

Annual Report

2020 – 2021

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# Section 1: Deputy Chairman’s Report

I am pleased to have the opportunity to introduce this Annual Report, in my first year as Deputy Chairman of the Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland.

The Boundary Commission commenced the 2023 Review of Parliamentary Constituencies in January 2021, shortly after the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 2020 received Royal Assent. This Act provided for a number of changes to the Review process, as well as bringing the 2018 Review to a close without implementation. In line with that legislation, the four UK Boundary Commissions are required to undertake a new review and submit their final reports with recommendations for Parliamentary constituencies before 1st July 2023.

We will develop and publish our proposals, in accordance with the Act (as amended). The public will have opportunities to submit written and oral representations about the published proposals, as part of a structured process. We will take these representations into account when preparing recommendations for our final report. Our initial proposals are planned to be published in autumn 2021, followed by an 8-week statutory consultation period. Further information about the consultation will be published in due course.

I am grateful to my predecessor, the Hon. Madam Justice Denise McBride, for her work with the Commission over the last 6 years, and to the Secretariat team who supported that work, led by Secretary Eamonn McConville. I look forward to progressing the 2023 Review as Deputy Chairman, working with Commissioners Sarah Havlin and Vilma Patterson, and the Commission’s Secretariat. I thank them all for their input to this challenging task.

I would also like to thank the Commission’s Assessors and their teams, who have provided invaluable support for the 2023 Review process to date. In particular, I wish to pay tribute to Alan Brontë,former Commissioner of Valuation for his work with the Commission, and in doing so, I welcome his successor, Angela McGrath.

I would encourage everyone with an interest in our work to participate in the upcoming consultation process and to follow our website and social media channels for more updates throughout the review.

**Mr Justice Michael Humphreys**

**Deputy Chairman**

7 September 2021

# Section 2: The Commission

## 2.1 Background

The Boundary Commission is an independent and impartial public body which is responsible for reviewing Parliamentary constituency boundaries in Northern Ireland on the basis of rules set out in the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986 (as amended). The Boundary Commission is an advisory non-departmental public body of the Northern Ireland Office.

## 2.2 Membership

Appointments to the Commission are made under Schedule 1 of the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986, as amended. The 1986 Act specifies that the Commission’s membership comprises a Chairman, Deputy Chairman and two further Members.

The ex-officio Chairman for all four UK Boundary Commissions is the Speaker of the House of Commons, although in practice the Chairman takes no active part in the business of any of the Commissions. The Deputy Chair of the Commission is a judge of the High Court appointed by the Lord Chief Justice of Northern Ireland. The other two Commission Members are appointed by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland through a public appointments process. The Commission is supported in its work by four statutory Assessors and a small Secretariat.

**Chairman:**

The Speaker of the House of Commons

**Deputy Chairman:**

Mr Justice Michael Humphreys (from March 2021)

Hon. Madam Justice Denise McBride (October 2015 – March 2021)

**Members:**

Ms Sarah Havlin

Ms Vilma Patterson MBE

**Assessors:**

Ms Angela McGrath, Commissioner of Valuation for Northern Ireland

Ms Siobhan Carey, Registrar General Northern Ireland

Ms Virginia McVea, Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland

Mr Jim Lennon, Chief Survey Officer of Land and Property Services

**Secretary:**

Ms Heather McKinley (from February 2021)

Mr Eamonn McConville (November 2015 – January 2021)

## 2.3 Meetings

The Commission met formally on eight occasions during the period covered by this report. These meetings were used to discuss the delivery of the Commission’s statutory obligations, as well as operational and financial matters.

The Commission also attended the annual meeting of the UK Commissions in November 2020, facilitated via video link due to public health restrictions. The meeting provided an opportunity to reflect on the impact of COVID-19, share updates on our work and discuss good practice in common areas of interest.

## 2.4 Code of Practice

The Commission’s Code of Practice is available on the Boundary Commission website ([www.boundarycommission.org.uk](http://www.boundarycommission.org.uk/)) or a copy can be provided on request.

## 2.5 Register of Members’ Interests

The Commission maintains a Register of Members’ Interests, in accordance with the Code of Practice, which is available to the public on request.

