

## **MATTERS ARISING SINCE 18 DECEMBER 2012**

### Formal closure of 2013 Review

1. As Members will be aware, an amendment was made to the Electoral Registration and Administration Bill in late 2012, the effect of which was to postpone to autumn 2018 the submission of the first report of a constituency review under the post-2011 legislative framework. The Bill subsequently gained Royal Assent, and the relevant section came into force on 23 April 2013.
2. Work to wind down the Secretariat and the work of the 2013 Review was concluded over the following two months, so that by the end of June 2013 all records relating to the 2013 had been audited and archived/published as appropriate.
3. As from the beginning of July 2013, the Secretariat had reduced to 4.2 full-time equivalent staff. Following two forthcoming retirements in November 2013 and January 2014, this will leave the Secretariat with a skeleton staff of 2.2 FTE, which is considered the bare minimum required to handle inter-review business, such as corporate governance and statutory requirements, policy development work and preparing and implementing arrangements for the beginning of the 2018 Review process.

### Publication of Annual Report and Accounts for 2012-3

4. The Annual Report and Accounts for the financial year 2012-3 have been published on the BCE website, following the clearance of the text with Members by correspondence.

### Investigation of possible secretariat merger with LGBCE

5. Following initial discussions earlier in 2013, there was principled agreement to undertake some more detailed exploratory work on the viability and desirability of merging the Secretariats of the Local Government and Parliamentary Boundary Commissions for England, as has been the case in Wales and Scotland for a number of years.
6. Over the summer the BCE Secretary provided an outline of a five-year cycle of review work (including staffing levels and expenditure) to LGBCE senior officials. With LGBCE's own work to settle their future work programme due to be formally concluded shortly, we aim to work with them to develop a model for what a merged Secretariat would look like in terms of work programme and costs/benefits over a five year period.
7. Such a cost/benefit analysis model would then form the basis of any formal proposal that would need to go to Cabinet Office Ministers (and the Speaker's Committee, to whom LGBCE are accountable) in order for any merger to proceed.

### Members terms of office

8. The terms of office of all three appointed Members are due to expire within the next year. Appointment of full Commissioners is handled by the sponsor team within Cabinet Office, who have recently indicated they wished to consider David Elvin QC and Neil Pringle at the same time for possible reappointment (although their terms of office expire in January 2014 and June 2014 respectively). In response to the sponsor team's request, the Deputy Chairman and Secretary to the Commission have provided assessments of those Members' suitability for reappointment, and we await notification of a decision.
9. Mr Justice Sales' current term of office expires in June 2014, but the sponsor team have not yet given an indication of when they propose to address the position of Deputy Chair.

### New Junior Minister in Cabinet Office

10. Following the Government reshuffle of 7 October the Junior Minister within the Cabinet Office who has responsibility for constitutional policy is Greg Clark, MP for Tunbridge Wells. The Deputy Prime Minister continues to have senior responsibility within Cabinet for the area.

### Individual Electoral Registration

11. As Members will be aware, the shift to a system of individual electoral registration (IER) has the potential to significantly impact on the substance of BCE's work. The first major step in transition to IER will be the matching of existing electoral registers against records held by the Department for Work and Pensions – 'confirmation' - which is intended to automatically confirm the majority of electors on the register during the transition to IER in 2014.
12. A complete national test of this data matching process was carried out in the summer of 2013. This confirmation dry run involved the matching of all 380 registers from across Great Britain, containing around 46 million people, against Department for Work and Pensions data, using the process, IT and people who will implement the process for real next year.
13. According to the official reporting on [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk), results were positive, with 78% of electors matched (higher than achieved in our previous pilots in 2012 and 2011), and more localised data matching has the potential to add an average of 7%. This means that most electors will not need to actively apply under IER unless their circumstances change (e.g. they move house), and that the risk of a large drop in the register during transition is therefore significantly reduced, although in publishing the results on 23 October, the Cabinet Office acknowledged that match rates fluctuate between different local authority areas, for instance areas with high student populations often have a lower match rate.
14. A full report of the confirmation dry run and detailed results data are available on [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk).

### Annual Meeting of UK Boundary Commissions

15. The Annual Meeting of the Local Government and Parliamentary Boundary Commissions from across the UK will take place on 21 November 2013, in Cardiff. It has previously been agreed the Neil Pringle will represent the BCE Commissioners,

and Tony Bellringer will represent the Secretariat. The Agenda for the meeting is attached at Appendix A.

### Triennial Review of UK Parliamentary Boundary Commissions

16. It is Government policy that Departments should formally review all the Non-Departmental Public Bodies they sponsor once in each three-year cycle. Discussions with the sponsor team in Cabinet Office's Constitution Group indicate that current thinking is that the reviews of the Parliamentary Boundary Commissions from across the UK will be 'clustered' and conducted together, given the identical functions, with a likely start to this review early in 2014.
17. Detailed guidance on Triennial Reviews for NDPBs is available on [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk). In brief, the resources put into conducting them should be proportionate to the size of the NDPB, but there is always a basic template for the process, which should be led by somebody of suitable seniority, who is independent of both the NDPB and the sponsor team.
18. Reviews are in split into two stages. Stage 1 looks at whether the function still needs to be delivered, and, if so, whether the form of the body remains the most appropriate, or whether an alternative delivery model may be more appropriate (which might include moving the function wholly into a Government Department, or moving it out of the public sector (at least in part) to the private or charitable sectors. If Stage 1 concludes the current function and form should continue, Stage 2 then looks at whether the control and governance arrangements in place are in line with recognised principles of good practice, including requirements on openness, transparency and accountability. Members are referred to the Cabinet Office's publication 'Advisory NDPBs: corporate governance arrangements' (attached at Appendix B), for a statement of the good practice expectations against which the BCE is likely to be assessed.