
Meeting: General Purposes Committee
Date: 13 November 2012
Subject: The 2013 Review of Parliamentary Constituencies
Report of: Head of Legal and Democratic Services
Summary: The report sets out the revised 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:

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

Legal:

2. The process described in the report is prescribed in the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986 (as amended by the Boundary Commissions Act 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:

3. None resulting from this report.

Staffing (including Trades Unions):

4. Not Applicable.

Equalities/Human Rights:

5. Not Applicable.

Public Health

6. Not Applicable.

Community Safety:

7. Not Applicable.

Sustainability:

8. Not Applicable.

Procurement:

9. Not Applicable.

RECOMMENDATION:

that the Committee note the revised proposals for the new Parliamentary constituency boundaries in England and consider whether any further representations should be made to the Boundary Commission for England.

Background

10. In February 2011, Parliament passed legislation that a review of Parliamentary Constituencies must be carried out and that the relevant Boundary Commission make recommendations to Government by October 2013. In respect of the English constituencies the Boundary Commission for England (BCE) is the responsible body.
11. The BCE has the task of reviewing all the Parliamentary constituencies in England every five years. 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) resulting in the number of constituencies in the Eastern region reducing by two, to 56. The rules also 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.
12. Following the publication of the initial proposals in September 2011, and two consultation exercises the BCE have determined that the evidence presented is such that it is appropriate to change the initial proposals and consult on them for a further eight weeks. During this consultation period there are no further public hearings, and no opportunity to comment on the representations of others.
13. 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.

The Base Data for the 2013 Review

14. The Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986 (as amended) provides that the electorate figures that have been used for the review were 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 and therefore in the case of Central Bedfordshire the former County Council divisions and not the current wards are the building blocks of each of the proposed constituencies.

Consultation and Revised Proposals

15. The consultation on the initial proposals for the Eastern region was carried out in the Autumn of 2011 and some 1452 unique written representations were made. Additionally, 102 oral representations were heard at the four public hearings held across the region. The secondary consultation on the representations received attracted a further 353 unique written representations and as a consequence the BCE have decided that the evidence is such that they consider it appropriate to revise the initial proposal in some areas. In particular, the BCE are proposing substantial revision to the constituencies in Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire sub-region.
16. In determining the revised proposals, the BCE specifically highlights the fact that Luton is the largest town in the sub-region and its electorate is too many for one constituency and too few for two. Consequently, any adopted solution for Luton has a significant impact on the surrounding constituencies and therefore the matter must be dealt with first. The BCE were not persuaded by the representations made regarding their initial proposals and considers that the solution for Luton that best fits the statutory factors is that put forward by them. Moreover the BCE highlight the fact that there is a continuous built up area between Luton and Dunstable whereas there is open parkland between Luton and Harpenden.
17. For the remainder of the Central Bedfordshire Council area the BCE were persuaded, primarily, by the representations made by two members of the public. Furthermore, it was noted that this counter proposal addressed many of the concerns raised by CBC and others specifically as it minimised the number of cross-county boundary constituencies.

Conclusion

18. The effects of the revised proposals for Central Bedfordshire are that the electorate would continue to be served by 4 MPs with administrative responsibility shared across 5 separate authorities. The full list of the proposed constituencies, as they affect Central Bedfordshire, and their respective electorate are shown at Annex A. A pictorial view is shown at Annexes B to F.

19. Whilst it is acknowledged that the revised proposals differ significantly from the submission put forward by this Council, it is felt that given the constraints imposed on the size of constituencies that no other numeric solution will meet the aspirations of the Council specifically in relation to Dunstable.

Appendices:

Appendix A – Revised Proposals for Constituencies, Including Wards and Electorates
Appendix B – Central Bedfordshire Wards
Appendix C – Unchanged Proposed Boundary – Luton North and Dunstable BC
Appendix D – Revised Proposed Boundary – Mid Bedfordshire and Harpenden CC
Appendix E – Revised Proposed Boundary – South West Bedfordshire CC
Appendix F – Revised Proposed Boundary – North Bedfordshire CC

Background Papers: (open to public inspection)

None