

## **MATTERS ARISING SINCE 21 FEBRUARY 2011**

### Reaction to Newsletter No.2/2011, including media coverage

1. A news release was distributed to media and MPs and political parties on the afternoon of 3 March, embargoed until 4 March. The Newsletter was sent to MPs and others on the BCE mail list, by post on Thursday and by email Friday. The electoral figures and the newsletter were both available on website on 4 March.
2. The morning headlines focused on the Barnsley's bye-election result but by the afternoon the media were running with the story and contacting the BCE to follow up the news release. BBC online ran a positive story and the Guardian online had our story on the home page. Calls were received from journalists from ITV, Press Association, BBC, Radio Four, Politics Show, Politicshome.com, and regional journalists from BBC West Midlands, Yorkshire, Oxford and Leicester. Most of the focus of their enquiries was on the proposed allocation of seats across the English regions and what the impact of the new legislation would be for specific regions. Overall the coverage was positive in nature.
3. There were noticeably very few queries from MPs on the day, and this trend has continued in the days following the announcement. There were some very technical queries from members of the public on the detail of the electoral figures.
4. In conclusion, we noted the following key points and lessons learned:
  - Journalists need information broken down into small chunks and explained in layman's terms
  - The interest from journalists and members of the public is primarily in the local effect of the proposals
  - the timing of the distribution of our new release is crucial in determining the extent of coverage
  - our distribution service COI uses a standard list of media contacts but we will need to add our own contacts to COI's distribution list to ensure the right media coverage.
  - We should build relationships with key national and regional journalists to alert them to up and coming stories and ensure they get the right messages directly from us.

### Places of deposit

5. Members previously agreed that documentation (information booklet, reports on the initial proposals, and maps) should continue to be deposited at locations in each review area to allow for full and proper public consultation, particularly for those who do not have internet access.
6. It was noted that at the fifth general review it had been agreed that a minimum of one Place of Deposit (PoD) should be used in each of the existing constituencies (to meet the statutory requirement) and that in a number of constituencies (particularly those of a more rural nature), extra PoD would be required. For instance, in North Yorkshire (without York),

which was allocated six constituencies, 17 PoD were used. Members agreed to adopt a similar approach for the 2013 Review. It should be noted that section 5(1)(a)(ii) of the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986 (as amended by the 2011 Act) requires “that a copy of the proposals is open to inspection at a specified place within the proposed constituency”.

7. In preparation for the 2013 Review, the Secretariat wrote to every local authority requesting their assistance in compiling a list of the PoD. To assist them, a list of the PoD used during the fifth general review was included with the letter and the local authorities were requested to update the list and suggest new PoD to replace those that were no longer available. The consultation produced a list of 1,386 PoD made up of 649 libraries (46.8%) with the rest being Council offices, “One Stop Shops” etc..

8. Members will be aware from reports in the media that some local authorities have decided to close a number of libraries in their area in order to meet the reduction in expenditure required of them by Government: some local council services such as One Stop Shops may also be affected. In one example cited by the media, it was claimed that one local authority intended to close 24 (57%) of its 42 libraries.

9. The current timetable for the review confirms that the Secretariat’s administration team is scheduled to confirm the availability of the PoD during June and early July. Given the potential closure of a large number of PoD (libraries), this work now assumes extra importance. Therefore, Angela Kikugawa has included reference to this action in the Review Plan and it will be highlighted as a potential risk. The PoD will be checked with the local authorities before they are used for each round of public consultation.

#### Website: development progress and URL

10. The current website has been maintained by MoJ and will have ceased to be supported by them on 31 March 2011. We have been working with the Cabinet Office Digital Media team to build a new site on the CO infrastructure with a design that reflects the Commission’s independence. We have taken the approach that the new site’s main aims are to provide:

- information about the 2013 Review
- guidance on making representations and the ability to view proposals and send representations
- Information about the Commission.

11. All the content from old site has been reviewed and will be archived, accessed via a link to the National Archives from the new site. New content has been written to ensure it is up to date, accurate and accessible. The Secretariat is able to edit and maintain its own pages independently of the CO web team. We have also worked with MoJ and CO to ensure a smooth transition to new system.

12. As part of government’s web rationalisation policy, which applies to the websites of all Government bodies including arms-length organisations, we have been required to reconsider the URL for our website, which is currently [www.boundarycommissionforengland.org.uk](http://www.boundarycommissionforengland.org.uk). Working in conjunction with Cabinet Office Elections and Democracy Division and the CO web team, we have agreed that our new URL will be [www.independent.gov.uk/boundarycommissionforengland](http://www.independent.gov.uk/boundarycommissionforengland). Whilst this is 12

characters longer than the current URL, it has the advantage of leaving in no doubt the independent nature of the Commission.

13. As part of the transfer arrangements to the new website and URL, any user clicking on or typing in the old web address will be automatically redirected to the new website. The redirection will remain in place for at least two years and possibly in perpetuity. We therefore do not envisage any disruption at all to our existing users. All future communications will advertise the new independent.gov.uk web address.

#### Staffing: recruitment and training

14. The final vacant post in the Secretariat's organisational structure was filled with [REDACTED] joining on 28 March as a Review Team Officer. Induction training – including detailed specialised training on the development of schemes and technical use of the GIS software – was completed by all other staff in week commencing 7 March, and staff have begun working with live data in developing schemes for the 2013 Review. Induction and training for our final joiner will be conducted within her team. Work on recruitment now turns to organising the selection of suitable individuals as Assistant Commissioners, and additional short-term Secretariat staff to co-ordinate and provide administrative support at public hearings (see separate agenda items) and to back-fill posts temporarily vacated by those out of the office supporting public hearings.