

Report to	-	Cabinet
Date	-	4 December 2017
Report of the	-	Executive Director of Resources
Subject	-	Parliamentary Review 2018 – Revised Proposals

Recommendation: It be **RESOLVED:** That the draft response attached at Appendix B to the report be approved as this Council's response to the Boundary Commission for England's consultation on Parliamentary Boundary changes.

Service Manager: John Collins
Lead Cabinet Member: Councillor Maynard

The Chairman of Council has already agreed that, subject to the approval of Cabinet, this decision can be taken as an urgent decision to allow the Council to respond to the Consultation by the deadline of 11 December 2017.

Introduction

1. As Members may be aware, the Boundary Commission for England (BCE) are currently reviewing the boundaries of all the Parliamentary constituencies in England. The BCE is an independent and impartial non-departmental public body, which is responsible for reviewing Parliamentary constituency boundaries in England. The Review is being conducted in accordance with the Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Act 2011 ('the 2011 Act').
2. The 2011 Act involves a significant reduction in the number of constituencies in England (from 533 to 501), resulting in the number of constituencies in the South East reducing by one, to 83. The rules also require that every constituency – apart from two specified exceptions (the Isle of Wight) – must have an electorate that is no smaller than 71,031 and no larger than 78,507.
3. In terms of data used for the 2018 Review, electorate figures used must be those from the electoral registers that were required to be published on or before 1 December 2015. With regard to 'local government boundaries' the 2011 Act defines such boundaries in England as the boundaries of: counties and their electoral divisions; districts and their wards; London boroughs and their wards; and the City of London; all as they were in force on the last ordinary day of election of councillors before the review date. For the 2018 Review, this means the local government boundaries referred to are those in force as at 7 May 2015 and not those coming into force in Rother in 2019 as a result of the Boundary Review undertaken in 2015/16.
4. The BCE published the initial proposals for new boundaries in September 2016 and consulted on them; as Members may recall, the Council responded to the initial proposals in December 2016 (Minute CB16/55 refers). Following the initial consultation the BCE published all the comments received and held

a second consultation exercise in relation to the comments received in March 2017 and invited further comment, if necessary.

5. All Members were sent a copy of the comments in relation to the Rother area and it was determined by the Executive Director of Resources, that a further response, at that stage was not required.
6. Following the two consultation exercises the BCE has now completed the next stage of the review process and published revised proposals on 17 October 2017. The deadline for responses to these revised proposals is Monday 11 December 2017. There are five stages to the review, this being the fourth stage. The fifth and final stage will be the development and publication of the final report and recommendations which is expected in September 2018.
7. Members were advised of the launch of the consultation on 17 October and comments were invited to be included within this report. Comments were received from RDC Darwell Ward Councillors J. Barnes (East Sussex County Councillor for Northern Rother also) and Mrs Kirby-Green and their points raised have been addressed within the proposed response.
8. Given the fairly short time frame to respond (eight weeks from publication) and little capacity at the next meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, this report has come direct to Cabinet for decision. To ensure that the Council's response can be submitted in time, it is also necessary to designate this decision as an urgent one, and therefore outside the realm of the Overview and Scrutiny call-in procedure. However, as advised above, all Members have been invited to contribute to this report and formulate this Council's response.

Revised Proposals for East Sussex

9. An extract from the BCE's revised proposals for new constituency boundaries in the South East, detailing the relevant paragraphs from their report is attached at Appendix A. A copy of the full report for the South East can be found on the BCE's consultation portal at the following link:
<https://www.bce2018.org.uk/node/6488>
10. A summary of the revised proposals is as follows:
11. With regard to Bexhill and Battle County Constituency (CC) there has been some remodelling that enables less change to the current position with Darwell, Ewhurst and Sedlescombe and Rother Levels coming back in, all of Hailsham being removed and Horam being added (see paragraphs 3.64 and 3.65 at Appendix A). This has resulted in an overall increase of 2,398 electors, compared to the initial proposals.

