

BOUNDARY COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND

Minutes of the meeting held in the 2nd floor meeting room, Cabinet Office, 35 Great Smith Street, London, SW1P 3BQ on Tuesday 18 December 2012 at 10.00am.

Present:-

The Hon. Mr Justice Sales	Deputy Chairman
Mr D Elvin	Commissioner
Mr N Pringle	Commissioner
Mr S D James	Secretary (Cabinet Office)
Mr A Bellringer	Secretariat “
Mr R Farrance	“
Mr G Reed	“
Mr S Hartley	“
Ms C Batterbee (Paper 9 only)	“
Ms K Budge (Paper 10 only)	“

The presence of the Assessors from Ordnance Survey and the Statistics Authority was not required at the meeting.

1. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 1 MAY 2012 (BCE/2012/Paper 6)

1.1 The minutes of the previous meeting were approved by the Commission without amendment and signed by the Deputy Chairman.

2. MINUTES OF THE MEETINGS HELD BETWEEN COMMISSIONERS, ASSISTANT COMMISSIONERS AND THE SECRETARIAT, 23 – 26 JULY 2012 (BCE/2012/Paper 7)

2.1 The Secretary explained to Members that these were the minutes of the meetings with each of the regional teams of Assistant Commissioners (ACs) and recorded the main points in consideration of the AC reports. The minutes also recorded the decisions made on constituency designations. The minutes were approved by the Commission without amendment and signed by the Deputy Chairman.

2.2 In addition, the Annexe to Paper 7 included the comments made about the review by ACs. Members noted the comments and requested minor corrections. The corrections having been made the Annexe was duly signed by the Deputy Chairman

3. MATTERS ARISING SINCE 26 JULY 2012 (BCE/2012/Paper 8)

Political developments

3.1 Tony Bellringer explained that in early August, Nick Clegg (Deputy Prime Minister with particular responsibility for constitutional issues) announced publicly that the Liberal Democrats would no longer support the implementation of revised

constituencies for the 2015 General election. He clarified that his intention was to let the current Review run its course and have the Boundary Commissions formally report, but then vote against the subsequent statutory instrument that would actually implement the changes, i.e. the intention was not to bring forward primary legislation to stop work on the current reviews. The Prime Minister subsequently stated that the intention of the Conservatives was to continue to support the changes and to have them voted through when the time came.

- 3.2 In November, an amendment to the Electoral Registration and Administration Bill was submitted in the House of Lords, which related to the Parliamentary boundary review process. The strict effect of the amendment as currently worded would be to prevent a Boundary Commission from submitting a report before 1 October 2018. Following an impasse about the admissibility of the amendment, the House authorities have postponed further consideration on the Bill (currently in committee stage prior to returning to the Commons).
- 3.3 It was unlikely that the impasse could continue for much longer, as the main purpose of the Bill – the introduction of individual voter electoral registration – has a defined implementation timetable that will become increasingly jeopardised with further delay in the legislative phase. It was expected that the position would come to a head in early January 2013.
- 3.4 Members noted the continuing political uncertainty about the progress of this and future reviews. Members asked the Secretariat to keep them up to date with developments and noted that, in the absence of any legislative changes to the contrary, the Commission was bound to maintain work on the review given the existing legislative framework.

Finance update

- 3.5 The most recent forecast indicated that the BCE would have a significant under-spend by the end of the 2012-13 financial year. The main reasons for this were:
- Communications and advertising costs were considerably lower than first envisaged, partly due to not proceeding with radio advertisements for the revised proposals, the use of black and white text instead of colour, and benefits that have been realised with the use of Williams Lea. The anticipated level of under-spend was currently estimated to be around £550,000;
 - Ordnance Survey costs were markedly lower than expected. It was clear that OS had been able to base much of the mapping for the revised proposals on the earlier work they had undertaken on the initial proposals mapping. The under spend for the year was expected to be in the order of £100K.
- 3.6 A number of other areas were showing minor anticipated under or over-spends, but these broadly negated each others' effects (e.g. circa £30k overspend on AC costs likely to be negated by anticipated circa £30k under-spend on Secretariat staff costs due to number of staff leaving before assignment end dates).

Staffing update

- 3.7 Since July, four Review Officers and a Review Team Manager had left the Secretariat. Whilst this was a relatively large percentage of the overall staff complement for a small Secretariat, it coincided with the transfer of much of the labour-intensive quantitative logging of consultation responses to an external processing centre. In light of the level of response to the consultation on the revised proposals it had been determined that there would be insufficient work to justify filling the Review Team Manager vacancy that the Secretariat had been carrying since September. The senior management team were content that the remaining complement of Secretariat staff was adequate to meet the demands of the remainder of the current Review. Members noted an up-to-date organisational chart for the Secretariat at Appendix A.
- 3.8 Work had commenced to look at what the staffing requirements will be after the end of the review, in terms of tasks that may still need to be performed in between reviews and what staff will be needed to support those. Commissioners will be advised of the recommendations of senior management in the New Year.

