

**Boundary Commission
for Northern Ireland**



Fifth Review of Parliamentary Constituency Boundaries

**Report
2007-2008**

July 2008



Forestview, Purdy's Lane, Newtownbreda,
BELFAST BT8 7AR

16 May 2008

The Rt Hon Shaun Woodward MP
Secretary of State for Northern Ireland
11 Millbank
LONDON SW1P 4PN

Dear Secretary of State,

I present to you a report of the work of the Boundary Commission. The report covers the twelve month period to 16 May 2008.

The Commission concluded their Fifth Periodical Review of constituencies and submitted their recommendations in a report of their Review to you in September 2007. The Commission have noted your acceptance of their recommendations and that effect is being given to them.

The Commission have also noted the Government's acceptance of the majority of the recommendations of the Committee on Standards in Public Life affecting boundary setting functions. The Commission propose to submit evidence to the intended review of the workings of the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986.

The Northern Ireland Executive have announced their decision to restructure local government in Northern Ireland. The Commission will consider conducting an interim review of constituencies once any restructuring of local government wards has been finalised.

I am copying this letter to the Speaker.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'The Hon Mr Justice Coghlin', is written over a light blue horizontal line.

The Hon Mr Justice Coghlin
Deputy Chairman
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CONSTITUTION

The Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland are constituted in accordance with section 2 of and Schedule 1 to the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986:

Chairman: The Speaker of the House of Commons*
The Rt Hon Michael Martin MP

Deputy Chairman: The Hon Mr Justice Patrick Coghlin

Members: Mr Richard Mackenzie CB
Mrs Joan Ruddock CBE

Assessors: The Registrar General in
Northern Ireland
Dr Norman Caven

The Commissioner of Valuation for
Northern Ireland
Mr Alan Brontë**

The Chief Electoral Officer for
Northern Ireland
Mr Douglas Bain CBE, TD

Mr Iain Greenway, Chief Survey Officer,
Land & Property Services, provides
professional advice on matters affecting
mapping matters

Secretary: Mr John Fisher

* The Deputy Chairman, by custom, presided at all meetings of the Commission but the Speaker was kept fully informed of the progress of the work of the Commission.

** Mr Brontë was appointed Commissioner of Valuation in succession to Mr David Rainey who retired on 7 April 2008.

REPORT 2007-2008

1. In common with the three other Boundary Commissions for the United Kingdom, the Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland are a permanent body constituted under the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986 as amended by the Boundary Commissions Act 1992 and are an independent advisory non-departmental public body. The role of the Commission is to keep under continuous review the number, names and boundaries of the parliamentary constituencies into which Northern Ireland is divided and to make recommendations to the Secretary of State. The Commission are also required to undertake general periodical reviews and to report with recommendations every 8 to 12 years.
2. The Report covers the twelve month period to 16 May 2008.

Meetings and Consultation

3. In the twelve month period the Commission met on 4 occasions. In addition, the Commission were represented by two of their members at a meeting of all four United Kingdom Parliamentary Boundary Commissions to discuss matters of common concern, as provided for by Schedule 1 to the 1986 Act.
4. The joint meeting of Boundary Commissions was held in Cardiff in March 2008. The Commissions were advised by officials of outline arrangements for the review of legislation

in relation to the conduct of parliamentary boundary work earlier recommended in the Eleventh Report of the Committee on Standards in Public Life. The meeting also considered Ordnance Survey mapping procedures in Great Britain.

5. The Commission continue to work closely with the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland, Land & Property Services and the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency. The Commission's Secretariat also maintain contact with relevant Government departments and public bodies.
6. The Commission place on record their appreciation for the support and professional advice of the assessors appointed to the Commission, namely, Mr Douglas Bain, Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland, Dr Norman Caven, Registrar General in Northern Ireland and Mr Alan Brontë, Commissioner of Valuation for Northern Ireland. The Commission also rely upon the professional advice of the Chief Survey Officer of Land & Property Services, Mr Iain Greenway.
7. Mr Rainey retired as Commissioner of Valuation on 7 April 2008 and the Commission record their appreciation for his contribution to their work.

Progress of Review

8. The Commission published Revised Recommendations for Parliamentary constituencies in May 2006. The

recommendations affected 12 of the 18 Northern Ireland constituencies and gave effect, in large measure, to the recommendations of assistant Commissioners who had conducted Local Inquiries into the Commission's earlier published Provisional Recommendations.

9. Representations were received on the Revised Recommendations including several from political parties and elected representatives in Northern Ireland, and from interested groups and members of the public. Petitions were also received from two community groups. The Commission gave the representations careful consideration but deferred reaching a final view ahead of decisions on the restructuring of local government.

Local Government Boundaries

10. The Commission have on several occasions drawn attention to the difficulties arising from the proposed restructuring of local government in Northern Ireland. Accordingly, the appointment of a Local Government Boundaries Commissioner and his publication of proposals in November 2006 led the Commission to decide that it would not be in the public interest for them to proceed to their final recommendations. Local government district wards provide the building blocks with which the Commission construct constituencies. The Commission therefore decided to review their recommendations together with the representations that they had received on their Revised Recommendations in the light of progress by the Local

Government Boundaries Commissioner, and the effect of his proposals on the ward structure.

11. The Commissioner submitted recommendations on 30 May 2007. Accordingly, the Commission reviewed their position last Summer. They did so in the light of the newly appointed Northern Ireland Assembly Executive Minister with responsibility for local government announcing her intention, with Executive colleagues, to look again at the seven council model on which the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner had predicated his proposals, and to try to reach a political consensus on the number of councils needed in Northern Ireland. The Executive subsequently announced the terms of reference of that review and the Commission felt that it would be inappropriate for them to delay further their final recommendations on parliamentary constituencies. They therefore decided to submit their recommendations based on the existing ward structure.

