

## **MATTERS ARISING SINCE 20 DECEMBER 2010**

### **Electoral Registers and RPF29 forms**

1. As at 8 February 2011, the Secretariat had received a data copy of the full register from 308 local authorities out of the 326 in total. The reasons for the missing 18 are shown in the table below:-

<b>Number</b>	<b>Reason</b>
1	Incorrect password
4	Only partial register supplied
3	Query on completeness of register
1	Wrong format (Access instead of Excel)
7	IT issues
2	No response to reminders

2. These missing registers are being chased and the local authority has been reminded that they have a legal duty to supply the register to the Commission.
3. As at 8 February 2011, the Secretariat had received RPF29 forms from Population Estimates Unit (PEU) of the Office for National Statistics (ONS) 324 out of the 326 local authorities. The outstanding authorities are Isles of Scilly and South Somerset. In addition, two authorities (Central Bedfordshire and West Somerset) have submitted their RPF29 forms with the ward data relating to the new ward boundaries that will come into effect on 5 May 2011. Gerald Tessier is in the process of re-basing the ward figures on the existing ward structure in these authorities.

### **Staffing**

4. The Secretariat has now reached a near complete staff complement, with the arrival of the majority of the Review Team members. A staff organogram is attached at Appendix A, showing the names and roles of staff, together with the allocation of the regions between the teams, and individual extension numbers (prefix for all is 020 7276).

### **The UK Electorate**

5. Members will be aware that ONS is due to publish its monitor with the electorates for each part of the UK during the week commencing 21 February. It is likely that the Secretariat will have advance notice of the content of the monitor during the previous week (and hence by the time of the meeting). This will give the Secretariat an opportunity to check the electoral data in the monitor against its own records and ensure that there are no surprises on the date of publication. Following the release of the data by ONS, as part of an announcement co-ordinated with the three other Boundary Commissions, the Commission will itself announce the agreed electorate for the UK (and with it the electorate for England), the division of the 600 seats between the four

nations, and the UK Electoral Quota that will be used when distributing constituencies. (See BCE/2011/Paper 7 for further details of this announcement).

6. As Members are aware, the division of the 600 seats between the nations is calculated via application of the Sainte-Laguë method. This calculation requires the use of a spreadsheet to be done efficiently. The Secretariats are working together to ensure the consistent use of spreadsheets within all four Secretariats, to avoid errors in calculation and potential embarrassment (or worse) should one Secretariat's spreadsheet produce a different allocation from the other three.
7. The Secretariat has previously discussed with Members the related issue of the names of some 16 year olds erroneously appearing on the register of parliamentary electors. As noted at the last meeting, EDD finally issued a circular to EROs on 13 December which, inter alia, clarified the position with regard to 16 year olds on the register. This backed up the request by ONS that 16 year olds should not be included on the RPF29 returns. Since the last Commission meeting, and prompted by the circular from EDD, the electoral services departments in some local authorities have contacted EDD to admit to having inspected their registers and found them to contain some erroneous entries for 16 year olds. EDD reminded the local authorities concerned of the legal position and further reminded them that they would be expected to act accordingly.
8. After being advised by both EDD and ONS that some registers had been originally submitted with errors, the Secretariat has taken some further steps to best ensure the figures that the Commission uses for the next review are as robust as possible – whilst remaining clear that it is not the role or function of the Secretariat or the Commission to “strike through” entries in, or otherwise edit, a particular register. Analysis by Gerald Tessier and his team has been very positive: by comparing the relevant RPF29 data returns provided to ONS and the registers supplied directly to the Commission, we have concluded that the total number of 16 year olds erroneously appearing on the register of parliamentary electors across the whole of England must be less than 1,000. In the context of an overall electorate for England of over 38,000,000, this figure is highly unlikely to create any difficulties. In the same context, the Secretary has spoken to Alison Whitworth to ensure that ONS are aware of the potential issue as they conduct data checks on the figures submitted by local authorities prior to ONS's publication of the electoral registers. The Secretariat has also been keeping an audit trail of the steps it has been taking since early 2010 to mitigate the potential scale of the problem.

### **Communications**

9. The Commission's website, currently hosted by MoJ's IT platform, is to be migrated to the Cabinet Office by 31 March 2011. Until then, the MoJ IT team will continue to make any changes necessary to the website. The Secretariat has been working with the Cabinet Office on a design and specification for a new website, which it expects to be live early in the financial year 2011/12. Cabinet Office staff have indicated that they are confident that the new website will allow visitors to view all representations received during the consultation periods, and for users to submit views through the website using an online form.

10. There had previously been some concern that the Commission's independence, or, rather, the perception of its independence, might have been compromised by having to use an URL (Uniform Resource Locator) containing either 'cabinet-office', or the suffix '.gov.uk'. The Commission's current URL is www.boundarycommission.org.uk, maintaining the perception of its independence. A submission has been put to the Minister for the Cabinet Office via Cabinet Office's Elections and Democracy Division, requesting the retention of the '.org.uk' suffix for the BCE's website and the absence of "cabinet-office" from the URL.

#### Newsletter No.1/2011

11. This Newsletter was issued on 27 January 2011. It had originally been intended to issue it on 12 January but it was held back so that it could be updated to take account of the Bill's expected progress through its Committee stage in the House of Lords. However, given the difficulties that the Bill was encountering in the Lords, it was decided that the content relating to that section of the Newsletter should be reduced and that it should be issued.

#### **Technical and Commercial matters**

##### Service Level Agreement (SLA) with Ordnance Survey (OS)

12. Simon James and Bob Farrance met with officials from OS on 18 January 2011 to discuss the content of a draft SLA for the mapping the Commission will require for its provisional and revised recommendations, which will be supplied to the places of deposit during the sixth general review. The meeting was very productive and an updated draft of the SLA, which reflected the discussions, was received from OS the following day. This was checked and comments returned to OS. It is expected that the third draft of the SLA should be received by the date of the meeting. It is intended that the agreed SLA will be signed once the Bill has received Royal Assent or by 31 March 2011 at the latest.

##### A future Geographic Information System (GIS) solution

13. At the request of Bob Farrance, Cliff Wilkinson of ESRI(UK), who currently provide support to the Commission's GIS, supplied the first draft of a report outlining a possible GIS solution for the future. The solution would enable the Commission to take advantage of a new digital data map set that will become available later this year. This will enable the Commission to create "electoral" units below ward level in any area where it is considered necessary to achieve an electoral parity target of 5% (or less).
14. The Secretariat considered the draft report and, a number of corrections and suggestions were forwarded to ESRI. Bob Farrance will meet with Cliff Wilkinson on 18 February to discuss the Secretariat's thoughts on the report. It is expected that this discussion will result in a second draft which can be put before Members (for information) at a future meeting. Members are asked to note that, at this stage, the report is being provided to demonstrate what it may be possible to achieve for the seventh general review. The report is not a document that is intended to be the start of a formal procurement process for a new GIS solution from ESRI.

15. Bob Farrance and Gerald Tessier also met with the ESRI consultants who support the current GIS to discuss matters relating to the loading of the 2011 electoral data: this is scheduled for 1 April 2011 subject to the electoral data set being compiled and supplied to ESRI by 4 March.

