

Committee: Electoral Working Group

Agenda Item

Date: 26 September 2011

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Title: 2013 Review of Parliamentary
Constituencies

Author: Peter Snow, Democratic and Electoral
Services Manager, 01799 510430

Item for decision

Summary

1. The Boundary Commission for England (BCE) has published initial proposals for new Parliamentary constituency boundaries in England. The effect of the initial proposals will be to divide Uttlesford between three separate constituencies. The Council must decide how to respond to those proposals. If the Council decides to object, it must decide on the nature of the objection and whether this should include an alternative proposal.

Recommendations

2. Decide whether to recommend that the Council objects to the initial proposals of the BCE and whether that objection should include a counter proposal.

Financial Implications

3. *There are no financial implications arising from this report.*

Background Papers

4. The following papers were referred to by the author in the preparation of this report and are available for inspection from the author of the report.

Initial proposals of the BCE, including constituency maps.

Impact

Communication/Consultation	The Boundary Commission for England is responsible for consultation arrangements. The Council is a consultee.
Community Safety	No direct impact
Equalities	No direct impact
Health and Safety	No direct impact
Human Rights/Legal Implications	No known implications

Sustainability	No direct impact
Ward-specific impacts	All wards affected
Workforce/Workplace	No direct impact

Situation

5. The BCE published proposals for new Parliamentary constituency boundaries on 13 September 2011. A 12 week period of consultation will close on 5 December. Responses to the consultation may either be made in writing or in person at a public hearing, or by a combination of the two methods.
6. In conducting the 2013 review, the BCE must recommend a total number of no more than 502 constituencies in England (a reduction from the present 533), and must, with the sole exception of the Isle of Wight, recommend constituencies that have an electorate no smaller than 72,810 and no larger than 80,473. The range of electors allowed has been calculated by taking a 5% range either side of the electoral quota of 76,641. This quota was calculated in accordance with the formula laid down in The Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Act 2011 and is based on the electorate of all districts in England as on the review date of 1 December 2010.
7. The Act requires there to be a fixed number of 600 constituencies for the whole of the UK. Under the mathematical formula laid down, the allocation for England was determined as 502. The allocation of constituencies within England was decided on a regional basis as used for European Parliamentary elections. This gave an allocation to the Eastern region of 56 constituencies which is a reduction of two seats over the whole region.
8. The BCE may take account of other statutory factors such as special geographical considerations; local governments ward boundaries as they existed on 6 May 2010; the boundaries of existing constituencies; and any local ties that would be broken by changes in constituencies. However, all of these factors are subservient to the overriding rule that every constituency (apart from specified exceptions such as the Isle of Wight) must have an electorate within the range determined under the formula referred to above.
9. The rules are thus very tight and the BCE has accordingly had little room for manoeuvre in determining its initial proposals. The rules also now have the effect that boundaries between shire counties may be crossed within regions, as well as boundaries between adjoining districts which has always been the case.
10. In determining proposals for the eastern region, the BCE decided that, as it was not possible to allocate whole numbers of constituencies to individual counties or unitary authorities, the new constituencies would have to be grouped into sub-regions. This gave the following result:
 - Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire – 16 (reduction of one)

- Cambridgeshire, Norfolk and Suffolk – 23 (no change overall)
- Essex – 17 (reduction of one)

11. Having made this decision, the BCE based its proposals for Essex on the number indicated which inevitably resulted in a number of changes to accommodate the reduction of one seat. Only the seats of Colchester and Thurrock are proposed to remain unchanged.

12. The impact of these changes on Uttlesford has been to divide the district between three separate constituencies, and has led to the loss of the historic name of the Saffron Walden constituency.

13. Three wards of Uttlesford are proposed to be included in a revised Harlow constituency. Five wards are paired with Billericay and parts of the Chelmsford Borough area to form a new Billericay and Great Dunmow seat. The remaining 19 wards of Uttlesford are proposed to be included in a new North West Essex constituency together with 13 wards of Braintree district. The effect of this is demonstrated below:

Billericay and Great Dunmow CC	74,961
District of Basildon wards	33,357
Borough of Chelmsford wards	26,313
District of Uttlesford wards	15,291

Uttlesford wards included in Billericay and Great Dunmow constituency: Barnston and High Easter; Felsted; Great Dunmow North; Great Dunmow South; Takeley and the Canfields

Harlow CC	73,223
District of Epping Forest wards	8,320
District of Harlow wards	59,380
District of Uttlesford wards	5,523

Uttlesford wards included in Harlow constituency: Broad Oak and the Hallingburys; Hatfield Heath; The Rodings

North West Essex CC	74,218
District of Braintree wards	35,424
District of Uttlesford wards	38,794

Uttlesford wards included in North West Essex constituency: Ashdon; Birchanger; Clavering; Elsenham and Henham; Littlebury; Newport; Saffron Walden Audley; Saffron Walden Castle; Saffron Walden Shire; Stansted North; Stansted South; Stebbing; Stort Valley; Thaxted; The Chesterfords; The Eastons; The Sampfords; Wenden Lofts; Wimbish and Debden

14. It is clear that the BCE's initial proposals will lead to a fragmentation of the district between three different constituencies. Members may feel this will disadvantage both the District Council and residents of the district in any future dealings with the Government and in seeking to promote the interests of the district as a cohesive community. Although a secondary consideration, the administration of Parliamentary elections will become more complex and challenging.
15. If this is the case, the Council must decide the nature of its response and whether it will be possible to prepare an alternative proposal within the confines of the tight rules agreed by Parliament. The Working Group is invited to consider what that response should be and to recommend accordingly to Council.

Risk Analysis

16.

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigating actions
That the arrangements for Parliamentary representation do not adequately represent the interests of residents in the district.	2 – this is a matter of judgement but the Council will continue to consider the best interests of its residents in deciding how to proceed	2 – again this is a matter of judgement for Members to consider	Work through all possible alternative options to the initial proposals to see whether any of these would better serve electors in the district

1 = Little or no risk or impact

2 = Some risk or impact – action may be necessary.

3 = Significant risk or impact – action required

4 = Near certainty of risk occurring, catastrophic effect or failure of project.