

Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland



MEETING OF BCNI COMMISSIONERS AND ASSESSORS

Date: 29 November 2017 at 11.00am

Location: The Bungalow, Stormont Estate, Belfast

In attendance:

The Hon Madam Justice McBride (Deputy Chairperson, BCNI)
Dr Bill Smith (Commissioner, BCNI)
Sarah Havlin (Commissioner, BCNI)
Alan Bronte, Commissioner of Valuation, LPS (Assessor)
Virginia McVea, Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland (Assessor)
Jim Lennon, Chief Survey Officer, LPS (Assessor)
Jos Ijpelaar, NISRA
Eamonn McConville (Secretary, BCNI)
Michael Harris (Deputy Secretary, BCNI)
Tim Johnston (Office Manager, BCNI)

Apologies: Siobhan Carey, Registrar General, (Assessor) – represented by Mr Ijpelaar

Welcome & Introductions

1. The Deputy Chairperson welcomed everyone to the meeting and, in particular, to Mr Lennon who was attending his first meeting as Assessor. She recorded her thanks to John Deyermond for his input and time as Assessor.
2. The Deputy Chair explained that the main purpose of the meeting was to consider and finalise the draft Revised Proposals Report before moving to the printing stage. She thanked all those involved in its preparation including the analysis of responses and the mapping work undertaken by colleagues in Land and Property Services (LPS).

Update from the Secretary

3. The Secretary provided an update on the following:
 - a) Secondary Consultation:
 - The need to respect 'purdah' requirements associated with the Assembly and Westminster elections during 2017, meant that BCNI could not consult during February in line with the other UK Boundary Commissions.

- Substantial analysis work was undertaken ahead of the Secondary Consultation which ran from 5 September to 2 October 2017. This analysis work was then revisited to take account of the Secondary Consultation responses.
- 39 written representations were received during the Secondary Consultation. Responses were generally of a high quality but no new alternative proposals were received.

b) Revised Proposals Consultation:

- Arrangements are in hand to launch the final consultation stage on 30 January 2018.
- There will then be an intense period of work for the Commission following the completion of the consultation in drawing up the Final Recommendations for presentation to the Secretary of State in September 2018.

c) Annual Meeting of the UK Commissions

- The Annual meeting of the UK Commissions was held in Cardiff on 16-17 November. The meeting discussed the process that Commissions must use in submitting their Final Recommendations at the end of this Review. The process has still to be finalised. The Secretariat will continue to liaise with their GB counterparts on this.

Revised Proposals Report

4. The Assessors were briefed on the analysis undertaken on the initial and Secondary Consultation responses; the key themes emerging (three- or four-seat Belfast; respecting existing constituencies where possible; retaining towns with their hinterlands; and avoiding the splitting of the Glengormley/Newtownabbey area); and the conclusions reached by the Commission.
5. The Revised Proposals were now considered to be a significant improvement on the Provisional Proposals and closer to the Commission's interpretation of the enabling legislation than any of the alternative proposals received. The Revised Proposals:
 - Apply Rule 7
 - Retain a four-seat Belfast
 - Make fewer changes to existing constituency boundaries
 - Cut off fewer rural towns from their hinterlands.
6. The meeting discussed the suggested names of the proposed constituencies. Existing names have been retained unless there has been substantial change to the constituency boundary.

7. It was agreed that the colour scheme used in individual constituency maps in the Revised Proposals Report needs to be reviewed to avoid any confusion with areas containing water.
8. In conclusion, the Commissioners and Assessors agreed that the Revised Proposals Report was ready to proceed to printing stage subject to the refinement of the constituency maps referred to in para 7 above.

AP1 - Secretariat to discuss map colour scheme alternatives with LPS and proceed to print stage of consultation document.

AOB

9. The Secretary was asked about the implications for consultation should another snap election be called in the New Year. He explained that purdah guidelines allow for consultation to proceed in exceptional circumstances. The Secretary advised that the need for the Commission to meet their statutory timescale would, in his opinion, meet the exceptions conditions. Consultation would therefore proceed as planned.
10. The Secretary informed the meeting of a Private Members Bill which was due to have its Second Reading in Parliament on 1 December. Details of the Bill were unknown at this time but were likely to be similar to that previously introduced in the previous Parliamentary session i.e. retention of 650 MPs and an increase in the variance percentage of the electoral quota.
11. All four Boundary Commission Secretaries have been invited to appear before Westminster's Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee on 9 January to give evidence on the boundary review process. As the 2018 Review is still ongoing, the Secretaries will only be able to provide factual information.

Date of next meeting

12. It was agreed that the next meeting of Commissioners and Assessors should take place in June 2018 once analysis of the Revised Proposals consultation has concluded and draft Final Recommendations have been produced. Should any matters arise in the interim, these can be handled by correspondence or a meeting convened if required.

AP2 - Secretary to coordinate diaries. June 2018 proposed.