

**Parliamentary Boundary Review
(Kath Richards, Law & Governance)**

Synopsis of report:

- 1 The Boundary Commission for England (BCE) have the task of periodically reviewing the boundaries of all the Parliamentary constituencies in England. They are currently conducting a review based on legislative rules most recently updated by Parliament in 2020.**
- 2 Those rules tell them that they must make recommendations for new Parliamentary constituency boundaries by 1 July 2023. While retaining the overall number of constituencies across the UK at 650, the rules apply a distribution formula that results in an increase in the number of constituencies in England (from 533 to 543).**
- 3 In 2022 the initial proposals were published, and responses were invited and on 8 November the BCE have responded to the feedback received with in some instances resulting in a change being made.**

Recommendation(s):

- a) That the revised proposals be noted with regard to the Runnymede and Weybridge Constituency**
- b) To decide whether a submission to the Boundary Commission for England shall be made before the deadline of 5 December 2022 in relation to the revised proposals for the Runnymede and Weybridge and Windsor Constituencies.**

1. Context and background of report

- 1.1 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.
- 1.2 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 most recently updated by Parliament in 2020. These latest rules retain 650 constituencies for the UK Parliament as a whole and require constituencies that they propose or recommend complying with strict parameters, in particular as far as the number of electors in each constituency is concerned.
- 1.3 The review process is heavily informed by public consultation. The BCE developed and published initial proposals for constituencies across England. Representations from the public about those proposals were then taken in writing and at public hearings in each region of England across two rounds of consultation. In light of all the views expressed about these initial proposals, the BCE revised them and will then conduct a further round of written consultation on the revised proposals.

- 1.4 The BCE is required to make a formal final report to the Speaker of the House of Commons before 1 July 2023, recommending any changes that it believes are appropriate to the distribution, size, shape, name or designation of constituencies in England. The current constituencies review is therefore referred to as ‘the 2023 Review’.
- 1.5 The rules also require that every recommended constituency across the UK – apart from five specified exceptions (two of them in England) – must have an electorate that is no smaller than 69,724 and no larger than 77,062.
- 1.6 The Government must turn the recommendations of the BCE (and those of the equivalent Commissions for the other three parts of the UK) into an ‘Order in Council’ that implements the recommendations. The constituencies set out in the Order will then be implemented for the next General Election after the date on which the legislation is approved.

2. Report

- 2.1 The purpose of this report is to provide members with an update on the BCE proposals and to decide whether the Council wishes to respond to the revised recommendations.
- 2.2 The Commission had received over 45,000 comments sent in by the public during the previous two stages of public consultation and has changed nearly half of its initial proposals based on this feedback.
- 2.3 The BCE have published its new revised proposals for constituencies across the country and opened a final month-long consultation, giving the public a last opportunity to send in their views.
- 2.4 The final consultation on the new map of revised constituency proposals is open now until 5 December 2022. The public are invited to view and comment on the new map at bcereviews.org.uk.
- 2.5 After this final consultation has closed on 5 December, the BCE will analyse the responses and form its final recommendations. These will be submitted to Parliament by 1 July 2023.

Initial Proposals and Consultation

- 2.6 The South East has been allocated 91 constituencies – an increase of seven from the current number. This includes two protected constituencies on the Isle of Wight. Their proposals leave 13 of the 84 existing constituencies wholly unchanged, and three unchanged except to realign constituency boundaries with new or prospective local government ward boundaries.
- 2.7 As it has not always been possible to allocate whole numbers of constituencies to individual counties, they grouped some county council and unitary authority areas into sub-regions. The number of constituencies allocated to each sub-region is determined by the combined electorate of the local authorities they contain.
- 2.8 Consequently, it was necessary to propose some constituencies that cross county council or unitary authority boundaries, although they sought to keep such crossings to a minimum.