Office move

- 3.9 With the continuing rationalisation of the Government's estate, the BCE Secretariat would be relocated from 35 Great Smith Street with effect from 14 January 2013. The BCE's new office address will be 1 Horse Guards Road, London, SW1A 2HQ. It was anticipated that telephone numbers would remain unchanged though there will be some minor changes to email addresses. A full contact list would be circulated to Commissioners in January.
- 3.10 The new accommodation was part of a shared occupancy building, including staff and Ministers from Cabinet Office (including the BCE's sponsor unit), HM Treasury and HM Revenue & Customs. However, unlike most regular Government staff who work in a fully open-plan environment there, the Secretariat had secured its own rooms for exclusive use, so as to ensure it is able to keep its developing work relatively separate from other building occupants.

4. UPDATE ON COMMUNICATIONS AND MEDIA FOR THE REVISED CONSULTATION PERIOD BCE/2012/Paper 9

- 4.1 Colette Batterbee joined the meeting to provide details of the advertising strategy for the revised consultation.

Key communications activities

- 4.2 The advertising approach for the revised proposals consultation differed from that taken for the initial proposals consultation. As part of the need to reduce spending on communications radio adverts were not used; instead there was an additional burst of print media advertising. This approach was recommended in the initial proposals consultation evaluation.

- 4.3 The first burst began on Tuesday 16 October and continued until Sunday 21 October and the second burst began on 26 November and ended 2 December. There were quarter page adverts in all the main national daily and Sunday newspapers covering England.
- 4.4 The adverts were designed to highlight key messages, focussing on directing people to the BCE website and the enquiry line - as did all publications, the revised proposal reports, summaries, the review leaflet and press release - rather than attempting to inform them of the details of the proposals themselves. The first advert alerted the public to the start of the consultation and the second emphasised that this would be the last chance for the public to have their say. It is thought that the press activity would have reached 65 to 70% of all adults in England.

Online strategy

- 4.5 During the consultation period, the BCE website acted as a one-stop-shop for the consultation process, making readily available all reports and maps, and an online form for submission of written representations. Up to 7 December, 1,545 online representations had been submitted, with 50,355 visits to website since 16 October and 215,122 pages viewed.
- 4.6 From the start of the 8-week period of the revised proposals consultation, an online service ensured that searches on key words associated with the consultation and the Commission would return the consultation website at the top (or near the top) of the results and/or appearing as a 'sponsored link' on the results page for the search. The service had been secured in relation to a number of words connected with boundary changes until the end of March 2013. Initial analysis showed that over 50% of traffic to the consultation website was via search engines.
- 4.7 The BCE also used its Twitter account to efficiently disseminate key messages to social media communities. Nearly 400 people are now 'following' the BCE through this medium and comprise a mix of members of the public and other interested parties. Messages about the start of the consultation and closing date were tweeted before and during the campaign.

Members of Parliament - distribution and liaison

- 4.8 The relevant reports and supplementary information were made available to every MP, at the House of Commons, from noon to 3.00 pm on 15 October under embargo until 0001hrs 16 October.
- 4.9 In contrast to the publication of the initial proposals, which saw the reports appear in full and in breach of the embargo on a political blog, there was no wholesale break of the embargo. However, there were a number of "localised" breaks. At least two local news websites posted details of changes in the local area well before midnight, and at least one MP posted details of the changes to their constituency on their Twitter account soon after they had received their own personal copy of the report.

Media - distribution and liaison

- 4.10 There was some national media interest leading up to the launch and on the day itself. Most media enquiries were about the status of the review and the impact of the Liberal Democrats' withdrawal of support for the boundary changes.
- 4.11 The BCE used its media stakeholder list to disseminate its press release after the MPs had had the opportunity to collect their printed copies of the reports and maps. This contrasted with the approach for the initial proposals, when MPs and the media received their copies at the same time.
- 4.12 The press were given access to the revised proposal vector/shape files under embargo before they were published on BCE's website. This enabled the media to manipulate in maps the data from the revised proposals. This was another change from the approach taken to the initial proposals, when no shape files were released as part of the initial launch and which led to some criticism of BCE. Mr Pringle asked whether there was any evidence of the press using the shape files. Ms Batterbee said that there was only one known example of the press using shape files, but there was evidence that academics had used the facility.
- 4.13 There were a small number of regional pre-recorded interviews with Granada and ITV, covering local issues around the country.

