

## APPENDIX 2

### Boundary Commission for England's (BCE's) consultation about the Constituency changes for the North East region

#### Policy Context

1. Response to Boundary Commission for England (BCE) consultation.

#### Background

1. There are four Boundary Commissions covering the UK with separate Commissions for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986 states that they must conduct a review of Parliamentary constituency boundaries, and make recommendations to Government, every five years. Under the current review, they must report in September 2018. The four Commissions work separately. This report covers only the work of the Boundary Commission for England and, in particular, introduces their revised proposals for the North East region.
2. Parliamentary boundaries are important, as they define the area in which voters will elect a Member of Parliament. If the recommendations are accepted, the new Constituencies would be used for the first time at the next General Election following their acceptance.
3. The legislation the BCE works to states that there will be 600 Parliamentary constituencies covering the UK – a reduction of 50 from the current number. For England, that means that the number of constituencies must reduce from 533 to 501. There are also new rules that the Commission has to adhere to when conducting the review – a full set of rules can be found in their Guide to the 2018 Review of Parliamentary constituencies ('the Guide'), which was published in the summer of 2016.
4. Most significantly, the rules state that every constituency the BCE recommends (with the exception of two covering the Isle of Wight) must contain between 71,031 and 78,507 electors; that is 5% either side of the electoral quota of 74,769. The legislation also states that when deciding on boundaries, the Commission may also take into account:
  - special geographical considerations, i.e the size, shape and accessibility of a constituency;
  - local government boundaries as they existed on 7 May 2015;
  - boundaries of existing constituencies;
  - any local ties that would be broken by changes in constituencies.

*But none of those factors could override the need to fall within 5% of the electoral quota*

5. The consultation process has had four parts:-

Initial proposals were published on 13 September 2016 and the consultation was open until 5 December 2016. The initial proposals split Gateshead into 6 Constituencies all of which crossed Local Authority boundaries as follows:

- **Gateshead BC** – Bridges, Chowdene, Deckham, Dunston & Teams, Felling, High Fell, Lobley Hill & Bensham, Low Fell, Pelaw & Heworth, Saltwell, Windy Nook & Whitehills
- **Blaydon BC** – Blaydon, Crawcrook & Greenside, Dunston Hill & Whickham East, Ryton Crookhill & Stella, Whickham North, Whickham South & Sunnyside
- **Jarrow BC** – Wardley & Leam Lane
- **North Durham and Chester Le Street CC** – Lamesley
- **Sunderland West BC** – Birtley
- **West Durham and Teesdale CC** – Chopwell & Rowlands Gill, Winlaton & High Spenn

6. The Council responded to this initial consultation saying that the proposals would result in:

- Fragmentation of Gateshead
- Voter dissatisfaction – loss of local identity
- Voter confusion
- Weakened links between MPs, Councillors and Councils
- Impact on electoral participation
- Administration (postal votes, transport, logistics)

7. Four alternative proposals were put forward by the Council:-

- Reclaiming Lamesley and Birtley wards into Gateshead constituency
- Reclaiming Wardley and Leam Lane ward into Gateshead constituency
- Reclaiming Winlaton and High Spenn ward into Blaydon constituency
- Moving Birtley from Sunderland West into North Durham and Chester Le Street constituency

8. These proposals fully met BCE principles and one complete constituency in Gateshead.

10. BCE received all the responses then published revised proposals on 17 October 2017 which were open for consultation until 11 December 2017.

## **Proposals**

11. The revised proposals split the North East Region into 2 sub regions

Northumberland – 3 constituencies

Tyne and Wear, County Durham, Darlington and Cleveland - 22 constituencies

12. A constituency that crosses the River Tyne cannot be avoided (numerical and geographical constraints). A re-created Tyne Bridge constituency was 'a notable geographical barrier separating two communities either side of it' – no alternative but to have a constituency that crosses the river at Blaydon.
13. Creation of a wholly coterminous Gateshead constituency – not suggested in representations but an appropriate solution and a consequence of resolving issues elsewhere in the region.
14. Enlargement of Jarrow constituency – to resolve issues in the region  
  
