

MINUTES OF THE DECISIONS OF THE COMMISSION ON THE INITIAL PROPOSALS FOR THE NORTH 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
Donna Smith, Review Manager

Mrs Smith presented the schemes for the North East Region that had been prepared by the Secretariat.

North East Region

The Secretariat explained that the North East Region had been considered as a whole and had not sought to create sub-regions. The region consists of the unitary authorities of Northumberland and County Durham, five boroughs in the former Metropolitan County of Tyne and Wear, and the five unitary authorities in the Tees Valley. Currently the region has 29 existing constituencies; Commissioners noted that as part of this review the region has been allocated 25; a reduction of four.

The Secretariat explained that four of the existing constituencies met the electoral quota: North Tyneside (76,427), Stockton South (73,221), Sunderland Central (71,232) and Tynemouth (74,618). The Secretariat also noted that though the electorates are low in the remaining constituencies we have been able to create constituencies that do not cross the River Tyne to the east of St James Boulevard where there is little accessible crossing.

Starting in the south of the region the Secretariat outlined that Middlesbrough is currently divided between two constituencies and that in its proposal it would be divided between three constituencies. Commissioners agreed that the wards in Middlesbrough Borough that encompassed the Nunthorpe area should be included in a constituency with the towns of Guisborough and Skelton. Commissioners noted that this constituency ran from Middlesbrough to the coast but accepted that other alternative configurations of constituencies could not be proposed that met the electoral quota. Commissioners suggested this constituency should be called Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland. Similarly, Commissioners agreed to include the northern wards of Middlesbrough Borough in a constituency with the Redcar area. Again, Commissioners observed that this constituency covered parts of Middlesbrough with the coastal area to east but accepted that other configurations would not meet the electoral quota. Commissioners suggested this constituency should be named Middlesbrough North East and Redcar.

Currently no wards of Middlesbrough Borough are included in a constituency with parts of Stockton-on-Tees. The Secretariat outlined that in formulating a pattern of constituencies within the electoral quota it was necessary to include parts of Stockton in a constituency with parts of Middlesbrough. Commissioners agreed to include the western wards of Middlesbrough Borough in a constituency with the Thornaby-on-Tees area. Commissioners noted that this would result in Stockton being divided between constituencies including Stockton railway station. However, Commissioners agreed that alternative configurations would not better reflect the statutory criteria. Commissioners agreed that this constituency would be called Middlesbrough West.

The Secretariat explained that the majority of Stockton, including the central part of the borough could be included in a Stockton constituency. Currently, the centre of Stockton is divided between constituencies with parts of it being included in a constituency with Billingham. Commissioners agreed a Stockton constituency that was centred on the town and that Billingham should be included in a constituency with Hartlepool. To the west of Stockton, Commissioners noted that it was possible to create a Darlington constituency that was completely coterminous with the boundaries of Darlington Borough Council. Commissioners observed that the current Darlington constituency did not incorporate the entirety of the borough.

To the north of Darlington, the Secretariat proposed a Sedgefield constituency that incorporated the areas of Newton Aycliffe in the west, Sedgefield in the centre and parts of Hartlepool in the east. Commissioners observed that this constituency ran from the coast in the east to the town of Newton Aycliffe in the west.

To the west of the Sedgefield constituency, the Secretariat proposed a Bishop Auckland constituency that included Bishop Auckland and Spennymoor in the east and ran to Barnard Castle in the west. To the north west of Sedgefield the Secretariat outlined a City of Durham constituency that was based on the centre of Durham and Tow Law. To the north east of Sedgefield the Secretariat outlined an Easington and Houghton constituency that included the areas of Houghton-le-Spring, Easington and Peterlee.

Commissioners were concerned about the configurations of the Sedgefield constituency, particularly that it ran from the coast in the east to the town of Newton Aycliffe in the west. Commissioners were also concerned that it included towns with different characteristics, which may associate themselves more with other neighbouring constituencies.

Commissioners firstly investigated what modifications could be made to the Sedgefield, Bishop Auckland, City of Durham and Easington and Houghton constituencies to improve the pattern of constituencies. Commissioners investigated whether the Sedgefield constituency could not run to the coast in the east and whether it could include wards from the City of Durham constituency in the north and wards from the Bishop Auckland constituency to the west. Having examined the transferring of different wards in and out of the Sedgefield constituency, Commissioners accepted that a Sedgefield constituency had to be run from the coast to Newton Aycliffe in order to ensure that it and neighbouring constituencies met the electoral quota. Commissioners also noted that any other alternatives in this area that may result in better constituency configurations of Sedgefield would require consequential changes to the Stockton, Hartlepool and Darlington constituencies.

