

2013 Review of Parliamentary Constituencies

Lessons Learned Summary

From December 2010 to January 2013 the Boundary Commission for Wales conducted the 2013 Review of Parliamentary Constituencies. This was the Sixth general review of Parliamentary constituencies and the most significant review in the Commission's history. The Review followed the rules set out in the Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Act 2011 (the Act) which meant a reduction in the number of constituencies in Wales from 40 to 30 and a more equal number of electors in each constituency (+/- 5% from the UK Electoral Quota).

The major milestones during the review were:

- Launch of initial proposals – January 2012
- Five Public Hearings – February/March 2012
- Secondary Consultation Period – June 2012
- Revised Proposals Published – October 2012

In January 2013 Parliament passed an amendment to the Electoral Registration and Administration Bill which changed the reporting date for the first review under the Act and therefore had the effect of cancelling the 2013 Review.

Following the cancellation of the review Commission carried out a lessons learned review to assess what management and other processes went well or could be improved in order to pass on any lessons that can usefully be applied to future reviews. The main recommendations from this review are summarised in this paper.

The report focuses on administration and delivery, and not on tasks for which others were responsible. Therefore the legislative requirements, i.e. the statutory range or the reduction in constituencies, are not a part of this report. Rather the focus is on how the Commission has carried out the review, the information it supplied and how it engaged with the public and other stakeholders.

The report was derived from four main sources:

- The Lessons Learned Log – the log of lessons learned that has been kept for the majority of the review and updated by the Secretariat.
- Stakeholder Interviews – interviews with selected external stakeholders to assess how the Commission can improve its engagement with stakeholders.
- Internal Review – interviews with internal stakeholders to assess matters such as the skills and availability of staff, financial arrangements, engagement with Commissioners.
- Key Statistics and Financial Data.

Summary of Recommendations

The views expressed by internal and external stakeholders during the lessons learned review were largely positive and the Commission and its Secretariat can take pride in the manner in which it conducted the 2013 Review of Parliamentary Constituencies. It was a process that worked well under difficult political and administrative circumstances. The detailed report identified a number of learning points which were points of success from the 2013 review and which the Commission will look to continue in the future.

The report also made a number of 'recommendations' for change which are drawn out below. These are areas which were not addressed during the 2013 Review and could be implemented in order to improve the effectiveness of the Commission or the efficiency of the review process. Improvements that have been identified are not a reflection of failures but are examples of opportunities for continuous improvement.

RECOMMENDATION 1: Prior to the start of the next review meetings with the Commission should be offered to key stakeholder groups in order to discuss the process and how the Commission should engage. One meeting should be for Political Parties, one for representatives of Local Government (for example One Voice Wales, WLGA, SOLACE, AEA and North Wales Association of Larger Town and Community Councils), and one with the Local Government Boundary Commission for Wales to discuss operational matters. The Commission may wish to consider other meetings as appropriate.

RECOMMENDATION 2: Further consideration should be given to the kind of information made available at places of inspection and libraries. Rather than multiple copies of the printed report and large maps it may be possible to produce a more local summary (i.e. an A3 poster) with full content being available online, though summary information must not deter consideration of the knock-on impact of counter-proposals.

RECOMMENDATION 3: Arrangements should be made for a detailed external quality check of reports prior to their publication. This check should involve the use of the report rather than just proof reading.

RECOMMENDATION 4: For future reviews the following opportunities for improving the Public Hearings should be considered:

- Smaller venues could be used, particularly in Cardiff and Swansea, to provide better value for money
- Consideration should be given to the accessibility of venues, maps to venues and information about public transport should be given on the Commission's website.
- One day hearings could be held with the option of a second day depending on demand
- A more formal pre-meeting between the Commission and Assistant Commissioners should be held prior to the hearings in order to discuss the underlying principles of the review.

RECOMMENDATION 5: For any future amendments to the legislation governing Parliamentary boundary reviews consideration should be given to clarifying the conventions for the naming of constituencies in Welsh and English, ideally allowing for a simple and natural way to recognise both languages.

RECOMMENDATION 6: The Commission should continue to review the format of maps which it produces for publication and to work with stakeholders to develop maps that aid interpretation and engagement.

RECOMMENDATION 7: The Commission should consider opportunities for working in closer partnership with Ordnance Survey in order to continue to improve how it uses mapping and presents maps in its reports.

RECOMMENDATION 8: The next review should, if a cost effective approach is found, provide a web application which enables users to map their own constituencies and submit these to the Commission. Consideration should be given as to whether this could be developed in partnership with Ordnance Survey and the other UK Boundary Commissions.

RECOMMENDATION 9: The Commission should consider its use of public notices in the future and consider further engagement with local media, targeting press releases and public notices on local issues.

RECOMMENDATION 10: The Commission should ensure further use of social media and dynamic web content for improving communication and engagement with key stakeholders. It should become a fundamental part of the Communication Strategy for the next review and a social media policy should be developed.

RECOMMENDATION 11: Boundary Reviews should be carried out in accordance with good practice in project management, particularly planning, risk management, governance and reporting. Project Management processes were implemented after the 2013 Review had begun, in future these processes should be in place from the beginning of the review.

RECOMMENDATION 12: The membership of the BCW and LGBCW should be considered further in terms of whether membership should remain wholly separate or whether there is any benefit in allowing joint membership.

RECOMMENDATION 13: BCW Commissioner and Deputy Chair terms of office should be considered in order to ensure, as far as possible, that there is consistency in personnel during a review process.

RECOMMENDATION 14: The joint Secretariat arrangements should continue but an up-to-date Memorandum of Understanding must be put into place which defines a relationship which is acceptable to LGBCW, BCW, Cabinet Office and Welsh Government.

RECOMMENDATION 15: One 'Secretary' should cover the work of both the BCW and LGBCW and to lead the joint Secretariat. A representative of BCW and Cabinet Office, and the Deputy Chair of BCW, should be included in the recruitment process for this post. The Secretary post should be a joint appointment and this arrangement should be detailed in the updated MoU.

RECOMMENDATION 16: An action plan should be developed in partnership with LGBCW, but monitored by BCW, to ensure that review, project management and communication skills are developed across the Secretariat.

RECOMMENDATION 17: From the 2013/14 financial year the fixed costs to maintain the Commission should be paid by the Cabinet Office to LGBCW in order to allow all parties to be able to plan ahead, for both Commissions to maintain skills and knowledge during quieter periods, and to ensure an effective Secretariat is in place to conduct Parliamentary and NAFW reviews as required.

Where Next?

The recommendations above form an action plan for the Commission and its Secretariat to deliver in order to ensure that it is in the best possible position to deliver efficient and effective boundary reviews in the future, and that lessons are learned from the 2013 Review of Parliamentary Constituencies. The Commission will closely monitor progress towards the delivery of these recommendations.