

BOUNDARY COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND

Minutes of the meeting held in room 2.08A, 35 Great Smith Street, London, SW1P 3BQ on Wednesday 3 June 2014 at 17:00.

Present:-

The Hon. Mrs Justice Patterson	Deputy Chair
Mr D Elvin QC	Commissioner
Mr N Pringle	“
Mr A Bellringer	Secretary
Mr G Reed	Secretariat
Mr G Tessier	“

Observers (for Item 1)

Mr S James	Cabinet Office
Mr N Patrick	Cabinet Office

The presence of the Assessors from Ordnance Survey and the Statistics Authority was not required at the meeting.

1. PRESENTATION FROM CABINET OFFICE POLICY OFFICIALS

1.1 Mr James and Mr Patrick were introduced to the Commission. They outlined the manifesto commitments of the new Government in respect of the forthcoming review of parliamentary constituencies in the United Kingdom, and the legislative issues that these have created. It was confirmed that a new Secretary to the Commission would be recruited by open competition this year at the Senior Civil Service (SCS) grade band. It was anticipated that the Secretary should be in post by the end of August 2015. Mr James said that it would be helpful if Commissioners could assist in the drafting of the job specification, and with the interview process.

2. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 24 OCTOBER 2014

2.1 The minutes of the previous meeting were approved by the Commission and signed by the Deputy Chair.

3. MATTERS ARISING SINCE 24 OCTOBER 2014 (BCE/2015/Paper 1)

3.1 Members noted Paper 1.

Digital Mapping of Polling Districts in England

3.2 The Secretary said that Ordnance Survey (OS) had been focused on mapping the polling districts in the areas identified as a priority by the Secretariat. As of the end of May 2015, BCE had received from OS digital mapping of polling districts in London and all six metropolitan counties (Greater Manchester, Merseyside, South Yorkshire, Tyne & Wear, West Midlands, and West Yorkshire). The Secretariat are currently in the process of verifying the accuracy of this mapping and requesting updates from the relevant local authorities, in

order to accurately update the mapping to reflect the May 2015 position, which will be that to be used in the next Review.

- 3.3 The Secretariat had met with OS earlier that day to review progress and agree the final stages of the mapping process. The Secretary reported that OS had completed 46% of England, comprising London, the six metropolitan counties, and 27% of the non-metropolitan authorities. OS were on target to complete the project in October 2015, which would be in line with the Commission's timetable ahead of the 2018 Review.

Replacement Geographic Information System (GIS)

- 3.4 The Secretary reported that the 'Discovery' phase of the procurement – to identify exactly what technical solutions would be appropriate for the BCE's specific requirements – had formally commenced at the beginning of April, led by Informed Solutions (who have previously provided technical IT solutions to both the Boundary Commission for Scotland and for the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE)). This phase had been completed and has resulted in a detailed technical specification (including functional and architectural requirements). This will form the basis of the next step – formal procurement of a supplier of the solution via the G-Cloud procurement process – which would happen by the middle of June 2015.
- 3.5 The Discovery phase also gave an informed view on the length of time required to build, test and deliver a finished product of the new system, which ranged from two to three months, depending on the particular architectural option that was chosen. Taking into account the time required to procure a supplier, it is likely to be October or November before the BCE had a new GIS fully in place. This will still be before the new Review staff will be joining the Secretariat, and delivery may well be sooner, if it is possible to utilise an expedited process for procuring a supplier (which is currently being explored). Mr Pringle was concerned that this remained a very tight timetable, but the Secretary assured Commissioners that it was achievable.

Triennial Review

- 3.6 The Secretary said that he had formally received the final report of the Cabinet Office's Triennial Review of the Parliamentary Boundary Commissions on 26 March 2015. Paper 2015/01 on the agenda of this meeting considered the report and its recommendations (insofar as they required action by the Commission) in further detail.

Political and Constitutional Reform Committee report

- 3.7 The Secretary reported that the House of Commons Political and Constitutional Reform Committee (PCRC) had completed their inquiry 'What next on the redrawing of Parliamentary constituency boundaries?'. The PCRC's final report was published in March 2015 and contained a number of recommendations. Commissioners noted that the new Government had not responded as yet to these recommendations.

Post-election 2015: New Ministers

- 3.8 The Secretary reported that there had been changes in the Ministerial team at the Cabinet Office. The senior Cabinet Office Minister was now the Rt Hon Oliver Letwin MP, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. The Cabinet Office Minister most immediately responsible for Constitutional matters is John Penrose MP, and any legislation needing to be

brought forward in relation to Parliamentary constituency reviews would be led by the Rt Hon Chris Grayling MP, Leader of the House of Commons.

