

Wiltshire Council

Council

8 November 2011

Parliamentary Boundary Review

Summary

The Boundary Commission for England (BCE) has published its initial proposals for new Parliamentary constituencies and is consulting on those proposals until 5 December 2011.

The Council at its meeting on 17 May 2011 agreed to establish a Working Party to consider the initial proposals and to prepare a response for consideration by Council.

This report sets out the BCE's initial proposals and a proposed response as suggested by the Working Party.

Proposals

- A. That the Division of Lyneham reverts to the proposed Chippenham Constituency.**
- B. That the Council accepts with reluctance the proposals for the Corsham local government Divisions to be split between two Constituencies and the resultant split of both Town Council and Community Area boundaries.**
- C. That the following constituencies be re-named:-**
 - I. the Chippenham Constituency be re-named North Wiltshire; and**
 - II. the Trowbridge Constituency be re-named West Wiltshire.**

Reason for Proposal

To respond to the BCE proposals.

Cllr Tony Deane , Chairman of the Working Party

Parliamentary Boundary Review

1 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The Boundary Commission for England (BCE) has published its initial proposals for new Parliamentary constituencies, and is consulting on the proposals until 5 December 2011.

2. Background

- 2.1 The BCE is required to make a formal report to the Government by 1 October 2013, recommending any changes that it believes are appropriate to the distribution, size, shape, name or designation of constituencies in England. Any representations from the BCE proposals will be taken both in writing and at public hearings and the BCE may revise their proposals in the light of any views submitted.
- 2.2 The Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Act 2011 Act (PVSCA) provides a mathematical formula to determine how many constituencies each of the four parts of the UK should be allocated, based on the electorate figures as at the review date.
- 2.3 The electorate figures used in the review are those from the electoral registers that were required to be published on or before 1 December 2010. The BCE may have regard to 'local government boundaries' in developing its proposals i.e. the local government boundaries in force as at 6 May 2010. The South West region of England has been allocated 53 seats.
- 2.4 With limited (named) exceptions every constituency must have an electorate (as at the review date) which is no less than 95% and no more than 105% of the 'UK electoral quota'. The UK electoral quota for the 2013 Review is, to the nearest whole number, 76,641. This gives a range of between 72,810 and 80,473 electors per constituency.
- 2.5 The BCE uses wards (in district and borough council areas) or electoral divisions (in areas of unitary authorities that have a county status) as the basic building blocks for designing constituencies. Consequently the proposals (see Maps set out at Appendix 1 to this report) show four constituencies contained within Wiltshire, with a fifth straddling the Wiltshire/Dorset border (with the greater population on the Wiltshire side). A spreadsheet indicating the electorate per constituency as proposed by

the BCE and the suggested proposals of the Working Party is attached at Appendix 2.

- 2.6 The BCE is required by the Act to specify a name and designation for each proposed constituency. The BCE's policy on the naming of constituencies is that when constituencies remain largely unchanged, the existing constituency name should usually be retained. In such cases constituency names are likely to be altered only where there is good reason for change. Generally, the BCE considers that the name should normally reflect the main population centre(s) contained in the constituency, though if a suitable alternative name is proposed which generally commands greater support locally than that proposed by the BCE, it will usually be prepared to recommend that alternative.
- 2.7 An objection accompanied by a viable counter-proposal is likely to carry more weight than a simple statement of objection. In this respect a counter-proposal setting out the composition of each constituency in an area will generally be viewed as more persuasive than a proposal for the composition of only one constituency which does not address any knock-on effects on the electorate figures of other constituencies.
- 2.8 As soon as possible after 5 December 2011 the BCE will publish all of the representations that it has received for each region (including transcripts of the public hearings). Once the representations have been published there is a further statutory four-week period during which people can submit written comments on those representations.

