



Annual Report

2023 – 2024

This report covers the period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024. Copies are available from our website www.bcomm-scotland.independent.gov.uk, or by request from our Secretariat.

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Deputy Chair's foreword

In the last year we completed our work on the 2023 Review of UK Parliament constituencies. Our final report was submitted to the Speaker on 27 June and laid before Parliament on 28 June 2023. The Parliamentary Constituencies Order 2023 was made on 15 November 2023, came into force on 29th November 2023 and the new constituencies were used for the 2024 UK general election.

In December 2023, alongside Boundaries Scotland, we co-hosted the annual meeting of the UK Boundaries Commissions in Edinburgh. This event was attended by colleagues from all the UK commissions, the Office of the Secretary of State for Scotland and the Scottish Government and at which the guest speaker was George Adam MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Parliamentary Affairs. We were represented by Commissioner Dr Susan Walker, OBE. Professor Henderson also attended in her capacity as Chair of Boundaries Scotland. From all accounts this was a successful event and provided the opportunity for the UK Commissions to share their learning from the 2023 Review.

I will be completing my term of office as Deputy Chair later this year and would like to take this opportunity to thank the Commissioners and assessors, past and present, for their support during my 9 years as Deputy Chair. The Commission has successfully submitted two UK Parliament Constituency Reviews over this time and I would like to thank the Secretariat for their hard work and support in ensuring these reviews were delivered on time and within budget.

The Right Honourable Lord Matthews
Deputy Chair, Boundary Commission for Scotland
July 2024

Contents

.....	i
Deputy Chair’s foreword	i
1. The Commission	1
1.1 Background	1
1.2 Membership	1
1.3 Code of Practice.....	1
1.4 Register of Commissioners’ Interests	2
2 Secretariat.....	2
3 Review activity	3
3.1 Meetings.....	3
3.2 UK Parliament constituencies	3
4 Other activities	3
4.1 Staffing and training	3
4.2 Liaison with others	3
5 Governance	4
5.1 Legislation - UK Parliament reviews	4
5.2 Memorandum of Understanding.....	4
5.3 Data protection.....	4
5.4 Equality issues	4
5.5 Risk Management	4
6 Enquiries and public information	5
6.1 Freedom of Information Requests	5
6.2 Website.....	5
6.3 Maps of constituencies	5
6.4 Information Papers	5
6.5 Minutes and meeting papers.....	5
7 Expenditure.....	6
7.1 Staff salaries	6
7.2 Commissioners’ fees and expenses	6
7.3 Accommodation.....	6
7.4 Administration.....	6
7.5 Travel and subsistence	7
7.6 Review costs	7
7.7 Reportable transactions	7
8 Work programme for 2024-25.....	7
8.1 United Kingdom Parliament Review	7
8.2 Other activity.....	7
8.3 Funding for 2024-25	7
9 Further information	8

The Commission

1.1 Background

The Boundary Commission for Scotland was established in its current form by the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986 (the 1986 Act).

Our duties and powers are detailed in the 1986 Act (as amended). We are responsible for reviews of United Kingdom Parliament constituencies in Scotland.

We are an advisory Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB) sponsored and funded by the Office of the Secretary of State for Scotland (OSSS). We are an independent and non-political body.

1.2 Membership

The 1986 Act specifies that our membership comprises a Chair, Deputy Chair and two further Commissioners. In addition, the Act specifies that our officers shall include two ex-officio Assessors.

1.2.1 Chair

The ex-officio Chair of all four of the parliamentary Boundary Commissions in the United Kingdom is the Speaker of the House of Commons, as specified by the 1986 Act. In practice, the Chair takes no active part in the business of any of the Commissions.

1.2.2 Deputy Chair

The Deputy Chair is a judge of the Court of Session, appointed by the Lord President of the Court of Session, as specified by the 1986 Act. The current Deputy Chair is the Right Honourable Lord Matthews who was appointed from 1 January 2016 to 31 December 2018, re-appointed from 1 January 2019 to 31 December 2021, and again until 31 December 2024.

