

POLITICAL PARTIES, ELECTIONS AND  
REFERENDUMS ACT 2000



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**THE SPEAKER'S COMMITTEE**

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**THIRD REPORT 2007**



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REFERENDUMS ACT 2000



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**THIRD REPORT 2007**

*Presented to the House of Commons in pursuance of  
paragraph 1(1) of Schedule 2 of the Political Parties,  
Elections and Referendums Act 2000*

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## The Speaker's Committee

The Speaker's Committee is appointed in accordance with the provisions of section 2 of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 to perform the functions conferred on it by that Act.

### Membership (as at 12 December 2007)

Rt Hon Michael Martin MP, *Speaker of the House of Commons* (Chairman)  
Rt Hon Alan Beith MP  
Mr John Healey MP, *Minister for Local Government*  
Lady Hermon MP  
Rt Hon Sir Gerald Kaufman MP  
Mr Humfrey Malins CBE MP  
Rt Hon Jack Straw MP, *Secretary of State for Justice and Lord Chancellor*  
Mr Gary Streeter MP  
Mr Peter Viggers MP

### Previous Reports in this Parliament

The Second Report 2005, was published in July 2005 as House of Commons Paper No. 435 of Session 2005–06.

The Third Report 2005 was published in December 2005 as House of Commons Paper No. 783 of Session 2005–06.

The First Report 2006 was published in July 2006 as House of Commons Paper No. 1581 of Session 2005–06.

The First Report 2007 was published in August 2007 as House of Commons Paper No. 996 of Session 2006–07.

The Second Report 2007 was published in August 2007 as House of Commons Paper No. 997 of Session 2006–07

### Contacts

The Secretary of the Speaker's Committee is Mr Steve Priestley. Correspondence should be addressed to:

The Secretary of the Speaker's Committee  
Committee Office  
House of Commons  
7 Millbank  
London SW1P 3JA

Email: [speakerscommittee@parliament.uk](mailto:speakerscommittee@parliament.uk)

Telephone inquiries: 020 7219 2171

Fax: 020 7219 0300

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# Speaker's Committee Third Report, 2007

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## Introduction

1. The Speaker's Committee is appointed in accordance with the provisions of section 2 of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 (PPERA) to perform the functions conferred on it by that Act. A summary of the principal statutory functions of the Committee is given in Appendix 1.

2. By virtue of the provisions of paragraph 1(1) of Schedule 2, PERA, the Speaker's Committee is required to report to the House of Commons periodically on the exercise by it of its functions. This report is a general report by it on the exercise of its functions from the start of the current Parliament to 30 November 2007.

## Membership

3. Appendix 2 gives details of the membership of the Committee over the period covered by this report. There have been three changes of membership in the period covered by the current report: Mr Gary Streeter was appointed by the Speaker in March 2006 to replace Mrs Angela Browning, who had resigned from the Committee, and in November 2007, the Prime Minister appointed Mr John Healey in place of Mr Phil Woolas, who he had succeeded as Minister for Local Government. The Rt. Hon Jack Straw, MP, became an ex-officio member in June 2007, in succession to the Rt. Hon. Lord Falconer of Thoroton, on his appointment as Secretary of State for Justice and Lord Chancellor.

## Meetings

4. The Committee met seven times in the long 2005-06 Parliamentary Session and three times in the 2006-07 Session. The minutes of the meetings last two meetings in 2005-06, and all those in 2006-07 are reproduced at Appendix 3. The Chairman and officials of the Electoral Commission attended parts of these meetings, at the invitation of the Committee, as necessary.

5. The principal business, besides reviewing generally the work of the Electoral Commission, was consideration of its Main Estimates for 2006-07 and 2007-08, and the accompanying Five Year Plans. The Committee has also completed its review of the Electoral Commission; contributed to the inquiry by the Committee on Standards in Public Life into the Commission; and been involved in the reappointment of a number of Electoral Commissioners and, more recently, in the appointment of a number of new Commissioners.

6. In May 2006, the Committee agreed to establish an informal sub-committee, for the purpose of identifying key issues on which the Committee might focus. The membership is Mr Peter Viggers, who is also its Chairman, Mr Humfrey Malins and Mr Phil Woolas.<sup>1</sup> It has met on three occasions, twice in relation to the Committee's review of the Electoral Commission and once in preparation for the Committee's consideration of the 2007-08 Estimate and the accompanying Five Year plan.

### **Parliamentary Accountability**

7. Mr Peter Viggers continues in this Parliament as the member appointed by the Committee to answer parliamentary questions on its behalf. The number of Parliamentary Questions tabled to the Committee has continued to increase substantially. In the 2005-06 Session, 36 parliamentary questions were tabled to the Committee for oral answer in the House in the four-weekly periods of fifteen minutes shared with the Church Commissioners and the Public Accounts Commission, of which 26 received oral answers. The corresponding figures for the 2006-07 Session are 28 and 20 respectively. In addition, Mr Viggers answered 57 written questions in all in the 2005-06 Session and 87 in the 2006-07 Session.

8. Over this period, it has become established practice for questions in the House of Commons which are tabled to Ministers seeking information on the work of the Electoral Commission to be transferred to the Speaker's Committee for answer, in recognition of the independence of the Electoral Commission.

9. The first general debate to be devoted specifically to the work of the Electoral Commission was held on 3 July 2006, using as a vehicle the Commission's Estimate for 2006-07 and the device of an Estimates Day. The Committee is grateful to the Liaison Committee for selecting the Estimate for debate: the independence of the Commission from Government means that the principal means by which Members of the House can initiate debates cannot be used to secure a debate specifically on the work of the Commission.

### **Resourcing of the Electoral Commission**

10. The process of agreeing the Commission's 2006-07 Estimate was complicated by the need to anticipate the likely impact of additional resource requirements arising from enactment of the Electoral Administration Bill, which was still going through Parliament at the time the Estimate had to be agreed. The Net Resource Requirement of £26.180 million for 2006-07 finally agreed also reflected significant economies identified by the Commission in the course of consideration of the Estimate.

11. The 2007-08 Estimate process was the first in which the House of Commons Scrutiny Unit assisted in analysing the Commission's Estimate and the accompanying Plan. It also broke new ground in that an overall four-year financial framework, with the bulk of Commission expenditure capped in resource terms for that period, formed part of the settlement and is reflected in the Commission's five-year plan. Estimates remain subject to

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<sup>1</sup> Until he ceased to be a member of the Committee.

annual agreement, and the Net Resource Requirement for 2007-08 (and the resource cap for the three following financial years) set by the Committee is £23.995 million.

