



Parliamentary constituency boundaries: the Fifth Periodical Review

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This briefing is no longer being updated. It has been replaced by another Library briefing paper: [Constituency boundary reviews and the number of MPs](#).

This note gives details of the fifth periodical review of Parliamentary constituencies. For further information about the work of the Commissions see SN/PC/1158, [The Parliamentary Boundary Commissions](#).

The **Boundary Commission for England** completed its fifth general review of the Parliamentary constituencies in England in 2006. The **Boundary Commission for Wales** and the **Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland** completed their reviews in 2005 and 2007 respectively. The *Parliamentary Constituencies (England) Order 2007*, the *Parliamentary Constituencies and Assembly Electoral Regions (Wales) Order 2006* and the *Parliamentary Constituencies (Northern Ireland) Order 2008* made provisions for the new constituencies which were first used at the 2010 general election. The **Boundary Commission for Scotland** had submitted its final report to the Secretary of State for Scotland on 30 November 2004 and the new constituencies came into being at the General Election on 5 May 2005.

The Coalition Government announced that it would bring forward an electoral reform bill which would include measures to reduce the number of seats in the House of Commons by changing the rules for boundary reviews. The *Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Bill 2010-11* was introduced on 22 July 2010, see SN/PC/5570, [Reducing the size of the House of Commons](#), for further details.

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1 The Parliamentary Boundary Commissions

The four Parliamentary Boundary Commissions were required to undertake the fifth periodical review of Parliamentary constituencies under the provisions of the *Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986* as amended by the *Boundary Commissions Act 1992*. The legislation requires the Commissions to keep the Parliamentary constituencies under continuous review and periodically (every 8 to 12 years) to conduct a general review of all the constituencies at the same time. The four Commissions, one each for England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, are independent, non-political and impartial bodies. The ex-officio Chairman of each Commission is the Speaker. The Deputy Chairmen must be High Court judges but there are no specific qualifications required for the other Boundary Commissioner positions.¹

Under the provisions of the *Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000* the functions of the Commissions were to have been transferred to the Electoral Commission, which was established under the same legislation, after the completion of the fifth general review. However, the Committee on Standards in Public Life recommended in its report on the work of the Electoral Commission, published in January 2007, that this legislation should be repealed and that the responsibility for conducting Parliamentary boundary reviews should remain with the Boundary Commissions.² On 20 November 2007 the Labour Government responded formally to the Committee's report and agreed with the recommendation that the provisions in PPERA to transfer the work of the Boundary Commissions to the Electoral Commission should be repealed.³ The Government also agreed with the recommendations of the Committee on Standards in Public Life that the Boundary Committee for England should become an independent body in line with the other local government boundary commissions and that the local and Parliamentary boundary commissions in each of the four home countries should share joint secretariats.

The *Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009* subsequently removed the responsibility for electoral boundary matters from the Electoral Commission and made provision for an independent Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) to take on the functions of the Boundary Committee for England.

The Committee on Standards in Public Life had also recommended that the current legislation in relation to the conduct of Parliamentary boundary work should be reviewed and 'where necessary amended before the commencement of the sixth general review due around 2012'.⁴ The Labour Government agreed but said that the commissioning of the review should be the responsibility of the Government rather than the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission:

It is, however, undisputed that the review itself should be run quite clearly independently of Government, and Parliament should be given the opportunity to debate the conclusions and recommendations of the review.

As to the extent of the review, we see no good reason why it should not take the opportunity to look at all aspects of the current legislation on Parliamentary Boundary Reviews, with two specific exceptions: 1) the deliberate overrepresentation of Wales

¹ HC Deb 13 December 2006 c1071W

² *Review of the Electoral Commission*, Committee on Standards in Public Life Eleventh report, Cm 7006, January 2007

³ *The Government response to the Committee on Standards in Public Life's Eleventh Report: Review of the Electoral Commission*, Cm 7272, November 2007

⁴ *Ibid*, p11

and Northern Ireland in the UK Parliament; and 2) that each constituency shall return a single MP. In both cases, the underlying concepts involve much wider constitutional issues than a simple consideration of the boundary review process. On over-representation, this would require consideration of fundamental pillars of the devolution settlement, which we do not believe would be an appropriate topic for this review. The question of single member constituencies is really about the voting system used to elect MPs – this is already the subject of a specific Government review, so would again be inappropriate to include in this context.⁵

The Boundary Commissions have published booklets which outline the rules which guide them in making their proposals for new constituencies and the procedures which they are required to follow to allow a public debate to be held about these proposals. These are available on the Commissions' websites.⁶ There is also a Library Standard Note, SN/PC/1158, *The Parliamentary Boundary Commissions*, which gives further background to the work of the Commissions.⁷

