



Boundary Commission
for Northern Ireland



Mr Iain Bell
Deputy National Statistician and
Director General for Population and
Public Policy
Office for National Statistics

Mr Paul Lowe
Chief Executive
National Records of Scotland

23 November 2020

Dear Mr Bell and Mr Lowe

2023 Boundary Review - electorate data

The UK Boundary Commissions have not previously requested for pre-release access to statistics in regard to its work. We recognise the importance of the pre-release access procedures and that a core principle of it is transparency. This is also a core value of how the UK Boundary Commissions undertake their work.

As you will be aware, the electorate data for the 2023 Boundary Review (given this title as we must report our final recommendations by 1 July 2023) will be required to be based on the Parliamentary electorate as of 2 March 2020. This date was decided by Parliament during the Committee Stage in the House of Commons on the Parliamentary Constituencies Bill, in June 2020. Whilst the Bill has yet to receive Royal Assent, it is in the final stages of the Parliamentary process, and there are no proposed amendments to this requirement. Following the inclusion of the 2 March date in the Bill, Electoral Registration Officers across the United Kingdom have been compiling electorate data and providing it to their respective statistics authority.

The electorate data for Northern Ireland has been published. Originally, the electorate data for the 2023 Review for England, Wales and Scotland was due to be released on 29 October 2020. However, the release of the data was delayed due to data collection and verification issues. The UK Boundary Commissions have worked together with their relevant statistical authorities to overcome these issues and ensure a complete set of data has been compiled.

The data is now scheduled to be released on 5 January 2021. While the UK Boundary Commissions asked for the data to be released in November or December 2020, we gather a data release was not available before January 2021.

Given this delay, the UK Boundary Commissions are requesting the pre-release of the electorate data for the 2023 Review to enable us to share electorate data across the different Commissions, thus enabling us to calculate the allocation of constituencies across the UK and the electorate quota. A closed sharing of this data amongst the four UK Boundary Commissions will enable us to: a) calculate and agree between us the distribution of constituencies to our respective parts of the UK according to the prescribed statutory formula; b) be in a position to publish that distribution of constituencies at the same time as the ONS and NRS statistical publications; and c) accordingly start the detailed process of reviewing the Parliamentary constituencies from the formal statutory Review start date of 1 December, and subsequently deliver against a tighter than normal timetable for the review.

We note that if the UK Boundary Commissions are not able to have access to the data prior to its release, this potentially jeopardises our ability to deliver the Review. Therefore, we request that we all have access to the pre-release of data as soon as it can possibly be supplied by ONS and NRS. Specifically, each Commission will require access to the detailed ward and constituency data for its respective part of the UK. All UK Boundary Commissions will need the ability to share the total Parliamentary electorate data (minus any protected constituencies as defined in the Act), so that we can calculate the distribution of constituencies across the UK and the electorate quota.

At present the Boundary Commission for England (BCE) is able to share its data with the other UK Boundary Commissions. The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between BCE and ONS includes the following:

'BCE will carefully control and treat as restricted all materials sent for QA before publication and will limit access to the data in these materials to the parliamentary Boundary Commissions for Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales for the specific and only purpose of calculating the UK. electoral quota and allocation of constituencies among the four parts of the UK.'

In principle, what we are seeking is the ability of all the UK Boundary Commissions to be able to share their data with each other on the terms and purposes as the MoU between ONS and BCE.

For transparency purposes we will publish a copy of this letter on our respective websites.

Yours sincerely

Tim Bowden

Eamonn
McConville

Isabel
Drummond-Murray

Shereen
Williams

Secretary

Secretary

Secretary

Secretary

Boundary
Commission for
England

Boundary
Commission for
Northern Ireland

Boundary
Commission for
Scotland

Boundary
Commission
for Wales