

Minutes of Meeting held at Thistle House, 91 Haymarket Terrace, Edinburgh at 10am on Tuesday 10 December 2019

Present

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

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

Declaration of Interests

1. There were no declarations of interest.

Minutes of previous meeting

2. The Commission approved the minutes of the meeting on 29 October 2019 without amendments.

Matters arising

3. The Secretary advised that all matters arising from the previous minutes would be covered in subsequent items.

Business Update

4. The Secretary advised the Commission that the Welsh Parliament is considering the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Bill which, amongst other things, would extend the franchise to 16 and 17 year olds and allow local authorities to choose whether their councils are elected by the first-past-the-post or the single-transferrable vote system. The Secretary advised that she will keep in contact with the Chief Executive at the Local Democracy and Boundary Commission for Wales in order to keep the Commission informed of any developments which may be relevant to its work.
5. The Secretary noted that the UK General Election is scheduled for Thursday 12 December. This will not have any direct effect upon the work of the Commission; however, the policy of the new government could have an impact on the work of the Boundary Commission for Scotland (BCS), with which the Commission shares the Secretariat, and which is due to begin its next Review of UK Parliament Constituencies in early 2021. The Secretary will advise the Commission of any changes to the review schedule of the BCS.
6. The Secretary advised the Commission that she had been advised of a new Scottish Government "Governance Hub" which provides training resources for members of boards. She advised that she will send the commissioners login details when she receives them.

Introduction to papers LGBCS 2508 and 2509

7. The Secretariat provided an update on the public consultation which closed on 2 December 2019 for the 3 Islands-only council areas. The consultation yielded

128 responses, of which 123 came through the consultation portal. 80 respondents said they had first heard of the consultation through social media, and 15 through newspapers. Shetland Islands Council have been given an extension to the deadline, and will respond shortly after the General Election

8. The Secretariat explained that papers 2508 and 2509 provided an initial analysis of the responses received by close on 2 December and that further work mapping options would be conducted and presented to the Commission at its next meeting before the Commission makes a decision on next steps for all 3 Islands-only council areas.
9. The Commission asked for information to be provided on electorates and associated variation from parity for all inhabited islands within the 3 council areas.
10. The Secretariat advised that they would carry out research on the readability of the maps used in the consultation as a small number of respondents had said that they struggled to understand them. The Secretariat will also arrange to meet the Scottish Government's Communications team with a view to maximizing the effectiveness of the Commission's news releases.
11. The Commission discussed the new methods of digital engagement it had used during the public consultation on the Islands-only council areas. The Commission asked the Secretariat to present an analysis of this for a future meeting, with a view to informing future public consultations.
12. The Commission asked the Secretary to investigate how it would go about obtaining legal advice if it felt it required this during the course of the Reviews.

2019 Reviews of Electoral Arrangements – Na h-Eileanan an Iar council area (Paper LGBCS 2508)

13. The Commission discussed the responses received relating to Na h-Eileanan an Iar council area and asked the Secretariat to further summarise and analyse the responses and issues raised, grouping them where appropriate. The Commission asked the Secretariat to include an analysis of the proposed one-member Barra ward in its paper to the next Commission meeting, and investigate alternative suggestions to this ward.

2019 Reviews of Electoral Arrangements – Orkney Islands council area (Paper LGBCS 2509)

14. The Commission discussed the responses received relating to Orkney Islands council area and asked the Secretariat to further summarise and analyse the responses and issues raised, grouping them where appropriate. The Commission asked the Secretariat to incorporate an analysis of possible alternatives to the 3-member North Islands ward, taking into account inter-island transport links and the possibility of linking some islands to the Mainland.

2019 Reviews of Electoral Arrangements – Argyll and Bute, Highland and North Ayrshire council areas – Oral Update

15. The Secretariat provided an update on the three Island-Mainland council areas due to be reviewed as part of the Commission's Islands reviews. It advised that it was awaiting forecast electorate data from Highland Council, which Commissioners met in October, and expects to receive this after the UK General Election.

16. The Chair and Mr Wilson of the Secretariat had met Argyll and Bute Council in October to discuss the Review, and the Council had suggested that Commissioners may wish to attend its community planning meetings to get a sense of the issues in the council area. The Secretariat advised that the Chair and Mr Wilson would have a similar meeting with North Ayrshire Council on 17 December 2019.