1.1 Parliamentary Boundary Commission for England

The fourth general review of Parliamentary constituencies in England was carried out between 1991 and 1995. The Commission did not meet the statutory deadline of 31 December 1994 and finally submitted the report to the Home Secretary on 12 April 1995. Parliament approved the recommendations and the *Parliamentary Constituencies (England) Order 1995* (SI 1995 no 1626) was made on 28 June 1995. The new constituencies took effect at the general election on 1 May 1997. The fifth general review therefore had to report between 2003 and 2007 and no later than 12 years after the fourth report of 12 April 1995. In his foreword to the Commission's annual report for 2005-06 the Deputy Chairman gave details of the final stages of the review:

We have now completed the sixth year of our fifth general review and have published provisional recommendations for every area of England. If our provisional recommendations for the allocation of constituencies to each review area in England are accepted, the total number of constituencies allocated during this review will be 533. This will be a net increase of four over the current 529 constituencies. We have allocated an extra eleven constituencies to the Non-Metropolitan Counties and Unitary Authorities whilst the six Metropolitan Counties have each lost a constituency and one has been lost from the London Boroughs. By the end of the 2005/2006 financial year, final recommendations had been announced for 514 constituencies out of the 533 we had provisionally recommended.

At our current rate of progress, we expect to complete the general review in July 2006 and to submit our report to the Secretary of State for Constitutional Affairs by the end of October 2006. When we started the review in February 2000, it was our intention to conclude it by the end of 2005. However, our progress was affected by the need to await the final recommendations of the Boundary Committee for England in respect of the new ward structures for each local authority.

On 23 May 2005, the Government announced, as part of its Machinery of Government Change, that responsibility for our work would transfer from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister to the Department for Constitutional Affairs. This is the third change of

⁵ Ibid, p12

⁶ Parliamentary Boundary Commission for England http://www.statistics.gov.uk/pbc/general_info.asp
Parliamentary Boundary Commission for Scotland <http://www.bcomm-scotland.gov.uk/index.html>
Parliamentary Boundary Commission for Wales <http://www.bcomm-wales.gov.uk/>

⁷ Parliamentary Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland <http://www.boundarycommission.org.uk/>
<http://www.parliament.uk/documents/commons/lib/research/briefings/snpc-01158.pdf>

Departmental responsibility for the Commission during the fifth general review. I can confirm that this change, and the others that preceded it, have not affected our independence or the timetable for completion of the fifth general review.⁸

The Commission submitted its final report to the Lord Chancellor on 31 October 2006 as it had hoped to do and the report and draft Order were laid before Parliament on 26 February 2007.⁹

The Fourth Delegated Legislation Committee considered the draft *Parliamentary Constituencies (England) Order 2007* on 27 March 2007.¹⁰ The House of Commons approved the Order on 16 April 2007.¹¹ The House of Lords considered the Order on 17 May 2007. Once the Order had been approved by both Houses of Parliament it was considered and made by the Privy Council on 13 June 2007. The *Parliamentary Constituencies (England) Order 2007* came into force on 27 June 2007.¹²

A guide to the new Parliamentary constituencies was published by Professors Colin Rallings and Michael Thrasher of the University of Plymouth.¹³ The authors described the guide on their website:

It provides detailed 'notional' results for the 2005 general election in all those constituencies where there are boundary changes, and will be used throughout the media as the basis for determining which parties hold which seats and what change in share of the vote is required for seats to change hands. In addition, it shows how the electorate of each old constituency has been dispersed; where the electorate of each new constituency has come from; and the precise composition of the new constituencies in terms of local authority wards and divisions.¹⁴

1.2 Parliamentary Boundary Commission for Scotland

The Boundary Commission for Scotland published the last of its final recommendations for the new constituencies in Scotland on 11 December 2003.¹⁵ The Commission had to take account of changes to the Rules for Redistribution of Seats (which are contained in schedule 2 to the *Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986*) made by the *Scotland Act 1998*. These changes provided for the electoral quota for England to be used in the current review rather than the electoral quota for Scotland which was used in previous reviews. The electoral quota is obtained by dividing the total electorate by the number of constituencies at the time the review commences. The electoral quota for England is 69,935, which is higher than an electoral quota for Scotland would have been. This has meant that the number of seats recommended for Scotland has been reduced from 72 to 59. The Boundary Commission was required to review the regions of Scotland but this did not take place because the *Scottish Parliament (Constituencies) Act 2004* removed the statutory link between the constituencies for the Scottish Parliament and for the House of Commons and retained the

⁸ http://www.statistics.gov.uk/pbc/downloads/PBCAnnual_Report_05_06.doc

⁹ HC Deb 26 February 2007 c76WS.

