

Minutes of the meeting of the Electoral Commission held  
on Wednesday 03 October 2007, London

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

In attendance: Peter Wardle (PW)  
Clare Ettinghausen (CE)  
Lisa Klein (LK)  
Andrew Scallan (AS)  
Carolyn Hughes (CH)  
Helena Hird (HH) for items 2, 3 and 7  
Molly McCarthy (MMcC) for item 3  
Dirk Haubrich (DH) for item 3  
Mark Williams (MW) for item 4  
Tim Atkinson (TA) for item 4  
Rachel Savage (RS) for item 5  
Bob Posner (BP) for items 6 and 7  
Nina Ziaullah (NZ) for item 7  
Doug Stewart (DS) for item 7  
Vera Markos (VM) minutes

Apologies were received from Stephen Rooney

1. Minutes of meeting of 9 August 2007 (EC135/07)
  - 1.1 The Commission agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 13 September 2007.
  - 1.2 The Commission noted in relation to agenda item 3 that the UK Parliamentary by-elections report had been published and in relation to agenda item 7.1 that the Commission and Boundary Committee for England had responded to the DCLG consultation on the implementation of new unitary authority structure.

- 1.3 In relation to agenda item 4.2 LK noted that the PEF team review of the approach to future updates on regulatory issues would be available by December Commission meeting.
- 1.4 In relation to agenda item 5 PW noted that although the Commission would not be attending the 10 October meeting a number of opportunities had been identified to reinforce issues raised with Sir Hayden Phillips and parties.
2. Scottish Elections 2007 report (Part B of Scottish elections report) (EC136/07)
  - 2.1 AS noted that this report (Part B of the Scottish elections report) covered those areas not expected to be covered by the Ron Gould report including issues relating to the introduction of personal identifiers for absent voters in Scotland, the guidance produced to support Returning Officers and their staff and the candidates and agents, electoral integrity activities undertaken by the Commission, the police and others and minor matters relating to electoral registration, polling, electoral observation and candidate nomination.
  - 2.2 AS informed the Commission that the report by Ron Gould remained on target for publication on 23 or 24 October and that Ron Gould would present his findings at the Commission meeting scheduled for 25 October. The report would be postponed to November should a UK parliamentary general election be called.
  - 2.3 The Commission considered each section of the 'Part B' report and noted that the facts and figures section be presented as an appendix to enable greater clarity.
  - 2.4 The Commission agreed the report subject to amendments discussed and delegated final sign off to SY and NM.
3. Electoral registers research – London pilot and next steps (EC137/07)
  - 3.1 MMcC reported that the pilot study brought to light some key registration trends in Greater London and provided information about the advantages and limitations of a range of methodologies that could be used to ascertain the accuracy and completeness of the electoral registers. These were:
    - the age group with the greatest number of eligible and unregistered respondents in Greater London was the 25-34 year old age group, a slightly higher age group than has been found previously.
    - 91% of respondents thought they were registered, this was at least 11% in excess of the overall registration estimate for London,

suggesting there is still work to be done in informing people about the registration process.

- while the level of over-registration could not be ascertained satisfactorily, it did however reveal that only 0.5% of the telephone survey sample were ineligible and on the register (solely due to their nationality).
- the chosen methodology was not best suited to determining levels of inaccuracy in the electoral register with a high degree of robustness, and alternative methodologies will be necessary to further address this issue.

MMcC further noted that the methodologies used in the London pilot were unsuitable for drawing firm conclusions about the integrity of electoral registers. The Commission planned to convene a roundtable of stakeholders and experts to examine the best way forward in measuring completeness and accuracy of the electoral registers.

- 3.2 The Commission considered the issues presented and noted the complexity of issues concerned and the costs involved in measuring completeness and accuracy of the electoral registers. The Commission was concerned that there remain a number of issues that the pilot had not succeeded in covering including better understanding dual registration, redundancy and population movement.
- 3.3 The Commission requested a review of work undertaken into the integrity of electoral registers and of the outstanding issues that had not been addressed by the pilot methodology.
- 3.4 The Commission agreed that the pilot research be published but that the limitations of the research methodology should be highlighted. The Commission also agreed the importance of further research into alternative methods of addressing the integrity of the electoral registers and noted the roundtable as a mechanism to support the Commission's objective.
4. Response to Ministry of Justice consultation on fees for the marked register (EC138/07)
  - 4.1 MW highlighted the key recommendations in the proposed response to the Ministry of Justice: that the charge for the marked register be reduced in order to facilitate campaigning and that authorised recipients of the marked register also be permitted to make notes from the inspection copy using a laptop computer or equivalent device.
  - 4.2 The Commission considered the proposed response and noted Northern Ireland had been excluded from the consultation.
  - 4.3 The Commission agreed that that in principle the marked register should be provided free of charge to candidates and agents and a modest fee charged for others that reflected the administrative costs

incurred by the local authorities. The Commission agreed the response subject to this change.

5. Voluntary undertaking on loans – Northern Ireland (EC139/07)

5.1 RS reported that the proposed approach outlined was an interim approach to monitoring loans taken out by political parties in Northern Ireland prior to the introduction of legislation on this subject. This approach was considered necessary as from 1 November 2007, Part IV PPERA would apply to parties on the Northern Ireland register thereby regulating donations to such parties for the first time. Although Northern Ireland Office officials have assured the Commission that a draft Order is a priority there is no firm timetable available and any Order was unlikely to commence prior to April 2008 at the earliest.

5.2 BP noted that any loan information voluntarily submitted to the Commission could be subject to freedom of information requests.

5.3 The Commission agreed to the approach outlined.

6. Consultation protocol for the Electoral Commission

6.1 BP presented a policy statement setting out the Commission's requested approach from law making bodies or individuals (parliament, devolved bodies, government and Ministerial) on all statutory consultation with the Commission, relating to proposed legislation on electoral law. BP noted that this policy statement was developed further to the 7 June 2007 Commission meeting.

6.2 The Commission welcomed the policy statement as a useful document for both internal and external use.

6.3 The Commission agreed the policy statement subject to indicating in the policy that the Commission will generally be able to respond to consultation requests within a four week timeframe.

7. General election planning – verbal update

7.1 The Commission received a briefing outlining the planning arrangements in place should a November 2007 UK parliamentary general election be called.

8. Government response to Committee on Standards in Public Life (CSPL) report – verbal update

8.1 CE reported that the Government response to the CSPL was anticipated to be published on 20 November. CSPL had requested to meet with the Commission following Government publication. The

Commission anticipated writing to key stakeholders to explain key areas of achievement further to those areas identified in the Commission's own response to CSPL.