

# **Report to the Electoral and Community Governance Review Committee**

Date of Meeting: 29 September 2011

Item: 7

Subject: Review of Parliamentary Constituencies – Next Steps

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## **Recommendations:**

- (1) To consider how to respond to the current consultation;**
- (2) To consider arguments to be put forward in the Council's response which could be developed in a further report for approval by the Council;**
- (3) To agree that adjustment of the constituency boundary at Matching Green should be part of the response;**
- (4) To consider whether to be represented at the public hearings; and**
- (5) To consider dates for future meetings of this Committee.**

## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 The Boundary Commission for England (BCE) has published its initial proposals for new Parliamentary Constituencies in the Eastern Region. These are open for public consultation purposes until 5 December 2011.

## **2. The Initial Proposals**

- 2.1 The proposals for this area have been the subject of a briefing under the preceding item. The following supporting information is attached to this report:

- (a) maps showing three new constituencies affecting this District, namely Brentwood and Ongar, Epping Forest and Harlow (large scale version will be available at the meeting);
- (b) a summary of the proposals for the Eastern Region (Appendix 1);
- (c) 'Timeline' for the review (Appendix 2);
- (d) a large map showing the overall position within the Eastern Region (this will be on display at the meeting);
- (e) the Initial Proposals report (Extract attached as Appendix 3); and
- (f) listing of current constituency data (Appendix 4).

### **3. The Criteria Adopted for the Review**

3.1 In summary these are:

- (a) the BCE was required by legislation to allocate a precise number of constituencies to England;
- (b) this number is based on a fixed total of 600 for the whole of the UK (650 at present);
- (c) the BCE must also ensure that every constituency has an electorate that is within 5% of the UK electoral quota of 76,641 electors;
- (d) whilst the following factors can be considered by BCE, these are all subordinated to the electoral parity rule;
  - (i) special geographical considerations: size, shape and accessibility of a constituency;
  - (ii) local government boundaries;
  - (iii) boundaries of existing constituencies; and
  - (iv) any local ties which are broken by new constituencies;
- (e) the BCE bases the review on register totals published between 1.12.10 and 1.2.11;
- (f) the total number of constituencies for England will be 500 (with two protected constituencies the total is 502);
- (g) the building blocks for the revised constituencies continue to be District Wards where it is feasible to do so, having regard to the 5% tolerance;
- (h) the review is presented on a regional basis, EFDC is part of the Eastern Region and has an allocation of 56 constituencies, compared with 58 at present;
- (i) the consultation document breaks down the Eastern Region into a series of sub regions, of which Essex is one (see paragraphs 50-58 of Appendix 3);

### **4. Local Constituencies**

- 4.1 There are currently 18 constituencies in Essex and the Commission's proposals would reduce this to 17.
- 4.2 Epping Forest is regarded as too small in electorate terms and the District Ward of Lambourne has therefore been added. Otherwise, the constituency is unchanged.
- 4.3 Brentwood and Ongar is compensated for the transfer of Lambourne by extending the constituency to cover Orsett ward of Thurrock Borough.
- 4.4 Harlow is also regarded as too small. The boundaries with Epping Forest and Brentwood and Ongar are not changed but to increase the electorate of the constituency, 3 wards from Uttlesford District Council have been added. The boundary between Harlow and Brentwood and Ongar is unchanged which means that the potential

anomaly at Matching Green is a live issue. The Committee agreed at its meeting on 19 May 2011 that the matter shall be raised in this review.

## **5. Response to Consultation**

5.1 The Commission is seeking views on its initial proposals by 5 December 2011. The last available Council meeting is on 1 November 2011 and therefore if the Council wishes to respond, the Committee must aim to have a report ready by 20 October 2011. However, at the Council meeting in December 2011, it was agreed that if there was insufficient time available to submit the proposed response to the Council before the deadline, this could be submitted to the Commission by this Committee but subject to confirmation at the next Council meeting.

5.2 It seems that the Council has three main options regarding this consultation:

(a) not to comment at this stage; or

(b) to comment by indicating those aspects which cause concern or attract support; or

(c) to comment as for (b) but produce its own proposals which meet the statutory criteria.

5.3 Option (c) of the previous paragraph will require considerable effort over a short timescale. Option (b) will be less demanding and is achievable over the current timescale. The fact that Epping Forest is largely unaltered may mean that if there is dissatisfaction in Harlow and Brentwood and Ongar this may focus on proposals which affect Epping Forest.

5.4 It should be emphasised that responses should be based on the criteria in 3.1(b) above. However it is clear that if arguments for exceptions are to be made these must acknowledge the statutory criteria. In view of the time pressure the Commission is itself under, arguments for change under 3.1(b) will need to be persuasive ones.

5.5 After 5.12.11, a further stage of consultation follows. This will provide one month to comment on the published responses by others. Following this there may be a further consultation period of eight weeks but only if the Commission accepts a case for revised proposals following previous consultations.

5.6 The period up to 5.12.11 includes public hearings. For Eastern Region, these will be held on Monday 31 October to 1 November 2011. The Council would not have considered its response by then, however. Those hearings are to be held in Colchester.

## **6. Future Meetings**

6.1 One further meeting would be required if the Committee wishes to make a formal response at Stage 1. This would be required to agree proposals for submission to the Council.

6.2 Further meetings may be required to consider the following consultation stages.