

MEETING WITH THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE PARLIAMENTARY POLITICAL PARTIES

1. As agreed at the Commission meeting of 21 February 2011, invitations to attend this meeting were sent to the representatives of the parliamentary political parties (PPPs) on 22 February 2011. The PPPs were asked to respond, and identify any matters that they wished to be considered at the meeting, by 18 March 2011.

2. The Commission have received letters of acceptance and general representation from the Conservative Party (dated 15 March 2011 – Appendix A), the Labour Party (dated 18 March 2011 – Appendix B) and the Liberal Democrat Party (dated 18 March 2011 – Appendix C). The Green Party declined the invitation, and did not submit any queries. The representatives attending the meeting will be:-

Conservative	Roger Pratt CBE (Boundary Review Manager) Rob Hayward
Labour	Greg Cook (Head of Political Strategy) Declan McHugh (Director of Strategic Planning and Constitutional Affairs)
Liberal Democrat	Mark Pack (Co-Editor, Liberal Democrat Voice)

3. Prior to the meeting, the Secretariat asked each of the PPPs whether they would agree to copies of their representations being circulated. They all agreed and copies have been circulated. The Secretariat also supplied the PPPs with copies of the 2011 electoral spreadsheets which confirmed the electoral quota (76,641).

4. The objective of the meeting is to consider the general matters raised by the PPPs in respect of the 2013 Review, and to communicate some of the Commission's key messages to the parties (see paragraph 7, below). It is not considered necessary to provide a definitive response to all the points raised. However, where the Commission has a firm policy or practice, it will be of assistance to those present if explaining it removes doubt or confusion.

5. By way of background information for the meeting, the Secretariat has supplied the following documents:

Appendix D	A copy of the minutes of the meeting (17 April 2000) with the PPPs at the start of the fifth general review.
Appendix E	Newsletter 2 (published 4 March 2011) in which many of the issues raised by the parties were discussed, or introduced

6. The Secretariat has analysed the general representations made by each of the PPPs and this analysis is set out in the table below. The PPP making the representation is listed and, where appropriate, the Commission's policy decision is set out underneath. If necessary, further comments, in respect of that policy, have been added by the Secretariat. Also, if there is an issue that has been raised by a PPP where the Commission do not have a policy or practice, the Secretariat has suggested a response.

7. The Secretariat has also suggested some matters which the Commission may wish to raise with the PPPs such as MP engagement throughout the process, the premature disclosure of embargoed information about the initial proposals, managing expectations of local party branches and members etc. The Secretariat has listed the subjects in the final table.

No.1	Timetable and Process
Conservative	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) The timetable for the Review and in particular the date for the publication of provisional proposals, and if this is not yet known, when we will have this information. 2) What information will be available to Parliamentary Political Parties in advance of the proposals. In particular what mapping can be made available as maps made available prior to the proposals at the previous Review were most helpful. 3) When the Information booklet will be available. 4) How and when the provisional proposals will be made to Parliamentary political party organisations and Members of Parliament and will the previous practice of proposals being made 24 Hours in advance of publication continue to be followed.
Labour	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) The Commission's timetable for the Review and in particular the publication of Provisional Recommendations and consultation and the issuing of Revised and Final Recommendations. 2) The extent to which the timetable may accommodate Parliamentary and political parties' timetables e.g. Conferences and recesses 3) The form and format in which the Commission may make information available e.g. mapping and representations
Liberal Democrat	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) What is the latest on expected date for proposals to be published and will it be the same date across the board?
Timetable	<p>In Newsletter No.2/2011, the Commission specified that it expected that the Information Booklet would be published by the end of April 2011. However, we have delayed that date in order to fully develop our policies and procedures, particularly on public hearings. We expect to publish the information booklet in late June or early July, to coincide with our engagement plans for Parliamentarians (see note 5). (Con 3)</p> <p>The Commission is finalising its timetable for the review, which will appear in the Information Booklet. However, it will take into account the Parliamentary calendar, and party conferences. With this in mind, the Commission is currently planning to publish initial proposals after the House returns on 5 September, and intends to avoid publishing while any of the PPP conferences are occurring. Although we have yet to announce publically in such detail, we expect that publication will take place during the week commencing Monday 12 September 2011. (Con 1, Lab 1, Lab 2, LD 1)</p> <p>Although the Commission is in regular communication with the commissions in the other parts of the UK, it cannot speak for them regarding their timetables. (LD 1)</p>

Process	<p>In the past, the Commission has made available maps and statistics to each PPP, on a county-by-county basis, as each area was reviewed. For the 2013 Review, the statistics have already been provided to the PPPs, and are on the Commission's website. The Commission does not intend to provide county mapping for the PPPs in advance of the initial proposals being published. This is in part due to the time and resource pressures facing the Commission in conducting the 2013 Review of the whole country on the same timescale; in part due to the fact that the mapping will be of a regional nature, unlike previous reviews; but also because of the wider availability of mapping and G.I. products, including mapping of local government boundaries available on the internet.</p> <p>(Con 2)</p>
Process	<p>The Commission will be providing MPs and the PPPs with an embargoed copy of the initial proposals report and large map of their region showing the proposed constituencies the day before the official publication. The specific timing of this has yet to be decided.</p> <p>(Con 4)</p> <p>The initial proposals will consist of a report, outlining the background, rationale, and electoral data within the proposals; an A3 book of maps of each constituency and a large (A0 size) map of the region. All these documents will be on the Commission's website and in around 1,500 places of deposit across the country. Copies of the representations (with personal data redacted) and transcripts of hearings will be placed on the Commission's website and, subject to the Commission's consideration, sent to at least one place of deposit in each proposed constituency at the beginning of the four-week consultation on representations specified in the Act.</p> <p>(Lab 3)</p>

