

OPENING STATEMENT FOR PUBLIC HEARINGS

1. This paper has appended to it an example opening statement to be made at the start of each public hearing. Once considered by the Commission, the Secretariat will produce opening statements relevant to each and every hearing to be conducted.

2. An opening statement is necessary not only as an introduction and welcome for attendees at the hearing, but also to ensure that the provisions in Schedule 2A to the 1986 Parliamentary Constituencies Act are adhered to. Schedule 2A states, *inter alia*:

“The chair shall make arrangements for a public hearing to begin with an explanation of—

(a) the proposals with which the hearing is concerned;

(b) how written representations about the proposals may be made (as mentioned in section 5(1)(a), (4)(b) or (5)(c) of this Act).”

3. It is hoped that the proposed opening statement fulfils this obligation, without containing too much detail about the initial proposals, nor inviting specific debate with the Assistant Commissioner (or member of the senior management team) on them. In addition to this statement being made at the start of the hearing, it is our intention that copies of the statement be available during the course of the hearing itself, to act as an aide-memoire for attendees who were not present at the start of the hearing.

4. The opening statement is split between an introductory welcome from the Chair of the hearing, that contains detail about the conduct and process of the hearing itself, and a more detailed statement from the member of the Commission’s senior management team about the initial proposals and the consultation. The Chair’s statement, as drafted, is for guidance only, as the Commission may wish for the Chair to retain discretion over the length and content of their opening statement.

5. The detailed statement about the initial proposals given by the member of the senior management team is intended to ensure that the Commission’s obligations under the Act (above) are adhered to, and cover other important factors such as next steps and data protection. The Commission is invited specifically to consider whether the suggested text regarding the initial proposals, which is taken from the summary of the North West report, is sufficient to satisfy the wording in the Act – ‘an explanation of the proposals with which the hearing is concerned’.

6. The Commission is also invited to comment on and approve the appended draft opening statement as a whole.

Public hearings – draft opening statement[s]

Chair (*for guidance only*):

Ladies and Gentlemen, welcome to this public hearing on the Boundary Commission for England's initial proposals for new parliamentary constituency boundaries in the North West region.

My name is xxxx, and I am an Assistant Commissioner of the Boundary Commission for England. I was appointed by the Commission to assist them in their task of making recommendations for new parliamentary boundaries in the North West. [I am the lead assistant commissioner and, supported by two other assistant commissioners, I am responsible for chairing all five public hearings in the North West, analysing all the representations received about the initial proposals for the North West, and writing a report to the Commission with recommendations on whether or not to revise their initial proposals.]

I am supported here today by members of the Commission's staff, lead by xxxx. Mr xxxx will shortly provide an explanation of the Commission's initial proposals for new Parliamentary boundaries in the North West region, and cover one or two other matters.

The hearing is scheduled to run from (10/11)am to 8pm today, and 9am to 5pm tomorrow. I will give full notice of the exact timings, taking into account attendance and the demand for opportunities to make oral representations. We will also take short 15-minute breaks over the course of the two days, at appropriate times. I should point out that, under the legislation that governs the conduct of the Commission's review, each public hearing must be held over two days and cannot extend into a third day.

The purpose of this hearing is to allow anyone to make oral representations about the initial proposals for the North West region. A number of people have already registered and been given time slots to speak. I will invite you to speak at the appropriate time. If there is any unaccounted for time during, or at the end of, the day, I will invite anyone who has not registered but wishes to speak to do so.

[This is the first, and lead, public hearing we are holding in the North West – there will be four further hearings around the region in the coming three weeks. As this is the lead hearing, we have invited representatives of the parliamentary political parties to make their initial presentations for the region at the start of the day. This will enable others to hear the parties' representations first, and will free the remainder of the hearing for representations from individuals. The political parties have been allocated xx minutes each, and therefore will make their representations from xx am to xx am. Following this, people who have reserved speaking slots will be invited to speak.]