1.2.3 Commissioners

The Commissioners, other than the Chair and Deputy Chair, are appointed on a term basis through open competition using the procedures laid down by the Commissioner for Public Appointments. The OSSS makes the appointments.

In the year 2023-24, the Commissioners were:

- Professor Ailsa Henderson, appointed from 16 February 2016 until 15 February 2020, and re-appointed until 31 January 2024 with an extension until 30 September 2024. A replacement Commissioner is expected to commence in October 2024.
- Dr Susan Walker OBE, appointed 1 January 2021 to 31 December 2024.

1.2.4 Assessors

Our two ex-officio Assessors are the Registrar General for Scotland and the Director General of Ordnance Survey, represented by Dominic Cuthbert.

1.3 Code of Practice

The Cabinet Office Code of Practice for Members of Non-Departmental Public Bodies is available on our website, or a copy can be provided on request.

1.4 Register of Commissioners' Interests

We maintain a Register of Interests of Commissioners, in accordance with the Code of Practice. The Register of Interests is available on our website, or a copy can be provided on request.

2 Secretariat

We are supported by a small Secretariat. Schedule 1 to the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986 provides that the Secretary of State shall appoint a Secretary to the Commission. The Secretary, who is the Secretariat's senior officer, is normally a civil servant assigned from the Scottish Government, and the Secretary of State is invited to approve the appointment following a recommendation by officials in the OSSS. The previous Secretary, Isabel Drummond-Murray retired in December 2023 (having been in post since October 2014) and the new Secretary, Kirsty Mavor joined in April 2024.

The work of the Secretariat includes:

- facilitating boundary reviews.
- dealing with the everyday administrative matters relating to our business, such as finance, purchasing and accommodation.
- consulting with other UK Commissions and government departments with an interest in boundary matters.
- maintaining contact with Ordnance Survey and other relevant bodies on boundary related issues.
- maintaining links with organisations involved with electoral matters.
- improving and extending our published information explaining our work.
- responding to correspondence on our work and constituency boundary issues.
- providing ongoing training as appropriate to meet staff and review requirements; and
- continuing to meet all financial and other requirements of our Memorandum of Understanding and other key sponsorship documents.

The Secretariat is accommodated in Thistle House, in central Edinburgh. Staff of the Secretariat are assigned from the Scottish Government. The number of staff assigned is dependent on the volume of review activity and the need to develop, maintain and update information systems, respond to enquiries, and undertake other work in support of the Commission's activities. During the year 2023-24, the average assignment of Secretariat staff to support the Commission was as follows:

Post	Full-time equivalent
Secretary	0.5
Review Manager	0.5
Deputy Review Manager	0.5
Review Officer	0.5
Finance and Governance Officer	0.5
IT Database Manager	0.19
General Office Manager	0.5
Total	3.19

Staff members' time is allocated between support for us and for Boundaries Scotland, which is responsible for reviewing electoral ward and local authority areas in Scotland and Scottish Parliament boundaries. The Secretariat is funded separately by the Scottish Government for that work.

3 Review activity

3.1 Meetings

During the reporting period two meetings were held at Thistle House on 24 April 2023 and 16 November 2023. Minutes of meetings and copies of our discussion papers are published on our website.

3.2 UK Parliament constituencies

We began work on the 2023 Review of UK Parliament Constituencies in January 2021. Recommendations were developed and consulted on with the final recommendations laid before Parliament on 28 June 2023.

The Parliamentary Constituencies Order 2023 was made on 15 November 2023 and came into force on 29th November 2023. The new constituencies took effect at the next General Election.

The next Review of UK Parliament Constituencies is due to be completed in 2031, and work is not expected to commence on it until 2028.

4 Other activities

4.1 Staffing and training

Training has continued to meet staff and future review requirements as well as mandatory requirements from the Scottish Government as employer, such as data protection training.

4.2 Liaison with others

4.2.1 Other UK Boundary Commissions

On 8th December 2023, we co-hosted and participated in the annual UK Boundaries Commissions meeting, held in Edinburgh where Dr Susan Walker OBE represented us and Professor Ailsa Henderson attended in her capacity as Chair of Boundaries Scotland. At the meeting we discussed the 2023 Review and shared experiences and ideas with the other parliamentary commissions as well as those responsible for local government arrangements across the UK.

