

MINUTES OF THE DECISIONS OF THE COMMISSION ON THE INITIAL PROPOSALS FOR THE WEST MIDLANDS REGION

Session 1: Wednesday 8 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
Gerald Tessier, Review Manager
Rashid Burki, Review Officer

Mr Tessier and Mr Burki presented the schemes for the West Midlands region that had been prepared by the Secretariat.

West Midlands Region

Mr Tessier and Mr Burki presented the schemes for the West Midlands region that had been prepared by the Secretariat. They outlined the challenges that the region presented the Secretariat in the creation of viable schemes. The Commissioners noted that, whilst it should be mathematically possible to create viable sub-regions based on the counties, with only limited cross-county boundary constituencies, in practice the electoral size of the wards, in Birmingham and Dudley in particular, makes this a very hard task. Of the three schemes presented, the Commissioners noted that two were based on whole wards, and the third contained seven wards that were split between constituencies.

After consideration, the Commissioners agreed that the first scheme, which resulted in only four cross-county constituencies, was to be preferred as a basis for the proposals. Commissioners were of the view that the eight cross-county constituencies that resulted from the second scheme did not strike the best balance of the statutory factors, notwithstanding the arguable improvements to constituencies in Birmingham and Warwickshire.

Staffordshire

Staffordshire, including the unitary authority of Stoke-on-Trent, is entitled to 10.90 constituencies. The Commissioners noted that the allocation of 11 constituencies would result in a reduction of one constituency. They also noted that two of the presented schemes were identical and both were able to keep Staffordshire as a sub-region on its own, but that the other scheme created constituencies that crossed the Staffordshire and West Midlands county boundary, and therefore required greater change to be made in Staffordshire. They rejected the scheme, which involved greater change in Staffordshire to solve issues in the West Midlands county.

Commissioners agreed that there was no need to change the three existing constituencies of Burton, Cannock Chase, and South Staffordshire. They also agreed that the whole of Staffordshire Moorlands district should form a constituency. They noted that the electorate of the existing Tamworth constituency was below 5% of the electoral quota, and agreed to the inclusion of the whole of the Lichfield district ward of Whittington & Streethay in the Tamworth constituency. They also agreed to the inclusion of the Stafford borough ward of Haywood & Hixon in the Lichfield constituency.

Commissioners noted that the electorate of the existing Newcastle-under-Lyme constituency was below 5% of the electoral quota. They agreed to include the five wards of the town of Kidsgrove in the Newcastle-under-Lyme constituency together with 15 wards from the existing constituency.

The Commissioners noted that the electorate of the city of Stoke-on-Trent was too big for two whole constituencies, but too small for three constituencies. They agreed that 14 wards from the north of the city should form a Stoke-on-Trent North constituency, and the 18 wards in the south and east of the city should form a Stoke-on-Trent South constituency.

Commissioners noted that the electorate of the existing Stafford constituency was below 5% of the electoral quota. They agreed to the inclusion of the whole of the two divided Stafford borough wards of Mllwich, and Seighford & Church Eaton, and the Stafford borough ward of Gnosall & Woodseaves.

Commissioners agreed that the four remaining Newcastle-under-Lyme borough wards, should be combined with the six remaining Stafford borough wards, and the five remaining Stoke-on-Trent city wards to form a constituency called West Staffordshire.

Herefordshire, Shropshire, Warwickshire, West Midlands, and Worcestershire

The five remaining counties have an entitlement to 42.45 constituencies. The Commissioners noted that an allocation of 42 constituencies would result in a reduction of five constituencies. Commissioners noted that it had proved difficult to create constituencies wholly within the county of West Midlands, which respected county boundaries and did not divide wards. They also noted that the counties of Herefordshire, Shropshire and Telford and Wrekin, Warwickshire, and Worcestershire needed to be combined with a neighbouring county, in order to create constituencies with electorates within 5% of the electoral quota.

Commissioners noted that the city of Coventry was now too small to continue to be allocated three constituencies. They also noted that the options for the pattern of constituencies in Coventry were to include two wards from Solihull borough, or to include the three wards that make up the town of Kenilworth from Warwick district. They considered both options carefully, because this would affect the composition of neighbouring constituencies. They agreed that the two Solihull borough wards of Knowle and Meriden should be included in a constituency containing five Coventry city wards to be called Coventry West and Meriden. They agreed to make no change to the existing Coventry North East constituency, and that the remaining seven Coventry city wards would form a Coventry South constituency.

Commissioners noted that it was not possible to include the town of Kenilworth in a constituency with the town of Rugby, so they agreed that the towns of Kenilworth and Royal Leamington Spa should be combined in a constituency called Kenilworth and Leamington. They also agreed that the towns of Warwick and Stratford-upon-Avon should be combined in a constituency called Warwick and Stratford-on-Avon.

Commissioners agreed that the two North Warwickshire borough wards of Arley and Whitacre, and Hartshill should be transferred from the existing Nuneaton constituency to the North Warwickshire constituency, with the Nuneaton and Bedworth borough ward of Bulkington and three Rugby borough wards being transferred from the existing Rugby constituency to the Nuneaton constituency. They also agreed to the inclusion of seven Stratford-on-Avon district wards, including the town of Southam, in a constituency with the town of Rugby to be called Rugby and Southam.

