



Boundary Commission for England

Annual Report
2020/21



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

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Contents

Foreword from the Deputy Chair	2
Information about the Boundary Commission for England	4
The Sponsor	4
The Commission	4
Membership of the Commission	5
Code of practice	5
Assessors	6
Assistant Commissioners	6
The Secretariat	6
Statutory duties	7
Objectives and outcomes for 2020/21	9
Overall objective	9
Main objectives and outcomes for 2020/21	9
Budget and expenditure for 2020/21	12
Staff complement	12
Budget and expenditure by subhead	13
Monitoring expenditure	13
Outline work programme for 2021/22	14
Programme	14
Budget by subhead for 2021/22	15

Foreword from the Deputy Chair

The bulk of the 2020/21 year has been spent preparing for the formal launch of the 2023 Review of Parliamentary constituencies. This preparation phase culminated with our announcement in January 2021 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 making our preparations, we watched with interest the progress onto the statute book of the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 2020, which made several changes to our work and the way we undertake it. In particular, the fact that public hearings will now take place in the secondary consultation period allows us to reflect on the best locations for those hearings, in the light of responses received during the initial consultation period. The 2020 Act also makes new provision for how the Commission's recommendations will be implemented, with the report containing the final recommendations now being submitted to the Speaker of the House of Commons, rather than to Government.

Another effect of the 2020 Act is that the timescale for the 2023 Review is shorter than it will be for future reviews. This meant we were keen to publish our initial proposals for new constituency boundaries and names in early summer 2020. We achieved that aim.

Both I and my fellow Commissioners are extremely proud of the way in which the Commission's Secretariat (led by Tim Bowden and, prior to August 2020, Anthony Bellringer) has responded to the challenges presented by the Covid-19 pandemic. These included developing new ways of working and of disseminating our consultation materials.

The Commission's progress has been greatly facilitated by robust IT software to support homeworking, a comprehensive Geographic Information System and the creation of an online consultation platform.

In short, the work in the period covered by this Report has laid the basis for delivering the 2023 Review. We look forward, during the course of the statutory consultations, to receiving the public's views on our proposals.

Sir Peter Lane

Deputy Chair

30 July 2021

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 Speaker of the House of Commons. It is the Speaker's statutory duty to lay the reports before Parliament and for the Government to present an Order to Privy 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 Mr Justice Peter Lane (appointed on 23 June 2020, for a term of three years). The two other Members of the Commission are Mr Colin Byrne and Mrs Sarah Hamilton (both appointed for a term of five years, to 2024).
6. 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

7. 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

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 officials whenever the Commission has a need to consult them on their areas of expertise.

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 is 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 recommendations to the Commissioners on how they consider the initial proposals might be improved in light of the consultation evidence received. The Assistant Commissioners are paid a daily rate set by the Treasury when they work for the Commission.
10. The Commission has recommended that 18 Assistant Commissioners are appointed for the 2023 Review, following an open public recruitment exercise, which started in the latter part of 2020/21.

The Secretariat

11. The acting statutory Secretary to the Commission for the period April – August 2020 was Mr Anthony Bellringer. From September, Mr Tim Bowden 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 (currently every eight years) with recommendations to the Speaker of the House of Commons, 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 and Parliamentary Constituencies Act 2020 (both which amended the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986), the Commission allocates 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 2 March 2020 (in the case of the 2023 Review) 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 an eight week period in which to submit representations of support or objection. The Commission is then required to make the representations submitted during the eight week period available so that interested parties can consider them and submit counter-representations during a further six week period. During the secondary consultation period, the Commission holds public hearings, so that oral submissions can be made to it as well as written representations.

16. Once the six 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).

17. The Assistant Commissioners are subsequently asked to submit recommendations to the Commission, taking into account all the evidence from consultation. Once those recommendations 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 evidence presented by the Assistant Commissioners. If revised proposals are announced, a period of four 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.

18. The Commission is required to submit its final report and recommendation following an active review to the Speaker of the House of Commons at a time specified in the Act. For the 2023 Review, this is specified as July 2023, with subsequent reports to be submitted every eight years thereafter.

