

**BOUNDARY COMMISSION FOR
ENGLAND**



ANNUAL REPORT

2019/2020

BOUNDARY COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND

Membership

The Speaker, the Rt. Hon Sir Lindsay Hoyle MP
(ex-officio Chairman)

The Hon. Mr Justice Peter Lane, Deputy Chair

Colin Byrne, Commissioner

Sarah Hamilton, Commissioner

Boundary Commission for England
35 Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BQ

Tel: 020 7276 1102

Email: information@boundarycommissionengland.gov.uk
Website: www.independent.gov.uk/boundarycommissionforengland

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Foreword from the Deputy Chair

I am very pleased to open this formal report of the Commission's activities during the financial year 2019-20, having been appointed to the position of Deputy Chair of the Commission shortly after the end of the year in question.

I should first like to pay tribute to my predecessor, Sir Andrew Nicol. Though I had no personal experience of his work with the Commission during his time as Deputy Chair, the staff and Commissioners greatly valued his contributions, not least in steering the Commission through the bulk of the last constituencies Review, after taking on the role mid-project in difficult circumstances. I am privileged to be following him.

The 2019-20 year has been the second of the 'fallow' years for the Commission under the current legislative framework, which sees a constituencies Review conducted every five years, in each case taking the best part of three years to deliver (if one includes the preparatory scaling up and post-report winding down activities). The year has therefore been a very quiet one, with a skeleton staff maintaining the basic tasks of collating, checking and publishing the annual data on how Parliamentary constituency electorates change year to year, together with general administrative and governance activities. The main interest therefore lies in the latter part of the 2019-20 year, and the outline objectives set out for the current year, as we begin to plan, procure and recruit for the next constituencies Review, scheduled to commence around the end of 2020.

Adding challenge to the planning and preparation for that next Review is the Government's introduction of a new Parliamentary Constituencies Bill, currently being debated in Parliament. Ultimately, the Bill would result in the recommendations of the 2018 Review not being implemented, as it would change key aspects of how the next constituencies Review is to be conducted. As drafted, the Bill changes the total number of constituencies for the UK, the number of 'protected' seats, and the time allowed for delivery of the next Review. Only once the legislative landscape is settled, shall we know the parameters within which we must work in the coming Review.

Sir Peter Lane
Deputy Chair
17 September 2020

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 until 26 March 2020 was the Honourable Mr Justice Andrew Nicol. The Honourable Mr Justice Peter Lane was appointed to be the new Deputy Chair shortly after the end of the period covered by this report, on 23 June 2020, for a term of three years.

6. Neil Pringle's term of office as a Commissioner came to an end on 30 June 2019, immediately following which two new Commissioners were appointed, Colin Byrne and Sarah Hamilton, both for a term of five years.

7. The Commissioners are part-time appointees who meet whenever the work programme requires it. 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

8. The Commission adheres to the Cabinet Office's code of conduct for board members of public bodies. It also maintains a Register of Members' Interests, which is updated at least annually and can be accessed on the Commission's website.

Assessors

9. 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 officials 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 2019-20.

Assistant Commissioners

10. The Commission may arrange for Assistant Commissioners to be appointed by the Secretary of State to assist it with its work. The Commission did not require Assistant Commissioners during the 2019-20 year.

The Secretariat

11. The Acting Secretary to the Commission was Tony Bellringer throughout the 2019-20 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 (currently every five years) with recommendations to the Secretary of State in accordance with the provisions of the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986 (as amended).

13. The process of an active review takes broadly three years from preparation to winding down after submitting a final report and recommendations. With a statutory five year cycle of reporting, this leaves around two 'fallow' years in between active reviews, of which 2019-20 has been one.

14. During these periods in between active reviews, the Commission's role to 'keep under review' constituencies in England is restricted to collecting parliamentary electorate data annually from local electoral registration officers, collating and then publishing that statistical data for England as a whole, demonstrating how parliamentary electorate figures change in existing constituencies from year to year.

Objectives 2019/20

Overall objective

15. The whole of the 2019/20 financial year falls in between the active review periods under the statutory five-year cycle of reviews. Our primary purpose this year has therefore been limited to collecting, collating and publishing parliamentary electorate data for existing constituencies in England.

