

REPORT TO: Executive Board
DATE: 13th October 2011
REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director, Policy and Resources
SUBJECT: Parliamentary Boundary Review
WARD(S) Borough-wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 **The purpose of the report is to appraise members of the Boundary Commission for England's initial proposals for revised Parliamentary Boundaries as they affect Halton and to propose a response to those proposals from the Council.**

2.0 **RECOMMENDATION: That Council support the response outlined in paragraph 5.1 of this report.**

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 The Boundary Commission for England has the task of periodically reviewing the Boundaries of all the Parliamentary Constituencies of England. They are currently conducting a review on the basis of new rules laid down by Parliament.

3.2 The rules in question involve a significant reduction in the number of Constituencies in England – from 533 to 502. They require that every Constituency, apart from a couple of exceptions, **must** have an electorate that is no smaller than 72,810 and no larger than 80,473.

3.3 The Commission has now completed the first stage of the review process and has published its initial proposals. The full detail of those proposals can be found at –

<http://consultation.boundarycommissionforengland.independent.gov.uk/>

However, for the North West, Cheshire and Halton the proposals are as follows:

- The North West has been 'allocated' 68 Constituencies – a reduction of 7,
- Only 7 of the existing 75 North West Constituencies remain unchanged,
- It has not been possible to allocate whole numbers of Constituencies to individual Council areas (because of the number rule),
- It has been necessary to propose some Constituencies that cross county or unitary authority boundaries,
- The initial proposals place Wards (as Wards are the building blocks of Constituencies) in Halton in three new Constituencies as follows:

- **Hale and Ditton** in a Mersey Banks Constituency that also includes two Wards in Wirral (Bromborough and Eastham) and five Wards in Cheshire West and Chester
- **Daresbury and Norton North and Norton South** in a Warrington South Constituency that also includes ten Wards in Warrington
- **The rest of the Wards** would form part of a Widnes and Runcorn Constituency which also includes a Ward in Warrington (Penketh and Cuerdley).

3.4 The Council, or indeed anybody, has until 5th December 2011 to comment on these initial proposals.

3.5 The overall review process is being undertaken in five stages. These are outlined below:

Stage 1	Publication of Initial Proposals
Stage 2	Consultation on Initial Proposals (current phase)
Stage 3	Consultation on representations received (likely to be in Spring 2012)
Stage 4	Publication of Revised Proposals (likely towards end of 2012)
Stage 5	final recommendations (must be done by 1 st October 2013).

4.0 **SUGGESTED RESPONSE**

4.1 The rules set by Parliament provide a significant challenge to the Boundary Commission. The legislation states that when deciding on boundaries, the Commission **may** also take into account:

- (a) special geographical considerations, including the size, shape and accessibility of a Constituency;
- (b) Local Government boundaries as they existed on 6th May 2010;
- (c) boundaries of existing Constituencies; and
- (d) any local ties that would be broken by change in constituencies.

4.2 However, the overriding rule is the one related to the number of electors. The proposed Constituencies **must** fall within the range outlined earlier. This inevitably means there will be some of the proposals that fail to comply wholly or partly to rules (a) to (d) above. The debate will be around how much a Constituency departs from the rules the Commission **may** consider.

4.3 Turning to the proposals that affect Halton, the first question is “What would the ideal set of circumstances be?” It would seem sensible that, if at all possible, the Constituency or Constituencies affecting Halton should, wherever possible, be either coterminous or rest wholly within the existing Borough boundaries. This would meet the Commission’s rules in (a) to (d) above. However, with a Borough electorate of 92,550, this is not possible as it does not comply (or even nearly comply) with the numbers rule.

4.4 The next best option, therefore, would be that, if there are to be a minimum of

two Constituencies within Halton, then one of those should wholly rest within the Borough boundaries. This would be clear for residents, would meet the Commission's rules and would be simple to administer for election purposes.

