

AGENDA ITEM
REPORT TO COUNCIL
1 DECEMBER 2011
REPORT OF
CORPORATE
MANAGEMENT TEAM

PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCIES REVIEW

SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to secure Council's agreement to the comments which will be submitted to the Boundary Commission for England, regarding its initial proposals for new parliamentary constituencies for the Stockton-on-Tees Borough area.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the comments specified at paragraph 18 of the report to Council regarding the initial proposals produced by the Boundary Commission for England be agreed as the Authority's formal representations in relation to those proposals, and that
2. Subject to this, the Director of Law and Democracy be authorised to submit the agreed representations to the Boundary Commission for England before the deadline of the 5 December, 2011.

DETAIL

Background

1. The Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Act 2011 ("the Act") requires the four Boundary Commissions to conduct a review of the parliamentary constituencies in their part of the UK and to submit final reports to Government before 1 October, 2013.
2. The Act requires there to be a fixed number of 600 constituencies for the whole of the UK (as opposed to the current 650). The number of constituencies allocated to England is 502 (including the two reserved for the Isle of Wight).
3. The Boundary Commission for England ("BCE") has subdivided the 500 England constituencies between the regions used for European Parliament elections.
4. The North East has been allocated 26 constituencies (currently it has 29). The BCE's initial proposals will ensure that each of these constituencies are wholly contained in the North East region.
5. The BCE is also required by the Act to ensure that each constituency has an electorate that is no less than 95% and no more than 105% of the UK electoral quota.

This quota has been calculated at 76,641. Accordingly, each constituency must have an electorate that is no smaller than 72,810 and no larger than 80,473.

Initial Proposals

6. Taking these requirements into account, the BCE published its initial proposals for England, including the North East on 13 September, 2011.
7. Details of the North East proposals have been made available for inspection at the Municipal Buildings and at Libraries across the Borough.
8. A direct link to the proposals has also been provided from the front page of the Council's website.
9. Copies of all of the initial proposals for the UK are accessible at: www.independent.gov.uk/boundarycommissionforengland

The Proposals for the Stockton-on-Tees Borough area.

10. Both of the existing constituencies (Stockton North and Stockton South) have been changed significantly. The Stockton-on-Tees Borough area has been split into four constituencies, with the Borough Council retaining full electoral responsibility for one.
11. The Billingham North Ward has been included in the Hartlepool Borough constituency. Billingham is not referred to in the name of that Constituency. The other four Billingham wards are retained in a new Stockton and Billingham Constituency, even though Billingham North is not a part of it and there are other wards within the Constituency.
12. The three Thornaby wards are included in a new Middlesbrough Borough Constituency. There is no reference to Thornaby in the Constituency name.
13. The wards of Eaglescliffe, Ingleby Barwick East and Ingleby Barwick West, Parkfield and Oxbridge, Western Parishes and Yarm are included in a new Sedgefield and Yarm County (Durham) Constituency. Yarm is included in the Constituency title, even though there are other wards, one of which has a larger electorate (Eaglescliffe). More than half of the Constituency electorate are Stockton Borough electors.
14. Copies of the description of and the maps for the proposals affecting the Stockton Borough area were included in the report to Cabinet on 3 November 2011. That report is accessible at <http://www.egenda.stockton.gov.uk/aksstockton/users/public/admin/kab12.pl?cmte=CAB&meet=88&arc=71>

Comments on the Proposals for the Stockton-on-Tees Borough area

15. Views on the proposals for Stockton-on-Tees Borough area were canvassed at the Members' Policy Seminar on 10 October 2011.
16. Further views were invited from Members at a morning drop in event on 17 October, together with a similar opportunity before the Council meeting on 19 October.

17. Cabinet considered these views at its meeting on 3 November, and further comments were made by Cabinet Members. The details are referred to in the report to Cabinet (and the relevant Cabinet minute (attached as an **Appendix** to this report)

<http://www.egenda.stockton.gov.uk/aksstockton/users/public/admin/kab12.pl?cmte=CAB&meet=88&arc=71>

18. The comments which Cabinet has recommended to Council as the Authority's representations in relation to the initial proposals produced by the BCE are as follows:-

- (i) There is general concern that the restrictions imposed by the legislation, specifically the proposed reduction in the number of MPs from 650 to 600 and the requirement for each Constituency to have an electorate that is no less than 95% and no more than 105% of the UK electoral quota, will cause significant problems locally, with illogical parliamentary boundaries being created and constituencies sometimes being separated only by the width of a particular street.
- (ii) Specific concerns regarding the impact on community boundaries and the loss of community identities as a result of all of the proposals.
- (iii) The proposals will create four Members of Parliament for the Stockton Borough area. This will inevitably result in an increased use of the Council's resources than at present and will not, therefore, be cost effective.
- (iv) The impact of the proposals at election time should not be underestimated. There will be voter confusion, with parts of the same communities voting for different Members of Parliament. The administration of elections for four different constituencies will be logistically complex and will require an increased use of resources.
- (v) There is widespread concern amongst residents and Members regarding the splitting of the Billingham wards and communities as a result of the proposals for **Hartlepool BC** and for Stockton and Billingham BC. It is, therefore, recommended that the Billingham North Ward is not included in the proposed Hartlepool BC and that it is retained with other Billingham wards, in any new, revised proposals.
- (vi) If the Billingham North ward is however to remain a part of the proposed Hartlepool BC, it is recommended that the constituency be renamed Hartlepool and Billingham North BC.
- (vii) As regards the **Middlesbrough BC**, it is recommended that the constituency be renamed Middlesbrough and Thornaby BC
- (viii) With regard to the **Sedgefield and Yarm CC**, the majority of the electorate will be Stockton Borough residents. The constituency should be a Stockton Borough, not County Constituency, administered by/on behalf of the Borough Council at elections. It is also recommended that it be renamed South West Stockton and Sedgefield BC

The Parkfield and Oxbridge ward is closely associated with the Stockton Town Centre area and should accordingly be retained as part of the new

Stockton and Billingham BC (subject to the comments which follow regarding the name of that constituency).

