

Board minutes: 24 June 2020 | Electoral Commission    Search

Board minutes: 24 June 2020    You are in the Electoral Commission Board section

Home   How we make decisions Electoral Commission Board On this page Apologies

Declarations of interest Minutes and matters arising Annual report of the Audit

Committee to the Commission Board Annual report of the Remuneration and Human

Resources Committee to the Commission Board Annual report Chief Executive's update

Business items taken via electronic means since the previous board meeting First

published: 29 July 2020 Last updated: 21 June 2021 Meeting overview Date: Wednesday

24 June 2020 Time: 9:30am to 12:40pm Location: by video conference Date of next

scheduled meeting: Wednesday 22 July Who was at the meeting Who was at the meeting

John Holmes, Chair Alasdair Morgan Anna Carragher Elan Closs Stephens Joan Walley

Sarah Chambers Stephen Gilbert Sue Bruce Rob Vincent (until 12 midday) Bob Posner,

Chief Executive Craig Westwood, Director, Communications, Policy and Research Louise

Edwards, Director, Regulation Ailsa Irvine, Director, Electoral Administration and

Guidance Kieran Rix, Director, Finance and Corporate Services Amanda Kelly, General

Counsel David Bailey, Head of Strategic Planning and Performance Madeleine Spink,

Senior Advisor, Governance Apologies There were no apologies Declarations of interest

There were no new declarations of interest. Minutes and matters arising (EC 53/20)

Action: The minutes be amended to clarify that decision making was via electronic

means. Resolved: That the minutes be agreed, with the additional point above. Annual

report of the Audit Committee to the Commission Board (EC 54/20) Commissioner Sue

Bruce introduced the report and presented a summary of the Audit Committee discussion

on it to the Commission Board. The internal auditors had given a 'substantial' rating

to the Commission, which was good and better than previous years. The National Audit

Office (NAO) had also given an unqualified rating to the accounts. The independent

advisor to the Audit Committee Paul Redfern had conducted an effectiveness review and

concluded that the Committee was working effectively and robustly. The Committee was

planning to make more deep dives into issues in the future, including risk management

and investigations. Meanwhile the Committee was happy to support the draft Annual

Report and Accounts. On outstanding audit recommendations it was noted that these had

significantly reduced, and it was now intended by staff to complete the limited

number remaining. The situation would continue to be monitored. The Chair picked up

the suggestion in the Audit Committee report that the Board should commission the

Committee to consider specific issues in detail on a more frequent basis. This was

agreed. The Committee had already considered procurement in this way. It was

suggested that the Committee should look at the implications of the coronavirus

pandemic on Commission work delivery. The Board discussed the value of having legal

cases presented in a tracker format, and the progress of Freedom of Information (FOI)

requests. Action: The Chair of the Audit Committee to give a verbal update to the

Commission Board after each Committee meeting. Action: A legal case tracker to be

established by the General Counsel and regularly provided to the Board for

information. Resolved: That the paper be agreed, subject to these points. Annual

report of the Remuneration and Human Resources Committee to the Commission Board (EC

55/20) The Chair of the Remuneration and Human Resources Committee (RemCo) introduced

the report. The Committee Chair noted that the RemCo had met staff on two occasions,

as well as their formal meetings. The new People Strategy was now an excellent basis

for future work in the area of staff well-being. The Committee had already been

looking closely at issues such as staff turnover and retention, where the recent

trends were positive, as well as recruitment policy and the importance of diversity.