Main objectives for 2019/20, with outcomes

16. The main objectives for the Commission during the financial year 2019/20 were:

- **By the end of May 2019, collate and publish parliamentary electorate data from all local electoral registration officers in England, illustrating changes in electorate size in existing constituencies.** The parliamentary electorate figures for 2019 were added to the data published on our website, which displays the year by year changes in the parliamentary electorate figures in English constituencies.
- **By the end of June 2019, support the sponsor Department in the appointment of two new Commissioners, to ensure the Commission remains quorate.** Our two new Commissioners, Colin Byrne and Sarah Hamilton, were appointed with effect from 1 July 2019, immediately following the expiry of the term of office of Neil Pringle on 30 June.
- **During the course of the year, hold at least one formal meeting of Commissioners to maintain governance oversight and make key strategic planning and policy decisions relating to the next scheduled constituencies review.** The Commissioners met formally on 21 February 2020, the papers and minutes of which will be published on the Commission's website.
- **By the end of November 2019, organise and deliver the Annual Meeting of the UK Boundary Commissions. The Commission organised and hosted this annual event on 29 November 2019.** As well as sharing of knowledge and best practice between the Commissions, the meeting also received presentations from The Electoral Commission, the late Professor Ron Johnston, and Informed Solutions.
- **By March 2020, produce an evaluation report on the administration of the 2018 Review, highlighting areas that could be improved and instances of good practice.** A management report was produced and formed one of the papers at the Commissioners meeting on 21 February 2020.

17. Following the general election in December 2019, the Commission also responded to requests for specialist technical briefing in relation to the practicalities of prospective changes to the arrangements for delivering a review of

Parliamentary constituencies. This material informed the Government's development of its Parliamentary Constituencies Bill, which has subsequently been progressing through Parliament.

Budget and expenditure 2019/20

18. The Commission agreed an initial budget of **£103,560** with the sponsor Department, which it considered would be necessary to deliver the basic functions of the Commission through the 2019/20 year. 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. The Commission ultimately saw a slight overspend against budget of £4,052.

Staff complement (Full Time Equivalent)

Grade	Apr-Jun 2019		Jul-Sep 2019		Oct-Dec 2019		Jan-Mar 2020	
	Plan	Actual	Plan	Actual	Plan	Actual	Plan	Actual
SCS	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Band A	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.4
Band B2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Band B1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Band C	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Temp staff	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	1.4	1.4	1.4	1.4	1.4	1.4	1.4	1.4

Figures shown represent the position as at the end of the relevant financial quarter.

2019/20 Budget and expenditure by subhead (figures supplied by Cabinet Office)

Budget component	Budget 19/20 (£)	Expenditure (£)*	Variance (£)
Pay and related costs	85,560	98,357	-12,797
Travel and subsistence costs	600	937	-337
Accommodation costs	1,000	886	114
IT and equipment costs	10,000	6,350	3,650
Personnel related costs	0	0	0
Other professional services	0	0	0
Marketing and media	0	0	0
Other goods and services	5,400	305	5,095
Training and development	1,000	838	162
Contractors	0	969	-969
Miscellaneous expenditure	0	-1,628	1,628
Total	103,560	107,612**	-4,052**

*Rounded up or down to the nearest pound.

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

Monitoring expenditure

19. 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 the Cabinet Office central finance team, 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 2020/21

Programme

20. The 2020/21 financial year will see the Commission scale up again, and commence the next scheduled Review of constituencies. As the Government's Parliamentary Constituencies Bill – which would amend when and how the Commission should deliver future Reviews - was about to enter Parliament at the start of the financial year, it was difficult to be certain about the Commission's workplan and associated budget for the year. However, the budget provisionally agreed with the Cabinet Office is **£758,570** and the Commission expects to:

- Continue to respond to requests for information and its specialist views on practical matters relating to the delivery of constituency reviews, as the Parliamentary Constituencies Bill is debated by Parliament;
- By September 2020, secure the appointment of a permanent Secretary to the Commission, to lead the Secretariat through the next Review, with the remainder of the planned headcount recruited and in post by the end of December;
- By the end of November 2020, have procured the specialist software required to develop and analyse prospective revised constituency boundaries and the associated electorates;
- By the end of December 2020, have received and verified the key Parliamentary electorate data to be used in the next Review, allowing the four Parliamentary Boundary Commissions to jointly confirm the initial distribution of constituencies for that Review to the four parts of the UK;
- By the end of January 2021, have begun development of initial proposals for revised constituencies across England, aiming have these ready to publish for consultation in the summer;
- By the end of March 2021, have secured the appointment of Assistant Commissioners, to assist the Commissioners during the Review, primarily with analysis of the responses to initial and secondary consultation, and the development of subsequent revised proposals;
- During the course of the year, hold at least three formal meetings to assess progress with the Review and make key decisions, and also be represented at the Annual Meeting of UK Boundary Commissions. One of the planned formal meetings will also include representatives of the Parliamentary political parties in England, to consider their views on the internal policies that the Commission works to in delivering a Review, within the overall framework of the statutory process.

Budget for 2020/21 by subhead

Budget component	Budget 20/21 (£)
Pay and related costs	418,170
Travel and subsistence costs	10,000
Accommodation costs	15,000
IT and equipment costs	300,000
Other goods and services	5,400
Training and development	10,000
Total	758,570