Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland

Minutes of Meeting held on 14 December 2020 at 2pm

By Video Link

# In Attendance

Madam Justice Denise McBride, Deputy Chair (DMB)

Sarah Havlin, Commissioner (SH)

Vilma Patterson, Commissioner (VP)

Eamonn McConville, Secretary (EMC)

Andrea Richardson, Deputy Secretary (AR)

# Staffing

SH confirmed that her re-appointment as Boundary Commissioner had been ratified by the Secretary of State for another 5 year period. The news was warmly welcomed by everyone at the meeting.

With regards to the recruitment of a new Secretary, Members acknowledged the time pressure to fill the post and were eager to ensure appropriate engagement between the Commission and the Sponsor Branch with regards to the various recruitment processes. This spoke to the value in reviewing the existing Framework Document.

EMC advised the meeting that the closing date for the re-advertised Office Manager and Support Officer posts was 18 December 2020.

# 2023 Review Preparations

The meeting discussed the provision of IT equipment required for the 2023 Review. EMC continued by explaining some work that AR had been taking forward on corporate documentation, which would be completed by the Office Manager once in post. AR then took the Members through some options for encouraging participation in a Review. The Secretariat would also explore the possibilities of live streaming the public hearings and of appropriate translation and transcription services into other languages, including sign language.

# Methodology for 2023 Review

The meeting discussed next steps on the 2023 Review, ahead of commencing work on developing the Initial Proposals. The meeting agreed that it was important to agree the methodology to be used for the 2023 Review, including the discretionary criteria, the use of Rule 7 and other considerations.

# Legislation and ONS Data

EMC advised that Royal Assent had not yet been scheduled for the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 2020. He would keep Members informed on developments. The outcome of the Court of Appeal decision was discussed in light of new legislation about to be passed.

EMC also advised that the scheduled publication date for the relevant electoral data was 5 January 21. It was agreed that there would be a public announcement of the allocations and electoral quota by the 4 Commissions.

# COVID-19 Contingency Planning

The meeting discussed the need for, and options around, contingency arrangements in relation to public health restrictions, particularly regarding the consultation and public hearings.

# Communications

The meeting discussed the vital importance of communications for the upcoming Review, including public-facing lines. There was consensus that the use of digital/social media should be considered in how the Commission communicates its work to the public.

# Meeting with Political Parties

Attendees discussed the value of the meeting with political parties that had taken place at an early point of the 2018 Review. It was agreed that a similar briefing should take place again for the 2023 Review, most likely around April/May 2021. There was a discussion around the practical limitations which may be in place around Covid-19.

# AOB

VP asked if the timetable of Member commitments previously provided could be expanded to indicate where there would be intensive periods required of Members’ time during the Review.

DMB then advised the meeting that she would be stepping down as Deputy Chair earlier than planned to allow the new Deputy Chair to take up their position and become involved at the beginning of the 2023 Review. DMB would keep the Commission informed of the likely handover date to her successor. The Members and staff expressed their regret at hearing the news and warmly thanked DMB for the guidance and wisdom she had brought to the Commission.

**BCNI Secretariat**

**16 December 2020**