



Meeting of the

GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE

Thursday, 13 October 2011 at 7.30 p.m.

SUPPLEMENTAL AGENDA

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5 .2 Local Government Boundary Review 2012		
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If you require any further information relating to this meeting, would like to request a large print, Braille or audio version of this document, or would like to discuss access arrangements or any other special requirements, please contact:

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Agenda Item 5.1

Committee General Purposes Committee	Date 13 October 2011	Classification Unrestricted	Report No.	Agenda Item No.
Report of: Assistant Chief Executive (Legal Services) Originating Officer(s): Isabella Freeman		Title: CABINET OFFICE – DATA MATCHING 2011 Ward(s) affected: All		

REASONS FOR LATENESS AND URGENCY: This report was not circulated with the Committee agenda as information required to complete the report was not available at that time. The report is nevertheless recommended for consideration at this meeting to ensure timely information to Councillors on the data matching pilot exercise.

SUMMARY

1. Tower Hamlets chose the whole borough to trial the data matching process.
2. Following receipt of the initial data set from DWP, where there were more than 500,000 records returned, we asked for a further match to take place with matching currency of the records to be reduced to 2 years (in line with the life of the Register). This resulted in a reduction of around 100,000 records.
3. The results of the further match with DWP were as follows:
 - 24,675 DWP records where the names on the DWP database match with a void ERO property. These matches were conducted by our software supplier, who came to our offices on two occasions to conduct additional matches for us. These records have all been loaded into our software system and we will monitor the responses throughout the canvass period. If, towards the end of October, we have not received a response from the property, we will write out to the named individual and ask them to confirm their residency. The letter will confirm we are conducting a pilot for the Cabinet Office and have received information from a Government database that does not match records held on our current Register.
 - 83,783 ERO records that have not been matched against the DWP database records. Again, we have loaded all of these records into our

software system and will monitor the response throughout the canvass period.

- 39,863 DWP records where we currently cannot match the names to an address in the borough. We will manually match as many of these records as possible before the start of the annual canvass and load the records into the software system. During the canvass period, we will carry on matching the addresses and load them periodically. However, if all else fails, we will take a sample of these records (% from each ward) and carry out additional manual checks throughout the canvass period.
4. Each year, we remove around 4,000 electors as a result of the 2 year non-responders. So again, there may be some people in this dataset who will be deleted naturally through these removals.

RECOMMENDATIONS

5. That the data matching pilot report is noted.

BACKGROUND

6. The canvass return rate in Tower Hamlets for the 2011 Register of Electors, published on 10 January 2011, was 84.4%, leaving nearly 16% of non-responding properties. Tower Hamlets has a high proportion of gated and private blocks (7%), which are difficult to canvass due to entry systems or concierge refusing entry. In addition to this, we have a significant amount of short term company lets where the residents are only in situ for a few weeks and therefore do not respond.
7. The annual canvass in Tower Hamlets is conducted in three main stages:
- Stage 1 – canvassers to knock and collect initial voter registration forms over a four week period, then hand deliver remaining forms
 - Stage 2 – canvassers to knock and collect reminder voter registration forms over a four week period, then hand deliver remaining forms
 - Stage 3 – Royal Mail to deliver final reminder voter registration forms, with a four week period to respond
8. Over the past five years using over 130 canvassers to make personal visits from the beginning of the annual canvass has resulted in an average of 40% properties responding to the canvassers visits at stage one and a further 25% responding to the canvassers visits at stage two. The remaining returns are from the telephone/Internet services used for no changes or via the post.
9. Annually we have an average of 50+% of properties where there are changes to registration details during the canvass period.