### Other matters

12. In the period covered by this report, there have been two statutory reports from the Comptroller and Auditor General on the economy, efficiency and effectiveness with which the Electoral Commission discharged its duties. The first, entitled 'Is the public aware of democracy?' was the subject of a formal presentation to us in July 2006. It was published in the Committee's First Report 2006<sup>2</sup> The second, entitled 'Electoral registration: The lynchpin of democracy' was considered by us in June 2007, and published in the Committee's Second Report 2007<sup>3</sup>.

13. The Committee published its response to the report of the Committee on Standards in Public Life on the Electoral Commission, addressing principally the recommendations addressed to the Committee, in July 2007 in its First Report 2007<sup>4</sup>. The Committee was pleased to see from the Government Response to the CSPL Report that there is agreement between the Government and the Committee on recommendations of mutual interest.

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2 HC 1581, Session 2005-06.

3 HC 997, Session 2006-07

4 HC 996, Session 2006-07

## Appendix 1: Powers and Duties of the Speaker's Committee

The following table summarises the principal powers and duties of the Speaker's Committee. References are to the relevant provisions of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000.

To agree with the Electoral Commission the maximum number of Deputy Electoral Commissioners (who serve only as members of Boundary Committees)	Section 15(2)
To report to the House that one or more of the statutory grounds for removal of an Electoral Commissioner has been made out before a Motion for an Address for the removal of a Commissioner can be made	Schedule 1, paragraph 3(5)
To designate the Commission's accounting officer and to specify his responsibilities	Schedule 1, paragraph 19(1) and 19(2)
To receive the Electoral Commission's annual accounts	Schedule 1, paragraph 18(1)(b)
To report to the House, at least once a year, on the exercise of its functions	Schedule 2, paragraph 1
To examine the Electoral Commission's estimates; decide whether the Committee is satisfied that they are consistent with the economical, efficient and effective discharge by the Commission of its functions; and modify them as necessary to make them consistent	Schedule 1, paragraph 14(3)
To lay before the House of Commons, with or without modification, the Electoral Commission's estimates	Schedule 1, paragraph 14(5)
To examine the Electoral Commission's plan of aims and objectives over the next five years and its estimated requirement for resources during that period; decide whether the Committee is satisfied that the plan is consistent with the economical, efficient and effective discharge by the Commission of its functions; and to modify the plan as necessary to make it consistent	Schedule 1, paragraph 15(2)
To lay before the House of Commons, with or without modification, the Electoral Commission's five year plan	Schedule 1, paragraph 15(4)
To consult the Treasury, and have regard to any advice it may give, before reaching decisions on the Electoral Commission's estimates and five year plan	Schedule 1, paragraph 14(4) and (6); and 15(3) and (5)
To receive the Comptroller and Auditor General's reports on the economy, efficiency and effectiveness' with which the Commission has used its resources, and to have regard to the most recent when considering the Commission's estimates and five year plan	Schedule 1, paragraph 16(1); 14(4) and (6); and 15(3) and (5)

If the Committee modifies an estimate or five year plan, or does not follow any recommendation in a report of the Comptroller and Auditor General, or any statutory advice from the Treasury, to include a statement of the reasons in its next report to the House	Schedule 1, paragraph 14(6) and 15(5)
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## Appendix 2: Membership of the Speaker's Committee in the period covered by this Report

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The membership of the Speaker's Committee is determined in accordance with the provisions of section 2 of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000. It consists of nine members as listed below: three ex officio, and six appointed—a member of the House of Commons who is a Minister of the Crown with responsibilities in relation to local government, appointed by the Prime Minister, and five Members of the House of Commons who are not Ministers of the Crown, appointed by the Speaker. Appointed members serve for the duration of the Parliament, unless they cease to be Members of the House, resign from the Committee, or another Member is appointed in their place, and are eligible for reappointment.

### Ex officio members

The Rt. Hon. Michael Martin, MP, as Speaker of the House of Commons, who is also the chairman of the Committee, by virtue of section 2(2).

#### *By virtue of the provisions of sections 2(2)(a) and 2(6)*

The Rt. Hon. Alan Beith MP, as Chairman of the Justice Committee<sup>1</sup>.

#### *By virtue of the provisions of section 2(2)(b)*

The Rt. Hon. the Lord Falconer of Thoroton, as Lord Chancellor (until June 2007) and the Rt. Hon. Jack Straw MP (from June 2007)<sup>2</sup>.

### Appointed members

#### *Appointed by the Prime Minister, by virtue of the provisions of section 2(2)(c) and 2(3)*

Mr Phil Woolas, MP, Minister for Local Government, Regional Governance and Community Cohesion (until November 2007)<sup>3</sup>. Mr John Healey, MP, Minister for Local Government (from November 2007).

#### *Appointed by the Speaker, by virtue of the provisions of section 2(2)(d) and 2(4)*

Mrs Angela Browning, MP (resigned, January 2006)

Lady Hermon, MP

The Rt. Hon. Sir Gerald Kaufman, MP

Humfrey Malins, CBE, MP

Mr Gary Streeter, MP (from March 2006)

Peter Viggers, MP

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1 Known as the Constitutional Affairs Committee until 6 November 2007.

2 By virtue of Article 11 of the Transfer of Functions (Transport, Local Government and the Regions) Order 2002 (S.I. 2002/2626).

3 Mr Woolas was appointed Minister for the Environment, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, in June 2007, but not formally replaced on the Speaker's Committee by the Prime Minister until November 2007.

# Appendix 3: Minutes of the Speaker's Committee

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## *Minutes of the Sixth Meeting, Session 2005-06, Tuesday 18th July 2006*

**Present:** Rt Hon Michael J Martin, MP, Speaker, in the Chair  
 Rt Hon Alan Beith, MP Chairman, Constitutional Affairs Committee  
 Rt. Hon. Sir Gerald Kaufman, MP  
 Mr Humfrey Malins, CBE, MP  
 Mr Gary Streeter, MP  
 Mr Peter Viggers, MP

**Apologies:** Rt Hon the Lord Falconer of Thoroton, Lord Chancellor  
 Lady Hermon, MP  
 Mr Phil Woolas, MP, Minister for Local Government, Regional Governance and Community Cohesion

### 1. Opening remarks

The Speaker informed the Committee that he had recently had a meeting with Sir Alistair Graham, Chairman of the Committee on Standards in Public Life (CSPL), in connection with that Committee's inquiry into the Electoral Commission. He had agreed to meet Sir Alistair further as necessary.

