

Minutes of the second meeting of 2022 of the Boundary Commission for England, held on 6 June 2022

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

1. Welcome and minutes of the last meeting

- 1.1 Commissioners agreed the minutes of the 22 November 2021 and 6 January 2022 meetings.
- 1.2 Commissioners agreed to reorder the agenda for the meeting. The agenda now followed as set out in the minutes.

2. Paper 1: Review Programme Update

- 2.1 Mr Bowden presented a paper on the Review Programme Update.
- 2.2 Mr Bowden noted that the Machinery of Government change has now been completed, the Boundary Commission for England's new sponsor department is the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.
- 2.4 Mr Bowden noted that the Commission would be staying at its current premises of 35 Great Smith Street for the 2023 Review and that further conversations would be required about the future location of the Commission in due course.
- 2.3 Commissioners noted the recent Government announcement to reduce the size of the Civil Service. Commissioners reflected on the potential impact this could have concerning the retention of staff and supported further conversations with the sponsor department should it be necessary.
- 2.5 Mr Bowden presented the timetable for upcoming work of the Commission.
- 2.6 Mr Bowden noted that the specific risk in regards to public hearings on the risk register has been closed, now that these have been delivered. Commissioners were content for this risk to be closed.

3. Paper 4: Review Update

- 3.1 The Deputy Secretary presented a paper highlighting the main issues arising from the initial proposal and secondary consultations.

- 3.2 The Deputy Secretary noted the number of representations made over the two consultations periods, of 45,678 representations.
- 3.3 The Deputy Secretary presented the Commissioners with maps highlighting the progress that had been made by Review teams (including Assistant Commissioners) in regards to draft revised proposals for the Commissioners.
- 3.4 The Secretary and Deputy Secretary would be meeting with all the lead Assistant Commissioners around the end of the month to do a benchmarking/consistency check of ward splits that Assistant Commissioners were considering proposing to Commissioners.

4. Paper 2: Public Hearing Evaluation

- 4.1 The Head of Corporate Services presented a paper of evaluation of the public hearings and noted the overall success of the delivery of the hearings.
- 4.2 The Head of Corporate Services outlined a number of recommendations and learning points the Commission may want to consider at future reviews. One of these recommendations included the ability for the Commission to hold both in-person and virtual public hearings in the future.
- 4.3 Mr Justice Lane noted that it would be good to engage early with the sponsor department to discuss modifying the legislation to provide for virtual hearings. Commissioners noted that the potential to hold both in-person and virtual hearings may in turn affect the number of public hearings held and their location for future reviews.
- 4.4 Mr Byrne noted the overall cost of the public hearings and the value they provide for the review, particularly given the opportunity for the public to make oral representations.
- 4.5 Mr Bowden noted the benefit of holding the public hearings during the secondary consultation period, as in his opinion respondents were more prepared to provide evidence and consider different counter-proposals.
- 4.6 Commissioners commended the work done on the delivery of the public hearings, particularly the work of the Head of Corporate Services and their team in organising them. Commissioners were also incredibly proud of the secretariat and Assistant Commissioners, highlighting their professionalism, commitment and resilience throughout the secondary consultation period.

5. Paper 3: Communications Evaluation

- 5.1 The Communications Manager presented a paper and gave a presentation regarding the Commissioners communications strategy during the secondary consultation period.

- 5.2 The Communications Manager noted that the Commission's advertisements had been seen by a wider audience during the secondary consultation period than the consultation on the initial proposals. This had been achieved by changing the strategy used by the advertising agency to reach more members of the public.
- 5.3 The Communications Manager noted that recordings of the public hearings had been uploaded to YouTube throughout the secondary consultation period. This was considered a success as it enabled respondents to watch proceedings if they hadn't been able to attend.
- 5.4 The Communications Manager noted the positive feedback from the survey conducted with speakers and attendees from the public hearings.
- 5.5 Mr Justice Lane queried if advertisements featured on Spotify could be regionalised for future consultation periods or future reviews. The Communications Manager will explore this.

6. Paper 5 : Working towards the revised proposals

- 6.1 Mr Bowden presented the timescale of the secretariat's work on revised proposals and key milestones for the Commissioners.

7. Any other business

- 7.1 Commissioners agreed it would be valuable to meet in the autumn of 2022 to begin the process of recording learning points from the 2023 Review.