

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 1 May 2012 at 10.00am.

Present:-

The Hon. Mr Justice Sales	Deputy Chairman
Mr N Pringle	Commissioner
Mr S D James	Secretary (Cabinet Office)
Mr A Bellringer	Secretariat “
Mr R Farrance	“
Mr G Reed	“
Mr S Hartley	“

Apologies were received from Mr Elvin who was unable to attend the meeting.

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 19 DECEMBER 2011
(BCE/2012/Paper 1)**

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

2. MATTERS ARISING SINCE 19 DECEMBER 2011 (BCE/2012/Paper 2)

Statutory Progress Report

2.1 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, and 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

2.2 The final part of the communications campaign for the secondary consultation had been completed. 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 there were two media requests for interviews or comments. Twitter was used to announce the start of secondary consultation and there are now over 250 followers. The digital media advertising, which involves buying key words and sponsored links in Google, remained in place until the secondary consultation ends.

- 2.3 The campaign for the initial proposals had been fully evaluated. Research had been undertaken on the secondary consultation campaign, but the analysis of the data would not take place until all the data from the final consultation was also available. The key outcomes of the evaluation were positive: the website was seen as very effective at getting the message across and the BCE was seen as independent and non-political. The outcomes will assist the Secretariat in planning the communications campaign for the revised proposals, although the funding for this will require approval from Cabinet Office before any work can be commissioned. Subject to approval, tendering for a range of suppliers to provide the services required to run the revised proposals campaign will be conducted in the summer.

Newsletter 01/2012

- 2.4 The Commission published its first Newsletter of 2012 on 31 January. Its primary purpose was to publicise for the first time the 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.
- 2.5 The Secretary reported that there had been some complaints about the decision not to place hard copies of the representations received during the initial consultation at places of deposit, but this had not been a significant issue. The Deputy Chairman asked that such issues be recorded so that reference could be made to them in the Commission's report to the Secretary of State.

Secondary consultation period

- 2.6 The secondary consultation period began on 6 March 2012 and closed on 3 April 2012. Over 9,000 representations were received during the consultation period, of which over 5,000 were unique representations (i.e. not part of a proforma letter campaign). The Secretariat provided a more detailed breakdown by region at the meeting, which Members noted.
- 2.7 The representations had been processed and categorised by the Secretariat, and were to be distributed to the regional AC teams on 4 May for their analysis. It was noted that in general the qualifying Political Parties had used the secondary consultation stage primarily to identify those representations that supported their initial proposals, rather than as an opportunity to question the proposals of the other Parties or individuals.
- 2.8 There had been 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 some of the concerns that had been raised and was particularly welcomed by MPs.

Financial outturn 2011/12

- 2.9 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 was not yet possible to provide the final outturn for the year, the current outturn is £2.768m, which represents a significant under spend of £475K. There were large under spends in several areas, but the largest under spend (£305K) was for the communications strategy. This was largely because the communications budget was originally set in August 2010, before the legislation had been published and the current communications strategy was established.
- 2.10 Members noted that the Secretariat had requested an extra £600K for the 2012/13 financial year, bringing the budget to £2,471K. The original budget of £1,871K was set in 2010 and the extra funding requested was more in line with what had actually been spent in 2011/12. Most of the extra required funding was for the work that ACs would be doing and for the communications strategy.
- 2.11 The Secretariat had yet to hear from the Finance Director that the extra funding would be provided. However, the Secretary confirmed to Members that the BCE's sponsor division was fully behind the request for extra funding.

2012 changes in electorates and wards

- 2.12 Members noted the revised electoral figures in the registers published on 1 December 2011, and the ward and Principal Area Boundary changes and reviews that were imminent.
- 2.13 Members noted that, as a result of local ward boundary changes and the introduction of individual voter registration, the next review of constituencies, rather than being straightforward with minimal changes being required to what would be the new constituencies at the 2015 general election, could be just as radical as the current Review. They asked that this point be borne in mind when preparations began for the 2018 Review.