Commissioners considered these constituencies were clear and that significant modifications of these constituencies would not better reflect the statutory criteria.

Commissioners were concerned that the Secretariats suggested Sedgefield constituency did divide the town of Peterlee. Commissioners investigated alternatives and agreed that the wards of Peterlee West and Parsfield should be included in the Easington and Houghton constituency. In order to ensure neighbouring constituencies met the electoral quota, Commissioners agreed that Hatton ward should be included in the City of Durham constituency and Coxhoe ward should be included in the Sedgefield constituency. Finally, Commissioners also agreed that the proposed name for the existing Sedgefield constituency should be changed to East Durham as this name better reflected the geographical area covered by the constituency. Commissioners also considered that the suggested constituency name of Bishop Auckland should be West Durham and Teesdale in order to better reflect the geographical area covered by the constituency.

In Sunderland, Commissioners noted that the existing Sunderland Central constituency could be retained. However, the remaining constituencies covering Sunderland required modifications in order to meet the electoral quota. Commissioners agreed that the areas of Washington, Peshaw, Pennywell and Silksworth areas should be incorporated in a Sunderland West constituency.

To the north of Sunderland, Commissioners agreed to a Jarrow constituency that included the areas of Jarrow, Hebburn and Castletown. To east of the Jarrow constituency, Commissioners agreed to a South Shields constituency, which was similar to the existing but had been expanded south to include the areas of East and West Boldon. Commissioners accepted that the South Shields constituency needed to be larger in order to meet the electoral quota.

The Secretariat had proposed a Gateshead constituency that was similar to the existing but had been expanded to include the wards of Pelaw and Heworth and Washington West. Commissioners investigated whether the Washington West ward could be included in a neighbouring constituency but noted that the size of electorates in the ward provided for little alternative configuration. Commissioners therefore agreed to include both wards, detailed above, in the Gateshead constituency.

At present, Commissioners noted that the Newcastle upon Tyne area was divided by three constituencies and that under the Secretariat's proposals it would be divided between two constituencies - Newcastle upon Tyne East and Newcastle upon Tyne North West. Commissioners agreed that these two constituencies met the electoral quota and should be included in the initial proposals.

To the north east of Newcastle, Commissioners noted that the existing constituencies of North Tyneside and Tynemouth could be retained, as they were both within the electoral quota.

In Northumberland the Commissioners noted that the Hexham constituency had been extended to include four wards and the town of Morpeth from the existing Wansbeck constituency and three wards from the existing Berwick upon Tweed constituency. The Commissioners also noted that it had been necessary to include eight wards and the town of

Ashington from the existing Wansbeck constituency to the existing Berwick upon Tweed constituency extending it further along the coast. The Commissioners recognised the difficulties created in dividing areas that would generally have looked south. The Commissioners considered a move of these eight wards and the town of Ashington to the proposed constituency of Blythe Valley. However, this would have caused considerable disruption to meeting the electoral quota in the adjacent existing constituencies of North Tyneside and Tynemouth. Commissioners agreed that the names of these constituencies should be changed to reflect the new constituencies. Commissioners agreed the names of Hexham and Morpeth, and Berwick and Ashington, respectively.

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. He outlined that the region had been taken as a whole and that it was not proposed to be divided into sub-regions.

Starting in the south of the region it was outlined that parts of Middlesbrough needed to be included in constituencies with Redcar and Stockton to ensure that all proposed constituencies were within the electoral quota. Moving slightly north the proposals for a constituency coterminous with the boundaries of Darlington Borough Council and one centred on Hartlepool were explained.

Moving to the Durham area, Mr Pringle outlined the different constituency configurations in this area and why those that included the wards of Peterlee West and Passfield wards in the Easington and Houghton constituency provided for clearer boundaries.

Moving north towards the Sunderland and Newcastle areas, the Secretariat explained the proposed constituencies in this area, highlighting those that had been retained and that the Jarrow wards were included within one constituency.

In the Northumberland area it was explained that the proposed constituencies were geographically large and that this was unavoidable in having constituencies that met the required electoral quotas.

The Deputy Chair agreed that the Commission's initial proposals would be as agreed during session 1.