Objectives and outcomes for 2020/21

Overall objective

19. The Commission's focus this year has been on completing the preparatory work for the current review, and then formally getting the 2023 Review launched and underway.

Main objectives and outcomes for 2020/21

20. The main objectives for the Commission during the financial year 2020/21 were:-

- **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.**

The Commission provided evidence during the passage of the Bill, including the Acting Secretary giving evidence at the Committee stage of the Bill.

- **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.**

The Secretary to the Commission started in post in early September 2020. Staff were recruited in line with anticipated need - see staff complement profile table below.

- **By the end of November 2020, procure the specialist software required to develop and analyse prospective revised constituency boundaries and the associated electorates.**

Following a procurement exercise, the contract was awarded to Informed Solutions, who had previous experience of delivering this software, including for the Commission at the previous review. The software was developed and installed to time, and has been functioning well ever since.

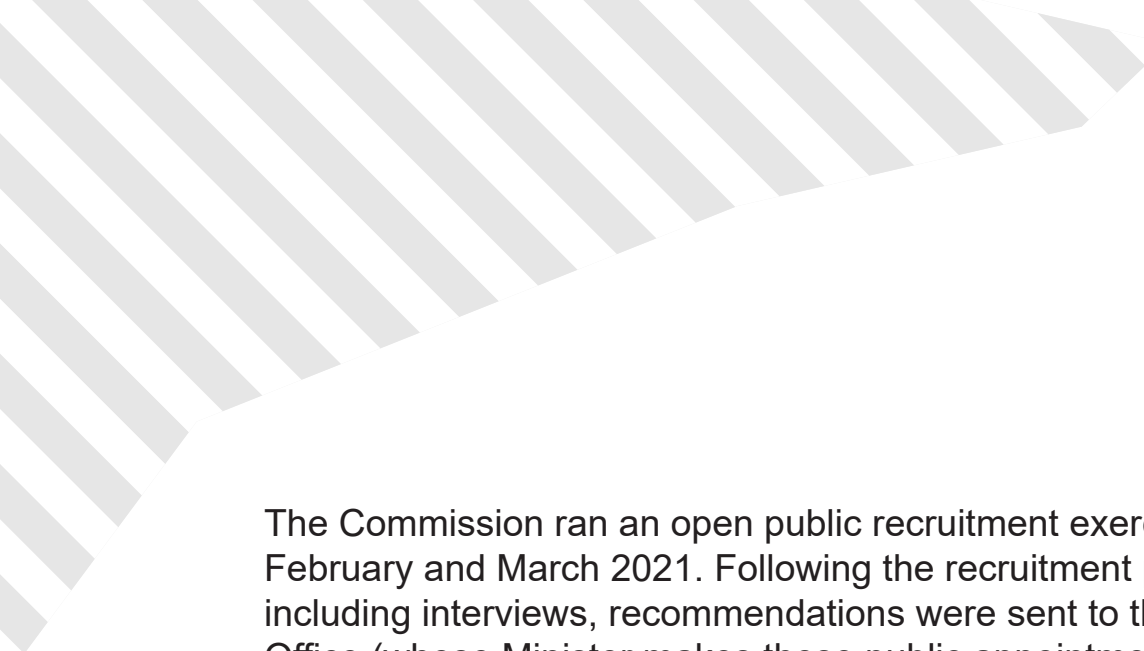
- **By the end of December 2020, have received and verified the key Parliamentary electorate data to be used in the next Review, allowing the four Parliamentary Boundary Commissions to jointly confirm the initial distribution of constituencies for that Review to the four parts of the UK.**

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) collated and verified this information following the Royal Assent of the Parliamentary Constituencies Bill in December 2020. The UK figures were agreed with the other three Parliamentary Boundary Commissions, and the formal start of the 2023 Review was announced on 5 January 2021. As part of that announcement the Commission confirmed the number of constituencies that 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.

