

CORPORATE AFFAIRS AND AUDIT COMMITTEE

A meeting of the Corporate Affairs and Audit Committee was held on 3 November 2016.

PRESENT: Councillors D Rooney (In the Chair); T Higgins, C Hobson, B A Hubbard, B E Taylor and M Storey(As Substitute for P Purvis)

PRESENT AS OBSERVERS: Councillor M Walters, J Etherington, L Henman and N Mumtaz

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: S Kenny - Ernst Young

OFFICERS: B Carr, J Shiel, J Stuart

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE Councillor P Purvis, Councillor J Blyth.

DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

Name of Member	Type of Interest	Item/Nature of Interest
Councillor M Storey	Non-Pecuniary	Report on Parliamentary Boundary Proposals

1 **MINUTES - CORPORATE AFFAIRS AND AUDIT COMMITTEE - 29 SEPTEMBER 2016**

The minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Affairs and Audit Committee held on 29 September 2016 were taken as read and approved as a correct record subject to the following:

Any Other Urgent Items

Corporate Affairs and Audit Committee - Appointments

A Member advised that he had sought clarification on the process for the appointment of the Vice-Chair of the Committee and was advised by the Chief Executive that he would request the Monitoring Officer to clarify the process.

2 **REPORT ON PARLIAMENTARY BOUNDARY PROPOSALS**

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services submitted a report, the purpose of which was to provide details of a consultation that was being carried out by the Boundary Commission for England on their proposals to change the Parliamentary constituency boundaries for England in 2018, and to seek the views or recommendations from the Committee on whether representations should be made on behalf of the Council.

Members were advised that the Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Act 2011 required that a review of the Parliamentary constituencies be carried out, and the Act required that the current 650 constituencies be reduced to 600.

The Boundary Commission for England review, if agreed, would result in a significant reduction in the number of constituencies in England (from 533 to 501) and two of these constituencies were allocated to the Isle of Wight which left 499 constituencies between the regions used for European Parliamentary elections.

The proposals were designed to ensure that each constituency contained a similar number of registered electors and with the exception of two constituencies, each constituency would be based on an electorate no smaller than 71,031 and no larger than 78,507.

All existing constituencies in the North East would be affected by the changes. The region had been allocated 25 constituencies which was 4 less than at present.

The proposed changes that would impact on Middlesbrough were as follows:

Middlesbrough North East and Redcar constituency would take on six wards from the existing Middlesbrough Constituency and retain 11 wards from the existing Redcar constituency.

Middlesbrough West and Stockton East constituency would take on eight wards from the existing Middlesbrough constituency and seven wards, including Stockton Town Centre Ward, from the existing Stockton South constituency.

Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland constituency would retain 13 wards from the existing constituency but lose the Stainton and Thornton ward and the Hemlington ward to the Middlesbrough West and Stockton East constituency, and the divided Ladgate Ward to the Middlesbrough North East and Redcar constituency. In addition, three wards from the existing Redcar constituency were to be added to the Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland constituency.

If the above proposals were agreed it would mean that Middlesbrough would no longer have a Parliamentary constituency. If a Parliamentary election was to be called then Redcar Borough Council would take responsibility for organising the Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland and the Middlesbrough North East and Redcar constituency Parliamentary elections and Stockton Borough Council would take on responsibility for organising the Middlesbrough West and Stockton East Parliamentary constituency election.

The proposals were detailed at Pages 24 and 25 of the BCE Initial proposals for new Parliamentary constituency boundaries in the North East.

A3 maps showing the proposed areas of the new Parliamentary constituencies, together with a table showing the proposed wards and the number of electors per ward were circulated at the meeting.

Members were advised that the commission were hosting public hearings in the North East as follows:

Newcastle Victoria Hall, Royal Station Hotel, Neville Street on:

14 November 2016 - 10.00am - 8.00pm
15 November 2016 - 9.00am - 5.00pm and

Darlington King's Ballroom, Mercure Darlington Kings Hotel, 9 - 12 Priestgate on:

17 November 2016 - 10.00am - 8.00pm
18 November 2016 - 9.00am - 5.00pm

The BCE were encouraging people to use their consultation website at www.bce2018.org.uk.

