

Annual meeting of the UK Boundary Commissions

Action required

1. The Commission is invited to offer suggestions for the timing, format and content of the annual meeting of the UK Boundary Commissions.

Background

2. The UK Boundary Commissions meet annually to discuss matters of common interest and the hosting of the meeting rotates between the 4 countries of the United Kingdom. Last year the meeting was held in Cardiff and the Commission was represented by Professor Henderson. When it is Scotland's turn the event is jointly hosted by BCS and LGBCS; it was last held in Edinburgh in 2014 and is due to be hosted by the Scottish Commissions in 2018.
3. The agenda for the Edinburgh meeting in 2014 is set out in Appendix A. This follows a common format used by all Commissions of a dinner, overnight stay, and a meeting scheduled to finish mid-afternoon. At least one guest speaker is invited. If there is any suitable opportunity identified, then a tour or visit is arranged before the dinner. In 2014 some attendees went on a tour of the Scottish Parliament.

Suggestions for 2018

Agenda

4. It is envisaged the agenda will follow the standard format. The weakness of this is finding topics of interests to all attendees, from both local government and parliamentary commissions. Discussion on effective consultation may be something worth returning to as all Commissions look to maximise the impact of their consultation processes. As the 4 parliamentary Commissions will have submitted their reports in September it may also be worth having a session on latest state of play with their implementation; and lessons learned from the 2018 Review. This might be preferable to a round table update from the Parliamentary Commissions as we will all be at the same stage of the post-Review process.

Timing

5. Securing a date may be the most challenging issue and the Secretariat suggests either 15/16 or 22/23 November for the dinner/meeting. If these dates also suit LGBCS then the other Commissions will be asked for a preference as well as an indication of numbers attending as this has a bearing on subsequent decisions about meeting and dinner venues.

Venue

6. In 2014 the Carlton Highland Hotel on North Bridge was used for the dinner, accommodation and meeting. This was cost effective but perhaps did not maximise the opportunity for the other Commissions to see more of Edinburgh. The Secretariat suggests it may be more interesting to use different venues. For example the Dome at New Register House can accommodate 24 attendees boardroom style or 36 cabaret style; is centrally located; and is available for either November day at a cost of £100 (catering is available for lunch but would be an additional cost).

7. There are a number of options for dinner including a dinner/accommodation package at a hotel or separate venues for each. The Secretariat explored the cost of Edinburgh Castle as a dinner venue – the standard cost of this was expensive but it may be possible to explore whether a discount is available if the dinner was to be hosted via Scottish Government. Other public sector venues include National Museums of Scotland or the Royal Botanic Gardens Edinburgh which both have meeting room and dinner options. Hotel costs are met by each Commission individually but are expected to fall within normal civil service rates. The Secretariat would look to identify an appropriate hotel and responsibility for booking would be for the other Commissions.

Visits

8. The previous tour of the Parliament was well-received but it may be too soon to run this again. If the dinner were to be held in a suitable venue then that in itself may provide a focus for a visit, for example Edinburgh Castle. The map library at the National Library of Scotland is interesting and a visit there could be explored.

Dinner Guests

9. The Commission will wish to consider invitees for the dinner. In 2014 the Director of our sponsor Department, the Scotland Office, attended as did the Scottish Government Minister for Local Government. It may be appropriate to invite the Secretary of State for Scotland.

Guest speakers

10. The Commission are invited to consider any options for guest speaker(s). Suggestions are also being sought from LGBCS. Possible subjects for discussion include: consultation approaches; mapping; use of technology/digital advances; or Scottish Government's electoral reform consultation.

Conclusion

11. At this stage it would be helpful for the Commission to confirm preferences for dates and discuss general approach to the meeting. It is open to us to propose changes to the standard agenda for example starting the meeting at lunchtime and concluding with dinner and overnight stay. However, views from the other Commissions suggest there is no great push to change the usual format and a lunchtime start may make travel arrangements harder for some attendees. On the other hand concluding with the dinner after the business has been conducted has some merit.
12. LGBCS is meeting on 22 May and will also be asked to make suggestions before any arrangements are finalised.

AGENDA
Annual Meeting of the UK Boundary Commissions

Carlton Hotel, North Bridge, Edinburgh
Wednesday 19 – Thursday 20 November 2014

Wednesday 19 November 2014

Scottish Parliament tour – 3.45pm meet for 4pm start
Pre-dinner drinks – 7pm
Dinner – 7.30pm

Thursday 20 November 2014

9.30	Introduction – Ronnie Hinds – Chair, LGBCS
9.40	Reports from the Parliamentary Boundary Commissions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • England • Northern Ireland • Scotland • Wales
10.05	Reports from the Local Government Boundary Commissions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wales • Scotland • England
10.30	Tea and coffee
11.00	Discussion session to be chaired by Isabel Drummond-Murray, Secretary to the Scottish Boundary Commissions. Triennial Review of Parliamentary Boundary Commissions led by Kathryn Fairhurst of the Cabinet Office. Web-based consultation led by Informed Solutions. The best way for Commissions to use Social Media led by Jolyon Jackson, Chief Executive Designate of the LGBCE. Parliamentary Inquiry into constituency design led by Tony Bellringer, Secretary to the BCE.
12.30	Lunch
13.30	Guest speaker Professor John Curtice, University of Strathclyde The Scottish Independence Referendum and its consequences
15.00	Any other business
15.30	Close of the meeting