

Cabinet
Council

29 November 2016
6 December 2016

Name of Cabinet Member:

Cabinet Member for Policing and Equalities - Councillor A Khan

Director Approving Submission of the report:

Executive Director of Resources

Ward(s) affected:

All

Title:

Boundary Commission for England Review of Parliamentary Constituencies: Consultation Response

Is this a key decision?

No

Executive Summary:

In September 2016, the Boundary Commission for England published initial proposals for new parliamentary constituency boundaries and is consulting on these until Monday 5th December 2016. These proposals make changes to two of Coventry's three parliamentary constituencies, including combining two Solihull Borough wards with wards in Coventry to create a new constituency called Coventry West and Meriden.

Recommendations:

Cabinet is recommended to:

- a) Endorse the City Council's response to the consultation set out at Appendix 1.
- b) Recommend that Council endorse the response to the consultation set out at Appendix 1.

Council is recommended to:

- a) Endorse the City Council's response to the consultation set out at Appendix 1.

List of Appendices included:

Appendix 1: Proposed response to the consultation

Background papers:

None

Other useful background papers:

Boundary Commission website and reports giving background information about the review and proposals

www.bce2018.org.uk/

Has it been or will it be considered by Scrutiny?

No

Has it been or will it be considered by any other Council Committee, Advisory Panel or other body?

No, although the Electoral Arrangements Advisory Panel received an initial briefing on the consultation process at their meeting of 15th September 2016.

Will this report go to Council?

Yes – 6th December 2016

Report title: Boundary Commission for England Review of Parliamentary Constituencies:
Consultation Response

1. Context (or background)

- 1.1 A review of Parliamentary constituency boundaries is being undertaken following the Government's decision to reduce the number of parliamentary constituencies across the UK from 650 to 600 and equalise the number of electors in each constituency.
- 1.2 The Boundary Commission for England (BCE) is an independent and impartial non-departmental public body, which is responsible for reviewing Parliamentary constituency boundaries in England. The BCE has the task of periodically reviewing all the Parliamentary constituencies in England. It is currently conducting a review on the basis of rules set by Parliament in 2011 under the Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Act 2011 (The Act). The rules require the Commission to make recommendations for new parliamentary constituency boundaries. They involve a significant reduction in the number of constituencies in England (from 533 to 501) and require that constituencies, apart from two specified exceptions, have an electorate that is no smaller than 71,031 and no larger than 78,507. The West Midlands has been allocated 53 constituencies – a reduction of six from the current number.
- 1.3 At the conclusion of its review, the BCE is required to make a formal report to the Government during September 2018, recommending any changes that it believes are appropriate to the distribution, size, shape, name or designation of constituencies in England. This review is therefore referred to as “the 2018 Review”.
- 1.4 The Government will turn the recommendations of the BCE into draft legislation, which is then presented to Parliament. If Parliament approves the legislation, the recommended changes will be implemented for the next General Election after the date on which the legislation is passed.
- 1.5 The BCE has produced a Guide to help to explain how the process for the 2018 Review will work. The Guide covers both what the law says the BCE must do as part of the process, and issues where the BCE has decided – as a matter of policy within its own discretion – to take a particular approach (see Other Useful Background Papers above).

2. Options considered and recommended proposal

- 2.1 The framework under which the BCE is to carry out the review is set out in the Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Act 2011.
- 2.2 The Act provides that the electorate figures that are being used for the review are those that were in the version of the electoral register published on the ‘review date’. This is defined by the Act as the date two years and ten months before the review is required to report to the Government. For the 2018 Review, this means the electorate figures being used are those from the electoral registers which were published on or before 1 December 2015.
- 2.3 The Act says that the BCE may have regard to ‘local government boundaries’ in developing its proposals. These are defined and in relation to Coventry City means the ward boundaries in force on 7 May 2015.

