

Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland



ANNUAL REPORT

2017 - 2018

This publication is available at www.boundarycommission.org.uk.

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Deputy Chairman's Report

The Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland commenced the 2018 Review of Parliamentary Constituencies on 24 February 2016. Since then, the Commission has developed and published for consultation its Provisional Proposals and Revised Proposals for the 17 Parliamentary constituencies in Northern Ireland.

I am particularly grateful to my Commissioner colleagues, Dr Bill Smith and Ms Sarah Havlin for their diligent approach to the development of our Proposals, ably supported by our Secretary, Mr Eamonn McConville and his team in the Secretariat.

I would like to record my thanks to all of the Commission Assessors who have been of great assistance to the Review during this year. I wish to pay tribute to Mr John Deyermund who left his post as Chief Survey Officer of Land and Property Services in May 2017, and in doing so, I welcome his successor, Mr Jim Lennon.

Assembly and Westminster elections during 2017 impacted on the timings of our secondary and Revised Proposals consultations. However, despite these unavoidable delays we will meet the statutory requirement to present the Secretary of State with the Commission's Final Recommendations during September 2018.

The Hon Madam Justice McBride DBE, QC
Deputy Chairman

September 2018

1. The Commission

1.1 Background

The Boundary Commission is an independent, advisory non-departmental public body sponsored and funded by the Northern Ireland Office. The Commission is constituted under the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986, as amended by the Boundary Commissions Act 1992 and the Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Act 2011.

The Commission's role 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 about these to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. Reviews are carried out every five years. The Commission was reconstituted in November 2015 to commence preparatory work for the 2018 Review.

1.2 Membership

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

The Chairman is the Speaker of the House of Commons, as is the case for the Parliamentary Boundary Commissions in England, Scotland and Wales. The Deputy Chairman of the Commission is a judge of the High Court appointed by the Lord Chief Justice of Northern Ireland. The other two 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.

For the 2018 Review, the Commission comprises:

Chairman: The Speaker of the House of Commons

Deputy Chairman: The Hon Madam Justice McBride DBE, QC

Members: Dr William Smith
Ms Sarah Havlin

Assessors: Mr Alan Brontë
Commissioner of Valuation for Northern Ireland
Ms Siobhan Carey
Registrar General of Births & Deaths in Northern Ireland
Ms Virginia McVea
Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland
Mr Jim Lennon*
Chief Survey Officer of Land and Property Services

* Succeeded Mr John Deyermond on 22 May 2017

Secretary: Mr Eamonn McConville

1.3 Meetings

The Commission met on seven occasions during the period covered by this report. These meetings were used to discuss preparations for the secondary consultation in light of the Assembly and Westminster elections; the outcome of the secondary consultation; and development of the Revised Proposals.

1.4 Code of Practice

The Commission's Code of Practice is available on the Boundary Commission website (www.boundarycommission.org.uk) or a copy can be provided on request.

1.5 Register of Members' Interests

The Commission maintains an up to date Register of Members' Interests, in accordance with the Code of Practice, which is available to the public.

1.6 Secretariat

Mr Eamonn McConville is the Secretary to the Commission. He has been in post since 16 November 2015, in accordance with paragraph 7 of Schedule 1 to the Parliamentary Constituencies Act.

The Secretariat had a full complement of staff at the start of the year but has carried a vacant post at Administrative Officer level since June 2017.

Post	Full-time Equivalent
Secretary	1
Deputy Secretary	1
Office Manager	1
Administrative Officer*	1

* Post became vacant on 8 June 2017 and not subsequently filled

The work of the Secretariat includes:

- facilitating Members' work on the ongoing boundary review, including the delineation and testing of boundary options;
- managing the consultation process;
- dealing with administrative matters such as finance, procurement and accommodation;
- liaising with other UK Commissions and government departments with an interest in boundary matters;
- responding to queries and correspondence concerning boundary issues; and
- maintaining the Commission's [website](#).

2. Governance

2.1 Legislation

The work of the Commission is governed by the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986, as amended. The current text of the legislation is available on www.boundarycommission.org.uk or a copy can be provided on request.

On 16 February 2011, the Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Act 2011 received Royal Assent, after its passage through the United Kingdom Parliament. Part 2 of the Act substantially amended the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986, which governs the reviews of Westminster constituencies. The amended legislation introduced considerable changes to the rules, process and timing of reviews. It also reduced the total number of constituencies in the United Kingdom from 650 to 600.

The amended rules introduced a requirement that the electorate of each constituency should be within 5% of the UK electoral quota. Exceptions are made for four protected island constituencies in Scotland and England and for any constituency larger than 12,000 square kilometres (of which Northern Ireland has none). Rule 7 of the legislation allows the Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland to define constituencies with electorates which vary by more than 5% from the UK electoral quota within prescribed circumstances, that is, a calculation based on the electorate of Northern Ireland and the UK Electoral Quota (this condition is met for the 2018 Review); and where the Commission is satisfied that the application of the electoral range would unreasonably impair their ability to apply discretionary factors or would jeopardise their reporting deadline.

2.2 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.

2.3 Data Protection

Our handling of personal information under Data Protection legislation is covered by the Commission's registration with the Information Commissioner's Office. Our Publication Scheme sets out our privacy policy for handling any personal information contained in representations we receive.

Significant preparations for the introduction of the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) on 25 May 2018 were undertaken during the period of this report. This work ensured that the Commission was GDPR compliant by implementation date.

3. Enquiries and Information

The Commission uses its website and Twitter as channels to inform the public about our work. In addition, the Secretariat responds to requests for information made by email, letter or phone and issues press releases at key stages of the Review process.

