

BOUNDARY COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND

Minutes of the meeting held in room G/20, 1 Horse Guards Road, London, SW1A 2HQ on Tuesday 21 October 2014 at 15.00.

Present:-

The Hon. Mr Justice Sales	Deputy Chairman
Mr D Elvin QC	Commissioner
Mr N Pringle	“
Mr A Bellringer	Secretary
Mr G Reed	Secretariat
Mr G Tessier	“
Observers (for Item 2.2)	
Mr T Bowden	LGBCE
Mr M Bowell	LGBCE
Mr A Acuna	Cabinet Office Digital Transformation Team
Mr J Katz	Cabinet Office Digital Transformation Team

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

1. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 1 NOVEMBER 2013

- 1.1 The minutes of the previous meeting were approved by the Commission and signed by the Deputy Chairman.

2. MATTERS ARISING SINCE 1 NOVEMBER 2013 (BCE/2014/Paper 1)

- 2.1 Members noted Paper 1.

Replacement Geographic Information System (GIS)

- 2.2 Members noted that a GIS Prototype, which had been developed by ESRI UK, the current GIS suppliers, had been completed and made available to the Commission for a 30 day trial period. This had confirmed the proof of concept and deliverability of functionality required in a future internal GIS system. It had been demonstrated to Members before the meeting and had been well received. The Secretary reported that the procurement process was underway and the aim was for a new GIS to be installed by the Summer of 2015, with the Invitation to Tender issued by the end of 2014. However, it was not certain that the latter date would be met, due to some confusion around the particular procurement process required. He added that following advice from Cabinet Office colleagues, it was recommended that the procurement be split into two parts, one for the purchase of the internal GIS and a separate procurement for a consultation website portal. He said that this would allow for the new GIS to be procured as a priority, whilst providing over 12 months additional time - before the Initial Proposals are published in the Autumn of 2016 - to fully develop the consultation element of the Commission’s website.
- 2.3 Members considered that the new GIS could not be delayed, as that would seriously impact upon the Commission’s ability to meet the statutory timetable for the 2018 review.

- 2.4 Mr Bowden and Mr Bowell from the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) were invited to describe how their website operated as part of the consultations on the LGBCE's recommendations. They said that the aim had been to make the mapping element as easy to use as Google Maps, that it had taken between 6 and 8 months to build the website and that there had been subsequent updates to make improvements on an iterative basis. They added that the LGBCE web portal did not utilise actual GIS shape files, so it was not possible for a user to create new maps to illustrate alternative ward boundaries. Rather, the site displayed a scalable map with different levels of existing boundary that could be toggled on and off, on which it was possible for a user to draw shapes and lines on the displayed map and to comment in an accompanying text box. They stated that the consultation website had increased the number of representations received by 100%.
- 2.5 Members considered how the consultation process during the 2018 review could be improved and discussed how best to allow interested parties to submit representations. They agreed that it would be essential to let interested parties view interactive maps and allow them to make comments about the proposals, either by annotating the map or by using a comment box. They were concerned about how the secondary consultation period would be handled, particularly when attempting to give interested parties the ability to comment on a wide range of representations from the first consultation. They considered that there may be a need to reduce the interactive graphical element in the secondary consultation stage.
- 2.6 Members agreed that the procurement should be split: there should be no further delay in the process to procure a new internal GIS, on the basis of the functional specification already identified. It was accepted there would need to be further discussions to develop the detailed functionality requirements of a consultation website for the 2018 review, which would then form the basis of a separate later procurement.

Digital Mapping of Polling Districts in England

- 2.7 Mr Tessier informed members of the work being undertaken by the Secretariat and Ordnance Survey to create the dataset ahead of the 2018 review. Members were content with the progress so far.

Joint BCE-Cabinet Office project board

- 2.8 The Secretary reported that three meetings of the project board had been held and that they had been useful in keeping all parties involved and up to date on the issues affecting the planning being undertaken ahead of the 2018 review. He added that it was expected that the project board meetings would continue throughout the 2018 review, as they were a useful forum to secure high level official understanding and support for BCE's work where delivery was reliant on Cabinet Office infrastructure and 'back office' procedures. The Deputy Chairman offered to attend the next project board meeting on a transitional basis, along with his successor, to assist the new Deputy Chairman, once appointed.

Triennial Review of UK Parliamentary Boundary Commissions

- 2.9 The Secretary reported that there had been few developments in the Triennial Review process so far. The Deputy Chairman reported that he had met with Sue Gray, who had been appointed to undertake the triennial review, and that her line of questioning of him had focused on potential efficiencies that could arise from closer working (and possible merger)

of the BCE and LGBCE Secretariats. Questioning also touched on the possibility of sponsorship of BCE transferring from Government direct to Parliament (as had been the case with the LGBCE in recent years).