- 2.4 The Act requires there to be a fixed number of 600 constituencies for the whole of the UK. Having stated that no single constituency may be split between different parts of the UK, the Act 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. The number of constituencies allocated to England for the 2018 Review is 501 (two of these are reserved for the Isle of Wight). The BCE has subsequently distributed the remaining 499 constituencies between the regions used for the European Parliament elections using the formula. The West Midlands region has been allocated 53 constituencies.
- 2.5 The BCE states that in formulating its initial proposals it exercises its own judgement and does not consult the major Parliamentary political parties, local authorities or any other interested groups or people. In doing this the proposals are formed by the BCE from a position of independence and impartiality and are not influenced by any particular viewpoint or opinion.
- 2.6 The Act sets out the rules relevant to the detailed development of proposals for individual constituencies. One of the rules provides that apart from four specified exceptions every constituency must have an electorate that is no less than 95% and no more than 105% of the 'UK electoral quota'. The UK electoral quota for the 2018 review is, to the nearest whole number, 74,769.
- 2.7 Accordingly, every constituency in England must have an electorate as at the review date that is no smaller than 71,031 and no larger than 78,507.
- 2.8 The rules provides for a number of other factors that the BCE may take into account in establishing a new map of constituencies for the 2018 review. Specifically
- Special geographical considerations, including in particular the size, shape and accessibility of a constituency;
 - Local government boundaries as they existed on 7 May 2015;
 - Boundaries of existing constituencies; and
 - Any local ties that would be broken by changes in constituencies.
- 2.9 The BCE also sets out the factors that it will not consider as part of its review.
- 2.10 The BCE emphasises very strongly that existing voting patterns and the prospective fortunes of political parties should not and do not enter into considerations during a review.
- 2.11 The local government boundaries are those that existed on 7 May 2015 and new boundaries will not be taken into account.
- 2.12 The BCE is required to work on the basis of the numbers of electors on the electoral registers at the 'review date'. It is not able to take into account any under-registration or over-registration of electors that may be claimed in some areas.
- 2.13 However, the BCE does not take the view that it is obliged to shut its eyes entirely to growth (or decline) that has occurred since the review date, which it may be aware of from the annual updates of electorate figures it receives, or that it is satisfied is likely to occur. Such a factor may be taken into account in choosing between two or more competing options for the same area that satisfy the statutory rules.

- 2.14 The BCE states that the electorate of the City of Coventry is too small to continue to be allocated three whole constituencies. It proposes:
- that the existing Coventry North East constituency be left unchanged;
 - that an altered constituency of Coventry South be made up of four wards in the current Coventry South constituency (Binley and Willenhall, Cheylesmore, Earlsdon and St Michaels) plus three wards currently in Coventry North West (Radford, Sherbourne and Whoberley);
 - a new constituency of Coventry West and Meriden made up of Bablake, Holbrook and Woodlands wards (currently in Coventry North West), Wainbody and Westwood wards (currently in Coventry South) and the Solihull Borough wards of Knowle and Meriden.

2.15 The constituencies proposed in the review are:

Coventry North East		72,135
Foleshill	Coventry	10,419
Henley	Coventry	12,310
Longford	Coventry	12,538
Lower Stoke	Coventry	13,029
Upper Stoke	Coventry	11,520
Wyken	Coventry	12,319

Coventry South		77,914
Binley and Willenhall	Coventry	11,588
Cheylesmore	Coventry	11,308
Earlsdon	Coventry	11,604
Radford	Coventry	11,633
Sherbourne	Coventry	11,136
St. Michael's	Coventry	9,766
Whoberley	Coventry	10,879

Coventry West and Meriden		77,586
Bablake	Coventry	12,376
Holbrook	Coventry	11,536
Wainbody	Coventry	10,670
Westwood	Coventry	12,244
Woodlands	Coventry	13,156
Knowle	Solihull	8,183
Meriden	Solihull	9,421

3. Results of consultation undertaken

- 3.1 Any person or organisation is able to contribute directly to the consultation process being run by the BCE. The Council has not carried out any further consultation in preparing this response.