Blaydon constituency - shared with Newcastle and Durham  
Gateshead West constituency (coterminous)  
Jarrow constituency - shared with South Tyneside  
  
BCE stated that they would, therefore, require new and significantly stronger arguments to depart from their revised proposals.
15. The Council's response to the consultation is set out in the following paragraphs.
16. It is clear from the Assistant Commissioners' report in relation to the North East that their approach to the task of recommending revised proposals has aspired towards balance and transparency. There is, throughout their report, a significant emphasis placed on the representations that have informed the process and these are frequently cited as examples in support of the reasoning behind each instance of revision. Care has also been taken to reference counter proposals from interested parties that could not be accommodated or that the Assistant Commissioners did not consider to offer any improvement on the initial proposals.
17. Gateshead Council commends this approach. Furthermore, with 950 unique written and 50 oral representations to consider, the Council acknowledges the scale of the exercise. It goes without saying that the Assistant Commissioners could not conceivably accommodate every respondent's views of what the most desirable arrangements would be and there must have been many challenging decisions to make. That the Boundary Commission for England (the Commission) has accepted, and chooses to endorse in full, the recommendations made in this report shows that the Assistant Commissioners are regarded as having handled the exercise adequately.
18. The Assistant Commissioners acknowledge that of the representations received from interested parties, those proposing 'viable solutions in line with the rules' carried more weight than those simply disagreeing with the Commission's proposals without offering alternatives.
19. Although not a perfect solution, the revised proposals are a significant improvement for Gateshead and its voters, and that Gateshead no longer has any wards 'orphaned off' to make up the numbers elsewhere is welcomed. That does not mean, however, that the Council is in full agreement with the proposals.
20. At this stage Gateshead Council does not intend to offer alternative solutions to the proposed revised constituency boundaries and asks that the Commission does not

make any further changes to constituency boundaries that would negatively impact on the borough's current position.

21. We would instead ask the Commission to consider whether the proposed constituency names truly reflect the communities that make up the revised constituencies.
22. The proposed Blaydon constituency will include voters from Gateshead, Newcastle and Durham. We do not in this response intend to offer an alternative constituency name. We feel that this is a well-established constituency that is already recognised by Gateshead's voters. We are aware, however, that representations from Newcastle or Durham may be received that make alternative suggestions.
23. The proposed Gateshead West constituency will only include voters from Gateshead. This constituency will include voters from the current Gateshead and Blaydon constituencies. Gateshead West does not fully reflect the area of Gateshead that it represents. West Gateshead is essentially the part of the Borough that is in the proposed Blaydon constituency. The wards that make up the proposed Gateshead West constituency are predominately located in the central and south of the Borough and it is requested that the current name of Gateshead constituency be retained. Like the Blaydon constituency, it is well established and recognised by voters.
24. The proposed Jarrow constituency will contain 41% of Gateshead voters. These voters reside in the East of Gateshead and do not identify themselves with Jarrow. The constituency name of Jarrow does not reflect the Gateshead communities that make up the revised constituency and a proposed change of the constituency name to Gateshead East and Jarrow or Jarrow and Gateshead East is requested. This name change will allow the Gateshead voters in this constituency to identify with it and we note at the 2010 boundary review the Commission in its own proposals suggested a constituency name that included the names of both Gateshead East and Jarrow.

### **Consultation**

25. All elected members.

### **Alternative Options**

26. None

### **Implications of Recommended Option**

#### **27. Resources:**

- a) **Financial Implications** – There are no financial implications arising directly from this consultation.
- b) **Human Resources Implications** – There are no human resources implications.
- c) **Property Implications** - There are no property implications

28. **Risk Management Implication** - There are no risk management implications

29. **Equality and Diversity Implications** - There are no equality and diversity implications
30. **Crime and Disorder Implications** – There are no crime and disorder implications
31. **Health Implications** - There are no Health implications
32. **Sustainability Implications** - There are no sustainability implications
33. **Human Rights Implications** - There are no human rights implications
34. **Area and Ward Implications** - There are no ward implications