

Minutes of Meeting held by videolink at 10am on Monday 8 February 2021

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 meeting on 15 December 2020 without amendment.

Matters arising

3. The Secretary updated the Commission on discussions with Scottish Government on the process for appointing a new Chair and two new Commissioners to replace the current Chair and two Commissioners when their terms of appointment end and a possibility of extending their terms by 12 months. A further update would be provided to the next meeting.
4. The Secretary provided an update on discussions with the councillor who had been responsible for submitting multiple responses to the consultation on the Initial Proposals for Argyll and Bute council area. The Commission agreed that the Secretary should work with the Chair to draft a letter of complaint to the Commission for Ethical Standards in Public Life. This would be copied to Argyll and Bute Council.
5. The Secretary advised the Commission that the Boundary Commission for Scotland (BCS) had announced the start of the 2023 Review of UK Parliament Constituencies on 5 January 2021.
6. The Chair asked the Secretary to circulate a note of the recent meeting of the UK Boundary Commissions to the Commission.

Business Update

7. The Secretary advised the Commission that the Secretariat is still working from home with very limited access to the office, with no date for going back to the office yet.
8. The Secretary advised the Commission that there is no date set for commencement of the section of the Scottish Elections (Reform) Act 2020 which

would change the Commission's name to "Boundaries Scotland". It would, however, be before submission of the final reports to be submitted in May 2021. The Commission requested a short paper for the next meeting discussing options for managing the impact of the name change.

9. The Secretary advised that the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner for Northern Ireland is conducting its first review of local government boundaries in Northern Ireland since 2009.
10. The Commission noted that the sections of the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018 relating to Islands Community Impact Assessment had recently been commenced. The Secretary is in touch with Scottish Government officials in regards to this, with a view to establishing the implications for the current Islands reviews.

2019 Review of Electoral Arrangements – Draft summary of responses to public consultation – Argyll and Bute (Paper LGBCS 2456)

11. The Commission considered Paper LGBCS 2456 and noted the high level of responses to the public consultation.
12. For the paper at the next meeting, which would examine and analyse the responses in more detail, the Commission asked the Secretariat to discuss in particular the responses to the proposed 2-member ward on Bute, with a view to considering whether a 2-member or 3-member ward would be more appropriate.

2019 Review of Electoral Arrangements – Draft summary of responses to public consultation – Highland (Paper LGBCS 2547)

13. The Commission considered Paper LGBCS 2547 and noted the high level of responses to the public consultation.
14. For the paper at the next meeting, which would examine and analyse the responses in more detail, the Commission asked the Secretariat to consider in particular arrangements in Caithness, Sutherland, Skye and Culloden.
15. The Commission agreed to respond to the letter sent by the Leader of Highland Council to clarify a number of points relating to the review, which it would copy to councillors and local MSPs representing Highland council.

2019 Review of Electoral Arrangements – Draft summary of responses to public consultation – North Ayrshire (Paper LGBCS 2548)

16. The Commission considered Paper LGBCS 2548. For the paper at the next meeting, which would examine and analyse the responses in more detail, the Commission asked the Secretariat to discuss in particular the responses to the proposed 1-member Arran ward and the Garnock Valley 5-member ward.

Final Reports – format and content (Paper LGBCS 2549)

17. The Commission discussed Paper LGBCS 2549 and asked the Secretariat to make some changes to the format and content of the template Final Report, with another draft version to be considered at the next meeting. The Commission agreed that it would seek legal advice with regard to checking the Final Reports and asked the Secretariat to make arrangements for this.

Risk register (Paper LGBCS 2550)

18. The Commission considered Paper LGBCS 2550. The Commission requested that the Secretariat amend the Risk Register to remove the risk relating to Brexit, and to include the risk of deliberate public misinformation about the Reviews, and to review the risks relating to the expectations of councils and political lobbying.

Finance Update (Paper LGBCS 2551)

19. The Commission noted the Finance update. In the context of the decision to pursue legal advice with respect to the final reports, the Commission decided that it was not in a position to give up further funds.

Future meetings (oral update)

20. The Commission agreed to meet again on Thursday 11 March. The Secretariat will email Commissioners to arrange meeting dates for the following two months.

Any other business

21. There was no other business.