



Comisiwn Ffiniau
i Gymru

Boundary Commission
for Wales

Boundary Commission for Wales

Annual Report 2020/21

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and telephone calls in Welsh or English.

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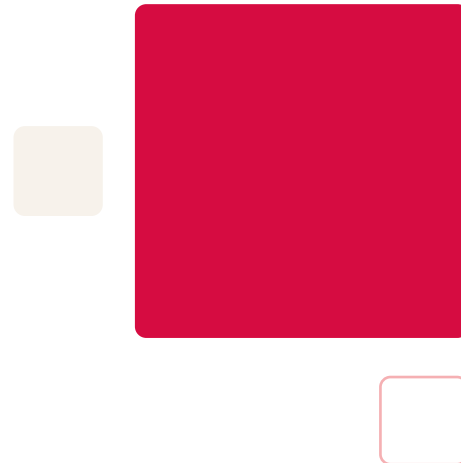
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Foreword



I am pleased to present the Annual Report of the Boundary Commission for Wales for the financial year 2020-21.

The main activities during 2020-21 were focused on preparing the data for the 2023 Review, recruitment of additional staff, development of key Parliamentary Review policies, meeting with key stakeholders and publication of the 'Guide to the 2023 Review'. During this year, the Commission also began developing its initial proposals and worked in partnership with the Boundary Commission for England and the Boundary Commission for Scotland to procure and develop the Consultation Portal for the 2023 Review. I would like to take this opportunity to thank outgoing Commission Members Mr Paul Loveluck and Professor Robert McNabb for their invaluable contributions over the past eight years.

The Hon Mrs Justice Jefford DBE

Deputy Chair



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 Lord Chancellor appoints the Deputy Chair, the Minister for the Cabinet Office appoints the members of the Commission, the Assistant Commissioners, and the Secretary to the Commission (see Membership below).

1.2 On the 23rd September 2021, the Prime Minister published a written statements on a Machinery of Government change. The Union and Constitution Group from Cabinet Office will be moving to the new Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. This move will create a change of sponsor division for the Commission.

The Commission

1.3 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.

1.4 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

1.5 The Speaker of the House of Commons is the ex-officio Chair of all four Parliamentary Boundary Commissions in the United Kingdom. The appointment of the Speaker emphasises the

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

independence, impartiality, and non-political nature of the Commissions. The Speaker plays no part in the conduct of reviews. The Deputy Chair, who presides over the meetings, is a High Court Judge: The Honourable Mrs Justice Jefford. The Members are Mr Huw Vaughan Thomas CBE and Mr Sam Hartley (both appointed from 05 October 2020).

1.6 The Commissioners are part-time appointees who meet whenever the work programme demands. The Commission Members (not including the Deputy Chair) 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 Chair, are entitled to recover any expenses (such as travel and subsistence) incurred on Commission work.

1.7 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.

1.8 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.

1.9 The Minister for the Cabinet Office also appoints a Secretary to the Commission. Under the joint Secretariat arrangements, the Secretary, Mrs Shereen Williams MBE OStJ is also the Chief Executive of the LDBCW.

1.10 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 Cabinet Office and Welsh Government. This working relationship is covered by a memorandum of understanding between the two Commissions and their respective sponsor bodies.

Statutory Duties

1.11 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 Minister for the Cabinet Office in accordance with the provisions of the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986 (as amended).

1.12 The Parliamentary Constituencies Act 2020 made substantial changes to the legislation governing the distribution of Parliamentary seats.

1.13 The Act also designated the constituency of Ynys Môn as a 'protected constituency, introduced the rule of 'automaticity' on the implementation of the recommendations of the four Boundary Commissions and made changes to the consultation process.

Objectives

General Objective

2.1 To keep under continuous review the representation of Wales in the House of Commons.

Specific Objective for 2020/21

2.2 The objectives for the Commission during the 2020/21 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 Guide to the Review booklet that explains how the process for the review will work;
- To publish an announcement of the start of the 2023 Review, and to begin formulation of Initial Proposals; and
- To prepare a report on the operation of Welsh Language Standards during 2019-20 will be submitted to the Welsh Language Commissioner and published on the Commission's web site; and
- To conduct any such activities and recommendations falling out of the review of the 2018 Review in preparation for the 2023 Review.

