

Broadcasters' Liaison Group (BLG) meeting, 4 September 2003
Note of conclusions and action points

Present: Steve Anderson (ITV), Paul Chinnery (Five), Lena Ferguson (BBC Northern Ireland), John Howells (S4C), James Leaton-Gray (BBC), Rob Morrison (Ulster TV), Nick Powell (HTV), Ian Pratt (BBC Wales), Stephen Rudoff (Carlton), Sue Robertson (Five), Anne Sloman (BBC), Martin Stott (Channel 4), Nick Toon (ITV)

In attendance: Chris Banatvala (ITC), Martin Campbell (Radio Authority), Stephen Judson (Electoral Commission), Jaron Lewis (BBC).

Apologies: Eleanor Aitken (BBC Scotland), Dorothy Byrne (Channel 4), Peter Lowe (Sky News), Prash Naik (Channel 4), Derrick Thomson (SMG),

Venue: BBC Broadcasting House, Portland Place, London

1. TRANSPARENCY

Following a discussion at the previous meeting (17 March) on the need for greater transparency, a manager from the Electoral Commission attended the meeting as an observer. The BBC will be placing a summary of the BLG's meetings on its website.

2. FUTURE CHAIR OF THE BLG

For the reasons discussed previously, it was decided that it would be inappropriate for a non-broadcaster to be appointed as an independent chair for BLG meetings. It was decided unanimously that the BBC would continue to chair the meetings for the time being.

3. MEETING WITH THE POLITICAL PARTIES

It was decided that the political parties should be invited to the next meeting of the BLG in November 2003. The BLG would like to hear the views of political parties about some of the issues raised by the Electoral Commission's report – for example the length of PEBs and the announcements read before them - and also the practical arrangements for the elections in June 2004. For example, the BLG would like the views of the parties on the length of PEBs, the announcements read before them and practical arrangements for the elections on 10 June 2004.

It was noted that for logistical reasons it would not be possible to meet all the political parties at the same time. It was appreciated that all parties needed to be treated fairly and given an opportunity to express their views. It was agreed that the three main political parties, which secure the majority of the PEBs, would be met for 45 minutes each. The BLG would then meet representatives of Plaid Cymru and the SNP together for a further 45 minutes. A longer meeting would be held the same day with the remaining political parties. A separate meeting will be held in Northern Ireland for the political parties based there.

4. **DURATION OF PEBs**

There was further discussion about the problems of having PEBs with a reduced duration of 1 minute 40 seconds. This is to be discussed again at a future meeting.

5. **CHANNELS REQUIRED TO CARRY PEBs**

It was noted that DCMS might want to increase the number of channels that are obliged to carry PEBs. This will be considered further if proposals are published.

6. **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Electoral Commission offered to commission some ideas for new standard announcements for the beginning of PEBs for consideration by the BLG. This was welcomed.

The BLG discussed the characteristics of PEB announcements necessary to ensure fairness between the political parties and to distinguish the PEBs from normal programming. A separate announcement in Welsh is also required. Thought should be given to whether to include the date of the election. This should be discussed with the political parties when the BLG meets them in November.

7. **10 JUNE 2004**

A number of elections will be held on 10 June 2004, including for some local authorities, the European Parliament and the Greater London Assembly. A co-ordinated approach to PEBs will need to be taken to determine how many PEBs each party is allowed to broadcast. It was agreed that the political parties would be consulted about this at the meeting in November.

JL