

EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL14 December 2016Report by Chief ExecutiveREVIEW OF UK PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCIES**PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1. To seek approval of a proposed response to the Boundary Commission for Scotland's proposals for the new UK parliamentary constituencies for the East Renfrewshire area.

**RECOMMENDATION**

2. That the Boundary Commission be advised that:-
- (a) the Council does not support the new proposals for the establishment of 2 new parliamentary constituencies to cover the East Renfrewshire area;
  - (b) the Council supports an alternative proposal whereby a slight reconfiguration of the existing boundary could achieve the minimum electoral quota figure required;
  - (c) in the event the Commission chooses to adhere to its proposals that the Council does not support the choice of names for the 2 constituencies; and
  - (d) any names chosen should also reflect areas/communities within East Renfrewshire, particularly in respect of the constituency covering the eastern part of the authority where the majority of the electorate stay in communities in East Renfrewshire.

**BACKGROUND**

3. In terms of the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986 the Boundary Commission for Scotland is responsible for keeping Westminster constituencies in Scotland under review and making recommendations to UK Ministers.

4. The current review commenced in February 2016 after the publication of the UK electorate statistics from 1 December 2015. The review is being carried out in each of the 4 constituent parts of the UK by the respective Boundary Commissions, and each Commission is required to submit its report "not before 1 September 2018 and before 1 October 2018".

5. The reviews are being carried out against a legislative change which sees a reduction in the number of constituencies from the current 650 to 600, with a reduction in the number of Scottish constituencies from 59 to 53.

6. In developing proposals for new UK constituencies the legislation prescribes a number of factors that must be considered by Boundary Commissions:-

- No constituency is permitted to be larger than 13,000 square kilometres.
- Every constituency must have an electorate that is no less than 95% (71,031) and no more than 105% (78,705) of the United Kingdom electoral quota. The electoral quota is the total electorate for the UK divided by 596 (for the purposes of calculating the quota the 2 Scottish island constituencies and the 2 constituencies for the Isle of Wight are disregarded).
- The island constituencies and any constituency larger than 12,000 square kilometres may have an electorate lower than 95% of the electoral quota if it is not possible for it to comply with that requirement.

7. Subject to the foregoing the legislation also states that there are a number of factors other than the electorate which the commissions **may** take into account. These are:-

- special geographical considerations, including in particular the size, shape and accessibility of a constituency;
- boundaries of Council areas and electoral wards;
- existing Westminster constituency boundaries; and
- any local ties which would be broken by changes in constituencies.

**REPORT**

8. The Boundary Commission’s proposals for the East Renfrewshire area were published on 20 October and are set out below.

Constituency	Area description	Area size	electorate
Cunninghame East	This constituency comprises East Renfrewshire Council current electoral wards 1, (southern eastern part) 3, 4, 5 and 6 supplemented by 2 current electoral wards from East Ayrshire Council	437 square kilometres	71,251
Paisley	This constituency comprises Renfrewshire Council current electoral wards 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 supplemented by 2 current electoral wards 1 (excluding south eastern part) and 2 from East Renfrewshire Council	102 square kilometres	75,331

**Comment**

9. It would appear from the proposals produced by the Boundary Commission they have stuck rigidly to the main parts of the legislation resulting in basically a “number

crunching” exercise and have chosen not to take into account any of the other factors relating to geography, boundaries, local ties etc. that they can consider if they choose to do so.

10. Under the current arrangements the East Renfrewshire Westminster constituency boundary is coterminous with the Council’s boundary. The Commission’s proposals see an end to this arrangement and the creation of 2 constituencies covering East Renfrewshire. As part of this, local ties have been disregarded. For example, Barrhead, Neilston and Uplawmoor will now be separated from the rest of the Council area in terms of Westminster representation as part of the Paisley constituency, whilst the new Cunninghame East Constituency artificially combines communities with no links, from Giffnock and Thornliebank at the northern end beyond Kilmarnock in the south to take in communities such as Fenwick, Moscow, Galston, Greenholm and Priestland. There have been no historical links between these areas of East Renfrewshire and East Ayrshire, and it appears that the constituency has been created simply for numerical convenience.

11. Using the 1 December 2015 electorate figure, the East Renfrewshire electorate was 68,847. This was only 2,184 below the minimum electoral quota figure of 71,031 electors. This shortfall could have been made up by some relatively small adjustments to the existing constituency boundary. Whilst it is recognised that even this small adjustment would have led to the council and constituency boundaries no longer being coterminous, a much stronger link between the Council and constituency boundaries would remain than under the Commission’s proposals.

12. The Commission’s proposals if accepted will also remove any reference to East Renfrewshire or any communities in East Renfrewshire from the Westminster constituency map. The commission should be advised that any names chosen should also reflect areas/communities within East Renfrewshire, particularly in respect of the constituency covering the eastern part of the authority where the majority of the electorate stay in communities in East Renfrewshire.

## **FINANCE AND EFFICIENCY**

11. There are no finance or efficiency implications arising from this report.

## **IMPLICATIONS OF THE PROPOSALS**

13. The proposals if introduced will see the introduction of 2 new UK parliament constituencies to cover the East Renfrewshire area.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

14. It is clear from the proposals that have been produced by the Boundary Commission that they have focussed solely on the mandatory considerations as set out in the legislation and have taken no account of those other discretionary factors they are able to take into account. The result of this has been the creation of 2 new constituencies, destroys links that already exist, and creates artificial links between communities where there are or, particularly with regard to the proposals for the eastern part of the authority, have not been any historical or geographical links.

**RECOMMENDATION**

15. That the Boundary Commission be advised that:-
- (a) the Council does not support the new proposals for the establishment of 2 new parliamentary constituencies to cover the East Renfrewshire area;
  - (b) the Council supports an alternative proposal whereby a slight reconfiguration of the existing boundary could achieve the minimum electoral quota figure required;
  - (c) in the event the Commission chooses to adhere to its proposals that the Council does not support the choice of names for the 2 constituencies; and
  - (d) any name chosen should also reflect areas/communities within East Renfrewshire, particularly in respect of the constituency covering the eastern part of the authority where the majority of the electorate stay in communities in East Renfrewshire.

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

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