

**Minutes of Meeting held in person
10:00am on Tuesday 5 October 2023**

Present

Prof. A Henderson, Chair
Dr S Walker, Deputy Chair
Mr G Macmillan
Mr A Stewart
Mr M Smith

Ms I Drummond–Murray, Secretary
Mr C Wilson
Mr D Campbell
Mr P Allan
Mrs Y Croll

Declaration of Interests

1. Prof Henderson declared a connection in Papers 71 and 73 as she resides within the constituency grouping of East Lothian, Edinburgh, Midlothian and West Lothian Council areas. Mr Smith declared a connection in Papers BS 72 and 73 as he resides within the constituency grouping of Argyll and Bute, East Dunbartonshire, North Lanarkshire and West Dunbartonshire Council areas. Mr Stewart declared a connection in Paper BS 73 as he resides within Falkirk Council area.

Minutes of previous meeting

2. The Commission agreed the minutes of the meeting of 29 August 2023 with a minor amendment.

Matters arising

3. The Secretary reported that the closing date for Deputy Chair and Commissioner vacancy advertisements is 9 October 2023.
4. The Secretary advised she is still awaiting a response from the Scottish Government's sponsor team regarding the updated Framework document.
5. The Secretary stated she had emailed the SPPA (Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments) Committee Convenor, regarding their invitation to attend a further informal session with MSPs to discuss the Second Review of Scottish Parliament Boundaries.

6. The Chair, Deputy Chair and Secretary reported that they had met with the Convenor of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee.

Business update

7. The Secretary advised that the Ministerial Direction, not to undertake reviews under section 14(2) of the Act that would affect more than 500 electors, expired on 30 September 2023. She had been in touch with Scottish Government officials but had no indication of when or if the Direction might be renewed.
8. The Secretary reported that the Welsh Government had published the Senedd (Members and Elections) Bill. Its progress would be of interest and the Secretariat would keep the Commission informed.

Electoral Reform (oral)

9. The Secretary advised that Scottish Government officials had provided no further updates on the draft Bill.
10. A meeting had been held with Scottish Government officials and Scottish Assessors Association to discuss the Commission's access to and use of electoral registers including attainer information. The Commission asked that their views be relayed to the Elections Team.
11. A letter to the Minister for Parliamentary Business had been agreed and will be issued shortly. This thanks the Minister for his recent letter and outlines our engagement with the Scottish Government, and identifies possible areas for further improvement within the rules governing our work. The Secretary would circulate the final letter once issued.

Second Review of Scottish Parliament Boundaries – Consideration of responses to consultation on Provisional Proposals for constituencies – Scottish Borders and South Lanarkshire Council area (Paper BS 70)

12. The Commission discussed Paper BS 70 and noted the responses to its consultation on its provisional proposals for constituencies in Scottish Borders and South Lanarkshire Council area.
13. The Commission noted that Scottish Borders Council had objected to the proposed Clyde Valley and Tweeddale constituency. Therefore the Commission agreed it would need to hold a local inquiry regarding that proposed constituency.

14. The Commission considered all of the responses to the consultation and their alternative suggestions.

15. The Commission agreed it would be appropriate to devise revised proposals after the local inquiry.

Second Review of Scottish Parliament Boundaries – Consideration of responses to consultation on Provisional Proposals for constituencies – City of Edinburgh, East Lothian, Midlothian and West Lothian Council area (Paper BS 71)

16. The Commission considered Paper BS 71 and noted the responses to its consultation on its provisional proposals for constituencies for City of Edinburgh, East Lothian, Midlothian and West Lothian Council areas.

17. The Commission noted that East Lothian Council had objected to the proposed Midlothian North and Musselburgh constituency. Therefore the Commission agreed it would need to hold a local inquiry regarding that proposed constituency.

18. The Commission also agreed to hold a local inquiry in respect of the proposed Edinburgh Forth and Linlithgow constituency due to the large number of responses relating to that constituency.

19. The Commission considered all of the responses to the consultation and their alternative suggestions.

20. The Commission agreed it would be appropriate to devise revised proposals after the local inquiry.

Second Review of Scottish Parliament Boundaries – Consideration of responses to consultation on Provisional Proposals for Argyll and Bute, East Dunbartonshire, North Lanarkshire and West Dunbartonshire Council areas (Paper BS 72)

21. The Commission considered Paper BS 72 and noted the responses to its consultation on its provisional proposals for Argyll and Bute, East Dunbartonshire, North Lanarkshire and West Dunbartonshire Council areas.

22. The Commission acknowledged that over 200 responses had objected to the division of Clydebank between two constituencies as it broke local ties in the area and agreed to hold local inquiry there.

23. The Commission considered all of the responses to the consultation and their alternative suggestions.

24. The Commission agreed it would be appropriate to devise revised proposals after the local inquiry.

Second Review of Scottish Parliament Boundaries – alternative groupings of council areas for constituency design (Paper BS 73)

25. The Commission considered Paper BS 73 and the alternative possible groupings of local authorities.

26. The Commission was mindful that new issues will be raised in local inquiries but for areas where there are not local inquiries, alternative groupings might identify possible improvements to constituency designs. They also recognised that new concerns could arise if changes are made to areas where there had been little opposition to either retained boundaries or new boundaries.

Second Review of Scottish Parliament Boundaries – Local Inquiries (Paper BS 74)

27. The Commission considered Paper BS 74 and the location, timing, general approach and format of its local inquiries.

28. The Commission agreed it must hold a local inquiry where a Council had objected to the provisional proposals for constituencies and objections had been received from: East Lothian Council; Scottish Borders Council; Renfrewshire Council; and East Renfrewshire Council. Although it was not required to hold a local inquiry, the Commission agreed to hold one in Clydebank and the north-west of Edinburgh relating to the Edinburgh Forth and Linlithgow constituency. The Commission asked the Secretariat to contact East Ayrshire Council to clarify if they wished a local inquiry to be held in their area regarding the proposed Cunninghame South and Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley constituencies.

29. The Commission agreed to hold the local inquiries over two sessions, one of which being in the evening to accommodate those unavailable during regular working hours. The Commission also agreed to hold local inquiries in two locations, where necessary, so it could hear the views of locals in different areas of a constituency or council area.

30. The Commission made a number of suggestions regarding the materials required for a local inquiry and how best practice might be followed. The Secretariat will share draft materials at the next Commission meeting or by email beforehand.

UK Commissions Meeting (Paper BS 75)

31. The Commission considered Paper BS 75 and agreed that the Chair and any Commissioners who wished would attend this year's UK Commissions Meeting, hosted jointly by Boundaries Scotland and the Boundary Commission for Scotland on the 7 and 8 December 2023.
32. The Commission provided a number of suggestions for possible guest speakers and the format of the meeting.

Finance update (Paper BS 76)

33. The Commission noted the finance update.

Future meetings

34. The next meeting is scheduled for 14 November 2023.

Any other business

35. The Chair, Mr Stewart and Mr Smith reported that they had attended a training session for board members hosted by Scottish Government, which they had all found useful.
36. The Commission noted that the Secretary had shared recently published Electoral Commission research into the accuracy and completeness of the electoral register.
37. The Commission discussed how to handle an increasing number of consultation responses that included inappropriate language and agreed that a warning should be added to the consultation site when responses are published.