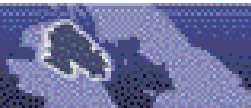


**Boundary Commission
for Northern Ireland**



Fifth Review of Parliamentary Constituency Boundaries

**Report
2003-2004**

November 2004

13 October 2004

Dear Secretary of State,

In accordance with established practice that non-departmental public bodies should produce regular reports, I present a Report of the Boundary Commission. It covers the period to 16 May 2004.

The Commission convened their first meeting since the last Periodical Review on 7 February 2003 and published notice of their intention to conduct their Fifth Periodical Review on 16 May 2003. The Commission published Provisional Recommendations on 29 April 2004 and are currently considering representations made in response to those Recommendations.

This Report outlines the work of the Commission over this period and considerations the Commission had regard to when preparing their Provisional Recommendations.

The Commission intend to conclude their review next year.

I am copying this letter to The Speaker.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'The Hon Mr Justice Coghlin', written in a cursive style.

**The Hon Mr Justice Coghlin
Deputy Chairman**

CONSTITUTION

The Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland are constituted in accordance with 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 Coghlin

Members: Mr R Mackenzie CB
Mrs J Ruddock CBE

Assessors: The Registrar General of Births and Deaths
for Northern Ireland
Dr T N Caven

The Commissioner of Valuation for
Northern Ireland
Mr N Woods

The Chief Electoral Officer for Northern
Ireland
Mr D Stanley

Mr M Cory, Chief Executive, Ordnance
Survey of Northern Ireland provides
professional advice on matters affecting
Ordnance Survey responsibilities

Secretary: Mr J R 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.

REPORT 2003-2004

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 Parliamentary 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 periodic reviews and to report with recommendations every 8 to 12 years.
2. The Report covers the twelve month period from the announcement of the Fifth Periodical Review on 16 May 2003. Since, however, this is the first Report of the Commission, it also covers the period commencing just prior to the beginning of 2003, when the Commission began preparations for the Review.

Consultation

3. In the period from January 2003 to May 2004 the Commission met on nine occasions. In addition to these meetings, Members of the Commission met the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on 23 April 2003 to discuss aspects of the timing of the review. On 24 April 2003, one of the Members of the Commission, Mr Mackenzie, and members of the Commission's Secretariat, attended a joint meeting of United Kingdom Parliamentary and Local

Government Boundary Commissions to discuss matters of common concern as provided for by schedule 1 of the 1986 Act. By convention, the Commission met representatives of main Northern Ireland political parties on 20 June 2003 to discuss matters of process and procedure affecting the Review. The Commission also met representatives of various public bodies.¹

4. The Commission co-operate closely with the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland, the Valuation and Lands Agency, the Statistics and Research Agency and Ordnance Survey for Northern Ireland. In addition, members of the Commission's Secretariat have maintained regular contact with Government Departments, other Boundary Commissions and with the Electoral Commission. The Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 provides that in common with the other Boundary Commissions, the functions of the Commission will transfer to a Boundary Committee of the Electoral Commission at a time to be determined by Order.

Progress of Review

5. The Commission last reported in June 1995 and are bound to conclude a general review of parliamentary constituencies and submit their report to the Secretary of State by June 2007. Appointment of a Local Government Boundaries Commissioner normally precedes the review of parliamentary constituencies. That appointment, however,

¹ The Commission wish to record their appreciation for the presentations and information made available to them by Mr Greg McConnell (Head of the Review of Public Administration Team), Mr Pat Quinn (Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland), Mr Ian Raphael and Mr Jack Cargo (Department for Regional Development) and Mr Archie Gall and Mr Seamus Magee (Electoral Commission).

was postponed pending the report of the Review of Public Administration.² When the Commission met the Secretary of State on 23 April 2003 he was unable to say when the Review would be completed and a Local Government Boundaries Commissioner might be appointed. The Commission accordingly decided to proceed to a general review of constituencies. However, the Commission recognises, as they did during the previous review, that there are likely to be problems arising from the inability to sequence appropriately the work of these bodies but are unable to discern any alternative to proceeding with their work which must be completed by 2007. The imminent publication of the findings of the Review of Public Administration continue to be relevant and will be taken into consideration by the Commission insofar as may be practicable. Formal notice of the Review was published on 16 May 2003. A comprehensive statement was also issued and a website was launched carrying an Explanatory Note of the process and procedures of the Review, maps illustrating existing constituency boundaries, statistical material of local government ward electorates provided by the Electoral Office, a publication scheme in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000, and other material.

6. When the Commission met representatives of main Northern Ireland political parties on 20 June concerns were

² The terms of reference of the Review are: 'In line with the political agreement of 18 December 1998, which sets out policy responsibilities, and reflecting the Executive's vision as described in the Programme for Government, to review the existing arrangements for the accountability, development, administration and delivery of public services in Northern Ireland, and to bring forward options for reform which are consistent with the arrangements and principles of the Belfast Agreement, within an appropriate framework of political and financial accountability'.

expressed about recent changes made to the electoral registration process and the accuracy of the Electoral Register. The Commission were satisfied, however, that deferring the Review would not result in more certain electorate figures becoming available. Moreover, the Commission were constrained by the statutory deadline for completing the Review and later electorate figures might be taken into account when deciding between competing schemes. Similarly, concerns were expressed by the parties and acknowledged by the Commission that the Review of Public Administration could lead to significant changes in the number and boundaries of local government districts. Views were also expressed to the Commission on the mapping and other material needed to facilitate consideration of the Commission's Provisional Recommendations when published.

