

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the
Parliamentary Constituency Boundaries Review Sub-Committee
held on Thursday, 10th November, 2011 at Committee Suite 3, Westfields,
Middlewich Road, Sandbach CW11 1HZ

PRESENT

Councillors W Livesley, D Marren, P Mason, G Morris, B Murphy and
D Newton

Officers

Lindsey Parton, Registration Service and Business Manager
Paul Mountford, Democratic Services Officer
Rose Hignett, Senior Elections Officer
Marion Hancock, Elections Officer

1 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED

That Councillor D Marren be appointed Chairman of the Sub-Committee.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No interests were declared.

3 PUBLIC SPEAKING TIME/OPEN SESSION

There were no members of the public present.

4 BOUNDARY COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND: PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY BOUNDARIES REVIEW

The Sub-Committee had been appointed by the Constitution Committee to consider in detail the Boundary Commission's proposed review of Parliamentary Constituency Boundaries.

The Boundary Commission for England (BCE) had launched a 12-week consultation on its initial proposals for new Parliamentary constituency boundaries in England. The review of constituency boundaries was being carried out after Parliament had decided that there should be a reduction in the number of constituencies across the UK, and that there should be similar numbers of electors in each constituency. The number of constituencies in England was being reduced from 533 to 502.

The Boundary Commission had to report formally to the Government by 1st October 2013 and make recommendations on changes which it believed to be appropriate: in respect of the distribution, size, shape, name or designation of constituencies. These recommendations would then be converted into draft legislation, which would be implemented in time for the next Parliamentary Election after the date on which the legislation was passed.

The legislation provided that the electorate figures to be used for the 2013 review were the figures published on or before 1st December 2010. Local government boundaries to be taken into account were defined as those which were in force as at 6th May 2010.

Legislation requires there to be 600 constituencies for the whole of the UK, of which 68 had been allocated to the North West. In the Boundary Commission's initial proposals the Wirral had been added to Cheshire to form a Cheshire and Wirral Sub -Region. Electors from Poynton had been included in the Greater Manchester Sub-Region, in a constituency for Poynton and Hazel Grove.

The legislation stipulated that every constituency must have an electorate range of between 72,810 and 80,473 electors.

Local authority wards were seen as the basic building blocks for designing constituencies. They were regarded as well-defined and well-understood units which were generally indicative of areas which had a broad community of interest. Any divisions of these units between constituencies was seen as being likely to break local ties, disrupt political party organisations and cause difficulties for Electoral Registration and Returning Officers. In the absence of compelling and exceptional circumstances, the Boundary Commission's view was that it would not be appropriate to divide wards where it was possible to construct constituencies that met the statutory electorate range without doing so. As Cheshire East Council had recently undergone a Boundary Review in 2011, eight out of the 52 new wards were split between two constituencies by the initial proposals for the North West, namely:

- Leighton
- Wilmslow West and Chorley
- Wilmslow East
- Poynton West and Adlington
- Poynton East and Pott Shrigley
- Gawsworth
- Brereton Rural
- Prestbury and Tytherington

At the request of the Constitution Committee, a briefing had been arranged for all members of the Council on 19th October 2011, following which all members were invited by email to submit their comments to the Sub-Committee for consideration in formulating the draft response.

Following informal discussions with members of the Sub-Committee, the Officers had prepared a draft response to the Boundary Commission's initial proposals which was circulated at the meeting. Submissions by Poynton Town Council and David Rutley MP were also circulated for Members' consideration.

It was proposed that the Council's response would be centred around the adverse impact on the 8 new Borough wards, which would be split between two constituencies. The draft response proposed that the 2011 wards should be used instead. In this respect, it was noted that Cheshire East was possibly unique among the newly-created unitary authorities in not having its current ward boundaries used for the Review. The response also objected strongly to the Boundary Commission's proposal for the former Poynton ward (comprising 11,080 electors) to be included in the Greater Manchester Sub-Region, in a Constituency for Hazel Grove and Poynton.

Members acknowledged that the Council's response would be strengthened if alternative proposals could be suggested, to ensure that the key criteria stipulated by the Boundary Commission (such as electorate range) could be met. Legal advice and discussions with the Boundary Commission had established that the Council could put forward a response which outlined the adverse impact that using the 2010 ward boundaries in Cheshire East would cause. The draft response therefore included an alternative proposal that sought to resolve the issue of splitting the 8 new Borough wards and which brought Poynton back into the Macclesfield constituency and Cheshire and Wirral Sub-Region.

Members asked for a number of amendments to be made to the draft response:

1. the Council's opposition to the splitting of wards should be reiterated towards the end of the submission;
2. the submission should emphasise that if the old wards are used for the Review, those wards will not have been reviewed since 2001;
3. as with Tatton, the traditional constituency name of Eddisbury should be retained as it better reflected the identify of the area.

Members noted that the Cabinet had proposed the inclusion in the response of a fallback position in the event that the Boundary Commission was not prepared to agree to use the 2011 ward boundaries. The purpose of the fallback position would be to retain the former Poynton ward within the Macclesfield constituency by adjusting the ward composition of the Macclesfield and adjoining constituencies. However, there was a view among members of the Sub-Committee that the inclusion of a fallback position within the response to the Boundary Commission's initial proposals would make it less likely that the Boundary Commission would consider seriously the Council's principal substantive objections and counter-proposals by presenting the Commission with an easier option which would not be the Council's first preference. It was agreed that Councillor P Mason would take these comments back to the Cabinet for consideration; the Officers were asked to liaise with Councillor Mason accordingly. If Cabinet were still of the view that a

fallback position should still be included in the Council's response, a form of wording would be prepared for consideration by the Constitution Committee. The final decision would rest with that Committee.

The Officers advised that the Boundary Commission would have to publish any revised proposals for public consultation.

RESOLVED

That

- (1) subject to (2) below, the draft response to the Boundary Commission's proposals be approved for submission to the Constitution Committee subject to the specific amendments agreed by the Sub-Committee;
- (2) Cabinet be asked to reconsider its view that a fallback position should be included in the response, and the Officers liaise with Councillor Mason accordingly;
- (3) if necessary, a form of wording for the fallback position be drafted for consideration by the Constitution Committee.

The meeting commenced at 2.00 pm and concluded at 2.35 pm

Councillor D Marren (Chairman)