Recommendations

12. In reaching their final recommendations, the Commission had regard to all representations and submissions made to them throughout the Review, the reports and recommendations of the assistant Commissioners and evidence adduced at the Local Inquiries conducted by them. They also had regard to changes which had occurred in the distribution of the electorate since the inception of the Review, and other relevant considerations.

13. The Commission proposed that no change should be made to their already published Revised Recommendations, and that a further Local Inquiry or Local Inquiries should not be held. The Commission's recommendations were that 18 constituencies should be retained for Northern Ireland but that the boundaries of 12 constituencies should be changed. No changes were recommended to be made to the names of constituencies or their designation. Under the recommendations less than 5% of the Northern Ireland Parliamentary electorate would transfer constituencies. The Commission also made recommendations for changes to be made to the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986 affecting the procedure for reviews and the statutory Rules for Redistribution of Seats which form Schedule 2 to that Act and provide the Commissions with guidelines by which they must formulate their recommendations.
14. The Commission's recommendations contained in their report¹ describing the review and setting out its process and the considerations which the Commission had regard to when reaching decisions, and their recommendations was submitted to the Secretary of State in September 2007. The Report was published and laid before Parliament by the Secretary of State on 31 March 2008 together with a draft Order to give effect to the Commission's recommendations without modification.² The draft Order was approved by the House of Commons on 15 May.

¹ *Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland. Fifth Periodical Report on Parliamentary Constituencies* (Cm.7321, March 2008).

² Representation of the People. Redistribution of Seats and Review of Election Arrangements. The Parliamentary Constituencies (Northern Ireland) Order 2008.

Transfer of Functions and Review of Procedure

15. The Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 provides that the functions of the Commission will transfer to a Boundary Committee of the Electoral Commission at a time to be determined by Order. The proposed transfer of functions has, however, formed part of a review of the mandate, governance arrangements and accountability framework of the Electoral Commission. The Review was undertaken by the Committee on Standards in Public Life and the Commission drew to the attention of the Committee a number of concerns affecting the proposed transfer of functions. The Committee reported³ to the Prime Minister in January 2007.

16. In its response⁴ the Government accepted the majority of the Committee's recommendations and that:
 - the Boundary Commissions perform well and the provisions contained in the 2000 Act to transfer operational responsibility for conducting reviews to the Electoral Commission should be repealed. However, the Electoral Commission should retain an oversight role in relation to the review of electoral boundaries with the express power to review the local and boundary review process in any part of the United Kingdom, and make recommendations for improvement.

³ *Committee on Standards in Public Life. Review of the Electoral Commission. Eleventh Report* (Cm.7006, January 2007)

⁴ *The Government Response to the Committee on Standards in Public Life's Eleventh Report. Review of the Electoral Commission.* (Cm.7272, November 2007)

- in Northern Ireland there would be benefits in the parliamentary and local government boundary commissions sharing a joint secretariat underpinned by arrangements to ensure that the different lines of accountability remain clear.
- it would be appropriate to review the legislation in relation to the conduct of parliamentary boundary work to assess whether it remains fit for purpose. The commissioning of this review should be the responsibility of the Government but should be run independently, and parliament be given the opportunity to debate the conclusions and recommendations of the review. The review should look at all aspects of legislation with the exception of the deliberate over-representation of Wales and Northern Ireland and that constituencies should return a single Member of Parliament.

17. The Commission have reservations about the need for the proposed oversight role of the Electoral Commission but otherwise broadly support the Government's conclusions. The Commission will submit evidence to the proposed review of the legislation and with particular regard to any steps that may be taken to implement the establishment of a joint secretariat to support not only this Commission, but the work of the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner and District Electoral Areas Commissioner.

Interim Review of Constituencies

18. The Northern Ireland Executive has recently announced its decision to restructure local government on the basis of 11 local government districts, and to appoint a Local Government Boundaries Commissioner to make recommendations on the number, names and boundaries of their constituent wards⁵. The Commission will consider whether to announce an interim review of constituencies once any restructuring of wards has been finalised. Any review would have regard to changes in the distribution of the electorate since the Commission last reported, and any other relevant considerations.

Other Matters

19. During the period of this Report, the Commission have been kept informed of developments affecting electoral reform. The Commission's geographic information system which combines digitised boundaries with electorate figures and Ordnance Survey mapping continues to perform well. It was made available to the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner to facilitate his review and has benefited from enhanced functionality.

⁵ The Commission have noted the passage of the Local Government (Boundaries) Bill (Northern Ireland) 2008 in the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Staff and Expenditure

20. The Commission have been very ably supported by the Secretary to the Commission, Mr John Fisher, and by Mrs Jennifer Hamilton. Mrs Catherine Martin of Land & Property Services has provided mapping support. In the course of the year two former full time members of the Secretariat, Dr Colm McNamee and Mr Crawford McIlveen, have also provided valuable assistance for which the Commission are grateful.

21. The Commission incurred the following provisionally calculated expenditure in the financial year 2007-2008.

	Expenditure (£k)
Salaries and related costs ^a	71.4
Members' attendance allowances and travelling and other expenses	5.1
Local Inquiry payment	7.0
IT and equipment ^b	14.3
Running costs ^c	35.5
Stationery, postage, printing and reprographics	2.7
Other ^d	7.2
Total	143.2

^a includes payments of £8.7k made to the Northern Ireland Assembly in respect of a member of staff on loan.

^b includes licence and maintenance charges.

^c includes maintenance and minor works, cost of cleaning, electricity charges, telephone rental and usage charges and accommodation rental, rates, and service charges.

^d includes catering and hospitality, publications and newspapers, travel and subsistence and incidental expenditure.

**Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland
May 2008**