

Draft Corporate Plan

1. The Commission is invited to consider the draft Corporate Plan for the period April 2020 to March 2023 which appears at Appendix A.
2. There is uncertainty in the workload of the LGBCS in the next few years, and the Corporate Plan is drafted with a view to providing the Commission some flexibility in its approach, and as such errs of the side of higher expenditure estimates.

Background

3. The draft Corporate Plan provides a forecast expenditure of £480,069 for 2020–21. However, the Scottish Government on 3 December 2019 have suggested a figure of no more than £437,000. This figure is derived from an earlier estimate provided at short notice by the Secretariat in the summer of 2019 which did not include any provision for work around strategic seminars. The Scottish Government have also asked if the Commission can further reduce its budget below £437,000 for 2020–21.
4. Incorporation of the budget for the strategic seminars, including research and survey work (which is estimated to be £44,500 in the Draft Corporate Plan, under the heading “Legal and Research”) within the £437,000, would require reductions elsewhere and the plan as drafted sets out a budget of £480,000 in 2020–21.
5. Reductions could be found from funds allocated in the Corporate Plan for public consultations for the Islands Reviews, including consultations on any Revised Proposals and any Local Inquiries, and from contingencies within the Review Costs budget. Such reductions would likely include reduced expenditure on advertising / publicity costs, such as newspaper advertising and public notices; as well as from costs allocated for public meetings and corresponding fees for commissioners to attending such meetings. Some reductions could also be found from contingencies within the Administration budget. The Secretariat will present options for such reductions at the meeting on 10 December 2019.
6. At this stage a one year budget only is expected and as is normal with a corporate plan, years two and three are indicative only. The Scottish Government are aware of the uncertainties about the future work programme that will become clearer following the passage of the Scottish Elections (Reform) Bill.
7. The Commission’s Memorandum of Understanding with the Scottish Government requires the Corporate Plan to be submitted by 31 December 2019. However, the Secretariat has agreed with officials from the Commission’s sponsor division in the Scottish Government that the Corporate Plan can be submitted in February, should the Commission wish to consider it again at its next scheduled meeting on 4 February 2020.

Review Costs

8. Apart from Staff Costs, which are largely outwith the Commission's control as staff salaries are set by the Scottish Government, Review Costs form the biggest part of the Commission's expenditure. This section of the paper discusses the reviews the Commission expects to carry out in the period of the Corporate Plan, and the cost assumptions made in the Plan.

Islands Reviews

9. The draft Corporate Plan incorporates provision in 2020–21 for the Commission to consult with councils and the public on Revised Proposals for electoral arrangement for the Islands–Only council areas, Orkney Islands, Shetland Islands and Na h–Eileanan an Iar; or hold Local Inquiries into electoral arrangements in those council areas.
10. The costs are budgeted on the basis that Revised Proposals are required for two out of the three council areas. If Revised Proposals are required for none, or only one of the council areas, significant savings could be made. If Revised Proposals were required in all three of the council areas, the budgeted expenditure for public consultation per council area could be reduced proportionately, and Review Costs reserves could be used.
11. The draft Corporate Plan assumes that the consultation with councils on the Commission's Initial Proposals for the Islands Reviews for the Island–Mainland council areas, Argyll and Bute, Highland and North Ayrshire; will begin in March 2020. It assumes that the subsequent public consultation on the Commission's Initial Proposals will begin around July 2020, with a view to the Commission having sufficient time to carry out further consultations with councils and the public on Revised Proposals, or hold a Local Inquiry if it considers either of these necessary.
12. The Plan includes provision for Revised Proposals or Local Inquiries in all of three these council areas. As with the Islands–Only councils, if these were not required, significant savings could be made.

Scottish Parliament Reviews

13. The draft Corporate Plan assumes that the Commission will begin its Second Periodic Review of Scottish Parliament Boundaries around June 2021, to be submitted by May 2024, in line with the timetable set out in the Scottish Elections (Reform) Bill. However, if the Bill introduces 5 year terms and the next but one election falls in 2026 rather than 2025, then the timetable may be put back a year in line with the suggestion contained in the Commission's evidence on the Bill.
14. The draft Corporate Plan assumes that the Interim Review of Scottish Parliament Boundaries at Cardowan, by Stepps, in progress at the time of writing, will be completed by March 2020, outwith the scope of the Plan. It further assumes that the Commission will not undertake any other interim reviews of Scottish Parliament boundaries prior to the Second Periodic Review of Scottish Parliament Boundaries discussed above.

Other Local Government Reviews

15. The draft Corporate Plan assumes that Commission will not undertake any Interim Reviews of electoral arrangements for local authorities over its period. This takes into account that the next set of local authority elections are due to be held in May 2022, the time these Reviews take, and the uncertainty at the time of writing whether the Commission will be granted powers to use 2 and 5 member wards in such Reviews.
16. The draft Corporate Plan makes provision for one Administrative Review of local Authority council area boundaries beginning in 2020–21 and concluding in 2021–22; with a second such review commencing in 2022–23. This is precautionary, and takes into account the recent frequency of such reviews.

Budget Estimates Compared to Last Corporate Plan

17. This draft Corporate Plan includes a cost forecast for 2019–20 which is c. 14% higher than that in the 2019–22 Corporate Plan (£421,529). This is largely due to the additional forecast costs of £44,500 for strategy seminar events (under the Legal and Research heading) which were not forecast in the 2019–22 Corporate Plan.
18. Other changes included a higher estimate for staff costs of c. £24,000 and higher Administration costs of c. £9,000. These offset by lower estimates for Review Costs of c. £14,000.

Conclusion

19. The Commission is invited to provide any comments on the draft Corporate Plan. Once the plan has been agreed with the Commission and the Sponsor Division within the Scottish Government, it will be placed on the Commission's website.

Secretariat
December 2019