Next Steps

Pre and post consultation evaluation

- 4.14 Market research had been commissioned, both before and after the consultation period (and its associated promotional activity), to evaluate both the broader political awareness and awareness of the BCE's review specifically. The Secretariat will receive the post-consultation research for review in the latter half of January and will provide supplementary information to update this communications paper in the light of those results.

Conclusions

- 4.15 On the basis of an initial evaluation, Members considered that the BCE's communication approach for its final consultation had been a success, especially when considering the resource constraints currently operating within Government. In particular, the BCE had learnt successfully from the experience of the publication of the initial proposals (not least in its provision of shape files, and in the timing of distribution of material to MPs). Members were also encouraged that the focus of debate during the consultation exercise remained firmly on the "lines on the map" rather than on the methods that BCE had chosen to publicise and disseminate its proposals.

5. ANALYSIS OF REPRESENTATIONS - Tabled Paper

- 5.1 Sam Hartley introduced a tabled paper that provided the latest number of representations received, by type and by region. The number received so far was

4,694, although this would be subject to some revision as decisions still had to be made as to whether some representations were “unique” or part of pro forma campaigns. The region with the largest number of representations, and also where the issues were thought to be most complex, was London.

- 5.2 Members noted the work plan and the dates that had previously been agreed between them and the Secretariat. The Secretary asked Members to consider whether, in view of the relatively light number of representations and the reasonably straightforward issues raised within them, the timetable could be brought forward. Members decided that they wished to keep to the timetable as previously agreed (i.e. 18 March – 12 April to consider the representations), but that if the Secretariat were able to analyse some regions quickly, then they would prefer to receive these as and when they were ready for their consideration. With regard to the currently scheduled meetings, they would be flexible and might be able to attend the meetings due to be held in the week commencing 15 April during the previous week instead. They also agreed that the meeting due to be held during the third week of June could be brought forward by a week. The Secretary agreed to amend the timetable accordingly and to circulate it to Members.

6. PROGRAMME UPDATE (BCE/2012/Paper 10)

- 6.1 Members noted the

- Project Plan
- Risk register
- Monthly risk report; and
- Highlight Report

- 6.2 Further to the recommendations of the recent internal audit report, the Secretariat had reviewed and revised its risk management and assurance mechanisms. Specifically, the risk register itself had been adapted to provide for the recording and monitoring of both inherent and residual risks. Ms Budge explained the revised format and definitions to Members. The risk register will be considered on a weekly basis by the quadrilateral team (the Deputy Secretary, Review Co-ordinators and Communications Manager) and a monthly report will be provided to the Secretariat Senior Management Team and Commission Members. Further, the manner in which risk management discussions are recorded had been revised to ensure a more formal and structured account. Risk management would be an agenda item in future meetings which would record discussions on the risks and decisions taken. The agreed actions relating to risk outlined in the internal audit report had been completed within the target deadline. Members confirmed that they were content with the new format and noted that risk management procedures had been changed to bring them in to line with the recommendations of the internal audit.

7. STATUTORY REPORT TO THE SPEAKER BCE/2012/Paper 11

- 7.1 Section 3(2B) of the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986 (as amended) required the Commission to submit a report to the Speaker before 31 January 2013: this would be the second report submitted by the Commission in respect of the 2013 Review.

7.2 The Secretariat had prepared a draft of the statutory report for Members in mid-October; further minor amendments were requested. Members confirmed that they were content for the report to be submitted to the Speaker. Mr Farrance confirmed that the Secretariat would liaise with the House about the submission of the report.

8. THE FINAL REPORT BCE/2012/Paper 12

8.1 Section 3(1)(a) of the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986 (as amended) required the Commission to submit a report to the Secretary of State (the Deputy Prime Minister) showing the constituencies into which England should be divided to give effect to the rules set out in Schedule 2 to the Act. Section 3(2)(a) requires that the report is submitted “before 1st October 2013”.

Background

8.2 The statutory criteria applied to the 2013 Review were significantly different from those used for the Fifth General Review and Members considered that the final Report to be submitted should be markedly different in approach and content. An immediate difference between the preparation of the fifth periodical Report and that required for the 2013 Review was that the former was drafted in stages as the review was conducted and the Report for the 2013 Review will need to be drafted once all the main stages have been completed.

8.3 The new legislation provided an opportunity to consider the content and style of the Report to be submitted, particularly with a view to reducing the size of Volume 1 – which deals with the review process in specific areas – whilst, at the same time, retaining and updating a sufficient amount of the “technical” material relating to the conduct of the Review. The Secretariat suggested that to attempt to explain the degree of change required to the constituencies during the Review, in a blow-by-blow account, would be unrealistic and make the Report unnecessarily long without adding any greater understanding.