### 2. Report from the informal Sub-Committee

Mr Viggers reported that the Sub-Committee had met twice to examine and take forward the recommendations of the Scrutiny Unit following its review of the Electoral Commission. On the second occasion it had held separate meetings with representatives from the Scrutiny Unit, National Audit Office and Electoral Commission.

### 3. Estimates Day debate on the Electoral Commission on 3rd July

The Committee welcomed Mr Viggers' initiative in seeking an Estimates Day debate. It was agreed that the debate had provided a valuable occasion to discuss the work of the Electoral Commission on the Floor of the House. It had also provided an opportunity to draw attention to the role of the Speaker's Committee, and to underpin the independence of the Commission from Government.

### 4. Comptroller and Auditor General's value-for-money report for 2004-05 (SC 32)

*[Aileen Murphie, Director, Home Affairs and Criminal Justice value-for-money, National Audit Office (NAO), was invited to join the meeting.]*

Aileen Murphie told the Committee that in general the Commission's work had been found by the NAO to be effective. Good feedback had been received on the small-scale work with hard-to-reach groups, and there was evidence of some increase in voter registration. The outcome-focussed campaigns directed towards particular groups, for example those moving house, were well received and evaluated as good value for money. In terms of areas for improvement, NAO suggested that the Electoral Commission should formalise its networking with local authorities and other partners; develop more formal relationships with counterparts in Europe; and improve its website.

Ms Murphie was asked whether the NAO had any breakdown, by age and ethnic background, of reaction to the Electoral Commission's television and radio advertisements. She undertook to look into whether it would be possible to obtain such breakdowns. She was also asked whether the NAO had examined the area of

registered overseas voters. Ms Murphie said that the NAO had not looked at this area in this exercise, but noted it as a good subject for inclusion in a future study.

Ms Murphie was asked about methods used to target hard-to-reach voters, such as those who did not speak English. She explained that the Commission used partners, such as healthcare trusts and local authorities, in order to target those groups that were traditionally hard to reach. For example, posters raising awareness of voter registration could be displayed in doctors' surgeries in different languages. She added that a special NAO team planned a workshop with the Commission on strategies to target hard-to-reach groups; she would report back, if the Committee wished, on the outcome.

Ms Murphie was asked whether the Commission would be more effective in targeting hard-to-reach groups if it took a more proactive approach to returning officers and electoral registration officers. She responded that the Electoral Administration Act 2006 would be something of a watershed as the Act would promote closer working; the statutory duties imposed would provide the Commission with more influence and enable it to enforce standards.

Ms Murphie was asked whether she thought there was any evidence that the Commission was translating public awareness into greater electoral involvement on any scale proportionate to the sums invested in this work. She replied that although there was evidence of an increase in electoral involvement, it was hard to demonstrate the extent to which the increase resulted directly from the public awareness work of the Commission; there was a disconnection between what the public may see and hear as a consequence of public awareness campaigns and how they later act. She suggested that this area of expenditure be revisited by the NAO in three years, although she would be happy to look at it sooner if the Committee wished.

The Committee asked Ms Murphie to explain the key features of an effective value-for-money programme. She advised that the programme should examine the biggest areas of the organisations' responsibilities, and the biggest areas of its expenditure (including areas of influence), and should take into account the NAO corporate responsibilities and priorities, such as evaluation of risk. She also advised that each report within a running programme should inform the next report. She had found the Electoral Commission, and its Audit Committee in particular, receptive to the recommendations made by the NAO in its value-for-money reports.

*[Ms Aileen Murphie withdrew from the meeting.]*

## **5. Electoral Commission Resource Accounts for 2005-06**

*[Mr Peter Wardle, Chief Executive and Accounting Officer of the Electoral Commission, was invited to join the meeting.]*

The Committee asked whether the speedier production of the audited 2005-06 resource accounts could be attributed, at least in part, to the strengthening of the Commission's finance section. Mr Wardle agreed that the performance of this section had considerably improved and had played a major part in the faster production of the accounts. The accounts had been produced separately from the annual report; Mr Wardle intended this practice to continue because it enabled the Commission to produce a more attractive looking report within the necessary timescales.

Mr Wardle was asked why staff costs had risen so substantially over the past year. He responded that increased national insurance costs were mainly responsible for the rise. If that cost was taken out then underlying staff costs had increased by 5%; this was due to an increase in the proportion of more senior staff following restructuring.

Mr Wardle was asked about the movement of staff out of 'involvement' into 'integrity' and 'effectiveness'. This was attributed to the lack of referendums in 2005-06. If referendums had taken place staff would have been redeployed. It may also have been necessary to use temporary staff if redeployment had failed to provide the necessary numbers, particularly in the case of a national referendum, but Mr Wardle said that the Commission keen to develop core expertise in its permanent staff and would not wish to rely too heavily on temporary staff; that had been one of the lessons learned from the North-East regional government referendum.

Mr Wardle was asked to comment on the reduced administration costs, particularly the drop in expenditure on consultants; design, production and printing; publicity and publications. He replied that the Commission had established a reputation for well produced documents, but had successfully sought to reduce document production costs this year, whilst maintaining the quality.

Over the past year the Commission has made considerable efforts to increase recycling as part of its environmental policy. Mr Wardle was asked what estimate could be made of the financial savings accrued as a result of the Commission's environmental policy. He responded that the financial savings generated through the policy would be on-going and significant and although difficult to quantify he would seek to do so in future years.

Mr Wardle concluded by stating that he was pleased with the Commission's accounts and with the progress it had made in responding to the concerns of the Committee.

## **6. Scrutiny Unit Review of the Electoral Commission: Discussion of the recommendations addressed to the Speaker's Committee**

Mr Viggers advised the Committee that the sub-committee had considered the 19 recommendations specifically addressed to the Speaker's Committee<sup>1</sup>. The conclusion of the sub-committee, following discussions with the Scrutiny Unit, Electoral Commission and NAO, was that all the recommendations should be accepted in principle, although in one or two cases there were good practical reasons for implementing them in a slightly different way from that envisaged by the Scrutiny Unit, as the note from the Secretary proposed.

The Committee agreed with the sub-committee's conclusions.

## **7. Committee on Standards in Public Life inquiry into the Electoral Commission**

Mr Viggers reported that, accompanied by the Secretary, he had given evidence to CSPL on behalf of the Committee, as agreed at the previous meeting. They were one of the first group of witnesses, and had been asked to give evidence to the inquiry for a second time in September, when most of the remaining evidence would have been taken.

