

Meeting: COUNCIL

Agenda Item:

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Date: 5 DECEMBER 2012

PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY BOUNDARY CHANGES

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1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To advise the Council on the Boundary Commission's consultation on revised proposals for new boundaries for the Stevenage Parliamentary Constituency

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That the report be noted
- 2.2 That the Chief Executive responds to the consultation issued by the Boundary Commission for England ('the Commission') as set out in 4.4 below.

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Act 2011 provided that the number of parliamentary constituencies in the UK will be reduced to 600. In England this means a reduction of 31 seats to 502 and for the Eastern Region, which includes Stevenage, a reduction of 2 seats. These changes should be in place for the next election assuming that it takes place in May 2015.
- 3.2 In addition the rules also require that every constituency must have an electorate which is no smaller than 72,810 and no larger than 80,473.
- 3.3 These proposals will result in radical changes to the parliamentary boundaries throughout Hertfordshire and an expansion of the Stevenage Constituency.
- 3.4 In September 2011 the Commission published its initial proposals for consultation.
- 3.5 In March 2012 the responses to this consultation were published and in October this year the Commission published its revised proposals and there is a statutory period for responses to be submitted which ends on 10 December.

4 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED COURSE OF ACTION AND OTHER OPTIONS

- 4.1 The present parliamentary constituency for Stevenage has an electorate of less than 68,000 and therefore must be increased under the new law.
- 4.2 The Commission's initial proposals added the wards of Walkern and Chesfield but the recent revised proposals also include Mundens and Cottered (from Letchworth) and Watton-at-Stone (from Welwyn Hatfield). Together these changes would result in an electorate for the Stevenage constituency of 80,273. (The plan showing the new proposals is attached at Appendix A)
- 4.3 In proposing new boundaries the Commission is permitted to take into account 4 factors (in addition to the size of the electorate). These are:
- Special geographical considerations, including the size, shape and accessibility of a constituency
 - Local government boundaries
 - Existing constituency boundaries
 - Local ties that would be broken
- 4.4 The size and shape of parliamentary constituencies are largely outside the concerns of local authorities however, I am inclined to draw the Commission's attention to following points:
- 4.4.1 Stevenage Borough Council has long standing plans for an expansion of house building both within and on the borders of its boundaries to meet the recognised acute shortage of housing in the general area. I expect these plans to be realised at least in part over the next decade. The revised proposals would produce an electorate only 200 below the upper statutory limit and if adopted would probably mean that the upper limit on the size of the electorate would be exceeded in the next election after 2015.
- 4.4.2 The road and other transport links and therefore accessibility between Stevenage and in particular Mundens and Cottered are poor. Their road links tend to be with Hertford and Royston rather than Stevenage.

5.1 IMPLICATIONS

None

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Boundary Commission Eastern Region - Revised proposals October 2012

APPENDICES

Appendix A - Boundary Commission Revised Proposals Stevenage CC Map