

MINUTES OF THE DECISIONS OF THE COMMISSION ON THE INITIAL PROPOSALS FOR THE SOUTH EAST REGION

Session 1: Thursday 9 June 2016

Present:

David Elvin QC, Commissioner
Neil Pringle, Commissioner
Sam Hartley, Secretary to the Commission
Tony Bellringer, Deputy Secretary to the Commission
Tim Bowden, Head of Reviews
Roger Winter, Review Manager

Mr Winter presented the schemes for the South East region that had been prepared by the Secretariat.

Summary

The Commissioners agreed to take the preferred scheme for most of the South East, with a small modification to Oxfordshire, and the alternative scheme for the East Sussex, Brighton and Hove, Kent, and Medway sub-region as the initial proposal. The patterns of constituencies outlined by the Secretariat had resulted in few constituencies that crossed county boundaries. Of the nine counties in this region, the Secretariat had only created the sub-region outlined above, otherwise constituencies were contained within county boundaries.

Berkshire

Berkshire is entitled to 7.86 constituencies, unchanged from its current allocation of eight constituencies. The Commissioners agreed that Berkshire could be considered as a sub-region in its own right. The Secretariat detailed that very little reconfiguring is required, with just one or two wards being moved between constituencies across the sub-region to bring all the constituencies within the electoral quota. The only change to Bracknell is to re-designate it as a Borough Constituency. Maidenhead CC is unchanged. Newbury CC is too large at 78,963 electors to be a constituency, so one ward (Aldermaston) is transferred to Wokingham CC.

Reading West takes Mapledurham Ward from Reading East to bring it within electoral quota, and is re-designated a Borough Constituency. As a consequence, Reading East BC takes one ward from Wokingham CC to bring both within the electoral quota.

Windsor CC is too small with 68,834 electors to form a constituency and therefore requires electors from neighbouring boroughs. To bring Windsor CC within the electoral quota, Chalvey Ward moves from Slough BC. The Commissioners noted that, although not required to bring Slough BC within electoral quota, no other ward can be moved without splitting Slough BC in part or the requirement of more extensive re-configuration of constituencies across the county. The Commissioners noted that the only other possible alternative would have been to include wards from Buckinghamshire County in the Windsor constituency.

Commissioners did not consider the crossing of the county boundary in this instance was required.

Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes

Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes is entitled to 7.18 constituencies, unchanged from the current allocation of seven constituencies. The Commissioners agreed that Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes could be considered as a sub-region.

The Secretariat proposed an Aylesbury CC which has been substantially reconfigured, taking the six wards in the eastern limb of the county from Buckingham CC and moving two wards to Chesham and Amersham CC, and two to Wycombe CC. The Secretariat proposed a Beaconsfield CC, which is unchanged. Buckingham CC takes the remainder of the north of the county, plus two wards from Milton Keynes to allow the two Milton Keynes constituencies to fit the electoral quota.

Milton Keynes has been reconfigured on a North East/South West axis. The reconfigured constituencies are Milton Keynes Bletchley BC and Milton Keynes Newport Pagnell CC. Commissioners agreed that the options for configuring constituencies in the Milton Keynes area were limited given the size of electorates in the wards and its geographic location in the region.

East Sussex, and Brighton and Hove; and Kent and Medway

East Sussex and Brighton and Hove has an entitlement to 7.57 constituencies. Kent and Medway has an entitlement of 16.41. It is not possible to formulate a pattern of constituencies that are contained wholly within East Sussex and Brighton and Hove. Therefore, Commissioners agreed to consider it as a sub region with Kent and Medway with an entitlement of 23.99, a reduction of one.

The south coast towns within this sub region have been reconfigured as a continuous urban strip from Hove to Seaford as Hove BC, Brighton North BC and Brighton East and Newhaven BC. This strip continues westwards and is described in the West Sussex sub region.

Bexhill and Battle CC has been redrawn to allow for the cross-county High Weald CC. This constituency combines wards from the districts of Wealden and Rother. Eastbourne BC has been slightly reconfigured due to changes to local government wards in Wealden District Council.

The Hastings and Rye CC is unchanged. The existing Lewes CC is too small and requires wards from neighbouring constituencies to bring it within the electoral quota. It therefore includes wards from the existing Wealden CC to create a Lewes and Uckfield CC. The rest of Wealden CC becomes part of the cross-county High Weald CC.

Tunbridge Wells CC gives some eastern wards to High Weald CC and gains Tonbridge and Malling CC wards to ensure it is within the electoral quota. Commissioners noted that this pattern of constituencies resulted in a constituency that was largely centred on Tunbridge Wells.