Sub-region	Existing allocation	Proposed allocation
Berkshire ¹ , Hampshire ² , and Surrey	37	39
Buckinghamshire ³	7	8
Sussex ⁴	16	17
Isle of Wight	1	2
Kent ⁵	17	18
Oxfordshire	6	7

- 2.9 Berkshire's electorate of 635,137 results in a mathematical entitlement to 8.65 constituencies. However, to allocate Berkshire nine constituencies would require average constituency sizes so close to the minimum permitted electorate that it would be impossible to realise in practice without an undesirable number of ward splits and/or significant disruption to local community ties. The BCE proposed a sub-region pairing Berkshire with the neighbouring counties of Hampshire and Surrey, which included two constituencies that cross from Berkshire to Surrey, and Surrey to Hampshire respectively.
- 2.10 Although neither Hampshire nor Surrey, with respective mathematical entitlements to 18.44 and 11.72 constituencies, required these crossings to build constituencies within the permitted electorate range, it would result in the preservation of a greater overall number of existing constituencies, particularly along the coast of Hampshire.
- 2.11 The sub-region of Berkshire, Hampshire, and Surrey together (with a total electorate of 2,848,212) has a mathematical entitlement to 38.81 constituencies; the BCE have therefore allocated 39 constituencies, an increase of two.
- 2.12 The BCE proposed one constituency that contains electors from both Berkshire and Surrey, which combines the town of Windsor and the town of Egham.
- 2.13 They also proposed one constituency that contains electors from both Surrey and Hampshire, which combines the town of Bordon from the district of East Hampshire in a constituency with the towns of Farnham and Haslemere in Surrey's Borough of Waverley.
- 2.14 There are currently 11 constituencies in Surrey. Of the existing constituencies, five have electorates within the permitted range; however, only three of these could remain wholly unchanged, due to changes to local government ward boundaries (this due to local authorities in those constituencies having undertaken electoral reviews since constituencies last reviewed). All of the remaining six constituencies are above the 5% limit.
- 2.15 Of the three constituencies which could be retained wholly unchanged, the Spelthorne constituency (which is coterminous with the Borough of Spelthorne) is the only one which the BCE propose no alterations to.
- 2.16 The BCE have proposed changes to 10 out of 11 existing constituencies in Surrey. To enable Members to understand how complex the process is and impact of changes, officers set out below the changes which have been proposed to the 10 existing Surrey constituencies.

- 2.17 The BCE proposed that two wards from the existing Woking constituency be transferred to Surrey Heath, such that the Woking constituency would become coterminous with the Woking local authority.
- 2.18 With electorates having increased to the east of the existing Mole Valley constituency, the BCE propose that it would include the three wards for the town of Horley, as well as the South Park & Woodhatch ward, from the Borough of Reigate and Banstead. The BCE proposed that the constituency be called Dorking and Horley to reflect both major population centres as well as the constituency including parts of two local authorities.
- 2.19 The BCE considered that the Reigate constituency would not be able to remain unchanged despite falling within the permitted electorate range, due to the need to align with changes to local government boundaries and the adjacent East Surrey constituency. This latter constituency is largely contained within Tandridge district, which is mathematically entitled to 0.89 constituencies, so needed to include wards from elsewhere, but is penned in by boundaries with two other counties in the South East region, as well as with London. The BCE proposed that the East Surrey constituency included the Hooley, Merstham & Netherne ward from the Reigate and Banstead local authority.
- 2.20 The BCE also proposed a Reigate constituency comprising the northern part of the Reigate and Banstead local authority, including two wards (Nork, and Tattenham Corner & Preston) that were previously included in the Epsom and Ewell constituency.
- 2.21 The BCE also proposed that the Epsom and Ewell constituency, which previously included wards from three different local authorities, would consist of the entirety of the Borough of Epsom and Ewell with only one authority crossing, into Mole Valley district, to include the towns of Leatherhead and Ashtead.
- 2.22 In order to bring the Surrey Heath constituency to within the permitted range, the BCE proposed that it include, in addition to the entirety of Surrey Heath district, two wards from the existing Woking constituency, but that the three wards consisting of the villages of Ash and Ash Vale are transferred to the Godalming and Ash constituency.
- 2.23 The BCE proposed that the Guildford constituency be reconfigured, such that it is entirely within the Borough of Guildford. The village of Cranleigh, which was previously in the Guildford constituency, would be included with its closer neighbour Godalming from the same Borough of Waverley, along with Ash in a Godalming and Ash constituency which crosses the local authority boundary between the Borough of Guildford and the Borough of Waverley.

Impact on Runnymede

- 2.24 In relation to the Runnymede area the proposal was for a new constituency called Weybridge and Chertsey, which would have incorporated all wards within Runnymede except for Egham Town and Egham Hythe which it was proposed to be added to the Windsor Constituency which will be managed by Windsor and Maidenhead Royal Borough Council.
- 2.25 In addition to the Runnymede Wards which will make up the Weybridge and Chertsey Constituency it is proposed that the Cobham and Downside, Oatlands and Burwood

Park, Weybridge Riverside and Weybridge St George's Hill wards from Elmbridge will be included.