Boundary Commission for England Fifth Periodical Report, Cm 7032, 2007

¹⁰ <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200607/cmgeneral/deleg4/070327/70327s01.htm> An *Explanatory Memorandum* is available at http://www.opsi.gov.uk/SI/si2007/draft/em/uksidem_9780110762463_en.pdf

¹¹ HC Deb 16 April 2007 c132

¹² The *Parliamentary Constituencies (England) Order 2007*, SI 1681, 2007. Available at <http://www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2007/20071681.htm>

¹³ Media guide to the new Parliamentary constituencies, compiled and edited by Colin Rallings and Michael Thrasher. Local Government Chronicle Elections Centre, 2007.

¹⁴ www.plymouth.ac.uk/elections

¹⁵ Available on the Boundary Commission for Scotland website at <http://www.bcomm-scotland.gov.uk/index.html>

present regions. These provisions allowed the retention of 129 MSPs in the Scottish Parliament even though the Boundary Commission had recommended a reduction in the number of seats for Scotland in the House of Commons. Library Research Paper 04/12, *The Scottish Parliament (Constituencies) Bill* gives further information.¹⁶

The Boundary Commission for Scotland sent its final report to the Secretary of State for Scotland on 30 November 2004. Alistair Darling announced at Scottish Questions that day that he had received the report and would publish it and lay the Order as soon as possible.

All being well, assuming that it gets the approval of both Houses, I hope that it will be in force in February, in ample time for any election that may take place next year, or indeed the year after.¹⁷

The draft order giving effect to the recommendations of the Boundary Commission for Scotland's fifth periodical review of constituencies was laid before Parliament on 14th December 2004 together with the Commission's report (Cm 6427).¹⁸ The draft Order was considered by the First Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation on 24 January 2005. It was subsequently approved by the House of Commons on 25 January 2005 without a vote. The House of Lords debated and approved the Order on 1 February 2005 and the Privy Council approved the Order on 9 February 2005. The *Parliamentary Constituencies (Scotland) Order 2005* came into effect immediately and the new constituencies came into being at the General Election on 5 May 2005. The Explanatory Note to the Order gives further details:

This Order gives effect, without modifications, to the recommendations contained in the Fifth Periodic Report of the Boundary Commission for Scotland dated 30th November 2004 (Cm 6427).

Article 2 of, and the Schedule to, this Order set out and describe the constituencies into which Scotland will be divided.

Every electoral registration officer is required to amend the registers of parliamentary electors to give effect to this Order (Article 3).

As a consequence of this Order, the Parliamentary Constituencies (Scotland) Order 1995 is revoked (Article 4).

By virtue of section 4(6) of the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986 and Article 1(2) of the Order, the coming into force of this Order does not affect any parliamentary election until a proclamation is issued by Her Majesty summoning a new Parliament.

This Order does not impose any new costs on business.¹⁹

This is the first time that the recommendations of one Boundary Commission have been implemented ahead of those of the other Commissions. Usually the Orders to give effect to the Commissions' recommendations are made at the same time and come into effect at the same general election. (See the table in **D** below for further details.)

¹⁶ Available at <http://www.parliament.uk/commons/lib/research/rp2004/rp04-012.pdf>

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ Both are available on the Scotland Office website at www.scotlandoffice.gov.uk

¹⁹ *The Parliamentary Constituencies (Scotland) Order 2005*, SI 250 (S. 1), 2005. Available at <http://www.legislation.hmso.gov.uk/si/si2005/20050250.htm>

1.3 Parliamentary Boundary Commission for Wales

The Boundary Commission for Wales published its provisional recommendations in January 2004.²⁰ The summary of recommendations was as follows:

- The proposed number of parliamentary constituencies (and thus Assembly constituencies) remains at 40.
- Significant changes to parts of the Clwyd and Gwynedd preserved county areas are proposed with the creation of new constituencies of Conwy, Arfon, and Dwyfor Meirionnydd. Minor changes are proposed to the following constituencies: Clwyd South, Clwyd West, Vale of Clwyd, Carmarthen East and Dinefwr, Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire, Preseli Pembrokeshire, Blaenau Gwent, Bridgend, Caerphilly, Cynon Valley, Islwyn, Ogmore, Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney, Montgomeryshire, Cardiff South and Penarth, Vale of Glamorgan, Gower and Neath.
- No changes are proposed to the remaining 17 constituencies.
- Changes are proposed to the Assembly electoral regions of North Wales and Mid and West Wales and a minor change is proposed to the electoral regions of South Wales Central and South Wales West, in each case to reflect proposed changes to parliamentary/Assembly constituencies.

The Boundary Commission held public inquiries about their recommendations and details of these can also be found on its website. On 31 January 2005 the Commission sent its fifth periodical report of Parliamentary constituencies and first report on the National Assembly for Wales electoral regions to the Deputy Prime Minister. The then Minister of State, Nick Raynsford, answered the following written questions on 7 February 2005:

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister whether he has received the report from the Boundary Commission for Wales on the proposed new parliamentary boundaries in Wales; when he will lay the Order implementing the changes; and if he will deposit a copy of the report in the Library.

