

MATTERS ARISING SINCE 1 NOVEMBER 2013

Digital Mapping of Polling Districts in England

1. Cabinet Office approval has been secured to contract with Ordnance Survey (OS) for the digital mapping of all polling districts in England. A formal agreement has recently been drawn up to underpin that arrangement, and work formally commenced on the mapping in OS at the beginning of October.
2. An initial dataset will be created between now and spring 2015, representing the polling district boundaries as they stand in October 2014. A subsequent refresh will then be conducted over the summer of 2015 to update the dataset to reflect the boundaries as they will be at the time of the May 2015 elections (which are the boundaries that we will need to use in the 2018 Review, as determined by the Act). This 'May 2015' mapping will be delivered to us as part of the OS's official 'Boundary Line' product by October 2015 at the latest.

Replacement Geographic Information System (GIS)

3. The Secretariat has worked closely with a GIS professional seconded to us from Ordnance Survey in the development of a formal technical specification for a replacement GIS, which will form the foundation of the subsequent work to secure a new system.
4. Having secured Cabinet Office financial approval, the Secretariat contracted with ESRI (provider of our previous GIS) to develop a basic prototype 'proof of concept', to demonstrate that the basic functionality that we were seeking would be deliverable in a fully-fledged product. That prototype was formally delivered and demonstrated to the Secretariat on 9 October, and remains available for our use for 30 days thereafter. This process of developing this prototype, together with discussions the Secretariat has had with colleagues in other Boundary Commissions has indicated prospective significant technical issues in the development of interactive online mapping functionality for the public during the consultation periods.
5. Since the decision was first formally taken in principle to move to a new GIS, the Secretariat has relied heavily on the support and advice of Cabinet Office procurement officials in ensuring that it follows the appropriate government procurement process. We were therefore surprised to learn in early October of further procedural steps that we would have to undergo prior to commencement of the formal public procurement. Inevitably, this will add extra time to the process, which begins to raise concern about the achievability of timely delivery of a new system prior to the commencement of the 2018 Review. The Secretariat is currently seeking escalation of our concerns to senior Cabinet Office managers, in order to ensure that there is no further unanticipated delay in the process.

Joint BCE-Cabinet Office project board

6. A senior-level joint project board was established at the end of 2013, with membership of the BCE's Deputy Chairman, the Cabinet Office's Constitution Director, and the Cabinet Office's Head of Elections and Parliament Division. The intention was to establish a forum for both the Commission and the sponsor department to jointly monitor progress with effective planning and preparation for the commencement of the 2018 Review, with sufficiently senior membership to be able to

facilitate necessary action to overcome obstacles that might arise within the Commission or government along the way.

7. The board meets formally roughly once every quarter, supported by the Secretary to the Commission, who provides papers to the board members in the form of project plan timeline, risk register, and highlight report.

Triennial Review

8. The commencement of a Triennial Review of the Parliamentary Boundary Commissions was formally announced on 7 April. The Secretary was interviewed in June by an official from the Cabinet Office team running the Triennial Review, and has provided corporate governance and performance information as requested by the team. The Secretariat has not been advised when the team expect to conclude the Triennial Review and produce their formal report, but they have been invited to attend the Annual Meeting of the UK's Boundary Commissions (see below) to provide an update.

Members appointments

9. The terms of office of the Deputy Chairman and both other Commissioners expired in the first half of 2014. All three were re-appointed: Philip Sales until 31 May 2019, David Elvin until 11 January 2019 and Neil Pringle until 30 June 2019.
10. Philip Sales was subsequently elevated to the Court of Appeal, with effect from 10 November 2014. As this makes him no longer eligible to hold the Deputy Chairman position - which must be held by a High Court judge - from that date, a new Deputy Chairman will need to be appointed by the Secretary of State for Justice. At the time of writing this paper, that appointments process is underway, but the individual to be appointed is not yet known to the Secretariat.

Changes in Cabinet Office sponsor officials

11. At the beginning of 2014 Ciaran Martin moved to another senior post within Cabinet Office and Mark Sweeney was appointed as the new Constitution Director.
12. Flowing from the Scottish referendum, there is a large amount of consequential work to be undertaken on the constitutional settlement across the UK. This has necessitated the splitting of the current Elections and Parliament Division, which BCE falls under the sponsorship of. There will be two successor divisions: Alex Thomas will continue to lead the one dealing with the broader constitutional settlement, but electoral policy (which BCE falls under) will from 27 October 2014 be a separate division, headed by Simon James (formerly Secretary to the Commission during the 2013 Review).

New Cabinet Office Constitution junior Minister

13. As part of a small Ministerial reshuffle in July 2014 a new junior Minister was appointed with responsibility for Constitutional issues: Sam Gyimah, who is MP for the East Surrey constituency. Mr Gyimah will support Greg Clark MP, who remains the Minister for Cities and the Constitution. The Deputy Prime Minister remains the senior Minister with specific responsibility for Constitutional issues.

Annual Meeting of UK Boundary Commissions

14. The regular Annual Meeting of the Parliamentary and Local Government Boundary Commissions from across the UK will take place on 20 November 2014 in Edinburgh. The BCE will be represented by Commissioner Neil Pringle and the Secretary to the Commission.