

Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland



MEETING OF BCNI COMMISSIONERS

Date: 13 April 2017 at 10.00am

Location: The Bungalow, Stormont Estate, Belfast

In attendance:

Dr Bill Smith (Commissioner, BCNI)

Sarah Havlin (Commissioner, BCNI)

Eamonn McConville (Secretary, BCNI)

Michael Harris (Deputy Secretary, BCNI)

Update from the Secretary

1. The Secretary welcomed everyone to the meeting and explained that its purpose was to update the Commissioners on work to date and to consider the timing implications for the Secondary Consultation arising from the ongoing political situation.

Analysis of responses to Provisional Proposals

2. The Secretary explained that the delay in being able to publish the Secondary Consultation has meant that work has necessarily started on analysing the responses to date. In doing so, there is a realisation that much of this will need to be revisited following the secondary consultation. The work underway includes:
 - A comparative analysis of responses against the existing 2008 constituency framework;
 - A comparison of composite responses against those received which deal with just specific issues;
 - An analysis of responses advocating the use of Rule 7;
 - An analysis of responses promoting the use of split wards;
 - Modelling the 1982 17-seat model using the current wards; and
 - Modelling the 1994 proposed 17-seat model using current wards.
3. On these last two pieces of work, the Commission agreed that the legislative requirement to use the existing wards as building blocks made these 'ultra vires' given that they were based on previous ward boundaries. The Commission also discussed the

DUP's assertion that the 'Commission was misdirecting itself' by only using the council boundaries in Belfast as a constituency framework.

4. It was noted that the Secretariat is in the process of building maps based on submitted responses with a view to narrowing down possible alternative proposals.
5. It was agreed that the various pieces of work would be passed to the Commissioners as they are completed rather than waiting until all work was complete. This would allow the Commissioners to begin their considerations.

Political situation

6. Secondary consultation had been scheduled to take place in February or March but had been unavoidably delayed due to the Assembly election 'purdah' period. This delay had to be further extended into the post election talks phase and Easter break. As talks will continue after the Easter break, it was agreed that clarification should be sought from both the NIO and Cabinet Office on status of pre-election guidance in these circumstances. Any decision to consult should await further NIO clarification and any public statements from the Secretary of State on his intentions in early May.

Triennial Review by NIO/Cabinet Office

7. The Secretary explained that, under current scheduling arrangements, the Boundary Commissions are due to undergo a Triennial Review by the Cabinet Office during the 2018 Review. However, Cabinet Office has confirmed that this will not now happen until the various Orders in Council setting out the new UK Parliamentary Constituencies have been introduced in Parliament. SO, unlikely now to happen before late 2018/early 2019.

Date of next meeting

8. A full meeting of Commissioners and Assessors is still scheduled for June 2017 with a date yet to be confirmed.

**Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland
January 2017**