Bexhill and Battle CC (electorate 75,872)

Ward	Local Authority	Previous Constituency
Battle Town	Rother	Bexhill and Battle
Central	Rother	Bexhill and Battle
Collington	Rother	Bexhill and Battle
Crowhurst	Rother	Bexhill and Battle
Darwell	Rother	Bexhill and Battle
Ewhurst and Sedlescombe	Rother	Bexhill and Battle
Kewhurst	Rother	Bexhill and Battle

Old Town	Rother	Bexhill and Battle
Rother Levels	Rother	Bexhill and Battle
Sackville	Rother	Bexhill and Battle
Salehurst	Rother	Bexhill and Battle
Sidley	Rother	Bexhill and Battle
St. Marks	Rother	Bexhill and Battle
St. Michaels	Rother	Bexhill and Battle
St. Stephens	Rother	Bexhill and Battle
Cross in Hand/Five Ashes	Wealden	Bexhill and Battle
Heathfield East	Wealden	Wealden
Heathfield North & Central	Wealden	Wealden
Herstmonceux	Wealden	Wealden
Horam	Wealden	Wealden
Ninfield & Hooe with Wartling	Wealden	Bexhill and Battle
Pevensay & Westham	Wealden	Bexhill and Battle

12. The previous proposal to create a High Weald CC with an electorate of 74,102 has also been remodelled to form Mid Kent and Ticehurst CC. This pulls in wards from Ashford, Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells Borough Councils, together with Ticehurst and Etchingham from Rother (see paragraphs 3.65 and 3.74 at Appendix A). This has resulted in an overall increase of 1,601 electors, compared to the initial proposals.

Mid Kent and Ticehurst CC (electorate 75,703)

Ward	Local Authority	Previous Constituency
Biddenden	Ashford	Ashford
Rolvenden & Tenterden West	Ashford	Ashford
St. Michaels	Ashford	Ashford
Tenterden North	Ashford	Ashford
Tenterden South	Ashford	Ashford
Weald Central	Ashford	Ashford
Weald North	Ashford	Ashford
Boughton Monchelsea and Chart Sutton	Maidstone	Faversham & Mid Kent
Coxheath and Hunton	Maidstone	Maidstone & The Weald
Harrietsham and Lenham	Maidstone	Faversham & Mid Kent
Headcorn	Maidstone	Faversham & Mid Kent
Leeds	Maidstone	Faversham & Mid Kent
Loose	Maidstone	Maidstone & The Weald
Marden and Yalding	Maidstone	Maidstone & The Weald
North Downs	Maidstone	Tunbridge Wells
Staplehurst	Maidstone	Tunbridge Wells
Sutton Valence and Langley	Maidstone	Faversham & Mid Kent
Ticehurst and Etchingham	Rother	Bexhill and Battle
Benenden and Cranbrook	Tunbridge Wells	Maidstone & The Weald
Brenchley and Horsmonden	Tunbridge Wells	Tunbridge Wells
Frittenden and Sissinghurst	Tunbridge Wells	Maidstone & The Weald
Goudhurst and Lamberhurst	Tunbridge Wells	Tunbridge Wells
Hawkhurst and Sandhurst	Tunbridge Wells	Tunbridge Wells
Paddock Wood East	Tunbridge Wells	Tunbridge Wells
Paddock Wood West	Tunbridge Wells	Tunbridge Wells

13. **Hastings and Rye CC (electorate 71,672)** – no changes are proposed, but for completeness, wards are confirmed as follows:

Ward	Local Authority	Previous Constituency
Ashdown	Hastings	Hastings and Rye
Baird	Hastings	Hastings and Rye
Braybrooke	Hastings	Hastings and Rye
Castle	Hastings	Hastings and Rye
Central St. Leonards	Hastings	Hastings and Rye
Conquest	Hastings	Hastings and Rye
Gensing	Hastings	Hastings and Rye
Hollington	Hastings	Hastings and Rye
Maze Hill	Hastings	Hastings and Rye
Old Hastings	Hastings	Hastings and Rye
Ore	Hastings	Hastings and Rye
Silverhill	Hastings	Hastings and Rye
St. Helens	Hastings	Hastings and Rye
Tressell	Hastings	Hastings and Rye
West St. Leonards	Hastings	Hastings and Rye
Wishing Tree	Hastings	Hastings and Rye
Brede Valley	Rother	Hastings and Rye
Eastern Rother	Rother	Hastings and Rye
Marsham	Rother	Hastings and Rye
Rye	Rother	Hastings and Rye

