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Dear Ariane,

Thank you for your letter of 7 February seeking further information on the independent review into the process for approving Boundaries Scotland's proposals for changes to electoral boundaries.

In a 2022 public consultation on elections related policy and legislation, the Scottish Government asked whether the process by which Boundaries Scotland reviews are implemented should be changed. Of those who noted their support for a change to the system, a form of automaticity—that is, a system where the recommendations of the body that reviews electoral boundaries take effect automatically, without needing approval from the legislature—was the preferred option. Forms of automaticity now apply to changes to electoral boundaries in the UK Parliament and the Senedd Cymru.

The independent review will consider options for the introduction of a form of automaticity, taking account of the experience elsewhere in the United Kingdom and internationally. Where the review considers that changes are required to other aspects of the boundary review process in consequence of the recommendations it makes about the process for implementing changes to boundaries, it can also recommend these. For example, recommendations might be made about engagement and consultation with the public and elected representatives.

I expect the review to take an open, transparent and participative approach to considering options and making recommendations, including consultation with all parties and institutions it considers to have an interest, including voters. A copy of the review's report, containing its recommendations, will of course be laid before Parliament for committees and others to consider.

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I had hoped to be in a position to have appointed a chair for the review by now, but unfortunately that hasn't proved possible. My officials are finalising arrangements so that I may appoint a Chair to lead the review and I expect to be in a position to confirm this in the coming weeks. The review will commence shortly after this, with its recommendations and report expected this Autumn.

On your question as to the emergence of a broad position of consensus for automaticity, my impression is that during the passage of the Elections (Representation and Reform) Act 2025 the position emerged on automaticity as the way forward and it was welcomed by the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee in their Stage 1 Report.

Ultimately, however, it will require primary legislation to introduce automaticity and Parliament will have the final say if the process is to be changed.

I am copying this letter to the Convener of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee.

Yours,

JAMIE HEPBURN

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