4.5 Given that this would appear to be a sensible objective for the Council, it now needs to be applied to the Commission's proposals. The following points need to be considered:

- Without a change to the rules set by Parliament, the Council has to accept that there will be a minimum of two Parliamentary Constituencies covering Halton (this has been the case in recent years),
- Does the inclusion of Hale and Ditton in the Mersey Banks Constituency make any sense in the light of Parliamentary rules (a) to (d) above?
- Does the inclusion of the Penketh and Cuerdley Ward in the new Widnes and Runcorn Constituency make sense in the light of the rules?
- Does the inclusion of Daresbury, Norton North and Norton South in the Warrington South Constituency make sense in the light of the rules?

4.6 Looking at Ditton and Hale first, the simple answer to the question has to be an emphatic no, for the following reasons:

- Ditton and Hale have no local ties whatsoever with the other Wards contained within the Mersey Banks Constituency,
- The maps used by the Commission suggest that Ditton and Hale are near neighbours to the other Wards in Mersey Banks. The reality is that the River Mersey, at that point, is some 1.8 miles wide,
- Movement in and around that proposed Constituency is difficult as the current river crossing points are either the Silver Jubilee Bridge or the Mersey Tunnels, giving journey times between Hale and Bromborough of above 45 minutes, whichever route is chosen, assuming there is no congestion on the Bridge or through Liverpool and the Tunnels,
- Hale and Ditton have been associated for Parliamentary purposes with Widnes since 1885 and part of the Borough of Halton since 1974 (37 years),
- There is simply no community of interest between Hale and Ditton and the other Wards in the proposed Constituency,
- Retaining Hale and Ditton within the Widnes and Runcorn Constituency is in line with existing Borough Council boundaries and the existing Parliamentary boundary of Halton.

4.7 Looking then at the inclusion of the Penketh and Cuerdley Ward in the Widnes and Runcorn Constituency, the Council would argue that it makes little sense to take one Ward out of the Borough of Warrington, particularly as the consequence of doing so places Hale and Ditton into a Constituency that makes no sense at all.

4.8 Turning finally to the issue of the Daresbury, Norton North and Norton South Wards being proposed as part of a Warrington South Constituency, the issues would appear to be that:

- Given that the Halton electorate is too large to have its own single constituency, then some Wards would have to sit with a cross-borough constituency,
- These Wards have previously been associated with cross-borough constituencies, eg. Weaver Vale and prior to that Warrington South,
- While the Council would prefer coterminous Constituencies with the Borough Boundary, it recognises that this simply is not possible.

5.0 CONCLUSIONS

5.1 Having carefully considered the Commission's proposals and recognising the difficult job the Commission has, it is suggested that the Council responds as follows:

1. It strongly opposes the inclusion of Hale and Ditton in the Mersey Banks Constituency for the reasons outlined in paragraph 4.6,
2. Suggests that the Penketh and Cuerdley Ward remains within a Warrington based Constituency,
3. Supports the creation of a Widnes and Runcorn Constituency containing the following Wards:

Appleton, Beechwood, Birchfield, Broadheath, Hale, Halton Castle, Farnworth, Grange, Halton Brook, Halton Lea, Halton View, Heath, Ditton, Hough Green, Kingsway, Mersey, Riverside and Windmill Hill.

This Constituency would fit the Commission's number criteria as it contains 79,654 electors.

4. Accepts the inclusion of Daresbury Norton North and Norton South in the Warrington South Constituency.

6.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

6.1 None.

7.0 OTHER/FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 None.

8.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

8.1 Children & Young People in Halton

None

8.2 Employment, Learning & Skills in Halton

None

8.3 A Healthy Halton

None

8.4 A Safer Halton

None

8.5 Halton's Urban Renewal

None

9.0 RISK ANALYSIS

9.1 There are no risks associated with the report.

10.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

10.1 There are no equality issues associated with this report.

11.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

Document	Place of Inspection	Contact Officer
Initial Proposals Paper	Boundary Commission for England	BCE's Website