

Boundary Commission for Wales

Annual Report 2015/16



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BOUNDARY COMMISSION FOR WALES

ANNUAL REPORT 2015/16

September 2016

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Foreword

I am pleased to present the Annual Report of the Boundary Commission for Wales for the financial year 2015-16.

The main activities during 2015-16 were centred around the preparation for the 2018 review of parliamentary constituencies the formal start of which we announced on 23 March 2016.

As I was only appointed Deputy Chair on 1 August 2016, the work that is being reported on here was carried out under the auspices of my predecessor Mr Justice Wyn Williams. I have however been assured of the accuracy of the contents of the report by the two continuing Commission Members, Mr Paul Loveluck and Professor Robert McNabb.

The Hon. Mr Justice Lewis
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: who, for the period of this report, was the Honourable Mr Wyn Williams. The Members are Mr Paul Loveluck and Professor Robert M^cNabb.
- 1.5** The Commissioners are part-time appointees who meet whenever the work programme demands. Since the passing of the Boundary

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

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. Both are represented by designated deputies 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. This working relationship is covered by a memorandum of understanding between the two Commissions and their respective sponsor bodies

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 the 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'.

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 2015/16

2.2 The objectives for the Commission during the 2015-16 financial year were:

- 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 guide 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 ;
- To consider and implement the recommendations to the Commission's operation as recommended in the Triennial Review report; and
- To develop a map-based online portal for use in future consultations.

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 four meetings of the Commission during the financial year. In addition two Commissioners and the Secretary met with colleagues from the other UK Boundary Commissions in November 2015 to discuss new developments and the implementation of operational improvements.

Resource Planning

- 3.2** Plans were made, agreed and revised in liaison with Cabinet Office in respect of the resources required to carry out the 2018 Review.

Information Gathering

- 3.3** The electoral statistics that will be required for the review were obtained from the Office for National Statistics in February 2016 and were published on the Commission's web site.

Information Booklet

- 3.4** A revised information booklet was drafted ready for publication during 2016/17.

Start of the 2018 Review

- 3.5** The announcement of the start of the 2018 review of parliamentary constituencies in Wales was made on 23 March 2016. Work was begun in respect of the formulation of initial proposals.

Triennial Review

- 3.6** The Triennial Review of the Commission made a number of recommendations concerning its operations and these were, where possible, implemented during the year.

Mapping Portal

3.7 An agreement was reached with the Boundary Commission for England and the Boundary Commission for Scotland for the development of an on-line consultation portal. It was agreed that the Boundary Commission for England would take the lead in this in conjunction with the Cabinet Office. Work was undertaken by all parties in order to define the requirements both collectively and individually for all three Commissions.

Welsh Language

3.8 The Commission's annual report on the operation of the Welsh Language Scheme was submitted to the Welsh Language Commissioner.

Training

3.9 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, Information and Record Management, Welsh Language Awareness, Welsh Language Entry, Payroll, Facilities Management, Excel, Sustainable Development, Performance Management, Project Management, Finance Skills and Geographical Information System Software training. Welsh Language coaching has been given on an informal basis to non Welsh speaking staff.

Information

3.10 The Commission makes as much information publically available as is 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 2015-16 we received 24 requests for information all of which were responded to within 15 days. This compares to 15 requests received in 2014-15.

4. Budget and Expenditure

Expenditure April 2015 to March 2016

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	63,500	63,500
Commissioners and Assistant Commissioners Fees	10,010	10,010
Office Accommodation	23,500	23,500
Travel and Subsistence	1,578	1,578
Hospitality	120	120
IT and Telecoms	5,430	5,430
Other Review Costs*	15,862	15,862
Total	120,000	120,000

*includes training, postage, printing and translation.

4.2 For 2015-16 the Cabinet Office agreed to provide the Commission with fixed funding of £100,000. This was later increased by £20,000 to £120,000 with the agreement of Cabinet Office to cover the additional cost of preparatory work for the 2018 Review. Table 1 shows the various categories to which the fixed funding was allocated.

Member's Fees and Expenses

4.3 During 2015-16 the following fees and expenses were claimed by Commission Members:

Member	Fees	Expenses
Mr P Loveluck	£6,066	£709
Prof R McNabb	£3,539	£286

5. Work Programme for 2016/17

5.1 As required by the current legislation, the Boundary Commission for Wales has started the next (2018) review of parliamentary constituencies. The Commission's specific objectives in 2016/17 will be:

- By the end of July 2016, to publish the Commission's formal 'Guide to the 2018 Review', setting out in detail the legislation, procedure and the Commission's policies for the conduct of the review;
- By the end of July, to have secured the appointment of a suitable number of Assistant Commissioners to assist the Commission in its work, particularly in relation to chairing public hearings and assessing responses to the Commission's proposals for new constituencies;
- By the end of August 2016 to develop all hard copy and electronic documentation for publication of the initial proposals;
- By the end of August 2016, to have a fully developed and tested online consultation portal ready to deploy for the initial consultation period, complete with data layers for existing boundaries and electorates for regions, local authorities, wards and polling districts;
- Develop initial proposals for new constituencies to be published in September 2016;
- By the end of December 2016, to have conducted a comprehensive 12-week statutory consultation on the initial proposals, including the required public hearings in every region of Wales;
- By the end of January 2017, to have published the statutory 'Annual Report on Progress', which the Commission is required to provide to the Speaker of the House of Commons, updating on progress with a live review;
- By the end of March 2017, to have prepared for publication all written and oral responses received in the consultation on initial proposals; and
- During the course of the year the Commission will aim to hold three formal meetings to assess progress with the Review and will also be represented at the Annual Meeting of UK Boundary Commissions.

Budget

5.2 To enable the objectives listed at 5.1 above to be met, the Commission has been allocated a budget of £500,000 for the financial year 2016/17.