Scottish Elections (Reform) Bill 2019 – Oral Update

17. The Secretary updated the Commission on the progress of the Scottish Elections (Reform) Bill. She advised that Stage One of the Bill must be completed by 7 February, at which point any legislative changes relevant to the Commission may become clearer.

18. The Chair, the Deputy Chair and the Secretary had met the Minister for Parliamentary Business and Veterans on 13 November, to discuss the Commission's views on the Bill. The Chair asked that the follow-up letter to the Minister be circulated to Commissioners.

19. The Chair had given evidence on the Bill to the Local Government and Communities Committee of the Parliament on 6 November and, along with the Deputy Chair and the Secretary, had also given evidence to the Standards, Procedure and Public Appointments Committee on 21 November. The Official Report of both meetings is available on the Scottish Parliament website.

Interim Review of Scottish Parliament Constituencies and Regions at Cardowan by Steps (LGBCS Paper 2510)

20. The Commission considered the responses to the public consultation which ended on 31 October, and noted that the majority of respondents were in favour of its proposals. The Commission decided to adopt its proposals as its Final Recommendations, taking into account that they would align Scottish Parliament boundaries with council area boundaries, and the public support they had received. The Commission approved the Draft Report in Appendix C, and asked the Secretariat to submit it to Scottish Ministers in March 2020.

21. The Commission noted that some respondents had raised issues related to schools during the public consultation. The Commission asked the Secretariat to contact North Lanarkshire council to make them aware of the issues that had been raised and seek their views.

22. The Commission also asked the Secretariat to notify the Boundary Commission for Scotland of its recommendations to Scottish Ministers.

Strategic Seminar Options – Multi-Member wards (Paper LGBCS 2511)

23. The Commission considered Paper LGBCS 2511 and discussed the aims, format and possible participants of future events relating to multi-member wards. The Commission noted that its interest in holding an event on multi-member wards was primarily focused on understanding what is meant by effective and convenient local government. The Commission agreed that it would be interested in exploring this further with other interested parties.

24. The Commission agreed that the Chair, the Deputy Chair and the Secretary would progress arrangements including contacting other organisations with a

view to having a workshop or roundtable discussion to further explore the issue in early 2019.

UK Boundary Commissions Meeting (Oral Update)

25. The Secretary updated the Commission on the annual meeting of the UK Boundaries Commissions, hosted by the Boundary Commission for England in London on 28–29th November 2019. The Commission was represented by the Chair and Mr Bean. The Deputy Chair also participated in the meeting remotely, in her capacity as a member of the Boundary Commission for Scotland.
26. A note of the meeting and the presentations, from the Electoral Commission and Professor Ron Johnston, would be circulated when available. The Commission asked the Secretary to monitor progress of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Bill, (see Business Update, above); to consider further the options for provision of a consultation portal for future reviews; and consider the implications of the judicial review of the recommendations of the Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland.

Risk Register (Paper 2512)

27. The Commission discussed the Risk Register and agreed to remove risk 10, which related to whether the Commission's website would be ready in time for the Islands Reviews' public consultation. The Commission asked the Secretariat to update risks 11 and 12, and to review risk 3 with reference to the need for transparency and clarity with regard to consideration of responses to consultations.

Draft Corporate Plan (Paper 2514)

28. The Commission discussed the Draft Corporate Plan, and the Scottish Government's advice that £437,000 had been provisionally allocated in 2020–21, and its request that the Commission find further savings.
29. The Secretariat presented the Commission with some options for savings. The Commission noted these, and that the Corporate Plan, which had budgeted for £480,069 in 2020–21, erred on the high side in terms of costs and the Commission's likely activity during the Islands Reviews.
30. The Commission agreed that it would not seek to spend more than £437,000 in 2020–21, but that it could not offer further savings at this point. The Commission asked the Secretariat to re-present the Corporate Plan at its next meeting, with an analysis which categorises costs for 2020–21 in terms of importance, making clear where spend is essential and where discretionary, with a view to identifying further savings the Commission could make if necessary.

Finance update (Paper LGBCS 2515)

31. The Commission noted the latest Finance Update.

Future meetings (oral update)

32. The Commission confirmed that its next meeting would be held on 4 February 2020, and asked the Secretariat to liaise with Commissioners to determine the date of its subsequent meeting, currently scheduled for March.

Any other business

33. There was no other business.