

AGENDA ITEM 6

REPORT TO COUNCIL

17 NOVEMBER 2016

REPORT OF SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM

INITIAL PROPOSALS FOR NEW PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY BOUNDARIES IN THE NORTH EAST – CONSULTATION RESPONSE

SUMMARY

This report provides an update on the initial proposals for new Parliamentary constituencies in the North East and seeks approval of the Council's formal response.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the comments specified at paragraphs 10 – 13 of the report regarding the initial proposals produced by the Boundary Commission for England be recommended to Council as the Authority's formal representations.
2. That, subject to this, the Assistant Director Administration, Democratic and Electoral Services be authorised to submit the agreed representations to the Boundary Commission for England before the deadline of 5 December 2016.
3. That a further report be submitted to Council following the end of the initial consultation period.

DETAIL

Background

1. In 2011 legislation was passed to reduce the number of MPs from 650 to 600, but the review of constituency boundaries that would have made the recommendations necessary to implement these changes was halted because of disagreements within the previous Government over constitutional reform.
2. A new review by the Boundary Commission for England (BCE) must be conducted after the 2015 General Election and completed by October 2018. It must again divide the UK into 600 constituencies.
3. The BCE is also required to ensure that each constituency has an electorate that is no less than 95% and no more than 105% of the UK electoral quota. Accordingly, each constituency must have an electorate that is no smaller than 71,031 and no larger than 78,507.
4. On 13 September, the Boundary Commission for England published their initial proposals for the new Parliamentary constituency boundaries. Copies of all of the initial proposals for the UK are accessible at: www.bce2018.org.uk

Proposals for the North East and Stockton

5. The North East has been allocated 25 constituencies – a reduction of four from the current number. Details of the North East proposals have been made available for inspection at Libraries across the Borough and a direct link to the proposals has also been provided from the Council's website. The proposals for the North East are detailed at **Appendix 1**.
6. Copies of a map illustrating the proposals for Stockton will be on display at the Council meeting.
7. It is proposed to divide Stockton-on-Tees into three constituencies two of which include overlapping parliamentary boundaries with Middlesbrough and Hartlepool as follows:
 - **Hartlepool and Billingham constituency** retaining eight wards from the existing Hartlepool constituency. Four wards from the existing Stockton North constituency including four wards in Billingham are included in the constituency. This reconfiguration ensures that this constituency does not cross the River Tees
 - **Stockton West constituency** retaining seven wards from the existing Stockton South constituency. Transferred to this constituency are eight wards from the existing Stockton North constituency.
 - **Middlesbrough West and Stockton East constituency** retaining eight wards from the existing Middlesbrough constituency and seven wards including Stockton Town Centre ward, from the existing Stockton South constituency. The BCE did investigate whether alternative constituencies could be formulated that did not include parts of both Middlesbrough and Stockton in the same constituency. However, they considered that in order to have an electorate that was within 5% of the electoral quota, it was necessary to propose a constituency of Middlesbrough West and Stockton East that crosses the boundaries of the unitary authorities of Middlesbrough and Stockton-on-Tees

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

8. Views on the proposals for Stockton-on-Tees Borough area were canvassed via email and at three Member Drop-In Sessions.
9. All of the views expressed by Members have been considered and the principal comments are considered to be as follows:-
10. Not keeping Townships Together

Members acknowledged that Stockton is made up of a collection of townships, and under the proposals these townships, and therefore these communities have been split as follows:

- Four out of five Billingham wards proposed to go into a constituency with Hartlepool and Billingham West ward staying with Stockton West constituency
- Stockton Town Centre ward is proposed to go into a constituency with Middlesbrough as is Norton South leaving the remaining two Norton wards with Stockton West

Members felt strongly that the townships should be kept together under the new constituency boundaries, as breaking up townships would be breaking up communities. Although it was acknowledged that due to the electoral quota, this may not be possible in all cases. Suggestions included moving Yarm to Middlesbrough West and Stockton East constituency, and replacing this with Stockton Town Centre and Norton South wards in the Stockton West constituency.

11. Constituencies based on quota of electorate only and not understanding of the area and community

There was concern that the boundaries had purely been drawn by looking at numbers in each ward and not taking into consideration local knowledge and the strong community identity that exists. Members felt strongly that to not take this knowledge into consideration would isolate communities. In particular Members believed that Ingleby Barwick, Thornaby and Yarm feel more affiliated to each other hence Members proposal to include Yarm in the Middlesbrough West and Stockton East constituency.

They believed that the rule on number of electorate should be more flexible to enable the types of communities e.g. rural/urban to be taken into consideration when realigning boundaries as the issues in these different communities vary. Although they accept that the electoral quota is part of the rules of the boundary changes.

Members were aware that the boundaries for constituencies covering Stockton would impact not only on Middlesbrough and Hartlepool constituencies but also the wider North East constituency boundaries e.g. East Durham, Sunderland, Redcar and East Cleveland. However it was believed that some of the suggested changes to the three Stockton constituencies could be accommodated i.e. reviewing Middlesbrough West and Stockton East constituency and Stockton West constituency.

12. Billingham boundaries

It is proposed that four of the five Billingham wards be included in the Hartlepool and Billingham constituency, with only Billingham West ward being included in Stockton West constituency.