Preliminary results of data matching with DWP

- 10.
- 169,397 records provided by the ERO
 - 286,675 records received back from DWP
 - 106,860 confirmed matches (up to 55% match)
 - 139,952 additional data matches found by the ERO to addresses
 - 39,863 manual matches to perform with Council Tax records and previous registers of which, 2,700 (see table 1) were manually matched before the start of the canvass
11. Table 1: Preliminary Manual Data Matching Codes and Results as @ 12/8/2011
- 1 = Property and Elector match – 133 (4.93%)
 - 2 = Property Only match – 1,645 (60.93%)
 - 3 = Property Only match, but confirmed Elector Move by ERO – 188 (6.96%)
 - 4 = Property Not Identified – 62 (2.3%)
 - 5 = New Property Identified – 2 (0.07%)
 - 6 = Incorrect Postcode/Address – 85 (3.15%)
 - 7 = Confirmed Commercial Property – 6 (0.22%)
 - 8 = Foreign Nationals – 76 (2.81%)
 - 9 = Elector Search – found at another address – 1 (0.03%)
 - 10 = Property Identified, new elector found – 494 (18.3%)
 - 11 = Duplicate DWP entry – 8 (0.3%)

Identifying eligible and ineligible electors

11. At present the results do not show whether these are indeed accurate records. This will only become clear as the canvass progresses and additional matches are undertaken. During the initial manual match in table 1, we identified 494 new residents, who were sent a personalised Registration form to complete. To date, 55 forms (11%) have been completed and returned.
12. It is also clear that the data contains people who should not be followed up as a missing elector as a result of one of the following circumstances:
- Non-qualifying nationality. The DWP data does not provide nationality which is one of the criteria for registration.
 - Duplicate records held by the DWP. Due to the way data has been presented back, we are unable to establish the level of duplicate entries existing in the DWP data.
 - Confirmed Moves. With a high population churn, there are a number of properties with multiple electors who have been confirmed as moved by the new resident, or confirmed by council tax records.
 - Out of date records. Again, with a high population churn and migrant communities, a number of properties appear to have an unrealistic number of records for potentially missing electors on the DWP list. This could be potential fraudulent activity in the source data.

Issues with the data matching process

- 13.** The data was returned as multiple line entries for each matched property. Additionally the data was returned with duplications to allow property matches to occur which created additional confusion and an inability to identify genuine entries within both data sets.
- 14.** Due to the absence of the LLPG reference or a returned eXpress property reference from the DWP data match, the quality of the addresses incurred additional manual checks, which could have been avoided.
- 16.** Use of inconsistent abbreviations, WY, ST, AV, AVE, CL, in the DWP data created difficulties with property matches.
- 17.** The use of middle names, in full by DWP, but only initials by the ERO caused additional mismatches.
- 18.** Tower Hamlets is concerned about the transfer of data, which was sent via the GCSX network. The data was split into four files by the ERO and sent to DWP for matching. DWP returned a large amount of data in 21 separate files, which was rejected by the ERO due to the currency of the data.
- 19.** The data was matched again by DWP using a currency value of 2 years. The re-matched data was returned in 12 separate files. To receive the data from DWP, the authority was required to confirm via email that they were ready to receive the data. Once confirmed, DWP would release the first file. This email was stopped by the authorities firewall due to the data being password protected. The email had to be released by ICT. The authority was then required to confirm to DWP via a further email that the data had been received, before the next data file was released. This process had to be followed for all 12 DWP files and took a considerable time to complete.
- 20.** Identifying new residents from within the DWP data set does not allow the authority add the residents on register due to lack of additional information required – nationality, exclusion form the edited register etc. These residents can only be invited to register by sending them a registration form. This can be seen as an additional onerous task, with already stretched resources.
- 21.** In order to maximise use of the information, data matching should be performed during the rolling registration period, prior to the annual canvass. This will give the authority time to write out to individuals found during the data match.
- 22.** All new electors identified from the DWP data were checked as still current with our council tax records, prior to being sent a registration form. This exercise has identified the need to set up communication with our own internal departments, to alert us when a resident moves into or out of a property within the borough. We can then allow a period of 2-4 weeks to enable the resident to settle in, before writing out to each person, inviting them to register.