## **8. Future Programme of value-for-money studies**

The Committee agreed with the recommendation from the NAO that the next value-for-money study should be on voter registration.

## **9. Report to the House**

The Committee agreed a report to the House.

*This report was published on 1 August as the Committee's First Report 2006, HC 1581.*

## **10. Date of next meeting**

The Committee adjourned to a date to be fixed by the Speaker.

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<sup>1</sup> Reproduced in the Annex.

## Annex: Recommendations for the attention of the Speaker's Committee

### Financial planning

1. We recommend that, having examined the Commission's Estimate and five-year plan each year, the Speaker's Committee provide the Commission with an explicit assurance about the level of funding it is willing to agree for the forthcoming three years, but that this should be conditional on the changes proposed for the Commission's funding requests and budget setting and on a general improvement in the Commission's financial management. (Paragraph 22)
2. We recommend that the Speaker's Committee require the Commission to produce each year a formal plan for efficiency savings, for consideration alongside the Commission's Estimate and five-year plan, and to incorporate such savings in the Estimate and plan. (Paragraph 28)

### Financial management

3. We recommend that the Speaker's Committee monitor the Commission's planning and implementation of its new financial information system. (Paragraph 38)
4. We recommend that the Speaker's Committee ask the Office of Government Commerce to review the Commission's proposed new financial information system before the project is put out to tender and before the new system goes live. (Paragraph 39)

### Targets and performance measures

5. We recommend that the Speaker's Committee discuss with the Commission the possibility of the Commission agreeing joint targets, and in particular whether joint targets with a government department would be seen as compromising the Commission's independence. (Paragraph 93)

### Stakeholders

6. We recommend that the Speaker's Committee monitor the Commission's strategy for consulting stakeholders. (Paragraph 114)

### Value for money studies

7. We recommend that the Speaker's Committee set a date by which it expects to receive each year the Value For Money report from the National Audit Office. (Paragraph 118)
8. We recommend that the Speaker's Committee consider making more use of oral briefings from National Audit Office staff about Value For Money reports. (Paragraph 120)
9. We recommend that the Speaker's Committee ask the Commission to provide a regular progress report on the action it has taken in response to each recommendation in the Value For Money reports. (Paragraph 121)
10. We recommend that the Speaker's Committee discuss with the National Audit Office the possibility of a rolling timetable of Value For Money reports. (Paragraph 122)

### The general audit

11. We recommend that the Speaker's Committee discuss with the Commission and the National Audit Office the possibility of it having access to the management letter<sup>2</sup> in confidence. (Paragraph 126)

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2 PPERA requires the Comptroller and Auditor General to examine and certify the Commission's accounts each year and lay them before Parliament. For this purpose the NAO conducts an annual audit, and currently contracts out most of the work to Deloitte. Deloitte makes a report and provides a "management letter" to the Commission,

### Advice from the Treasury

12. We recommend that the Speaker's Committee ask the Treasury to set out in writing the criteria it uses to assess the Estimate and five-year plan, and to indicate the degree of assurance it is willing to offer about the consistency of the Commission's request for funds with the economical, efficient and effective performance of its duties. (Paragraph 133)
13. We recommend that the Speaker's Committee discuss with the Treasury ways of ensuring that the Treasury's advice is timely. (Paragraph 134)
14. We recommend that the Speaker's Committee ask the Commission to report orally or in writing on its discussions with the Treasury, in order to make the process more transparent to the Committee. (Paragraph 135)

### Consideration of the Estimate and five-year plan

15. We recommend that the Speaker's Committee require a clearer and more detailed explanation from the Commission of its funding proposals for the forthcoming three years, including a breakdown of funding by objective. (Paragraph 146)
16. We recommend that the Speaker's Committee secure independent scrutiny of the figures in the Commission's requests for funding. (Paragraph 146)
17. We recommend that the Speaker's Committee seek more systematically to resolve matters of detail relating to the Estimate and five-year plan in advance of its meetings. (Paragraph 149)
18. We recommend that the Speaker's Committee request the Commission report regularly to it in writing on actions taken in response to the Committee's requests or suggestions. (Paragraph 149)

### Staffing of the Speaker's Committee

19. We recommend that the staffing of the Speaker's Committee be reviewed in the light of its increased workload, including any further increase in workload resulting from recommendations in this report. (Paragraph 150)

## ***Minutes of the Seventh Meeting, Session 2005-06, Tuesday 17th October 2006***

**Present:** Rt Hon Michael J Martin MP, Speaker, in the Chair  
Rt Hon the Lord Falconer of Thornton, Lord Chancellor  
Rt. Hon. Sir Gerald Kaufman MP  
Mr Peter Viggers MP

**Apologies:** Rt Hon Alan Beith MP, Chairman, Constitutional Affairs Committee  
Lady Hermon MP  
Mr Humfrey Malins MP  
Mr Gary Streeter MP  
Mr Phil Woolas MP, Minister for Local Government, Regional Governance and Community Cohesion

### **1. Opening remarks**

The Speaker welcomed members, and said that, due to the short notice, a larger than usual number of colleagues had been unable to attend due to prior commitments. Some of them had, however, made comments on the matter under consideration, which he would pass on.

### **2. Chairmanship of the Electoral Commission**

The Speaker informed the Committee that he had called the meeting so he could hear its views on the matter of the chairmanship of the Electoral Commission following the completion on 18 January 2007 by Mr Sam Younger of his six year initial period of office as Chairman. He had circulated copies of an independent appraisal he had commissioned of Mr Younger's performance to date.

The independent appraisal, conducted by Sir William McKay, had concluded that Mr Younger's performance had been such as fully to justify reappointment for a further period. The Committee unanimously endorsed Sir William McKay's conclusion.

The Speaker then invited the Committee to express a view as to what might be an appropriate further period of office to offer Mr Younger.

The Committee discussed a range of factors which it considered relevant, including the need to ensure the continued effective operation of the Electoral Commission, and in particular the effective implementation of its additional responsibilities arising from the Electoral Administration Act 2006 and other recently-enacted legislation; and the current inquiry by the Committee on Standards in Public Life focussing on the mandate, governance and accountability of the Commission.

Following the discussion, the Committee unanimously proposed to the Speaker that, subject to the required statutory consultation of the registered leaders of certain registered political parties, any further period of office as Chairman of the Electoral Commission to be offered to Mr Younger should expire on 31st December 2008.

The Speaker thanked the Committee for its advice, which he was happy to accept. He would offer Mr Younger a further period of office on that basis, and subject to the agreement of the House.