Mr. Raynsford: A copy of the Boundary Commission for Wales' report was presented to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister on 31 January 2005. Under the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986 we are required to lay the report before Parliament, together with a draft of an order in Council giving effect to the Commission's recommendations, with or without modifications, as soon as may be. Copies of the Commission's report will be made available in the Library of the House.

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what dates he has planned for implementing the recommendations of the Boundary Commission in Wales.

Mr. Raynsford: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister received the Report of the Welsh Parliamentary Boundary Commission on Monday 31 January. By statute, we are obliged to lay this report before Parliament, together with a draft Order in Council giving effect to the new constituencies, as soon as may be after receiving it, and if Parliament approves the draft, to submit that draft to Her Majesty in Council. Subsequently the Order will be made and come into force immediately thereafter or at such later date as may be provided for in the Order. ²¹

²⁰ <http://www.bcomm-wales.gov.uk/>

²¹ HC Deb 7 February 2005 Vol 430 c1294W

In response to a question in the House of Lords on 6 June 2005 as to whether the new constituencies would be in place for the next elections to the National Assembly for Wales, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the Department for Constitutional Affairs, Baroness Ashton of Upholland, replied:

The intention is for the necessary legislation concerning the National Assembly for Wales constituencies and electoral regions to be in place in time for the Assembly elections in 2007.²²

On 14 December 2005 the Minister of State at the Department for Constitutional Affairs announced in a written Ministerial statement that the report, HC 743, and draft Order had been laid before Parliament.²³ The Order was debated by the Fourth Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation on 16 February 2006.²⁴ The House of Commons approved the Order on 28 February 2006. The House of Lords considered the Order and approved it on 9 March 2006.²⁵ The Parliamentary Constituencies and Assembly Electoral Regions (Wales) Order 2006 was made on 11 April 2006 and came into force fourteen days later.²⁶ The boundary changes implemented by the 2006 order were first used in the ordinary elections to the National Assembly for Wales in May 2007, but the Westminster constituencies were not altered until the 2010 general election.

1.4 Parliamentary Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland

The Commission published its provisional recommendations in May 2004.²⁷ The Commission recommended that the number of constituencies should remain at 18 but proposed significant changes to some boundaries. The summary of recommendations stated:

The Provisional recommendations reduce imbalances in the electorates of the Northern Ireland constituencies to within 7.5% of the electoral quota on the enumeration date. Throughout the review, the Commission have borne in mind the convenience of both electors and those who participate in and organise election campaigns and have sought to accommodate their needs as far as possible within the statutory Rules for Redistribution of Seats. Accordingly, the Commission's recommendations have succeeded in reducing the number of electors transferred to a different constituency to 65,450, representing under 6% of the total Northern Ireland electorate. The recommendations seek to address the problem created by the decline in size of the electorates in the Belfast borough constituencies and increases elsewhere in Northern Ireland, since the last review of constituencies. By their proposals the Commission have sought to remove existing electoral inequalities and avoid dividing wards between constituencies.

On 14 June 2005 the Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland announced that there would be three local inquiries to consider the responses to the recommendations.²⁸ A written Parliamentary question on 20 June 2005 gave further details:

²² HL Deb 6 June 2005 Vol 672 WA34

²³ HC Deb 14 December 2005 Vol 440c147WS

²⁴ <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200506/cmstand/deleg4/st060216/60216s01.htm>

²⁵ <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld199697/ldhansrd/pdvn/lds06/text/60309-27.htm>

²⁶ <http://www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2006/20061041.htm>

²⁷ <http://www.boundarycommission.org.uk/>

²⁸ Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland Press Notice, 14 June 2005, available at http://www.boundarycommission.org.uk/pubs/NOTICE_LOCAL_INQUIRIES.pdf

Mr. Gregory Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he expects hearings arising from responses to the draft recommendations for parliamentary election boundaries in Northern Ireland to take place.

