

## **TRIENNIAL REVIEW REPORT ON PARLIAMENTARY BOUNDARY COMMISSIONS**

### Issue

1. How to respond to the detailed recommendations of the final report of the Triennial Review of the Parliamentary Boundary Commissions (copy of report attached).

### Background

2. All UK Government-sponsored Non-Departmental Public Bodies (NDPBs) are currently subject to a formal review process once in every three-year period. This review is required to look specifically at whether the function for which the NDPB was established is still necessary, and, if so, whether the NDPB delivery model for that function remains the most appropriate. If the answer to both questions is 'yes' the review should then go on to consider how the corporate governance, efficiency and effectiveness of the NDPB match up to modern standards and guidance produced by the Government, and make recommendations for improvement accordingly.
3. The Cabinet Office chose to conduct a single combined review of all four Parliamentary Boundary Commissions, and formally announced the commencement of that Triennial Review in April 2014. Cabinet Office officials interviewed and obtained data from representatives of all four Commissions and/or their Secretariats, as well as meeting with some stakeholders, and in March 2015 the final report and recommendations was published.
4. The Review concluded that the function of regular constituency reviews still needed to be delivered by a body separate from Government, and a NDPB remained the best delivery model for that. Individual recommendations – insofar as they may be considered to be for the Commission itself to respond to - are highlighted below, with some contextual consideration from the Secretariat immediately following each.

### BCE and LGBCE “continue to consider whether they could share expertise or support arrangements and services”

5. This recommendation is in the context of Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland each having a single joint Secretariat supporting both Parliamentary and Local Government Boundary Commissions in each country. Closer working between the respective Commission Secretariats in England was looked at following the end of the BCE's 2013 Review, but despite positive support from the Chairs of both the BCE and LGBCE, it did not prove possible at that time to progress beyond a general commitment to provide informal support and advice to each other in areas where there was an identifiable area of common interest (e.g. in relation to developing and procuring a new GIS and online consultation).
6. A significant obstacle to closer formal working and harmonisation of the two Secretariats is the sheer scale of the task in England. Specifically, any actual pooling of Secretariat resources would almost certainly see the progression of local government review work disrupted Parliamentary review work during the busiest period of the latter (although this would arguably be compensated for in the quieter years of the Parliamentary review cycle).

7. The BCE Secretariat are extremely willing to continue to explore prospective closer working with the LGBCE Secretariat, not least because in such a direction lies improved possibilities for retention of experienced and knowledgeable staff between Parliamentary constituency reviews, which has become increasingly problematic under the new statutory arrangements.

“Consider agreeing and publishing a Framework Document”

8. A Framework Document is the definitive document that sets down the detail of the sponsor relationship between an arms length body and its sponsor Government department. It therefore has the benefit of clarifying and regularising exactly how that relationship should work, rather than relying on custom and/or good personal relationships between the individuals involved on both sides. It is relevant here to highlight that a Framework Document would be a key component in addressing another of the recommendations of the triennial review, that Sponsor Departments should *“assure themselves that they are carrying out an appropriate level of Scrutiny and oversight and Performance reporting”*.
9. Whilst the Secretariat supports the development and publication of a formal Framework Document (as per Government’s own guidance for NDPBs), our understanding is that that document is owned ultimately by the sponsor – i.e. the Government department – so the initiative is with our Cabinet office sponsor team to take this recommendation forward. We will, of course, expect to be fully and actively involved in the development of any Framework Document, as again our understanding is that whilst the sponsor is ultimately responsible for it, the content of the document should be mutually agreed between sponsor and sponsored body, not imposed on the latter.

“Induction and appraisal [of Commissioners] should be carried out with regard to best practise guidance”

10. These are areas where the Commission has had difficulty in the past implementing a regular and formal process in the manner envisaged by Government guidance.
11. In relation to Induction, the report notes that the induction of Commissioners seems to have been effective, but may benefit from some degree of standardisation. The Secretariat is very willing to pursue this, and would welcome input from Commissioners themselves as to what this should look like in practice, in light of their own experiences.
12. As regards Performance evaluation of Commissioners, this has, as noted in the report, usually only been done on an ad hoc basis – specifically where an individual’s performance in the role needs to be considered in the context of prospective re-appointment. However, Government guidance is clear that performance evaluation should take place regularly, on at least an annual basis. Whilst the Secretariat is supportive of the recommendation in principle, there are practical issues to consider, such as the difficulty of assessing Commissioners in the particularly quiet ‘inter-Review’ years.

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