

**BOUNDARY COMMISSION FOR
ENGLAND**



ANNUAL REPORT

2015/2016

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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CONTENTS

Deputy Chair's Report

Information about the Boundary Commission for England

- The Sponsor
- The Commission
- Membership of the Commission
- Code of Practice
- Assessors
- Assistant Commissioners
- The Secretariat
- Statutory Duties

Objectives & Outcomes for 2015/16

- Overall Objective
- Main Objectives and Outcomes for 2015/16

Budget and Expenditure 2015/16

- Staff Complement
- Budget and Expenditure by Subhead
- Monitoring Expenditure

Outline Work Programme for 2016/17

- Programme
- Budget by Subhead for 2016/17

**Boundary Commission for England
Annual Report 2015/16**

Deputy Chair's Report on Commission's activities 2015/16

The bulk of the 2015/16 year has seen the Commission increasing in both pace, scale and detail its preparations for the formal launch of the 2018 Review of Parliamentary constituencies. This preparation phase culminated with our announcement in February of the formal start of that review process, as the electorates and consequential number of constituencies to be allocated across the UK were confirmed.

Whilst focused on our own preparations, we have been very aware of developments in the wider area of electoral policy, which have the potential to significantly impact our work and the way we undertake it. The full implementation of Individual Electoral Registration, taken together with significant changes in registration figures around major constitutional referendums, has caused some to question whether the electorate figure as it stood on 1st December 2015 is the best figure to use during the 2018 Review. However, that is the figure current law specifies we must use, and in its formal response to the recommendations of the House of Commons March 2015 select committee report, we have noted that the Government stated that it had no plans to change the current law relating to constituency boundary reviews.

The remainder of the year has, therefore, been consumed with the substantive work of developing the core initial proposals for where new constituency boundaries should lie, and making the practical arrangements for disseminating those, and conducting the statutory consultation. I am pleased to say that that work has been greatly facilitated by the improved Geographic Information System developed in the early part of the year, and we have high hopes for the new online consultation portal currently in development.

Work in the 2015/16 year has, we believe, put us in a good position to substantively deliver the first part of the statutory review in the following year, and we look forward to putting our initial proposals in the public domain, and engaging fully with the public during the statutory consultation period.

Frances Patterson

Deputy Chair
28 July 2016

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 is 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

7. 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

8. 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 2015-16.

Assistant Commissioners

9. 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 initial proposals, 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.

10. As part of finalising preparations for the 2018 Review, in the 2015-16 financial year the Commission made arrangements to conduct an open recruitment of new Assistant Commissioners early in the following financial year.

The Secretariat

11. The acting statutory Secretary to the Commission for the period April – November 2015 was Mr Anthony Bellringer. From December, Mr Sam Hartley took up office as the Secretary to the Commission, following an open competitive application procedure earlier in the year. 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 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. It is important to emphasise that those calculations are again defined in the Act, based on the electorates returned by local authorities for the period ending December 2015 and are not open to debate by us

15. 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).

16. 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.

17. 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 (for the 2018 Review, this is specified as during September 2018), with subsequent reports to be submitted every five years thereafter.

OBJECTIVES 2015/16

Overall objective

18. The Commission's clear focus this year has been completing the preparatory work for the new review, and then formally getting that '2018 Review' launched and underway.

Main objectives for 2015/16, with outcomes

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

- **Hold at least three formal Commission meetings during the year to assess progress in planning and preparation for the 2018 Review.** In addition to email updates from the Secretariat during the year, the Commission also held three formal meetings during the year, on 3 June, 15 September, and 10 December 2015. Minutes of all these meetings are on the Commission's website.
- **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.** In the event, this highly detailed and specialised work involved significantly more resource than had been originally estimated, so it was agreed with OS that the end delivery of the full digitised polling district mapset would be put back six months, until the end of April 2016.
- **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.** Following a procurement exercise, the contract was awarded to Informed Solutions, who had previous experience developing very similar software for the Boundary Commission for Scotland and the Local Government Boundary Commission for England. The software was developed and installed to time, and has been functioning well since.
- **Recruit and train significant additional Secretariat staff on a staggered basis from September 2015 onwards, to support the delivery of the forthcoming constituency review.** Staff have been recruited in line with anticipated need – see staff complement profile table below.
- **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.** In the event, the proposed portal, being an external-facing digital service, had to be subjected to a very detailed service delivery scrutiny process established by the Government Digital Service. This

was a longer process than had been originally anticipated, so this objective was revised in-year, with a new target to complete the Discovery and pre-procurement phases by the end of March 2016, which was achieved, ready to conduct a procurement of a supplier early in the next financial year.