Welsh Language Standards

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.

Outcomes

Meetings

3.1 There were seven meetings of the Commission during the financial year. The focus of the meetings was to plan for the 2023 Review, develop the 'Guide to the Review' publication and finalise schemes for the 'Initial Proposals Report'. In addition, briefing meetings for the 2023 Review were held with qualifying political parties, Members of Parliament and key stakeholders. The Commission also participated in the annual meeting of the UK Boundary Commissions in November 2020.

Welsh Language

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

Training

3.3 Essential training courses that members of staff are required to attend and for personal development have continued this year and include : a session delivered by the Electoral Commission and workshops on Local Government, the Senedd and Mastering conversations in a political world. Members of staff continue to be reminded at the monthly team meeting of the support for and availability of Welsh Language training for any member of staff that is interested. One member of staff has enrolled on a Welsh Language course during the year.

COVID-19

3.4 During 2020-21 the Commission established a robust Work from Home system for all staff and developed new digital procedures to replace existing paper-based ones to ensure the continuity of business during the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions. The Commission continued to

follow COVID-19 guidance and restrictions issued by the Welsh Government. Staff continued to work from home during full lockdown periods with a rota based partial return to office working for a low number of staff during periods when restrictions were eased.

Information

3.5 The Commission makes as much information publicly 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 20 days to respond to such requests. In 2020-21 the Commission received five requests for information all of which were responded to within 20 days. This compares to four requests received in 2019-20.

Budget and Expenditure

Expenditure April 2020 to March 2021

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	90,100	101,259
Commissioners Fees	18,000	11,306
Office Accommodation	35,100	30,944
Travel and Subsistence	3,000	-
Hospitality	430	-
IT and Telecoms	20,920	13,905
Other Review Costs*	41,280	51,215
Total	208,830	208,629

*includes media and advertising, training, postage, printing and translation.

4.2 Table 1 shows that for 2020-21 the Boundary Commission underspent its budget by £201. Staff Salaries were higher than estimated due to the recruitment of a Communications & Engagement Manager for the last quarter of the year. Commissioner Fees were less than estimated due to fewer meetings being required than estimated. Commission meetings being held remotely also meant that there was no requirement for Travel and Subsistence. Overall LDBCW Accommodation and IT costs were less than estimated resulting in lower costs being allocated to the Boundary Commission expenditure. Other Review Costs were more than estimated due to additional Legal and Media costs incurred following the recruitment of the Communications & Engagement Manager.

Member's Fees and Expenses

4.3 During 2020-21 the following fees and expenses were claimed by Commission Members:

Member	Fees	Expenses
Mr P Loveluck	£3,286	£0
Prof R McNabb	£3,286	£0
Mr H V Thomas	£2,275	£0
Mr S Hartley	£2,275	£0

Work Programme for 2021/22

5.1 The Commission's specific objectives in 2021/22 will be:

- To have developed and published an online consultation portal to allow for comments to be made on the Initial Proposals of the 2023 Parliamentary constituencies review;
- 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;
- To develop initial proposals for new constituencies to be published in September 2021;
- To publish all hard copy and electronic documentation for publication of the initial proposals;
- To have conducted two comprehensive statutory consultation on the initial proposals, one 8-week consultation period and a further 6-week consultation that will include the required public hearings;
- To have prepared and published all written responses received in the first consultation on initial proposals;
- To prepare a report on the operation of Welsh Language Standards during 2020-21 which will be submitted to the Welsh Language Commissioner and published on the Commission's web site;
- To provide an update to the Speaker of the House of Commons on the work undertaken by the Commission in the first year of the 2023 Review; and
- To continue with activities and recommendations falling out of the review of the 2018 Review and incorporate it as part of the 2023 Review.

Budget

5.2 To enable the objectives listed at 5.1 above to be met, the Commission has been allocated a budget of £813,000 for the financial year 2021/22.





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