4.2.2 OSSS

We continue to have regular contact and dialogue with the OSSS as our sponsoring department (see 5.2 below). A representative of OSSS was involved in the recruitment process and on the interview panel for the appointment of the new Secretary.

4.2.3 Ordnance Survey

The Secretariat continues to work with Ordnance Survey to ensure that we have access to the optimum set of mapping data products to support our work, and that we receive technical advice on the deployment of those products.

4.2.4 National Records of Scotland

The Secretariat consults regularly with staff of the National Records of Scotland on shared interests concerning geographic information and electoral statistics.

4.2.5 Other organisations

The Secretariat maintains and develops contacts with the Association of Electoral Administrators, the Scottish Assessors' Association, Electoral Registration Committee, and the Electoral Commission. This has been through attendance at meetings of the Scotland and Northern Ireland Branch of the Association of Electoral Administrators, the Electoral Commission's Scottish Parliament Political Parties Panel in Scotland, and written correspondence.

5 Governance

Our Governance documents below are available on our website, or a copy can be provided on request. Please see: www.bcomm-scotland.independent.gov.uk/?q=corporate-documents

5.1 Legislation - UK Parliament reviews

Our reviews of UK Parliament constituencies are governed by the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986, as amended by the UK Parliamentary Constituencies Act 2020. The text of the legislation, incorporating current amendments, is available from www.legislation.gov.uk

5.2 Memorandum of Understanding

We have a Memorandum of Understanding setting out governance arrangements between us and our sponsoring department, the OSSS. This was adopted in May 2017, following a review in conjunction with the OSSS.

5.3 Data protection

We manage personal information in line with the Data Protection Act 2018, and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). We have notified the Information Commissioner's Office of the personal data which we manage. All staff have completed annual mandatory training in data protection issues.

We have a Privacy Policy for managing any personal information contained in representations made during public consultations on our proposals.

5.4 Equality issues

We have an Equality Statement which is available on our website which sets out our approach to equality and diversity issues.

5.5 Risk Management

The Secretariat has developed a Risk Management policy covering our work. In line with this policy, we maintain a risk register which is reviewed regularly.

6 Enquiries and public information

We use our website and social media to inform the public about our work, including answers to Frequently Asked Questions. We publish our meeting papers and minutes of our meetings on our website. In addition, the Secretariat responds to requests for information made by email, letter, or phone.

We have a freedom of information policy which incorporates the Information Commissioner's Office Model Publication Scheme for public bodies under the Freedom of Information Act 2018. Our freedom of information policy and the model publication scheme are available on our website, or a copy can be provided on request.

6.1 Freedom of Information Requests

Between 1 April 2023 and 31 March 2024, the Secretariat recorded 10 Freedom of Information requests. All were complied with and no requests for review were received.

6.2 Website

Our website remains the primary means for us to make information available. We update the website with all the material which we publish. An archive version of our website containing historical material is maintained by the National Records of Scotland and is available via our website and here:

<https://webarchive.nrsotland.gov.uk/20190111180034/http://www.bcomm-scotland.independent.gov.uk/>.

6.3 Maps of constituencies

In conjunction with Boundaries Scotland, we provide an interactive map browser. The map browser allows anyone with internet access to view maps showing a selection of the current and past electoral boundaries that we have been responsible for since our establishment in 1944 on a background of current Ordnance Survey mapping.

We have made downloadable data of past constituencies available on the website. These are in shapefile format which is widely used for geographic data.

6.4 Information Papers

We have a series of Information Papers which explain our work. They cover:

- A General Guide to the Commission.
- UK Parliament constituencies in Scotland: 1832 – present day.
- UK constituency names 1950 – present day.

The Information Papers are available on our website, or a copy can be provided on request.

6.5 Minutes and meeting papers

We publish the minutes and meeting papers of our meetings on a staged basis during a review. Our minutes and meeting papers relating to the 2023 Review are available to view on our website. Where meeting papers include a draft of a

document which is later published on its own (such as our Information Papers, Annual Reports and Corporate Plans), we do not normally publish the draft.

