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**Annual Report**

**2021-2022**

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# Section 1: Deputy Chairman’s Report

I am pleased to have the opportunity to introduce this Annual Report, reflecting on the previous 12 months of work on the 2023 Boundary Review.

During the 2021-22 reporting period, the Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland published its Initial Proposals for Parliamentary constituencies in Northern Ireland, and carried out its initial and secondary consultations in accordance with the Parliamentary Constituencies Act (as amended). These consultations provided the public with opportunities to submit representations about the published proposals, and about any counterproposals.

The initial consultation period took place in autumn 2021 and the Commission used an online consultation portal to facilitate members of the public, political parties and wider civic society in sharing their views. The secondary consultation period took place in spring 2022, and included three public hearings which were held in Belfast, Cookstown and Derry/Londonderry. I would like to record my thanks to District Judges Steven Keown, Peter King and Michael Ranaghan for chairing these hearings.

The Commission published the representations received during the initial and secondary consultation periods, and the records of the public hearings. These representations will be taken into account by the Commission when deciding if, and to what extent, to revise its initial proposals. Any revisions to its initial proposals are planned to be published in autumn 2022, followed by a 4-week statutory consultation period. Further information about this consultation will be published in due course.

I am particularly grateful to Boundary Commissioners, Ms Sarah Havlin and Ms Vilma Patterson for their diligent approach to the development of our Initial Proposals, supported by our Secretary, Ms Heather McKinley and the Secretariat team. I wish to thank Land & Property Services (LPS) whose mapping expertise was invaluable to the Commission in the modelling and publication of its Initial Proposals, and whose static and interactive mapping products supported the consultation process. I am also grateful to Libraries NI and to local Councils, for facilitating public display points for our consultation materials. Finally, I would like to record my thanks to the Commission’s statutory Assessors for their advice and expertise - Ms Siobhan Carey, Mr Jim Lennon, Ms Virginia McVea, and Ms Angela McGrath.

I would encourage everyone with an interest in the Commission’s work to participate in the upcoming third consultation process and to follow our website and social media channels for more updates throughout the Review.

**Mr Justice Michael Humphreys**

**Deputy Chairman**

23rd August 2022

# Section 2: The Commission

## 2.1 Background

The Boundary Commission is an independent and impartial public body which is responsible for reviewing Parliamentary constituency boundaries in Northern Ireland on the basis of rules set out in the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986 (as amended). The Boundary Commission is an advisory non-departmental public body of the Northern Ireland Office.

## 2.2 Membership

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

The ex-officio Chairman for all four UK Boundary Commissions is the Speaker of the House of Commons, although in practice the Chairman takes no active part in the business of any of the Commissions. The Deputy Chair of the Commission is a judge of the High Court appointed by the Lord Chief Justice of Northern Ireland. The other two Commission 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.

**Chairman:**

The Speaker of the House of Commons

**Deputy Chairman:**

Mr Justice Michael Humphreys

**Members:**

Ms Sarah Havlin

Ms Vilma Patterson MBE

**Assessors:**

Ms Angela McGrath, Commissioner of Valuation for Northern Ireland

Ms Siobhan Carey, Registrar General Northern Ireland[[1]](#footnote-1)

Ms Virginia McVea, Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland

Mr Jim Lennon, Chief Survey Officer of Land & Property Services

**Secretary:**

Ms Heather McKinley

## 2.3 Meetings

The Commission met formally on eight occasions during the period covered by this report. These meetings were used to discuss the delivery of the Commission’s statutory obligations, as well as operational, financial and governance matters.

The Commission also attended the annual meeting of the UK Commissions in January 2022, facilitated via video link due to public health restrictions. The meeting provided an opportunity to reflect on the impact of COVID-19, share updates on our work and discuss good practice in common areas of interest.

## 2.4 Code of Practice

The Commission’s Code of Practice is available on the Boundary Commission website ([www.boundarycommission.org.uk](http://www.boundarycommission.org.uk/)) or a copy can be provided on request.

## 2.5 Register of Members’ Interests

The Commission maintains a Register of Members’ Interests, in accordance with the Code of Practice, which is available to the public on request.