Move to Individual Electoral Registration

23. In 2014, it is currently envisaged that the annual canvass will continue, but will be a request for information – the household enquiry form. The ERO will be required to send an individual registration form to every eligible person on the household enquiry form, enabling them to register should they so choose.
24. The implications of this voluntary, not mandatory provision will almost certainly have an impact on registration levels within the borough. In Tower Hamlets, I would guesstimate this to be in the region of 20-25%.
25. With the introduction of IER in 2014, an opportunity arises to register ALL residents in the borough, thus creating a ‘complete’ register of electors. At the time of an election, those residents who are not eligible to vote can be identified in the database with a ‘classification mark’ and a separate register produced for election purposes.

COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER

26. There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

CONCURRENT REPORT OF THE ASSISTANT CHIEF EXECUTIVE (LEGAL)

27. There are no legal implications arising directly from this report.

IMPLICATIONS FOR ONE TOWER HAMLETS

28. There are no immediate implications for One Tower Hamlets arising from this report.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT, 2000 (SECTION 97)

LIST OF “BACKGROUND PAPERS” USED IN THE PREPARATION OF THIS REPORT

Brief description of “background paper”

Name and telephone number of holder and address where open to inspection

None

Louise Stamp
020 7364 3139

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Agenda Item 5.2

Committee	Date	Classification	Report No.	Agenda Item No.
General Purposes Committee	13 October 2011	Unrestricted		
Report of: Assistant Chief Executive (Legal Services)	Title: Local Government Boundary Commission for England – Electoral Review 2012			
Originating Officer(s): Isabella Freeman	Ward(s) affected: All			

REASONS FOR LATENESS AND URGENCY: This report was not circulated with the Committee agenda as information required to complete the report was not available at that time. The report is nevertheless recommended for consideration at this meeting as the next meeting of the General Purposes Committee is scheduled to take place after the commencement of consultation with Councillors on the proposed electoral review.

SUMMARY

1. The council was informed by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) in April 2011 that Tower Hamlets has been identified as potentially requiring an electoral review as the authority appears to meet the required criteria. The Review will commence in January 2012.
2. Through development and the natural move of people, some wards in Tower Hamlets have become much larger than others. There are six wards that have an electoral variance of more than 10% from the average as at the September 2011 figures (see appendix A). One ward, Millwall, has an electoral variance of nearly 36%.
3. In considering the electoral arrangements, the following criteria should be considered:
 - Total number of councillors (council size);
 - Boundaries of all wards for the purposes of the election of councillors;
 - Number of wards; and
 - Names of any ward
4. The LGBCE will take decisions on the basis of statutory criteria:
 - To deliver electoral equality for voters
 - To provide boundaries that reflect natural communities
 - To promote effective and convenient local government

RECOMMENDATIONS

5. This is a noting report. Representatives of the LGBCE will address Councillors prior to the next full Council meeting and the political groups on

the Council will then be consulted by the LGBCE and invited to submit proposals on ward patterns in November/December this year prior to the start of the Review in January 2012.

BACKGROUND

6. The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) is an independent body set up by Parliament in April 2010 by the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009.
7. The LGBCE are responsible for reviewing local authority electoral arrangements, administrative boundaries and structure.
8. Councils cannot change their own boundaries; the LGBCE are a facilitator of change in circumstances where councils believe such change is in the interests of the efficient and effective delivery of local government services to communities and individual residents.
9. Under the criteria adopted by the Commission, any local authority with a ward that has an electoral variance in excess of 10% of the average, will be considered for a review.

THE REVIEW PROCESS

10. The initial stage of the review is to determine a preferred council size. This is the number of councillors required to deliver effective and convenient local government (choosing the appropriate number of councillors to allow the council and individual councillors to perform effectively).
11. This will subsequently determine the average (optimum) number of electors per councillor to be achieved across all wards of the authority. This number is reached by dividing the electorate by the number of councillors on the authority,
12. Preliminary stage: 6-8 weeks (starts January 2012). Issues to be determined during this stage:
 - View taken on council size
 - Determination of review 'type'
13. Depending on outcomes of the preliminary stage. The LGBCE will then determine the type of review for Tower Hamlets:
 - A – No expectation of change in council type: Typical length: 26-30 week
 - B – Expectation that any change in council size will be small: Typical length: 42-50 weeks
 - C - Expectation that a change in council size could be substantial: Typical length: 52-62 weeks.
14. If the preliminary stage proposes significant change, there will be a further information gathering period (10 weeks) to:

Invite warding patterns from council, public, resident associations and everyone who takes an interest
Welcome proposals for whole borough or a certain area
LBGCE tours area

15. The LGBCE will publish draft recommendations and posters will be provided to the council to publicise the review. This will open a consultation on draft recommendations (10-12 weeks)
16. The LGBCE will publish the final recommendations, which will be implemented by order in the Houses of Parliament.

CALCULATING THE COUNCIL SIZE

17. Guidance issued by the LGBCE suggests that the following issues should be considered when developing a proposal for council size:
 - Managing the business of the council – the model of local governance used by the local authority impacts on the workload of councillors and the working practices of the council, and therefore will have an effect on the number of councillors needed by the council.
 - The functions of Scrutiny, regulatory committees, outside bodies and others – the structure and responsibilities of these functions impacts on the workload of councillors
 - Representation role: representing electors to the council and the council in the community – the role and responsibility of councillors

POPULATION AND ELECTORATE

18. The 2001 census population total for Tower Hamlets was 196,106. Population growth up to 2001, for the ten years since the 1991 census, represented the second largest percentage increase for this period of all the London boroughs at 17.9 per cent, or over 45,000 people.
19. The Tower Hamlets resident population at mid-2010 was 237,900 – this is the latest estimate from the Office for National Statistics.
20. Tower Hamlets has a high level of population turnover and churn. In 2009/10 the rate of change was 237 per 1000 population – 11th highest in England
21. GLA estimates for 2011 show that 47 per cent of the borough's population are from BME groups. This is high compared to the London average (34 per cent) and is the fifth highest in London, after Newham (70 per cent), Brent (58 per cent), Harrow (53 per cent) and Redbridge (49 per cent).
22. Within the borough's BME population, the largest ethnic group is the Bangladeshi population, who make up 30 per cent of all residents. Tower Hamlets has – by far – the largest Bangladeshi population in both London and England.

23. In addition to the impact of this volume of population on council business and council workload, the diversity of the population, its complex needs and levels of disadvantage within the community adds to the demands on councillors in neighbourhood working and case load.
24. The Tower Hamlets population is expected to grow significantly in the future. Projections from the GLA predict that the borough's population will rise from 254,200 (the current estimate for 2011) up to 326,100 by 2026. This would be a 28 per cent increase, more than double the rate of expected increase across London (11 per cent). If realised, it would make Tower Hamlets one of the fastest growing areas in the capital, alongside Greenwich.
25. The electorate in Tower Hamlets has increased from 132,996 in 2001 to 169,397 in 2011. Currently, each Councillor on average represents 3,322 residents.

CONSULTATION

26. All proposals on council size, whether for changing the existing or not, should be justified and evidence must be provided in support of the proposal

COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER

27. There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

CONCURRENT REPORT OF THE ASSISTANT CHIEF EXECUTIVE (LEGAL)

28. There are no legal implications arising directly from this report.

IMPLICATIONS FOR ONE TOWER HAMLETS

29. There are no immediate implications for One Tower Hamlets arising from this report.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT, 2000 (SECTION 97)

LIST OF "BACKGROUND PAPERS" USED IN THE PREPARATION OF THIS REPORT

Brief description of "background paper"

