

REVIEWS OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

For discussion

1. The Commission gave initial consideration to its approach to future reviews of electoral arrangements at its meeting of 14 March, including noting the recommendations of the Local Government and Communities Committee of the Scottish Parliament. It also noted the current position with regard to administrative reviews (LGBCS Paper 2408 refers). This paper gives an update on these issues.

Meeting with LGBCE

2. At its meeting of 14 March 2017, the Commission asked the Secretariat to arrange a meeting with the Local Government Boundary Commission for England with a view to discussing:
 - consultation processes;
 - approach to council size;
 - size of wards in terms of numbers of councillors
 - dealings with the LGA and SOLACE
3. On 24 April 2017, Roland Bean, Isabel Drummond-Murray and Colin Wilson went to the LGBCE offices in London to meet Chief Executive Jolyon Jackson and two of his review managers. Notes from the meeting are attached at Appendix A.
4. In summary, there was not a strong sense that the overall approach of rolling reviews in England was driven by anything other than pragmatic need. In other words the size and complexity of the task in England necessitates a different approach. In Scotland it is possible to review all councils at the same time and with a consistent approach.
5. However, discussion with LGBCE did raise some points that may be worth considering:
 - if there is no specific answer to the question of how many councillors are needed then flexibility and willingness to let councils make their case individually, within parameters that could be defined, does not seem unreasonable.
 - while consultation is important, consulting the public on councillor numbers, for example, is time consuming but may offer little benefit. Legislative constraints govern some of LGBCS procedures but consideration of how the Commission consults, and on what, may be helpful. LGBCE's own paper on consultation processes is at Appendix B.
 - LGBCE invite councils to produce initial ward designs. The Commission may want to consider the advantages and disadvantages of this. Short of producing ward designs, pre-consultation could allow discussion of

individual council priorities that they consider to be in the interests of effective and convenient local government.

Equality issues

6. The Commission had noted that at the meeting of the UK Boundary Commissions held in Belfast in 2016, there had been discussion around how the Commissions embed best practice approaches to equalities. LGBCS have now reviewed their approach and this is included within their consultation paper at Appendix B. The Secretariat will review the Commission's own approach and bring a further paper to a future meeting.

Local Government and Communities Committee

7. Informal discussions with Scottish Government colleagues suggest their current thinking is that the recommendations simply need to be progressed before the next round of electoral reviews. This is something that might usefully be explored at the meeting with the Minister for Parliamentary Business, particularly if there is any legislative change envisaged. A clear timescale and remit would be helpful.

Administrative reviews – Directions

8. Scottish Ministers have issued a further Direction to the Commission not to carry out administrative area reviews of all local authorities. This renewed Direction is in force until 2022.
9. The Secretariat understands from officials that the Scottish Government is still considering whether a further Direction, similar to that which expired in 2011, is necessary to constrain the Commission's powers so that significant review of administrative boundaries is not conducted on an ad hoc basis. This continues to have implications for the Commission's consideration of the request for review received from Dundee Civic Trust.

Meeting with the Minister

10. At the March meeting the Commission asked the Secretariat to arrange a meeting with the Minister for Parliamentary Business. This will take place on 13 June and will provide an opportunity for discussion of the issues raised in this paper and LGBCS Papers 2415 (Islands Review) and 2416 (Scottish Parliament).

Conclusion

11. The Commission is invited to consider the issues raised in this paper.