## 2.6 Secretariat

Heather McKinley is the Secretary to the Commission. Her appointment is in accordance with paragraph 7 of Schedule 1 to the Parliamentary Constituencies Act. The Secretary, together with a small Secretariat, supports the work of the Commission.

During the period of this report the Secretariat’s work has included the following key areas:

* Supporting the development of the Commission’s Initial Proposals, and their publication;
* Completion of the initial and secondary statutory consultation stages of the 2023 Boundary Review, including public hearings;
* Managing the Commission’s corporate and operational infrastructure;
* Financial and administrative matters;
* Liaison with other UK Commissions and other public bodies to support the work of the Commission;
* Responding to queries and correspondence from members of the public, elected representatives, and other stakeholders;
* Maintenance of the Commission’s [website](http://www.boundarycommission.org.uk) and social media.

# Section 3: Governance

## 3.1 Legislation

The work of the Boundary Commission is governed by the Parliamentary Constituencies Act (1986), as amended most recently by the Parliamentary Constituencies Act (2020), which is available at <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/>. The 2020 Act brought the 2018 Review to a close without implementation, and introduced some key changes to the statutory boundary review process, as follows:

* 650 seats across the UK, compared to 600 in the 2018 Review;
* There are three periods of public consultation, rather than two;
* Public hearings now take place during the secondary consultation period rather than the first;
* The interval between reviews will be 8 years once the 2023 Review is completed, meaning the next review after 2023 is currently anticipated to finish in 2031;
* Other changes include reintroduction of the ‘inconvenience’ Rule 5 factor and a change to the Parliamentary process after submission.

The Act specifies which electorate figures are to be used by the Commission when carrying out a review. For the 2023 Review, the Commission is required to use the total number of persons whose names appeared on the electoral register as at 2 March 2020. The Commission has obtained the [electorate figures](https://www.boundarycommission.org.uk/publications/parliamentary-electorate-2nd-march-2020-by-2012-wards) for the 2023 Review from the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland.

A mathematical formula specified in the Act is used to distribute constituencies across the four parts of the United Kingdom. For the 2023 Review, Northern Ireland has 18 seats, compared to 17 for the 2018 Review. The Act also specifies a mathematical formula which is used to calculate the number of electors which must be in each proposed constituency. As provided for by the legislation, Commissioners may take into account a number of factors, if and to such extent as they think fit, when deciding on their recommendations for Parliamentary constituencies.

## 3.2 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. This document was most recently reviewed in June 2022.

## 3.3 Data Protection

Our handling of personal information under General Data Protection Regulations and Data Protection legislation is covered by the Commission’s registration with the Information Commissioner’s Office. Our [Data Protection and Privacy Policy](https://www.boundarycommission.org.uk/publications/data-protection-and-privacy-policy) sets out how the Commission handles personal information.

# Section 4: Enquiries and Information

The Commission uses its website and social media presence on Twitter as channels to inform the public about its work. In addition, we welcome requests for information through other means, such as by email, letter or phone.

## 4.1 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 [Freedom of Information Policy and Publication Scheme](https://www.boundarycommission.org.uk/publications/freedom-information-policy-and-publication-scheme) is available on its website.

During the period of this Report, the Secretariat received and responded to a number of enquiries relating to the ongoing work of the Commission. Sixteen requests for information were made under the Freedom of Information Act and all were answered within the statutory deadline for dealing with such requests. The nature of these enquiries included requests for records kept relating to the Commission’s IT and telephony provision, insurance, and facilities management, as well as operational queries. No requests for review or appeals to the Information Commissioner's Office were made regarding the handling of these information requests.

## 4.2 Website

The Commission’s website is the primary means of making information available to the public. The Commission also has a Twitter account to help reach a wider audience. During the reporting period, the website was used to provide updates about the 2023 Review, and to publish the Initial Proposals and accompanying maps, as well as representations received and records of the public hearings, in line with the legislation. The Commission also used the Citizen Space online consultation portal to facilitate members of the public, political parties and wider civic society in making representations on the Commission’s Initial Proposals.

# Section 5: The 2023 Review of Parliamentary Constituencies

## 5.1 The 2023 Review

The Commission’s Initial Proposals for 18 constituencies in Northern Ireland were published on 20th October 2021, which marked the commencement of the initial consultation period. In line with Rule 2 in Schedule 2 of the Act, all 18 constituencies proposed had electorates within 5% of the electoral quota, this range being 69,724 – 77,062.

