

**Boundary Commission for England - Parliamentary Constituency Boundaries Review**

The Committee considered a report by the Head of Legal and Democratic Services which set out the initial proposals by the Boundary Commission for England arising from its current review of Parliamentary constituencies.

The meeting was aware that new Parliamentary rules required a significant reduction in the number of constituencies in England and that every constituency (apart from two specified exceptions) should have an electorate that was no smaller than 72,810 and no larger than 80,473. The Commission had the task of making a formal report to the Government by 1 October 2013 with its recommended changes. Subject to parliamentary approval the changes would be implemented in time for the next General Election scheduled for May 2015.

The meeting noted the timeline for the consultation process for the review. It was further noted that the consultation period on the Commission's initial proposals ran from 13 September to 5 December 2011 and that a public hearing for the Eastern Region proposals would take place on 7/8 November 2011.

The officers sought the Committee's views on whether to accept the Commission's initial proposals for the constituencies contained within the Central Bedfordshire Council area (which fell within the Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire Sub-Region of the Eastern Region) or formulate a revised scheme.

Lengthy debate took place during which Members expressed major concern at the impact of the initial proposals should they be adopted. A large number of Central Bedfordshire parishes would be lost to neighbouring authorities within Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire in what, it was felt, was an attempt to ensure that constituencies within the Sub-Region met the Government's size requirements. This appeared to be at the expense of any close alignment between Parliamentary and local authority boundaries and to the detriment of any sense of community. Further, Central Bedfordshire's electorate would be served by six MP's rather than the current four and some wards would have one or more parishes being represented by a different MP from the remainder of the ward. The proposals would see only one of the six MP's solely representing Central Bedfordshire. Disquiet was also expressed at the detrimental impact on Central Bedfordshire Council as a recently created unitary authority and, as such, the need to support the Council whilst it became fully established.

The need for any constituency boundary review to take full note of a sense of locality and place was emphasised.

The Committee noted that Luton Borough Council had accepted the initial proposals as they affected that Council in full. The Committee also noted that Bedford Borough Council was likely to seek only minor amendments to the initial proposals that were of relevance to that Authority.

The Committee was aware that the electorate figures used for the review were, as a result of the requirements of the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986 (as amended), those from electoral registers two years and ten months before the review was required to report to the Government. For the 2013 review this meant that the electorate figures used were from the electoral registers required to be published on or before 1 December 2010. Further, the proposals took no account of the affect of potential housing development on the basis that properties might not be occupied.

## **RESOLVED**

- 1 that the General Purposes Committee register its major concern regarding the Boundary Commission for England's initial proposals, arising from its review of Parliamentary boundaries, as they affect Central Bedfordshire;**
- 2 that officers, in consultation with the Chairman of the General Purposes Committee and having regard to the views of all interested parties, develop revised alternative proposals for those Parliamentary boundaries as they affect the Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire Sub-Region of the Eastern Region for submission to the Council for approval on 24 November 2011;**
- 3 that the concern expressed by the General Purposes Committee about the Boundary Commission for England's initial proposals be reported to the public hearing for the Eastern Region at Luton Borough Council on 7/8 November 2011.**

## **RECOMMENDED to Council**

**that the alternative proposals for those Parliamentary boundaries as they affect the Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire Sub-Region of the Eastern Region, as revised by the officers in consultation with the Chairman of General Purposes Committee, be approved and adopted and then submitted to the Boundary Commission for England for consideration. (set out in Appendix A, to follow)**