- 2.26 Officers held a workshop with the Constitution Member Working Party to see if an alternative could be found to the initial proposals. It was agreed that the limitations on the numbers would not enable the current Runnymede and Weybridge Constituency to remain as is. A copy of the Council's submission on the initial proposals can be found at Appendix A.

What are the revised proposals for the South East region?

- 2.27 They have revised the composition of 27 of the 91 constituencies proposed in June 2021 and maintained the initial proposals for the remainder. They have revised the name of 19 of our initially proposed constituencies. Our revised proposals would leave 15 existing constituencies in the South East region wholly unchanged, and three unchanged except to realign constituency boundaries with local government ward boundaries.
- 2.28 As it is not always possible to allocate whole numbers of constituencies to individual counties or unitary authorities, they sometimes group these into sub-regions, meaning some constituencies cross county or unitary authority boundaries. After consideration of the responses to the sub-regions in the initial proposals, the revised proposals are based on unchanged sub-regions, as follows:
- Berkshire/Hampshire/Surrey (allocated 39 constituencies);
 - Buckinghamshire (allocated eight constituencies);
 - Sussex (allocated 17 constituencies);
 - Isle of Wight (allocated two constituencies);
 - Kent (allocated 18 constituencies);
 - and Oxfordshire (allocated seven constituencies).
- 2.29 In Berkshire, Hampshire, and Surrey, they have retained one county-crossing constituency between Berkshire and Surrey, and one between Surrey and Hampshire, with minor alterations to what was initially proposed. They have also proposed minor revisions to a series of constituencies between Farnham and Bordon and Reigate, such that those settlements would not be divided between constituencies; they have additionally proposed a minor reconfiguration around Cobham and Stoke D'Abernon as well as the inclusion of Englefield Green and Virginia Water in the Windsor constituency instead of Egham.

Extract from the BCE's revised proposals relating to Runnymede.

- 2.30 We received a number of representations in opposition to the initial proposals from the two Egham wards, which were initially proposed to be included in the Windsor constituency. Many of these responses disagreed with the principle of a constituency straddling the county boundary. Separately to the boundary concerns, we received several comments arguing for the retention of the name Runnymede and Weybridge, as opposed to the Commission's initially proposed name of Weybridge and Chertsey; local respondents advocated for the importance of the Runnymede name.
- 2.31 An alternative county crossing at Englefield Green and Virginia Water was separately proposed by two people this counterproposal would transfer the three wards of Englefield Green East, Englefield Green West, and Virginia Water, to the Windsor constituency and return the Egham Hythe and Egham Town wards to Weybridge and Chertsey. Some local residents acknowledged the merits of such an arrangement,

noting that '[Englefield Green and Virginia Water] are areas that look to Windsor and Ascot for entertainment and commerce, and are more similar in character to Windsor and Ascot'. See Appendix A.

