

**Minutes of Meeting held remotely via Teams  
14:00 on Thursday 29 January 2026**

**Present**

Prof. A Henderson, Chair  
Mr S Jones, Deputy Chair  
Ms A McNab  
Mr G Macmillan  
Mr M Smith  
Mr A Stewart

Ms K Mavor, Secretary  
Mr C Wilson  
Mr D Campbell  
Mr P Allan  
Mrs Y Croll

**Apologies**

None

**Declaration of Interest or Connection**

1. There were no declarations of interest.

**Minutes of previous meeting**

2. The Commission agreed the minute of the 9 December 2025 meeting without amendment.

**Matters arising**

3. The Secretary updated the Commission on discussions with Scottish Government about document sharing practices. Knowledge Hub has been recommended as an appropriate platform and the Secretariat intends to share the next meeting's papers via this restricted group.
4. The Secretary provided details of the engagement and communication budget of the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) and Democracy and Boundary Commission Cymru (DBCC). The Commission requested more detailed information regarding their respective budgets.

**Business update**

5. The Chair, Deputy Chair and Secretary reported they had recently met with the Electoral Commission and had discussed various topics including the recommendations from the Independent Review of the Process for Determining Electoral Boundaries in Scotland.
6. The Chair provided a brief update on her recent meeting with Luke Mcbratney, Deputy Director, Elections and Constitutional Projects.
7. The Secretary reported that she is awaiting confirmation of a date for the Chair to meet with the Minister for Parliamentary Business and Veterans.
8. The Secretary confirmed that the 2026 UK Boundary Commissions' meeting will take place in Cardiff on 12 - 13 March 2026. The Chair and Deputy Chair will be

attending this meeting along with the Secretary. The agenda for this meeting will be shared with the Commission, once received.

9. The Secretary reported that the pre-election period, for the 7 May 2026 Scottish Parliament election would begin on 26 March 2026.
10. The Secretary advised that DBCC carried out an automatic voter registration pilot and this was evaluated by the Electoral Commission. The link to the relevant report is to be shared with Commissioners.

### **S17A Further review: Highland Council (BS 210)**

11. The Commission had agreed at its 9 December meeting to undertake a further review of Highland Council area as directed by Scottish Ministers. The Commission requested a paper setting out the background information to the 2019 electoral review and information about possible approaches and timing.
12. The Commission considered paper BS 210 and noted that s17A clearly states that the manner and extent of the further review is at the Commission's discretion. However, the Commission is required to consider the representations from Parliament as set in paragraph 39 of paper BS 210. The Commission considered the following representations:

"The Committee notes that where the recommendations have been welcomed by local authorities, those authorities have also been very positive about the consultation and engagement work undertaken by Boundaries Scotland. This points to the value of effective dialogue between local authorities and Boundaries Scotland and the Committee would encourage all parties to participate in such conversations in the context of the re-examination of proposals for Argyll and Bute and Highland Council areas with a view to reaching recommendations acceptable to all parties.

The Committee recommends the benefits from building in additional time for discussion with councils in advance of the formal consultation stage of a review should be incorporated into all future reviews of local authority boundaries.

The Committee notes the benefits of digital engagement, but also recognises the challenges it will present to others. The Committee asks that these concerns are taken into account in any future engagement."

The Committee asks the Scottish Government to provide detail of whether the further reviews of the boundaries in Highland and Argyll and Bute will be carried out in as a separate piece of work or as part of a suite of other reviews."

13. After considering the Parliament's representations the Commission noted it had a statutory obligation to "reconsider the proposals and make any further or supplementary proposals as it thinks fit." It further noted that an option available to the Commission was to submit a report to Ministers with a notification there are no further or supplementary proposals to make.
14. The Commissions reconsidered the proposals set out in the published report relating to the 2019 review of Highland Council. To assess how the current boundaries were faring, the Commission also reviewed the current ward electorate data and data relating to the Islands Reviews recommended wards (based on 2022 electoral data as used in the review of Scottish Parliament boundaries). It was noted that the upcoming Scottish Parliament elections and

2027 local government elections meant there was limited time in which consultation could be carried out without impeding genuine consultation or confusing the electorate.

15. The Commission considered the options available and noted that paper BS 2010 provided details of an option where there were minimal changes to the previous recommendations from the Islands Review. The Commission noted that another available option (not explored in paper BS 210) would be to make more significant changes to both recommended ward boundaries and councillor numbers. Further options open to the Commission were to resubmit the Islands Review recommendations with no change or propose that no change be made to the existing boundaries.
16. It was noted that a further review was not a new review and the same methodology would be applied as the 5<sup>th</sup> reviews and the Islands Reviews. Further, there were some concerns raised about this methodology at the time of the Islands Reviews.
17. The Commission noted that the goal of a further review was not to correct for passive malapportionment that might have occurred since the review was submitted. Instead, it was to evaluate the data available as well as the observations made by various actors at the time. The Commission noted The Highland Council has raised concerns relating to the methodology but that this would not be changed until the 2032 reviews following extensive consultation and engagement with councils across Scotland. Considering this, the Commission was of the view that radical or minimal change would not offer an improvement on the status quo.
18. In addition, whilst s17A of the Act did not require consultation to take place, the Commission agreed that it would be good practice to do so if there were any proposed changes. The Commission noted the importance of engaging in consultation exercises in good faith, and that with the two upcoming elections there was limited time in which to carry out meaningful engagement. Also, the Commission noted the risk of confusing voters by engaging in consultations about local wards immediately after a Scottish Parliament review, as well as before, during or immediately after the 2027 local elections. Given the limited time available to carry out a comprehensive further review and meaningfully engage with stakeholders, the Commission agreed that the most appropriate approach was to make no changes to the Islands Review report and propose there should be no change to the existing electoral arrangements for Highland Council.
19. It was the preliminary view of the Commission that it would not submit further proposals but that it would wish to notify Highland Council of this intended approach.
20. The Commission asked the Secretariat to draft a letter to Highland Council formally notifying them of the Commission's intended approach to a further review. It was agreed that the draft letter should be shared with the Commissioners for approval before sending.