Members expressed concern as they believe there are already issues with the Billingham community feeling isolated and moving Billingham out of a Stockton named constituency would exacerbate feelings of isolation from Stockton Borough. It was noted that Billingham does not have a natural affiliation or commonality with Hartlepool. There were also concerns that by not keeping all Billingham wards together would affect the feeling of community in Billingham and cause confusion due to people living within the same township and voting for two different MPs.

It was suggested that all Billingham wards should be included in Stockton West constituency, and that Northern Parishes be included in the Hartlepool Constituency along with the two Hartlepool wards that had been included in East Durham. This would ensure that the wards that represent Wynyard are within the same constituency, along with all of the Hartlepool wards. This would meet the quota for the number of electorate for the Hartlepool constituency and keep communities together; however East Durham would not meet the electoral quota. Similarly due to the electoral quotas set it would not be possible to include all Billingham wards in Stockton West.

13. Not taking natural boundaries into account

The current proposals suggest that seven SBC wards be included in a Middlesbrough West and Stockton East Constituency. This includes the wards that cover Thornaby and Ingleby Barwick, which are south of the river Tees, along with Norton South and Stockton Town Centre wards which are north of the river Tees. This constituency does not include Yarm ward which is south of the river Tees.

Members noted that in the introduction to the proposals the Boundary Commission has stated that they have taken natural boundaries into account, however the proposals for these two wards do not consider the natural boundary of the river Tees, with the new constituencies including wards on both sides of the river. Members noted that the historical North Yorkshire/Durham boundary was the river Tees and that communities on the south of the river felt a strong affiliation with the historical North Yorkshire border, it was therefore felt that not including Yarm in the Middlesbrough West and Stockton East constituency but including two wards north of the river would split communities.

It was therefore suggested that the Stockton West constituency should include Stockton Town Centre and Norton South wards, while the Middlesbrough West and Stockton East constituency should include the Yarm ward. This would follow the natural boundary rule, keep communities together, and meet the quota for the number of electorate for each constituency.

14. Council is asked to consider submitting these comments to the BCE prior to the initial consultation period deadline of 5 December 2016. Individual Members and Groups still have the facility to submit separate comments to the BCE.

Initial Consultation Period

15. The initial consultation period ends on 5 December 2016. In the meantime representations about the BCE's proposals can still be submitted by visiting the website.
16. The BCE will also be taking oral representations at public hearings within each region of the UK. There are two proposed hearings in the North East, as follows:-
- Royal Station Hotel, Neville Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 5DH – Monday 14 – Tuesday 15 November 2016
 - Mercure Darlington Kings Hotel, 9 – 12 Priestgate, Darlington, DL1 1NW – Thursday 17 – Friday 18 November 2016
17. The hearings are not inquiries, public meetings or debates, but are intended to provide an opportunity both for the BCE to explain its initial proposals and for people to give their views on these proposals.

Secondary Consultation Period

18. Once the 12 week consultation period on the initial proposals has concluded, the BCE will publish all of the representations it has received. This publication will mark the start of a four-week 'secondary consultation' period, likely to take place in spring 2017. The purpose of the secondary consultation is for people to see what others have said in response to the initial proposals, and to make comments on their views, for example by countering an argument, or by supporting and reinforcing what others have said. All the comments will be on the website, where there will be the facility to make comments on what others have said.

19. It is proposed to report back to Council regarding the representations submitted to the BCE during the initial consultation period. Members will then be able to determine if any further comments should be made to the BCE during the secondary consultation period.

Revised Proposals

20. After the end of the secondary consultation period, the BCE will analyse those representations and decide whether changes should be made to the initial proposals. If they decide that the evidence presented persuades them to change the initial proposals, revised proposals will be published for the areas concerned, and a further consultation period of eight weeks will take place. This is likely to be towards the end of 2017. There will be no further public hearings, nor will there be a repeat of the four-week period for commenting on the representations of others in respect of the revised proposals. All of the revised proposals will be published on the website where views may be submitted.

Final Recommendations and Report

21. Finally, following the consultation on revised proposals, the BCE will consider all the evidence received at this stage, and throughout the review, before determining final recommendations. The recommendations will be set out in a published report to the Government, who will present it, without amendment, to Parliament on behalf of the BCE. The legislation states that the BCE must report to the Government in September 2018. Further details about what the Government and Parliament then do with our recommendations are contained in the *Guide to the 2018 Review*.
22. Cabinet will have considered the matter at their meeting to be held on 10 November 2016. A copy of the relevant minute extract will be forwarded to Members following that meeting.

COMMUNITY IMPACT IMPLICATIONS

23. Any changes to parliamentary constituency boundaries will impact on democratic representation.

FINANCIAL AND LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

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

RISK ASSESSMENT

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

COUNCIL PLAN POLICY PRINCIPLES AND PRIORITIES

26. Enhancing democratic representation and local democracy is a key feature in developing strong and healthy communities.

CONSULTATION

27. The BCE are consulting relevant political parties and individuals as part of the review. Views on the proposals for Stockton-on-Tees Borough area were canvassed via email and at three Member Drop-In Sessions.

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Background Papers:

Not applicable

Ward(s) and Ward Councillors:

The report affects all wards

Property Implications:

Not applicable