4. Timetable for implementing this decision

- 4.1 The closing date for the consultation is Monday 5th December 2016. In order to meet this deadline, the Council's response as agreed by Cabinet on 29th November 2016 will be forwarded to the Boundary Commission for England with a cover explaining that it is to be considered at Council on 6th December 2016 and that notification of the outcome of that meeting will be given.
- 4.2 The BCE is required to consider all written representations made to it within a statutory 12 week period commencing with publication of the initial proposals.
- 4.3 There will be a secondary consultation period following the initial 12 week consultation on the BCE's initial proposals and all representations received for each region together with the records of the public hearings will be published on its website. There will then be a further four week period during which people can submit to the BCE written comments on those representations it received during the initial consultation period.
- 4.4 Following consideration of the representations, the BCE will prepare a report recommending whether and if so how the initial proposals for that region should be revised in the light of those representations. The BCE will then publish a report for each region stating whether or not revisions have been made to the initial proposals for that region. If the proposals are revised there will then be a further eight week period for written representations to be made.
- 4.5 Publication of any representations received during this period will take place alongside the publication of the final report.
- 4.6 The BCE will take into consideration any written representations made in the eight week consultation period about the revised proposals, and makes its final decisions about whether further modifications need to be made in light of those representations.
- 4.7 Once the BCE has decided on its final recommendations it will submit a formal report to the Government and this will conclude the review process. The Government must then lay the final report before Parliament where it has to be debated and approved (or rejected) by both Houses. The final Order will come in to effect at the next General Election after the legislation is made.

5. Comments from Executive Director, Resources

- 5.1 Financial implications
There are no financial implications for the Council arising from this consultation response.
- 5.2 Legal implications
The BCE boundary review process, of which this consultation is a part, is governed by the provisions of the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986 (as amended by the Boundary Commissions Act 1992 and the Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Act 2011 Act.) There are no legal implications to the Council arising from this consultation response.

6. Other implications

No other implications are identified at this stage as this is only a response to a consultation. Should any final proposals introduce changes to parliamentary constituencies in Coventry which combine wards with any other Council, then the Returning Officers will manage this through their usual election planning arrangements.

6.1 How will this contribute to achievement of the Council's key objectives / corporate priorities (corporate plan/scorecard) / organisational blueprint / Local Area Agreement (or Coventry Sustainable Community Strategy)?

Not applicable

6.2 How is risk being managed?

No risks are identified as part of this consultation response.

6.3 What is the impact on the organisation?

No impacts are identified as part of this consultation response.

6.4 Equalities / EIA

There are no public sector equality duties which are of relevance in relation to this consultation response.

6.5 Implications for (or impact on) the environment

None

6.6 Implications for partner organisations?

None

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Councillor A Khan	Cabinet Member for Policing and Equalities	-	16/11/16	18/11/16

This report is published on the council's website: www.coventry.gov.uk/councilmeetings

**Boundary Commission for England:
Initial proposals for new Parliamentary Constituency boundaries in the West Midlands**

13 September – 5 December 2016 Consultation

Response from Coventry City Council

Contextual Comments:

While noting the legislative framework under which the Boundary Commission for England is carrying out this review, the Council does not agree with the reduction in the number of Members of Parliament from 650 to 600. Instead of putting time and resources into reducing the number of elected representatives, reform should be focussed on reducing the over 800 members of the House of Lords, especially as this is the only upper house of any two chambered parliament to be larger than its lower house.

The Council remains concerned at the extent of under-registration and that the electorate figures on which these proposals are based significantly understate the eligible electorate. This is further compounded by the lack of any consideration of the projected population growth for Coventry which is significant both for the city alone and when compared to other areas.

Response to the Proposals:

Coventry City Council does not agree with the proposals for the West Midlands as they affect the City of Coventry for a number of reasons.

The consultation documents sets out the rules that the BCE may take into account in establishing a new map of constituencies which include geographical considerations and any local ties that would be broken by changes. In particular it is *“seeking evidence and intelligence of how our proposals reflect or break local community ties”*. The addition of the wards of Meriden and Knowle to the city of Coventry does not reflect any geographical factors, particularly shape and accessibility, and does not reflect local ties.