No. 2	Use of the regions, allocation method and overall methodology
Conservative	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) If following the consultation the Commission is in a position to confirm its method of allocation of constituencies in England. 2) If the allocation is by Region any methodology the Commission will use within a Region. Will it for example use Theoretical Entitlements for Local Government units within the region.
Labour	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) <i>The Commission's initial views, if any, as to interpretation of the new rules, [specifically the importance of local authority and existing constituency boundaries].</i>
Liberal Democrat	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) <i>Assuming the Euro region boundaries proposal is accepted, under what circumstances (if any) would the BCE still come up with a cross-regional boundary seat?</i> 2) <i>How will the BCE approach questions of particular constituency shape, such as whether or not to have doughnuts?</i>
Use of regions	<p>In Newsletter No.2/2011, the Commission asked for views on their proposed use of the European electoral regions and the Sainte-Laguë methodology for the initial allocation of constituencies within England. The closing date for representations is 1 April 2011 – the Friday prior to the meeting with the PPPs.</p> <p>The Commission have not taken a view on this issue at the time of writing. Indeed, the Commission may not wish to take a formal view on the subsequent working day to the close of the consultation period, preferring instead to allow a</p>

Allocation and methodology	<p>brief period of consideration to the representations received. However, the Commission will be aware (through the paper emailed to them on the evening of Friday 1 April 2011) of the representations received and the initial analysis of those representations. Should the consultation show clear support for the use of the regions, the Commission may wish to offer an initial view on this issue to the PPPs. This can be discussed on Monday 4 April, prior to the meeting with the parties. (Con 1, LD 1)</p> <p>In Newsletter No.2/2011, the Commission stated that if they do decide to adopt the allocation of constituencies based on the European regions, ‘it is likely that compelling reasons would need to be given ... to persuade the Commission to depart from employing such an approach in making ... its recommendations’. This means that, in effect, regional boundaries would only be crossed if the reasons for doing so were compelling. (LD 1)</p> <p>The Commission’s interpretation of the new rules is set out clearly in Newsletter No.2/2011, and will be contained in the Information Booklet. When considering the shape of constituencies, the Commission will be mindful of the rules set out in the Act of not breaking local ties, bearing in mind that no constituency (apart from those on the Isle of Wight) will be permitted to deviate by more than 5% from the UKEQ. The Commission does not have a specific policy on ‘doughnut’ constituencies, whereby a town or city is completely surrounded by one (normally rural) constituency. The Commission does not see the value at this stage in explicitly ruling on ‘doughnuts’ as being in or out of consideration – each set of circumstances will be given individual consideration. (Lab 1, LD 2)</p> <p>If the Commission does decide to use the regions and the Sainte-Laguë method of allocation as the basis of its initial allocation of constituencies, then each region will have allocated to it a specific number of constituencies, as set out in Newsletter No.2/2011. Within any region the scale of change necessary will inevitably require that, in some cases, constituencies will need to cross the boundaries of local government areas. With that in mind, the Commission will not always be able to approach the regions as it has done previously by pairing or grouping counties to achieve an entitlement of constituencies for local government units, lower than regional level. (Con 2)</p>
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No.3	The use of local government and existing constituency boundaries, and wards
Conservative	<p>1) In terms of Local Government units will the Commission have a policy regarding a maximum number of authorities that it will link together.</p> <p>2) In terms of the need to split wards how will the information be published on the electorates within split wards and what attitude will be taken to counter proposals that split different wards from the Commission and what information will need to be provided by those submitting such proposals on the way in which a ward is split.</p>
Labour	<p>1) <i>The Commission's initial views, if any, [as to interpretation of the new rules], specifically the importance of local authority and existing constituency boundaries.</i></p>
Liberal	<p>1) What will the BCE’s attitude be towards new local government boundaries</p>

Democrat	<p>created since May last year when it comes to considering issues of local ties etc. for deciding between different possible schemes?</p> <p>2) How will the BCE's approach be affected by the Act defining local government boundaries with respect to counties, boroughs and the City of London (clause 9(3)), i.e. without reference to unitaries and Mets?</p> <p>To note: the Liberal Democrat Party also asked two specific questions of a factual nature, that the Secretariat has already provided answers to. These are reproduced below, and have already been circulated to all PPPs.</p> <p>Q: Is the BCE aware of any councils where the electoral register data for the 1st December 2010 register is available on both old and new ward or polling district boundaries? (This has been the practice in some councils in the past that had rewording come in.)</p> <p>A: No – all councils submitted their registers in either the old or the new wards (and hence polling districts).</p> <p>Q: Are there any councils that were rewarded between May and December last year where the register has been produced (only) on the basis of the rewarded set-up?</p> <p>A: Yes, two councils submitted registers on the basis of changes to ward boundaries which will come into force at the 2011 local elections. We have rebased the register to match the 2010 ward boundaries.</p>
Local authorities and their boundaries	<p>The Commission's approach to local government boundaries and to the new ward boundaries which come into effect in 2011 or later years is set out in paragraphs 10 and 11 of Newsletter No.2/2011. Section 9(3) of Schedule 2 to the 1986 Act defines local government boundaries as 'the boundaries of counties and their electoral divisions, districts and their wards, London boroughs and their wards and the City of London'. All types of local government unit in England are covered by these definitions, as unitary authorities can be either counties or districts and metropolitan authorities are districts.</p> <p>(LD 2)</p> <p>The Act states that the Commission 'may take into account, if and to such an extent as they think fit ... local government boundaries ... [and] ... boundaries of existing constituencies'. These rules do not override the necessity set out in the Act that every constituency should have an electorate that is within 5% of the UKEQ. In early work on the initial proposals, the Secretariat and Members have not adopted a 'clean sheet' approach and are very mindful of the current arrangement of constituencies. Consideration will be given to how many of the existing constituencies, particularly those that have electorates within the 5% parity target, can be retained unchanged but the reduction in the number of constituencies and the 5% parity target will mean that significant changes to the existing pattern will be unavoidable. The Commission does not have a specific policy on the maximum number of authorities it will link together, above and beyond its adherence to the rule referred to above.</p> <p>(Con 1, Lab 1)</p>
Divided wards	<p>The Commission stated in paragraph 17 of Newsletter No.2/2011 that, in the exceptional and compelling circumstances that might necessitate dividing a ward or wards, it would divide using polling districts, as the electorate and mapping would be more easily obtained from the Local Authority and/or Ordnance Survey (in the case of the mapping). The case for doing so only in exceptional and compelling circumstances is made in the Newsletter.</p>

