

## Content

1. This Newsletter contains information about the following subjects:-

- The new statutory framework for constituency reviews established by the Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Act 2011;
- Applicability and availability of 2011 electorate data;
- Applicability of local government boundaries
- Use of local government electoral divisions as building blocks for constituencies;
- Publication and distribution of an information booklet; and
- Meeting with the Parliamentary political parties

## The Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Act 2011

2. The Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Act 2011 received Royal Assent on 17 February 2011. That Act further amends the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986 ('the 1986 Act'). The four UK Boundary Commissions are now required to conduct a general review of parliamentary constituencies in their respective parts of the UK and submit their final reports on the reviews to Government "before 1<sup>st</sup> October 2013". The Boundary Commission for Wales accordingly wrote to the Deputy Prime Minister on 4 March 2011 to confirm that it had formally commenced its sixth general review, although under the terms of the 1986 Act the 'review date' is 1 December 2010.
3. The two main requirements of the amendments to the 1986 Act will be that the Boundary Commission for Wales must allocate a precise number of constituencies to Wales (calculated from a fixed total for the whole UK of 600 constituencies), and that it must ensure that every constituency has an electorate that is within 5% of the 'UK electoral quota'. Whilst other factors may be taken into account, these are all subject to the requirement that the electorate shall be not less than 95% nor more than 105% of the UK electoral quota. Full details relating to the other changes made to the 1986 Act will be included in a guidance booklet, which the Commission will issue in due course (see the item below headed "Guidance booklet").

4. Under the new legislation, for the sixth general review, the Commission will be required to base its recommendations on the number of electors whose names appear on the register of parliamentary electors published between 1 December 2010 and 1 February 2011 (see the item below headed “2011 electorate data”).
5. The four UK Boundary Commissions have therefore agreed that, for the purposes of the sixth general review, the total UK electorate is 45,678,175 and that after applying the formula specified in the 1986 Act, the allocation of constituencies to each part of the UK is:-

Country	Electorate	Current allocation	New allocation	Reduction
England*	38,332,557	533	502	31
Northern Ireland	1,190,635	18	16	2
Scotland**	3,873,387	59	52	7
Wales	2,281,596	40	30	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>45,678,175</b>	<b>650</b>	<b>600</b>	<b>50</b>

\* The electorate for England does not contain the electorate of the Isle of Wight. This area is permitted to create constituencies with an electorate that is more than 5% outside the UK electoral quota.

\*\* The electorate for Scotland does not contain the electorate of the two preserved constituencies which are a) Orkney and Shetland and b) Na h-Eileanan an Iar. These constituencies are permitted to have an electorate that is more than 5% outside the UK electoral quota.

6. The UK electoral quota is to the nearest whole number 76,641. Therefore, every constituency in Wales must have an electorate that is between 72,810 and 80,473.
7. Following some preliminary modelling work, the Commission has concluded that implementing the new statutory framework is likely to require very extensive and wide-ranging changes to be made to the existing pattern and composition of constituencies. The fact that major changes will be required by the new framework has been noted by a range of politicians, academics and political commentators .
8. The number of constituencies in Wales, calculated according to the formula set out in Para 8 of Schedule 2, and the requirement that the electorate of each constituency should no less than 95% and no more than 105% of the UK electoral quota, are statutory requirements which the Commission must apply, having no discretion in the matter. Those areas where the Commission does have some discretion, such as the local government boundaries to be taken account in the course of the review, and any local ties that would be broken by changes in constituencies, are subject to these two statutory requirements.

#### 2011 electorate data

9. The 2011 electorate data for Wales, which is derived from the statistics published by the Office of National Statistics and based on the electoral registers published by unitary authority Electoral Registration Officers between 1 December 2010 and 1 February 2011, is available on the Commission’s website today to download. The data includes the electorate for every unitary authority area and the electorate for every local government electoral division for Wales.