Mr. Hain: A public notice and press release were issued by the Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland on 14 June announcing that there would be three public Local Inquiries to be held in respect of all 14 parliamentary constituencies affected by the Boundary Commission's Provisional Recommendations published on 6 May 2004. They will begin on 5 September in Belfast, 14 September in Ballymena, and 19 September in Newcastle, Co Down.²⁹

On 18 May 2006 the Boundary Commission published its revised recommendations which took account of the representations received by the Commission and reflected the conclusions and recommendations contained in the reports of the Assistant Commissioners who held the local inquiries in 2005.³⁰ Representations about the revised recommendations had to be made to the Commission by 24 June 2006. A Written Ministerial Statement announced the publication of the revised recommendations and the then Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Peter Hain, added:

The Revised Recommendations continue to provide for 18 constituencies and revise the boundaries of 12 constituencies. The Commission must consider all representations on the Revised Recommendations received within one month of their publication. I will, of course, report back to Parliament once the Commission has submitted its final recommendations to me.³¹

On 16 November 2006 the Boundary Commission issued a press notice saying that it was deferring consideration of the revised Parliamentary boundaries and consequently the submission of final recommendations to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.³² The reasons for temporarily halting the fifth review in Northern Ireland lay in the current review of local government districts.

Following the Review of Public Administration in Northern Ireland a Local Government Boundaries Commissioner was appointed to draw up the boundaries of the 7 proposed new district council areas which will replace the existing 26. On 7 November 2006 the Commissioner published provisional recommendations for restructuring the local government districts in Northern Ireland and the number, boundaries and names of their constituent wards.³³ The Boundary Commission decided that, in view of the changes proposed to the wards by the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner, its revised recommendations for the Parliamentary boundaries (which were based on the existing ward structure) needed to be reviewed:

It is important for the organisation and conduct of elections and to avoid confusion amongst voters that elections in Northern Ireland are conducted on common ward boundaries. The Commission have therefore decided to review their Revised Recommendations. They will do so at the earliest opportunity and, if appropriate, will publish Modified Recommendations.³⁴

²⁹ HC Deb 20 June 2005 Vol 435 c846W

³⁰ Available at <http://www.boundarycommission.org.uk/index.asp>

³¹ HC Deb 18 May 2006 Vol 446 c64WS

³² Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland press notice, 16 November 2006. Available at <http://www.boundarycommission.org.uk/pubs/announcement-defer-revised-recs.pdf>

³³ http://www.lgbc-ni.org/index/announcements/press_releases.htm

³⁴ Ibid

The Commission added that any modified recommendations would take into account the conclusions and recommendations arising from the three local inquiries held in 2005 and that there would be further opportunity for representations to be made to the Commission.

Public hearings about the new local government districts were held in January and February 2007; the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner had been asked to submit his final recommendations to the NI Department of the Environment by 31 May 2007. The procedure guide for the review stated that the recommendations had to be approved by the Northern Ireland Assembly:

As soon as possible after the Commissioner submits his final report, DOE will lay the report before the Assembly together with a draft Order giving effect to the recommendations with or without modifications. If modifications are proposed, DOE is required to lay a statement of the reasons for them at the same time. The draft Order must be debated by the Assembly and, if approved, is made and takes effect at the next local government election. In the event of Direct Rule continuing, the Order will be laid before Westminster Parliament under the Negative Resolution procedure.³⁵

The deferment of consideration of the revised Parliamentary constituency boundaries until after the completion of the local government boundaries review meant that the Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland did not meet its statutory deadline of June 2007 for submitting its final report to the Secretary of State.

However, on 3 October 2007, the Boundary Commission announced that as the local government boundaries review was not yet completed and the Northern Ireland Executive had now announced a review of the future shape of local government in Northern Ireland, the Commission had decided that it should not delay the submission of its final recommendations. The Commission had considered the representations received in response to its revised recommendations, which had been published in May 2006, but decided that the representations did not justify a further local inquiry. The revised recommendations were therefore confirmed as final. The Commission submitted its report and final recommendations to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and noted in its press notice that 'once new ward boundaries are established, the Commission propose to consider whether, exceptionally, to conduct an interim review of constituencies.'³⁶

On 31 March 2008 Paul Goggins, then Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office, announced that the final report had been laid before Parliament together with the draft *Parliamentary Constituencies (Northern Ireland) Order 2008* which gave effect to the recommendations.³⁷ The draft order was considered by the 6th Delegated Legislation Committee on 15 May 2008 and by the House of Lords Grand Committee on 20 May 2008. The House of Lords approved the order on 22 May 2008 and the House of Commons approved it on 2 June 2008.

2 Procedure following publication of the final recommendations

When the Commissions have decided on their final recommendations these are submitted to the relevant Secretaries of State for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The English

³⁵ *Review of local government boundaries in Northern Ireland: procedure guide*, September 2006. Available at http://www.lgbc-ni.org/procedure_guide_31-8-7.doc

³⁶ *Recommended Parliamentary constituencies*, Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland press notice, 3 October 2007

³⁷ HC Deb 31 March 2008 c33WS

Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland Fifth Periodical Report on Parliamentary Constituencies, Cm 7321, 2008

Boundary Commission submits its report to the Lord Chancellor. The reports are laid before Parliament with draft Orders in Council giving effect to the recommendations. If modifications are proposed the Secretary of State is required to lay a statement of the reasons for them at the same time but to date no orders have ever been laid modifying recommendations made by the Boundary Commissions.³⁸ The draft Orders must be approved by both Houses of Parliament under the affirmative resolution procedure. As with other delegated legislation, there is no mechanism for Parliament to make changes to the draft Orders. Once approved the draft Orders are then submitted to Her Majesty in Council. After the Orders in Council have been made the new constituencies take effect at the following general election; any by-elections held in the meantime have to be held on the old (existing) constituencies.

