

MATTERS ARISING SINCE 26 JULY 2012

Political developments

1. In early August, Nick Clegg (Leader of the Liberal Democrats, and Deputy Prime Minister in the Coalition Government 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 the 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 seek to have them voted through when the time came.
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 amendment was put down in the name of peers from the Labour party, the Liberal Democrats, Plaid Cymru and the crossbenches. The strict effect of the amendment as currently worded would be to prevent a Boundary Commission from submitting a report before 1 October 2018. However, the authorities in the House of Lords (on the advice of the clerks), took the view that the amendment was inadmissible, as it was too far removed from the main purpose of the Bill. The Labour Party then secured legal advice that the amendment should indeed be admissible. Whilst this impasse remains, at the time of writing (late November) the House authorities have postponed further consideration on the Bill (currently in committee stage prior to returning to the Commons). It is not thought that the impasse can continue for much longer, as the main purpose of the Bill – the introduction of individual electoral registration – has a defined implementation timetable that will become increasingly jeopardised with further delay in the legislative phase.
3. If there are further developments prior to the meeting on 18 December, we will provide an oral update.

Finance update

4. The most recent forecast at the time of writing (covering actual expenditure up to the end of October) indicates that the BCE will have a significant under-spend by the end of the 2012-13 financial year. The main reasons for this are:
 - Communications and advertising costs will be considerably lower than first envisaged, partly due to not proceeding with radio advertisements for revised proposals and benefits that have been realised with the use of Williams Lea. The anticipated level of under-spend is currently estimated to be around £550,000;
 - Ordnance Survey costs are markedly lower than expected. It is clear that OS have been able to base much of the mapping for the revised proposals on the

earlier work they undertook on the initial proposals mapping. The under spend for the year is expected to be in the order of £100K.

5. A number of other areas are showing minor anticipated under or over-spends, but these broadly negate each others effects (e.g. circa £30k overspend on Assistant Commissioners 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 – see below).

Staffing update

6. Since July, four Review Officers have left the Secretariat. Whilst this is a relatively large percentage of the overall staff complement for an organisation this small, it coincides with the transfer of much of the labour-intensive quantitative logging of consultation responses to an external processing centre. In light of the low rate of response to the consultation on the revised proposals, and the generally limited complexity of those responses received, it has also been determined that there will be insufficient work to justify filling the Review Team Manager vacancy that the Secretariat had been carrying since September. The senior management team are content that the remaining complement of Secretariat staff is adequate to meet the demands of the remainder of the current Review. An up-to-date organisational chart for the Secretariat is attached at Appendix A.
7. Additionally, work has 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 as soon as that analysis has been completed in the New Year.

Office move

8. With the continuing rationalisation of the Government's estate, arrangements have been made for the BCE to be relocated from 35 Great Smith Street. A move date has been agreed, so Commissioners are asked to note that **from 14 January 2013:**
 - the BCE's new office address will be **1 Horse Guards Road, London, SW1A 2HQ;**
 - it is anticipated that telephone numbers will remain unchanged though there will be some minor changes to email addresses. A full contact list will be circulated to Commissioners in January.
9. The new accommodation is 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 has 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.

