

<b>Recommendation to Council on 29 November 2012</b>	<b>From: General Purposes Committee on 13 November 2012</b>	<b>Item 10</b>
	<b>The 2013 Review of Parliamentary Constituencies – Eastern Region</b>	
1.	Council is asked to approve the following recommendation:-	
	<p><b>that whilst the General Purposes Committee notes the revised proposals for the new Parliamentary constituency boundaries in England it makes the following observations which the Committee wishes the Council to forward to the Boundary Commission for England:</b></p> <p><b>a) the Committee remains fully supportive of the proposal put forward by the Leader of the Council in the first consultation to retain the wards in Dunstable in the Parliamentary constituency of South West Bedfordshire. It therefore regrets the outcome of the proposed revised boundary changes, as such affect the town of Dunstable to be joined with the present constituency of Luton North, for the following reasons:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>• Dunstable is a market town with its traditions and customs and Luton is an aspiring city with a very different set of traditions and customs;</b></li> <li><b>• A market town has more in common with the rural areas of South West Bedfordshire than with Luton. A continuous urban area is itself not a valid argument for joining two disparate communities;</b></li> <li><b>• There is minimal support from the constituents of Dunstable to join with Luton North;</b></li> </ul> <p><b>b) the Committee welcomes the revised proposals in that the administrative area of Central Bedfordshire will be served by four Members of Parliament and not six as was originally proposed by the Boundary Commission for England, that there is only one cross-county boundary constituency and that the constituency of Mid Bedfordshire has been retained;</b></p> <p><b>c) the Committee supports the introduction of a Bedford North constituency and a Bedford South constituency to replace the proposed North Bedfordshire and Bedford Parliamentary constituencies (Bedford North taking in that part of the town of Bedford and other communities north</b></p>	

	<p><b>of the river Ouse whilst Bedford South would take in that part of Bedford, Kempston and those communities to the south of the river Ouse) subject to the outcome of an analysis of the electoral impact of the two constituencies by the Democratic Services Manager which confirms that their creation would comply with all statutory requirements.</b></p>
	<p><b>Background</b></p>
2.	<p>At its meeting on 13 November 2012 the Committee considered a report by the Head of Legal and Democratic Services which set out the Boundary Commission for England's revised proposals for the Parliamentary constituencies falling within the Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire Sub-Region of the Eastern Region and affecting Central Bedfordshire. The closing date for representations to the Boundary Commission was 10 December 2012.</p>
3.	<p>The meeting was aware that that the Boundary Commission's review was being undertaken within certain parameters that had been laid down by Parliament. These included a requirement that every constituency, apart from two specified exceptions, must have an electorate no smaller than 72,810 and no larger than 80,473 and the use of electorate figures that were in the version of the electoral register published on the "review date" which, for the 2013 review, meant the use of electoral registers published on or before 1 December 2010. Further, the former Bedfordshire County Council divisions were the required building blocks of the proposed constituencies rather than the current wards.</p>
4.	<p>The first main area of debate concerned the proposed North Bedfordshire constituency which would ring the town and constituency of Bedford. As an alternative to this a Member suggested a roughly east-west horizontal split based on the river Ouse under which a Bedford North constituency and a Bedford South constituency would be introduced. The Member's suggestion received support subject to it complying with the relevant legislation. However, the Democratic Services Officer's subsequent analysis of the electoral impact of the proposal, using, as required, the former Bedfordshire County Council divisions as the basis for the proposed constituencies, established that the number of electors in the suggested Bedford South constituency would exceed that allowed under Parliament's rules (i.e. 81,822 compared to the permitted maximum of 80,473).</p>
5.	<p>The second area of debate related to a Member's suggestion that the proposed South East Bedfordshire division, which included Caddington and Slip End, be transferred from the proposed Mid Bedfordshire and Harpenden constituency to the proposed South West Bedfordshire constituency. The Democratic Services Officer advised that any increase in the numbers of electors from the South</p>

	East Bedfordshire division would need to be balanced by the transfer of a similarly sized and neighbouring division from South West Bedfordshire to Mid Bedfordshire and Harpenden. Following discussion, and the absence of a division suitable for this purpose, it was acknowledged that the suggested transfer could not take place.
6.	The third area of debate focussed on the proposed linking of Dunstable with some Luton divisions to form the proposed Luton North and Dunstable constituency. Members noted that, in determining its revised proposals, the Boundary Commission had specifically highlighted the fact that Luton was the largest town in the Sub-Region and that its electorate was too large for one constituency and too small for two. In order to meet the statutory requirement for the size of the constituency electorate, and despite earlier representations by the Council, the Boundary Commission had remained committed to its initial proposal which would see, for electoral purposes, Dunstable joined with the existing North Luton constituency. Whilst remaining dissatisfied with this outcome the Committee felt that, given the Boundary Commission's stance and the numerical constraints imposed on the size of the constituencies, there was no alternative arrangement that could be proposed and that any further request for revision was likely to be counter-productive.
7.	For the remainder of the proposals affecting Central Bedfordshire the Boundary Commission had accepted the representations of two members of the public. These had addressed many of the concerns raised by the Council and others as they minimised the number of cross-county boundary constituencies. Further, the Central Bedfordshire electorate would continue to be served by four MPs rather than the originally proposed six. The Committee felt that some positive gains had been made.
<b>Appendices</b>	None