Announcing the completion of the fifth periodical review for England the Boundary Commission said that it was often asked how soon after receiving the report the Secretary of State is required to lay the report and the draft Order before Parliament and noted that:

Whilst the *Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986* (as amended) requires the Secretary of State to lay the report before Parliament 'as soon as may be' after it has been received, it does not give any guidance as to how soon that must be. However, it is worth noting that the Commission's final report on their last (fourth) general review was submitted to the Secretary of State on 12 April 1995 and the Order giving effect to the recommendations was made on 28 June 1995.³⁹

The Commission also noted in the same newsletter that the validity of an Order in Council, once made, may not be called into question in any legal proceedings.

3 Size of the House of Commons

The final recommendations of the Boundary Commission for Scotland reduced the number of Scottish seats by 13 from 72 to 59. Following the Order in Council implementing the changes, the House of Commons was reduced in size to 646 at the general election on 5 May 2005.

The Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland did not recommend any changes to the number of constituencies in Northern Ireland (18). The Boundary Commission for Wales also recommended the retention of the same number of constituencies in Wales (40). The Boundary Commission for England recommended an increase of 4 in the number of constituencies in England (533). The present size of the House of Commons following the 2010 general election is therefore 650.

4 The Arbuthnott Commission on Boundary Differences and Voting Systems in Scotland

The provisions of the *Scottish Parliament (Constituencies) Act 2004*, which removed the statutory link between the constituencies for the Scottish Parliament and those for the House of Commons, mean that the constituency boundaries are no longer coterminous now that the recommendations in the Boundary Commission for Scotland's fifth review have been implemented (at the May 2005 General Election). Responses to a consultation paper on the size of the Scottish Parliament which preceded the *Scottish Parliament (Constituencies) Bill* raised concerns about there being different boundaries for Westminster and Scottish

³⁸ For further information about this see SN/PC/1158 available at <http://www.parliament.uk/documents/commons/lib/research/briefings/snpc-01158.pdf>

³⁹ BCE Newsletter 2/2006. Available at http://www.statistics.gov.uk/pbc/downloads/Newsletter_No2_2006.doc

Parliament constituencies. Helen Liddell, then Secretary of State for Scotland, made a statement on the outcome of this consultation exercise on 18 December 2002. Mrs Liddell acknowledged the concerns about the operation of different boundaries for Westminster and Holyrood and proposed that an independent commission should be established 'to examine and make recommendations on issues caused by different boundaries.'⁴⁰ However, she did not propose to establish the commission until after the Scottish Parliament elections in 2007.

During the second reading debate on the *Scottish Parliament (Constituencies) Bill*, the then Secretary of State for Scotland, Alistair Darling, announced that:

I have come to the view that we need to consider such questions not in 2007 but this year. I shall inform the House how I intend to take this matter forward, taking account of some significant changes that have occurred following the Scottish Parliament election last May. As the House will know, the Scottish Parliament is currently considering legislation that, if enacted, would lead to councils in Scotland being elected by the single transferable vote from 2007. Therefore, Scotland now faces the prospect of four different voting systems for an electorate of just over 3.8 million: for UK general elections, the first-past-the-post system; for European elections, a PR list system; for Holyrood, the additional member system; and, if the legislation goes through, STV for local government. In addition, the further complication exists that local government elections in Scotland are expected to take place on the same day as the Holyrood election.⁴¹

Mr Darling set out the terms of reference for the commission:

It will examine the consequences of having four different voting systems in Scotland, and different boundaries between Westminster and Holyrood. It will consider the implications for voter participation, the relationship between public bodies and authorities in Scotland and MPs and MSPs, and the representation of constituents by different tiers of elected members. It will be asked to make representations on whether the consequences require action to be taken in respect of arrangements between elected representatives, to ensure that constituents and organisations receive the best possible service; the pattern of electoral boundaries in Scotland; the relationship with other public bodies and authorities in Scotland; and the method of voting in Scottish parliamentary elections.

