

Boundary Commission for Scotland

Minutes of Meeting held at Thistle House, Edinburgh

Thursday 13 April 2017

Present

The Hon Lord Matthews, Deputy Chairman
Professor Ailsa Henderson, Commissioner
Mrs Paula Sharp, Commissioner

Isabel Drummond-Murray, Secretary
Laura Cregan, Secretariat
David Logue, Secretariat
Colin Wilson, Secretariat

Apologies

Mr Tim Ellis, Registrar General, National Records of Scotland
Ms Michaela Gordon, Ordnance Survey, Assessor

Declarations of Interest

1. There were no declarations of interest.

Minutes of the previous meeting

2. The minutes of the 17 February 2017 meeting were agreed without amendment.

Matters arising

3. The Secretary advised the Commission that she would discuss equality issues with the Equality Unit at the Scottish Government in order to ensure the Commission's approach was up to date and reflected best practice. She advised that she would also discuss equality issues with the Local Government Boundary Commission for England at a meeting later this month to consider their work on equality following the UK Commission's meeting in Belfast.
4. The Secretary advised the Commission that there is no date yet for the Committee stage of Pat Glass MP's Private Member's Bill, "Parliamentary Constituencies (Amendment) Bill 2016-17". The Secretary will continue to update the Commission on the Bill's progress.
5. The Secretary advised the Commission that the 2016 electorate data for Scotland has now been published.
6. The Secretary advised the Commission that she would circulate the latest copy of the Memorandum of Understanding between the Commission and the Scotland Office. The Commission noted that it did not plan to adopt the

Memorandum of Understanding until after the transfer of responsibility for Scottish Parliament Reviews to the Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland (LGBCS) had taken place.

7. The Secretariat presented the Commission with an oral update on the Corporate Plan. The Secretariat advised that the final budgeting for 2017 -18 depends on the timescale for the transfer of responsibility for Scottish Parliament Reviews and the implications of subsequent decisions on this by LGBCS. The budget would therefore be kept under review. The Commission has been allocated £400,000 by the Scotland Office and on the basis of current forecasts spend is estimated at £290,000. Refresh of the Commissions' websites remains a priority which, depending on funding availability from LGBCS, may proceed this financial year.
8. The Commission discussed how the estimated costs for its consultation portal had varied through the financial year. The Secretariat advised the Commission that there is a possibility that VAT may be applied to recharges paid by the Scotland Office to the Scottish Government, which could increase the Commission's costs. The Secretariat has requested guidance from the Scotland Office sponsor department on the matter
9. The Commission discussed the scheduling of its planned August meeting. The Secretary will co-ordinate with Commissioners to arrange a suitable date.
10. The Commission discussed its approach to minuting decisions on its proposals for constituencies in order to facilitate writing of the final report of the 2018 Review

Business Update

11. The Secretary advised the Commission that responsibility for Scottish Parliament reviews is likely to be transferred to the LGBCS in May.
12. The Secretary advised the Commission that Tim Ellis, Registrar General of National Records of Scotland had suggested delegating attendance at meetings, depending on the agenda, to NRS colleagues who may be able to bring more technical expertise. The Commission agreed this would be acceptable and asked the Secretary to discuss further with NRS.

2018 Review – Secondary Consultation Update (Paper 2017/59)

13. The Commission noted the number and character of the responses it had received during the secondary consultation. It noted in particular that some respondents had suggested changes to its Initial Proposals based on 2017 Local Government ward boundaries, as opposed to the ward boundaries in place at the commencement of the 2018 Review. The Commission discussed this and noted that according to the legislation governing the Review, it may take into account, if and to such extent it sees fit, local government

boundaries in use at the last local government election prior to the commencement of the Review; however, the Commission also agreed that it would consider suggestions made in response to its consultations to use the 2017 boundaries, but do so on the merits of these boundaries being better indicators of local ties, rather than because they are the boundaries in place from the local elections on 4th May 2017 onwards.

14. The Commission asked the Secretariat to consider handling and presentation of suggestions made which lie out-with the scope of the legislation as it pertains to the Review.
15. The Commission expressed concern that the proposed timetable for papers on Revised Proposals was ambitious and agreed this should be kept under review. It also noted that the counts of responses in Appendix A do not always agree with those in the body of the text. The Secretariat explained the reasons for this, and will clarify where totals include responses which cover multiple areas.

Consideration of Revised Proposals East Lothian council area (Paper 2017/60)

16. The Commission noted the lack of opposition to its Initial Proposals for a constituency which exactly covers East Lothian Council area. The Commission agreed to adopt its Initial Proposals for East Lothian council area as its Revised Proposals, taking into account: the lack of opposition; that it takes account of local government boundaries by aligning with the boundaries of East Lothian Council area; that the proposed electorate of the constituency is within 5% of the UK electoral quota, and that it has no impact on the grouping of neighbouring council areas.

Consideration of Revised Proposals Midlothian and Scottish Borders (Paper 2017/61)

17. The Commission noted the low number of responses to its consultation on its Initial Proposals for Midlothian and Scottish Borders council areas.
18. The Commission noted that some responses objected to the Initial Proposals due to there being no ties between Midlothian council area and Peebles. The Commission did not agree that there were no ties between these areas, noting, for example, the links between Penicuik and Peebles.
19. The Commission noted that some respondents argued that the Initial Proposals broke ties within the Tweed Valley. The Commission agreed to adopt as its Revised Proposals for Midlothian and Scottish Borders council areas an option (Appendix B1) which amends the Initial Proposals in the Tweed Valley by including Cardrona within the proposed Midlothian and Peebles constituency to reflect its ties with Peebles. The Commission noted that it could not also incorporate Innerleithen or Walkerburn within

- Midlothian and Peebles constituency without breaching the maximum number of electors permitted by the legislation for this review.
20. The Commission noted that the all-Scotland suggestion it had received was the same as the one it had considered at its meeting in August 2016 (Paper 2016/28 Option 3), which may have adversely affected local ties around Galashiels.
 21. The Commission considered whether it should change the name of its proposed Midlothian and Peebles constituency as a result of adding Cardrona. It decided that the existing name reflected its policy of preferring constituency names which are short rather than attempt to describe an area exhaustively.

Consideration of Revised Proposals Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire, Angus and Dundee council areas (Paper 2017/62)

22. The Commission noted the number of responses objecting to its Initial Proposals for the inclusion of Banchory in Kincardine and Angus East constituency, preferring that the town be included in a constituency with the rest of Deeside. The Commission noted that no alternative suggestions had been submitted as to how this could be achieved given the maximum number of electors permitted in a constituency. The Commission also noted that there had been few responses which related to other areas within the council area grouping.
23. The Commission considered that Option 1 presented more of an improvement to its Initial Proposals than Option 2, because it minimises change to Banff and Buchan constituency and better reflects local ties to the north of Aberdeen.
24. The Commission considered that Option 3 does not reflect local ties outside Aberdeen City council area. The Commission deferred consideration of Option 3 with respect to Aberdeen City council area because it relies upon there being 2 constituencies which wholly cover the boundaries of Aberdeen City council area. The Commission intends to decide this taking into account the effect on constituencies in the rest of the council area grouping.
25. The Commission asked the Secretariat to present a paper at its next meeting which included variants of Option 1, with a view to incorporating as much of Deeside as possible within Gordon and Deeside constituency; without causing excessive disruption to local ties in Peterculter or Angus.

Finance update (Paper 2017/63)

16. The Secretariat provided an update on the Commission's finances for 2016-17. The Commission noted the reasons for the variances between spending and budget forecasts.

Any other business

17. There was no other business.

Secretariat

April 2017