

BOUNDARY COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND

Minutes of the meeting held in room 2.08A, 35 Great Smith Street, London, SW1P 3BQ on Tuesday 15 September 2014 at 17:00.

Present:-

The Hon. Mrs Justice Patterson	Deputy Chair
Mr D Elvin QC	Commissioner
Mr N Pringle	“
Mr A Bellringer	Secretary
Mr G Tessier	Secretariat

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 3 JUNE 2015

- 1.1 The minutes of the previous meeting were approved by the Commission and signed by the Deputy Chair. The Secretary confirmed that that the Annual Report for 2014-15 had been published on the Commission’s website. Members also confirmed that Commissioner Appraisal should be undertaken before the end of the calendar year.
- 1.2 Following the meeting Commissioners agreed that in future, minutes could be published on the BCE’s website in draft prior to formal sign-off at the next Commission meeting, as long as they were clearly marked as not yet approved.

2. PROGRESS WITH PREPARATIONS FOR 2018 REVIEW (BCE/2015/Paper 4)

- 2.1 Members noted Paper 4.

Replacement Geographic Information System (GIS)

- 2.2 The Secretary said that good progress was being made with the customisation of the new GIS. He clarified that it would not be possible for the GIS to be directly accessed by Commissioners, because the GIS was hosted within Cabinet Office’s secure IT network, which Commissioners did not have accounts or IT hardware for. He confirmed that the plan was for Commissioners to have access to GIS output in a similar method to the general public, i.e. via the Online Consultation Portal that would be procured and developed shortly.

Digital Mapping of Polling Districts in England

- 2.3 The Secretary reported that the polling districts for all but one District (South Gloucestershire) in England had been mapped by Ordnance Survey (OS). Currently the Secretariat were engaging with local authorities in ensuring that the OS data is accurate and up to date. This had thrown up a number of issues, especially where it became apparent

that some authorities had not ensured that their maps of polling districts and the polling districts as described in their electoral registers matched. As a result of this OS now expected that it would not have a complete verified and agreed set of polling district boundaries to release until March 2016. In the meantime, the Secretariat would be able to use the draft boundaries in the GIS, making sure to double-check polling district boundaries and figures with the relevant local authority if there was a proposal to split a ward in the area of an authority where polling district mapping had not yet been verified with them.

Staffing and Recruitment

- 2.4 The Secretary confirmed that Sam Hartley, who had worked in the Secretariat for the duration of the abandoned 2013 Review (and had previously been a Review Manager within the Local Government Boundary Commission for England), had been the successful candidate from the recent recruitment process to appoint a Senior Civil Service-level Secretary to the Commission for the forthcoming Review. A start date for Mr Hartley was currently being negotiated.
- 2.5 The Secretary reported that Cabinet Office Approvals Board had approved the Review posts required by the Secretariat for the 2018 Review and that recruitment of staff for these posts was underway. He added that there had been no applicants for the lead GIS 'super-user' role and that he would be exploring alternative approaches, including potentially recruiting from outside the Civil Service.
- 2.6 The Secretary also reported that Cabinet Office Approvals Board had queried the number of Support posts required by the Secretariat for the 2018 Review. The Secretary had been reviewing the requirements, and discussed with Cabinet Office Communications team what support they could give to the Secretariat during the 2018 Review without jeopardising the BCE's substantive operational independence. Whilst final details were awaited from Cabinet Office Communications officials, it was likely that two posts could be dropped from the bid, which would be re-submitted to the Approvals Board shortly.

Accommodation

- 2.7 The Secretary reported that, as the Secretariat staff was due to expand significantly in the next few months, staff would need to relocate, but would most likely remain within 35 Great Smith Street, where a larger vacant area was available. There would therefore be no change to contact details for the Secretariat.

Pre-Launch Communications

- 2.8 Members noted the draft prepared by the Secretary for submission to Electoral Registration Officers ahead of the publication of the 2016 electoral register and agreed to inform him of any required changes. Members agreed to meet with representatives of the five political parties with MPs representing English constituencies early next year to discuss general policy issues and an outline timetable for the 2018 Review. Members also noted that the Secretary would be speaking at a Constitution Unit seminar jointly organised with the House of Commons Library, currently scheduled for 27 October 2015.

Policy Review

- 2.9 Members considered that a policy review should be conducted at the next meeting. Mr Elvin suggested that the policy review held before the 2013 Review should form the basis of the

next review, with updates as necessary to reflect changes, such as a less restrictive approach to splitting wards.

3. DEMONSTRATION OF THE NEW GIS

3.1 Mr Tessier and The Secretary gave a brief demonstration of the new GIS to Members.

4. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

4.1 It was agreed that the next Commission meeting should be held in the first half of December 2015, with a first meeting with political party representatives in January 2016. The Secretary would approach Members individually to firm up dates.