

UK COMMISSIONS' ANNUAL MEETING: 2018

Purpose

1. This paper provides a report of the annual meeting of the UK commissions held on 1-2 November in Edinburgh and considers arrangements for future meetings.

Discussion

2. A summary note of the 2018 meeting is at Appendix A. This is intended for internal use only (notes are not generally provided by host Commissions to attendees). Feedback received suggests that people felt the meeting went well. Copies of the presentations by Professor Pattie, University of Sheffield, and Sam Hartley, BCE, have been circulated to Commissioners separately.
3. Two specific action points arose. The first related to a coordinated approach by Parliamentary Commissions to set out views on future legislative change to their Chair who is the Speaker of the House of Commons. The Secretary will progress this with the other UK Commissions once there is greater clarity over next steps following the 2018 review.
4. The second action point committed Commissions to agreeing a way forward with regard to future annual meetings by Spring 2019 and this is discussed further below.

Future meetings

5. The acting Secretary of the Boundary Commission for England, Tony Bellringer, raised the question of the arrangements for future meetings including hosting and costs. BCE are due to host in 2019 but as they, along with all other Parliamentary Commissions, are not expected to be in review mode they will have limited staff resource and limited budget availability. BCE raised two questions: first the value of the meetings - do participants find them worthwhile and could the benefits be maximised by different logistical arrangements eg how often they are held and who should attend in terms of numbers and mix of Commissioners and staff? Second, if they are considered worthwhile how best should they be paid for?
6. Traditionally hosting rotates between the 4 countries. Unlike Wales and Scotland where there are shared Secretariats, in England LGBCE and BCE operate entirely separately and alternate hosting ie each hosts once every 8 years. Costs picked up by the host nation/organisation cover venue hire for dinner and meeting and costs for the dinner and refreshments during the meeting including lunch. Costs incurred by BCS in 2018 are set out in Appendix B.
7. The Secretary to the Welsh Commissions spoke at the meeting in favour of continued meetings. This was endorsed by LGBCE. BCNI also appeared to recognise the value in continuing not least because of their lack of continuity at Secretariat level. That said, the issues raised by BCE need to be considered as the question of the annual meetings and how to maximise the benefit from them is a perennial one. The cost issues for BCE and the fact they are due to host while not in review mode bring these into particular focus for 2019.

8. The principal benefit from the meeting would appear to be the opportunity to discuss review approaches and progress, and the wider political context within which each Commission works, within a fairly informal structure. The dinner and meeting both allow opportunity to engage with counterparts from across the UK and this strengthens relationships and helps provide support and challenge. However, it could be argued that there is less to be gained by local government and parliamentary commissions interacting and this is perhaps felt more keenly in England where there is no joint Secretariat function. That said, LGBCE seem to recognise learning across Commissions, and all Commissions do share some common challenges and these include effective consultation and engagement, technical challenges, use of GIS and IT. Structuring the agenda around those common themes may improve the relevance for all.

Next steps

9. Assuming the Commission sees value in continuing to attend or host an annual meeting there are options to be considered:
 - a. BCE and LGBCE could co-host and share the cost between their two commissions which might solve the immediate challenge for BCE
 - b. The event could be run as a conference with delegates being invoiced for attendance to include dinner, accommodation and the meeting. This would mean each Commission would pay its own way and contribute more if more representatives attended.
 - c. The current arrangements could continue but on a bi-annual basis
 - d. The hosting schedule could be altered so BCE host when the Parliamentary Commissions are in review mode (essentially three out of every 5 years)
 - e. The event could become a meeting only with no dinner and accommodation arranged by the host – if any attendees required to stay overnight in order to make the meeting then this would be met under normal travel and subsistence rules.
10. Aside from the annual meeting of UK Commissions the Secretariat have benefitted from visits to LGBCE in 2017 and LDBCW/BCW in 2018 to discuss organisational issues as well as approach to reviews. Such discussions might usefully continue on an ad hoc basis outwith the annual meeting schedule or be formalised into a regular meeting between the three local government commissions.

Conclusion

11. The Commission is invited to consider the future of its participation in annual commission meetings, in particular the value of the meetings, their cost-effectiveness and any proposals for change. The Secretariat would then propose to share BCS views with the other Commissions and offer to collate opinions with a view to agreeing a way forward for 2019 by next April.

**COST SUMMARY FOR ANNUAL UK BOUNDARY COMMISSIONS MEETING,
NOVEMBER 2018**

SHARED COSTS (BCS/LGBCS)			
Item	Participants	Cost per person	Total
Tour of Edinburgh Castle	11	£0	£0
Dinner including room hire	29	£62.40	£1810
Meeting including room hire, lunch and coffees	25 (including guest speaker)	£56	£1400
Travel expenses guest speaker	1	£122.90	£122.90
		Total cost	£3332.90
		BCS share	£1666.45

BCS-ONLY COSTS			
Commissioner fees	1	£758.25	£758.25
Secretariat t&s (50%)	1	£10.59	£10.59
		BCS - only	£768.84

TOTAL	£2435.29
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It did not prove possible to find suitable accommodation offering dinner, accommodation and meeting room provision which would probably have been more cost effective than use of 2 hotels.