

Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland



ANNUAL REPORT

2015 - 2016

Deputy Chairman's Report

The Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland was brought out of abeyance on 16 November 2015 by the Secretary of State to commence work on the 2018 Review of Parliamentary Constituencies. It is my great honour to be appointed as Deputy Chairman for the period of this Review and I am grateful to be joined by my Commissioner colleagues, Dr Bill Smith and Ms Sarah Havlin.

During the relatively short period that this report covers, the Commission has commenced the development of a range of modelling options which take account of the legislative requirement to reduce the number of Parliamentary constituencies in Northern Ireland from 18 to 17. This period also saw the appointment of Mr Eamonn McConville as Secretary to the Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland in November 2015 and the start of the process to re-establish a fully operational Secretariat.

The Commission's Provisional Proposals will be published in the autumn of 2016 followed by any Revised Proposals during 2017. I look forward to presenting the Secretary of State with the Commission's Final Recommendations during September 2018.

The Hon Madam Justice McBride
Deputy Chairman

October 2016

1. The Commission

1.1 Background

The Boundary Commission is an independent, advisory non-departmental public body sponsored and funded by the Northern Ireland Office. The Commission is constituted under the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986, as amended by the Boundary Commissions Act 1992 and the Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Act 2011.

The Commission's role is to keep under continuous review the number, names and boundaries of the Parliamentary constituencies into which Northern Ireland is divided and to make recommendations about these to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. Reviews are carried out every 5 years.

1.2 Membership

Appointments to the Commission are made under Schedule 1 of the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986 which specifies that the Chairman of the Commission is the Speaker of the House of Commons, as is the case for the Parliamentary Boundary Commissions in England, Scotland and Wales.

The 1986 Act specifies that the Commission's membership comprises a Chairman, Deputy Chairman and two further Commissioners. The Chairman is the Speaker of the House of Commons. The Deputy Chairman of the Commission is a judge of the High Court appointed by the Lord Chief Justice of Northern Ireland. The other two Commissioners are appointed by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland through a public appointments process. The Commission is supported in its work by four statutory assessors and a small Secretariat.

For the 2018 Review, the Commission comprises:

Chairman: The Speaker of the House of Commons

Deputy Chairman: The Hon Madam Justice McBride

Commissioners: Ms Sarah Havlin
Dr William Smith

Assessors: Mr Graham Shields,
Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland;

Mr Alan Brontë,
Commissioner of Valuation for Northern Ireland;

Mr John Deyermond
Chief Survey Officer of Land and Property Services

Mr Jos Ijpelaar*,
Registrar General of Births & Deaths in Northern Ireland;

Secretary: Mr Eamonn McConville

* Since a new Registrar General had not been appointed, Mr Jos Ijpelaar represented that Office during the period of this report.

1.3 Meetings

The Commission met on two occasions during the period covered by this report (i.e. between 1 April 2015 and 31 March 2016).

On 18 November 2015, the Deputy Chairman, Dr Bill Smith and the Secretary to the Commission attended the annual meeting of UK Boundary Commissions which was held in the House of Commons, Westminster. The meeting provided an excellent opportunity for the Commissions to update each other on their respective work programmes, discuss matters of mutual interest and learn from each other's experience.

1.4 Code of Practice

The Commissioners' Code of Practice is available on the Boundary Commission website (www.boundarycommission.org.uk) or a copy can be provided on request.

1.5 Register of Members' Interests

The Commission maintains an up to date Register of Members' Interests, in accordance with the Code of Practice, which is open to the public.

1.6 Secretariat

Mr Eamonn McConville is the Secretary to the Commission. He has been in post since his appointment on 16 November 2015, in accordance with paragraph 7 of Schedule 1 to the Parliamentary Constituencies Act.

Recruitment of staff to the Boundary Commission secretariat commenced in December 2015 in readiness for the 2018 Review of Parliamentary constituency boundaries. The full complement of staff for the 2018 Review will be as follows:

Post	Full-time Equivalent
Secretary	1
Deputy Secretary	1
Office Manager	1
Administrative Officer	1

The work of the Secretariat will include:

- facilitating Commissioners' work on ongoing boundary reviews, including the consultation process;
- dealing with administrative matters such as finance, procurement and accommodation;
- liaising with other UK Commissions and government departments with an interest in boundary matters;
- responding to queries and correspondence concerning boundary issues.
- maintaining the Commission's [website](#).

2. Governance

2.1 Legislation

The work of the Commission is governed by the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986, as amended. The current text of the legislation is available on www.boundarycommission.org.uk, or a copy can be provided on request.

On 16 February 2011, the Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Act 2011 received Royal Assent, after its passage through the United Kingdom Parliament. Part 2 of the Act substantially amended the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986 which governs the reviews of Westminster constituencies. The amended legislation introduced considerable changes to the rules, process and timing of reviews. It also reduced the total number of constituencies in the United Kingdom from 650 to 600.

The amended rules introduce a strict requirement that the electorate of each constituency should be within 5% of the UK electoral quota. The Commission expects that this requirement will result in considerable changes to the existing constituencies in Northern Ireland. Exceptions are made for four protected island constituencies in Scotland and England and for any constituency larger than 12,000 square kilometres (of which Northern Ireland has none). Rule 7 of the legislation allows the Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland to define constituencies with electorates which vary by more than 5% from the UK electoral quota where the Commission is satisfied that the application of the electoral range would unreasonably impair their ability to apply discretionary factors or would jeopardise their reporting deadline.

