

**BOUNDARY COMMISSION FOR
ENGLAND**



ANNUAL REPORT

2014/2015

BOUNDARY COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND

Membership

The Speaker, the Rt. Hon John Bercow MP
(ex-officio Chairman)

The Hon. Mrs Justice Patterson, Deputy Chair

Mr David Elvin, QC, Commissioner

Mr Neil Pringle, Commissioner

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I was honoured to take up the position of Deputy Chair of the Boundary Commission for England in November 2014 in succession to Philip Sales after his appointment to the Court of Appeal.

In the last year the Secretariat has used the time advantageously in making preparations for the next Review. That is due to commence in 2016 and will be supported by our new Geographic Information System and improved online consultation process.

We welcome the interest shown in constituency review process in the McDougall Trust academic report, published in July 2014, and by Parliament's Political and Constitutional Reform select committee in its inquiry 'What next on the redrawing of Parliamentary boundaries?' to which we contributed, and the report of which was published in March 2015. That report makes a number of specific recommendations to the process of review, some of which we would actively welcome. We look forward to seeing the Government's response, particularly if changes are to be introduced for the next Review.

Frances Patterson

Deputy Chair
27 July 2015

Information about the Boundary Commission for England

The Sponsor

1. The Boundary Commission for England is an advisory Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB), which is sponsored by the Cabinet Office. The Secretariat staff and corporate functions such as Finance, IT and HR support are all provided by the Cabinet Office, which also oversees the corporate governance arrangements for the Commission.

The Commission

2. The Commission is constituted under Schedule 1 to the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986 (as amended). The Commission is an independent, non-political and impartial body and it takes every opportunity to emphasise that the results and voting patterns of previous elections do not, and should not, enter into its considerations. Nor does it consider the possible effects of its recommendations on future voting patterns.

3. The Commission is required to submit periodical reports in respect of the parliamentary constituencies in England to the Government. It is the Government's statutory duty to lay the reports before Parliament together with the draft of an Order in Council giving effect to the Commission's recommendations.

Membership of the Commission

4. The Speaker of the House of Commons is the ex-officio Chairman of all four Boundary Commissions in the United Kingdom. The appointment of the Speaker emphasises the independent, impartial, and non-political nature of the Commission. The Speaker plays no part in the actual conduct of reviews.

5. The Deputy Chair of the Boundary Commission for England, who presides over meetings, is a High Court judge appointed by the Lord Chancellor. The Deputy Chair for the first half of the year was the Honourable Mr Justice Sales, and following his elevation to the Court of Appeal the new Deputy Chair has been the Honourable Mrs Justice Patterson (whose appointment is effective until 9 November 2019). The two other Members of the Commission are Mr David Elvin QC (appointment effective until 11 January 2019), and Mr Neil Pringle (appointment effective until 30 June 2019).

6. The Commissioners are part-time appointees who meet whenever the work programme requires at the Secretariat offices in London. Since the passing of the Boundary Commissions Act 1992, the Commissioners (not including the Deputy Chair) are paid a daily fee set by the Treasury and, together with the Deputy Chair, are entitled to recover any expenses incurred on Commission work.

Code of Practice

8. The Commission maintains a Code of Practice and a Register of Members' Interests. These documents are updated annually and can be accessed on the Commission's website.

Assessors

9. There are two statutory assessors - i.e. technical advisers - to the Commission. They are the Director General of Ordnance Survey and the Statistics Authority. Both are represented at Commission meetings by deputies, whenever the Commission has a need to consult them on their areas of expertise. The Commission did not require the presence of the Assessors at its meetings during 2014-15.

Assistant Commissioners

10. The Commission may arrange for Assistant Commissioners to be appointed by the Secretary of State to assist it with its work. During an active constituency review, Assistant Commissioners chair the public hearings that the Commission are now statutorily required to hold. They are also asked to undertake an assessment of the representations submitted to the Commission in respect of its provisional recommendations, together with subsequent comments on those representations, received during the secondary consultation period. The Assistant Commissioners then submit reports, with recommendations, to the Commission. The Assistant Commissioners are paid a daily rate set by the Treasury when they work for the Commission.

11. As the Commission is currently between statutory constituency reviews, there has been no need to appoint Assistant Commissioners during the 2014-15 financial year.

The Secretariat

12. The statutory Secretary to the Commission for the period of this report was Mr Anthony Bellringer. The Secretary heads the Secretariat, the role of which is to service and assist the Commission in its conduct of reviews and executing the decisions it takes, and generally to facilitate the smooth and efficient administration of the Commission's business. The Secretariat may be contacted at the address at the front of this report.

Statutory Duties

12. The Commission's statutory function is to keep under review the distribution of constituencies in England and to make periodical reports with recommendations to the Secretary of State in accordance with the provisions of the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986 (as amended).

