

MEETING WITH THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE PARLIAMENTARY POLITICAL PARTIES (PPPs)

1. Members agreed at the meeting of 8 February 2010 that the practice of meeting with the representatives of the PPPs should be continued for the sixth general review. Members are asked to confirm that original decision and that the meeting should take place on Monday 4 April 2011: this is a date also set aside for a meeting of the Commission.
2. Records show that meetings have taken place with the PPPs since the second general review (1965-1969). The meetings appear to have always taken place after the commencement of the review has been announced: this always coincided with the publication of the electoral registers which will not be the case for the sixth general review where the electoral registers to be used are set out in the Bill. It is presumed that this timing was such so as to enable the compilation of the electoral statistics that would apply to the review ahead of the meeting. This was certainly the case at the fifth general review when the meeting took place on 17 April 2000, with the electoral statistics being compiled, analysed and sent to the PPPs by the Secretariat ahead of the meeting. A record of the meeting can be found at Appendix D of Volume 2 of the fifth periodical report (see pages 137-148).
3. It was anticipated that the sixth general review would be required to use the electoral registers published between 1 December 2010 and 1 February 2011. The Office for National Statistics is due to publish a Monitor on 23 February 2011 which will confirm the parliamentary electorate for each part of the UK. Therefore, the UK electoral quota and the allocation of constituencies to each part of the UK can be calculated by each Commission (and the PPPs) shortly after.
4. The Commission is scheduled to send the electoral statistics (for every county, London borough, district and ward) to the PPPs on 4 March 2011, at the same time as they are placed on the website. Holding a meeting on 4 April 2011 will enable the PPPs to consider the electorates and their potential impact ahead of the meeting. Also, the Commission is due to issue a Newsletter (No.2/2011) on 4 March 2011 which opens consultation on the use of the electoral regions. The outcome of that consultation (% for or against and the main areas of opposition) will be known to Members before the meeting with the political parties.
5. At the fifth general review, the PPPs were asked to submit written questions about those aspects they wished to discuss: their responses were copied to the other parties ahead of the meeting. At the meeting, answering the questions submitted by the PPPs allowed the Commission to disclose the policies it intended to follow, as well as to explain how it would deal with some of the main statutory criteria. A free flowing discussion ensued and at the end of the process, the Commission was able to consider the set of policies it intended to follow at the review. Any tweaks to the policies it had set in the year before the meeting were then carried through to the information booklet. The meeting also enabled the Commission to highlight those areas it considered the PPPs could have a positive impact on the review process.
6. Given the very different review process to be undertaken this time, the meeting is expected to provide the Commission with an opportunity to explain its thoughts on the use of the electoral regions, the continued use of wards, the crossing of boundaries, public

consultation etc. It will also be possible to explain what the Commission's communication strategy is and, hopefully, to persuade the PPPs how they can assist and ensure a successful review. e.g. taking and keeping control of their local parties.

7. If Members agree that the meeting should be held on Monday 4 April 2011, it is suggested that the Secretary sends formal invitations to the PPPs (and the one Green Party representative) immediately after the meeting requesting a list of matters relating to the conduct of the review and the policies that the Commission may adopt, that they wish to discuss. It will be confirmed that matters that relate directly to what will be contained in the provisional recommendations, such as which counties and London boroughs should be paired/grouped for the allocation of constituencies, will not be open to discussion. It will also be confirmed that matters relating to the conduct of the new style public hearings will be better considered at a later, second, meeting once the Commission has had time to consider its policies in respect of them. Responses will be required by 23 March 2011 which will allow the Secretariat time to conduct an analysis of what has been said and provide a briefing paper to Members a few days before the meeting.

8. At the time this paper was prepared, the final shape of the Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Bill was far from clear and a date for Royal Assent was unknown. However, it was considered essential that this consultation process should be started so as not to delay the review in any way.