

Progress with preparations for 2018 Review Oct-Dec 2015

Finance

1. Due primarily to some delays in recruiting staff (see below), the Commission currently has a forecast outturn which will see a significant underspend against the budget agreed at the beginning of the financial year.
2. The Secretariat contributed forecast figures to the recent Spending Review process to agree allocations over the next five years. Whilst the Cabinet Office has subsequently announced its overall Departmental allocation from HM Treasury has been reduced by 26%, details have yet to be confirmed of the specific allocations within the Cabinet Office's remit, i.e. Constitution Group, and within that the Commission itself.

Accommodation

3. Secretariat staff moved into the new accommodation at the beginning of November, and there have been no significant issues encountered with the process. Address and phone numbers remain unchanged, as the move was a relocation to a different floor within the same building.

Staffing

4. The new Secretary to the Commission, Sam Hartley, took up post on 1 December.
5. Following the earlier pushback from Cabinet Office to our request for eight 'Review support' roles, the Secretariat submitted a revised bid for six such roles, which was finally approved on 2 December. Tony Bellringer will move to fill the Deputy Secretary/Head of Corporate Support role, meaning that the Head of Reviews role will be advertised alongside the other five support posts. The senior leadership team is confident that the smaller headcount will not adversely affect the success of the review.
6. All the remaining core Review team posts have now been filled, with the last three of the Review Officers taking up post on 4 January.

Replacement Geographic Information System (GIS)

7. Final user acceptance testing was completed in October and the system formally went 'go live' at the beginning of November. All Review staff currently in post have been trained in its use and are now fully engaged in practising scheme development on the basis of historic data, prior to the 'live data' becoming available (see below).
8. A full service and support agreement is in place, and the system appears to be working well, with no significant issues.

Digital Mapping of Polling Districts in England

9. As advised at the previous meeting, Ordnance Survey are continuing to work through the verification process with individual local authorities, in particular looking to resolve apparent anomalies between the map a local authority may have supplied and the map that OS have reconstructed from the actual electoral register for that area.

10. March 2016 remains the target for completion of full verification, although it should be noted that this target may be jeopardised by the apparent lack of engagement in the process by some authorities. We will be taking direct steps to address this in the new year.

Electorate Data

11. December is the time at which most statutory annual publication of the electoral registers takes place. We are therefore now starting to receive copies of the new register from many local electoral registration officers, which is the first of the electorate data upon which the 2018 Review will rely.
12. There is statutory provision for the annual publication of the register to be delayed until February if the local authority has held a by-election during the canvass period, and we are aware of at least one authority where that is the case. Accordingly we should not expect to be in a position to receive the final electorate data - and therefore be able to apply the statutory formulae to calculate the electoral quota and distribution of constituencies around the UK – until February.

Online Consultation Portal

13. The Commission has previously agreed to focus significant effort on improving its online offering in relation to the statutory consultation periods in the Review. As this is a process common across all four Parliamentary Boundary Commissions, representatives of the four Secretariats met with the Cabinet Office Digital and Technology Team in October to discuss in broad terms the process that would need to be followed to develop such an online consultation portal, and the extent to which a joint approach may be beneficial.
14. In relation to process, as a public-facing digital service, the process must follow the 'Service Design' protocols established by the Government Digital Service. This mandates, for example, reasonable user research with potential public users of the service, as well as 'internal' users (i.e. Secretariat staff and potentially Commissioners), before the process of specifying design requirements and functionality can complete, and procurement itself begin.
15. In relation to joint working, the Secretariats provisionally agreed – subject to Commissioners' approval – that there was value on working jointly on the initial 'discovery' phase (user research and subsequent drawing up of the system specification). Once this stage was complete, a final decision would need to be taken by the Commissions as to whether they wished to work together on the subsequent procurement and delivery of the online portal itself. This approach was subsequently endorsed by Commissioner representatives present at the annual Inter-Commission meeting on 18 November. An outline timetable for the ultimate delivery of the portal is attached at Annex A.

Annex A
Outline timetable for Online Consultation Portal

Milestone	Baseline Date	Actual Date
Discovery		Complete
Discovery terms of reference available		Complete
Business requirements catalogue (scope baseline 1)		Complete
User research plan complete		Complete
Formal discovery kick off	23 Nov 2015	23 Nov 2015
Online survey results received	9 Dec 2015	
Senior user research starting	7 Dec 2015	
Face-to-face (task Rabbit)	18 Dec 2015	
On location / on street	15 Jan 2016	
Niche users interviews	15 Jan 2016	
Face-to-face user research complete	15 Jan 2016	
Information on NBCs technology setup / constraints available	18 Dec 2015	
User research report complete	22 Jan 2016	
User personas created (optional)	22 Jan 2016	
User journey created (optional)	22 Jan 2016	
Prioritisation workshop	27 Jan 2016	
Prioritised product backlog. (scope baseline 2)	3 Feb 2016	
Delivery options paper available	5 Feb 2016	
High level plan for alpha available	5 Feb 2016	
Decision on participation in alpha	12 Feb 2016	
Pre-alpha		
Pre-alpha complete	18 Mar 2016	
Alpha		
Alpha complete	29 Apr 2016	
Pre-beta		
Pre-beta complete	13 May 2016	
Beta		
Beta complete	12 Aug 2016	
Go live		
Go live date	19 Aug 2016	