13. During an active general review of the constituencies in England, by virtue of the provisions introduced by the Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Act 2011 (which further amended the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986), the Commission allocate a defined number of constituencies to England, the precise number being calculated using a formula defined in the Act and producing a figure broadly in proportion to the size of England's electorate as against that of the whole United Kingdom. Each constituency is also required to have an electorate that is within 5% of the United Kingdom 'electoral quota' (also defined in the Act).

14. Once the Commission has completed its consideration of the distribution of the constituencies, it announces its initial proposals. Interested parties have a twelve week

period in which to submit representations of support or objection. During this initial consultation period, the Commission holds public hearings, so that oral submissions can be made to it as well as written representations. The Commission is then required to make the representations submitted during the twelve week period available so that interested parties can consider them and submit counter-representations during a further four week period. Once the four week 'secondary consultation' period for counter-representations has closed, the Assistant Commissioners are asked to consider:-

- The Commission's initial proposals,
- the representations received in respect of those,
- the oral submissions made at the public hearings, and
- the counter-representations received

also taking into account a number of statutory factors listed in the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986 (as amended).

15. The Assistant Commissioners are asked to submit reports with recommendations to the Commission. Once the reports have been considered, the Commission may decide to announce revised proposals for those initially proposed constituencies where change has been recommended by the Assistant Commissioners. The Commission may also propose no change, or their own changes in light of the recommendations from the Assistant Commissioners. If revised proposals are announced, a period of eight weeks is made available, during which representations on those revised proposals can be made to the Commission. Further public hearings are not held at this stage and there is no subsequent period for counter-representations to be submitted.

16. The Commission is required to submit its final report and recommendations following an active review to the Government at a time specified in the Act, with subsequent reports to be submitted every five years thereafter.

17. Section 6 of the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 in effect postponed the Parliamentary constituencies review by five years (to report in September 2018), so for the period covered by this report, the Commission has not been conducting active review work.

OBJECTIVES 2014/15

Overall objective

17. Although this year in the statutory five-year cycle of constituency reviews is potentially the quietest under the new statutory arrangements, the Commission's main focus during the year has been on two major projects that will be fundamental to the effective delivery of the next Review. Those two projects are: the development of comprehensive England-wide digital mapping of polling district boundaries (to support potential future constituency proposals that require the splitting of individual wards); and the procurement of new Geographic Information System software.

Main objectives for 2014/15, with outcomes

18. The main objectives for the Commission during the 2014/15 financial year were to:-

- **Hold at least one formal Commission meeting during the year to assess progress in planning and preparation for the 2018 Review.** The Commission met formally on 21 October 2014, and was content with the progress that was being made in preparing for the next Review.
- **Establish a high-level project board with joint membership from BCE Commissioner and SCS Cabinet Office official(s) to oversee and facilitate planning and preparation for the 2018 Review, to meet three or four times during the year.** A joint project board was established, with membership of the Commission's Deputy Chair, the Cabinet office's Constitution Director, and Deputy Director responsible for constituency review policy, and supported by the Secretary to the Commission. The group met on three occasions during 2014-15, and was content with the progress being made in preparation for the next Review.
- **Work with the sponsor Department to secure the Ministerial re-appointment or replacement of the Deputy Chair, whose term of office expires at the end of June 2014.** Mr Justice Sales was re-appointed as Deputy Chair following the expiry of his initial five year appointment. However, he was shortly thereafter elevated to the Court of Appeal, which made him ineligible to continue in post as Deputy Chair of the Commission. The Commission and Secretariat thereafter supported the Cabinet Office in arranging the appointment of a new Deputy Chair, Mrs Justice Patterson, with effect from November 2014.
- **Negotiate and agree a contract with Ordnance Survey for the digital mapping of all polling districts in England, secure existing polling district information from all English local authorities and supply to OS by October 2014, with substantive OS work to commence in October 2014 and final delivery in spring 2015.** A formal agreement was signed with Ordnance Survey in October 2014, and they have been working on the digitisation of polling district boundaries since that time. By the end of the period covered by this report they had developed an initial mapset of all the most complex (urban metropolitan) areas.

- **Refresh the Commission’s website by the end of October 2014.** The Commission’s website from the 2013 Review period has been archived (it remains accessible for historical interest via The National Archives website). A new corporate website for the Commission is now in place, with key information about existing constituency electorates, the review process, and the Commission itself.
- **Secure external GIS expertise in order to develop during spring and summer 2014 a detailed technical specification for a replacement GIS, to form the basis of a formal procurement exercise in November/December 2014 with award of the contract in early 2015.** The Commission secured initial technical input – via a GIS-specialist secondee from Ordnance Survey - to the development of outline functional requirements during the first half of the year. This work helped inform the more detailed pre-procurement procedures the Commission has had to go through with the Cabinet Office subsequently. At the end of the reporting year, the formal ‘Discovery’ phase was about to commence, with the award of contract for supply of the final product estimated for June 2015.
- **Participate fully in the Cabinet Office’s Triennial Review of the UK Parliamentary Boundary Commissions (timetable driven by Cabinet Office).** The Commission participated fully in the Triennial Review process, the final report of which was published in March 2015. The Commission is currently reviewing the specific recommendations in that final report, and will seek to make improvements wherever appropriate. It should also be noted that the Commission participated fully in the inquiry ‘What next on the redrawing of Parliamentary boundaries?’, which the House of Commons Political and Constitutional Reform Committee conducted in late 2014 and early 2015. The Commission provided both written and oral evidence in detail to the inquiry, which reported its conclusions and recommendations in March 2015.
- **Participate in the next Annual Meeting of the UK Boundary Commissions.** The Commission was represented at the Annual Meeting of the UK Boundary Commissions, which took place on 20 November 2014 in Edinburgh, at which the Commissions from across the UK discussed relevant current issues and best practice.
- **Update databases with the 2015 (1 December 2014) electoral statistics by the end of March 2015.** The new electorate statistics from across England were collated and verified by the end of March, and subsequently published on the ‘Data’ page of the Commission’s new website during April 2015.

