

Minutes of Meeting held by videolink at 10am on Monday 12 October 2020**Present**

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

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

Apologies:

Dr S Walker

Declaration of Interests

1. There were no declarations of interest.

Minutes of previous meeting

2. The Commission approved the minutes of the meeting on 21 July 2020 without amendment.

Matters arising

3. The Secretary advised the Commission that the Secretariat will continue to follow government advice and will work from home until at least early 2021. The Secretariat has limited access to its office, but will do its best to ensure that it is able to continue to post printed copies of maps and papers to the Commission at future meetings. The Scottish Government is expecting to roll out new videoconferencing software, Microsoft Teams, soon. The Secretariat will explore using this software for future Commission meetings.
4. The Secretary advised the Commission that she had begun discussions with Scottish Government officials on appointments of a new Chair and new Commissioners. These appointments are due next year, when the terms of the the Chair and two of the current Commissioners end.
5. The Secretary advised that the annual meeting of the UK Boundaries Commissions is scheduled for the morning of Friday 27 November. The Local Government Boundary Commission for England will host the meeting and is in the process of drawing up the agenda. At present, only the Chairs and Secretaries / Chief Executives of the Commissions are scheduled to attend but it may be possible for other Commissioners to attend if they are keen to do so.
6. The Secretary updated the Commission on the Boundary Commission for Scotland's (BCS) preparations for the 2023 Review of UK Parliament Constituencies. She advised that the Parliamentary Constituencies Bill is in progress and therefore the structure, timing and electoral data for the review has not yet been confirmed. The Secretary also advised that the date for applications to join BCS had passed.

7. The Secretary advised the Commission that the Parliamentary Boundary Commissions planned to explore further the use of new mapping software during the 2023 Review of UK Parliament Constituencies. The Commission would be in a position to consider the results of this when considering mapping for future reviews. The Secretariat will keep the Commission informed of any developments.

Business Update

8. The Chair, Deputy Chair and Secretary met Graeme Dey, Minister for Parliamentary Business and Veterans, on 30 September to discuss various matters. With regard to the Islands Reviews they had made the Minister aware that some councils may have expectations of the Reviews that the legislation does not allow the Commission to meet. For example, the Commission would not be able to propose different ratios of electors to councillors for island-only wards and mainland wards within the same council area.
9. The Commission discussed with the Minister that the Scottish Elections Reform Act 2020, had not changed the date by which the next set of reviews of local government electoral arrangements are scheduled to be completed from May 2028 to May 2031, in line with changing the timetable for those reviews from an 8–12 to a 15 year cycle. The Minister agreed in principle to amend the Act to move the date to May 2031 and this would be pursued at a future date.
10. The Commission also discussed the use of 2 and 5 member wards, and multi-member wards more generally, with the Minister. The Chair and Secretary agreed to write to the Minister summarising their understanding of the meeting, and circulate this letter to the Commission.
11. The Secretary advised that the Commission's recommendations to align Scottish Parliament boundaries with revised local authority boundaries at Cardowan, by Steps, are likely to be considered by the Privy Council in November.

2019 Review of Electoral Arrangements – oral update

12. The Secretariat summarised the progress of the Islands Reviews so far, and advised the Commission that it is working on a template for the Final Reports for Na h-Eileanan Iar, Orkney Islands and Shetland Islands council areas, which it hopes to bring to the next Commission meeting.

2019 review of Electoral Arrangements – Consideration of Initial Proposals for North Ayrshire council area (Paper LGBCS 2533)

13. The Commission noted that North Ayrshire Council supported the Initial Proposals, but had submitted a suggestion to make a minor amendment to the proposed ward boundary in hills between Fairlie and Kilbirnie so that it matches the watershed in the area, transferring two wind turbines which overlook the Garnock Valley into the proposed Garnock Valley ward. Adopting this suggestion would mean that the proposed ward boundaries would match the Council's Locality boundaries, and would help to ensure that future community benefits associated with windfarms go to the community which they overlook.
14. The Commission noted that the suggestion by North Ayrshire Council would not affect the number of electors in either of the relevant wards, and that changing the boundary in the manner suggested would better reflect local ties and enhance effective and convenient local government.

15. The Commission agreed to use its Initial Proposals as its proposals for Public Consultation, amended to incorporate the change suggested by North Ayrshire Council.

