**Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland**

Minutes of Meeting held on 17 September 2020 at 11am 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)

# Introductions

AR was introduced and warmly welcomed by the Members as the new Deputy Secretary.

# Future Meetings

The meeting agreed that continued use of video conferencing for BCNI meetings was likely to be required for the foreseeable future. EMC advised that a more suitable and permanent platform would be sourced and introduced. The meeting also discussed the advantages of having video/streaming facilities available for the 2023 Review public hearings, which could further improve the outreach to the general public. This would need to be looked at in line with the legislative requirements.

# Staff Recruitment and Members’ Tenures

EMC advised that recruitment of the Office Manager and Support Officer would proceed using the Interchange process.

The meeting discussed the Members’ remaining tenures and the practical implications for the Commission in terms of sequencing and continuity for the 2023 Review and beyond. The meeting also briefly touched on the options for chairing the public hearings.

# New Legislation

EMC advised that the legislation introduced by government to amend the 1986 Act was progressing through Parliament. During debates in the House of Commons the enumeration date for electoral registers had been amended from December 2020 to March 2020. Anglesey had also been added as a further protected constituency.

The Bill was currently in the House of Lords with the main points of debate being around the +/- 5% Electoral Quota tolerance and the automatic implementation of Boundary Commissions’ Final Recommendations. The meeting discussed the practical out-workings of these points as well as the impact of moving from a five year cycle to an eight year cycle. It was thought that Royal Assent may be achieved before the end of 2020.

The meeting discussed the practical implications of the Bill’s progress through Parliament in relation to the Court of Appeal judgment. The Members agreed that with the pace of the new legislation through Parliament, which would set aside the 2018 Review, it would be prudent to await the outcome. However, this would be kept under review in case action needs to be taken in the event of any delay.

# 2023 Review Preparations

EMC advised that preparations were advancing well including regular liaison with LPS on software requirements and with EONI on data supply regarding the relevant electoral register extract. The meeting discussed the provision of hardware and software for the Commissioners which would support their work throughout the 2023 Review.

# Covid-19

EMC advised that the Commission could continue to operate remotely in line with government advice without any impact on the Review at this stage. Plans would be produced to manage the public events should the current restrictions continue into 2021 and beyond, with the first such event being the meeting with political parties.

# Accommodation

A discussion took place around the Commission’s current physical accommodation at the Bungalow, in the Stormont estate, particularly given the likelihood of continued remote working for the foreseeable future.

# Annual Report 2019-2020

It was agreed that Members would provide any comments/amendments to EMC in writing with a view to finalising and issuing the annual report to the Secretary of State and the Speaker in September if possible.

# Next Meeting

It was agreed that EMC would write to Members to set up the next BCNI meeting.

**BCNI Secretariat**

**18 September 2020**