Consultation Response

14. As with many consultations, it is not enough to simply state that the Council does not like the proposals without offering an alternative solution that meets the criteria for the review. Unfortunately, boundary reviews, as the Council's own experience has shown, very often come down to a "numbers game" and there is limited scope to suggest other viable solutions, without knock-on effects, making alternative solutions non-viable.
15. For example, should the Council wish to recommend that Ticehurst and Etchingham be removed from Mid Kent and Ticehurst and returned to Bexhill and Battle, this would result in the Bexhill and Battle Constituency being over the maximum number of electors (Mid Kent and Ticehurst would remain within the viable number). There would therefore need to be a corresponding number of electors moved to an alternative constituency.
16. The obvious Ward for removal from Bexhill and Battle being Horam returning to Lewes and Uckfield, however, this then takes Lewes and Uckfield over the maximum number of electors, requiring an additional move. It is suggested that East Dean moves from Lewes and Uckfield into Eastbourne; this would leave all constituencies within the viable number of electors.
17. If it is not agreeable to bring Ticehurst and Etchingham back into Bexhill and Battle an alternative solution, whilst not entirely desirable, but is a better fit than the current proposals, is to recommend that Ticehurst and Etchingham be moved into Tunbridge Wells and Crowborough which could be accommodated within the criteria set. This would bring the number of electors within the Tunbridge Wells and Crowborough Ward to 77,965; whilst on the high side, it is within the maximum number permitted under the criteria.

18. The BCE are also looking for comments in support of their proposals, as past experience suggests that too often people who agree with proposals do not respond in support, whilst those who do object make their points. This can give a distorted view of the balance of public support or objection to proposals.
19. Members are therefore invited to comment as to whether they are generally in support of the revised Bexhill and Battle Constituency as it stands, notwithstanding the Ticehurst and Etchingham issue, and pleased to acknowledge that Hastings and Rye Constituency has remained the same. A draft response, picking up the points of the local Members and subject to Cabinet's approval, is attached at Appendix B for consideration.
20. The consultation closes on 11 December 2017, following which the BCE will consider all the representations received at this stage, and throughout the review, before making final recommendations to the Government. The legislation states that the BCE must do this during September 2018. The submission of the formal final report to Government concludes the review process and the procedure to implement new constituencies is the responsibility of the Government and Parliament.

Conclusion

21. Members are invited to consider the revised proposals for the Parliamentary Constituent boundaries within the Rother District and agree the Council's response for submission by the deadline of 11 December 2017. To ensure that the Council's response can be submitted in time, this decision will be taken as an urgent one, and therefore outside the realm of the Overview and Scrutiny call-in procedure. All Members have been given the opportunity to contribute to the drafting of this draft response.

Malcolm Johnston
Executive Director of Resources

Risk Assessment Statement

If the Council fails to comment upon the South East revised proposals it will be a missed opportunity to contribute to the design of the new constituencies that will come into force from the next General Election after the due legislature processes have been undertaken.

Backgrounds Papers

Boundary Commission for England's publications:
Revised proposals for new constituency boundaries in the South East
Guide to the 2018 Review of Parliamentary constituencies

Relevant Extracts from the Boundary Commission for England's Revised proposals for new constituency boundaries in the South East

East Sussex

3.63 The Commission's proposed Eastbourne and Hastings and Rye constituencies were largely supported during both consultation periods. The rest of East Sussex was supported by both the Conservative Party (BCE-30308, BCE-31975 and BCE-40878) and the Labour Party (BCE-30359, BCE-31969 and BCE-40901), with the Liberal Democrat Party (BCE-28287) opposing, instead suggesting a dumbbell-shaped High Weald constituency.

3.64 Other representations did not support the initial proposals approach to Lewes and Uckfield, perceived locally to be too large a constituency north-south for effective representation. John Bryant's (BCE-28072) counter-proposal addressed this by transferring Buxted and Maresfield, Forest Row, Framfield, and Hartfield wards to his alternative cross county constituency, Tunbridge Wells and Crowborough. This counter-proposal also delivers less change to Bexhill and Battle and brings Hailsham back into Lewes and Uckfield.

