

Minutes of the meeting of the Electoral Commission held
on Thursday 22 November 2007, London

Present: Sir Neil Macintosh (NM) (Chair)
Karamjit Singh (KS)
Henrietta Campbell (HC) – see note below
Max Caller (MC)

In attendance: Peter Wardle (PW)
Clare Ettinghausen (CE)
Carolyn Hughes (CH)
Stephen Rooney (SR)
Bob Posner (BP)
Kate Sullivan (KBS) - for items 2, 4, 5 and 8
Tom Hawthorn (TH) – for item 2
Daisy Houghton (DH) – for item 3
Archie Gall (AG) – for item 6
Seamus McGee (SM) – for item 8
Vera Markos (VM) - minutes

Apologies were received from Sam Younger (SY), Glyn Mathias (GM), Lisa Klein (LK) and Andrew Scallan (AS)

It was noted at the commencement that the meeting was not quorate and agreed that whilst matters could be discussed no decisions would be taken until the meeting was quorate. The meeting became quorate when HC arrived following item 7. At that point all the preceding items were revisited and decisions taken.

- 1 Minutes of the meeting of 25 October 2007 (EC145/07)
 - 1.1 The Commission agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 25 October 2007.
2. Response to Gould report and election status report (EC146/07)
 - 2.1 PW introduced the reports stating that they covered the status of elections and opened a wider debate on the future structure of electoral arrangements across the UK. The proposed date for publication of the response to the Gould report was 29 December and 13 December for the election status report.

- 2.2 On the Gould response PW noted that the report would cover the whole of the UK and that it was important to acknowledge the differences in electoral arrangements in Northern Ireland. PW further noted that the strength of language in certain sections would be reviewed to ensure that it was measured.
- 2.3 The Commission welcomed the approach as set out in the reports and the call for an open debate on the future of electoral administration issues. The Commission also welcomed addressing first the issues immediately raised by the May 2007 elections in Scotland followed by the wider issues raised by Gould.
- 2.4 The Commission gave detailed consideration to the response to each of the Gould recommendations and agreed the report subject to drafting amendments. It was agreed to circulate a revised version of the Gould response to the Commission for final approval on 23 November.
- 2.5 The Commission requested a report on the review of registration of party descriptions for its meeting on 12 December 2007 (referred to in paragraph 33 of the report).
- 2.6 The Commission agreed the report on electoral administration in the UK subject to minor drafting amendments. The Commission further agreed to undertake an examination of future electoral arrangements. The Commission requested a report on the project scope document.

3. Budget and Corporate Plan (EC147/07)

- 3.1 PW noted that the corporate plan had been revised in line with the Commission agreement at its 25 October Commission meeting. PW noted that the corporate plan would be sent to the Speaker's Committee for discussion in advance of final review and sign off by the Commission in early 2008. CE noted that the corporate plan would be revised to take into account the recent government response to the Committee on Standards in Public Life (CSPL) eleventh inquiry and the Commission decision with regards to agenda item 2.
- 3.2 KS and MC noted that they would provide drafting comments to DS.
- 3.3 The Commission agreed the corporate plan, subject to above mentioned revisions, for onward submission to the Speaker's Committee.

4. Pilots in 2008

- 4.1 This agenda item was withdrawn. The Commission had been notified by the Ministry of Justice that it had no plans to run pilots for the May 2008 elections.

5. Consultation response: absent voting identifiers in Scotland (EC149/07)
 - 5.1 KBS introduced the draft Commission response to the Scotland Office's consultation on the draft Representation of the People (Scotland) (Amendment) (No.2) Regulations 2007 and the draft Absent Voting (Transitional Provisions) (Scotland) Regulations stating that the response reflects recommendations made to the Ministry of Justice in July 2007 in the Commission's evaluation of the introduction of absent voting identifiers in England and Wales during 2007.
 - 5.2 During the discussion of the response the Commission noted that the objective of public confidence in absent voting would be undermined if full 100% verification as standard was not accepted.
 - 5.3 The Commission agreed the response. The Commission further agreed to delegate approval of the Commission's response to the draft Scottish Parliament (Elections etc.) (Amendment) (No.2) Order to the Chair and NM as Commissioner with special interest for Scotland.

