

2023 Review of UK Parliament Constituencies Preparation for Secondary Consultation and Public Hearings

Action required

1. The Commission is invited to consider its approach for the 2023 Review secondary consultation and locations for its public hearings.

Background

2. For the 2023 Review the secondary consultation is to run for a six-week period. The Commission must publish all comments received during the initial consultation period for further comment and hold between 2 – 5 public hearings.
3. All responses to the initial consultation will be redacted and published on the Commission's consultation site.
4. The public hearings are chaired by a Sheriff Principal and verbatim reporters transcribe each hearing.
5. During previous reviews the public hearings were held during the initial consultation stage.
6. During the 2018 Review, 71 people attended the five public hearings (Ayr, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Inverness and Dundee) with 63 making verbal comments. Attendees were mainly elected officials.

Timing of the secondary consultation period

7. The Commission will wish to consider and agree the timing of its secondary consultation.
8. The Boundary Commission for England and Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland will commence their secondary consultation in February 2022. The Boundary Commission for Wales are to consult from early January 2022.
9. The Commission may wish to conclude the consultation before the Easter holidays (Easter Sunday is 17 April 2022) and purdah period before the 5 May 2022 local government elections. The six-week purdah period will begin on 24 March 2022.
10. 10 February 2022 is the latest start date to conclude the six-week consultation before the purdah period commences on 24 March. The consultation could start earlier but this depends on the number of responses received during the initial consultation period and the time needed for the Secretariat redact all the comments received during the initial consultation. The Commission may wish to consider publishing consultation responses before the secondary consultation commences, to enable stakeholders to study the initial consultation comments in good time prior to the public hearings, but this is discussed later in this paper under Public Hearing Timing.
11. The Commission could defer the secondary consultation until after the May elections and still conclude the 2023 Review by the 1 July 2023 statutory deadline. This could offer a potential advantage in that hearings could be held in spring when the risk of Covid restrictions may be less but may add pressure to other Secretariat work commitments. Boundaries Scotland are likely to begin their second review of Scottish Parliament boundaries in late 2022, although no start date has been officially agreed yet.

Public Hearing Locations

12. The Commission will wish to consider and agree the number and locations of its public hearings based on comments from the initial consultation. An oral summary of consultation responses received so far will be provided at the 22 November meeting and this may give a steer as to where the hearings should be held. Other considerations include central locations with good transport links to maximise participation.
13. The table below offers some suggested locations for public hearings and the council area groupings nearest to their location.

Location	Council area grouping
Edinburgh	East Lothian, City of Edinburgh, Midlothian
Glasgow	Glasgow City, Inverclyde, Renfrewshire Ayrshires (North, South, East) East Renfrewshire
Aberdeen and/or Inverness	Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire, Argyll and Bute, Highland and Moray
Lanark, Hamilton or Motherwell	Dumfries and Galloway, North Lanarkshire, South Lanarkshire, East Dunbartonshire, West Dunbartonshire and Scottish Borders
Dundee, Dunfermline, Perth or Stirling	Fife, Perth and Kinross, Clackmannanshire, Falkirk, Stirling, Angus, Dundee City and West Lothian

14. During the 2018 Review, the Commission held five public hearings in Ayr, Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow and Inverness. During the Commission's 6th Review five public hearings were held in Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Inverness and Lanark.
15. The Commission may wish to consider venues spread across different Sheriffdoms, so that a different Sheriff Principal is responsible for each Public Hearing. There are six Sheriffdoms in Scotland: Glasgow and Strathkelvin; Grampian, Highland and Islands; Lothian and Borders; North Strathclyde; South Strathclyde, Dumfries and Galloway; Tayside, Central and Fife. See Appendix A for a map of Sheriffdoms and the Commissions council area groupings.
16. The Secretariat will plan to make initial contact with Sheriff Principals later this year to seek their availability in February and March 2022. Supporting materials will be sent to each Sheriff Principal beforehand to explain their role at each hearing.
17. Attendees do not have to comment on an area where the public hearing is being held. For example during the 2018 Review, MSPs commented at the Edinburgh public hearing on the Commission's proposals in Aberdeenshire and Perthshire.