8.4 Members considered the background to the submission of previous Reports and agreed the content of the Report, as detailed and suggested in the Appendixes that had been prepared by the Secretariat. In summary, they agreed:

8.5 Volume 1 of the Report should comprise four sections which cover the following subjects:-

- **Section 1 – The Context:** an explanation of the statutory background to the review
- **Section 2 – The Policies:** an explanation of the policies adopted by the Commission, ahead of the publication of the Initial Proposals
- **Section 3 – The Process:** how the various stages of the review process worked, and refer, where applicable, to the relevant Commission policies. For example, how the Commission’s policy of not splitting wards in the absence of “exceptional and compelling circumstances” was applied in

practice. It would also confirm the various steps the Commission took to engage with the public and publicise its proposals

- **Section 4 – The Recommendations:** the decisions taken for each Region

- 8.6 Members discussed how the final recommendations should be described and decided that the detail of the text should be similar to that of the revised proposals reports. The starting point for each regional “chapter” would be the main issues for that region as outlined in their “covering notes” to the AC Reports which were contained in the revised proposal publications. They decided that the main issues raised in the representations should be identified and their decisions explained in full. Where necessary, they would refer back to the ACs’ reports where issues had previously been considered. It was agreed that convincing arguments would need to be advanced to persuade them to make alterations at this stage of the review. The final Report would not, therefore, just be a list of the constituencies that had been recommended; neither would it be a “stand alone” document.
- 8.7 Members noted that Volume 2 should continue to hold much of the “technical” information and, most importantly, the composition of the recommended constituencies.
- 8.8 The Secretariat had given some thought as to whether a fifth section should be included that would set out the Commission’s views on the Review itself: what had worked well, what could be improved and how, and any statutory changes that were considered necessary. Members considered that, given their unique perspective on the operation of the review, they should record their experiences in order to inform future reviews. However they agreed that it would not be appropriate for them to include any such “lessons learned” section in the body of the final Report. Instead, the provisional conclusion of Members was that the sponsor department might be the most appropriate recipient of a “lessons learned” report. Members decided to defer a final decision regarding to whom a “lessons learned” report should be submitted, and precisely when, until a later meeting.
- 8.9 Members also considered whether the existing constituencies should be mapped. The number of constituencies is being significantly reduced, they are undergoing considerable change, and attempting to make comparisons between the two constituency sets was likely to be both complex and of limited value. They therefore decided not to publish maps of the existing constituencies: to do so would not aid public understanding and would not represent value for money. With this change, and the changes recommended above, the Secretariat considered that it was likely that the number of map volumes will be reduced by one.
- 8.10 Volume 3 would therefore contain the maps of each finally recommended constituency. Members considered some mock-ups of “final recommendations” maps that had been prepared by Ordnance Survey. Each map had been reduced from A3 size (as at the fifth general Review) to A4 size. This would allow for two maps at A4 size to be printed on either side of an A3 sheet i.e. four A4 maps printed on a single A3 sheet. This would allow for 502 maps to be printed on just 126 sheets. Members considered that the proposed maps were of high quality and were fit for purpose and decided they would use this format for the map volume.

Submission of the final report

8.11 Members noted that Sections 3(5) and 3(5A) of the 1986 Act stated:-

“(5) As soon as may be after the submission of a report the Secretary of State shall lay the report before Parliament.”

“(5A) As soon as may be after the submission of all four reports the Secretary of State shall lay before Parliament the draft of an Order in Council for giving effect to the recommendations contained in them.”

8.12 The Secretary understood that the other three Commissions expect to submit their Reports towards the end of March or the beginning of April 2013: approximately five months before the Commission will deliver its own Report, which is expected to be in September. It was not clear when the Deputy Prime Minister will lay the other three reports after their submission – “as soon as may be” or when the English Report is submitted so that all four reports are laid together. It is possible that, given the political background now attached to the Reviews, he may delay laying the first three reports.

Other matters

8.13 Immediately prior to the submission of the final Report, and prior to its progress through Parliament, the Secretariat would need to be involved in a number of matters relating to the Report. A short paper covering these matters will be prepared for Members nearer to the time of submission. It was expected to touch on:-

- the proof reading of the Report, once it is typeset by The Stationery Office, and the draft Order in Council; and
- preparation of a briefing note about the Review to aid the sponsor division in briefing the Minister(s) taking the Report through Parliament.

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10. OTHER BUSINESS

Meeting of the UK Boundary Commissions in January 2013

- 10.1 The meeting would be held in Admiralty House on 17 January, with a dinner the evening before. Agenda items included a presentation on the Electoral Registration and Administration Bill and a presentation of the implications on the legislation linking Welsh Assembly and Parliamentary constituency boundaries.