

Minutes of the fourth meeting of 2021 of the Boundary Commission for England, held on 21 May 2021

Mr Justice Lane (Deputy Chair)
Colin Byrne (Commissioner)
Sarah Hamilton (Commissioner)
Tim Bowden (Secretary to the Commission)
Deputy Secretary
Head of Corporate Services
Business Manager
Communications manager
Business Assistant

1. Welcome and minutes of the last meeting

1.1 The draft minutes of the Commission meeting on the 22nd and 23rd of March 2021 were agreed by members of the Commission.

2. Paper 1: Review Programme Update

Budget

2.1 Mr Bowden noted that the Commission's budget for 2021-22 matches with its original bid as part of the spending review

Communications

2.2 Mr Bowden noted that work has begun on implementing the communications strategy, particularly the creative and advertising elements.

Accommodation

2.3 Mr Bowden noted that the Boundary Commission had now returned to their main office space, after the end of the maintenance work to the building. There will be a presence by Boundary Commission staff in the office in the build up to and throughout the period after the publication of initial proposals. Measures are in place to support safe working in the office during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Risk Register

2.4 Mr Bowden noted that the scores on the risk register have remained static during the period. He noted that this is likely to decrease in the next quarter after the publication of the initial proposals.

Technology

2.5 Commissioner Mr Byrne asked the Secretariat if there had been any progress in the exploration of virtual public hearings.

2.6 Mr Bowden noted that this is being looked at currently by the Secretariat, with different possibilities and systems being considered. A report for the Commissioners will be presented in the summer.

3. Paper 2: Initial Proposals

3.1 Mr Bowden noted the work done in drafting and quality assuring initial proposal documents by the Commissioners and members of the Secretariat. These proposal documents have now been sent for printing.

3.2 Mr Bowden updated the Commissioners on the protocol for the distribution of initial proposals to Members of Parliament on the 7th of June 2021

3.3 Mr Bowden updated the Commissioners on the protocol for the distribution of initial proposals to the media. The Commissioners agreed upon the timescale outlined in the paper.

3.4 Mr Bowden and the Communications Manager presented the Commissioners with the prospective newspaper advert for the Boundary Commission for publication on the 8th of June 2021. Commissioners agreed upon the presentation and wording of the advert.

4. Paper 3: Equality Impact Assessment

4.1 Commissioners considered the Equality Impact Assessment put forward by the Secretariat.

4.2 Commissioners suggested that the Commission take legal advice in regards to the Equality Impact Assessment, alongside other matters it may wish to take advice on. Commissioners will provide the Secretariat with any changes to the draft Assessment..

5. Paper 4: Communications Paper

5.1 The Communications Manager noted the approach to accessibility the Boundary Commission for England would be taking in regards to consultation materials via the Commission's website and in hardcopy.

5.2 Commissioners noted the detailed approach of the paper and it's clarity in regards to accessibility and agreed the approach in the paper.

5.3 Commissioner Mr Byrne noted that the Boundary Commission for Wales has an "Easy to Read" guide on their website and asked if the Secretariat could consider a similar document. Deputy Chair Sir Justice Lane also endorsed this, though noted that this document should be for the main guide only and not for the nine sub-regions proposals. Mr Bowden stated that the Secretariat would explore the possibility of creating a similar guide.

6. Assistant Commissioners Recruitment

6.1 Mr Bowden noted that the interview process for the Assistant Commissioners has now concluded.

6.2 Commissioners approved the eighteen candidates proposed by the Secretariat, and asked that when writing to the Cabinet Office asking to appoint these candidates it would be courteous to copy the correspondence to the Speaker of the House of Commons as Chair of the Commission.

7. Consultation Portal

7.1 The Deputy Secretary provided a demonstration of the Boundary Commissions consultation portal, which will go online in conjunction with the initial proposals on 8 June 2021.

7.2 The Deputy Secretary noted that Commissioners will also be offered further familiarisation with the system in the coming months.

8. Any other business

8.1 Mr Bowden noted that the next Commission meeting will be held in September, though further updates will be given during the consultation period.