

Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland



ANNUAL REPORT

2016 - 2017

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Deputy Chairman's Report

The Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland commenced work on the 2018 Review of Parliamentary Constituencies on 24 February 2016. Since then, the Commission has developed and published for consultation its Provisional Proposals for the 17 Parliamentary constituencies in Northern Ireland.

I am particularly grateful to my Commissioner colleagues, Dr Bill Smith and Ms Sarah Havlin for their diligent approach to the development of our Provisional Proposals, ably supported by our Secretary, Mr Eamonn McConville and his team in the Secretariat. The introduction of new technologies has been of great benefit to the 2018 Review. The use of mapping software, along with the expertise and support provided by Land and Property Services (LPS), was particularly effective in producing the Provisional Proposals. We also developed an online consultation portal which has improved interaction not only with our politicians but the wider general public. The introduction of these new technologies has led to a more effective and efficient Review.

We held four public hearings (Belfast, Ballymena, Omagh and Portadown) during the consultation on our Provisional Proposals. I would like to record my thanks to District Judges Liam McNally, Peter King, Nigel Broderick and Ken Dixon for the professional and courteous way they chaired the hearings.

I would also like to record my thanks to all of the Commission Assessors who have been of great assistance to the Review. I wish to pay tribute to Mr Graham Shields who retired from his post as Chief Electoral Officer in January, and in doing so, I welcome his successor, Ms Virginia McVea. I also welcome our other new Assessor, Ms Siobhan Carey, who took up her role as Registrar General for Births and Deaths in Northern Ireland during the year.

Political developments during 2017 at both a local and national level have had unintended consequences for the 2018 Review. A Secondary Consultation on the responses received to our Provisional Proposals has been delayed by the respective Northern Ireland Assembly and Westminster elections. However, we intend to hold the Secondary Consultation during the second half of 2017 to ensure that we meet our statutory deadline.

Despite this delay I look forward to presenting the Secretary of State with the Commission's Final Recommendations during September 2018.

The Hon Madam Justice McBride DBE, QC
Deputy Chairman

June 2017

1. The Commission

1.1 Background

The Boundary Commission is an independent, advisory non-departmental public body sponsored and funded by the Northern Ireland Office. The Commission is constituted under the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986, as amended by the Boundary Commissions Act 1992 and the Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Act 2011.

The Commission's role is to keep under continuous review the number, names and boundaries of the Parliamentary constituencies into which Northern Ireland is divided and to make recommendations about these to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. Reviews are carried out every five years. The Commission was reconstituted in November 2015 to commence preparatory work for the 2018 Review.

1.2 Membership

Appointments to the Commission are made under Schedule 1 of the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986 which specifies that the Chairman of the Commission is the Speaker of the House of Commons, as is the case for the Parliamentary Boundary Commissions in England, Scotland and Wales.

The 1986 Act specifies that the Commission's membership comprises a Chairman, Deputy Chairman and two further Members. The Chairman is the Speaker of the House of Commons. The Deputy Chairman of the Commission is a judge of the High Court appointed by the Lord Chief Justice of Northern Ireland. The other two Members are appointed by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland through a public appointments process. The Commission is supported in its work by four statutory assessors and a small Secretariat.

For the 2018 Review, the Commission comprises:

Chairman: The Speaker of the House of Commons

Deputy Chairman: The Hon Madam Justice McBride DBE, QC

Members: Ms Sarah Havlin

Dr William Smith

Assessors: Mr Alan Brontë
Commissioner of Valuation for Northern Ireland
Ms Siobhan Carey[#]
Registrar General of Births & Deaths in Northern Ireland
Mr John Deyermond
Chief Survey Officer of Land and Property Services
Ms Virginia McVea*
Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland

Secretary: Mr Eamonn McConville

[#] Appointed to post of Registrar General on 1 September 2016

* Succeeded Mr Graham Shields on 23 December 2016

1.3 Meetings

The Commission met on six occasions during the period covered by this report. These meetings were used to discuss progress on the development of the Provisional Proposals; the subsequent outcome of the consultation; plans for the annual meeting of all four Boundary Commissions; and work towards the Secondary consultation.

On 27 May 2016, the Commission met with the five main political parties to brief them on the 2018 Review process. Minutes of this meeting are available on the Commission's website.

1.4 Code of Practice

The Commission's Code of Practice is available on the Boundary Commission website (www.boundarycommission.org.uk) or a copy can be provided on request.

1.5 Register of Members' Interests

The Commission maintains an up to date Register of Members' Interests, in accordance with the Code of Practice, which is open to the public.

1.6 Secretariat

Mr Eamonn McConville is the Secretary to the Commission. He has been in post since his appointment on 16 November 2015, in accordance with paragraph 7 of Schedule 1 to the Parliamentary Constituencies Act.

The Secretariat reached a full complement of staff during the year having been seconded from the Northern Ireland Civil Service and Home Civil Service.