## Local government boundaries

10. The 1986 Act, as amended, provides that a Boundary Commission "... may take into account, if and to such extent as they think fit- ..... (b) local government boundaries as they exist on the most recent ordinary council-election day before the review date; ....". Accordingly, the Commission may take into account the local government boundaries as they existed on 6 May 2010. The Commission has decided that it will, in so far as it is able subject to the fixed allocation of constituencies and the requirement that the electorate be no less than 95% and no more than 105% of the UK electoral quota, take account of those local government boundaries when forming its provisional recommendations.
11. Where a unitary authority has either new electoral divisions or changes to electoral division boundaries that are due to take effect at the unitary authority elections in May 2011, or in subsequent years, these changes are, for the reason given in paragraph 10, not to be taken into account by the Commission in the recommendations that it will be submitting to the Secretary of State, in this review.

## The use of local government electoral divisions, Community areas and Community area wards as the building blocks for constituencies

12. The Commission first adopted its policy of using electoral divisions as the basic building block for constituencies at the third general review (1976-1983) and it continued with this policy at both the fourth (1991-1995) and fifth (2000-2006) general reviews, where no (local government) electoral division was split between constituencies." In considering its policies for the sixth general review, the Commission has decided that it would normally be desirable, once again, to use whole electoral divisions to create constituencies where it is feasible to do so, while at the same time observing the requirement that an electorate shall be not less than 95% and no more than 105% of the UK electoral quota.
13. Using local government electoral divisions will enable the Commission to benefit from the considerable information that is already available about them. The composition and the area of each electoral division is clearly defined in a Statutory Instrument, and the electoral statistics for each are available from the Electoral Registration Officers for the unitary authorities in which they are located.
14. The Commission also notes and adopts the other reasons that it had previously given for using whole electoral divisions to construct constituencies. These were that electoral divisions:-
  - are generally indicative of areas which have a broad community of interest;
  - usually have an established and well run administrative machinery in place for organising elections within them;
  - have an identity that is generally known to the local electorate who understand how they are organised and where they may vote in them; and
  - local political party organisations are usually based on electoral divisions or groups of divisions.

15. The Commission's experience from previous general reviews also confirmed that any splitting of an electoral division between constituencies would be likely to break local ties, disrupt political party organisations, cause difficulties for Electoral Registration and Returning Officers and, possibly, cause confusion to the electorate.
16. In those instances where it does prove feasible to meet the requirement that the electorate shall be not less than 95% and no more than 105% of the UK electoral quota, the Commission is bound to divide electoral divisions between constituencies to the extent necessary to meet that requirement. In such circumstances, the Commission may divide an electoral division into Community areas and the wards of those Community areas (where wards exist), as the electorates for these units can be calculated from the published electoral registers with the assistance of the relevant Electoral Registration Officers. In such cases the departure from the general approach explained in paragraphs 12 to 14 will be unavoidable.

### Guidance booklet

17. As with previous general reviews, the Commission has decided to issue a guidance booklet to assist with making the review process more widely known and understood. The booklet is intended to help those who wish to participate in the review by outlining in more detail the statutory rules the Commission must have regard to in making its proposals, and the processes it is required to follow, to facilitate informed public debate on the proposals.
18. It is expected that the booklet will be published by the end of April 2011. It will be issued to all MPs who represent a Welsh constituency, the headquarters of the Parliamentary political parties, the House of Commons library, the Chief Executives of each unitary authority, all Electoral Registration Officers, and those who are already on the Commission's general mailing list. The booklet will also be available on the Commission's website.
19. If you are not one of those listed in the preceding paragraph, and wish to receive a copy, please contact us on 029 2039 5031 and request that you are added to the general mailing list. Alternatively, we can be contacted by e-mail ([bcomm.wales@wales.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:bcomm.wales@wales.gsi.gov.uk)) or by writing to the address at the foot of the front page.

### Meeting with the Parliamentary political parties

20. As has been the practice at previous general reviews, the Commission will hold a joint meeting with the representatives of the Welsh Parliamentary political parties in April 2011. The meeting is being held to discuss the statutory Rules to which the Commission must have regard, the processes it is required to follow, and the approach it will adopt in conducting the review. It will not consider any specific boundary proposals.