**S17A Further review: Argyll and Bute Council (BS 211)**

21. The Commission had agreed at its 9 December meeting to undertake a further review of Argyll and Bute Council area as directed by Scottish Ministers. The Commission requested a paper setting out the background information to the 2019 electoral review and information about possible approaches and timing.
22. The Commission considered paper BS 211 and noted that s17A clearly states that the manner and extent of the further review is at the Commission's discretion. However, the Commission is required to consider the representations from Parliament as set out in paragraph 35 of paper BS 211. The Commission considered the following representations: -

“The Committee notes that where the recommendations have been welcomed by local authorities, those authorities have also been very positive about the consultation and engagement work undertaken by Boundaries Scotland. This points to the value of effective dialogue between local authorities and Boundaries Scotland and the Committee would encourage all parties to participate in such conversations in the context of the re-examination of proposals for Argyll and Bute and Highland Council areas with a view to reaching recommendations acceptable to all parties.

The Committee recommends the benefits from building in additional time for discussion with councils in advance of the formal consultation stage of a review should be incorporated into all future reviews of local authority boundaries.

The Committee notes the benefits of digital engagement, but also recognises the challenges it will present to others. The Committee asks that these concerns are taken into account in any future engagement.”
23. After considering the Parliament's representations the Commission noted it had a statutory obligation to “reconsider the proposals and make any further or supplementary proposals as it thinks fit.” It further noted that an option available to the Commission was to submit a report to Ministers with a notification that there are no further or supplementary proposals to make.
24. The Commissions reconsidered the proposals set out in the published report relating to the 2019 review of Argyll and Bute Council. To assess how the current boundaries were faring the Commission also reviewed the current ward electorate data and data relating to the Islands Reviews recommended wards (based on 2022 electoral data as used in the review of Scottish Parliament boundaries). It was noted that the upcoming Scottish Parliament elections and 2027 local government elections meant there was limited time in which consultation could be carried out without impeding genuine consultation or confusing the electorate.
25. The Commission considered the options available and noted that paper BS 2011 provided details of an option where there were minimal changes to the previous recommendations from the Islands Review. The Commission noted that another available option (not explored in paper BS 211) would be to make more significant changes to both recommended ward boundaries and councillor numbers. Further options open to the Commission were to resubmit the Islands Review recommendations with no change or propose that no change be made to the existing boundaries.

26. It was noted that a further review was not a new review and the same methodology would be applied as the 5<sup>th</sup> reviews and the Islands Reviews. Further, there were some concerns raised about this methodology at the time of the Islands Reviews.
27. The Commission noted that the goal of a further review was not to correct for passive malapportionment that might have occurred since the review was submitted. Instead, it was to evaluate the data available as well as the observations made by various actors at the time. The Commission noted some concerns were raised about the methodology but that this would not be changed until the 2032 review following extensive consultation and engagement with councils across Scotland. Considering this, the Commission was of the view that radical or minimal change would not offer an improvement on the status quo.
28. In addition, whilst s17A of the Act did not require consultation to take place, the Commission agreed that it would be good practice to do so if there were any proposed changes. The Commission noted the importance of engaging in consultation exercises in good faith, and that with the two upcoming elections there was limited time in which to carry out meaningful engagement. Also, the Commission noted the risk of confusing voters by engaging in consultations about local wards immediately after a Scottish Parliament review, as well as before, during or immediately after the 2027 local elections. Given the limited time available to carry out a comprehensive further review and meaningfully engage with stakeholders, the Commission agreed that the most appropriate approach was to make no changes to the Islands Review report and propose there should be no change to the existing electoral arrangements for Argyll and Bute Council.
29. It was the preliminary view of the Commission that it would not submit further proposals but that it would wish to notify Argyll and Bute Council of this intended approach.
30. The Commission asked the Secretariat to draft a letter to Argyll and Bute Council formally notifying them of the Commission's intended approach to a further review. It was agreed that the draft letter should be shared with the Commissions for approval before sending.

### **Independent Review (BS 212)**

31. The Commission discussed the final report of the Independent Review of the Process for Determining Electoral Boundaries and broadly welcomed the recommendations, in particular the proposal for automaticity, changes to consultation and recognition of the Commission's independence.
32. The Secretary agreed to draft a formal response to the report which is to be shared with Commissioners for approval. It was agreed that the Commission should continue to liaise with the Electoral Commission regarding the Independent Review recommendations. Also, once a formal response is agreed it should be published on the Commission's website.

**Research (BS 213)**

33. The Commission considered Paper BS 213 and had a general discussion about potential areas where research would be beneficial. The Commission asked the Secretariat to prepare a further paper to enable the Commission to refine its research topics and priorities.

**Future meetings**

34. The Secretariat was asked to canvass for meeting dates in late March and late June 2026.

**Any other business**

35. The Commission discussed potential agenda items and shared research ideas for the upcoming UK Boundary Commissions' meeting.