Future ward boundaries	<p>Counter-proposals that divide wards will be taken into account by the Commission like any other representation. However, given the challenges associated with verifying the accuracy of counter-proposals that do not provide robust polling district-based figures, it is unlikely to be achievable in the short time likely to be available for analysing the representations. Additionally, the Commission will want to make very clear to the PPPs its position (espoused in paragraphs 12-17 of the Newsletter) that, in the absence of exceptional and compelling circumstances the Commission does not consider it would be proportionate or appropriate to divide wards where it is possible to meet the 5% statutory requirement without so doing. (Con 2)</p> <p>The Commission has stated explicitly in paragraph 10 of Newsletter No.2/2011 that it will exercise its discretionary power to take into account the most recent local government boundaries, i.e. the ward (and division) boundaries at 6 May 2010. The Newsletter also states in paragraph 11 that changes to ward boundaries due in May 2011, and subsequent years, will <u>not</u> be taken into account.</p> <p>The Commission's Secretariat has received the Local Government Boundary Commission for England's timetable for current and future reviews, which reveals that in 2011 10 local authorities will have new wards, in 2012 seven councils, and in 2013 14 councils (though it should be noted that 11 of these will be new divisions in two-tier counties). Many of these will have ward patterns quite different from the existing ones, due to factors such as new unitary authorities being established, the patterns being based on significantly different numbers of councillors (and hence wards) or being based on new legislation that requires the number of councillors in each ward to reflect the electoral cycle (i.e. three-member wards in areas that elect by thirds), leading to geographically larger wards. It would be impracticable to accommodate these changes in the Commission's initial proposals and, given that there is no statutory requirement to do so, the Commission's line must remain that future boundaries will not be taken into account.</p> <p>The Commission will wish to be aware that an email has been sent to a Conservative MP in the North West region, which unfortunately erroneously stated:</p> <p><i>'You [i.e. the MP] mention in particular having regard to the new ward boundaries in the circumstances where the Commissions may be looking to split old wards in order to create a viable constituency. This would certainly be one aspect that the Commissions would take into account in those circumstances'.</i></p> <p>The Commission may want to take the opportunity to be completely clear with the PPPs, and ask that they pass on the message to their parties, that the Commission will not be taking into account future ward boundaries, for the reasons given above. (LD 1)</p>
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No.4	Public hearings
Conservative	1) When the Commission will be in a position to discuss further its policy and proposals in respect of Public Hearings.
Labour	None

Liberal Democrat	1) When are further details on how the hearings will be run likely to be available?
Hearings	<p>In the invitation sent to the PPPs, the Secretary stated that the Commission would wish to have a subsequent meeting with the parties to discuss the conduct of public hearings, once it had considered the matter more fully.</p> <p>The Secretariat suggests that the Commission may wish to invite any initial comments from the PPPs at the meeting on 4 April 2011, but that they defer any of the Commission's thoughts on the hearings until a future meeting.</p> <p>The Secretariat has a number of suggestions as to the timing of a further meeting with the parties which it will discuss with the Members at the pre-meeting, immediately prior to the meeting with the PPPs. (Con 1, LD 1)</p>

	No.5 Key messages for the parties
National and local party co-operation	<p>The Commission may wish to explore with the PPPs the likely approach taken by the national and local parties, and whether they would expect their membership to submit views to the national parties, rather than direct to the Commission. It is suggested that the Commission remind the parties that the new rules and reduction in constituencies leave much less discretion to the Commission, and that if counter-proposals are to be viable they need to be clearly in accordance with the rules, and in particular the Commission's policies on the factors that the Commission may take into account – the use of local government wards being a good example of this.</p> <p>It would be beneficial if this message could be communicated clearly to local parties and membership.</p> <p>The Commission can make clear its commitment to providing the PPPs and MPs with an advanced copy of the initial proposals, under embargo, but that (as has been the case in previous reviews) the Commission will treat seriously any breach of an embargo that can be attributed to an MP or PPP, and will consider withdrawing early sight of the proposals at revised or final recommendation stage.</p>
Engagement	<p>The Commission may want to inform the PPPs that it appreciates the more high-profile nature of this review, and that it intends, as it has in the past, to take very seriously its engagement with MPs and the PPPs. The Commission is giving thought to how it might engage directly with MPs.</p> <p>The purpose of any early engagement would be to explain the process and timetable of the review, picking up specifics such as the conduct of the hearings, rather than being an opportunity for MPs to make representations on the boundaries. PPPs might be invited to give views on the desirability and format of any direct engagement with MPs.</p>

Appendix A – questions from the Conservative Party

From: Pratt, Roger [mailto:Roger.Pratt@Conservatives.com]
Sent: 15 March 2011 08:42
To: Farrance Bob - Boundary Commission for England
Subject: Meeting 4th April 2011

Bob,

Further to Simon James' letter to me of the 22nd of February I confirm that I will be present at the meeting of Parliamentary political party organisations to be held at 10.30 on Monday 4th April 2011 at 35 Great Smith Street London SW1P 3BQ. I will be accompanied at the meeting by Rob Hayward.