- 2.32 The Assistant Commissioners conducted a site visit to assess this alternative and were persuaded that a constituency pairing Windsor with Englefield Green and Virginia Water would have a more consistent character than the initially proposed Windsor constituency. They additionally noted the strength of local feeling regarding the Runnymede and Weybridge constituency name. The Assistant Commissioners therefore recommended that the Windsor constituency should include Englefield Green East, Englefield Green West, and Virginia Water (see appendix C), and that the proposed Weybridge and Chertsey constituency both retain the wards of Egham Hythe and Egham Town and retain its existing name of 'Runnymede and Weybridge'. We agree with their recommendations and therefore propose these revisions.
- 2.33 There was a significant discussion concerning the two wards of Cobham & Downside and Oxshott & Stoke D'Abernon in Elmbridge. Both wards fall within the existing Esher and Walton constituency, which is above the permitted electorate range. To bring the constituency within range, we initially proposed including Cobham & Downside ward in Weybridge and Chertsey, retaining Oxshott & Stoke D'Abernon in Esher and Walton. Residents of both wards opposed this, arguing that the Cobham and Stoke D'Abernon area is a continuous settlement (BCE-95568, and Councillor Dave Lewis – BCE-97867). Some of these representations proposed reuniting the two wards within the Esher and Walton constituency by removing the Hersham Village ward instead. The latter submission additionally mentioned the possibility of splitting Esher ward, as one of its component polling districts falls on the western side of the River Mole (next to Hersham Village ward); however, this split is not required to bring either constituency within the permitted electorate range. A large number of representations were, however, received from across the area that disagreed with the Conservative Party's counterproposal to transfer Hersham Village ward out, asserting that the Hersham settlement represents an integral part of the Esher and Walton community. Other responses said that the Cobham, Downside, Stoke D'Abernon and Oxshott communities should be reunited in a different constituency if it were not possible to do so within Esher and Walton.
- 2.34 In light of the considerable discussion generated around the counterproposal, and the number of responses concerning these Elmbridge wards, the Assistant Commissioners visited the area. Their assessment was that the connections of Hersham Village ward with Esher and Walton were too strong to be broken in order to make room for both Cobham & Downside and Oxshott & Stoke D'Abernon. Specifically, they considered the railway line between Hersham Village ward and Walton South ward did not represent a significant barrier between the two communities, and neither did the River Mole between Hersham Village ward and Esher ward. They observed that these three communities represented one continuous area, and therefore did not endorse the counterproposal.
- 2.35 Nonetheless, the Assistant Commissioners accepted that the initial proposals broke local ties between Cobham & Downside and Oxshott & Stoke D'Abernon wards. They therefore recommended a revision that would bring both wards into Runnymede and Weybridge rather than Esher and Walton. In order to accommodate the addition of Cobham & Downside ward and Oxshott & Stoke D'Abernon ward to Runnymede and Weybridge, they recommended bringing the Oatlands & Burwood Park ward into Esher and Walton. Although this specific orientation was not proposed by any representations, the Assistant Commissioners were of the view that it best maintained the local ties in both the Hersham and Cobham/Stoke D'Abernon/Oxshott areas. The

Assistant Commissioners noted that the Burwood Park estate already falls within the boundaries of the existing Esher and Walton, and that Oatlands is linked with Walton for its county council representation. They further noted the representation which suggested that the ties of Oatlands and Burwood Park are to Hersham, rather than to Cobham and Downside. See Appendix B.

- 2.36 In considering the Assistant Commissioners' recommended revisions for Esher and Walton, and Weybridge and Chertsey, we acknowledge that there may be more limited connections of the Cobham & Downside and Oxshott & Stoke D'Abernon ward pair with Weybridge than with Esher, but feel that the communities of those wards represent a semi-independent settlement area, and note there are some links between these areas and Weybridge, including the 'Chatterbus' local transport service mentioned in some representations. In contrast, we consider that Hersham Village ward is part of a contiguous community with the neighbouring wards of Esher and Walton South. Accordingly, we agree with the recommendations of the Assistant Commissioners in this area and therefore propose a revised Esher and Walton constituency to include the Oatlands & Burwood Park ward and the renamed Runnymede and Weybridge constituency to include together the Cobham & Downside, and Oxshott & Stoke D'Abernon wards.
- 2.37 Attached at Appendix D is a table with all the numbers relating to the first and second proposals.
- 2.38 Clearly the Council could submit a response whilst in an ideal world we could object on the principal issue, but the BCE have said that previous arguments should not be submitted as they have already been taken into consideration.

3. Policy framework implications

- 3.1 There is no existing policy that relates to this. However, it does come under the Empowering Communities theme in the corporate business plan. Dealing with this proposal facilitates supporting the community to respond to its democratic structure.

4. Resource implications/Value for Money

- 4.1 There are no resource or financial implications.

5. Legal implications

- 5.1 There is a legal requirement for the BCE to carry out this exercise which is laid out in the body of the report.

6. Equality implications

- 6.1 This proposal will not change the current equality implications.

7. Environmental/Sustainability/Biodiversity implications

- 7.1 The consultations were encouraged to be submitted electronically.

8. Timetable for Implementation

- 8.1 If the Council decides to submit a further response it will have to be submitted by 5 December 2022. The BCE has reiterated that they do not want any previous issues that had been raised submitted again.

9. **Conclusions**

- 9.1 The BCE are charged with this exercise; they have to undertake it with regard to certain criteria. They have applied that criteria in the proposals. We have reviewed their proposals and could not devise an alternative that falls within the boundaries required that would retain the Runnymede and Weybridge constituency in its current form.

(To resolve)

Background papers

None stated