7. To assist the Commission in their consideration of different schemes for constituencies in Northern Ireland, the Commission modernised the computerised Geographic Information System which had been used during their last periodical review. The system, which integrates electoral and statistical data with an automated map-drawing facility, was enhanced by software to speed up the preparation of schemes and to view these against a mapping background to help understand the implications of change. The Commission were grateful for the assistance and co-operation extended to them by Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland.
8. In addition to the statutory Rules for Redistribution of Seats contained in schedule 2 to the 1986 Act which the Commission are required to give effect to in making their

recommendations, the Commission had regard to information affecting the Northern Ireland regional transport and development strategy; the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan; and planned residential and industrial development. The Commission also drew up a set of working principles to aid the formulation of their Provisional Recommendations.

9. In formulating their Provisional Recommendations, the Commission sought to limit the number and scale of proposed boundary changes and to preserve the integrity of local government districts and district electoral areas wherever practicable, and maintain the integrity of all 582 wards in Northern Ireland. The Commission looked very carefully at the number of constituencies in Belfast, but having done so concluded that there should continue to be four constituencies in Belfast, the boundaries of which should be extended in a radial fashion. In the course of their deliberations the Commission gave careful consideration to a number of schemes according to which the electorate might be distributed into 17 constituencies. However, in their view each such scheme posed substantial difficulties in relation to the application of the Rules for Redistribution of Seats, in particular with regard to inconvenience to electors and the significant disruption of local ties. The Commission concluded that there should continue to be 18 constituencies in Northern Ireland.
10. The Commission sought to address the problem created by the decline in size of the electorates in the Belfast borough constituencies and increases elsewhere in Northern Ireland since the last review of constituencies, and to reduce imbalances in the electorates of constituencies. The Commission also had in mind the convenience of both

electors and those who participate in and organise election campaigns and to accommodate their needs as far as possible within the terms of the Rules for Redistribution of Seats. Accordingly, the Commission's Provisional Recommendations succeeded in reducing the number of electors being transferred to a different constituency to under 6% of the total Northern Ireland electorate.

11. The Provisional Recommendations were announced on 29 April 2004 and the Recommendations and maps illustrating the proposed boundary changes were formally published and made available for public inspection both in hard copy and CD Rom format at district council headquarter offices and Area Electoral Offices, public libraries and at the offices of the Electoral Commission and the Boundary Commission from 6 May 2004. The Commission appreciate the co-operation of those bodies concerned, and also in the case of public libraries, of the Association of Chief Librarians. Developments in information technology also enabled the Commission to place on the website not only the Recommendations but searchable maps and an address search facility. The Commission were grateful for the funding provided by the Secretary of State for this purpose. The Commission are required to consider representations made within one month of publication of the Recommendations. Representations were invited to be made to the Commission by 7 June 2004.

Programme

12. Where Provisional Recommendations alter any existing constituency and representations are received by the Commission from an affected district council in that

constituency, or a body of 100 or more parliamentary electors, the Commission cannot proceed with their Final Recommendations until a public Local Inquiry has been held in relation to that constituency.

13. The Commission are currently reviewing the representations received in response to their Provisional Recommendations and intend to convene public Local Inquiries to ascertain local information and opinion and to receive counter proposals to their Provisional Recommendations. The Commission will consider the reports and recommendations of assistant Commissioners appointed to conduct these Inquiries. If necessary, the Commission will publish Revised Recommendations and receive representations on them; and plan to submit their Fifth Periodical Report to the Secretary of State in 2005.

Premises and Staff

14. The Commission are serviced by a small Secretariat which assists them in their conduct of reviews. The Commission established Secretariat premises at Enterprise House, Adelaide Street, Belfast in October 2002 but transferred to prepared offices at their present location in August 2003 where they may be contacted. The Commission are grateful to the Secretary of State for the additional funding which made this transfer of premises possible.
15. The Secretary of State appointed Mr John Fisher as Secretary to the Commission in September 2002. In addition, the Secretariat now comprises a Senior Research Officer, Dr Colm McNamee; an Office Manager, Mrs Carolyn

Fullerton; and a Personal Secretary, Mrs Beverley McCabe. Technical assistance is provided by Mr Crawford McIlveen who is seconded to the Secretariat from Ordnance Survey for Northern Ireland.

The Commission incurred the following expenditure during the financial years 2002-03 and 2003-04.

	Expenditure (£)
Salaries and related costs	123,635
Members fees and expenses	15,570
Accommodation design and fitting out, maintenance and minor works and related professional fees	85,740
Furniture and furnishings	31,255
IT equipment & maintenance ^(a)	68,170
Ordnance Survey charges	34,185
Running costs ^(b)	51,440
Advertising and publishing	10,885
Miscellaneous ^(c)	38,310
Total	459,190

^(a) includes installation charges, design and website maintenance

^(b) includes cleaning, electricity charges, telephone installation and rental and accommodation service charges

^(c) includes catering and hospitality, postage, printing and reprographics, publications and newspapers, stationery, travel and subsistence

Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland November 2004