The items we would like to discuss are as follows:

- 1) The timetable for the Review and in particular the date for the publication of provisional proposals and if this is not yet known when we will have this information.
- 2) If following the consultation the Commission is in a position to confirm its method of allocation of constituencies in England.
- 3) What information will be available to Parliamentary Political Parties in advance of the proposals in particular what mapping can be made available as maps made available prior to the proposals at the previous Review were most helpful.
- 4) When the Information booklet will be available.
- 5) If the allocation is by Region any methodology the Commission will use within a Region. Will it for example use Theoretical Entitlements for Local Government units within the Region.
- 6) In terms of Local Government units will the Commission have a policy regarding a maximum number of authorities that it will link together.
- 7) In terms of the need to split wards how will the information be published on the electorates within split wards and what attitude will be taken to counter proposals that split different wards from the Commission and what information will need to be provided by those submitting such proposals on the way in which a ward is split.
- 8) How and when the provisional proposals will be made to Parliamentary political party organisations and Members of Parliament and will the previous practice of proposals being made 24 Hours in advance of publication continue to be followed.
- 9) When the Commission will be in a position to discuss further its policy and proposals in respect of Public Hearings.

I look forward to seeing you at the meeting, if you have any queries please let me know.

Best wishes

Roger

Roger Pratt CBE

Boundary Review Manager for the Conservative Party

Appendix B- questions from the Labour Party

From: Greg Cook

To: Farrance Bob - Boundary Commission for England

Cc: Hartley Sam - Boundary Commission for England; James Simon - Boundary Commission for England; Declan McHugh

Subject: Re: 2013 Review of Parliamentary Constituencies

Date: 18 March 2011 14:08:04

Bob,

Thank you for the invitation. I can confirm that I will be attending along with Declan McHugh, our Director of Strategic Planning and Constitutional Affairs.

We would wish to discuss in as much detail as you are able to:

- 1) The Commission's timetable for the Review and in particular the publication of Provisional Recommendations and consultation and the issuing of Revised and Final Recommendations.
- 2) The extent to which the timetable may accommodate parliamentary and political parties' timetables e.g. Conferences and recesses
- 3) The form and format in which the Commission may make information available e.g. mapping and representations
- 4) The Commission's initial views, if any, as to interpretation of the new rules, specifically the importance of local authority and existing constituency boundaries

Greg Cook

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Appendix C- questions from the Liberal Democrat Party

From: Mark Pack

To: Farrance Bob - Boundary Commission for England

Cc: Hartley Sam - Boundary Commission for England; Bellringer Tony - Boundary Commission for England; James Simon - Boundary Commission for England

Subject: Re: 2013 Review of Parliamentary Constituencies

Date: 18 March 2011 16:14:04

Dear Bob,

Thank you for the invitation to the 4 April meeting. As requested, I highlight below some areas that we would like to discuss.

The first two are simple factual questions in nature, so if you would rather answer them by correspondence in advance of the meeting that would be most helpful.

Is the BCE aware of any councils where the electoral register data for the 1st December 2010 register is available on both old and new ward or polling district boundaries? (This has been the practice in some councils in the past that had rewarding come in.)

Are there any councils that were rewarded between May and December last year where the register has been produced (only) on the basis of the rewarded set-up?

What is the latest on expected date for proposals to be published and will it be the same date across the board?

Assuming the Euro region boundaries proposal is accepted, under what circumstances (if any) would the BCE still come up with a cross-regional boundary seat?

When are further details on how the hearings will be run likely to be available?

What will the BCE's attitude be towards new local government boundaries created since May last year when it comes to considering issues of local ties etc. for deciding between different possible schemes?

How will the BCE's approach be affected by the Act defining local government boundaries with respect to counties, boroughs and the City of London (clause 9(3)), i.e. without reference to unitaries and Mets?

How will the BCE approach questions of particular constituency shape, such as whether or not to have doughnuts?

I will be the only attendee from the Liberal Democrats.

Best wishes,

Mark

Appendix D – minutes of the meeting with the PPPs at the start of the 5th General Review

BCE/2000/3rd Meeting

BOUNDARY COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND

Minutes of the meeting held in Room DG/M25, Office for National Statistics, 1 Drummond Gate, London SW1V 2QQ on Monday, 17 April 2000 at 10.30am.

Present:-

The Hon Mr Justice Harrison	Deputy Chairman (in the Chair)
Mr M E Lewer QC	Commissioner
Mr R Gray	Commissioner
Mr S Trigg	Assessor (Ordnance Survey)
Mr R W Farrance	Joint Secretary (Office for National Statistics)
Mr M Rawlings	Joint Secretary (Home Office)
Mr T J Bergin	Secretariat (Office for National Statistics)
Mr G Reed	“
Mr G R Tessier	“
Mr D Simpson CBE	Legal Officer, Conservative Party
Mr G Cook	General Secretary’s Office, Labour Party
Mr A Sharp	Head of Party Services, Labour Party
Mr M Pack	Liberal Democrat Party

Ms R Chappell, Assessor (Office for National Statistics), sent apologies for her absence.

1. Introduction

1.1 The Deputy Chairman welcomed Mr Greg Cook, General Secretary’s Office, and Mr Andrew Sharp, Head of Party Services, of the Labour Party; Mr David Simpson CBE, Legal Officer, of the Conservative Party; and Mr Mark Pack of the Liberal Democrat Party, and thanked them for attending the meeting. He introduced his fellow Commissioners and others attending the meeting. He also thanked the representatives for their written questions and for allowing those questions to be copied to the other parties. He said that he proposed to deal with those questions on a topic by topic basis, explaining the Commission’s policy where appropriate, adding any further relevant comments, and then allowing any supplementary questions.

2. The number of constituencies

2.1 The Conservative Party had asked in their written questions:-

Under Rule 1 the number of constituencies in Great Britain shall not be substantially greater or less than 613. The current figure is 641. Bearing in mind the repeal of Rule 1(2) by the Scotland Act 1998 is it the intention to increase the number of seats in England thus reducing the electoral quota?

2.2 The Labour Party had asked:-

Does the Commission interpret Rule 1 to mean that it should have any target number of constituencies for England? If so, how will this be applied in respect of individual review areas, especially in regard to rounding up of marginal seat entitlements?