Commissioners noted that only three of the 10 existing Birmingham constituencies have an electorate within 5% of the electoral quota. They agreed to make no changes to the existing Birmingham Hodge Hill and Sutton Coldfield constituencies. They also agreed to the inclusion of the Birmingham city ward of Sheldon in a constituency with seven wards from Solihull borough. They noted that the preferred scheme presented by the Secretariat created five constituencies containing only Birmingham city wards, that four constituencies each contained four Birmingham city wards and a ward from a neighbouring borough (either Sandwell or Walsall), and that one constituency would contain three Birmingham city wards and three wards from Dudley borough.

In the West Midlands county, 14 of the 25 agreed constituencies contained wards from one borough only, nine contained wards from two boroughs, and one contained wards from one borough and a ward from the county of Warwickshire. Commissioners agreed that the names of the new constituencies should use existing constituency names where appropriate.

In Shropshire, and Telford and Wrekin, Commissioners agreed not to change the existing North Shropshire constituency. They also agreed to transfer the Shropshire ward of Chirbury and Worthen from the existing Ludlow constituency to the Shrewsbury constituency, which would lose Atcham from the name, as it was no longer based upon the district of the same name. They agreed to transfer the two Telford and Wrekin borough wards of Donnington, and Hadley & Leegomery from the existing The Wrekin constituency to the Telford constituency.

Commissioners agreed to the extension of the existing The Wrekin constituency, by including six wards from the existing Ludlow constituency, including the town of Bridgnorth. They agreed that the constituency should be called Bridgnorth, Wellington and The Wrekin. They agreed that the 11 remaining Shropshire wards from the existing Ludlow constituency, including the town of Ludlow, should form a constituency with 15 wards from the existing North Herefordshire constituency, including the towns of Bromyard and Leominster. They agreed that the constituency should be called Ludlow and Leominster.

Commissioners agreed that the existing Hereford and South Herefordshire constituency should be extended by transferring three wards from the existing North Herefordshire constituency, which are close to the city of Hereford. They agreed that the seven remaining

Herefordshire wards, including the town of Ledbury, should be included in a constituency with the whole of the Malvern Hills district and the Wychavon district ward of Ombersley. They also agreed that the constituency should be called Malvern and Ledbury.

The Commissioners noted that the electorate of the existing Worcester constituency was below 5% of the electoral quota. They agreed to extend the constituency by including the two Wychavon district wards of Drakes Broughton, and Norton and Whittington from the existing Mid Worcestershire constituency. They also noted that whilst the electorate of the existing Wyre Forest constituency was within 5% of the electoral quota, they decided to include the Wychavon district ward of Hartlebury, from the existing Mid Worcestershire constituency, to allow for neighbouring constituencies to be within 5% of the electoral quota.

Commissioners noted that the electorate of the existing Redditch constituency was below 5% of the electoral quota. They also noted that the Wychavon district ward of Inkberrow had been included in the proposed Evesham and South Warwickshire constituency. They agreed to include eight Bromsgrove district wards, including the towns of Alvechurch and Wythall, in the Redditch constituency.

Commissioners agreed that the 20 remaining Bromsgrove district wards should be combined with the remaining seven Wychavon district wards, including the town of Droitwich, in a constituency called Bromsgrove and Droitwich.

Commissioners considered the scheme, which divided seven wards between constituencies. They considered that dividing seven wards in the initial proposals would not create a configuration of constituencies, which would better reflect the statutory criteria. However, Commissioners suggested they would consider alternatives suggested by interested parties that did divide wards during the consultation periods.

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. Firstly, Mr Pringle detailed the difficulties faced by the Secretariat in creating 53 constituencies in the region, all with an electorate within 5% of the electoral quota. He noted that it had not always been possible to adhere to predetermined sub-regions in order to use smaller wards from neighbouring local authorities. However, the agreed scheme created a Staffordshire sub-region, and included the rest of the region in together in second sub-region.

Mr Pringle reported that the Secretariat had presented an alternative that divided seven wards, thereby reducing the number of cross-boundary constituencies. He said that this had been rejected because it was not considered to better meet the statutory criteria.

The Secretariat outlined the proposals in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent, detailing the changes required to ensure every constituency was in electoral quota. The Secretariat explained that Stoke-on-Trent was too small for three constituencies and that some of the city council's wards have been included with neighbouring constituencies.

Mr Pringle and the Secretariat explained that the size of the wards covering Birmingham and Dudley provided for few patterns of constituencies based on whole wards that met the electoral quota. The Secretariat outlined the other potential configurations and detailed why this may not better reflect the statutory criteria across the whole of the region.

In Herefordshire, Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin and Worcestershire the Secretariat explained that minor changes were required to existing constituencies to bring them within the electoral quota.

In Warwickshire, Mr Pringle detailed the proposals that combined Kenilworth and Royal Leamington Spa to form a constituency called Kenilworth and Leamington. He also outlined that the towns of Warwick and Stratford-upon-Avon should be combined in a constituency called Warwick and Stratford-on-Avon. The Secretariat explained that other configurations would result in consequential changes across the region.

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