2019 review of Electoral Arrangements – Consideration of Initial Proposals for Argyll and Bute council area (Paper LGBCS 2534)

14. The Commission discussed Paper LGBCS 2534, noting in particular the Council's opposition to the reduction in councillor numbers and to a two-member ward in Bute; as well as noting that the Council would support placing small islands which are within mainland wards in the Initial Proposals within dedicated island wards if views were expressed in favour of this during the Public Consultation. The Commission also noted in particular that the Council would be interested in the views of the public on whether island-only or island-mainland wards would better represent the interests of communities.
15. The Commission considered the concerns raised by the Council relating to the number of councillors Bute should have, and its comparisons with the representation of other island-only wards where special geographic circumstances would also apply. The Commission noted the high variance from electoral parity a three-member ward in Bute would have, and the opposition in the previous Review to a ward linking Bute and the mainland for better electoral parity. The Commission agreed to retain a 2-member ward for Bute in its Initial Proposals for the Public Consultation; but were keen to hear public responses to the proposed Bute ward.
16. The Commission considered the suggestion by the Council to amend the Initial Proposals' boundary in Kintyre to place Tarbert and Skipness within a Mid-Argyll ward. It agreed that this would be likely to better reflect local ties in the area by following a community council area boundary, and that this change could be made without causing the variation from electoral parity of either of the affected wards to exceed 10%. The Commission agreed to adopt this suggested change within its proposals for Public Consultation.
17. The Commission agreed to adopt its Initial Proposals as its proposals for Public Consultation, amended to incorporate the change suggested by the Council in Kintyre.
18. The Commission asked the Secretariat to liaise with the Council with a view to Commissioners attending meetings of the Council's Area Community Planning Groups in November, which are also attended by community councils in order to discuss the Review.

2019 Review of Electoral Arrangements – Consideration of Initial Proposals for Highland council area (Paper LGBCS 2535)

19. The Commission discussed Paper LGBCS 2535 and regretted that Highland Council had failed to respond and comment on the Initial Proposals during the council consultation. The Commission agreed that in the absence of a response it had no alternative but to retain its Initial Proposals without amendment for public consultation.

Islands Review – Public Consultation – Argyll and Bute, Highland and North Ayrshire council areas (Paper LGBCS 2536)

20. The Commission discussed Paper LGBCS 2536, and agreed various approaches to effectively promote the public consultation while taking account of restrictions

to public buildings during the COVID-19 pandemic. These included continued use of social media, newspaper adverts and display points.

21. The Commission agreed to retain the 12-week length for the public consultation.
22. The Commission asked the Secretariat to prepare questions and answers for media enquiries, and that Commissioners should make themselves available for media interviews.
23. The Commission asked the Secretariat to prepare sub-questions relevant to each council area, and circulate these to the Commission for consideration.
24. The Commissioners suggested some amendments to the Guidance Booklet, and agreed to email the Secretariat with any corrections.

Islands Review – Media coverage to date for Highland council area (Paper LGBCS 2537)

25. The Secretariat advised the Commission that there had been one further media report on the Reviews since the paper was issued: a report in the Oban Times which focused on the Initial Proposals' reduction of councillor numbers in Argyll and Bute council area. The Secretariat would continue to monitor the media report and keep the Commission updated.
26. The Commission noted the media reports in the paper.

Scottish Parliament Constituency name policy (Paper LGBCS 2538)

27. The Commission discussed Paper LGBCS 2538 and expressed a preference for naming constituencies after localities within the constituency where possible, and agreed the general criteria for naming constituencies in point 12 in Paper LGBCS 2538. The Commission agreed to share its criteria for naming constituencies with the Boundary Commission for Scotland.

Risk Register (Paper LGBCS 2539)

28. The Commission considered Paper LGBCS 2539 and made some suggestions and asked that the Risk Register be presented at a Commission meeting in early 2021.

Finance Update (Paper LGBCS 2540)

29. The Secretariat advised the Commission that the Scottish Government had acknowledged the Commission's advice that it would not spend more than £337,000 this financial year, taking into account the changes to the review timetable as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic, and that the £100,000 saved from its budget allocation would now be used elsewhere.
30. The Commission noted the Finance Update.

Future meetings (oral update)

31. The Commission provisionally agreed to have its next meeting on 15 December 2020, to be confirmed by email.

Any other business

32. There was no other business.