The Board discussed the results of the Staff Survey, which had been positive overall

but revealed some areas where further efforts were needed. The Board discussed the importance of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) inclusion in the Commission. The Black Lives Matter movement had moved this issue to the fore and it was important for the Commission to take a further serious look at diversity and inclusion issues internally in relation to staff and externally around the face the Commission presented to the world. The Board discussed how the Human Resources team and other teams worked together, and the importance of managers taking responsibility for managing their teams, rather than relying too much on the Human Resources team. The Board noted that the annual review process reflected the number of meetings of the Committee, and that three meetings per year should be the norm, as well as engagement between meetings. Action: The Chair of the Remuneration and Human Resources Committee to give a verbal update to the Commission Board after each Committee meeting. Resolved: That the paper be agreed, subject to these points. Annual report (EC 56/20) The Chief Executive introduced the draft Annual Report, which Board members had seen and commented on before. The National Audit Office was content to endorse the accounts without qualification. Commissioners raised comments to ensure that external meetings and full Commissioner term lengths were recorded accurately. Otherwise the Board praised the effort which had gone into the content and format of the Report, and were content with it. Resolved: That the paper be agreed, subject to these points. Chief Executive's update (EC 57/20) The Chief Executive updated the Board on how the Commission was continuing to cope with the challenge of the coronavirus pandemic. Good progress was being made on all fronts. The Board discussed the upcoming review of the regulatory framework by the Committee for Standards in Public Life; plans for returning to more regular office-based working after lockdown; and ensuring that party registration processes were compliant with Welsh language requirements. The Board discussed the implications of the Coronavirus pandemic for by-elections and for the electoral registers to be used for the upcoming boundary review. It was noted that there was a different picture across the UK in terms of when by-elections could take place. In relation to the upcoming boundary review, the electoral register from 2 March 2020 would be used. It was noted that the impact of the Coronavirus pandemic on these matters would be considered as part of items scheduled for the July and October meetings. The Board noted a delay in the UK Government's willingness to lay in Parliament the codes of conduct on candidate and party spending. The Government's priority was their planned bill on limited electoral law reform in line with their manifesto commitments. In Scotland and Wales work on equivalent codes was proceeding. In the UK wide and context, wording from the code of conduct would for the time being be reflected in Commission guidance. Resolved: That the paper be agreed, subject to these points. The Chair introduced a discussion on equality, diversity and inclusion, building on the earlier discussion under the RemCo item. The Chair emphasised the need for new and concentrated attention on these important issues, including in terms of diversity in our workforce, Board composition and our work to ensure that all communities could be fully engaged in the electoral process. The Chief Executive acknowledged that more could and should be done to improve diversity in the Commission. Some staff had formed a sub-group on BAME matters, which was welcomed. The Executive Team had encouraged dialogue and were working to promote an internal environment where people felt comfortable about speaking out. It was noted that the first step was to listen to peoples' experiences. The Board noted that 11% of the UK population are from an ethnic minority, and 9% of Commission staff had declared themselves to be from an ethnic minority, although not all were willing to complete such surveys. However, diversity is not consistent at

all levels of the organisation. The Board discussed how internal development and our approach to recruitment, including job specifications, could help to change this. Commissioners discussed specific methods to increase diversity through changed recruitment practices. The Board emphasised its commitment that outreach in electoral registration campaigns should include a greater focus on BAME communities. The Commission worked with a number of organisations in this area, and although the lack of grant funding restricted the potential for some possible partnerships, there was a willingness to look at how problems of this kind could be overcome going forward. The Board noted a desire to build on its knowledge of the experiences of BAME communities before offering suggestions or taking any specific decisions, including through engagement with more outside stakeholders through either one-off or ongoing advisory relationships. The Board also noted that equality, diversity and inclusion in its broadest sense included age, class, social background, geography and diversity of thought. This should be reflected in our approach. The Board acknowledged the lack of Commissioners from BAME communities, and the importance of doing something about this. The recruitment processes for Commissioners were in the hands of the Speaker's Committee, but the Commission should encourage further efforts to ensure a greater diversity of candidates. The Board agreed that there was a need to be ambitious and link up with the work of RemCo. Understanding of inequality should be embedded in engagement and partnership strategies. The Commission should be using best practice from other organisations. Business items taken via electronic means since the previous board meeting No matters were raised.