### **3. Date of next meeting**

The Committee adjourned to a date and time to be fixed by Mr Speaker.

## ***Minutes of the First Meeting, Session 2006-07, Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> March 2007***

**Present:** Rt Hon Michael J Martin, MP, Speaker, in the Chair  
 Rt Hon the Lord Falconer of Thoroton, Lord Chancellor  
 Rt Hon Alan Beith, MP, Chairman, Constitutional Affairs Committee  
 Lady Hermon, MP  
 Rt. Hon. Sir Gerald Kaufman, MP  
 Mr Gary Streeter, MP  
 Mr Peter Viggers, MP

**Apologies:** Mr Humfrey Malins, CBE, MP  
 Mr Phil Woolas, MP, Minister for Local Government, Regional Governance and Community Cohesion

### **1. Opening remarks**

The Speaker welcomed Members and thanked them for their input on the draft person specification and job description for the Electoral Commissioner recruitment process, now in hand.

### **2. Consideration of the Electoral Commission's Estimate for 2007-08 and Five Year Plan for 2007-08 to 2011-12**

#### ***Report from the informal Sub-Committee***

Mr Viggers reported that the Sub-Committee had met representatives from both the Scrutiny Unit and the Electoral Commission on 7 February to undertake a preliminary examination of the Commission's Estimate for 2007-08 and Five Year Plan for 2007-08 to 2011-12. The dialogue between the Scrutiny Unit and the Commission had been particularly productive and the outcome had been reflected in the papers circulated by the Scrutiny Unit in advance of this meeting.

#### ***Presentation by the Scrutiny Unit***

*[Mr Simon Fiander, Deputy Head (Finance) and Ms Susannah Drazin, finance expert, from the Scrutiny Unit, were invited to join the meeting.]*

The representatives of the Scrutiny Unit began with a general overview of their work. Mr Fiander said that the extensive dialogue and co-operation with the Electoral Commission had been invaluable and had been of benefit to both sides. Compared with previous Estimates, the Commission had improved identification and quantification of costs.

The Unit's overall view of the Estimate was that it was reasonable, and there were no great issues over the proposed five year Plan. Maintaining a flat expenditure figure in cash terms over the next four years would be demanding, but not, in the Unit's view, overly so; the Commission would need to find around £600,000 a year in efficiency savings. In percentage terms, this put it in a similar position to many government departments. The Commission had not previously set efficiency targets, so there might be a lot to gain from this.

The new Five Year Plan was considered a great improvement on previous Plans, and many of the changes had been prompted by the recommendations of the Speaker's Committee following its review. The increased prioritisation in the Plan was a welcome development.

Mr Fiander was asked whether the weaknesses in the Commission's financial planning processes identified in last year's Scrutiny Unit review had been addressed by the Commission. He considered that the recommendations had been taken seriously by the Commission, and that it was making good progress with all the key elements. The staffing of the finance section had been strengthened, and this year the Unit had been able to focus on specific areas of concern rather than re-auditing the body entirely. The concerns that remained were centred on the establishment of a robust efficiency programme; a risk management system; and a process of benchmarking.

Asked whether the flat net resource requirement up to 2010-11 was a realistic proposition, Mr Fiander thought that it was. Efficiency savings would offset inflation and rises in the cost of pay, which were expected to be around 2.5-2.7%. This was already a requirement for government departments and other smaller public sector bodies and was in his view achievable by the Commission. In the past two years, the Commission had underspent its budget by around £2 million.

The Committee asked whether the recommendations of the Committee on Standards in Public Life (CSPL) that the Commission should cease its public promotion of democracy generally meant that it was likely to need less resources in this area. It noted that the Estimate still contained £4.5 million for public awareness campaigns. Mr Fiander said that he understood that the Commission had given commitments to fund certain projects in the coming year and felt an obligation honour these. Ms Drazin added that the Estimate could be adjusted if the CSPL recommendations were implemented. More generally, the CSPL had stated that it thought its recommendations would be cost neutral overall, apart from those relating to boundary work.

The Scrutiny Unit representatives were asked what 'unknown' factors had been excluded from the expenditure cap and whether these were reasonable. Mr Fiander responded that the main exclusions were the recommendations of the CSPL report and of the Sir Hayden Phillips review of party funding; a potential increase in demand for electoral reviews if the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Bill was enacted; and the possibility of a referendum. He agreed with the Commission that it was better to exclude these factors and the other identified 'known unknowns' and to revise the Estimate if they came to pass. Ms Drazin added that government departments revisited their Estimates in the case of a significant change in functions or transfer of responsibility. On the question of agreeing a four-year settlement, Mr Fiander said that an Estimate would still need to be formally agreed by the Speaker's Committee each year, and this would be the opportunity to make appropriate provision should unexpected events transpire.

The Committee inquired about the provision of end-year flexibility for the Commission. Mr Fiander thought it sensible to provide a similar facility to that enjoyed by government departments. This would avoid a rush to spend the remaining budget at the end of March, but its use would not be automatic—it would have to be justified and approved by the Speaker's Committee on each occasion. He expected it to be primarily of use in the case of slippage of capital projects. In any case, the Committee needed to be open to the possibility of adjusting the Estimate in the case of unexpected developments. This was now much easier to justify than before, because the Commission had improved its provision of financial data and current costs.

The Committee thanked the representatives of the Scrutiny Unit for the work undertaken by the Unit for the Committee.

*[Mr Fiander and Ms Drazin withdrew from the meeting.]*

### **The Electoral Commission**

*[Mr Sam Younger, Chairman, Electoral Commission, and Mr Peter Wardle, Chief Executive and Accounting Officer, were invited to join the meeting.]*

The Committee asked whether the Commission's figure for the forecast outturn of expenditure for the current year was still £24 million. Mr Wardle responded that it was now £22.5 million, with a margin of error of around £250,000. The three principal reasons for this extra saving were economies in corporate services expenditure such as travel and consultancy; a delay in getting the Commission's English regional offices into operation; and the number of staff vacancies that had not yet been filled. The Estimate for 2007-08 had not been adjusted to reflect this underspend, because the expected costs would still generally arise in that financial year.

Asked whether the recommendations of the CSPL would have an impact on the Commission's future budget, Mr Wardle said that the Estimate already included provision for those aspects of the CSPL's report with which the Commission agreed and were not dependent on the enactment of legislation. He thought that the CSPL's report largely reflected the evidence that the Commission had submitted. A couple of the recommendations could involve additional expenditure if implemented, for example, increasing the number of Commissioners. However, this would require primary legislation and was not therefore imminent. The recommendation for regional electoral officers would also be expensive—the cost would probably be in the region of £1 million per

annum—and the cost was one of the reasons why the Electoral Commission did not support it. Recommended changes in compliance work could be absorbed within the existing budget.