2.3 The Liberal Democrats had asked:-

You will recall some dissatisfaction that when the review process was being completed, we believed that the Isle of Wight was not fairly treated. I, therefore, think that where an area is entitled to an additional seat by virtue of Rule 5 that this should be clearly stated in the Press Release announcing the Review.

2.4 The Deputy Chairman replied that, during their policy review, the Commission had decided that:-

- a) they would not attempt to halt the expected increase in the number of seats in the fifth general review; it would limit their discretion, be very controversial and probably not be achievable anyway;
- b) it would be desirable to try to limit the expected increase in the number of seats;
- c) they should not set a target for the maximum number of seats to be allocated because that would be too inflexible;
- d) they would concentrate more on recommending constituencies with electorates as close as practicable to the EQ whilst at the same time keeping in mind the primacy and requirements of Rule 1, this would probably entail a greater crossing of London borough boundaries and the crossing of county boundaries (particularly the unitary authorities which are counties);
- e) they would not adopt a fixed policy whereby no “Walton” seats (i.e. rounding theoretical entitlements at the harmonic mean rather than the arithmetic mean) were allocated at the next general review as that would fetter their discretion; and
- f) they would be prepared to consider allocating “Walton” seats to those review areas where a partner was not available to form a pairing and it would bring about a significant improvement in the closeness of the constituency electorates to the EQ.

2.5 In response to the Liberal Democrat representation, the Deputy Chairman said that the Isle of Wight was a “Walton” and had been a “Walton” at the last two general reviews when one seat was allocated. During the previous general review, the provisional

recommendations for the Isle of Wight were published in February 1992 and the Commission had confirmed in the News Release that they had considered three options. The first was for no change; the second was to allocate two seats; and the third was to allocate two seats, one of which would include part of Hampshire. The reasons for allocating one seat and rejecting the two other options had been explained in full. No representations objecting to the decision to allocate one seat were received. Final recommendations for no change were announced in June 1992 and it was only towards the end of the general review (late 1994) that the Liberal Democrats made a representation for a second seat to be allocated.

- 2.6 Mr Simpson asked whether the Commission would restrict the allocation of “Walton” seats. The Deputy Chairman said that it would not be right to have a fixed policy not to allocate “Walton” seats as that would fetter their discretion. The Commission would consider allocating a “Walton” seat where there was no suitable partner to form a pairing, and where such an allocation would result in a significant improvement in the constituency electorates.
- 2.7 Mr Cook said that the Commission had not allocated five “Walton” seats during the previous general review, and asked what criteria the Commission would use in deciding whether or not to allocate “Walton” seats during the current review, i.e. would factors such as Rule 1 and growth and decline in the electorate (e.g. the five year projections in the Local Government Commission’s reports) be considered.
- 2.8 The Deputy Chairman replied that, with Rule 1 in mind, the Commission wished to restrict the increase in the number of seats. They would provisionally decide the number of seats to be allocated to each area based on the electorate on the enumeration date, and growth and decline in the electorate as the review progressed would not be a factor in any alteration of those allocations (but might influence where the boundaries were drawn). Each area would be treated on its individual merits and the Commission would endeavour to create constituencies with electorates close to the electoral quota, whilst bearing Rule 1 in mind and also taking account of the disruption caused by changes to constituencies. This might mean that, in one case, an area is paired with another area for the allocation and distribution of seats. In another other case a “Walton” might be allocated. In yet another case, a “Walton” might not be allocated. There would be no hard and fixed rule.
- 2.9 Mr Cook asked whether this meant that there would be an increased potential for pairing areas in the current review than in the previous review. The Deputy Chairman replied that the Commission had not yet taken any decisions with regard to the pairing of areas and the allocation of seats. However, it was likely that there would have to be more pairing in this review, particularly in respect of the recently introduced unitary authorities, which have the legal status of counties, with their former counties.

3. London Boroughs

- 3.1 In their written submission, the Conservative Party had raised four issues:-
- a) Is it the intention of the Commission again to create cross borough boundaries within the Greater London electoral area?

- b) If so, will this mean the creation of Secretariats covering groups of London boroughs?
- c) If so, will these be based on last times' groupings or the groupings currently in place for the London Assembly elections?
- d) An early indication to the political parties on this matter would be appreciated.

3.2 The Labour Party had asked:-

If, as is assumed, London boroughs are to be continued to be "paired":-

- a) What are the criteria for considering such arrangements?
- b) Will multiple groupings (more than two boroughs) be specifically excluded from consideration?
- c) What presumptions will be made about existing arrangements, i.e. will the disruptions contingent upon changing current pairings be a relevant consideration in considering the merits of different proposals; indeed, will an existing pairing be used as an initial review area?

3.3 The Liberal Democrats had not raised any issues on this subject.

3.4 The Deputy Chairman explained that, during their policy review, the Commission had decided that:-

- a) the small electorates of London boroughs may require them to continue the practice of pairing London boroughs in order to bring constituency electorates closer to the electoral quota;
- b) subject to discussion with the political parties, they would reduce the guideline figure for triggering consideration of pairing London boroughs from the 12,500 deviation of the borough average from the electoral quota applied in the fourth general review to a figure of 10,000 for the fifth review because the lower figure would provide greater opportunity for crossing borough boundaries thus creating electorates closer to the electoral quota and limiting the increase in the number of seats;
- c) they accepted that it was possible that some such pairings might result in the loss of "real" seats in some London boroughs whilst other paired boroughs retained a "Walton" seat; and
- d) in addition to meeting the 10,000 cut-off point, the four criteria used in pairing London boroughs during the fourth general review would again be taken into account (with one amendment) during the fifth general review:-
 - i) the number of seats allocated to the paired London boroughs would not be greater than the sum of the seats to which they were separately entitled;

- ii) the result of pairing would be to reduce the disparity from the EQ of the borough average of both boroughs in the pair, with the amendment that pairing would still be considered where it would significantly reduce the disparity from the EQ of the average electorate of one of the boroughs whilst only slightly increasing the disparity of the other borough average – this would give the Commission yet further scope for pairing;
- iii) there should be a continuous residential area or some community of interest across the relevant boundaries; and
- iv) the relevant boroughs were not on opposite sides of the River Thames below Richmond upon Thames.