Post	Full-time Equivalent
Secretary	1
Deputy Secretary	1
Office Manager	1
Administrative Officer	1

The work of the Secretariat includes:

- facilitating Members' work on the ongoing boundary review, including the consultation process;
- dealing with administrative matters such as finance, procurement and accommodation;
- liaising with other UK Commissions and government departments with an interest in boundary matters;
- responding to queries and correspondence concerning boundary issues.
- maintaining the Commission's [website](#).

2. Governance

2.1 Legislation

The work of the Commission is governed by the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986, as amended. The current text of the legislation is available on www.boundarycommission.org.uk or a copy can be provided on request.

On 16 February 2011, the Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Act 2011 received Royal Assent, after its passage through the United Kingdom Parliament. Part 2 of the Act substantially amended the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986 which governs the reviews of Westminster constituencies. The amended legislation introduced considerable changes to the rules, process and timing of reviews. It also reduced the total number of constituencies in the United Kingdom from 650 to 600.

The amended rules introduced a strict requirement that the electorate of each constituency should be within 5% of the UK electoral quota. Exceptions are made for four protected island constituencies in Scotland and England and for any constituency larger than 12,000 square kilometres (of which Northern Ireland has none). Rule 7 of the legislation allows the Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland to define constituencies with electorates which vary by more than 5% from the UK electoral quota within prescribed circumstances, that is, where the Commission is satisfied that the application of the electoral range would unreasonably impair their ability to apply discretionary factors or would jeopardise their reporting deadline.

The Commission announced the start of the 2018 Review of Parliamentary Constituencies on 24 February 2016. The legislation specifies that a 12 week public consultation is held on Provisional Proposals. This was launched on 6 September 2016 and provided the opportunity for people to submit a representation in writing, via email, or using our dedicated consultation tool on the Commission's [website](#). The legislation also requires Public Hearings to be held during weeks 5 to 10 of the public consultation. These hearings took place during October 2016 and provided the opportunity for people to make verbal representations on our proposals.

Following this initial consultation period, the Commission is required to publish all representations received, including transcripts of the Public Hearings, for a further, secondary consultation period lasting for four weeks. This allows others to comment on the representations which have been made. This stage of the Review has been unavoidably delayed due to the Assembly and Westminster elections in 2017.

The Commission is required to report on its final recommendation of Parliamentary constituencies before 1 October 2018.

2.2 Framework Document

The Commission operates in accordance with a Framework Document which outlines the respective roles of the Commission and the Northern Ireland Office and the governance arrangements between them.

2.3 Data Protection

Our handling of personal information under Data Protection legislation is covered by the Commission's registration with the Information Commissioner's Office. Our Publication Scheme sets out our privacy policy for handling any personal information contained in representations we receive.

3. Enquiries and Information

The Commission uses its website and Twitter as channels to inform the public about our work. In addition, the Secretariat responds to requests for information made by email, letter or phone.

3.1 Enquiries

The Commission has a Freedom of Information policy which incorporates the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) model Publication Scheme for public bodies under the Freedom of Information Act 2000. The Commission's Policy and Publication Scheme are available on its website, or a copy can be provided on request.

The Secretariat met with the ICO during the year to discuss the Commission's approach to Freedom of Information and data protection to ensure best practice was being followed.

During 2016-17, the Secretariat received and responded to a small number of enquiries relating mainly to the work of the Commission, the timing of the review and the information/maps that would be published. Three requests for information were made under the Freedom of Information Act and all were answered within the statutory deadline for dealing with such requests. These enquiries were generic type requests for information on the staff composition of the Secretariat or contracts held for utilities. No requests for review or appeals to the Information Commissioner's Office were made regarding the handling of information requests.

3.2 Website

The Commission's website is the primary means of making information available to the public. A range of information is published on the website including relevant legislation, a guide to the review, press releases, all relevant Boundary Commission reports together with copies of constituency maps. The Commission also has a Twitter account ([@BCNI2018](https://twitter.com/BCNI2018)) to help reach a wider audience. During 2016-17, the website was updated with all relevant documents and maps relating to the Provisional Proposals consultation.

The Commission also provided an online consultation portal (www.bcni2018.uk) to allow consultees to view the Provisional Proposals and associated maps in electronic format and to upload their own alternative proposals.

3.3 Review Information

Throughout the 2018 Review, the Commission will publish information on proposals on its website (and online consultation portal) and at local display points, including council headquarters, public libraries, Electoral Area Offices and the offices of the Electoral Commission. Following public consultations, the Commission will publish all representations received and transcripts of public hearings. The Commission also produced a Guide to the 2018 Review during the year which is available on its website or on request.

4 The 2018 Review of Parliamentary Constituencies

On 24 February 2016 the Commission announced the start of the 2018 Review of Parliamentary Constituencies in Northern Ireland, which is on its way to becoming the first review to be completed and implemented under the current legislation.

