

Minutes of Meeting held at Thistle House, 91 Haymarket Terrace, Edinburgh at 10:00am on Wednesday 11 September 2019

Present

Mr R Hinds, Chair
Prof. A Henderson, Deputy Chair
Mr R Bean
Mr J Collins
Mr G Macmillan
Dr S Walker

Ms I Drummond-Murray, Secretary
Mr C Wilson
Mr D Campbell
Mrs Y Croll
Mr D Logue

Declaration of Interests

1. The Commission stated declarations of interest regarding agenda item 8 (Paper LGBCS 2499): the Chair, Mr Bean and Mr Macmillan own property in Perth and Kinross council area; and Dr Walker noted a close family member had registered at the University of St Andrews.

Minutes of previous meeting

2. The Commission approved the minutes of the meeting on 23 July 2019 with minor amendments.

Matters arising

3. The Secretariat advised the Commission that its new website had gone live at the beginning of September.
4. The Commission discussed the upcoming UK Commissions meeting to be held in London on 28 and 29 November 2019. The Chair, Mr Bean and Mr Macmillan would represent the Commission. The Secretary will have further discussions with the Boundary Commission for England, which is hosting the meeting, and will raise the issue of student electoral registration either as an agenda item or as part of the Commission's update to the meeting.
5. The Secretary advised the Commission that she had met Andy O'Neill, Head of the Electoral Commission, Scotland, to discuss student electoral registration and the Scottish Elections (Reform) Bill.
6. The Commission discussed student electoral registration and asked the Secretariat to contact the other UK Commissions to compare experience and information in other parts of the UK.
7. The Secretary advised the Commission that there was no further update as to when the UK Parliament would consider the Boundary Commission for Scotland's 2018 Review of UK Parliament Constituencies.
8. The Secretary advised the Commission that the both sides were appealing the judgement of the Judicial Review of the Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland's (BCNI) 2018 Review of UK Parliament Constituencies.

9. The Secretariat discussed the fees and expenses claims guidance document. The Secretariat would clarify any tax payable on expenses. The Commission requested the Secretariat check Scottish Government guidance with a view to incorporating caring responsibilities as well as childcare under expenses which could be claimed.
10. The Secretary advised the Commission that she would continue to monitor Brexit developments as part of ongoing risk-assessment.
11. The Secretariat advised the Commission that it will begin the Interim Review of Scottish Parliament boundaries at Cardowan, by Steps, in September, as agreed at the last Commission meeting in July.

Business Update

12. The Chair and Deputy Chair raised the possibility of an event dedicated to consideration of the strategic context affecting the work of the Commission. This could involve inviting stakeholders or others with expertise relevant to our work to attend, give presentations and take part in discussion. Possible issues included views on multi-member wards, proportionality, population trends and councillor numbers. The Commission agreed that this would be helpful, and asked the Secretariat to prepare a paper on this with options for the Commission to consider.

2019 Review of Electoral Arrangements – Na h-Eileanan an Iar, Orkney Islands and Shetland Islands council areas (oral update)

13. The Secretariat advised the Commission that the 12-week public consultation on the Commission's proposals for Na h-Eileanan an Iar, Orkney Islands and Shetland Islands council areas had begun on 10th September and would continue until 2 December. The Secretariat discussed its use of social media to promote the reviews, and advised that more responses had been received so far than in the equivalent consultation period during the 5th Reviews of Electoral Arrangements.
14. The Commission noted that the Chair and Secretary would meet the Association of Shetland Community Councils next week to discuss the review in Shetland.

2019 Review of Electoral Arrangements – Argyll and Bute, Highland and North Ayrshire council areas (oral update)

15. The Secretariat advised the Commission that it had arranged for Commissioners and members of the Secretariat to meet with representatives of each of the three councils in October to discuss their respective Reviews.
16. The Commission discussed the different challenges it may face in making proposals for these areas, which include inhabited islands and parts of the Scottish Mainland, compared to the three council areas which are comprised of islands only. The Commission noted that the Scottish Elections (Reform) Bill 2019, discussed in the next item, would potentially give it power to recommend 2 and 5 member wards throughout these council areas. The Commission noted that it would seek to time its considerations so that it would have the opportunity to consider using these powers if they are introduced by Parliament. During the wide-ranging discussion the Commission considered undertaking research on 1-member wards and asked the secretariat to work with the Deputy Chair to consider proposals for a short survey.

Scottish Elections (Reform) Bill 2019 (Paper LGBCS 2498)

17. The Commission discussed Paper LGBCS 2498 and asked the Secretary to draft evidence to submit to the Scottish Parliament's Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee, in response to the Bill. The Chair asked the Secretary to circulate the draft to Commissioners for comment before submission if the Committee deadline is before the next Commission meeting.

Interim Reviews of electoral arrangements (Paper LGBCS 2499)

18. The Commission considered Paper LGBCS 2499. The Commission noted that it would be seeking further information on student electoral issues, as discussed earlier, and did not wish at this point to initiate Interim Reviews in areas where this appeared to be the cause of high electoral disparity.

19. The Commission considered that the Electoral (Reform) Scotland Bill could have a significant impact on the timing of its future reviews, and could change the number of councillors per ward allowed to include 2 and 5 member wards. The Commission decided to defer a decision to initiate any Interim Reviews until after the Parliament had considered the Bill.

20. The Commission noted that the Bill, if passed, could make it possible for it to carry out the next set of reviews of electoral arrangements for all council areas in a phased manner. The Commission agreed that the evidence gathered in the paper could help it to prioritise reviews for council areas with wards with high levels of electoral disparity, by including them in an earlier group of reviews.

Administrative area reviews – boundary anomalies update (Paper LGBCS 2500)

21. The Commission considered Paper LGBCS 2500. In regards to planning permission for Creon Cottage near Leadburn, the Commission had asked both Midlothian and Scottish Borders councils to comment on advice it has received from Scottish Government. Only Midlothian Council had replied. The Commission asked the Secretariat to contact Scottish Borders Council again to seek a response, before giving further consideration to undertaking an Administrative Review of the local authority boundary in the area.

22. The Commission considered the boundary anomalies between Dumfries and Galloway and East Ayrshire council areas at Loch Doon; at Dundee City council area at the V & A Museum, and between East Dunbartonshire council area and Glasgow City council area at Netherton, south of Bearsden. The Commission agreed not to undertake Reviews of Administrative Area boundaries in these areas, given that none of the affected councils, nor any electors had raised concerns.

Finance update (Paper LGBCS 2501)

23. The Secretariat advised the Commission of an error affecting points 1–4 of the paper. It advised that the forecast expenditure had fallen by approximately £25,000 since that shown in the Finance Update presented in Paper LGBCS 2497 which was considered at the 23 July 2019 meeting.

24. The fall in the forecast expenditure was largely due to the effect of the Commission choosing not to hold public meetings in Na h-Eileanan an Iar, Orkney and Shetland council areas at this time. The Commission noted the revised Finance Update.

Future meetings (oral update)

25. The Commission confirmed that its next meetings would be held on 29 October 2019 and 10 December 2019. Mr Collins submitted his apologies for 29 October.

Any other business

26. There was no other business.