

Boundary Commission for Wales

Annual Report 2014/15



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BOUNDARY COMMISSION FOR WALES

ANNUAL REPORT 2014/15

June 2015

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Foreword

I am pleased to present the Annual Report of the Boundary Commission for Wales for the financial year 2014-15.

With no active review work taking place, this has been a quiet year for the Commission. During the year we provided information to the Cabinet Office's Triennial Review of the UK Boundary Commissions. The report of this review has recently been published and during this next year we will be considering and implementing its recommendations.

The Commission participated in the Political and Constitutional Reform Committee inquiry into the rules governing the reviews of parliamentary constituencies. The report of this inquiry was published in March 2015 and we are waiting with anticipation for the government's response as this may have a significant impact on the next review of parliamentary constituencies which is due to start in 2016.

The Hon. Mr Justice Wyn Williams
Deputy Chairman

1. Introduction

The Sponsor

- 1.1** The Boundary Commission for Wales is an advisory Non-Departmental Public Body sponsored and wholly funded by the Cabinet Office (CO). The Commission submits reports to the Secretary of State and it is the Secretary of State's statutory duty to lay them before Parliament. Where the report recommends that alterations are required to Parliamentary constituency boundaries the Secretary of State must also lay before Parliament the draft of an Order in Council for giving effect to the Commission's recommendations. The Lord Chancellor appoints the Deputy Chairman, the Secretary of State appoints the members of the Commission, the Assistant Commissioners, and the Secretary to the Commission (see Membership below).

The Commission

- 1.2** The Commission is constituted under section 2 and schedule 1 of the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986 (as amended). It is an independent, non-political, and totally impartial body. The Commission does not take political factors into account and the effects of the Commission's recommendations on future voting patterns are not considered.
- 1.3** With effect from 1 January 2002, officials of the Secretariat to the Local Democracy and Boundary Commission for Wales (LDBCW)¹, located in Cardiff, have also staffed the Secretariat of the Boundary Commission. Although accommodation and some staff resources are shared the two Commissions operate independently from each other.

Membership

- 1.4** The Speaker of the House of Commons is the ex-officio Chairman of all four Parliamentary Boundary Commissions in the United Kingdom. The appointment of the Speaker emphasises the independence, impartiality, and non-political nature of the Commissions. The Speaker plays no part in the conduct of reviews. The Deputy Chairman, who presides over the meetings, is a High Court Judge: the Honourable Mr Wyn Williams who was appointed until the end of September 2017. The Members are Mr Paul Loveluck and Professor Robert M^cNabb who were both appointed until the end of September 2016.

¹ The name was changed from the Local Government Boundary Commission for Wales by the Local Government (Democracy) (Wales) Act 2013.

- 1.5** The Commissioners are part-time appointees who meet whenever the work programme demands. Since the passing of the Boundary Commissions Act 1992, the Commission Members (not including the Deputy Chairman) have been paid a daily fee agreed by the Sponsor Department with HM Treasury for work carried out on behalf of the Commission and, with the Deputy Chairman, are entitled to recover any expenses (such as travel and subsistence) incurred on Commission work.
- 1.6** The Commission has established both a Code of Practice and a Register of Members' Interests, which are updated annually. Copies of these documents are available on request.
- 1.7** The Commission has two statutory assessors. One is the Statistics Board (represented by the National Statistician), and the other is the Director General of Ordnance Survey. Deputies represent both at Commission meetings.
- 1.8** The Secretary of State also appoints a Secretary to the Commission. Under the joint Secretariat arrangements the Secretary, Mr Steve Halsall is also the Chief Executive of the LDBCW.
- 1.9** The role of the Secretariat is to service and assist the Commissioners in the conduct of their reviews and in executing their decisions. The Secretariat is based at the offices of the Secretariat to the LDBCW in Cardiff and liaison about staffing and accommodation takes place with the Welsh Government.

Statutory Duties

- 1.10** The Commission's primary statutory function is to keep under continuous review the distribution of seats at Parliamentary elections, to conduct regular reviews of the boundaries of Parliamentary constituencies and to make reports with recommendations to the Secretary of State in accordance with the provisions of the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986 (as amended).
- 1.11** The Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Act 2011 made substantial changes to the legislation governing distribution of Parliamentary seats.
- 1.12** The Act also removed the link between the Parliamentary constituencies and those of the Welsh Assembly. This has the effect that, until new legislation is put into place, there is no mechanism for the regular review of the Welsh Assembly constituencies.
- 1.13** The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 amended the Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Act 2011. This changed the date which the Commission is required to report its recommendations to Parliament from 'before 1 October 2013' to 'not

before 1 September 2018 and before 1 October 2018'. This effectively means that the next review is due to start in Spring 2016 with preparatory work being undertaken in 2015.

2. Objectives

General Objective

- 2.1** To keep under continuous review the representation of Wales in the House of Commons and in the National Assembly for Wales².

Specific Objective for 2014/15

- 2.2** The objectives for the Commission during the 2014-15 financial year were:

- To maintain an office for the Commission in order to handle enquiries and to undertake statutory duties;
- To ensure that all work of the Commission is carried out with a view to providing the best possible value for money;
- To ensure that the knowledge and expertise within the Commission is retained; and
- To implement the changes to the Commission's operation as recommended in the Review Closure report.

In addition, the Commission will monitor the outcomes of the recommendations of the Commission on Public Service Governance and Delivery and consider the implications for the work of the Commission.