The Chair advised that some suggestions for responding to the consultation had been received following the Members Briefings in relation to the proposals, however the Committee needed to make a decision with regard to whether the authority would submit a cross-party response to the Boundary Commission. Individuals were also permitted to put forward their own views on the proposals to the Boundary Commission.

Members commented that the Government appeared to be increasing the number of Members of Parliament in the House of Lords, but reducing the number of MPs overall.

A Member queried why the number of MPs had been reduced by 50 as to reduce the number of MPs by 50 or under would be advantageous to one particular political party. He stated that under the previous boundaries, it had taken 34,000 voters to elect a Conservative MP but over 40,000 voters to elect a Labour MP. The data used to determine the constituency boundaries was taken in December 2015, so this would mean that two million people that had joined the electoral register since December 2015 could be disenfranchised. In addition, the data used to create the boundaries was already out of date.

The Chair advised that in terms of responding to the proposals, any suggestions put forward would have to meet the criteria in respect of the proposed size of the constituency e.g. it would need to be based on an electorate no smaller than 71,031 and no larger than 78,507. Any revised proposals put forward would have a knock on effect for other local authorities. It was highlighted that since the data had been collected, further development in the town had taken place and that could affect the numbers in the proposed new constituencies and the Boundary Commission did not appear to have taken this into account.

A Member commented on the proposed boundaries for Middlesbrough West and Stockton East constituency and stated that in his view the Wards of Norton South and Stockton Town Centre should not be included as they did not form a natural boundary.

A Member commented that it would be useful for the authority to put forward a submission suggesting new boundaries, but there were very little options that did not include the Redcar area. Another point to note was the upper-limit of 78,507 for the size of constituencies which would mean an increase of up to 12-14,000 electors for some constituencies. At the current time, only two constituencies met the criteria; Tynemouth and Stockton South. It was commented that there was a lack of flexibility offered by the Boundary Commission with leeway of just 5%. A Member commented that if the proposals put forward by the Boundary Commission went ahead, Middlesbrough would lose its identity

The Chair queried whether the Conservative Group and the Independents intended to put forward representations. Representatives from the Conservative Group and the Independents both confirmed that submissions would be put forward. The Chair suggested that it would be useful to know how other Groups were responding to see if the responses correlated with each other.

At a briefing session held for all elected Members, the following concerns had been raised:

- Middlesbrough would lose its identity
- Middlesbrough would be the minority authority for each of the constituencies and therefore may not be the focus for any one of the Parliamentary candidates
- Middlesbrough was the central district for the Tees Valley but the proposed new constituencies did not reflect this fact
- The public could become confused
- The Middlesbrough and Stockton South constituency would include two Town Centres
- How the increases in electorate in areas with large housing developments would impact upon the proposals

The Chair summed up the comments at the meeting as follows:

- Concerns regarding the fact that Middlesbrough would lose its identity as an area if the proposals went ahead;
- The Committee were not convinced that the boundaries put forward by the Boundary Commission were the right split;
- Concerns regarding the management of future elections, given that Middlesbrough would not have overall responsibility for managing any future Parliamentary elections if the boundaries were agreed;
- Concerns regarding the fact that the data used to determine the revised boundaries was already out of date and a significant number of people would be disenfranchised.

The Senior Electoral Services Officer advised that electoral services would be able to provide up-to-date data in respect of the number of electors in each ward and the planning service would be able to provide details of any new or proposed developments in Middlesbrough.

Members were advised that any representations in respect of the proposals, did not necessarily have to come from a Political Party, individual groups or members of the public were also permitted to submit representations.

Members were advised that any representations would need to be submitted by the deadline

of 5 December 2016.

AGREED as follows:

1. That representations be submitted to the Boundary Commission in response to the proposed new Parliamentary constituency boundaries;
2. That the representations be presented to Committee prior to submission to the Boundary Commission.
3. That up-to-date data in respect of the number of electors in each ward, be provided by electoral services and that the planning department be requested to provide details of any new developments in the Middlesbrough area.