3.65 The assistant commissioners recommended the adoption of the John Bryant counter-proposal for East Sussex (as this satisfies those representations which were concerned with the geographic size of the constituency), with some minor adjustment due to the revised configuration of the Brighton Kemptown and Seahaven constituency (described 24 Boundary Commission for England above). Specifically, Horam ward transfers from Lewes and Uckfield to Bexhill and Battle (linking it with Heathfield, as suggested by representations such as Virginia Roberts, BCE-16281), and Ticehurst and Etchingham ward transfers from Bexhill and Battle to the reconfigured constituency named 'High Weald' in our initial proposals (which is discussed further in the Kent section below). We agree with these recommendations.

Kent

3.71 In relation to central Kent and the Weald, there was opposition to the initial proposals for a High Weald constituency straddling East Sussex and Kent, with the view being that it was too large and would be difficult for a Member of Parliament to deal with, with no community of interest, other than that all parts are very rural in nature. As noted in the East Sussex sub-section, John Bryant (BCE-28072) suggested an alternative crossing of the Kent/East Sussex boundary, creating a Tunbridge Wells and Crowborough constituency, together with a reconfigured Mid Kent constituency, arguing that these give more compact and regularly shaped primarily rural constituencies.

3.72 There was opposition to the initially proposed Tonbridge and The Weald constituency, in that it was poorly aligned with both the existing constituency and local authority. Additionally, local opposition from Edenbridge (Mary McCarten, BCE-16412) argued that Edenbridge looks towards Tonbridge for education and has good road and rail links in that direction.

3.74 The assistant commissioners were persuaded by John Bryant's counter-proposals for a Tunbridge Wells and Crowborough constituency and a separate Mid Kent constituency. They therefore recommended these revised constituencies, with

two minor amendments to his Mid Kent constituency, specifically including the Ticehurst and Etchingham ward in both the composition and name of the Mid Kent and Ticehurst constituency (as noted in the East Sussex section above), and transferring Park Wood ward to Maidstone. Apart from the latter change, the assistant commissioners recommended no other changes to the Maidstone constituency in our original proposals.

Rother District Council

**Boundary Commission for England
2018 Review of Parliamentary Constituencies**

**CONSULTATION RESPONSE TO
SOUTH EAST REVISED PROPOSALS**



Rother District Council is pleased to note that the proposed new constituency of High Weald has been removed from the revised proposals.

However, the proposal to include Ticehurst and Etchingham into the proposed newly created Mid Kent and Ticehurst Constituency is not supported for the following reasons:

- It segregates the current Ticehurst and Etchingham ward from its District and County compatriots without any substantiating reasons.
- It means that at both County and District level Councillors will have to deal with two MPs when Hurst Green joins Ticehurst and Etchingham Burwash as the Local Government Boundary Commission for England have already determined.
- It will be the only Rother ward in Mid Kent, looks completely out of place and therefore likely to loom small in the MP's perspective.
- Secondary schools will all lie in a different parliamentary constituency (two in fact, but neither the one to which we are allocated), so too our hospitals and that is also true of our GP practices.

There is an alternative solution that requires a number of movements between the following constituencies:

Etchingham and Ticehurst move FROM Mid Kent and Etchingham TO Bexhill and Battle.

Horam move FROM Bexhill and Battle TO Lewes and Uckfield.

East Dean move from Lewes and Uckfield TO Eastbourne.

Mid Kent and Ticehurst to be renamed Mid Kent.

If the above is not possible, an alternative solution, that also fits the criteria, would be to recognise that Etchingham and Ticehurst are part of the High Weald, have nothing in common with Mid Kent and look more to Tunbridge Wells as a service town. It would therefore make more sense to move Etchingham and Ticehurst into Tunbridge Wells and Crowborough Constituency, if it is not able to be accommodated back within Bexhill and Battle.

Apart from the above observations with regard to Ticehurst and Etchingham, the remainder of the proposals in relation to the Bexhill and Battle Constituency and Hastings and Rye are supported by Rother District Council.