

MATTERS ARISING SINCE 19 DECEMBER 2011

Statutory Progress Report

1. The statutory progress report required by section 3(2B)(a) of the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986 (as amended) was submitted to the Speaker of the House of Commons on 24 January 2012. The draft report was considered and approved by Members at the meeting held on 19 December 2011 (Item 5). The report was laid in both Houses of Parliament on 24 January together with the statutory reports from the other parts of the UK. The Secretariat has received no enquiries from Members of either House following the laying of the report.

Communications Update

2. We have recently completed the final part of the communications campaign for the secondary consultation. This included print adverts in all national dailies between 6 and 10 March and in all national Sundays on 11 March. A press release was sent out on 5 March and we had two media requests for interviews or comments. We also used Twitter to announce the start of secondary consultation and now have over 250 followers. The digital media advertising, which involves buying key words and sponsored links in Google, will remain in place until the secondary consultation ends.
3. The initial proposals campaign has been fully evaluated and the evaluation of the secondary consultation will take place in April (we hope to be able to provide an oral update at the meeting). The key outcomes of the evaluation of the initial proposals campaign were that the website was seen as very effective at getting the message across, and that the BCE was seen as independent and non-political.
4. We are now planning the communications campaign for the revised proposals; the spend on this will require approval from Cabinet Office before we can start commissioning any work. Subject to approval, we will then be tendering for a range of suppliers to provide the services we will need to run the revised proposals campaign in the Autumn.

Newsletter 01/2012 issued

5. The Commission published its first Newsletter of 2012 on 31 January. The primary purpose of the Newsletter was to publicise for the first time the actual dates for the secondary consultation period, and the arrangements for that stage of the Review. In particular, it specified the Commission's intention to publish only online the representations from the initial consultation period, whilst providing specific support for any individual who was unable to access the material online. The notification of the specific consultation dates was welcomed.

Secondary consultation period

6. The secondary consultation period began on 6 March 2012 and closes on 3 April 2012. The Commission received over 9,000 representations during the consultation period, of which over 5,000 were unique representations (i.e. not part of a proforma letter campaign). The Secretariat intends to table a more detailed breakdown by region at the meeting.

7. The representations have been processed and categorised by the Secretariat, and are intended to be distributed to the regional AC teams for their analysis by the time of the meeting.
8. There was some initial negative feedback from users about the inability to search the online representations by any geographic area smaller than a whole region. There were technical reasons for this, but in response to the feedback the Secretariat quickly prepared and published a 'look-up table' to allow users to identify quickly which representations had come from existing constituencies the user was most interested in. This appeared to address at least some of the concerns that had been raised.

Likely financial outturn 2011/12

9. The BCE's budget allocation for 2011/12 was £3.243m. This includes the additional £390K that was provided for the conduct of the public hearings. Although it is not yet possible to provide the final outturn for the year, the current outturn is £2.778m, which represents a significant under spend of £465K.
10. The largest areas of under spend are:
 - £131K less than budgeted was spent on Ordnance Survey mapping and technical support from ESRI (UK) Ltd;
 - £259K less than expected was spent on the communications strategy. When the budget was set in 2010, it was thought that extensive newspaper advertisements would be carried at various stages in the national daily and Sunday press. In the event, newspaper advertising formed a much smaller component of the communications strategy;
 - £86K for the transcripts of public hearings. The original budget was set at £150K. However, Merrill Legal, the company responsible for providing the transcripts, submitted invoices amounting to only £64K, considerably less than their original pricing.

2012 changes in electorates and wards

11. Local Authorities in England published new electoral registers on 1 December 2011. The total electorate in England has risen again, from 38,443,481 to 38,654,024: an increase of 210,543 (+0.55%) electors. If the four UK Boundary Commissions were commencing a review of parliamentary constituencies based upon the 2012 electoral register, there would be no change to the allocation of constituencies to each of the four countries. However, distribution of electors in the nine English regions would differ slightly, with London gaining an extra constituency (69 instead of 68) at the expense of the South West region (52 instead of 53).
12. In the last year, the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) has revised a number of local ward boundaries. Orders have been made for new ward boundaries in six authorities that will come into effect in May 2012, and in one authority that will come into effect in May 2015. Further Orders are anticipated that will result in new wards coming into effect in one authority in May 2013, in another in May 2014. In addition, the LGBCE has completed one Principal Area Boundary Review (PABR) that has altered local authority boundaries between St Albans and Welwyn Hatfield. The LGBCE is currently undertaking two further PABRs: between Gateshead and Northumberland, and between East Hertfordshire and Stevenage. The Review may receive representations incorporating reference to these new local authority boundaries, but the legislation provides only that the Commission may have regard to the boundaries as they existed at May 2010.

Plans for revised proposals mapping

13. The Secretariat has been working with Ordnance Survey to produce drafts of mapping at A0 (regional) and A3 (individual constituency) paper sizes that can be placed on deposit when the consultation on the revised proposals takes place in the Autumn. The same basic format from the initial proposals has been retained with distinct changes made to highlight the constituencies that have been revised. Copies of the proposed revised mapping will be available at the meeting for Members to consider.