It is widely understood that that the electorate at 1st December is understated and that the registration associated with the referendum means that later registers more accurately reflect those eligible to vote. The total number of parliamentary electors in the city at 1st May 2016 was 217,714 which brings the electorate within 5% of the target of 74,769 electors per constituency.

Furthermore, Coventry is a fast growing city and is expected to grow at a significantly higher rate than the rest of the West Midlands. The Office of National Statistics projects that Coventry's population will grow at a rate of 9.72% during the period 2014 to 2020. This is almost double the rate of increase projected for any other of the West Midlands local authority areas and significantly above the average growth projection for the whole West Midlands region of 3.64%. See Table 1 below.

If the growth factor is applied to the electorate as at 1 December 2015, the potential number of parliamentary electors in the city of Coventry alone by 2020 (the point at which the first elections could be held based on the new constituencies) could total 230,446. This is 102.7% of the target figure for the new constituencies. This would mean that Coventry could comfortably retain three whole parliamentary constituencies.

If the relevant growth factor is also applied to the two Solihull wards incorporated in the BCE proposals for Coventry, by 2020 the electorate in the new constituencies could be 79,147 (Coventry North East), 85,487 (Coventry South) and 83,974 (Coventry West and Meriden). In all three cases this would mean that the electorate would exceed the 105% threshold and the new proposals would be out of date by the time they were first used. As a result, there is a real risk that electors in Coventry could be under represented. This data is shown at table 2.

Background information to the BCE consultation is very clear in stating that it “does not take the view that it is obliged to shut its eyes entirely to growth (or decline) that has occurred since the review date, which it may be aware of from the annual updates of electorate figures it receives, or that it is satisfied is likely to occur. Such a factor may be taken into account in choosing between two or more competing options for the same area that satisfy the statutory rules.” We think that the exceptional rate of population growth in Coventry should be considered as a factor and new proposals considered.