- **By the end of January 2021, begin development of initial proposals for revised constituencies across England, aiming to have these ready to publish for consultation in the summer.**

This was completed on time, with the Secretariat formulating initial proposals after the launch of the 2023 Review on 5 January 2021. Subsequently the Commission agreed its initial proposals at dedicated meetings on 22 and 23 March 2021, with initial proposals published on 8 June 2021.

- **By the end of March 2021, secure 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.**



The Commission ran an open public recruitment exercise during February and March 2021. Following the recruitment process, including interviews, recommendations were sent to the Cabinet Office (whose Minister makes these public appointments) to appoint 18 candidates.

- **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.**

The Commission held six formal meetings of its own during the 2020-21 financial year. The first meeting, on 11 September 2020, agreed a number of detailed policies and procedures for how the substantive stages of the review would subsequently be delivered. The second meeting, on 7 December 2020, refined those policies having reflected on the views of qualifying political parties at a meeting on 23 November 2020. The third meeting, on 8 February 2021, agreed policies relating to the review and the Guide to the 2023 Review. Finally, a sequence of meetings was held on 22 and 23 March, at each of which the Commission discussed and formally agreed their initial proposals for new constituency boundaries in each of the nine regions in England. The Commission was also represented at the Annual Meeting of UK Boundary Commissions to discuss matters of common interest, held this year virtually on 27 November 2020.

Budget and expenditure for 2020/21

21. The Commission agreed a budget of £758,570 with the sponsor Department, which it considered would be necessary to conclude preparations and commence substantive work on the 2023 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. The Commission saw an underspend of £127,466.

Staff complement

	Apr-Jun 2020		Jul-Sep 2020		Oct-Dec 2020		Jan-Mar 2021	
Grade	Plan	Actual	Plan	Actual	Plan	Actual	Plan	Actual
SCS	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1
Band A	0.4	0.4	1	1	2	2	2	2
Band SEO	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1
Band HEO	1	1	1	1	2	2	4	4
Band B1	0	0	0	0	6	6	9	9
Band C	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Temp staff	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	1.4	1.4	3	3	12	12	18	18

Full-time equivalent. Figures shown represent the position as at the end of the relevant financial quarter.

Budget and expenditure by subhead

Budget component	Budget 20/21 (£)	Expenditure (£)*	Variance (£)
Pay and related costs	418,170	365,086	58,084
Travel and subsistence costs	10,000	-325	10,325
Accommodation costs	15,000	3,996	11,004
IT and equipment costs	300,000	129,210	170,790
Other goods and services	15,400	43,486	-28,086
Miscellaneous expenditure	0	2,374	-2,374
Goods and services consultancy	0	87,276	-87,276
Total	758,570**	631,104**	127,466**

Figures supplied by Cabinet Office.

*Rounded up or down to the nearest pound.

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

Monitoring expenditure

22. The Secretariat maintained information that recorded by date, topic, sub-heading, 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 2021/22

Programme

23. The 2021/22 financial year is anticipated to be the busiest in the 2023 Review, as it includes consultation on the initial proposals, as well as preparation of responses to that for publication in the secondary consultation which includes the statutory public hearings. The budget agreed with the Cabinet Office is £2,182,718 and the Commission expects to:-
- By the end of May 2021, develop all hard copy and electronic documentation for publication of initial proposals;
 - By the end of May 2021, 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 local authorities and wards;
 - By the end of July 2021, 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 2021, conduct a comprehensive eight-week statutory consultation on the initial proposals;
 - By the end of February 2022, have prepared for publication all written responses received in the consultation on initial proposals;
 - By the end of spring 2022, organise and aim to deliver public hearings in each region;
 - By the end of March 2022, 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;

- 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 by subhead for 2021/22

Budget component	Budget 21/22 (£)
Pay and related costs	807,012
Travel and subsistence costs and hospitality	163,191
Accommodation costs	109,500
IT and equipment costs	331,641
Other professional services	2,000
Marketing and media	592,120
Other goods and services	170,254
Training and development	7,000
Total	2,182,718

