Adding the operation of any future CORE system to the Commission's range of responsibilities would represent a significant change to the current focus of the organisation, from monitoring and reporting on the performance of electoral administration to a direct involvement in the delivery of electoral registration in Great Britain. On a more practical front, the Commission has no existing expertise in managing the delivery of large national databases, and an attempt to develop such capacity could risk the Commission's other responsibilities being overshadowed by the need to manage and maintain CORE. However, as a regulator and an auditor of performance standards in electoral registration and administration the Commission was keen to continue to be involved in policy development discussions.

4 PEF update/PPE Bill update (EC96/08)

- 4.1 The Commission received and noted an update on current PEF activities and performance during the month of October 2008.
- 4.2 LK and PW noted the progression of the Political Parties and Elections Bill and the continued work of staff across the Commission in preparing briefing materials for Bill Committee members. The Commission noted the update and expressed its appreciation of the work being undertaken across the Commission in relation to the Bill.

5 Q2 performance and finance report (EC97/08)

- 5.1 CH and VM briefly presented the highlights of the Commission's financial and operational performance for the period from July – September 2008.
- 5.2 The Commission noted the report.

6 European Parliamentary elections public awareness campaign

- 6.1 CP presented the Commission with an update on the creative for the public awareness campaign for the European Parliamentary elections in June 2009.
- 6.2 The Commission welcomed the update.

7 Verbal updates

7.1 The Commission received updates following election observation visits:

- USA elections as observed by Max Caller, Henrietta Campbell and Andrew Scallan
- Canadian elections as observed by John McCormick and Tom Hawthorn
- New Zealand elections as observed by Sam Younger

7.2 MC provided an update on the latest developments and work of the Boundary Committee for England on its boundary reviews programme.