3.1 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 Policy and Publication Scheme is available on its website, or a copy can be provided on request.

During 2017-18, the Secretariat received and responded to a small number of enquiries relating mainly to the ongoing work of the Commission, the timing of the review and the information/maps that would be published. Ten requests for information were made under the Freedom of Information Act and all were answered within the statutory deadline for dealing with such requests. These enquiries included specific queries from MLAs and others concerning the Commission's application of legislative rules in the completion of its work, the Commission's correspondence with political parties during the Review period, and also some generic requests for information on the costs of the Review, membership of the Commission, details of the Commission's social media presence and of contracts held for its IT provision. No requests for review or appeals to the Information Commissioner's Office were made regarding the handling of these information requests.

3.2 Website

The Commission's website is the primary means of making information available to the public. A range of information is published on the website including relevant legislation, a guide to the review, press releases and all relevant Boundary Commission reports together with copies of constituency maps. The Commission also has a Twitter account ([@BCNI2018](https://twitter.com/BCNI2018)) to help reach a wider audience. During 2017-18, the website was updated with all relevant documents and maps relating to the secondary and Revised Proposals consultations.

The Commission continued to make use of its online consultation portal (www.bcni2018.uk) to allow consultees to view the Revised Proposals and associated maps in electronic format and to upload their own alternative proposals.

3.3 Review Information

Throughout the 2018 Review, the Commission has published information on its Provisional and Revised Proposals on its website (and online consultation portal) and at local display points, including council headquarters, public libraries, Electoral Area Offices and the offices of the Electoral Commission. Representations received and transcripts of public hearings have been made public at the relevant stages of the Review. The Commission's Guide to the 2018 Review is available on its website or on request.

4 The 2018 Review of Parliamentary Constituencies

The Commission announced the start of the 2018 Review of Parliamentary Constituencies on 24 February 2016. A 12 week public consultation on the Commission's Provisional Proposals was then held in Autumn 2016.

As noted in last year's Report, 56 written representations were received on our Provisional Proposals, with a further 34 representations made at the four public hearings held during the consultation period.

During the period of this Report, activity focussed on the secondary consultation and subsequent Revised Proposals consultation. The secondary consultation was unavoidably delayed due to the Northern Ireland Assembly elections in March 2017. As the Commission adhered to Government guidelines not to hold public consultations in the weeks prior to an election, we were unable to consult during the same timeframe as our Commission colleagues in Great Britain.

A four-week secondary consultation, which had been further delayed by the Westminster parliamentary elections in May 2017, began on 5 September 2017. We published transcripts of the public hearings and copies of the written representations received during the Provisional Proposals consultation. 39 written representations were received during the secondary consultation.

All responses received during both consultation periods were carefully considered by the Commission and a number of alternative proposals were modelled and tested. As a result, on 30 January 2018 we published our Revised Proposals for a statutory eight week consultation period, which ended on 26 March 2018. The consultation produced almost 14,000 responses. The majority of responses were in the form of various petition letters and an online petition.

The Commission has carefully considered the responses received in the development of its Final Recommendations which it will present to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland within the statutory timeframe.

5 Other activities

5.1 Accommodation and IT provision

The Commission is located in the Bungalow, Stormont House, Stormont Estate, Belfast BT4 3SH. The move from Forestview continues to result in savings in terms of accommodation costs.

Throughout the 2018 Review the Commission has continued to utilise the comprehensive service provided by IT Assist for all IT and telephony requirements. Additionally, the GIS technology secured through Land & Property Services has been extremely beneficial to the Commissioners in exploring alternative constituency models as the Review has progressed.

5.2 Risk Management

We have developed a Risk Management framework which we keep under continuous review.

5.3 Staffing and training

Training has continued to meet staff and Review requirements.

5.4 Liaison with others

5.4.1 Northern Ireland Office

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

5.4.2 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 in Cardiff on 16 and 17 November 2017.

5.4.3 Land and Property Services

The Commission has regular contact with Land and Property Services (LPS) including access to the mapping and charting staff; mapping data products; and GIS technology needed to support the 2018 Review. The Commission also benefits from technical advice and support provided by LPS.

5.4.4 Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency

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

5.4.5 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 registers required for the 2018 Review.

6. Expenditure

The Commission incurred the following provisionally calculated expenditure in the financial year 2017/18.

Expenditure 2017/18

2017/18 Expenditure (£k)	
Staff Costs:	
Salaries & related costs	175.4
Commissioners' costs:	
Members' attendance allowances	22.9
Non-Staff Costs:	
Accommodation & Related Costs	21.7
Travel & Other Expenses	3.2
Advertisements & Publicity	4.9
IT & telephony	12.5
Stationery, postage & printing	6.0
Depreciation	2.4
Total	249.0

Salary costs are determined by the pay arrangements for our staff who are on loan or secondment from government departments. Related costs include the costs of professional staff support from other government agencies such as LPS and NISRA. Travel and subsistence incurred in the course of official business are paid at Northern Ireland Office rates.

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 and has been unchanged

since April 2009. Travel and subsistence in the course of official business are paid at Northern Ireland Office rates. Throughout the period covered by this Report, the Secretariat continued to identify and implement efficiency savings wherever possible, with over £25k surrendered back to the sponsoring department (NIO) across the 2017/18 Monitoring Rounds.

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7. Further information

If you have a query which cannot be answered by this report or from the Commission's website www.boundarycommission.org.uk please contact us either by email, telephone or in writing at:

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