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**Subject:** **BOUNDARY COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY CONSULTATION**

**Meeting and Date:** **Electoral Matters Committee – 4 December 2012**

**Report of:** **Louise Cooke, Democratic Services Manager**

**Classification:** **Unrestricted**

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**Purpose of the report:** The Boundary Commission for England has published its revised proposals for new parliamentary constituencies following the consultation its initial proposals. The Committee is requested to consider these and alternative proposals for the purpose of formulating a response to the consultation.

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**Recommendation:** To consider the proposals with a view to submitting a response to the Boundary Commission England in respect of its consultation, having regard to the statutory framework.

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## 1. Summary

The Committee in November 2011 considered the initial proposals for new parliamentary constituencies from the Boundary Commission for England and made recommendations to Council that formed the basis of its response. Following the end of the consultation period on the initial proposals, the Boundary Commission is undertaking further consultation in respect of its revised proposals. This report seeks to explain what changes have taken place for the proposed new Dover Constituency since the previous report to Committee and identify the options available for formulating a response to the consultation on the revised proposal.

## 2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 As part of the Coalition Agreement, the Government committed itself to “the creation of fewer and more equal sized constituencies”. The Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Act 2011 set out the legislative basis for this commitment, reducing the total number of Westminster parliamentary constituencies for the United Kingdom from 650 to 600. For England, this equated to a reduction of 31 constituencies from 533 to 502.
- 2.2 In addition to a reduction in the number of constituencies, the Act also sets minimum (72,810) and maximum (80,473) legal limits for the electorate of each constituency as part of the commitment to more equal sized constituencies. This is based on a + / - 5% range from the electoral quota of 76,641. The electoral quota figure is determined by dividing the total electorate for the United Kingdom minus the electorates for the Isle of Wight (2 constituencies), Orkney and Shetland, and Na h-Eileanan an Iar constituencies by the total number of constituencies minus the 4 constituencies previously mentioned. The resultant figure of 76,641 compares to the current electorate for parliamentary constituencies in England which ranges from 55,077 to 110,924.
- 2.3 While the primary consideration under the Act is that the constituencies have an electorate within the specified range, the Boundary Commission for England (BCE), the independent non-departmental public body which is responsible for reviewing

English constituency boundaries, may also give consideration to the following in its deliberations provided that the electorate for a constituency remains within the + / - 5% range of the electoral quota:

- Special geographical considerations, including the size, shape and accessibility of a constituency;
- Local government boundaries as they existed on 6 May 2010;
- Boundaries of existing constituencies;
- Any local ties that would be broken by changes in constituencies; and
- The inconveniences attendant on such changes.

2.4 It is these criteria that this Committee will have to be mindful of, in its deliberations, if it decides to make any recommendations to the BCE contrary to those outlined in the revised proposals.

2.5 The BCE review is required to report to the Government in 2013 on its proposals and must, under the Act, base its calculations on the national electorate total published two years and ten months prior to the date it submits its report. In this case, the base electorate for the review is that as at 1 December 2010. As this is a legislative requirement, any growth in the electorate of a constituency after 1 December 2010 cannot be taken into account, this will be considered at the time of the next review which will be five years after the date of the current review (i.e. 2018). This is also consistent with the new five year fixed term parliaments, which would see elections in 2015 and 2020.

2.6 The previous report attached at Appendix 1 sets out in detail the changes to the South East region which includes Kent. In summary, the BCE in its initial proposals planned to reduce the number of constituencies in the Kent & Medway sub-region from 25 to 24. The constituency which is in effect 'abolished' by the changes is Faversham and Mid Kent which is divided between the new constituencies of Canterbury and Tonbridge.

2.7 The initial proposals for the new Kent constituencies involved changes to all of the existing ones with the exception of Sittingbourne and Sheppey which was proposed to remain unchanged. In addition, under the initial proposals the changes to Ashford, Dartford, Dover, Folkestone & Hythe, Gillingham & Rainham, Gravesham and Rochester involved a change of two or fewer local authority wards.

#### Revised Proposals

2.8 The revised proposals do not change the total number of planned Kent constituencies (24) but include changes to the composition of the revised constituencies with the exception of the Sittingbourne and Sheppey CC (unchanged from 2010 boundaries) and Gravesham CC (unchanged from initial Gravesend BCE proposals).

2.9 For the revised proposals the difference from the electoral quota ranges from +3.56% in Canterbury and Faversham CC constituency to -4.61% in Tunbridge Wells CC, a difference on 6,268 electors between the largest and smallest constituency in the county.

- 2.10 The proposed Kent constituencies are set out in greater detail in Appendices 2 and 3 of this report.

#### Dover

- 2.11 The existing Dover constituency has an electorate of 71,993 and is slightly smaller than the district council area, with the wards of Sandwich and Little Stour & Ashstone forming part of the South Thanet constituency. As the existing constituency is smaller than the electoral floor of 72,810 (5% below the electoral quota) the BCE initially proposed to add the Shepway District Council wards of Elham & Stelling Minnis (electorate of 1,761) and North East Downs (electorate of 6,529) to the Dover constituency, while the wards of Sandwich (electorate of 5,572) and Little Stour & Ashstone (electorate of 5,397) remained outside of the constituency, going to the Margate & Ramsgate constituency and the Herne Bay constituency respectively. This created a new Dover Constituency of 80,283 which was 190 electors below the maximum constituency size.
- 2.12 The revised proposals for the renamed Dover and Deal constituency have an electorate of 78,522. The revised proposal contains all of the existing Dover District Council wards with the exception of Little Stour & Ashstone and Sandwich wards which go to the revised East Thanet constituency and the addition of the Shepway District Council ward of North East Downs.
- 2.13 The BCE explains the change from the initial proposals of keeping Elham & Stelling Minnis with the Folkestone and Hythe constituency on the grounds of the strength of local representation concerning the wards links to Folkestone and that it better balances the sizes of the Folkestone and Hythe and Dover and Deal constituencies.
- 2.14 The BCE rejected representation from the Labour Party for the inclusion of Barham Down with the Dover and Deal constituency on the grounds of the strength of its ties with Canterbury and the attempts to respect the boundaries of existing constituencies where possible.
- 2.15 A similar justification is provided by the BCE for including the Little Stour & Ashstone and Sandwich wards in the East Thanet constituency as both wards are currently part of the South Thanet constituency. The BCE also identifies administrative benefits in its revised proposals as follows in terms of the local authorities covered by the constituencies:

Folkestone & Hythe CC - Ashford Borough Council/ Shepway District Council;

Dover & Deal CC – Shepway District Council / Dover District Council;

East Thanet CC – Dover District Council / Thanet District Council

Herne Bay CC – Thanet District Council / Canterbury City Council

- 2.16 For example, under the initial proposals the Dover constituency involved Dover District Council wards being spread across three constituencies whilst taking wards from Shepway District Council into the Dover constituency.

### **3. Identification of Options**

- 3.1 The BCE launched a public consultation on its initial proposals for the 502 English constituencies on 13 September 2011 which ran for a twelve-week period ending 5 December 2011. The revised proposals form part of a similar consultation period ending 10 December 2012.
- 3.2 The Committee will therefore have to determine its consultation response, if any, by no later than 9 December 2012. This response will be submitted directly to the BCE as the Committee's view. The Council at its meeting to be held on 12 December 2012 will also be asked to consider the matter.
- 3.3 Option 1 – To decide not to respond to the consultation by the Boundary Commission for England.
- 3.4 Option 2 – To respond to the consultation in support of the Boundary Commission for England proposals for a new Dover & Deal CC constituency.
- 3.5 Option 3 - To respond to the consultation in support of the Boundary Commission for England proposals for a new Dover & Deal constituency but to make different recommendations.
- 3.6 In addition, the Committee may wish to consider whether the name of the new Dover & Deal constituency is a matter that they wish to make recommendations upon as the BCE is required under the Act to specify in its recommendations a name and designation for each proposed constituency.

#### **4. Evaluation of Options**

- 4.1 The question of where to draw parliamentary constituency boundaries is complex and fraught with questions of community identity and political advantage. Although the Act sets out a methodology for drawing the constituencies there is no single right answer and even the movement of one or two local authority wards can radically reshape the identity of a constituency. With this in mind, this report does not seek to make any recommendation to Members as to a preferred option but rather intends to highlight possible options and factors that Members should take into consideration in the formulation of any recommendations to the Council.
- 4.2 In evaluating possible options, it is useful to start with the proposals advanced by the BCE. The proposed new Dover & Deal constituency is relatively simple and involves minimal changes to the constituency, with the addition of one ward from neighbouring Shepway District Council.
- 4.3 The revised BCE proposals for the two Dover District wards outside of the Dover constituency avoids the creation of two 'orphan wards' whereas under the initial proposals it was planned that the Little Stour & Ashstone ward would become part of Herne Bay constituency and Sandwich ward would become part of Margate & Ramsgate constituency. An 'orphan ward' is a ward of one local authority which is in a constituency with no other wards drawn from that local authority and is often unlikely to have strong ties with the rest of the constituency.
- 4.4 However, the revised proposal does create a single 'orphan ward' in North East Downs which is moved to the Dover & Deal constituency. The size of the electorate for the North East Downs ward (6,529) means that were it to be included in the Folkestone and Hythe constituency without any other adjustments it would create an electorate of 84,156 which exceeds the maximum size for a constituency of 80,473.

- 4.5 There exist a variety of other potential combinations achievable with only minor adjustments to the BCE proposed constituencies and Members may wish to evaluate other options that they feel could result in a more satisfactory outcome in terms of community identity, access / transportation links and administrative ease whilst preserving the primary consideration of an electoral quota.
- 4.6 In respect of the revised name for the Dover & Deal constituency, the guidance issued by the BCE is that the Act provides no guidance in respect of names other than making the BCE responsible for forming recommendations in respect of constituency names. In drafting any recommendations concerning the name of the Dover constituency (or others) the Committee should have regard to:
- The BCE considers the name should reflect the main population centre(s) contained within the constituency;
  - Where the constituency largely remains unchanged the BCE's policy is that the name be retained unless a suitable alternative name is proposed that generally commands greater support locally than that proposed by the BCE;
  - That compass point names are adopted where there is not a more suitable name. This takes the form of a prefix where the rest of the name refers to the county area or local council (i.e. South Thanet) and a suffix where the rest of the name refers to a population centre (i.e. Barnsley East).
- 4.7 It should be noted that the Dover constituency has historically, with the exception of the period 1974 to 1983 when it was known as the Dover and Deal constituency, been designated as the Dover constituency.

## 5. **Resource Implications**

- 5.1 Any changes to the parliamentary constituency boundaries for the Dover District may have implications for the administration of the election and the resultant costs arising from it. However, any expenditure incurred in the conduct of a Parliamentary election is recoverable from the government.

## 6. **Appendices**

- Appendix 1 – Report to the Electoral Matters Committee – 17 November 2011
- Appendix 2 – Comparison of Initial and Revised Proposals of the Boundary Commission England
- Appendix 3 - Breakdown of Boundary Commission England constituencies by local authority ward

## 7. **Background Papers**

- Boundary Commission England – Initial Proposals
- Boundary Commission England – Revised Proposals