

Progress with preparations for 2018 Review

Replacement Geographic Information System (GIS)

1. Development has been progressing well on the BCE's new GIS, and we hope to have a fully operational system in place by the end of October. We will have a short demonstration of the system at the meeting.

Digital Mapping of Polling Districts in England

2. By the end of September, Ordnance Survey anticipate completing a comprehensive digital mapset of the polling districts in England, which can be utilised within the BCE's GIS. However, this initial mapping will still not yet have been fully verified with local authorities (legally responsible for determining polling districts in their area), and such verification as has already taken place (mostly in London), has indicated a number of discrepancies between how a local council may itself have mapped its polling districts and how those polling districts have been listed in the local electoral register.
3. For the system to work, these discrepancies between mapping and the register must be resolved, and we will be working with Ordnance Survey and local Electoral Registration Officers to do so in the coming months. Our aim is to have resolved by the end of March any apparent discrepancies: realistically this would in any event be the earliest point at which we would be in a position to seriously look at splitting wards in specific areas.

Staffing and Recruitment

4. Cabinet Office determined that the Secretary to the Commission role for the live Review should again be a Senior Civil Service level post and accordingly advertised the position over the summer. Interviews were conducted in early September, with Neil Pringle on the panel to represent the Commission itself. Commissioners should have received a formal notification today that the successful candidate was Sam Hartley. Mr Hartley was a Review Co-ordinator with the BCE during the 2013 Review and also has significant LGBCE experience. A start date for Mr Hartley has yet to be agreed at the time of writing.
5. A headcount bid for the remainder of the Secretariat was put to Cabinet Office over the summer and all core Review posts were approved. Full job descriptions were prepared and vacancies advertised at the end of August and early September across the Civil Service. A number of applications have been received for the Review Manager and Review Officer posts, and interviews will be taking place in the week of 21 September, so we hope to have staff in post around the end of October or early November. No applications were received for the specialist GIS Analyst role (to provide localised expertise and support for our new GIS), so we are currently seeking Cabinet Office approval to take this post to external recruitment.
6. Cabinet Office queried our request for eight non-core 'internal support' staff (Communications, Finance, Logistics, corporate governance, etc). We have therefore subsequently been in negotiations with various parts of Cabinet Office to determine what resource could be provided to us from those areas without negatively impacting on the substantive independence of our work. We anticipate being able to go back to

Cabinet Office by the end of September for approval to a slightly smaller number of internal posts, which we would then aim to have filled by the end of December.

Accommodation

7. As the Secretariat will soon be expanding significantly following the current recruitment, we will also outgrow our existing accommodation arrangements. We have therefore initiated discussions with Cabinet Office's accommodation managers, outlining our requirements and timescales. It is likely that we will remain in our current building, but move to a larger space on a different floor around the end of October. Physical address, contact emails and telephone numbers will therefore stay the same.

Pre-launch Communications

8. As the BCE starts to build activity towards formal launch of the 2018 Review early next year, a number of Communications activities may be appropriate to get underway, as follows.
9. Electoral Registration Officers will currently be running their annual canvass exercises, to refresh the local electoral register in their area. The resulting register – to be published in December – is by statute the one that BCE will need to use for its electorate data for the life of the 2018 review. It is therefore suggested that BCE sends a note to all EROs at this time, highlighting some relatively simple administrative steps that can be taken locally by EROs to ensure the copy of their register we subsequently receive is in the best shape possible for our work. If Commissioners agree, some draft text for such a note accompanies this paper.
10. Prior to previous Reviews, the Commission has met with designated representatives of all political parties with at least one MP for an English constituency, to discuss plans for running the impending Review. Such meetings discuss only the administration of the Review, and expressly do not discuss the shape of distribution of any existing or possible future constituencies in any area. Both previous Commissions and the political parties have found such meetings to be useful to understand each others concerns and to aid the subsequent smooth running of the Review within the statutory framework. If Commissioners agree, we will identify the designated representatives with the Conservatives, Labour, Liberal Democrats, Greens and UKIP, and look to arrange an initial meeting sometime in January 2016.
11. The BCE might also undertake some activity to promote awareness and understanding of the forthcoming Review prior to the formal launch. The details of such work we would envisage forming a part of the role of a Communications-focused individual amongst the proposed new cadre of 'internal support' staff (see above), although we would welcome views from Commissioners on any specific activities that they might wish to see undertaken. For the time being, in addition to information about the BCE, its work, and the forthcoming Review on the BCE's own website, a representative from the Secretariat will be speaking at a seminar (primarily for MPs) about the constituency review process on 27 October, organised jointly by UCL's Constitution Unit and the House of Commons Library's Parliament and Constitution Centre.

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