Name and telephone number of holder and address where open to inspection

Correspondence from LGBCE

Louise Stamp
020 7364 3139

Tower Hamlets

Constituency/Ward/Polling District breakdown
September 2011

Bethnal Green and Bow Constituency – average = 9,587

<u>Ward Name</u>	<u>Electorate</u>	<u>Polling Districts</u>
Bethnal Green North	9,545 - ok	BGN1, BGN2, BGN3, BGN4
Bethnal Green South	9,577 - ok	BGS1, BGS2, BGS3, BGS4
Bow East	10,543 - ok	BE1, BE2, BE3, BE4
Bow West	8,968 - ok	BW1, BW2, BW3, BW4
Mile End and Globetown	10,228 - ok	MGT1, MGT2, MGT3, MGT4
Spitalfields and Banglatown	7,217 - -2,370 (24.72%)	SPB1, SPB2, SPB3
St Dunstan's and Stepney Green	11,074 +1,487 (15.51%)	SDS1, SDS2, SDS3, SDS4
Weavers	8,833 - ok	WE1, WE2, WE3
Whitechapel	10,298 - ok	WH1, WH2, WH3, WH4
Constituency Electorate:	86,283	

Poplar & Limehouse Constituency – average = 10,389

<u>Ward Name</u>	<u>Electorate</u>	<u>Polling Districts</u>
Blackwall and Cubitt Town	11,845 – +1,456 (14.01%)	BCT1, BCT2, BCT3, BCT4, BCT5
Bromley-By-Bow	9,316 - -1,073 (10.33%)	BBB1, BBB2, BBB3
East India and Lansbury	9,621 - ok	EIL1, EIL2, EIL3, EIL4, EIL5
Limehouse	10,232 - ok	LI1, LI2, LI3, LI4
Mile End East	8,706 - -1,683 (16.20%)	MEE1, MEE2, MEE3, MEE4
Millwall	14,101 - +3,712 (35.73%)	MI1, MI2, MI3, MI4
Shadwell	10,016 - ok	SH1, SH2, SH3, SH4, SH5, SH6
St Katharine's and Wapping	9,277 - -1,112 (10.71%)	SK1, SK2, SK3, SK4
Constituency Electorate:	83,114	
TOTAL ELECTORATE:	169,397	

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Agenda Item 5.3

Committee	Date	Classification	Report No.	Agenda Item No.
General Purposes Committee	13 October 2011	Unrestricted		
Report of: Assistant Chief Executive (Legal Services)		Title: Boundary Commission for England – Parliamentary Constituency Boundary Review 2013		
Originating Officer(s): Isabella Freeman		Ward(s) affected: All		

REASONS FOR LATENESS AND URGENCY: This report was not circulated with the Committee agenda as information required to complete the report was not available at that time. The report is nevertheless recommended for consideration at this meeting as the consultation period on the Boundary Commission for England's proposals ends on 5th December 2011, before the next meeting of the General Purposes Committee.

SUMMARY

1. The four Parliamentary Boundary Commissions announced the commencement of the Sixth Periodical Review on 4 March 2011. The Boundary Commission for England (BCE) published initial recommendations on 13 September 2011. These initial recommendations are subject to consultation until 5th December 2011.
2. Under the method of allocating the number of seats for each constituent country of the UK the BCE announced that England would have 502 constituencies, a reduction of 31 from the current number. Within London, the BCE's proposals would leave four of the 73 current constituencies unchanged including the two constituencies in Tower Hamlets, which would be one of only two London boroughs where Parliamentary Constituencies remain coterminous with the borough boundaries. Appendix 'A' attached summarises the proposals in relation to London.
3. The Mayor's proposed response to the BCE's consultation is attached at Appendix 'B'. This is recommended for adoption as the Council's submission subject to consultation with the respective political group leaders.

RECOMMENDATIONS

4. That the UK Parliamentary Boundary proposals for Tower Hamlets be noted.
5. That the proposed submission from the Mayor, as set out at Appendix 'B', be circulated to the political group leaders on the Council and the Assistant Chief Executive (Legal Services) be authorised to agree the Council's response to the Boundary Commission for England in the light of any comments received.