A map showing the Initial Proposals, along with information about how to participate in the consultation, was displayed in public libraries and local council premises across Northern Ireland, in line with the legislation. The Commission provided information and a range of consultation resources via its website, including an Easy Read Guide to the 2023 Review and an interactive map of the Initial Proposals. Citizen Space, an online consultation portal, was provided to facilitate the submission of representations. The Commission issued press releases which saw good uptake in the local press, and used social media and public display points to share information about the Review.

By the close of the initial consultation period on 15th December 2021, the Commission had received 31 written representations. These representations were published on the Commission’s website on 27th January 2022, just ahead of the start of the secondary consultation period, and in line with its statutory duties. A Guide to the Secondary Consultation Process, including the Public Hearings, was also published.

The secondary consultation period commenced on 9th February 2022 and ended on 23rd March 2022. It provided an opportunity to submit further written representations with respect to the representations from the initial consultation period, as well as to give representations at public hearings. Three public hearings were held during the secondary consultation period in Belfast, Cookstown and Derry/Londonderry, with the option to join by video link in order to support public engagement with the Review. Five representations were given at the public hearings, and records of these were published on the Commission’s website, in line with the legislation. The three written representations received during the secondary consultation period were also published.

Representations made will be taken into account by the Commission when deciding if, and to what extent, to revise its Initial Proposals. Any revisions to its initial proposals are planned to be published in autumn 2022, followed by a 4-week statutory consultation period. Further information about this consultation will be published in due course.

# Section 6: Other activities

## 6.1 Accommodation and IT provision

In February 2022, the Commission vacated its offices at the Bungalow, Stormont House, Belfast, BT4 3SH, following the NIO’s relocation from Stormont House to Erskine House, Belfast, BT1 4GF. The Commission now utilises office facilities at Erskine House as required, and has continued to use the comprehensive service provided by IT Assist for its IT and telephony requirements.

## 6.2 Risk Management

The Commission’s Risk Management framework is in place, and is kept under review.

## 6.3 Staffing and training

Training has been delivered during this reporting year in line with Commission and staff requirements.

## 6.4 Liaison with others

### 6.4.1 Northern Ireland Office

The Commission regularly liaises with the Northern Ireland Office as our sponsoring department in relation to governance matters, in line with the Framework Document. The Department has no role in relation to the operational matters connected with the Commission’s exercise of their powers and duties.

### 6.4.2 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 via video link in January 2022.

### 6.4.3 Land & Property Services

During the period of this Report the Commission has had regular contact with Land & Property Services (LPS) in relation to the Geographic Information Systems (GIS) technology needed to support the Parliamentary Boundary Review, and the delivery of related mapping.

### 6.4.4 Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency

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

### 6.4.5 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 data required for the Parliamentary Boundary Review.

# Section 7: Expenditure

The Commission’s operational expenditure in the financial year 2021/22 is shown in the table below.

|  | **Operational Expenditure**  **2021/22 (£k)** |
| --- | --- |
| **Staff Costs:** |  |
| Salaries & related costs | **173.8** |
| **Commissioners’ Costs:** |  |
| Members’ attendance allowances & related costs | **32.5** |
| **Non-Staff Costs:** |  |
| Accommodation & related costs | **9.9** |
| IT & telephony | **9.5** |
| Professional Fees & Subscriptions | **46.9** |
|  |  |
| **Total** | **272.6** |

Salary costs are determined by the pay arrangements for our staff who are on loan or secondment from other public bodies. 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. Travel and subsistence in the course of official business are paid at Northern Ireland Office rates.

# Section 8: Further information

If you have any queries or require further information, please contact us either by email, telephone or in writing at:

By phone: 028 90 527821

By email: [contact@boundarycommission.org](mailto:contact@boundarycommission.org)

By post: Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland

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20-32 Chichester Street

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You can also find more information on our website, at [www.boundarycommission.org.uk](http://www.boundarycommission.org.uk).

1. Deputised by Dr David Marshall, Director of Census and Population Statistics, during this reporting period. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)