BSM2022/03

Minutes of Meeting held by video conference at 10am on 9 May 2022.

Present

The Hon Lord Matthews, Deputy Chair
Dr Sue Walker, Commissioner
Professor Ailsa Henderson, Commissioner
Mr Dominic Cuthbert, Ordnance Survey, Assessor

Isabel Drummond-Murray, Secretary
Colin Wilson
Douglas Campbell
Yvonne Croll

Apologies
Mr Paul Lowe, National Records for Scotland, Assessor

Present for pre-meeting
Laurence Rockey, Director, Office of the Secretary of State for Scotland
Ross Finnie, Non-Executive Director, Office of the Secretary of State for Scotland
Nathan Lappin, Team Leader, Office of the Secretary of State for Scotland

Pre-meeting
1. Laurence Rockey, Director of the Office of the Secretary of State for Scotland (OSSS) and Ross Finnie (OSSS Non-Executive Director) introduced themselves to the Commission and discussed the role the OSSS has in supporting the work of the Commission. The Commission confirmed it was satisfied with the sponsorship relationship and governance arrangements. The Commission raised the question of hybrid hearings for future reviews and OSSS agreed to look into this.

Minutes of previous meeting
2. The Commission approved the minutes of the meeting on 4 April 2022 without amendment.

Matters Arising
3. The Secretary informed the Commission that she is in discussions with colleagues in the other UK Boundaries Commissions about reviewing the effectiveness of Public Hearings and whether hybrid Public Hearings could possibly be held in the future. A paper on the outcome will be brought to a future meeting.

Business Update
The Commission were informed that the next UK Boundary Commissions meeting will be hosted by Boundary Commission for Wales. The meeting will be held in Cardiff, provisional dates are late November/ early December 2022. Attendance numbers are not expected to be restricted and the ability to attend remotely will likely also be an option.

4. The Secretary advised that the Secretariat continues to follow a hybrid working model.

2023 Review: Consideration of Revised Proposals – East Renfrewshire council area (Paper 2022/07)

5. The Commission considered Paper 2022/07 and noted the responses to its consultation on its initial proposals for East Renfrewshire council area.

6. The Commission agreed to adopt without amendment the initial proposals (as in Appendix A), as the Commission's revised proposals subject to consideration of all other constituencies.

2023 Review: Consideration of Revised Proposals – Aberdeen City council area (Paper 2022/08)

7. The Commission considered Paper 2022/08 and noted responses to its consultation on its initial proposals for Aberdeen City council area.

8. The Commission discussed the alternative suggestions but felt they lacked strong arguments while there was generally support for, or a lack of opposition to, the initial proposals.

9. The Commission agreed to adopt without amendment the initial proposals (as in Appendix A), as the Commission's revised proposals subject to consideration of all other constituencies.

2023 Review: Consideration of Revised Proposals – Ayrshire council areas (Paper 2022/09)

10. The Deputy Chair declared an interest that he lives within this council area grouping.

11. The Commission considered Paper 2022/09 and noted the responses to its consultation on its initial proposals for East Ayrshire, North Ayrshire and South Ayrshire council areas.

12. The Commission discussed the suggestion to place Ayr, Prestwick and Troon in the same constituency. The Commission agreed that while there might be some support for an Ayr, Prestwick and Troon constituency, as a consequence it would create a large constituency extending from Ballantrae to Stewarton and there was some support for retaining the existing constituencies and initial proposals.

13. The Commission considered the suggestion to follow ward boundaries in North Ayrshire. Whilst it avoided splitting Kilwinning, it would result in changes to all four constituency boundaries within the grouping. The Commission discussed the other alternative suggestions but felt they lacked strong arguments while there was generally support for, or a lack of opposition to, the initial proposals.

14. The Commission agreed to adopt without amendment the initial proposals (as in Appendix A), as the Commission's revised proposals subject to consideration of all other constituencies. They agreed these boundaries are easily recognisable.

2023 Review: Consideration of Revised Proposals – City of Edinburgh, East Lothian, Midlothian council areas (Paper 2022/10)

15. Professor Henderson and Mr Cuthbert declared an interest that they both live within this council area grouping.

16. The Commission considered Paper 2022/10 and noted the responses to its consultation on its initial proposals for City of Edinburgh and Midlothian council areas.