The commission will be independent. It will consider the case for change, and make recommendations to me and to the First Minister. I intend to discuss the chairmanship and membership of the commission with the other political parties in the House, and I will announce its membership in due course.⁴²

The Commission on Boundary Differences and Voting Systems was set up in July 2004 under the chairmanship of Professor Sir John Arbuthnott and held its first meeting on 9 September 2004. In a press notice issued on 8 December 2004 Sir John Arbuthnott announced the Commission's future programme of work:

We are now set to launch early in the New Year a wide-ranging and open public inquiry into the issues covered by our remit. As well as issuing a consultation paper, we will be going out to key areas across Scotland to listen to people's views. We are also arranging to meet shortly with MEPs, MSPs and MPs, and to hold a seminar with academic experts. Other information gathering sessions will be held as our work

⁴⁰ HC Deb 18 December 2002 Vol 396 c859

⁴¹ HC Deb 9 February 2004 Vol 417 c1150

⁴² HC Deb 9 February 2004 Vol 417 c1151

develops. We are aiming to report to the Secretary of State and the First Minister by the end of 2005.⁴³

The Commission published its report, *Putting Citizens First: Boundaries, Voting and Representation in Scotland* on 19 January 2006.⁴⁴ The recommendations included:

- The current mixed member system for electing the Scottish Parliament should be retained, but with open lists to increase voter choice.
- Constituency and regional boundaries for the Scottish Parliament should be based on local authority areas rather than Westminster constituencies, with the regions revised to better reflect natural local communities.
- Candidates for election to the Scottish Parliament should not be prohibited from standing in a constituency and on the regional list.
- Clearer and more positive roles should be developed for constituency and regional MSPs.
- The single transferable vote system should be introduced for European parliamentary elections.
- Scottish Parliament and local government elections should be held on different days.⁴⁵

The Arbuthnott Commission also recommended that:

The functions of the Boundary Commission for Scotland and the Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland should be combined to enable the constituencies and regions for the Scottish Parliament and local authorities to be reviewed together. Consideration should also be given to integrating the review of Westminster constituencies in Scotland into this process.⁴⁶

For further information about the Arbuthnott Commission's report see Library Standard Note SN/PC/3918.⁴⁷

5 Interim reviews

The decision to hold an interim review of a Parliamentary constituency rests with the Boundary Commissions. Interim reviews are usually carried out to realign Parliamentary constituency boundaries with altered local government boundaries and are held between the periods when general reviews of all constituencies were being conducted. In response to a Parliamentary Question from Philip Hollobone MP seeking assurance that future elections in new Parliamentary constituencies with recently revised district council ward boundaries would be conducted on the basis of the new boundaries, Michael Wills, then Minister of State, Ministry of Justice, replied:

New parliamentary boundaries are delineated by reference to district council wards as they exist at a particular point in time. However, the use of wards is merely the most

⁴³ Available on the Commission's website at <http://www.arbuthnottcommission.gov.uk/>

⁴⁴ Available on the Commission's website at <http://www.arbuthnottcommission.gov.uk/FinalReport.htm>

⁴⁵ News release, 19 January 2006, Commission on Boundary Differences and Voting Systems. Available at <http://www.arbuthnottcommission.gov.uk/docs/Final%20Report/News%20Release1.doc>

⁴⁶ Ibid, p21

⁴⁷ Available at <http://www.parliament.uk/documents/commons/lib/research/briefings/snpc-03918.pdf>

convenient method by which to describe the physical geographical area of the constituency. There is no legislative requirement to run a parliamentary election on the basis of local government wards. The administrative units for the running of a parliamentary election are the polling district and the constituency.

As and when wards are amended, the parliamentary constituency will therefore not automatically change, although the Parliamentary Boundary Commission will consider whether an interim review and possible amendment to the parliamentary constituency may be justified.⁴⁸

The current interim reviews were announced in the summer of 2007. On 4 June 2007 the then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Ministry of Justice, Bridget Prentice, announced that the Lord Chancellor had received notice from the Boundary Commission for Wales that it was commencing an interim review of the boundaries of the constituencies of Neath county constituency and Brecon and Radnorshire county constituency.⁴⁹ On 2 July 2007 Bridget Prentice announced that the Lord Chancellor had received notice from the Boundary Commission for England that it too was commencing an interim review of the following constituencies:

Berwick-upon-Tweed
 Chippenham
 Daventry
 Hexham
 Somerton and Frome
 South Northamptonshire
 South West Wiltshire
 Wansbeck
 Wells⁵⁰

The interim reviews all followed changes to ward boundaries which had meant that these were no longer coterminous with the Parliamentary boundaries.