3.5 The Deputy Chairman also explained that, during the previous review, the “Secretariats” were groups of 3, 4 or 5 London boroughs handled by individual Secretariat teams. These “Secretariats” were created solely for administrative convenience and they did not prevent all pairing possibilities being considered. The “Secretariats” were devised after the Commission had taken their decisions on pairings of London boroughs. However, outside of the Secretariat (mainly within the political parties) the “Secretariats” appeared to acquire a special status and were given too much importance which they did not deserve.

3.6 The Deputy Chairman said that the Commission had not yet taken any decision about pairings for the current review, but he made it clear that the Commission would consider all potential pairings before the individual boroughs or pairs of boroughs are allocated to the individual Secretariat teams. The Commission intended to publish their proposals for all the South London boroughs together, and all their proposals for the North London boroughs together.

3.7 The Deputy Chairman said that the precise work flow for each of the Secretariat teams, after the first three groups of review areas, had yet to be decided. However, he confirmed that the Greater London Assembly areas would not be the starting point or basis for the review in London. The starting point would be the individual London boroughs which were covered by Rule 4. Mr Gray pointed out that, for the purposes of the Greater London Assembly, all the London boroughs were paired or grouped, whereas the Commission would only consider pairing where that would help to limit the increase in the number of seats and/or create electorates closer to the electoral quota.

3.8 The Deputy Chairman said that the Commission could not rule out the possibility of combining more than two boroughs in a group, particularly as there was already a group of three in the form of the City of London, the City of Westminster and Kensington and Chelsea.

3.9 The Deputy Chairman said that the existing pairings would not be the starting point for taking decisions and allocating seats in London. The starting point would be the individual boroughs because of the requirements of Rule 4. It was possible that some pairings might be retained, others might be disbanded, and new pairings might be

created. In taking their decisions, the disruption caused by alterations to constituencies will be a relevant factor to be considered.

- 3.10 Mr Cook asked how many extra boroughs might be paired as a result of lowering the threshold from 12,500 to 10,000. Mr Farrance said that, whilst no decisions had yet been taken, he estimated that a further three pairings might result.
- 3.11 Mr Cook asked whether the 10,000 threshold was a hard and fast rule and meant that any borough with an average constituency electorate more than 10,000 from the electoral quota would be paired. The Deputy Chairman replied that the 10,000 figure was only a trigger point for considering whether to pair a borough. It was not a hard and fast rule and the Commission retained the discretion not to pair. Each case would be treated on its merits.
- 3.12 Mr Pack said it was difficult to comment on the lower threshold without knowing the results which would flow from it. However, generally speaking, he said that an increase in pairing London boroughs was a cause for concern.
- 3.13 Mr Simpson said that any measure that dealt with the over-representation of Greater London and resulted in London being allocated its correct number of seats, and smaller disparities, was a positive step.
- 3.14 Mr Cook pointed out that Greater London did not exist in terms of the Rules for Redistribution of Seats and there was therefore no such thing as the correct entitlement for London or a target number of seats for London as a whole. Mr Cook also commented that, in general, he had no strong views on the lower threshold, but said that the Commission should not lose sight of Rule 4. He also said that it would be helpful if the combinations of boroughs could be limited to pairs rather than multiple groupings. If multiple groupings had to be formed, it was important that no constituency should contain parts of more than two boroughs.
- 3.15 Mr Pack asked whether the Commission could take account of the boundaries of the Greater London Assembly areas in terms of community of interest. The Deputy Chairman said that the Commission would consider this point.

4. The status of unitary authorities in respect of Rule 4

- 4.1 In their written submission, the Conservative Party had said:-

We note that in most review groupings unitary authorities contained within old administrative counties are being dealt with at the same time as the county with the notable exception of Lincolnshire. Why are North East Lincolnshire and North Lincolnshire in Group 9 and the county of Lincolnshire in Group 1?

- 4.2 The Labour Party had said:-

What will be the policy of the Commission in respect of the new non-metropolitan unitary authorities both in the case of those former counties which have now been completely restructured and those where a selection of former districts have been elevated to new status?

- 4.3 The Liberal Democrats had raised no issues on this subject.
- 4.4 The Deputy Chairman explained that, during their policy review, the Commission had considered that the small electorates of many of the new unitary authorities may make it necessary for them to consider pairing or grouping these counties with their neighbours (in the first instance with their former counties). The Commission had therefore decided that:-
- a) they would adopt an individual approach to their consideration of the unitary authorities, i.e. treating each case on its merits, but would consider pairing or grouping in those instances where it would:-
 - i) limit the increase in the number of seats; and/or
 - ii) bring constituency electorates closer to the EQ; and
 - b) they accepted that some pairings or groupings involving unitary authorities might lose a “real” seat whilst others retained a “Walton” seat.
- 4.5 The Deputy Chairman pointed out that the Commission did not normally discuss specific areas with outside parties before they published their provisional recommendations for those areas. However, in the particular case of North East Lincolnshire and North Lincolnshire, the Commission were prepared to hear what the parties had to say relating to the proposed grouping.
- 4.6 The Deputy Chairman explained that the unitary authorities of North East Lincolnshire and North Lincolnshire had not been created from the county of Lincolnshire but from the former county of Humberside. He also pointed out that they were not the only unitary authorities being dealt with at a different time from the county with which they had historical links (e.g. South Gloucestershire and Gloucestershire – in Groups 2 and 9 respectively). Additionally, whilst the new wards in Lincolnshire had already come into effect, the new wards in the two unitary authorities would not be available for the Commission to consider until the end of 2001.
- 4.7 Mr Simpson said that he had raised the issue only because there was a community of interest between the two authorities and Lincolnshire and there was still concern locally that the two areas had been split from Lincolnshire in 1974 to form part of Humberside.
- 4.8 Mr Cook said that those unitary authorities which had the legal status of counties came within the scope of Rule 4 (ceremonial counties and the unitary authorities in Berkshire did not come within the scope of Rule 4). Where a unitary authority had to be paired, it should be paired with the county from which it was created, even if that county had been abolished, rather than with a county with which it had historical links, or with other counties.
- 4.9 Mr Simpson asked whether unitary authorities and their former counties would be dealt with at the same local inquiry. Mr Farrance said that the Commission would