3. Main Considerations for the Council

- 3.1 The Council at its meeting on 17 May 2011 agreed to establish a Working Party to consider the initial proposals published by the Boundary Commission and to prepare a response for consideration by Council.
- 3.2 The Working Party has now met on three occasions and the notes of these meetings are attached at Appendix 3 to this report.
- 3.3 In summary the Working Party on 29 September agreed the following objectives for their review and that the proposed constituencies should:-
 - A. best serve the residents of Wiltshire
 - B. reflect minimum change where possible
 - C. reflect community cohesion/identities
- 3.4 The number of constituencies and the cross county border proposals were agreed in principle and that any revised proposals, which could include amendments to constituency names, should be supported by arguments that reflect the above objectives.
- 3.5 In considering the revised proposals at its meeting on 18 October the Working Party agreed to recommend the following motion to Council:-

“In consideration of the Boundary Commission proposals for the reorganisation of Parliamentary Constituencies in Wiltshire and Dorset, Wiltshire Council is mindful of the requirement to achieve Constituencies with a prerequisite number of voters and the complexity of achieving this task. Wiltshire Council would also prefer to retain the cohesion of Community Areas where at all possible.

Whilst there are several local government Divisions where the residents would prefer to be part of a Constituency other than that proposed by the Boundary Commission the plight of the Lyneham Division being separated from its natural topographical, Community Area and political connections to Wootton Bassett is the most dire and could be resolved without any further realignment of local government divisions. Wiltshire Council therefore recommends that the Division of Lyneham reverts to the proposed Chippenham Constituency.

Wiltshire Council has considered the realignment of the whole of the Corsham Community Area within one Constituency but accepts that this would produce a knock on effect that would leave other local government Divisions so similarly disaggregated as to make any proposals to realign Corsham equally unfair. Wiltshire Council thus accepts with reluctance the proposals for the Corsham local government Divisions to be split between two Constituencies and the resultant split of both Town Council and Community Area boundaries.

Wiltshire Council is also concerned at the names suggested for the new Constituencies. The Constituency of Chippenham is largely similar to the pre 2005 Constituency of North Wiltshire but adopting the name of “Chippenham” would ignore the inclusion of the other Towns of Wootton Bassett, Cricklade and Malmesbury within the new Constituency. Wiltshire Council recommends that this Constituency be renamed North Wiltshire accordingly. Similarly the Council suggests that the name of Trowbridge is inappropriate for a Constituency that also contains the significant towns of Melksham and Bradford on Avon and recommends that the name of West Wiltshire would be more appropriate.”

- 3.6 Following this meeting all members of the Council were asked if they had any revised proposals to submit to the final meeting of the Working Party prior to its recommendations to Council.
- 3.7 At its meeting on 24 October the Working Party considered revised proposals submitted to it for the inclusion of the Lavingtons and Erlestoke division within the Devizes constituency and for the Till and Wylye division within the Salisbury constituency. Neither proposal was agreed by the Working Party who also confirmed the draft recommendations as now set out in this report.

4. Equalities Impact of the Proposal

- 4.1 The BCE proposals are required to ensure that every constituency has an electorate of between 72,810 and 80,473 Parliamentary electors and this will ensure that electoral equality exists.

5. Risk Assessment

- 5.1 The proposed Warminster and Shaftesbury constituency is partly within the Council's administrative area and partly within North Dorset District Council's area. Where a constituency is shared across boundaries, the Ministry of Justice normally allocates the role of Acting Returning Officer (ARO) to the Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) with the greater number of electors in that constituency. The Council is fortunate to have all present constituencies self contained within Wiltshire, but the proposed new arrangements will require one ERO to assume the ARO role. In the event of the 2015 Parliamentary election being held on the same day as the scheduled District and Parish elections, the ARO may well also assume responsibility for the District elections in that part of North Dorset, although parishes would probably be deferred for four weeks. Such an arrangement would require clear delegation arrangements and accountability, and also require close sharing of data particularly in respect of postal vote issue and opening.

6. Financial Implications

- 6.1 There are unlikely to be any significant financial consequences arising from this review.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS TO COUNCIL

A. That the Division of Lyneham reverts to the proposed Chippenham Constituency.

B. That the Council accepts with reluctance the proposals for the Corsham local government Divisions to be split between two Constituencies and the resultant split of both Town Council and Community Area boundaries.

C. That the following constituencies be re-named:-

- I. the Chippenham Constituency be re-named North Wiltshire; and**
- II. the Trowbridge Constituency be re-named West Wiltshire.**

Cllr Tony Deane, Chairman of the Working Party

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24 October 2011.

Background Papers

None

The BCE website contains the original proposals plus further information at:

<http://consultation.boundarycommissionforengland.independent.gov.uk/>

Individual constituency maps can be found at:

<http://consultation.boundarycommissionforengland.independent.gov.uk/whats-proposed/south-west/dorset-and-wiltshire/>