## 2.6 Secretariat

Heather McKinley is the Secretary to the Commission. Her appointment is in accordance with paragraph 7 of Schedule 1 to the Parliamentary Constituencies Act. The Secretary, together with a small Secretariat, supports the work of the Commission.

During the period of this report the Secretariat’s work has included the following key areas:

* Review of the Commission’s corporate and operational infrastructure;
* Financial and administrative matters;
* Liaison with other UK Commissions and other public bodies to support the work of the Commission;
* Responding to queries and correspondence from members of the public, elected representatives, and other stakeholders;
* Maintenance of the Commission’s [website](http://www.boundarycommission.org.uk);
* Preparation for the 2023 Review.

# Section 3: Governance

## 3.1 Legislation

The work of the Boundary Commission is governed by the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986, as amended. The legislation is available at <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/>.

Amending legislation which received Royal Assent in December 2020 introduced some key changes to the statutory boundary review process:

* 650 seats across the UK, compared to 600 in the 2018 Review;
* There are three periods of public consultation, rather than two;
* Public hearings now take place during the secondary consultation period rather than the first;
* The interval between reviews will be 8 years once the 2023 Review is completed, meaning the next review after 2023 is currently anticipated to finish in 2031;
* Other changes include reintroduction of the ‘inconvenience’ Rule 5 factor and a change to the Parliamentary process after submission.

The Act specifies which electorate figures are to be used by the Commission when carrying out a review. For the 2023 Review, the Commission is required to use the total number of persons whose names appeared on the electoral register as at 2 March 2020. The Commission has obtained the [electorate figures](https://www.eoni.org.uk/Register-To-Vote/Electorate-Statistics/Electorate-Statistics-by-Ward-2020) for the 2023 Review from the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland.

A mathematical formula specified in the Act is used to distribute constituencies across the four parts of the United Kingdom. For the 2023 Review, Northern Ireland has 18 seats, compared to 17 for the 2018 Review. The Act also specifies a mathematical formula which is used to calculate the number of electors which must be in each proposed constituency.

As provided for by the legislation, Commissioners may take into account a number of factors, if and to such extent as they think fit, when deciding on their recommendations for Parliamentary constituencies.

## 3.2 Framework Document

The Commission operates in accordance with a Framework Document which outlines the respective roles of the Commission and the Northern Ireland Office, and the governance arrangements between them.

## 3.3 Data Protection

Our handling of personal information under General Data Protection Regulations and Data Protection legislation is covered by the Commission’s registration with the Information Commissioner’s Office. Our Data Protection and Privacy Policy sets out how the Commission handles personal information.

# Section 4: Enquiries and Information

The Commission uses its website and social media presence on Twitter as channels to inform the public about its work. In addition, we welcome requests for information through other means, such as by email, letter or phone.

## 4.1 Enquiries

The Commission has a Freedom of Information policy which incorporates the Information Commissioner’s Office (ICO) model Publication Scheme for public bodies under the Freedom of Information Act 2000. The Commission’s [Freedom of Information Policy and Publication Scheme](https://www.boundarycommission.org.uk/publications/freedom-information-policy-and-publication-scheme) is available on its website.

During the period of this Report, the Secretariat received and responded to a number of enquiries relating to the ongoing work of the Commission. Fifteen requests for information were made under the Freedom of Information Act and all were answered within the statutory deadline for dealing with such requests. The nature of these enquiries included requests for details around various contracts relating to the Commission’s IT and telephony provision, mailing provision, Facilities Management provision, as well as operational queries. No requests for review or appeals to the Information Commissioner's Office were made regarding the handling of these information requests.

## 4.2 Website

The Commission’s website is the primary means of making information available to the public. The Commission also has a Twitter account to help reach a wider audience. During the period of this Report, an accessibility audit was carried out and improvements to the Commission’s website were made, in line with statutory requirements. The website was also updated with relevant information about the 2023 Review.