I would like to stress that the purpose of this public hearing is for people to make oral representations on the initial proposals, rather than to engage in a debate with the Commission about the proposals. I will not engage in debate about, nor attempt to justify the Commission's proposals. Nor is this hearing an opportunity for people to cross-examine others during their presentations; people may pose questions of clarification at speakers through me only, and at my discretion, rather than direct to the speaker.

I will now hand over to Mr xxx, who provide a brief explanation of the Commission's initial proposals for the North West.

SMT member:

My name is xxxx, and as Mr(s) xxxx mentioned I am a member of the Commission's staff. I am responsible for supporting the Commissioners in their role to recommend new parliamentary constituency boundaries and, at this hearing, I lead the team of staff responsible for ensuring that the hearing runs smoothly.

As Mr/Mrs xxx has already stated, (s)he will chair the hearing itself and it is his/her responsibility to run the hearing and at his/her discretion to take decisions about speakers, questioners and timings. My team (*indicate team members*) and I are here today to support Mr/Mrs xxx in carrying out his/her role. Please ask one of us outside of the hearing if you need any help or assistance.

I'd like to talk now about the Commission's initial proposals for the North West region, which were published on 13 September 2011. The Commission's proposals for the North West are for 68 constituencies, a reduction of seven. We are proposing to retain only seven of the existing 75 constituencies.

As it has not always been possible to allocate whole numbers of constituencies to individual counties, we have grouped some local authority areas into sub-regions. It has also been necessary to propose some constituencies that cross county or unitary authority boundaries.

We have included the boroughs to the north of the River Mersey in our Merseyside sub-region, to which we have allocated ten constituencies.

We have included the Borough of Wirral with the unitary authorities of Cheshire East, Cheshire West and Chester, Halton, and Warrington in another sub-region containing 13 constituencies.

We propose one constituency that contains electors from both Cheshire and Greater Manchester, which combines the Cheshire East town of Poynton with the Borough of Stockport town of Hazel Grove.

Additionally, as the electorate of the County of Lancashire is such that it is not possible to allocate a whole number of constituencies, we propose another constituency that contains electors from both Lancashire and Greater Manchester,

which combines part of the Lancashire Borough of Rossendale with the north of the Greater Manchester Borough of Rochdale.

The Greater Manchester sub-region, which contains these two areas in Cheshire and Lancashire, contains 26 constituencies.

Finally, our proposals are for 14 constituencies in the Lancashire sub-region, and five constituencies entirely contained in our Cumbria sub-region.

The scale of change in the North West is significant, and we look forward to hearing the views of people at this hearing and throughout the rest of the consultation period.

We are consulting on our initial proposals until Monday 5 December 2011, so there is still another xx weeks after this hearing for you to contribute in writing. There are reference copies of the proposals present here at the hearing, and they are also available on our website and in a number of places of deposit around the region. There are also copies of a summary of the report that you can take away with you today.

You can make written representations to us by using our online form facility on our website, at www.consultation.independent.boundarycommissionforengland.gov.uk, by emailing northwest@bcommengland.x.gsi.gov.uk, or by writing direct to us at the address on the summary I have just referred to, which you can take away from the hearing. I urge everyone to submit written representations to us before the deadline of 5 December 2011.

Finally, I'd like to remind all participants that this hearing is part of a public consultation and you will be asked to provide us with your name and address if you make an oral representation. As you can see, we are taking a recording of the hearing, from which we will create a verbatim transcript. The Commission is required to publish the transcripts of the public hearings, along with all written representations, for a four-week period, during which members of the public have an opportunity to comment on those representations. We expect this period to occur during Spring of next year. The publication of the transcripts and written representations include certain personal data of those who have made representations. I invite all those contributing to read the Commission's Data Protection and Privacy Policy, a copy of which we have with us, and which is also available on our website.

At this stage I will hand over to Mr/Mrs xxx to begin the public hearing. Thank you very much for your attention, and your attendance today.