6 Parliamentary Boundary Commission reports 1832 – 2008

The recommendations of the Boundary Commissions come into effect at the general election following the Act or Order which implemented them. In 1970 the Orders were not made until November, after the general election in June, although the Boundary Commissions had reported in 1969. For further details see Library Standard Note SN/PC/1158.⁵¹

Date of Boundary Commission report	Date of Act or SI	Date of General Election when recommendations came into effect	
10 Feb 1832 (E)	11 July 1832	1832	
10 Feb 1832 (W)	11 July 1832	1832	
21 Feb 1832 (S)	17 July 1832	1832	

⁴⁸ HC Deb 12 September 2007 c2089W

⁴⁹ HC Deb 4 June 2007 c3WS

⁵⁰ HC Deb 2 July 2007 c42WS

⁵¹ Available at <http://www.parliament.uk/documents/commons/lib/research/briefings/snpc-01158.pdf>

5 Feb 1868 (E)	13 July 1868	1868	
5 Feb 1868 (W)	13 July 1868	1868	
10 Feb 1885 (E) & 22 April 1885	25 June 1885	1885	
10 Feb 1885 (W)	25 June 1885	1885	
10 Feb 1885 (S)	25 June 1885	1885	
27 Sep 1917 (E)	6 Feb 1918	14 Dec 1918	
27 Sep 1917 (W)	6 Feb 1918	14 Dec 1918	
28 Sep 1917 (S)	6 Feb 1918	14 Dec 1918	
29 Mar 1945 (E)	11 June 1945	5 July 1945	
24 Oct 1947 (E)	30 July 1948	23 Feb 1950	
17 Nov 1947 (W)	30 July 1948	23 Feb 1950	
5 Nov 1947 (S)	30 July 1948	23 Feb 1950	
4 Sep 1947 (NI)	30 July 1948	23 Feb 1950	
1st Periodical Review			Debates in the House of Commons
10 Nov 1954 (E)	5 Jan 1955 & 1 Feb 1955	26 May 1955	HC Deb 16 December 1954 [535] c1986-2288, HC Deb 26 January 1955 [536] c180-378
10 Nov 1954 (W)	1 Feb 1955	26 May 1955	HC Deb 26 January 1955 [536] c378-382
23 Aug 1954 (S)	5 Jan 1955	26 May 1955	HC Deb 15 December 1954 [535] c1913-1940
10 Nov 1954 (NI)	Not applicable / no changes recommended		
2nd Periodical Review	Date of Act or SI	Date of General Election when recommendations came into effect	Debates in the House of Commons
21 Apr 1969 (E)	11 Nov 1970	28 Feb 1974	HC Deb 12 November 1969 [791] c428-556, HC Deb 28 October 1970 [805] c241-375
19 May 1969 (W)	11 Nov 1970	28 Feb 1974	HC Deb 12 November 1969 [791] c428-560, HC Deb 28 October 1970 [805] c241-375
24 Apr 1969 (S)	11 Nov 1970	28 Feb 1974	HC Deb 12 November 1969 [791] c428-566,

			HC Deb 28 October 1970 [805] c241-375
16 Feb 1969 (NI)	11 Nov 1970	28 Feb 1974	HC Deb 12 November 1969 [791] c428-570, HC Deb 28 October 1970 [805] c241-375
3rd Periodical Review			
1 Feb 1983 (E)	16 Mar 1983	9 June 1983	HC Deb 2 March 1983 [38] c249-346
25 Jan 1983 (W)	16 Mar 1983	9 June 1983	HC Deb 16 February 1983 [37] c392-423, HC Deb 21 February 1983 [37] c751-771
18 Feb 1983 (S)	16 Mar 1983	9 June 1983	HC Deb 3 March 1983 [38] c424-463
27 Oct 1982 (NI)	22 Dec 1982	9 June 1983	Fourth Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments 15 December 1982
4th Periodical Review	Date of Act or SI	Date of General Election when recommendations came into effect	Debates in the House of Commons
6 June 1995 (E)	28 June 1995	1 May 1997	HC Deb 14 June 1995 [265] c799-862
15 Feb 1995 (W)	11 Apr 1995	1 May 1997	Third Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments 8 March 1995
16 Feb 1995 (S)	11 Apr 1995	1 May 1997	Fourth Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments 8 March 1995
20 June 1995 (NI)	23 Nov 1995	1 May 1997	First Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments 31 October 1995

5th Periodical Review			
14 Dec 2004 (S)	9 February 2005	5 May 2005	First Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation 24 January 2005 http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200405/cmstand/deleg1/st050124/50124s01.htm
14 Dec 2005 (W)	11 April 2006	6 May 2010	Fourth Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation 16 February 2006 http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200506/cmstand/deleg4/st060216/60216s01.htm
26 February 2007 (E)	13 June 2007	6 May 2010	Fourth Delegated Legislation Committee 27 March 2007 http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200607/cmgeneral/deleg4/070327/70327s01.htm
31 March 2008 (NI)		6 May 2010	Sixth Delegated Legislation Committee 15 May 2008 http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200708/cmgeneral/deleg6/080515/80515s01.htm

(E) England
(W) Wales
(S) Scotland
(NI) Northern Ireland