On public awareness campaigns, Mr Younger said that the Commission accepted the view of the CSPL and Sir Hayden Phillips that it should no longer engage in the general promotion of the democratic process, but should limit its activities to encouraging and explaining the process of registration, where most activity had in fact focussed in the past, and voting. The public awareness budget had decreased from £7 million in the current year to £6 million in the estimate to reflect this. There was still work to be done explaining complex voting requirements, such as the need for photographic identification in Northern Ireland, or the dual proportional representation system in Scotland. The scope for further reductions in this area is in his view limited, given the part played by television advertising in the Commission's strategy. He added that the general promotion of the democratic process itself had only ever been a small part of the Commission's public awareness spend.

The Commission was asked whether it had enough resources to discharge its boundary review functions, in the context of any work on unitary authority boundary changes which might follow on from the enactment of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Bill. Mr Younger affirmed that the Commission did have sufficient resources for existing projected levels of work, although it was at present unknown precisely how many local authorities might be involved seeking unitary status. There might also be a knock-on effect in relation to single-member wards. If the number significantly exceeded Ministers' current predictions then extra resources might be required. This, however, would be an issue for 2008-09 rather than 2007-08; it is one of the specific 'known unknowns' the Commission had brought to the Committee's attention as outside the framework of assumptions which had informed the projected resource requirements beyond 2007-08 in the proposed five-year plan.

Both Mr Younger and Mr Wardle were in favour of a multi-year financial settlement given the certainty it would provide when planning, and said that their estimate had been compiled on a five-year basis. They added that any significant changes in remit or responsibilities might necessitate a review. They recognised that such a settlement also implied a greater financial discipline. Within a multi-year settlement they thought that end-year flexibility would be a significant benefit, for example in the case of capital projects, such as the current IT project, that might be subject to slippage. Additionally, in the case of a snap election or referendum, some activities might have to be suspended and then resumed in a subsequent year.

Other new developments might include the implementation of those recommendations by the CSPL which are dependent on legislation and the Sir Hayden Phillips inquiry. Sir Hayden Phillips had costed the changes in resource requirement for the Commission arising from the proposals in his report at £3.4 million initially and £2.2 million recurring. These changes would, however, require primary legislation, and were therefore unlikely to impact on the Estimate before 2008-09. Both of these were also 'known unknowns'. Given the scale of resources that would be needed, provision for a referendum, a one-off event, was also accepted to be outside the planning framework.

Mr Wardle was asked whether the proposed cash flat expenditure was realistic and where efficiency savings would be found. He answered that the proposed four-year settlement would require the Commission to absorb around 2.5% inflation per year. This could in his view be achieved through headcount reduction (down to 150 staff over four years) and the reduction of overheads and support services costs through better use of technology. He was confident that this could be achieved. Mr Wardle accepted that the Commission had taken some time to produce a formal efficiency plan. He said that this had been due to the necessity to adapt the Gershon template adopted by the Treasury to apply it to a much smaller organisation; other smaller organisations had found a similar need.

The Commission told the Committee it was developing an IT database to monitor local authority performance in the light of the Commission's new duties that would arise following enactment of the Electoral Administration Act 2006. This had not yet been put to tender, because the exact standards and targets for local authorities had not yet been agreed. Mr Wardle said that an automated solution would be cheaper than recruiting extra staff to do the work. Depending on what standards were agreed, the database might be quite straightforward and able to collate information from councils' own systems. Mr Wardle hoped that it would be up and running by this time next year.

The Committee noted that the CSPL report had criticised the Electoral Commission for engaging in 'high risk' activities such as pilots of e-voting. Mr Wardle replied that some of the pilots had been focused on e-counting, which was seen to be secure and effective, rather than e-voting. E-counting would be used in Scotland for the forthcoming Scottish Parliamentary election, where it was expected to speed up the complex process of the count where the election had used STV. The e-voting pilots had been instigated by the Department for Constitutional Affairs and were on a small scale. Security issues were proving challenging and the recruitment of independent technical consultants had been expensive, as they were in short supply.

The Committee asked about the extent to which the Commission was making use of benchmarking. Mr Wardle said that benchmarking would be extended, in the context of the need to make consistent annual savings over the next four years of at least 2.7%, to include procurement, finance and IT services, and the Commission was looking for comparable organisations of similar size and function. Likely comparator organisations were the Charity Commission, the National Audit Office, the Audit Commission, the Standards Board for England and some private organisations. He would be surprised if the Commission was shown to be significantly more expensive than these other bodies. Mr Wardle also expected savings in corporate services. Specific performance measures and target baselines would be set for the new targets in the latest Five-year Plan by the end of May.

Finally the Committee asked about recent press coverage concerning the Commission's ability to investigate suspected electoral fraud. Mr Wardle informed the Committee that there had been significant mis-reporting, and he had written to ACPO to clarify the position. There was an important distinction to be drawn between Representation of the People Act offences, such as personation and electoral fraud, where the Commission, police and the CPS worked together well, and PPERA offences, where the Electoral Commission had real doubts, shared by the CSPL in its report, as to whether the large number of criminal offences was the appropriate way to regulate this area: it favoured a more proportionate regulatory process.

The Committee expressed an interest in being kept informed by the Commission on these matters. It noted that it was important for the Commission's choice of media spokesmen on any particular occasion to reflect the nature of the occasion.

*[Mr Younger and Mr Wardle withdrew from the meeting.]*

#### 4. Formal Decisions of the Committee

In reaching its formal decisions on the 2007-08 Estimate and the 2007-08 to 2011-12 five-year plan, the Committee had regard to the formal advice of the Treasury, as set out in the letter from the Chief Secretary to the Speaker of 22 February. It also had regard to the report of the Comptroller and Auditor General to the Committee dated June 2006 and published with the Committee's First Report 2006. This report constitutes 'the most recent report' for the purposes of paragraph 15(3)(a) of Schedule 1 of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000.

The Committee agreed a Net Resource Requirement for the Electoral Commission for 2007-08 of £23,995,000, with Operating Appropriations in Aid of £38,000, as consistent with the economical, efficient and effective discharge by the Commission of its functions in that year. It also agreed, on the same basis, a Net Cash Requirement for 2007-08 of £24,095,000, to include net voted capital of £950,000.