7 Expenditure

Our expenditure for the year 2023-24 is set out under broad headings in the table below. After receiving an initial budget allocation from the OSSS, the Secretariat re-forecasts expenditure monthly during the year and provides regular updates of the expenditure for the year. The UK Parliament must approve budgeted resources.

The budget allocation to the Commission from OSSS in 2023-24 was £408,000. Actual spend is shown in the table below:

Financial Performance April 2023 – March 2024		
	Forecast	Spend
Staff costs	£202,000	£222,344
Commissioners' fees and expenses	£24,000	£2,773
Accommodation	£23,000	£31,727
Administration	£39,000	£25,570
Travel and subsistence	£2,000	£302
Review costs	£118,000	£19,684
Total	£408,000	£302,401

7.1 Staff salaries

Salary costs are determined by the pay arrangements for our 6.4 staff (3.2 FTE for this Commission), who are employees of the Scottish Government. The Commission agrees the number of staff it requires with OSSS and agrees an apportionment of staff costs shared with Boundaries Scotland.

7.2 Commissioners' fees and expenses

Commissioners' fees are determined by OSSS and cover attendance at all our scheduled meetings and associated preparation, meetings held with other UK Boundary Commissions and ad hoc meetings held with other bodies.

Commissioners' fees are paid on a per day basis. Fewer meetings were held than initially budgeted for, with lower average cost per meeting, resulting in the spend being lower than forecast. The fee rate for Commissioners during the year was £505.50 per day, and this has been unchanged since April 2009. The Deputy Chair post is not remunerated.

7.3 Accommodation

The Commission shares accommodation with Boundaries Scotland. The figures shown in the above table in respect of accommodation reflect our share of rent, utilities and services such as insurance, managements fees and cleaning.

7.4 Administration

Administration costs include office equipment, stationery, telephone, website costs, internet and email, training, computer software maintenance, licence fees and IT costs. The underspend in administration costs is chiefly due to contingency funds not being required to be spent.

7.5 Travel and subsistence

Travel and subsistence includes rail, air and car-hire costs incurred by the Secretariat and Commissioners in the course of official business, which does not relate directly to a review (such costs fall under Review Costs). Travel and subsistence costs are paid at the same rate that applies to staff of the Scottish Government.

7.6 Review costs

Review costs cover those items directly attributable to the conduct of our boundary reviews, and include our consultation portal, newspaper and social media advertising, public hearing costs, legal advice, and printing. The underspend in Review Costs is chiefly due to there being lower costs than budgeted for and the Review completing at the start of the period.

7.7 Reportable transactions

In line with UK Government policy, we publish data on all single transactions greater than £25,000 and all Electronic Purchasing Card (ePC) transactions over £500 on our website. In 2023-24 we made no transactions greater than £25,000 and made three ePC transactions over £500. These transactions are also published on the Scottish Government website.

8 Work programme for 2024-25

8.1 United Kingdom Parliament Review

We will provide any assistance required to the Speaker, the OSSS and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government as they work to implement the recommendations of the four UK Boundary Commissions, such as providing written definitions of constituency boundaries.

8.2 Other activity

- We will conduct our governance functions throughout the year to ensure that we manage the Commission's operations efficiently and cost effectively and meet the Government's requirements of an advisory Non-departmental Public Body (NDPB).
- We will attend the annual meeting of the UK Boundary Commissions.
- We will meet with our sponsor department, the OSSS on a regular basis.
- We will work with OSSS to ensure continuity of Commissioner appointments.
- We will keep under review any developments in the area in which we work.

8.3 Funding for 2024-25

The Commission has been allocated £408,000 by OSSS for 2024-2025.

The Commission's Corporate Plan for 2024-2027, which is available on our website, forecasts spending of £313,000 for 2024-2025.

9 Further information

If you have a query which cannot be answered by this report or our website (www.bcomm-scotland.independent.gov.uk) please contact us either by email, telephone or in writing.