

Minutes of Meeting held by videolink at 10am on Tuesday 21 July 2020

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

Apologies:

None

Declaration of Interests

1. There were no declarations of interest.

Minutes of previous meeting

2. The Commission approved the minutes of the meetings on 14 February 2020 without amendment. The Commission approved the minutes of the meeting of 7 April 2020 with minor amendments.

Matters arising

3. The Secretary advised the Commission that she would bring a paper on digital engagement for the public consultation on proposals for Argyll and Bute, Highland and North Ayrshire council areas to the next meeting. The Chair asked that this be circulated to the Commission prior to the meeting.
4. The Secretary advised that the Secretariat is working on updating the Business Continuity Plan to incorporate lessons learned from the impact of the coronavirus, and would bring an updated Risk Register to the next meeting.

Business Update

5. The Secretary updated the Commission on the Secretariat's working arrangements, given the closure of the office at Thistle House. The Commission asked the Secretariat to explore ways of showing maps by videolink, and if possible to arrange for paper maps to be available for the next meeting.
6. The Secretary advised the Commission that Scottish Government officials had not yet confirmed when the Scottish Parliament would consider the Commission's recommendations from its Interim Review of Scottish Parliament boundaries at Cardowan, by Stepps, but were aware of the need for this to be in sufficient time for implementation at the next Scottish Parliament elections in May 2021.
7. The Secretary advised the Commission that Scottish Government would soon begin the process of appointing new Commissioners, as the appointments of some of the current Commissioners, including the Chair, are due to end next year. The Secretary suggested the Commission may wish to discuss this further

at its next meeting, with a view to considering any actions to encourage a diverse range of applicants.

8. The Commission was advised that the next UK Commissions meeting, due to be hosted by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE), will take place by videolink on 27 November 2020. LGBCE have suggested that participation should be limited to the Chairs and Chief Executives / Secretaries of each Commission.
9. The Secretary advised the Commission that the UK Parliament is considering the Parliamentary Constituencies Bill, which would result in the Boundary Commission for Scotland's next review of UK Parliament constituencies reporting by June 2023. This would overlap with the Commission's 2nd Periodic Review of Scottish Parliament Boundaries, which the Secretariat expects to commence in the last quarter of 2022.
10. The Secretary advised the Commission that Paula Sharp's appointment to the Boundary Commission for Scotland ends in December 2020, and that the Office of the Secretary of State for Scotland would be advertising for this position soon.
11. The Secretariat advised that it had been shown a demonstration of new mapping software, which may have benefits for ward or constituency design for both BCS and LGBCS. The Secretariat will monitor development of the software and keep the Commission informed.

2019 Review of Electoral Arrangements – oral update

12. The Secretariat advised the Commission that the consultations with Argyll and Bute, Highland and North Ayrshire councils on the Commission's initial proposals for electoral arrangements in these council areas had begun on 16 July and will close on 30 September 2020. The Secretariat had agreed extensions to the normal two-month consultation period to facilitate council consideration.
13. Argyll and Bute Council suggested that the Commission provide a presentation to the Council on the background to the review and its proposals. The presentation would take place by videolink in late August or early September. The Commission were happy to agree to this.

Scottish Elections (Reform) Act (Paper LGBCS 2528)

14. The Commission noted the changes introduced by the Scottish Elections (Reform) Act. The Commission noted the Parliamentary debate regarding use of two and five member wards and the requirement for the Commission to provide explanations of the use of two member wards. The Commission discussed the factors to be taken account of in making its decisions and asked the Secretariat to consider the wording of its reports and to work up examples of how it might present its recommendations over use of one and two member wards in the islands-only councils and bring these to a future meeting.
15. The Commission agreed that its preferred timing for the commencement of the sections of the Scottish Elections (Reform) Act which change the Commission's name to "Boundaries Scotland" and permit the use of 2 and 5 member wards, would be spring 2021, prior to the submission of the Commission's reports on the Islands Reviews. This would mean the Commission consulting on proposals for 2 and 5 member wards before the relevant sections are commenced but as

the legislation was enacted the Commission was content to proceed on this basis. The Secretariat was asked to advise Scottish Government of its views.

16. The Chair asked the Secretary to liaise with Scottish Government officials to arrange the next regular meeting with the Minister for Parliamentary Business, preferably before the Commission's October meeting.

Request for Administrative Boundary Review at Westerton Avenue (Paper LGBCS 2529)

14. The Commission considered the request for a review of the boundary between East Dunbartonshire council area and Glasgow City council area at Westerton Avenue. The Commission noted that there is little difference between the distance between Westerton Avenue and schools and amenities in Glasgow City council area; and the distance between Westerton Avenue and schools and amenities in East Dunbartonshire council area. The Commission considered that any issues regarding road safety could reasonably be resolved through co-operation between the councils. The Commission also noted that the existing boundary in this locality was a long-established boundary.
15. Against that background, the Commission was not persuaded that there was strong evidence that a review of the council area boundary in this area was required in the interests of effective and convenient local government.

Scottish Parliament constituency names (Paper LGBCS 2530)

16. The Secretariat and the Deputy Chair, who is also a member of the Boundary Commission for Scotland (BCS), advised the Commission that the BCS is content to continue its existing policy regarding the naming of constituencies, ahead of its 2023 Review of UK Parliament constituencies, but would be happy to engage with the Commission before confirming this.
17. The Commission noted the potential for confusion among members of the public where UK Parliament and Scottish Parliament constituencies cover much of the same area but have different names. The Commission asked the Secretariat to draft a set of criteria for considering Scottish Parliament constituency names for consideration at its next meeting. The Commission also asked the Secretariat to review the historical use of "burgh" or "county" designations.

Annual Report (Paper LGBCS 2531)

18. The Commission noted the draft Annual Report, and asked the Secretariat to redraft the Chair's forward, and make some minor revisions elsewhere. The Commission agreed that the report would be finalised by the Chair and Secretary, before being passed the Commission's sponsor department in the Scottish Government.

Finance Update (Paper LGBCS 2532)

19. The Commission agreed that due to the progress of the Islands Reviews, and the changes to the review timetable as a consequence of the coronavirus, it could reduce its budget forecast by £50,000 for 2020–21. This was in addition to the £50,000 reduction previously agreed with the Scottish Government and referred to in the Commission's letter of allocation, received in June 2020. The Commission's overall budget for 2020–21 would not therefore exceed £337,000. The Commission asked the Secretariat to advise the Scottish Government that the additional £50,000 could be released, emphasising that this should not prejudice budgetary decisions for future years.

20. The Commission agreed to retain funds set aside for activities associated with strategy seminars, such as opinion polling and commissioning research, within its budget for 2020–21. The Commission asked the Secretariat to prepare a paper on options for future work in this area at its next meeting, and to add this to the agenda for the Chair’s next meeting with the Minister for Parliamentary Business.

Future meetings (oral update)

21. The Commission confirmed that it next planned to meet on 12 October 2020, and asked the Secretariat to arrange a further meeting to take place after the conclusion of the public consultations on electoral arrangements for Argyll & Bute, Highland and North Ayrshire council areas.

Any other business

22. There was no other business.