

Committee General Purposes Committee	Date 23 November 2011	Classification Unrestricted	Report No.	Agenda Item No.
Report of: Assistant Chief Executive (Legal Services)		Title: Parliamentary Constituency Boundary Review 2013: Council response		
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.

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 The Boundary Commission for England (BCE) on 13th September 2011 published initial recommendations for the review of Parliamentary Constituency boundaries to take effect in 2013. These initial recommendations are subject to consultation until 5th December 2011.
- 1.2 Under the proposals England will have 502 constituencies, a reduction of 31 from the current number. Within London, there would be a reduction of five seats and the BCE's proposals would leave just four of the 73 current constituencies unchanged, including the two constituencies in Tower Hamlets.
- 1.3. The General Purposes Committee on 13th October noted the initial recommendations of the BCE together with a draft submission in response to those recommendations by the Mayor. The Committee agreed that the proposed submission from the Mayor be circulated to the Political Group Leaders for comments and that the Committee meet again before the 5th December to agree the Council's submission to the BCE in the light of any comments received.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1. That the Committee agree the proposed response on behalf of the Council to the Boundary Commission for England's initial recommendations as set out at Appendix 'A'.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 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. This means that every constituency in Great Britain (except those covering the Isle of Wight) must have an electorate no smaller than 72,810 and no larger than 80,473.
- 3.2 The four Parliamentary Boundary Commissions announced the commencement of the Sixth Periodical Review on 4 March 2011. The Boundary Commission for England (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”. The BCE published initial recommendations on 13th September 2011. These initial recommendations are subject to consultation until 5th December 2011.
- 3.3 Under the proposals England will have 502 constituencies, a reduction of 31 from the current number. 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.
- 3.4 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. 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.
- 3.5 London as a whole has been allocated 68 constituencies, a reduction of 5 seats. the BCE’s proposals for London would leave just four of the 73 current constituencies unchanged including the two constituencies in Tower Hamlets, which would be one of only two London boroughs (the other is L B Bromley) where Parliamentary Constituencies remain coterminous with the borough boundaries. 38 of the new constituencies would cross London borough boundaries.
- 3.6 The BCE's initial proposals in respect of London can be viewed on the BCE website at:-
http://rr-bce-static.s3.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/2011_09_09_BCE_LondonIP_acc2.pdf?9d7bd4
- and a summary is available at:-
http://rr-bce-static.s3.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/BCE_LondonIPS_acc.pdf?9d7bd4

The table at Appendix ‘B’ summarises the distribution of the proposed new constituencies across the London boroughs.

- 3.7 The General Purposes Committee on 13th October noted the Commission's initial recommendations, together with the Mayor's draft response (attached at Appendix 'C'). The Committee agreed that the proposed submission from the Mayor would be circulated to the Political Group Leaders for comments and that the Committee would meet again before the 5th December 2011 to agree the Council's submission to the Boundary Commission for England in the light of any comments received.
- 3.8 In accordance with these decisions, the Political Group Leaders were invited to submit comments on the Mayor's proposed response by 18th November. The comments received are summarised below.

4. COMMENTS RECEIVED

- 4.1 In response to the above invitation, the political groups have commented as follows:-

Labour Group:- No comments were received by 18th November but the Leader of the Labour Group's subsequent comments have been reflected in the attached final draft of the Council's submission.

Conservative Group:- "Whilst we cannot agree with the opening of the Mayor's letter regarding the review, we fully support his submission that Tower Hamlets remain unpaired, returning two members for the borough in unchanged constituencies. We believe this proposal supports cohesion and stability.

As support, I should add that the commission is working to law as approved by Parliament and at hearings across the country commissioners are routinely dismissing objections to the reduction in size of Parliament as not relevant to the work that they are undertaking."

Respect Group:- No comments received at the time of printing

Liberal Democrat (Councillor Stephanie Eaton):- "I do not agree with some of the comments in the Mayor's letter, although I am pleased that there has been no change to the parliamentary constituency boundaries in LBTH."

- 4.2 No further comments have been submitted by other ungrouped Councillors.
- 4.3 In view of the above, the Council's proposed submission to the BCE consultation is set out at Appendix 'A' attached. The Committee is asked to agree this submission on behalf of the Council. Officers understand that the Mayor is likely also to submit his own response to the consultation on behalf of the Executive.

5. COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER

- 5.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

6. CONCURRENT REPORT OF THE ASSISTANT CHIEF EXECUTIVE (LEGAL)

6.1 There are no legal implications arising directly from this report

7. IMPLICATIONS FOR ONE TOWER HAMLETS

7.1 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

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BOUNDARY COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND INITIAL RECOMMENDATIONS:

L B TOWER HAMLETS: COUNCIL'S PROPOSED SUBMISSION

Dear Commissioners,

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

The Council notes that the criteria against which the Commission is required to undertake the Sixth Periodical Review do not require any changes to the Parliamentary constituency boundaries in Tower Hamlets and that the Commission's initial recommendations are for no change to both the Bethnal Green and Bow; and the Poplar and Limehouse constituencies.

The Council welcomes your proposal to retain the two current Parliamentary constituencies that cover our borough and to leave untouched the boundaries of these constituencies resulting in our borough being served, as at present, by two Members of Parliament whose constituencies are wholly contained within the borough.

We consider that this proposal supports consistency, cohesion and stability.

The Council is aware that the elected Mayor of Tower Hamlets has made his own submission to your consultation and that he is also strongly supportive of the proposal for no change.

I look forward to confirmation of your final recommendations in relation to the review.

Yours sincerely,

Aman Dalvi,
Interim Chief Executive

APPENDIX 'B'

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

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