The Committee also agreed that the Electoral Commission may, without further reference to it, make such minor and insubstantial adjustments to the Estimate as may be required for technical reasons, subject to Treasury agreement in each case.

In relation to the resource implications of the five-year plan, the Committee noted that the Commission proposes to maintain its Net Resource Requirement at £23,995,000 throughout the period from 2007-08 to 2011-12, subject to the qualifications set out in paragraph 28 of the report which accompanied the draft Estimate and Plan. The Committee approved with the same qualifications as a basis for forward planning by the Commission, Net Resource Requirements for each of 2008-09, 2009-10 and 2010-11 of £23,995,000<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> In effect, the Speaker's Committee indicated its willingness in principle to commit to aggregate Net Resources of £95.98 million for the Electoral Commission over the period 2007-08 to 2010-11 on the basis set out in the Plan and

The Committee also agreed that the Electoral Commission should in future be able to take advantage of End Year Flexibility (EYF) in respect of both Resources and Capital categories of expenditure on a similar basis and extent to that afforded by the Treasury to Government Departments, and that this facility should be available to increase Estimates in 2008-09 onwards to reflect qualifying underspends occurring in 2007-08 onwards. The Committee will normally expect to consult the Treasury on any request from the Commission for EYF for advice as to whether it meets the relevant criteria.

The Committee decided to give its approval in respect of Net Resources for the next four financial years, rather than the full five years covered by the plan, to establish a pattern of multi-annual approval consistent with the Government's public expenditure planning cycle. It anticipated continuing to give forward multi-annual approvals for Net Resources on a pattern reflecting the continuing planning cycle.

The Committee approved the five-year plan for 2007-08 to 2011-12 without amendment, on the basis set out above.

The Committee noted that the Estimates themselves for each of the years covered by the multi-annual settlement remain subject to annual approval by the Committee. In this context, it indicated that it will expect any variation in future Estimates and Plans from the Net Resources and Capital figures for 2008-09 onwards set out in Appendix A (Resource Implications) of this year's Plan to be drawn to its attention at the appropriate time and properly justified.

## **5. Date of next meeting**

The Committee adjourned until 18th April 2007.

## **Minutes of the Second Meeting, Session 2006-07, Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> April 2007**

**Present:** Rt Hon Michael J Martin, MP, Speaker  
Rt Hon Alan Beith, MP, Chairman, Constitutional Affairs Committee  
Rt Hon the Lord Falconer of Thornton, Lord Chancellor  
Rt. Hon. Sir Gerald Kaufman, MP  
Mr Gary Streeter, MP  
Mr Peter Viggers, MP

**Apologies:** Lady Hermon, MP  
Mr Humfrey Malins, CBE, MP  
Mr Phil Woolas, MP Minister for Local Government, Regional Governance and Community Cohesion

*In the absence of Mr Speaker, Mr Peter Viggers took the Chair, pursuant to the decision of the Committee of 13 December 2005.*

### **1. Committee on Standards in Public Life (CSPL) inquiry into the Electoral Commission**

The Committee noted that the report, while formally addressed to the Prime Minister, made recommendations not only to the Government, but also to the Speaker's Committee, the Electoral Commission, and others. It also noted the response to the recommendations published by the Electoral Commission on 19 March.

The Committee agreed that, while it would be for the Government to respond formally to the report as a whole, it would be appropriate for it to do so in the context of the Committee's own views on the recommendations specifically addressed to it, and those others in relation to which it had a specific policy interest. The relevant recommendations are: R17-18, and R20 (Electoral boundaries); R21 and R22 (Increasing participation in the democratic process); R23 and R24 (Policy development and advice); R27 to R33 (Governance); and R34 to R39 (Accountability)<sup>2</sup>.

The Committee agreed to have a general discussion of the recommendations, on the basis of which the Secretary would be asked to prepare a formal draft response, for consideration at a future meeting.

On the CSPL recommendations on *electoral boundaries*, the Committee agreed with the recommendation that the Commission should no longer have any involvement in electoral boundary matters and that the existing legislative provision for the transfer of parliamentary boundary-setting functions to the Commission should be repealed.

On the question of oversight of any independent review of the arrangements for reviewing parliamentary constituency boundaries, the Committee noted that it would be for the Government to decide if such a review was necessary. It would be willing in principle to oversee a such a review, but legislation to extend its powers would appear to be necessary before it could do so.

On *increasing participation in the democratic process*, the Committee discussed the Electoral Commission's current public awareness approach. It agreed to ask the Scrutiny Unit to assist in monitoring this aspect of the Commission's work. On *policy development and advice*, the Committee agreed that the extent of the Commission's duty under section 6(1) of PPERA to keep matters under review should be restricted as recommended by CSPL in R23-24.

*Mr Speaker took the Chair*

On *governance*, the Committee agreed that the current restrictions on past political activity on the part of both Commissioners and Commission employees were disproportionate and should be modified. While accepting

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2 All references to Recommendations relate to the numbering in the full report, Cm. 7006.

the principles behind the CSPL recommendations for the appointment of a number of Commissioners with a political background, the Committee had reservations on some of the detail of the proposals.

On the chairmanship of the Commission, the Committee noted that the existing full-time chairman no longer performed an executive role. Differing views were expressed on the CSPL recommendation that this should become a part-time appointment after 31 December 2008, when Sam Younger's current term of office expires. The Committee recognised that there were arguments in both directions and that these were finely balanced. It was, however, inclined not to support the CSPL recommendation that the next appointment should be on a part-time basis, but the position should be kept under review thereafter.

The Committee agreed that the existing procedures for appointing and reappointing Electoral Commissioners appeared to operate satisfactorily, and that the Speaker's Committee should continue, for as long as Mr Speaker wished, to play an informal role in oversight of the process. The state of progress of the current round of new appointments was noted.

On *accountability*, the Committee was not inclined to support fully the CSPL recommendations on meeting in public and on the proposed change in the level of direct involvement in its work by the Speaker.

The Committee supported the CSPL recommendation for an annual debate in the House on the work of the Electoral Commission. It was content with the present degree of scrutiny of the activities of the Electoral Commission by the Constitutional Affairs Committee and other select committees, and saw no need to introduce a greater degree of formalisation into this area.

At the conclusion of the discussion, the Secretary was asked to prepare in the light of it a draft response to the relevant recommendations of the CSPL report, for consideration at the Committee's next meeting.