Welsh Language Scheme

- 2.3** The Commission operates a fully bilingual policy. All official documentation published by the Commission will be available in Welsh and English. The Commission welcomes correspondence from individuals and organisations in Welsh and English.

² See paragraph 1.12

3. Outcomes

Meetings

- 3.1** There were no meetings of the Commission during the financial year, the Commissioners were however regularly consulted on aspects of the Commission work by e-mail. In addition two Commissioners and the Secretary met with colleagues from the other UK Boundary Commissions in November 2014 to discuss new developments and the implementation of operational improvements.

Triennial Review

- 3.2** During the year the Cabinet Office conducted a Triennial Review of the UK Boundary Commissions. The Commission participated fully with this review by providing information about the current operation and governance arrangements of the Commission. The report of the review was published on 26 March 2015. The consideration and implementation of the recommendations contained in the report will form part of the work to be undertaken by the Commission during 2015-16.

Co-operation

- 3.3** The House of Commons, Political and Constitutional Reform Committee conducted an inquiry entitled 'What next on the redrawing of parliamentary constituency boundaries?' The Commission provided written evidence to the inquiry and the Secretary, along with the other UK Boundary Commission Secretaries, also gave oral evidence. The Committee's report, published in March 2015, made a number of recommendations for changes to the rules for redrawing parliamentary constituency boundaries.

Local Government

- 3.4** Following on from the recommendations of the Commission on Public Service Governance and Delivery, the Welsh Government are proposing changes to legislation that are set to reform local government in Wales. The Commission has monitored these proposals as they have emerged.

Welsh Language

3.5 The Commission's Welsh Language Scheme was reviewed and updated. The Commission's annual report on the operation of the Welsh Language Scheme was submitted to the Welsh Language Commissioner.

Training

3.6 Essential training courses that members of staff are required to attend have continued this year and include: Complaints Handling, Equality and Diversity, Health and Safety, Manual Handling, Handling Requests for Information, Welsh Language Awareness, Welsh Language Pre-Learning, Leadership, Payroll, Facilities Management, Excel, Powerpoint, Sustainable Development, Attendance Management, Performance Management, Project Management, Finance Skills,. A new Review Officer also received job specific training in respect of the Commission's geographical information system, and in-house coaching was arranged and supported. Welsh Language coaching has been given on an informal basis to non Welsh speaking staff, to help them improve their pronunciation of Welsh place names.

Information

3.7 The Commission makes as much information publically available as practicable through the web site (www.bcomm-wales.gov.uk). Requests for Information that is not available on the web site are responded to. The Commission has set a target of 15 days to respond to such requests. In 2014-15 we received 16 requests for information all of which were responded to within 15 days. This compares to 10 requests received in 2013-14.

3.8 During the year the staff of the Commission investigated the possibility of using a map-based online portal to conduct its consultations in future. This holds out the prospect of increasing the levels of engagement in the review process and engaging with a wider cross-section of the public.

4. Budget and Expenditure

Expenditure April 2014 to March 2015

4.1 Table 1 compares the actual expenditure with the budget, during the financial year covered by this report.

Table 1 – Budget and Expenditure

Budget Component	Budget (£)	Actual (£)
Staff Salaries	45,000	45,000
Commissioners and Assistant Commissioners Fees	6,100	2,624
Office Accommodation	27,000	27,000
Travel and Subsistence	1,500	871
Hospitality	120	0
IT and Telecoms	9,180	5,000
Other Review Costs*	11,100	9,890
Total	100,000	90,385

*includes training, postage, printing and translation.

4.2 For 2014-15 the Cabinet Office agreed to provide the Commission with a fixed funding of £100,000 to cover the cost of keeping a Secretariat based in Wales during years when no parliamentary review work was being undertaken. Table 1 shows the various categories to which the fixed funding was allocated. The main reasons for the under-spend were:

- Surrender of £9,615 funds back to Cabinet Office as an adjustment for estimated underspend;
- Fewer Commission meetings were held than had been anticipated; and
- The Commission sought to achieve the maximum possible value for money in all of its work.

5. Work Programme for 2015/16

5.1 As required by the current legislation, the Boundary Commission for Wales is due to commence the next (2018) review of parliamentary constituencies in 2016. Preparatory work will need to be undertaken in advance of this date. The Commission's specific objectives in 2014/15 will be:

- To plan the work and resource requirements of the forthcoming review. This will involve liaison with the Cabinet Office to ensure that the additional resources required for the review are agreed and in place;
- To ensure that the information required for the review, including electoral data, is updated and maintained;
- To produce and publish a revised Information Booklet that explains how the process for the review will work;
- To publish an announcement of the start of the 2018 Review, and to begin formulation of Initial Proposals ; and
- To consider and implement the recommendations to the Commission's operation as recommended in the Triennial Review report.
- To develop a map-based online portal for use in future consultations.

5.2 The government's response to the Political and Constitutional Reform Committee's report is awaited. This may have an impact on the timetable and operation of the review of parliamentary constituencies. The Commission will monitor the situation and, if necessary, make appropriate amendments to the work programme.

5.3 The Commission will also continue to monitor the changes to local government legislation being progressed by Welsh Government.

Budget

5.4 To enable the objectives listed at 5.1 above to be met, the Commission has been allocated a budget of £120,000 for the financial year 2015/16.

