Note of BCNI Briefing with Political Parties and Independents

Thursday 27 May 2021

3.30pm, Stormont Hotel Belfast and via video link

**Attendees:**

Mr. Justice Michael Humphreys, Deputy Chair to the Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland

Ms Sarah Havlin, Boundary Commissioner

Ms Vilma Patterson, Boundary Commissioner

Mr Peter McCully, Alliance Party

Dr. Ashleigh Perry, Democratic Unionist Party

Councillor Anthony Flynn, Green Party

Mr Gary Fleming, Sinn Féin

Mr Brian Tumilty, Sinn Féin

Mr Martin McAuley, Social Democratic and Labour Party

Mr Samuel Morrison, Traditional Unionist Voice

Mr Roy Beggs MLA, Ulster Unionist Party

Councillor Andrew Wilson, Ulster Unionist Party

Ms Heather McKinley, Secretary to the Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland

Dr Andrea Richardson, Deputy Secretary to the Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland

Ms Lisa Hay, Secretariat, Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland

Ms Lyn McBride, Secretariat, Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland

# Welcome and Introductions

Mr. Justice Humphreys welcomed attendees and Commissioners briefly introduced themselves. The Deputy Chair noted that the Guide to the 2023 Review had now been published and that the purpose of the briefing was to publicise general information about how the Commission proposes to carry out its functions. As part of this, political parties and independents with representation at either Westminster or the Northern Ireland Assembly had been invited to attend this briefing session. He emphasised that no specific boundary proposals would be discussed – there would be a number of opportunities during the Review process for representations to be made on these.

The Deputy Chair outlined the statutory framework which sets out a specific and detailed process which the Commission must follow. An overview of the process and anticipated timetable for the 2023 Review was provided, noting that there will be a number of opportunities for members of the public, political parties and wider civic society to share their views. Attendees were encouraged to refer to the [Guide to the Review](https://www.boundarycommission.org.uk/news/boundary-commission-northern-ireland-publishes-guide-2023-review), which is now available on the Commission’s website, for information throughout the Review.

# Role, Remit and Procedures

Mr Justice Humphreys set out the Commission’s role as an independent and impartial public body responsible for reviewing Parliamentary constituency boundaries in Northern Ireland on the basis of rules laid down by Parliament, namely the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986, as amended. He noted that the Act was most recently amended by the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 2020, so some of the details of the legislation have changed since the last Review. The 2018 boundary review was brought to a close by the 2020 Act, without implementation.

Mr. Justice Humphreys outlined how the Commission will develop and publish proposals in accordance with the Act, and then highlighted the importance of public consultation in the 2023 Review process. He set out the broad timetable of the Review as follows:

* The Commission aims to publish initial proposals in autumn 2021, followed by an eight week consultation period during which written representations may be submitted. Following the eight week consultation, the Commission will publish these representations on its website.
* A secondary consultation lasting six weeks will follow in due course. During the secondary consultation, individuals can submit written comments on the representations from the initial consultation.
* During the secondary consultation period, the Commission must also hold at least two, and no more than five, public hearings. The public hearings will provide an opportunity for those who wish to make oral representations about any of the Commission’s initial proposals, and present any counter-proposals.
* Following the secondary consultation period, the Commission will publish all written representations and transcripts of the public hearings received during the secondary consultation period on its website.
* Once these representations and transcripts have been published, there will be a further 4-week period during which individuals and organisations can submit written comments in relation to representations made at the Commission’s public hearings. This is known as the ‘third consultation period’
* If following the secondary consultation period, the Commission decides to revise its initial proposals, the Commission will also publish the revised proposals, together with an accompanying report, before the start of the third consultation period.
* Following the third consultation of four weeks, taking into account representations received, the Commission will consider what final recommendations to make for Parliamentary constituencies in Northern Ireland.
* Once the Commission has decided on its final recommendations, it will submit them in a report to the Speaker of the House of Commons who will lay it before Parliament. We will also publish the final recommendations. All four UK Commissions are required to submit their final reports before 1st July 2023.

# Rules

Mr. Justice Humphreys noted that the legislation specifies that the number of UK parliamentary constituencies is 650 and that it provides a formula for their allocation across the UK. He explained that Northern Ireland has been allocated eighteen constituencies for the 2023 Review. He noted the statutory rules regarding electorate size which apply to Northern Ireland, and he also noted Rule 5, which states that the Commission may take into account a number of other factors, if and to such extent as it thinks fit. He explained that the Commission considers that the boundaries of existing constituencies and local government boundaries (i.e. wards), being clear and certain, provide an appropriate starting point for its work in developing proposals. The development of proposals will also be informed by other matters in the course of the consultation process.

# Questions

The Commission invited questions from representatives who were present in the room and via video link; there were no questions raised. Commissioners reiterated that the Commission very much welcomed engagement from political parties, individuals and wider civic society, and that should any questions arise after the briefing, to direct these to the Secretariat. They also noted that the Commission would provide updates and information on its [website](https://www.boundarycommission.org.uk/) and via Twitter throughout the Review, and encouraged those present to use these resources going forward.

**BCNI Secretariat**