## **2. Consideration of the letter to Mr Speaker from the Chairman of the Committee on Standards in Public Life**

The Committee noted the letter to the Speaker of 28 March from Sir Alistair Graham, Chairman of the Committee on Standards in Public Life, concerning the Electoral Commission's response to his Committee's report, and in particular its position on the Committee's recommendation for the appointment of statutory Regional Electoral Officers.

## **3. Date of next meeting**

The Committee adjourned until a date to be fixed by Mr Speaker.

## ***Minutes of the Third Meeting, Session 2006-07, Wednesday 27<sup>th</sup> June 2007***

**Present:** Rt Hon Michael J Martin, MP, Speaker, in the Chair  
Rt Hon Alan Beith, MP, Chairman, Constitutional Affairs Committee  
Rt Hon the Lord Falconer of Thornton, Lord Chancellor  
Mr Gary Streeter, MP  
Mr Peter Viggers, MP  
Mr Phil Woolas, MP, Minister for Local Government, Regional Governance and Community Cohesion

**Apologies:** Lady Hermon, MP  
Rt. Hon. Sir Gerald Kaufman, MP  
Mr Humfrey Malins, CBE, MP

### **1. Opening remarks**

Mr Speaker welcomed members. He informed the Committee that the principal purpose of the meeting was to consider a response to the recommendations made by the Committee on Standards in Public Life (CSPL) in its report on the Electoral Commission (Cm. 7006).

### **2. Consideration of draft Committee response to the Eleventh Report of the Committee on Standards in Public Life**

Mr Speaker introduced the draft response, which had been prepared by the Secretary to reflect the views expressed on the CSPL recommendations at the meeting on 18 April.

Lord Falconer indicated that he expected the Government response to the report to be published before the start of the Summer Recess.

The Committee discussed further the CSPL recommendations on the extent to which it might meet in public, and the extent of the Speaker's personal involvement in its work (R34 and R35). The Committee agreed that the continued active involvement of the Speaker in its meetings was a key element in ensuring that it performed as intended by the House. The precise extent of this involvement was, however, a matter for the judgement of the Speaker of the day and, when the Speaker attended, the need to meet in private would continue. On other occasions when the Committee was taking evidence, sessions could in principle be held in public, and the evidence published by it.

The Committee agreed that there was a case for it to have an explicit power to appoint a Vice-Chairman, who could oversee as much of the day-to-day running of the Committee as the Speaker of the day wished to delegate.

The Committee agreed to investigate other ways of providing more information about its work.

The Committee also discussed the CSPL's recommendations (R21 and 22) aimed at reducing the scope of the Electoral Commission's public information work and, in particular the recommendation that it should no longer have the wider statutory duty to encourage participation in the democratic process. The Committee noted that the Electoral Commission had already started to narrow its focus in this area, but that this did not appear to have been reflected yet in the projected level of resources for this area of its work. It agreed to examine this point further at the next appropriate opportunity.

The Committee agreed its response to the CSPL report, and to publish it as soon as possible. It was agreed that copies would be sent, when published, to the Committee on Standards in Public Life, and to the Secretary of State for Justice.

*The Committee's Response was published as its First Report 2007, HC 996.*

### 3. Scottish Parliamentary and Local Elections, May 2007

The Committee discussed the recent problems experienced in the running of the Scottish Parliamentary and local elections. The wisdom of combining the two sets of elections, which were conducted on different bases, had been questioned. There had been delays in printing ballot papers and in distributing postal votes, and in some places the electronic counting procedures had not worked as intended in the parliamentary election. Also in those elections in particular, in some constituencies there had been exceptionally high levels of spoil papers.

The Committee noted that the Electoral Commission had a statutory duty to report on the administration of the Scottish Parliament general election, and had been asked by the Scottish Executive to report on the administration of the Scottish local government elections. The Commission had asked an independent international elections expert, Mr Ron Gould CM, to prepare an independent report on key aspects of the Scottish elections, and his remit would include examination of the Commission's own involvement in the preparations for the elections. Mr Gould's report would inform the Electoral Commission's own reports.

The Committee agreed that this was a matter of great importance and that Mr Gould and representatives of the Electoral Commission should be invited to give evidence to the Committee. It also agreed that, if possible, Mr Viggers should attend the meeting with Members which Mr Gould was seeking to arrange as part of his review.

### 4. National Audit Office Value-for-Money Report for 2005-06

The Committee considered the report, entitled 'Electoral Registration: The lynchpin of democracy', and agreed that it should be published. It also agreed to seek the response of the Electoral Commission to the eight recommendations made by the Comptroller and Auditor General in the report.

*The Report was published as an Appendix to the Committee's Second Report 2007, HC 997.*

The Committee also considered proposals from the National Audit Office (NAO) as to possible subjects for value-for-money reports in respect of 2006–07 and subsequent years. NAO had identified three possible areas for study: The Electoral Commission's role as a regulator; the efficiency of the Commission; and the performance measurement framework for electoral services being established by the Commission under the Electoral Administration Act 2006. The NAO view was that 'The Commission as regulator' scored most highly when assessed against the general strategic criteria.

The Electoral Commission, however, had noted that aspects of the current regulatory framework had not long been in place, and were still settling down. A study might in its view be more valuable when they had done so. An NAO study of the efficiency of the Commission, on the other hand, could well be immediately helpful to it in assisting it in meeting the financial challenges of the recently-agreed multi-annual financial framework<sup>3</sup>. The Committee agreed that the Secretary should discuss the possible options further with both parties and report back to Mr Speaker.

The Committee was pleased to note that systematic arrangements were now in place for the review both by the Commission and by the NAO of progress in implementing value-for-money recommendations made by the Comptroller and Auditor General in his statutory reports.

### 5. Recruitment of Electoral Commissioners

Mr Speaker reported that the appointment panel had submitted its recommendations to him on 13 June. The panel had recommended four candidates to go forward to the statutory stages of the appointment process, two for appointment in July 2007, and two for appointment in January 2008 on the retirement of Sir Neil McIntosh and Glyn Mathias. He had initiated the statutory consultations of party leaders on the four recommended candidates, and anticipated that the names would go to the House for approval before the Summer Recess.

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3 See the minutes of the meeting of 21 March 2007.

Mr Speaker noted that the recommendations, if approved by the House, would result in the appointment, for the first time, of an Electoral Commissioner with strong personal links with Northern Ireland, something the Committee had been keen to see.

#### **6. Any other business**

The Speaker noted that the meeting may be the last with the current membership, and thanked all members for their contributions to date.

#### **7. Date of next meeting**

The Committee adjourned to a date and time to be fixed by Mr Speaker.