# Section 5: The 2023 Review of Parliamentary Constituencies

## 5.1 The 2023 Review

The Commission began work on the 2023 Review of Parliamentary Constituencies in January 2021. The publication of the Commission’s initial proposals and the first period of public consultation is planned for autumn 2021. The Commission’s final recommendations are due to be submitted to the Speaker of the House of Commons, who is the Chair of all four UK Boundary Commissions, by 1st July 2023.

## 5.2 Impact of the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 2020

The Boundary Commission was judicially reviewed in relation to its Final Recommendations Report of the 2018 Boundary Review. The Court of Appeal judgment on 4 June 2020 sent the Final Recommendations Report back to the Commission for reconsideration on a number of points. However, in delivering judgment, the Court observed that no reconsideration by the Commission would be required should new legislation be enacted so as to abandon the 2018 Review. The Parliamentary Constituencies Act 2020 was passed in December 2020, bringing the 2018 Review to a close without implementation.

The 2020 Act also introduced some key changes to the statutory boundary review process, as set out at 3.1 above.

## 5.3 The Guide to the 2023 Review

In May 2021, the Commission published its Guide to the 2023 Review of Parliamentary Constituencies. The Guide includes information on the boundary review process and outlines how members of the public, political parties and wider civic society will be able to share their views. The Guide can be found on the Commission’s website - <https://www.boundarycommission.org.uk/publications/guide-2023-review>.

# Section 6: Other activities

## 6.1 Accommodation and IT provision

The Commission’s offices are located in the Bungalow, Stormont House, Stormont Estate, Belfast BT4 3SH. For the period of this Report, staff have been carrying out their duties in line with public health guidance, including working from home.

The Commission has continued to utilise the comprehensive service provided by IT Assist for its IT and telephony requirements.

## 6.2 Risk Management

Our Risk Management framework is in place, and is kept under review.

## 6.3 Staffing and training

Training has been delivered during this reporting year in line with Commission and staff requirements.

## 6.4 Liaison with others

### 6.4.1 Northern Ireland Office

We have regular dialogue with the Northern Ireland Office as our sponsoring department, in line with the Framework Document.

### 6.4.2 Other Boundary Commissions

The Commission maintains regular contact with the other UK Boundary Commissions on matters of mutual interest. The Commission attended the annual meeting of UK Boundary Commissions via video link in November 2020.

### 6.4.3 Land and Property Services

During the period of this Report the Commission has had regular contact with Land and Property Services (LPS) in relation to the Geographic Information Systems (GIS) technology needed to support the Parliamentary Review, and the delivery of related mapping.

### 6.4.4 Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency

The Commission liaises with staff of the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) in relation to statistical and geo-statistical matters.

### 6.4.5 The Electoral Office for Northern Ireland

The Commission liaises with staff of the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland in relation to information and advice on electoral data required for the Parliamentary Review.

# Section 7: Expenditure

The Commission’s operational expenditure in the financial year 2020/2021 is shown in the table below.

|  | **Operational**  **Expenditure 2020/21 (£k) (£k)** |
| --- | --- |
| **Staff Costs:** |  |
| **Salaries & related costs** | **91.8** |
| **Commissioners’ Costs:** |  |
| **Members’ attendance allowances** | **17.9** |
| **Non-Staff Costs:** |  |
| **Accommodation & Related Costs** | **10.0** |
| **IT & telephony** | **1.4** |
| **Professional Fees & Subscriptions** | **9.7** |
|  |  |
| **Total** | **130.8** |

Salary costs are determined by the pay arrangements for our staff who are on loan or secondment from other public bodies. Commissioners’ fees are determined by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and cover attendance at scheduled meetings and associated preparation, meetings held with other UK Boundary Commissions and ad hoc meetings held with other bodies. The fee rate for Commissioners is £505.50 per day. Travel and subsistence in the course of official business are paid at Northern Ireland Office rates.

# Section 8: Further information

If you have a query which is not answered by this report or from the Commission’s website [www.boundarycommission.org.uk](file:///C:\Users\1037496\RECORDS-NI_7.1.2\Offline%20Records%20(BC)\Annual%20Report%202015-16%20-%20Audit%20&%20Accountability%20-%20Governance\www.boundarycommission.org.uk), please contact us either by email, telephone or in writing at:

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