To bring it within the electoral quota, Sevenoaks CC also gains wards from Tonbridge and Malling CC. The existing Tonbridge and Malling CC is further changed by the inclusion of the four Mallings wards in the Chatham and The Mallings CC. That leaves Tonbridge with too few electors, so it now extends eastwards as Tonbridge and the Weald CC.

In northern Kent, Commissioners noted that small changes were required to ensure all constituencies were within the electoral quota. Firstly, Commissioners agreed that Dartford CC transfers one ward to Gravesham CC, which also gains one ward from Sevenoaks CC in exchange for transferring one ward to Rochester and Strood CC.

Commissioners also noted that the existing Gillingham and Rainham BC is too small and requires one ward from what was Chatham and Aylesford CC to bring it within the electoral quota. Under the pattern agreed by Commissioners Sittingbourne and Sheppey CC is unchanged.

Commissioners noted that the existing Ashford CC is substantially above the electoral quota so loses several wards to High Weald CC, but gains one from the too large Folkestone and Hythe CC in order to bring both within the electoral quota.

Having lost most of mid Kent to other constituencies, Faversham is now included in a constituency with Canterbury to create a Canterbury and Faversham CC. Resulting from these changes, Commissioners noted that Dover CC is reconfigured to accommodate the changes to Canterbury and Faversham CC, and East Thanet BC. East Thanet CC is created from most of South Thanet CC, taking four wards from North Thanet CC, which is also reconfigured, to create a North Kent Coastal CC.

Hampshire, Portsmouth and Southampton

Hampshire, Portsmouth and Southampton has an entitlement of 17 constituencies, a loss of one from the current allocation. The Commissioners agreed that it could be considered as a sub-region.

The constituency configuration presented by the Secretariat resulted in Basingstoke BC, Eastleigh BC and Gosport BC being unchanged. Commissioners noted that the existing New Forest West CC is too small, so requires one ward from New Forest East CC to bring it within electoral quota. Consequently, this requires the New Forest East CC to take wards from Romsey and Southampton North CC, which is substantially reconfigured to become Test Valley CC.

This effect flows across the north and centre of Hampshire, moving North West Hampshire CC further east and Winchester CC east and south into what was Meon Valley CC. The Secretariat outlined that a Meon Valley CC would not remain under the proposed constituency configuration.

Commissioners noted that Southampton could be built as two constituencies wholly within the unitary authority boundary by moving Bevois Ward from Southampton, Test BC to Southampton, Itchen BC and the wards of Bassett and Swaythling from Romsey and Southampton North CC to Southampton Test BC.

Commissioners noted that the existing Aldershot BC has too few electors, and has also been partly changed following modifications to local government ward boundaries. To avoid splitting Yateley, two wards are moved to North East Hampshire CC in exchange for the two wards forming Church Crookham. These changes result in the Aldershot BC meeting the electoral quota.

To bring it within the electoral quota the North East Hampshire CC takes the Alton wards from East Hampshire CC. This then results in the expansion of the East Hampshire CC in the south to bring it within the electoral quota. Commissioners noted that Fareham gains one ward from Meon Valley CC, and is re-designated a Borough Constituency.

Commissioners noted that Portsmouth has too many electors for two seats. Portsmouth South BC gains Nelson Ward from Portsmouth North BC which, as a consequence, gains two wards from Havant BC. The Commissioners noted that an alternative configuration, substituting Baffins Ward for Nelson Ward, would also create numerically acceptable constituencies, and they would welcome the views of the public during the consultation period as to which would be preferred.

Commissioners noted that Havant BC takes three wards from what was Meon Valley CC to balance the two lost to Portsmouth North BC.

Isle of Wight

Commissioners noted that the Isle of Wight is an exception to the electoral quota, requiring two constituencies regardless of their electorate but with no requirement to achieve an electoral quota for the island.

Nevertheless the Secretariat proposed constituencies of Isle of Wight East CC and Isle of Wight West CC which are both within 5% of the average constituency size for the island in terms of electors and to offer a consistency of approach to that imposed statutorily for the remainder of England. The two constituencies both contain a balance of urban, rural and tourist features.

Oxfordshire

Oxfordshire has an entitlement of 6.17 constituencies, unchanged from the current allocation of six constituencies. The Commissioners agreed that it could be considered as a sub-region.

Under the Secretariat's proposal, the constituency of Witney CC is unchanged. Commissioners noted that the Banbury and Bicester CC is too large, so transfers three wards to Henley and Thame CC. Commissioners also noted that Wantage CC has been partly reconfigured due to changes to local government wards and also transfers Wallingford Ward to Henley and Thame CC.

Commissioners noted that the existing Oxford East BC has too few electors to meet the electoral quota and requires two wards being transferred to from Oxford West and Abingdon CC. Consequently, this change requires three wards from Henley and Thame CC to be transferred to Oxford West and Abingdon. The Commissioners considered the different approaches to the configuration of constituencies in the Oxford area. Commissioners agreed

to include the two wards of St. Margaret's and North in the Oxford East BC and the two wards of Garsington & Horspath and Wheatley in the Henley and Thame CC.

