

PARLIAMENTARY BOUNDARY REVIEW 2018 - MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL

Middlesbrough Council would like to make the following representations which were raised during Members briefings, Corporate Affairs and Audit Committee and full Council.

Members' commented that it would be useful for the authority to put forward a submission suggesting new boundaries, but they felt that there was a lack of flexibility offered by the Boundary Commission with leeway of just 5%, and therefore it would be very difficult to offer alternative suggestions due to the complexity and possible knock on effects for other constituencies. A suggested plan has been submitted by the Council's Conservative Group, but no assessment of the impact of the suggested change has been made.

However, members strongly recommended that the following issues be raised with the Commission for their deliberation:

1. Many Members commented that if the proposals put forward by the Boundary Commission went ahead Middlesbrough would lose its identity, and expressed concerns that it would be the minority authority for each of the constituencies and would have the minority number of electorate in each of the constituencies; therefore it may not be the focus for any one of the Parliamentary candidates.
2. As identified in the 2015 Index of Multiple deprivation, Middlesbrough is the 6th most deprived local authority area in England and has many key challenges such as: employment; health and disability; education and skills; housing; crime; and living environment. Consequently, Middlesbrough Members' strongly suggest that we need at least one MP that can focus on our town, to represent those challenges and seek government support at the highest level.
3. The Middlesbrough and Stockton South constituency would see two town centres included within its catchment area, which could lead to conflicting priorities for the elected Member of Parliament when representing the 2 authority areas, seeking funding or prioritising needs / areas for special attention.
4. Another point noted was that 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.
5. Members further commented on the proposed boundaries for Middlesbrough West and Stockton East constituency, and stated that in their view the Wards of Norton South and Stockton Town Centre should not be included as they did not form a natural boundary.

6. Members also noted that the new constituency boundaries failed to reflect the reality that Middlesbrough is the centrally located authority within the district for the Tees Valley.
7. The public may become very confused especially at election times. The combined election in 2020 will see all out local elections across 20 wards, mayoral election across the whole Authority, parish elections within 2 areas and now parliamentary elections across 3 constituencies.
8. The data used to determine the constituency boundaries was taken in December 2015; this may mean that the two million people who have joined the electoral register nationally since December 2015, and the associated proportion within Middlesbrough, could be disenfranchised. In addition, the data used to create the boundaries was already out of date.
9. A drive at the beginning of 2016 to promote Individual electoral registration, together with the impending European Referendum in June 2016, saw an increase in the electorate registered across all three boroughs; as such, using the actual 2016 figures, each constituency would be in breach of the upper limit of for the number of 78,507 electorate per constituency (see APPENDIX 1).
10. Middlesbrough's Electorate at September 2016 is 94,378; however, it also had 9,448 pending electors giving a possible total of 103,826. Pending electors for each of the authorities do not seem to have been taken into account in the Commission's proposals and therefore allocations may not be truly reflective of the actual constituency population. If other authorities have similar proportions of pending applications (circa 10%), the upper limit on constituency electorate could be significantly breached.
11. The 3 constituencies proposed have been compared using figures from 2015 and the September 2016 Registers:
 - a) Middlesbrough West and Stockton East:
 - i. 2015 Figures: 78,701;
 - ii. September 2016 Figures: 82,842;
 - b) Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland:
 - i. 2015 Figures: 75,590;
 - ii. September 2016 Figures: 78,508;
 - c) Middlesbrough North East and Redcar:
 - i. 2015 Figures: 78,214;
 - ii. September 2016 Figures: 82,009.
12. In addition to the above the proposals do not reflect the future housing developments (projected 8,000 over the next 10 years) in Middlesbrough, or developments within the Stockton on Tees and Redcar authorities, which will impact on all three constituencies involving Middlesbrough. Consequently, and notwithstanding the fact that on current electorate it appears all the constituencies are already outside of the levels prescribed by the Boundary Commission for this review, future developments will further exacerbate this issue.

13. It is also envisaged that this model will add an additional layer of complexity to the administration of an election in respect of sharing staffing and polling venues, especially during combined elections. Elections in 2020 will see all out local elections across 20 wards, mayoral election across the whole Authority, parish elections within 2 areas and now parliamentary elections across 3 constituencies. The logistics of this will prove to be complex, and the problems for administrators in all 3 authorities will be myriad. These problems were previously experienced to a significantly lesser extent, since one entire constituency was based within Middlesbrough, leaving only a portion of the Borough to be administered on behalf of another authority.
14. Also generally the authority with the highest number of electorate will act as the administering authority and therefore take on the role of the Returning Officer and a much greater cross boundary area. It seems inconceivable that, with a potential electorate of in excess of 100,000 there will be no Parliamentary Returning Officer based in the Council.
15. In addition, it is noted that, in considering the proposed revised boundaries, Rule 5(1) of Schedule 2 to the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986 (as amended) provides that the following factors may be taken into account:
 - (a) special geographical considerations, including in particular the size, shape and accessibility of a constituency;
 - (b) local government boundaries as they exist on the most recent ordinary council-election day before the review date;
 - (c) boundaries of existing constituencies;
 - (d) any local ties that would be broken by changes in constituencies; and
 - (e) the inconveniences attendant on such changes.

It appears from the proposals, particularly in relation to the Middlesbrough West and Stockton East, that no consideration has been given to (b), (c), (d), or (e), in that:

- i) The proposed boundary severs a significant portion of the western side of the existing Middlesbrough Borough Council area;
- ii) This proposed boundary bears no resemblance to the existing constituency;
- iii) The 'severed' portion of Middlesbrough will be geographically severed from the remainder of the proposed constituency by the A19 trunk road, which provides only extremely limited interconnectivity between two portions of the same constituency;
- iv) Conversely, the 'severed' portion of Middlesbrough will lose parliamentary ties with parts of individual streets, without apparent justification (for example, the northern side of Emerson Avenue will fall within the Middlesbrough North East and Redcar constituency; the southern side of Emerson Avenue will fall within the Middlesbrough West and Stockton East constituency); and
- v) The proposed changes would significantly inconvenience both residents and Councils alike.