consider the unitary authorities at the same time as the counties from which they were created. This would allow the Commission to publish recommendations for both areas at the same time and for one map to be issued so that interested parties could assess how the boundaries of the newly recommended constituencies related to the boundaries of the existing constituencies which, in many cases, straddle the boundaries of the unitary authorities. The question of local inquiries could not be pre-judged as it would depend upon the Commission's proposals and the representations and counter-proposals made about them.

- 4.10 Mr Pack said that it would be helpful if unitary authorities and their former counties were dealt with at the same local inquiries.

5. Metropolitan Districts

- 5.1 In their written submission, the Labour Party had asked:-

What will be the policy of the Commission in respect of metropolitan districts and, specifically, will their status be any different from that of the non-metropolitan districts?

- 5.2 The Conservative and Liberal Democrat Parties had not raised any issues on this subject.

- 5.3 The Deputy Chairman explained that, during their policy review, the Commission had decided that they would also continue the practice of pairing or grouping metropolitan districts to:-

- a) ensure a correct allocation of seats to each metropolitan county; and/or
- b) bring constituency electorates closer to the EQ; and

that they would also continue to have regard to non-metropolitan district boundaries (whilst recognising that in many cases their boundaries would have to be crossed).

- 5.4 The Commission were not required by Rule 4 to have regard to district boundaries, either metropolitan or non-metropolitan. The Commission have previously recommended constituencies which recognise both metropolitan and non-metropolitan district boundaries, where it is practicable to do so, but often it is necessary to cross district boundaries in order to avoid excessive disparities. It is expected that this will be the situation during this general review but, of course, each review area will be treated on its merits.

- 5.5 Mr Cook said that, in the past, more regard had been given to metropolitan districts than non-metropolitan districts, i.e. some metropolitan districts had been treated individually and others had been paired or grouped, whereas non-metropolitan districts were always reviewed together with the county. He wondered whether metropolitan districts would continue to be given more regard during the current general review.

5.6 Mr Farrance replied that metropolitan districts usually had larger electorates than non-metropolitan districts which often meant that they were of sufficient size to be considered individually or as pairs/groups. There was no policy to give metropolitan districts any special status.

6. Local Government district wards

6.1 In their written submission, the Conservative Party had asked:-

Will the Commission confirm Local Government wards will remain as the building blocks for Parliamentary Constituencies?

6.2 The Liberal Democrats had said:-

- a) It seems to me very important that we receive copies of ward boundaries for each area as well as the ward electorates. Many of the ward boundaries will be new and it will be important to get maps as soon as possible.
- b) I also hope that you will publish a copy of the ward boundaries with each set of provisional recommendations.

6.3 The Deputy Chairman explained that, during their policy review, the Commission had decided that they would continue to use wards (electoral divisions in the Isle of Wight) as their building blocks for constituencies. They had decided to use all the new wards resulting from the Local Government Commission's Periodic Electoral Review. However, their ability to do this depended on the following chain of events:-

- a) the timely completion of the Periodical Electoral Reviews by the Local Government Commission;
- b) the timely making of the Orders, which will introduce the new wards, by the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions;
- c) Ordnance Survey digitising the new ward boundaries;
- d) the Electoral Registration Officers supplying re-based 2000 electorates for the new wards; and
- e) ESRI(UK) loading the digitised boundaries into the Commission's Geographic Information System together with the re-based electorates.

6.4 The Deputy Chairman explained that, as a result of these dependencies, a period of up to one year could elapse from the Local Government Commission submitting its final recommendations to the Secretary of State for new ward boundaries in any area, to those new wards being available to the Commission to work with in their Geographic Information System.

6.5 If the Liberal Democrats wanted early access to copies of the new ward boundaries, they could approach each local authority's Electoral Registration Officer who received copies of the Order (Statutory Instrument) which had accompanying maps showing the new

ward boundaries. This would enable the Liberal Democrats to access the new ward boundaries many months ahead of the Commission receiving the boundaries in digitised form from Ordnance Survey.

- 6.6 The Deputy Chairman confirmed that each of the Commission's news releases would contain an outline map showing the new ward boundaries and, in addition to these, the Liberal Democrats (and the other parties) would also be sent large base maps and ward overlays, which would also be put on deposit for public display.

7. The Electoral Quota and the Deviation of Constituency Electorates from the Electoral Quota

- 7.1 The Conservative Party had asked three questions:-

- a) When is the Commission likely to announce the electoral quota for the review?
- b) What will be the criteria for deciding the level of deviation from the electoral quota when published?
- c) What guidelines will the Commission issue in relation to any variance of deviation particularly in large metropolitan areas such as Birmingham and Manchester, where ward electorates tend to be in the order of up to 20,000?

- 7.2 The Labour and Liberal Democrat Parties had not raised any issues on this subject.

- 7.3 The Deputy Chairman replied that the political parties had been informed that the electoral quota is 69,932. The electoral quota will be contained in the provisional recommendations news release issued for each area, and will also be included in the Commission's information booklet.

- 7.4 The Deputy Chairman explained that the Commission had not set a specific target of deviation from the electoral quota for individual constituency electorates, but will, in accordance with Rule 5, endeavour to produce constituency electorates as close to the electoral quota as is practicable.