Table 1: ONS Population Projections, West Midlands

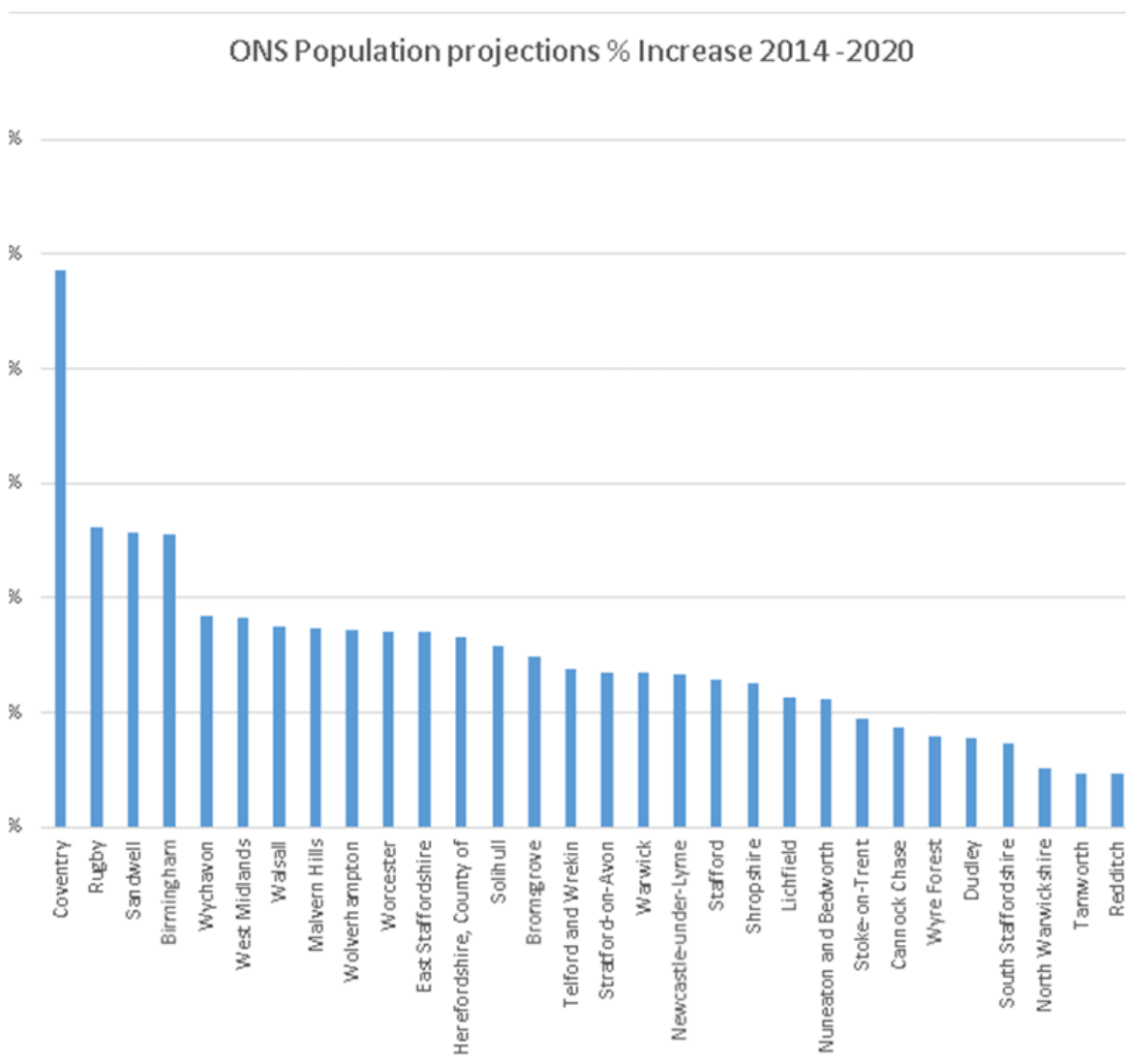


Table 2: Potential Impact of ONS Population Projections on electorate of the City of Coventry

Ward	Proposed Boundary Commission Constituency	Electorate as at 1 December 2015 - As used for Boundary Commission Review	ONS 2014 population estimate 18+	Electorate for proposed Boundary Commission Constituency	Population Estimate 18+ for proposed Boundary Commission Constituency	2014-2020 Population Projection growth factor applied to 1 December 2015 Electorate from Coventry 9.72% Solihull 3.17%	Impact of growth factor on proposed constituency	Parliamentary Electors as at 1/05/16	% Change since 01-12-15
Foleshill	Coventry NE	10,419	14,515	72,135	88,284	11,432	79,147	10,942	5%
Henley	Coventry NE	12,310	14,223			13,507		12,891	5%
Longford	Coventry NE	12,538	14,822			13,757		12,965	3%
Lower Stoke	Coventry NE	13,029	15,923			14,295		13,843	6%
Upper Stoke	Coventry NE	11,520	15,191			12,640		11,974	4%
Wyken	Coventry NE	12,319	13,610			13,516		12,782	4%
Binley & Willenhall	Coventry S	11,588	13,110	77,914	106,391	12,714	85,487	12,083	4%
Cheylesmore	Coventry S	11,308	13,810			12,407		11,775	4%
Earlsdon	Coventry S	11,604	13,029			12,732		12,011	4%
Radford	Coventry S	11,633	15,430			12,764		12,188	5%
Sherbourne	Coventry S	11,136	14,118			12,218		11,588	4%
St. Michael's	Coventry S	9,766	22,887			10,715		11,013	13%
Whoberley	Coventry S	10,879	14,007			11,936		11,392	5%
Bablake	Coventry W & Meriden	12,376	12,982	77,586	91,625	13,579	83,974	12,750	3%
Holbrook	Coventry W & Meriden	11,536	13,301			12,657		12,182	6%
Wainbody	Coventry W & Meriden	10,670	13,004			11,707		9,975	-7%
Westwood	Coventry W & Meriden	12,244	15,240			13,434		12,680	4%
Woodlands	Coventry W & Meriden	13,156	14,103			14,435		13,643	4%
Knowle	Coventry W & Meriden	8,183	12,121			8,442			
Meriden	Coventry W & Meriden	9,421	10,874			9,720			