Plans for revised proposals mapping

- 2.14 The Secretariat had 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.
- 2.15 Members considered and were satisfied with the examples of the proposed revised mapping that had been produced by Ordnance Survey.

3. PROGRAMME UPDATE (BCE/2012/Paper 3)

- 3.1 Members noted the Project Plan, Risk Register and Highlight Report which had been updated to take account of the latest planning events. However, as noted previously, there is still scope in the overall timetable to accommodate some slippage in the stages of the review if this became unavoidable. If there was a delay in the receipt and agreement of AC reports, the publication of the revised proposals might slip back to

early 2013, although that would be a last resort option. The Secretary confirmed that Revised Proposals are due to be published on 16 October but this could slip by one week and still allow for the consultation stage to be completed by Christmas. Even if the consultation included the Christmas period, it was not considered that this would be a critical problem, though clearly it would not be ideal and would be best avoided if at all possible.

- 3.2 Members agreed that when they considered the individual regional reports from ACs, each would take the lead in dealing with three regions at the meeting during the week commencing 23 July, though clearly all Members would join in the discussion and would take collective responsibility for agreeing (or, if required, rejecting) the AC reports.
- 3.3 Members also noted that a communications officer was due to join the Secretariat on 8 May to assist with the communications strategy.
- 3.5 Members received a brief, verbal update on the work that was underway between the AC teams and the Secretariat. Most of the teams had met with the Secretariat, had agreed ways of working, identified areas of interest for their region and had planned site visits. Several of the teams had made regular visits to 35 Great Smith Street and were well advanced in their discussions, with further meetings planned.
- 3.6 The Secretariat had begun to receive and approve claims for expenses and fees. Members considered the amounts paid thus far in light of their guidance to ACs on how to complete their work effectively and of ACs being reminded to bear in mind the need for the BCE to be able to demonstrate value for money. The Secretary said that he would continue to monitor the amount paid to ACs for fees and expenses and would report to Members by exception, as appropriate.
- 3.8 At the Deputy Chairman's request, Mr Hartley showed Members the draft evidence pack that the AC teams would be receiving at the end of the week.

4. ANNUAL REPORT 2011/12 (BCE/2012/Paper 4)

- 4.1 The BCE is an advisory Non-Departmental Public Body and although the Commission is not required to publish annual reports, it has done so since the 1997/98 financial year. Since the first annual report, Members have required that the reports should be brief and include details relating to:-
 - a) the sponsoring Department;
 - b) the Commission's remit and membership;
 - c) the budget; and
 - d) the work programme.
- 4.2 Members considered that, as there was a new statutory requirement on the Commission to provide an annual Progress Report to the Speaker of the House of Commons in January each year during a review period, there was little value in repeating this information in the Annual Report. They therefore decided that the Progress Report should be provided as an annex to the Annual Report.

- 4.3 The financial figures required for the budget and expenditure tables will be included once they have been agreed with the sponsor division of the Cabinet Office: this will probably be in mid May resulting in a likely publication of the Annual Report during June. The Secretariat noted an amendment to the draft requested by Mr Pringle and it was agreed that Members would consider the draft report and would provide the Secretariat with their amendments by 4 May 2012.
- 4.4 A copy of the report will be placed on the Commission's website. A hard copy will be sent only to the Speaker of the House of Commons, with interested stakeholders specifically notified by e-mail of the availability of the report on the website.

5. OTHER BUSINESS

- 5.1 The next scheduled meeting of the Commission would be in the week commencing 23 July 2012, during which Members would meet with each of the nine regional AC teams to discuss the reports that they would, by then, have submitted. The meetings would last all week and would provide the opportunity for Members to also consider a few papers regarding the practical arrangements for the publication of the Revised Proposals. It was agreed that no formal meeting before 23 July would be necessary.
- 5.2 The Secretary raised the issue of the analysis of the representations received in response to the Revised Proposals and whether it would be appropriate to retain some of the ACs to assist with this task. Members considered that in all likelihood they would not wish to pursue this option but that it was too soon to fully close down the option of using any further AC resource yet.