
Meeting: General Purposes Committee
Date: 6 October 2011
Subject: Parliamentary Constituencies Boundaries Review
Report of: Head of Legal & Democratic Services
Summary: The report sets out the initial proposals by the Boundary Commission for England on the current review of the Parliamentary constituencies for England.

Contact Officer: John Atkinson, Head of Legal and Democratic Services
Public/Exempt: Public
Wards Affected: All
Function of: General Purposes Committee

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

Council Priorities:

Not applicable.

Financial:

None specifically arising from this report but there are significant costs in administering an election; some of which are outwith the control of the Acting Returning Officer specifically when local elections are combined with national elections.

Legal:

The process described in the report is prescribed in the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986 (as amended by the Boundary Commissions 1992 and the Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Act 2011). The Boundary Commission is required to review the parliamentary constituencies in accordance with the provisions of the Act and submit a report to the Secretary of State before 1 October 2013. Central Bedfordshire Council has no formal role in the statutory process.

Risk Management:

None resulting from this report.

Staffing (including Trades Unions):

None resulting from this report.

Equalities/Human Rights:

None resulting from this report.

Community Safety:

Not applicable.

Sustainability:

Not applicable.

RECOMMENDATIONS:**That the Committee**

- 1. Notes the initial proposals for the new Parliamentary constituency boundaries in England; and**
- 2. Considers whether to accept the initial proposals or to formulate a revised scheme for the constituencies contained within the Central Bedfordshire Council area.**

Background

1. The Boundary Commission for England (BCE) is an independent and impartial non-departmental public body which is responsible for reviewing Parliamentary constituency boundaries in England.
2. The BCE has the task of periodically reviewing all the Parliamentary constituencies in England. It is currently conducting a review on the basis of the new rules laid down by Parliament. The new rules involve a significant reduction in the number of constituencies in England (from 533 to 502) and require that every constituency (apart from two specified exceptions) must have an electorate that is no smaller than 72,810 and no larger than 80,473.
3. The BCE is required to make a formal report to the Government by 1 October 2013 (the 2013 review); recommending any changes that it believes are appropriate to the distribution, size, shape, name or designation of constituencies in England.
4. The Government will turn the recommendations of the BCE into draft legislation, which is then presented to Parliament. If Parliament approves the legislation, the recommended changes will be implemented for the next General Election currently scheduled for May 2015.

Timeline

5. The review process is heavily informed by public consultation. The timeline for the 2013 review is:

March 2011	Initial proposal developed
13 September to 5 December 2011	Initial consultation period
7 & 8 November	Eastern Region Public Hearing (Luton BC)
Spring 2012	Secondary consultation period (Publication on the BCE website) of all the representations received. During the four-week secondary consultation period further representations can be made.
Towards the end of 2012	If the evidence presented at the secondary consultation period warrants revised proposals for the area concerned a further consultation of 8 weeks is introduced.
by 1 October 2013	Final recommendations to Government

The base data for the 2013 Review

6. The Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986 (as amended) provides that the electorate figures that are to be used for a review are those that were in the version of the electoral register published on the 'review date'. This is defined by the Act as the date two years and ten months before the review is required to report to the Government. For the 2013 Review, this means that the electorate figures used must be those from the electoral registers that were required to be published on or before 1 December 2010.
7. The BCE will not generally take into account new boundaries that came into effect at local council elections in 2011. However, in the limited circumstances where the BCE has to consider whether it should divide a ward (as it existed on 6 May 2010) between constituencies in order to meet the statutory electorate range, and if so how it should be divided, the BCE is prepared to take into account as appropriate any new boundaries introduced after 6 May 2010.

The distribution of constituencies

8. The number of constituencies allocated to England for the 2013 Review is 502. Two of these constituencies are expressly reserved for the Isle of Wight thus the remaining 500 have been allocated between the regions used for the European Parliament elections. The Eastern region has been allocated 56 constituencies (a reduction of two from the current arrangement). The proposals for the whole of the region are contained in Appendix A.
9. In formulating the proposals the BCE state that it had not been possible to allocate whole numbers of constituencies to individual counties or unitary authorities but instead grouped them into sub-regions. Moreover, as it was not possible to allocate whole constituencies to both Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire it was considered appropriate to review both counties together and allocate 16 constituencies, which is one fewer than present.

10. The impact of the proposals of the revised constituencies within the Central Bedfordshire area is shown at Appendix B together with a map at Appendix C which identifies each parish and its potential constituency.

Conclusion

11. The effects of the proposals for Central Bedfordshire are that the electorate would be served by 6 MP's rather than the current 4. Additionally, the base data used by the BCE is taken from the former Central Bedfordshire wards prior to the Electoral Arrangements Review. This means that the existing wards of Potton, Cranfield & Marston Moretaine, Caddington, Stotfold & Langford and Arlesey would have one or more parishes being represented by a different MP from the remainder of the ward.
12. The BCE actively promotes participation in the consultation process and welcomes written or oral representations made at public hearings for or against the proposals.

Appendices:

Appendix A – Eastern Region Initial Proposals (Boundary Commission for England)

Appendix B – Parliamentary Constituencies – Initial Proposals: Impact on Central Bedfordshire Wards

Appendix C – Central Bedfordshire Ward and Parish Boundaries (Map)

Background Papers: None

Location of Papers: N/A