Media Enquiry Handling

- 3.9 The Secretary said that when the Secretariat had scaled down its staffing complement, with the loss of a dedicated Communications Manager who filled the role of Press Officer, the Secretariat reverted to its approach prior to the commencement of the 2013 Review, which was to allow any experienced member of staff to respond to a request for information made by the media. With the date for the formal start of the 2018 Review getting closer, media interest is starting to noticeably increase. The Secretariat had therefore received a request from Cabinet Office to review its procedures for dealing with media enquiries, with a view to bringing them more into line with the Civil Service's own code. The latter was updated shortly before the election to require specific approval from a Minister's Office before a civil servant could speak officially to a media representative.
- 3.10 Commissioners agreed that it would clearly be inappropriate for Secretariat staff to have to seek Ministerial authority to speak to the media, given the arms' length nature of the Commission's work. They also agreed that it would be impractical and disproportionate for the Secretariat staff to contact a Commissioner every time a press inquiry was made, given both the technical and factual nature of most media requests for information, and the limited short-notice accessibility of Commissioners.
- 3.11 Commissioners agreed to delegate standing authority to the Secretary to the Commission to take all requests from the media for information in the first instance. The Secretary will respond directly to the enquiry, but may, at their discretion in the particular circumstances of the case: a) if the matter is particularly sensitive or controversial, agree the wording with the Deputy Chair (or other Commissioner) before responding; or b) if the request is for purely factual technical data (e.g. existing electorate figures or boundary lines), delegate the response to an appropriate other member of Secretariat staff. In the event that the Secretary is unavailable to respond, any Deputy Secretary (if so designated) should fill the role accordingly: other members of Secretariat staff should only deal directly with specific requests for technical and factual data.

4. 2015 ELECTORATES (BCE/2015/Paper 2)

- 4.1 Mr Tessier introduced the electorate data and said that whilst the number of parliamentary electors in England had dropped by just over 1 million in the last two years. Evidence from the recent General Election suggested that, since the registers had been published on 1 December 2014, just under 1 million electors had registered to vote. These extra electors would have impacted upon the distribution of constituencies between the four countries of the United Kingdom and between the nine regions in England. Mr Pringle commented that his understanding was that local authorities had been encouraged to leave existing electors on the register in the absence of evidence to the contrary and, that being the case, there was still scope for more electors to be removed from the register as the registers were further refined. Commissioners noted the figures.

5. TRIENNIAL REVIEW REPORT ON PARLIAMENTARY BOUNDARY COMMISSIONS (BCE/2015/Paper 3)

- 5.1 The Secretary said that there were three recommendations in the report that were at least in part directed to the Commission itself. The first was that this Commission and the LG BCE

“should continue to consider whether they could share expertise or support arrangements and services”. Commissioners agreed that this should be looked at as a benefit for both organisations, which could be pursued over a longer term, with spring 2018 being a critical date, when this Commission is close to completing the 2018 Review and before the LGBCE embarks on another five year programme of reviews.

- 5.2 The second recommendation was that the Commission should *“consider agreeing and publishing a Framework Document”*. Commissioners noted that there had been similar documents dealing with the Commission’s relationship with its previous sponsoring Departments, but that this had not continued when the Cabinet Office had taken on that role. Commissioners agreed that the Secretariat should support the sponsor Department in drawing up a Framework Document.
- 5.3 The final recommendation was that the *“induction and appraisal [of Commissioners] should be carried out with regard to best practice guidance”*. The Secretary suggested that any appraisal system should be light touch and scalable in proportion to how much call was made on Commissioners during and between reviews. Mr Elvin and Mr Pringle recalled that the previous Secretary had undertaken appraisals with them during the 2013 Review. It was agreed that these could be used as a framework for a future appraisal process.

6. ANNUAL REPORT 2014-15

- 6.1 The Secretary introduced the draft Annual Report, adding that the financial figures would be added when they had been confirmed with the sponsor Department, hopefully later this month. The Secretary noted that there were two further planned meetings of the Commission in this financial year. One would be held this autumn and the other would be held early in 2016 and incorporate a meeting with the parliamentary political parties at the start of the 2018 Review. Commissioners agreed the text of the draft report, subject to confirmation of the financial expenditure figures from Cabinet Office and inclusion of a Foreword by the Deputy Chair.

7. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

- 7.1 It was agreed that the next meeting would be held in the autumn and that either 15 or 16 September appeared to be the dates that were available. The Secretary would contact Commissioners to confirm the agreed date in due course.
- 7.2 The Secretary reported that the LGBCE were arranging this year’s annual meeting of the UK Boundary Commissions. This meeting would be held in London on 17 and 18 November 2015. Commissioners were invited to attend if available.