BACKGROUND

6. The Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Act 2011 requires the total number of constituencies in the UK to be reduced from 650 to 600 and requires greater parity between the number of voters in each constituency. The Act states that each constituency must be within 5% of the UK Electoral Quota of 76,641 voters.
7. The four Parliamentary Boundary Commissions announced the commencement of the Sixth Periodical Review on 4 March 2011. The Boundary Commissions agreed, for the purposes of the Sixth Review, that the total UK electorate was 45,678,175 which gave an electoral quota for the whole of the UK of 76,641. This means that every constituency in Great Britain must have an electorate no smaller than 72,810 and no larger than 80,473.
8. The Boundary Commission for England (BCE) published its initial recommendations on 13 September 2011. The recommendations for England are based on the electoral regions for the European Parliament. Under the method of allocating the number of seats for each constituent country of the UK, England would have 502 constituencies, a reduction of 31 from the current number.
9. The BCE also stated that it would refer to local government boundaries as they existed at 6 May 2010 and would not generally take into account local government boundaries that took effect at the local elections in May 2011.
10. The boundaries of most constituencies in England will be altered in some way by the proposals although 77 constituencies are unchanged by the recommendations; some seats have been abolished and the area they covered has been split up into several new constituencies.
11. The proposed constituencies are all wholly contained within larger regional boundaries. Wards are the smallest unit used when creating constituencies and the Commission has been able to avoid splitting them when drawing up the new boundaries.
12. To remain consistent with this methodology and achieve constituencies within 5% of the electoral quota, some proposed constituencies cross local authority boundaries or geographical features such as rivers.
13. The BCE has stated that there are likely to be “very extensive and wide-ranging changes to be made to the existing pattern and composition of constituencies”.

Initial proposals for London

14. Four of the 73 current constituencies are unchanged; two in the London Borough of Barnet and two in the London borough of Tower Hamlets. London

region has been allocated 68 constituencies, a reduction of 5 seats (see Appendix A).

15. 38 of the new constituencies cross London borough boundaries, 37 of these contain parts of 2 London boroughs and one (the new City of London and Islington South constituency) contains parts of two London boroughs and the whole of the City of London.
16. There are only two London boroughs where Parliamentary Constituencies remain coterminous, London borough of Tower Hamlets and London borough of Bromley.

COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER

17. There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

CONCURRENT REPORT OF THE ASSISTANT CHIEF EXECUTIVE (LEGAL)

18. There are no legal implications arising directly from this report

IMPLICATIONS FOR ONE TOWER HAMLETS

19. There are no immediate implications for One Tower Hamlets arising from this report.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT, 2000 (SECTION 97)

LIST OF "BACKGROUND PAPERS" USED IN THE PREPARATION OF THIS REPORT

Brief description of "background paper"	Name and telephone number of holder and address where open to inspection
None	Louise Stamp 020 7364 3139

APPENDIX 'A'

BOUNDARY COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND INITIAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LONDON

Local Authority	Previous Constituencies	Total New Constituencies	Whole (contained within borough)	Part (adjoining other boroughs)	Lead (borough has responsibility)	Local Authorities (no. of LA's to cross-work with)
Barking & Dagenham	2	2	0	2	2	2
Barnet	3	3	2	1	3	1
Bexley	3	3	2	1	2	1
Brent	3 (1 part)	5	0	5	2	4
Bromley	3	3	3	0	3	0
Camden	2	4	0	4	2	4
City	1	1	0	1	0	1
Croydon	3	4	2	2	4	1
Ealing	3	5	1	4	2	4
Enfield	3	5	2	3	2	2
Greenwich	2	3	1	2	2	2
Hackney	2	2	1	1	2	1
H'mith & Fulham	2 (1 part)	3	0	3	2	3
Haringey	2	3	0	3	2	2
Harrow	2	3	0	3	2	1
Havering	3	3	2	1	2	1
Hillingdon	3	4	1	3	3	3
Hounslow	2	4	1	3	2	3
Islington	2	2	1	1	2	2
Kensington & Chelsea	2	3	0	3	0	2
Kingston	2	2	1	1	1	1
Lambeth	3	6	1	5	2	2
Lewisham	3	3	1	2	3	2
Merton	2	4	0	4	2	4
Newham	2	3	1	2	3	2
Redbridge	4 (2 part)	4	2	2	2	2
Richmond	2	2	1	1	2	1
Southwark	3	3	1	2	2	2
Sutton	2	3	0	3	1	2
Tower Hamlets	2	2	2	0	2	0
Waltham Forest	3	3	1	2	2	2
Wandsworth	3	4	0	4	4	2
Westminster	2 (1 part)	3	0	3	2	2

