

Communications during the 2018 Review

1. The Secretariat have worked in conjunction with Communications specialists from the Cabinet Office to develop the outline Communications strategy attached as Annex A, which Commissioners are invited to consider. Views will be fed back to the Cabinet Office team and a final comms strategy and plan will be agreed in the new year.

Publication of consultation materials

2. A key decision for the 2018 Review will be the means by which consultation materials are published. At the 2013 Review, the Commission did the following at the initial and revised proposals consultation stages:
 - Deposited in usually more than one public place in each constituency a hard copy A4 report describing for that region the proposals and how they were arrived at, together with a hard copy A3 booklet of Ordnance Survey-produced maps of every constituency in that region, and an A0 map showing all the proposed constituencies in the region;
 - Issued by hand in person to each of the 532 English MPs the same hard copy report and A3 map booklet for their region (but not the A0 map); and
 - Published on the BCE website 'flat' PDF maps of every constituency in every region, the full regional map for each region, and the text report of our proposals for each region.
 - GIS files were output from our system on demand for those who requested them.
3. This exceeded the strict requirements of the legislation, which require the Commission to "take such steps as they see fit to inform the people in each of the proposed constituencies: i) what the proposals are; ii) that a copy of the proposals is open to inspection in a specified place within the constituency". In fact proposals do not even need to be made "open to inspection in a specified place" in a constituency if no changes are proposed for that constituency. Additionally it should be noted that a post-consultation survey of usage in a random sample of physical places of deposit of these hard copy materials indicated that there were extremely low levels of requests to view them (in many cases none at all).
4. At the secondary consultation stage (publication of responses to the initial proposals), even at the 2013 Review the sheer scale and complexity of the task obliged the Commission to only publish the documentation for that consultation online.
5. In an environment where savings of public money are increasingly being sought, better value for money is expected wherever public money continues to be spent, and digital proficiency and expectation amongst the general public in continually increasing, the Commission needs to demonstrate that it is encouraging and supporting enhanced digital engagement with its consultation, as well as minimising the costs.
6. Additionally, it is Government policy that engagement with the public by public sector bodies (including consultation) should be 'digital by default'. We are seeking to achieve this primarily through the development of a new, more interactive online consultation portal, and a Communications strategy which has a key objective of seeking to drive consultation respondents to respond through that consultation portal, rather than by non-digital means.

7. The Commission should also aim to drive down the extremely sizeable cost to the Review of the hard copy publication of consultation documentation outlined above. We do not believe it is possible to eradicate hard copy publication of initial and revised proposals altogether, not least because Government policy also requires public bodies to consider 'assisted digital' methods by which those members of the public who are less conversant with digital technology can nonetheless engage with public bodies. However, significant savings could be made if the Commission applies a more strict interpretation of the relevant legislation. Specifically, we invite the Commission to consider publication of consultation material at initial and revised proposals stages on the following basis:
- An electronic (most likely flat PDF) copy of the regional text report, A3 constituency maps, and A0 regional map is sent to a single suitable public place (generally library or town hall) in each of the proposed constituencies (consider excluding any constituency for which no changes are proposed), with a covering letter of instructions for the operator of the public place;
 - Crucially, whether the format of this copy is electronic (i.e. a USB stick or CD-ROM) or printed;
 - All existing English MPs continue to be handed personally a hard copy of the textual regional report, but accompanied by a printout of the proposed constituency (or constituencies) that their existing constituency forms a part of (rather than entire booklet of all constituencies in the region). A covering letter will provide details of how to access our online portal should they wish to view constituencies elsewhere in the region or England;
 - Individuals are provided with GIS output files from our new system, made available from our corporate website; and
 - The public at large are directed strongly to access our online portal for the proposals, though if an express request is made for a hard copy the relevant review team can printout A3 maps of individual constituencies and send them out.
8. The Secretariat believes this will meet the requirements of the legislation and the digital expectations of an increasingly modern world, whilst significantly reducing overall cost and maximising value for money. It importantly also retains 'assisted digital' means for those less conversant with technology to receive information and engage with the consultation if they wish to.