Public Hearing Timing

18. During the 2018 Review the public hearings were scheduled for two days and started at 11am. All of the public hearings were concluded within a single day, lasting between 1 to 4 hours.
19. The Commission will wish to consider holding its public hearings in a morning, afternoon or evening. MPs or MSPs may prefer a morning hearing to enable them to travel to Parliament for voting later in the day. Evening meetings may be

easier for those working during the day but perhaps more challenging for those with caring responsibilities.

20. Additionally, the Commission could host an informal daytime or evening road-show on the same day as the Hearing with proposals on display and with Secretariat staff available to discuss and explain the proposed boundaries. A road-show could be more accessible for those working 9-5, may help raise public awareness and provide a less formal environment to submit comments. Facilities such as access to the Commission's consultation site could be made available or a post-box for written submissions.
21. Some political parties will wish to review all the initial consultation comments before attending the public hearings. Therefore it may be desirable to host the public hearings later in the consultation period, in the second, third or fourth week of the six-week secondary consultation. The Boundary Commission for England and Boundary Commission for Wales expect to publish their initial consultation responses at least one or two weeks before their secondary consultations begin.
22. The availability of Sheriff Principals and suitable accommodation to host an event during the daytime and evening will also need to be considered.
23. Evening public hearings may require some overnight accommodation for Secretariat staff.

Covid issues

24. The Boundary Commission for England have sought legal advice on holding virtual hearings. The Deputy Chairs of each Commission are meeting on 18 November and a verbal update from that meeting will be provided at the 22 November Commission meeting.
25. The Secretariat will monitor protocols for holding public meetings over the next 2 to 3 months and venue managers will offer advice to ensure the hearings are held safely. Larger venues may be preferred to allow more space for attendees.
26. Attendees will be invited to contact the Secretariat or a ticketing website such as Eventbrite beforehand to book a time slot to speak at each hearing. An attendee booking system will allow the Secretariat to manage numbers and ensure any Covid safety measures are met.
27. Secretariat staff could travel separately to avoid the possible risk of spreading Covid.
28. The possibility of a reserve Sheriff Principal could be investigated to ensure each hearing proceeds, even if a Sheriff Principal is self-isolating.

Equality issues

29. Public hearing venues will be selected to ensure they are accessible for all users.
30. Those making a statement will be invited to speak in English. Those wishing to speak in other languages will be invited to submit a written statement as well so it can be translated.
31. The booking system referred to in paragraph 26 could allow participants to inform the Secretariat of any specific needs in advance.
32. Evening and daytime sessions will allow more opportunity for those with caring or other responsibilities to attend a hearing.

Public Hearing Statement

33. At the 2018 Review Public Hearings, a Sheriff Principal provided some brief background to the review and hearing before the Secretary read a 10 minute statement. Attendees were then invited to make comments on the proposals.
34. Feedback from the 2018 Review advised that it might be helpful if the statement explained all of the options considered by the Commission and why some options were not adopted. A draft statement for an Edinburgh hearing has been drafted as a possible template, see Appendix B.
35. Instead of a statement being read by the Secretary a short video could be presented at each venue. Most conference facilities have suitable IT and audio equipment. During the 2018 Review a projector and screen were available at the hearing venues but were not used.
36. Feedback from the 2018 Review suggested providing brief factsheets for each hearing, a draft factsheet is at Appendix C.
37. Printed copies of the Initial Proposals booklet and Policy and Procedure booklet can be provided at each hearing for attendees.
38. Paper maps of constituencies will also be available.

Public Hearing - Transcription service

39. A transcription service provider for the public hearings will be sought.
40. The Boundary Commission for England recorded both a transcript and video of each Hearing during the 2018 Review. Attendees may not wish to participate if the hearing is filmed.

Secondary Consultation publicity

41. The Commission will wish to consider publicising the secondary consultation by issuing a news release and/ or writing to stakeholders, placing newspaper adverts and using social media advertising.

Recommendations

42. The Commission is invited to agree its approach for holding its public hearings, specifically:
 - when it begins the secondary consultation and holds the public hearings;
 - how many public hearings it holds and the locations;
 - desirability of a sheriff principal chairing more than one public hearing;
 - timing - morning, afternoon or evenings;
 - whether an informal session before each hearing would be helpful;
 - whether to read or video the draft statement;
 - the content of the draft statement and draft factsheet and what other materials should be made available; and
 - how best to publicise the secondary consultation and hearings.



2023 Review of UK Parliament Constituencies Initial Proposal Groupings and Scottish Sheriffdoms