Surrey

Surrey has an entitlement of 10.92 constituencies, unchanged from the current allocation of 11 constituencies. The Commissioners agreed that it could be considered as a sub-region. The Secretariat outlined that little reconfiguring is required between the existing constituencies to bring them within the electoral quota.

Commissioners noted that Guildford BC, South West Surrey CC, East Surrey CC, Reigate BC and Epsom and Ewell BC are unchanged.

Commissioners noted that Spelthorne BC has too few electors and has to be reconfigured to bring it in the electoral quota. The Commissioners agreed that the Chertsey St Anne's ward should be included in this constituency rather than the constituency of Runnymede and Weybridge CC. The Commissioners noted that choosing which ward to include in the Spelthorne BC was made difficult by the usable crossings of the River Thames and the potential disruption to other constituencies.

Consequently, this change results in the Runnymede and Weybridge CC being too small to meet the electoral quota and requires wards from neighbouring constituencies. The Commissioners agreed that this constituency should include the Byfleet Ward from Woking CC. This does split Byfleet from West Byfleet, but the Commissioners noted that they are already physically divided by the M25.

In order to balance the electoral quota in Woking CC, Commissioners agreed to include the wards of Bisley and Send. Finally, Commissioners agreed to the transfer of Oxshott and Stoke D'abernon from Esher and Walton BC to Mole Valley CC to bring them both within the electoral quota.

West Sussex

West Sussex has an entitlement of 8.01 constituencies, unchanged from the current allocation of eight constituencies. The Commissioners agreed that it could be considered as a sub-region. The Secretariat outlined that very little reconfiguring is required of the existing constituencies to bring them within the electoral quota.

Commissioners noted that the existing Crawley BC has too few electors, to balance this they agreed to transfer Copthorne and Worth ward to it from Horsham CC.

Commissioners also noted that the existing Mid Sussex CC has too many electors, so Bolney Ward is transferred to Arundel and South Downs CC.

To the south of the county, Commissioners noted that Chichester CC has too many electors, so Plaistow ward is transferred to Arundel and South Downs CC. This results in the Arundel and South Downs having too many electors to meet the electoral quota, so Barnham ward is moved into Bognor Regis and Littlehampton CC. The Commissioners noted that this change ensured both the Arundel and South Downs CC and Bognor Regis and Littlehampton CC met the electoral quota.

Commissioners also noted Worthing West BC is slightly reconfigured due to changes to local government wards and East Worthing and Shoreham is re-designated a Borough Constituency but otherwise is unchanged.

Session 2: - Monday 13 June 2016

Present:

The Hon Mrs Justice Patterson, Deputy Chair of the Commission
Neil Pringle, Commissioner
Sam Hartley, Secretary to the Commission
Tony Bellringer, Deputy Secretary to the Commission
Tim Bowden, Head of Reviews

Mr Pringle presented the Commissioners' agreed conclusions from Session 1. In Berkshire, the Secretariat outlined that the proposed constituencies required minimal change to bring them within electoral quota. Mr Pringle outlined the suggestion of Chalvey Ward being included from Slough BC into the Windsor CC. The Secretariat detailed that other potential constituency configurations would divide Slough.

The Secretariat outlined the proposals for Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes, particularly highlighting the small number of constituency configurations in the Milton Keynes area due to its geographic location in the region and the size of the wards.

Mr Pringle detailed that East Sussex, Brighton and Hove, had been combined to form a sub-region with Kent and Medway. The Secretariat outlined the proposed crossing of the counties by the High Weald CC. The Secretariat also detailed that this sub-region provided for clearer constituencies in Ashford and Tunbridge Wells.

In Hampshire, Portsmouth and Southampton, Mr Pringle explained that more substantial change is required due to the reduction of one to its entitlement. Mr Pringle explained that the proposals for Portsmouth would be aired in the published report as either of the Baffins or Nelson wards could be transferred between the constituencies of Portsmouth North and Portsmouth South.

The Secretariat outlined the proposals for the Isle of Wight, explaining that although exempt from the electoral quota for England, the two proposed constituencies were within 5% of the average number of electors for each constituency on the island.

In Surrey and West Sussex, the Secretariat detailed that little change was required to the existing constituencies to bring them all within the electoral quota. The Secretariat detailed that in most cases only one ward was being transferred between constituencies.

In Oxfordshire, Mr Pringle explained the different configurations of constituencies in the Oxford area and the reasons to include St. Margaret's and North wards in the Oxford East constituency rather than in the Oxford West constituency.

It was agreed that the Commission's initial proposals would be as agreed during session 1.