- (ix) In relation to the **Stockton and Billingham BC**, the reference to Billingham will be confusing given that, at present, it will not include the Billingham North Ward. It should, therefore, be renamed North Stockton BC. It should also include the Parkfield and Oxbridge Ward, given its close association with the Stockton Town Centre area.

FINANCIAL AND LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Financial

19. There are no financial or legal implications arising directly from this report.

RISK ASSESSMENT

20. The report is considered to be a low risk category report.

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY IMPLICATIONS

21. Enhancing democratic representation and local democracy is a key feature of the Council Plan.

EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

22. An assessment has not been considered necessary for the purpose of this report.

CONSULTATION

23. All Members of the Council have been advised of and consulted in connection with the BCE's initial proposals.

Director of Law & Democracy

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<u>Background Papers:</u>	Not applicable
<u>Ward(s) and Ward Councillors:</u>	The report affects all wards
<u>Property Implications:</u>	Not applicable

Cabinet Minute Number:- CAB 81/11

Title:- Parliamentary Constituencies Review

Minute Details:-

Cabinet was reminded that the Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Act 2011 required there to be a fixed number of 600 constituencies for the UK, as opposed to the current 650. Within that the North East had been allocated 26 constituencies, as opposed to the current 29.

The Boundary Commission for England (BCE) had recently produced initial proposals for England, which included those relevant to Stockton on Tees Borough area. Initial responses to the proposals had to be submitted to the BCE by 5 December 2011. Members had been provided with details of the proposals and there had been a Members' Policy Seminar held on Monday 10th October 2011 where views were canvassed. Further views were invited at two drop in sessions. The following principal comments, coming from those events, were considered to be:-

- (i) General concern regarding the impact on community boundaries and the loss of community identities as a result of all the proposals.
- (ii) The proposals would create four Members of Parliament for the Stockton Borough area. This would inevitably result in an increased use of the Council's resources than at present and would not, therefore, be cost effective.
- (iii) The impact of the proposals at election time should not be underestimated. There would be voter confusion, with parts of the same communities voting for different Members of Parliament. The administration of elections for four different constituencies would be logistically complex and would require an increased use of resources.
- (iv) In relation to the proposals for Hartlepool BC if the Billingham North ward was to remain a part of the proposed constituency, it was recommended that it be renamed Hartlepool and Billingham North BC.

However, there was widespread concern amongst residents and Members regarding the splitting of the Billingham wards and communities in this way. It was, therefore, recommended that Billingham North was retained with other Billingham wards, in any new, revised proposals.

(v) As regards the Middlesbrough BC, it was recommended that the constituency be renamed Middlesbrough and Thornaby BC

(vi) With regard to the Sedgefield and Yarm CC, the majority of the electorate would be Stockton Borough residents. The constituency should be a Stockton Borough, not County Constituency, administered by/on behalf of the Borough Council at elections. It was also recommended that it be renamed South West Stockton and Sedgefield BC

The Parkfield and Oxbridge ward was a Stockton Town Centre ward and should accordingly be retained as part of the new Stockton and Billingham BC (subject to the comments which follow regarding the name of that constituency).

(vii) In relation to the Stockton and Billingham BC, the reference to Billingham would be confusing given that, at present, it would not include the Billingham North Ward. It should, therefore, be renamed North Stockton BC. It should also include the Stockton Town Centre ward of Parkfield and Oxbridge.

Cabinet endorsed the above comments for submission to Council for consideration, subject to the following changes and suggested that they be accompanied by a statement highlighting the impact these proposals would have on local communities with illogical parliamentary boundaries being created in order to comply with the electoral quota requirement specified within the legislation, and with separate constituencies being formed and sometimes separated only by the width of the same street:-

-the comments at paragraph (iv) be inverted;
-paragraphs vi) and vii) be amended to delete reference to Stockton Town Centre Ward and instead to refer to the Parkfield and Oxbridge Ward being closely associated with Stockton Town Centre.

Members were reminded of the full consultation process, which included a second consultation period, the opportunity for revised proposals, and a final consultation period prior to the Final Recommendations and Report being published.

RECOMMENDATIONS to Council that:-

1. the comments specified above and at paragraph 18 of the report regarding the initial proposals produced by the Boundary Commission for England form the Authority's formal representations, subject to:-

-an accompanying statement highlighting the impact these proposals would have on local communities with illogical parliamentary boundaries being created in order to comply with the electoral quota requirement specified within the legislation, and with separate constituencies being formed and sometimes separated only by the width of the same street;

-the comments at paragraph (iv) being inverted;

-paragraphs vi) and vii) being amended to delete reference to Stockton Town Centre Ward and instead referring to the Parkfield and Oxbridge Ward being closely associated with the Stockton Town Centre.

2. Subject to this, the Director of Law and Democracy be authorised to submit the agreed representations to the Boundary Commission for England before the deadline of 5 December.

3. A further report be submitted to Cabinet following the end of the initial consultation period.