17. The Commission considered the alternative suggestions in Edinburgh and agreed that some had offered strong arguments.

18. The Commission noted the robust public opposition to the initial proposals boundary at Musselburgh, East Lothian. The Commission considered the alternative suggestion from the Scottish Conservative and Unionist party which suggested following an historical constituency boundary. Although it still split Musselburgh between two constituencies the Commission agreed it was an improvement on the initial proposals.

19. The Commission asked the Secretariat to bring a paper to the next meeting incorporating a revised boundary in Musselburgh and some of the alternative suggestions in Edinburgh.

2023 Review: Consideration of Revised Proposals – Angus, Clackmannanshire, Dundee City, Falkirk, Fife, Perth and Kinross, Stirling and West Lothian council areas (Paper 2022/11)

20. The Commission considered Paper 2022/11 and noted there was some support for the proposed Perth and Tay constituency but strong opposition to the initial proposals in Kinross-shire, Carse of Gowrie and the Forth Valley. Few alternative suggestions were submitted that considered the whole area.

21. The Commission agreed to adopt the suggestion in West Lothian that placed Broxburn and Uphall in a Livingston constituency and Whitburn and Blackburn in a Bathgate and Linlithgow constituency because this better reflected historical local ties.

22. The Commission asked the Secretariat to consider alternative options, including merging this grouping with neighbouring council area groupings, to avoid a constituency covering both sides of the Forth Valley.

23. The Commission noted the option drafted by the Secretariat which closely reflected the existing boundaries in Clackmannanshire, Fife, Perth and Kinross and Stirling while addressing some of the concerns raised during the consultations. The Commission asked the Secretariat to see if it was possible to develop this option further.

24. The Commission asked the Secretariat to bring a revised paper to the next meeting incorporating revised options for this grouping and combining it with neighbouring council area groupings to resolve issues raised during the consultations.

2023 Review: Consideration of Revised Proposals – Aberdeenshire, Argyll and Bute, Highland and Moray council areas (Paper 2022/12)

25. Dr Walker declared an interest that she lives within this council area grouping.

26. The Commission considered Paper 2022/12 and noted there was strong opposition to the initial proposals within this grouping regarding the area of the North Highland constituency, the Argyll constituency name and the division of Moray between three constituencies. No alternative suggestions were submitted to resolve the issues raised.

27. The Commission asked the Secretariat to develop revised options for the northern boundary of the proposed Argyll constituency and in particular the boundary at Lochaber.

28. The Commission discussed the alternative suggestion from the Scottish Liberal Democrat Party, to create more equally sized Highland constituencies, with a revised boundary in Ross-shire. The Commission agreed this suggestion would address concerns raised during the consultation regarding constituency size, and asked the Secretariat to adopt this suggestion in any revised options. However the Commission noted the Scottish Liberal Democrat suggestion created an oddly shaped constituency boundary by Beauly and Inverness and asked the Secretariat to try to develop revised alternative boundaries in this area.

29. The Commission noted the strong opposition to the initial proposals in Moray but acknowledged no alternative suggestions were submitted that retained the existing Moray constituency. The Commission studied an option designed by the Secretariat which proposed a Moray constituency within a wider grouping of council areas but it created a constituency extending from north of Perth to Mallaig and the outskirts of Inverness.

30. The Commission noted support for the proposed West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine constituency but deferred agreeing its revised proposals in this area until after consideration of revised proposals which may merge the Aberdeenshire, Argyll and Bute, Highland and Moray council area grouping with the Angus, Clackmannanshire, Dundee City, Falkirk, Fife, Perth and Kinross, Stirling and West Lothian council area grouping.

31. The Commission asked the Secretariat to bring a revised paper to the next meeting acknowledging the issues discussed above alongside some of the alternative suggestions.

Finance Update (Paper 2022/13)

32. The Commission noted the finance update.

Any other business

33. The next meeting will take place on 6 June 2022. The Commission asked the Secretariat to canvas for an alternative date in July as the meeting due to take place on 11 July 2022 needs to be rescheduled.

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Secretariat
May 2022