The Commission considered agenda item 7 as the next item

6. Review of procedure for considering Boundary Committee recommendations
 - 6.1 Role of the Commission: BP introduced the item which invited the Commission to agree the proposed principles at Appendix A and endorse the new Guidance from the BCFE to its stakeholders. The Commission approved the statement of principles for its role in considering recommendations from the BCFE. Consideration was also given to the proposed new guidance from the BCFE and it was agreed that further work was required to finalise the guidance, including in particular adding a section on the Commission's implementation and Order making stages. The final approval of the new guidance was delegated to the Chair and NM.
 - 6.2 The Commission also requested a further report on the Commission's role in relation to work considered and/or undertaken by the Boundary Committee in response to any request or direction from the Secretary of State, rather than a direction from the Commission; such as the expected review of proposals for unitary authorities in Norfolk arising from the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 for its December 2007 or January 2008 meeting.
 - 6.3 Role of the Chairman of the Boundary Committee: The Commission agreed practice for the Chair of the BCFE when there are agenda decision items on boundary reviews arising from Boundary Committee recommendations, as recommended in the report.

7. Further electoral reviews

- 7.1 Crewe and Nantwich (EC150/07): A correction to paragraph 12.2 (page 8) was circulated. CE, on behalf of GM, recommended that the Commission approve in principle the recommendations outlined in section 2 of the paper for implementation in early 2008. CE noted that the Commission was awaiting the DCLG decision on structural change orders for unitary reviews which would impact on this FER. The Commission agreed to the recommendations and agreed to postpone implementation. Any decision to implement the FER was delegated to the Chair.
- 7.2 Welwyn Hatfield (EC151/07): KS introduced the item and recommended approval of the recommendations outlined in Section 2, subject to two modifications.

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AG indicated that the Boundary Committee was content with the proposed modifications.

The Commission agreed the recommendations of the BCFE subject to the modifications. The Welwyn Hatfield electoral change Order will be made in time for the elections in May 2008.

8. AoB

- 8.1 Proposed changes to prescribed photographic identification at polling stations in Northern Ireland. The Commission agreed the recommendation to support the extension of a proposal to include the Translink BlindPass and Translink War Disabled Smartpass as acceptable forms of photographic identification at polling stations in Northern Ireland. The Commission gave considerable consideration to the recommendation to support the Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland's request to remove the requirement for photographic identification to be 'current'. On this issue the Commission concluded that the Government should only accept the Chief Electoral Officer's proposal if statistics are to be made available to the Commission to enable the Commission to monitor its implementation and any implications arising.
- 8.2 PW noted that on 19 November a decision of the House of Commons Standards and Privileges Committee held that three Plaid Cymru MPs had breached rules on the use of the House of Commons Communication Allowance, which they had used to meet the costs of newspaper advertisements placed in late April, just ahead of the Assembly elections. The MPs are required to repay the costs of the adverts to the House of Commons authorities. This followed the Commission calls that the costs of the advertisements should be included in the party's election campaign spending.

- 8.3 PW noted that the Government had published its response to the CSPL on 20 November. SR noted that the Commission would be writing to key stakeholders highlighting key activities and achievements over the past year. The Commission would also write to Rita Donaghy, Interim Chair of the CSPL.
- 8.4 PW reported on Chair / Executive action taken by the Chair and PW to approve a boundary amendment Order in Newark and Sherwood District Council. The Order amends the previous Order to correct an inaccurate map reference affecting one property and some open ground. Making the order enables the electoral register to be issued 1 December 2007 for Newark and Sherwood District Council to be correct.
- 8.5 BP notified that there will be a number of Parish review orders required in advance of the May 2008 local government elections addressing arrangements, and, or minor related alterations to district wards and county electoral divisions. The Commission delegated approval of required Orders to the Chair and the Chief Executive. In the event of any of the proposed orders raising matters of controversy they would not be decided under delegation, but instead come to a Commission meeting for decision. All delegated action taken would be reported back to the next Commission meeting.