- **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.** The Commission held this special meeting with representatives of all political parties holding English House of Commons seats (Conservative, Labour, Liberal Democrat, Green, and UK Independence Party) on 25 February 2016. A note of this meeting is on the Commission's website.
- **Update databases with the December 2015 electoral statistics during March 2016.** In the event this was completed early, during February 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.** Following updating of the electorate databases, the UK figures were agreed with the other three Parliamentary Boundary Commissions, and the formal start of the 2018 Review was announced on 24 February 2016. As part of that announcement the Commission confirmed the number of constituencies there would be across England (and in each of the nine English regions), and published spreadsheets showing the new electorate figures to be used during the review.

BUDGET AND EXPENDITURE 2015/16

20. The Commission agreed an initial budget of **£1,146,564** with the sponsor Department, which it considered would be necessary to conclude preparations and commence substantive work on the 2018 Review. 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 subsequently reduced the BCE's budget to £800,000, the Commission nonetheless was able to keep actual expenditure for the year within this reduced figure, at **£584,938**.

Staff Complement (Full Time Equivalent)

Grade	Apr-Jun 2015		Jul-Sep 2015		Oct-Dec 2015		Jan-Mar 2016	
	Plan	Actual	Plan	Actual	Plan	Actual	Plan	Actual
SCS	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1
Band A	1	1	1	1	2	1	2	1
Band B2	2	2	2	2	7	6.2	7	7
Band B1	1	0	1	0	8	3	8	7
Total	4	3	4	3	18	11.2	18	16
Figures shown represent the position as at the end of the relevant financial quarter.								

2015/16 Budget and Expenditure by Subhead (figures supplied by Cabinet Office)

Budget component	Budget 15/16 (£)	Expenditure (£)*	Variance (£)
Staff salaries, superannuation and NI	621,314	265,793	(355,521)
Staff travel and subsistence	1,900	597	(1,303)
Commissioner fees and expenses	11,000	7,222	(3,778)
Conferences and events	3,000	116	(2,884)
Legal fees	3,000	0	(3,000)
GIS and website	348,000	219,571	(128,429)
Ordnance Survey and mapping	149,000	91,055	(57,945)
Hospitality	400	0	(400)
Publicity	6,100	0	(6,100)
Postage and courier services	350	0	(350)
Stationery, subscriptions and consumables	1,000	153	(847)
Print services	370	0	(370)
Records and data storage and management	1,130	432	(698)
Total	1,146,564	584,938**	(561,626)

*Rounded up or down to the nearest pound.

**Rounded to nearest pound from total derived from detailed (not rounded) component expenditure figures.

Monitoring Expenditure

21. 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 2016/17

Programme

22. The 2016/17 financial year is anticipated to be the busiest in the 2018 Review, as it includes development and consultation on the initial proposals, as well as preparation of responses to that for publication in the secondary consultation. The budget provisionally agreed with the Cabinet Office is **£2,500,000** and the Commission expects to:-

- Develop initial proposals for new constituencies, to be signed off by Commissioners by the end of June 2016;
- By the end of July 2016, have published the Commission's formal 'Guide to the 2018 Review of Parliamentary constituencies', setting out in detail the legislation, procedure and the Commission's policies for the conduct of the review;
- By the end of July, have secured the appointment of a suitable number of Assistant Commissioners to assist the Commission in its work, particularly in relation to chairing public hearings and assessing responses to the Commission's proposals for new constituencies;
- By the end of August 2016 develop all hard copy and electronic documentation for publication of initial proposals;
- By the end of August 2016, have a fully developed and tested online consultation portal ready to deploy for the initial consultation period, complete with data layers for existing boundaries and electorates for regions, local authorities, wards and polling districts;
- By the end of December 2016, have conducted a comprehensive 12-week statutory consultation on the initial proposals, including the required public hearings in every region;
- By the end of January 2017, have published the statutory 'annual report on progress', which the Commission is required to provide to the Speaker of the House of Commons, updating on progress with a live review;
- By the end of March 2017, have prepared for publication all written and oral responses received in the consultation on initial proposals;
- During the course of the year the Commission will aim to hold three formal meetings to assess progress with the Review and make key decisions, and will also be represented at the Annual Meeting of UK Boundary Commissions.

Budget for 2016/17 by subhead

9

BOUNDARY COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND

Budget component	Budget 16/17 (£)
Staff salaries, superannuation and NI	846,000
Staff travel and subsistence	41,000
Commissioner fees and expenses	283,000
Conferences and events (public hearing venue hire)	105,000
GIS and website (including consultation portal)	271,800
Publicity (media development and production)	626,000
Transcription services	200,000
Stationery, subscriptions, consumables, and postage	17,000
Print services	6,000
Records and data storage and management	104,200
Total	2,500,000