That legislation requires the number of constituencies in the United Kingdom to be reduced from 650 to 600. The number of constituencies allocated to each of the four parts of the United Kingdom is calculated using their respective Parliamentary electorates as of 1 December 2015. On that basis there would be 17 constituencies in Northern Ireland, a reduction from 18.

The Commission published its Provisional Proposals for a twelve week consultation on 6 September 2016. The Provisional Proposals and related maps were made available in hard copy and electronic formats.

As required by the Rules in Schedule 2 to the Act, all the proposed constituencies had electorates within the range 71,031 - 78,507 electors (5% of the electoral quota assessed at 74,769 electors). Rule 7 makes special provision for Northern Ireland. It allows the Commission, when specific circumstances arise, to delineate constituencies which fall slightly below the UK range, in accordance with a prescribed formula. For the 2018 Review this means that the Commission could, if necessary, propose one or more constituencies of less than 71,031 but no fewer than 69,401 electors. The Provisional Proposals were made without recourse to this provision.

The Provisional Proposals left none of the existing constituencies unchanged. Nine would recognisably continue with varying degrees of adjustment to their boundaries. Eight new constituencies would be created with names reflecting their locations.

Responses to the consultation and attendance at the public hearings was significantly higher than during the aborted Sixth Review.

	Responses to Provisional Proposals	Attendees at public hearings
Aborted 6 th Review (3 hearings)	38	27
2018 Review (4 hearings)	56	116

The Commission is grateful to the four District Judges who chaired the public hearings and to the Lord Chief Justice, Sir Declan Morgan, for facilitating their appointment.

5 Other activities

5.1 Accommodation and IT provision

The Commission is located in the Bungalow, Stormont House, Stormont Estate, Belfast BT4 3SH. This move from Forestview continues to result in savings in terms of accommodation costs.

For the 2018 Review the Commission is utilising the comprehensive service provided by IT Assist for all IT and telephony requirements. Additionally, the GIS technology secured through Land & Property Services has proven to be extremely beneficial and efficient. The user-friendly technology has allowed the Commissioners to consider a wide range of alternative proposals for Westminster constituencies. The Commission has also worked with Citizen Space to develop a bespoke online consultation portal.

5.2 Risk Management

We have developed a Risk Management framework which we keep under continuous review.

5.3 Staffing and training

Training opportunities continue to be identified for Secretariat staff to equip them for all duties associated with the 2018 Review. The Commission now uses the NICS-wide Account NI for the processing of payments with staff fully trained in its use.

5.4 Liaison with others

5.4.1 Northern Ireland Office

We have regular contact and dialogue with the Northern Ireland Office as our sponsoring department.

5.4.2 Other Boundary Commissions

The Commission maintains regular contact with the other UK Boundary Commissions on matters of mutual interest. The Commission hosted the annual meeting of UK Boundary Commissions in Belfast on 8/9 December 2016.

5.4.3 Land and Property Services

The Commission has regular contact with Land and Property Services (LPS) including access to the mapping and charting staff; mapping data products; and GIS

technology needed to support the 2018 Review. The Commission also benefits from technical advice and support provided by LPS.

5.4.4 Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency

The Commission liaises with staff of the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) in relation to the provision of advice on statistical, geo-statistical and mathematical matters.

5.4.5 The Electoral Office for Northern Ireland

The Commission liaises with staff of the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland in relation to information and advice on electoral registers required for the 2018 Review.

6. Expenditure

The Commission incurred the following provisionally calculated expenditure in the financial year 2016/17.

Expenditure 2016/17

	2016/17 Expenditure (£k)
Staff Costs:	
Salaries & related costs	185.6
Commissioners' costs:	
Members' attendance allowances	26.3
Accommodation & Related Costs	20.1
Non-Staff Costs:	
Professional Fees	6.3
Travel & Other Expenses	3.5
Events Expenses	7.6
IT & telephony	15.0
Stationery, postage & printing	5.3
Depreciation	2.3
Total	272.0

During 2016/17 the Secretariat critically reviewed its operations; applied value for money tests to all of its work; and introduced new technological solutions where possible to secure efficiencies..This has resulted in approximately £80k of savings, primarily arising from the introduction of new technologies and the associated reduction in the need for specialist staffing (saving approx £66k). Significant savings were also made on the Review's printing contracts and arrangements surrounding the annual meeting of the four UK Boundary Commissions.

As noted elsewhere in this report, the Secondary consultation phase has been unavoidably delayed due to the elections in 2017. This impacted on spend in the 2016/17 financial year but was a matter of timing, rather than a reduction in spend. The resultant underspend of around £30k will fall within the 2017/18 financial year,

but its impact, along with the actual savings identified above meant the Commission spent £272k in the 2016/17 financial year.

7. Further information

If you have a query which cannot be answered by this report or from the Commission's website www.boundarycommission.org.uk please contact us either by email, telephone or in writing at:

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