APPENDIX B

BOUNDARY COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND INITIAL RECOMMENDATIONS: MAYOR'S PROPOSED SUBMISSION

Dear Commissioners,

I write on behalf of the London Borough of Tower Hamlets with regard to your 2013 Review of Parliamentary constituency boundaries.

I would first like to place on record my thoughts on the wider review taking place in London and across the country.

I have to admit that I am not convinced by the initial premise behind this review, namely that it was desirable to reduce by 50 the number of representatives in Parliament. In an age in which we frequently bemoan how parliamentarians are too distant from their constituents, I cannot see how having fewer representatives to constituents can be helpful.

This exercise appears to be justified on the grounds of cost savings, which in my view sets a dangerous precedent. Matters as important as the democratic process – effectively altering our uncodified constitution – should be motivated solely by the desire improve upon the process.

Furthermore, I believe that the reduction by five in London constituencies will have a negative effect on representation. Given that London is home to the most diverse community in England, particularly with its large BME population, it appears likely that having fewer representatives for London will result in a Parliament that is less representative of modern Britain.

The proposed boundaries have been drawn up based on numbers of electors, not numbers of constituents – and so the much-cited principle of making representation more fair and equal neglects the fact that many constituents have not registered to vote. Given that statistically, non-registration is overrepresented in areas of poverty and deprivation, those most in need of political support will be underrepresented in Parliament.

These worries go hand in hand with the work my borough is doing around the Government's PREVENT initiative – aimed at tackling violent extremism in Britain. A major part of this is by encouraging engagement with the democratic process. It goes without saying that the groups this work focuses on are primarily BME communities and those in abject poverty. Anything that could be interpreted as moving these groups further away from the reach of democracy would be a major step backwards in this regard, and thoroughly detrimental to all that has been achieved in this sphere.

I now move onto your proposals for this locality. I strongly welcome your proposal to retain the two current parliamentary constituencies that cover our borough. You will be aware that our boundaries changed in the last realignment and I feel strongly that further alterations would jeopardise the relationship between our residents and their parliamentary representatives.

Tower Hamlets has a unique identity as a borough. Its boundaries encompass some of the largest groups of ethnic minority residents in London, as well as the economic powerhouse of Canary Wharf, the second most important financial centre in Europe. In addition, the borough has a rich cultural history as somewhere that has welcomed generations of immigrants, beginning with the French Huguenots in the seventeenth-century, followed by the Irish, the Jewish and most recently the Bangladeshi communities.

You may be aware that the borough has submitted a bid for city-status, as part of the competition recently announced, in which the Cabinet office will advise Her Majesty on which local authority is most deserving of this status which she will confer as part of the celebrations of her Diamond Jubilee next year.

Our bid is centred heavily on the borough's distinct identity. Any move that would break up the borough as such, grouping wards with those of neighbouring boroughs would seriously throw into doubt our definitive borders and undermine the integrity of Tower Hamlets Hamlets as a place, as a community. This in turn would run a significant risk of jeopardising our bid for city status. This would be a terrible blow.

When asked where they live, our residents, from Shoreditch to Milwall, and from Spitalfields to Bow will commonly reply 'Tower Hamlets'. Our communities identify strongly with their political representation. Any moves to disrupt these well-forged links would be notably detrimental to representation. It would take decades for local residents, many of whom are from very deprived backgrounds in which such an impressive level of political engagement is very rare, to accustom themselves once again to new structures of representation - and they do not identify with neighbouring Hackney or Newham, for example.

I do hope you will take this all into account when finalising your work.

Yours sincerely,

Lutfur Rahman
Mayor of Tower Hamlets