- 7.5 With regard to the large metropolitan districts, the Deputy Chairman said that, again, the Commission had not set themselves a specific target. However, it was recognised that in areas where ward electorates are in the magnitude of 15,000 – 25,000 there are likely to be large disparities from the electoral quota or from neighbouring constituencies, particularly if the number of wards in these areas is not exactly divisible by the number of seats. The metropolitan counties will be the last areas to be considered by the Local Government Commission so it is not known what level of electorate will be contained in the future wards.

8. Growth and Decline in the Electorates

- 8.1 The Conservative Party had asked the Commission to confirm that the key elements in this review will remain the actual electorate as at 17 February 2000 and that firm guidance will be given to Assistant Commissioners where local inquiries are held, particularly in areas that may be affected by the Government's recent announcement

regarding housing development in the South East. They also asked that the Commission take into account the position that could occur whereby the electorate at February 2000 diminished substantially in the period before they make their provisional recommendations for that constituency.

- 8.2 The Labour and Liberal Democrat Parties did not raise any issues on this subject.
- 8.3 The Deputy Chairman confirmed that the Commission were statutorily obliged to base their recommendations upon the electorate at the enumeration date of 17 February 2000 and that it could not take into account speculative growth or decline in electorates. Decisions about the number of seats allocated to each area would be based solely on the enumeration date electorates, However, he did explain that, if hard evidence was presented later in the review showing growth or decline that has actually occurred, the Commission would take note of this in considering the various boundary options for an area. Assistant Commissioners will be briefed accordingly and guidance will be given to them on future growth or decline (whether speculative or actual).

9. Public Consultation

- 9.1 The Conservative Party had asked if the Commission would continue its practice of publishing periodical newsletters as the review progressed. The Commission was also asked if it will issue easy to read guidance notes on Boundary Redistribution for local communities.
- 9.2 The Labour Party asked what weight will be given to public opinion, and whether the Commission regarded it as its duty to give account to the balance of opinions as measured by signatures on petitions or number of responses, or will it assess schemes on the basis of quality of evidence.
- 9.3 The Liberal Democrats had not raised any issues on this subject.
- 9.4 The Deputy Chairman replied that the Commission would issue newsletters throughout the 5th review. The first newsletter, announcing the start of the general review, had been issued on 22 February 2000. The Deputy Chairman also confirmed that an information booklet would be published in late May/early June with the second newsletter.
- 9.5 With regard to the Labour Party's point about what weight is given to the quality or quantity of public representations, the Deputy Chairman said that it was not a matter that had been expressly considered. Although public opinion was a very important consideration, more would be gained from the quality of the representations rather than from the use of pro-forma representations that added little to an argument. The Deputy Chairman reminded the political parties that at the meeting they had attended concerning the supplementary review of the European Parliamentary constituencies, they had agreed that the use of pro-forma letters and petitions should not be encouraged. Mr Gray said that the Local Government Commission welcomed representations, but preferred to receive letters written by individuals with their own views, and that reasoned arguments were given more weight than assertions that were usually received in pro-formas. Mr Lewer agreed and said that pro-formas and

petitions of signatures do not give all the reasons why people support or oppose a proposal.

- 9.6 Mr Cook asked if 100 spontaneous representations were received whether they would be likely to carry more weight than 100 pro-formas. The Deputy Chairman confirmed that they would. Mr Simpson said that it was his view that a small number of well-reasoned representations should have more weight than a large number of pro-formas.
- 9.7 The Deputy Chairman asked that political parties should not unveil counter-proposals for the first time at local inquiries. If they had not been put on public display with other representations, ahead of the inquiry, they would be unlikely to be influential as the Assistant Commissioner will not have been able to gauge the level of support for, or opposition to, the counter-proposal. He also asked if the political parties could supply at least four copies of their submissions – one for the Assistant Commissioner, one for each of the shorthand writers, and one for the Secretariat member attending the inquiry. If they were able to supply additional copies for the main participants at the inquiry, this would be most welcome. The parties agreed to the Deputy Chairman's request.

10. Other Matters

- 10.1 The Deputy Chairman raised two matters that were of concern to the Commission. Firstly, he reminded the political parties that their headquarters and local MPs were sent copies of news releases 24 hours ahead of them being published. During the last general review, it was found that, on occasions, the information had been leaked ahead of time, allegedly by MPs. Dealing with the consequences of the leaks had been very time consuming. The Deputy Chairman asked that they do all they could to ensure that this did not happen again, otherwise the Commission might have to review whether the political parties and MPs should continue to receive news releases ahead of publication.
- 10.2 The Deputy Chairman also mentioned that there would be at least one and possibly two general elections during this review. During the 4th general review the Commission had not published recommendations or held a local inquiry during the period of six weeks before and six weeks after the general election of 1992. He asked if the political parties were content for the moratorium on recommendations to be reduced from six to four weeks, and the moratorium on local inquiry announcements to be reduced to four weeks before and two weeks after a general election. All the representatives agreed, though Mr Simpson commented that the two week moratorium after a general election for a local inquiry announcement would be unwelcome. Mr Pack said that it was more important to have a moratorium ahead of an election than after.
- 10.3 Mr Cook raised concerns about nomenclature and expressed the view that that the Commission should, where possible, adhere to historical names for constituencies, rather than some of the more "exotic" names that had been proposed during the last general review. The Deputy Chairman said that this would be taken into account.

- 10.4 Mr Cook also asked how long was the gap likely to be between publishing provisional recommendations and holding an inquiry. Mr Farrance said that it depended upon a number of factors, such as local elections, public holidays and parliamentary recess. It was difficult to give a specific timetable, but, for example, for provisional recommendations that were being published in June, representations would be made during the one month period, but due to the summer recess, if a public inquiry was to be announced, it would not be until October, and the inquiry would not then be held until December.
- 10.5 The Deputy Chairman concluded the meeting with the political parties by thanking them for attending, and hoping that it had been of value to them.