The Commission announced the start of the 2018 Review of Parliamentary Constituencies on 24 February 2016. The legislation specifies that Public Hearings are held during a 12 week consultation period on Initial (Provisional) Proposals. The hearings will happen during October 2016 and will provide another means for people to make representations on our proposals, in addition to the opportunity to submit a representation in writing, via email, or via a dedicated consultation tool on the Commission's [website](#).

Following this initial consultation period, the Commission will publish all representations received, including transcripts of the Public Hearings, for a further, secondary consultation period lasting for four weeks. This will allow others to comment on the representations which have been made.

The Commission is required to report on its final recommendation of Parliamentary constituencies before 1 October 2018.

2.2 Framework Document

The Commission operates in accordance with a Framework Document which outlines the respective roles of the Commission and the Northern Ireland Office and the governance arrangements between them. The document is currently under review and when agreed will be made available on our website.

2.3 Data Protection

Our handling of personal information under Data Protection legislation is covered by the Commission's registration with the Information Commissioner's Office. Our Publication Scheme sets out our privacy policy for handling any personal information contained in representations we receive.

3. Enquiries and Information

The Commission uses its website and Twitter as channels to inform the public about our work. In addition, the Secretariat responds to requests for information made by email, letter or phone.

3.1 Enquiries

The Commission has a Freedom of Information policy which incorporates the Information Commissioner's Office model Publication Scheme for public bodies under the Freedom of Information Act 2000. The Commission's Policy and Publication Scheme are available on its website, or a copy can be provided on request.

During 2015-16, the Secretariat received and responded to a small number of enquiries relating mainly to the work of the Commission, the timing of the review and the information/maps that would be published. Three requests for information were made under the Freedom of Information Act. No requests for review or appeals to the Information Commissioner's Office were made regarding the handling of these information requests. Enquiries are reviewed to assess any areas for improvement.

3.2 Website

The Commission's website is the primary means of making information available to the public. A range of information is published on the website including relevant legislation, a guide to the review, press releases, all relevant Boundary Commission reports together with copies of constituency maps. The Commission has also introduced a Twitter account ([@BCNI2018](https://twitter.com/BCNI2018)) to help us reach a wider audience.

3.3 Review Information

During the 2018 Review, the Commission will publish information on proposals (including maps) on its website and at local display points, including council headquarters, public libraries, Electoral Area Offices and the offices of the Electoral Commission. Following public consultations, the Commission will publish all representations received and transcripts of public hearings. The Commission will also produce a Guide to the 2018 Review which will be available on its website or on request.

4 The 2018 Review of Parliamentary Constituencies

On 24 February 2016 the Commission announced the start of the 2018 Review of Parliamentary Constituencies in Northern Ireland, which will be the first review to be completed and implemented under the amended legislation passed by Parliament.

As a result of that legislation, the number of constituencies in the United Kingdom will reduce from 650 to 600. The number of constituencies allocated to each of the four parts of the United Kingdom is calculated using the respective Parliamentary electorates as of 1 December 2015. As a result of that calculation, there will be 17 constituencies in Northern Ireland, a reduction from the current 18. We expect to publish our Provisional Proposals for public consultation in September 2016.

In the period to end March 2016, the Commissioners commenced their work on modelling a range of options for constituencies which meet the requirements of the amended legislation.

5 Other activities

5.1 Accommodation and IT provision

During the period of abeyance the NIO moved the Commission offices from Forest View to the Bungalow, Stormont House, Stormont Estate, Belfast BT4 3SH. This has resulted in saving in terms of accommodation costs.

For the 2018 Review the Commission is utilising the comprehensive service provided by IT Assist for all IT and telephony requirements. Additionally, in negotiation with Land & Property Services, we have secured use of GIS technology for mapping purposes and support services to ensure best use of the functionality that this offers.

5.2 Risk Management

We have developed a Risk Management framework which we keep under continuous review.

5.3 Staffing and training

Training needs for new staff will be identified and met during the coming year to equip them for all duties associated with the 2018 Review.

5.4 Liaison with others

5.4.1 Northern Ireland Office

We have regular contact and dialogue with the Northern Ireland Office as our sponsoring department.

5.4.2 Other Boundary Commissions

The Commission maintains regular contact with the other UK Boundary Commissions on matters of mutual interest. The Commission attended the annual meeting of UK Boundary Commissions in London on 18 November 2015, and is scheduled to host the 2016 meeting in Belfast in December 2016.

5.4.3 Land and Property Services

The Commission has regular contact with Land and Property Services (LPS) including access to the mapping and charting staff; mapping data products; and GIS products needed to support the 2018 Review. The Commission also benefits from technical advice provided by LPS in the deployment of these products.

5.4.4 Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency

The Commission liaises with staff of the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) in relation to the provision of advice on statistical, geo-statistical and mathematical matters.

5.4.5 The Electoral Office for Northern Ireland

The Commission liaises with staff of the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland in relation to information and advice on electoral registers required for the 2018 Review.

6. Expenditure

The Commission incurred the following provisionally calculated expenditure in the financial year 2015-2016. Expenditure was low for the majority of the financial year as the Boundary Commission had been placed in abeyance following the aborted Sixth Review.

Expenditure 2015/16

	(£k)
Staff Costs:	
Salaries & related costs	38.0
Commissioners' costs:	
Members' attendance allowances	20.8
Members travelling & other expenses	0.8
Accommodation & Related Costs	14.8
Non-Staff Costs:	
Travel & Other Expenses	2.4
IT & telephony	0.6
Stationery & postage	0.8
Depreciation	2.4
Total	80.6

7. Further information

If you have a query which cannot be answered by this report or from the Commission's website www.boundarycommission.org.uk please contact us either by email, telephone or in writing at:

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