Members' appointments

- 2.10 The Secretary noted that Mr Elvin and Mr Pringle had been re-appointed until January and June 2019 respectively. With Mr Justice Sales' appointment to the Court of Appeal, a new Deputy Chairman would be appointed. It was expected that an announcement on that appointment would be made shortly.

Changes in Cabinet Office sponsor officials

- 2.11 Members noted that Ciaran Martin had moved to another senior post within Cabinet Office at the beginning of 2014 and had been replaced by Mark Sweeney as the Director of Constitution Group. Members also noted that Simon James, a former Secretary to the Commission, had been appointed as Deputy Director to the new Elections Division in Constitution Group and from 27 October would be responsible for Cabinet Office sponsorship of the Commission as part of his new role.

New Cabinet Office Constitution junior Minister

- 2.12 Members noted that Sam Gyimah MP had been appointed to assist Greg Clark MP, the Minister for Cities and the Constitution on constitutional matters (as well as having some ministerial responsibilities in relation to the Department for Education).

Annual Meeting of UK Boundary Commissions

- 2.13 Members noted that the next annual meeting of the UK Boundary Commissions would take place in Edinburgh on 20 November 2014. Mr Pringle and the Secretary would be attending on behalf of the Commission.

3. Annual Report 2013-14 (BCE/2014/Paper 2)

- 3.1 Members approved the Annual Report for 2013-14. Mr Reed reported that there had been considerable pressure on the Commission's budget for 2014-15, which had been significantly reduced from the initial bid to £400,000 at the start of the year, and now further trimmed to £380,000. Mr Reed informed Members that an indicative budget for 2015-16, which included funds for the procurement of the GIS, the final instalment for the polling district dataset, and the staff build up ahead of the 2018 review had been discussed with finance colleagues in the Cabinet Office. The Secretary would arrange for the report to be published in due course.

4. 2014 ELECTORATES (BCE/2014/Paper 3)

- 4.1 The 2014 electoral register had been published on 17 February 2014 in England, delayed due to the introduction of Individual Electoral Registration (IER). Members noted the figures in Paper 3.
- 4.2 For the first time since 2004, England's electorate had decreased. If these new figures were being used for a review, under the statutory distribution formula England would have been allocated 499 constituencies (excluding the two Isle of Wight constituencies), instead of 500

as in the 2013 review and Scotland would be allocated 51 constituencies (excluding the two Island constituencies), instead of 50. In regional terms, the London region would have been allocated an extra constituency, and the South West and West Midlands regions would have each lost a constituency.

- 3.3 In England, using the 2014 electoral register figures, just 193 (36%) of the 533 existing constituencies had an electorate within 5% of the electoral quota. The largest constituency continued to be Isle of Wight CC (111,800); the smallest constituency continued to be Wirral West CC (54,814). The second largest constituency continued to be Manchester Central BC (95,373).

4. BCE WEBSITE (BCE/2014/Paper 4)

- 4.1 Members considered whether the Commission should retain an independent website, or whether it should migrate to the 'gov.uk' website. Government general policy is that all UK Government organisations, including arm's length bodies such as the Commission, should be on gov.uk, but the Commission currently has an explicit exemption, due to the need for it to be seen as independent from Government. Members noted that whilst the Commission currently has a presence on 'gov.uk', it is just a link to the Commission's website.
- 4.2 Members considered that the need for the Commission to conform to the standard gov.uk style guide might adversely affect its ability to consult and inform the public and other stakeholders via its website in future, as well as detracting from user's understanding of the independence of the Commission from Government. It was therefore agreed that the Commission would not migrate substantively to the gov.uk website, and would retain its own independent website.

5. OTHER BUSINESS

- 5.1 Members discussed the position the Commission should take in Mr Pringle's discussions with Commissioners from the Northern Irish, Scottish and Welsh Commissions at the forthcoming annual meeting. Mr Pringle considered that there was a significant issue relating to the statutory timetable for the 2018 review, which because of the different scale of the task was easier for the three other country's Commissions, than for England. The fact that only 193 English constituencies had electorates within 5% of the electoral quota on the basis of the most recent register underlined the scale of change that the 2018 review might require. Members agreed the difficulties facing the English Commission should be made clear, and that the four Commissions would need to co-operate closely as the next review approached.
- 5.2 The Secretary reported that it was likely that the Secretariat would once again have to move offices in the near future. The Secretariat had been offered space on the second floor at 35 Great Smith Street, where it had been based from December 2010 until January 2013.
- 5.3 The Deputy Chairman thanked his fellow Commissioners and the Secretariat staff for the support given during his Deputy Chairmanship and wished his fellow Commissioners well during the forthcoming review. The Secretary thanked him for his support to the Secretariat during his time as Deputy Chairman.
- 5.4 The date of the next meeting would be determined at a later stage, once the new Deputy Chairman had been appointed.