BUDGET AND EXPENDITURE 2013/14

19. The Commission agreed an initial budget of **£400,000** with the sponsor Department, which it considered would be necessary to begin substantive preparatory work for the 2018 Review, as well as performing ongoing ‘housekeeping’ functions between Reviews. Two tables are set out below. The first provides a quarterly profile of the planned and actual staffing levels of the Secretariat during the financial year. The second compares the Commission’s actual expenditure during the year against the initial budget agreed with the Cabinet Office as sponsor Department. Although the Cabinet Office imposed an in-year 10% budget reduction, the Commission nonetheless was able to keep actual expenditure for the year within this reduced figure, at **£314,554**.

Staff Complement (Full Time Equivalent)

Grade	Apr-Jun 2014		Jul-Sep 2014		Oct-Dec 2014		Jan-Mar 2015	
	Plan	Actual	Plan	Actual	Plan	Actual	Plan	Actual
SCS	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Band A	0.4	0.4	1	1	1	1	1	1
Band B2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Band B1	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0
Total	3.4	2.4	4	3	4	3	4	3

Figures shown represent the position as at the end of the relevant financial quarter.

2014/15 Budget and Expenditure by Subhead (figures supplied by Cabinet Office)

Budget component	Budget 13/14 (£)	Expenditure (£)*	Variance (£)
Staff salaries, superannuation and NI	219,907	144,076	75,831
Staff travel and subsistence	1,200	550	650
Commissioner fees and expenses	6,400	3,070	3,330
Conferences and events	1,200	0	1,200
Legal fees	3,000	(21)	3,021
GIS and website	27,393	25,230	2,163
Ordnance Survey and mapping	133,000	141,000	(8,000)
Hospitality	400	0	400
Publicity	1,990	0	1,990
Postage and courier services	900	0	900
Stationery, subscriptions and consumables	850	175	675
Print services	800	0	800
Records and data storage and management	2,960	474	2,486
Total	400,000	314,554	85,446

*Rounded up or down to the nearest pound.

Monitoring Expenditure

20. The Secretariat maintained information that recorded by date, topic, sub-head, and component, every item of expenditure. Each month, the Secretariat met with officials from Cabinet Office central Finance, in order to confirm monthly expenditure and to provide accurate financial reports, to profile expenditure for the financial year, confirm quarterly expenditure, and report on potential under-spends or over-spends.

OUTLINE WORK PROGRAMME AND BUDGET FOR 2015/16

Programme

21. For the 2015/16 financial year, the budget provisionally agreed with the Cabinet Office is **£1,146,564** and the Commission expects to:-

- Hold at least three formal Commission meetings during the year to assess progress in planning and preparation for the 2018 Review;
- Secure the completion and delivery from Ordnance Survey of an accurate and comprehensive digital mapset of all polling district boundaries in England (as at May 2015) by the end of October 2015;
- Award a contract for supply of a new GIS by the end of June 2015, with delivery and installation of a fully functional system to the Commission by the end of October 2015;
- Recruit and train significant additional Secretariat staff on a staggered basis from September 2015 onwards, to support the delivery of the forthcoming constituency review;
- Complete by December 2015 pre-procurement and ‘Discovery’ phases in relation to development of a website-based consultation portal to enhance public consultation during future constituency reviews;
- Meet before the commencement of the next constituency review with representatives of the political parties represented in the House of Commons, to discuss the Commission’s intended approach to that review;
- Update databases with the December 2015 electoral statistics during March 2016;
- Agree UK electorate and distribution of constituencies with Boundary Commissions for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and formally announce commencement of 2018 review by the end of March 2016.

Budget for 2015/2016 by subhead

Budget component	Budget 15/16 (£)
Staff salaries, superannuation and NI	621,314
Staff travel and subsistence	1,900
Commissioner fees and expenses	11,000
Conferences and events	3,000
Legal fees	3,000
Ordnance Survey and mapping	149,000
GIS and website	348,000
Hospitality	400
Publicity	6,100
Postage and courier services	350
Stationery, subscriptions and consumables	1,000
Print services	370
Records and data storage and management	1,130
Total	1,146,564