

Full Council – 28 July 2021

REVIEW OF PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCIES – REPORT OF ELECTORAL REVIEW PANEL

LEAD MEMBER: Eileen Weir, Chair of Electoral Review Panel
LEAD OFFICER: Pat Graham, Chief Executive
REPORT AUTHOR: Stephanie Shaw, Electoral & Democratic Services Manager

Summary:	Reports the recommendations of the Electoral Review Panel on the proposals of the Boundary Commission for England for revised Parliamentary Constituencies in Cumbria
Recommendation:	That Council considers the initial proposals for Cumbria and the recommendations of the Electoral Review Panel, and that a response based on these recommendations and alternative proposal be forwarded to the Boundary Commission for England as the Council's formal response to the consultation.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Boundary Commission for England (BCE) is an independent and impartial non-departmental public body which is responsible for reviewing Parliamentary constituency boundaries in England.
- 1.2 The BCE has the task of periodically reviewing all the Parliamentary constituencies in England. It is currently conducting a review based on the rules set by Parliament in 2020.
- 1.3 The Parliamentary Constituencies Act 2020 provides for a fixed number of parliamentary constituencies for the whole of the UK and new rules for the calculation of electorate figures for use when constituencies are reviewed

by the BCE. The BCE is required to make a formal report to the Government on the outcome of the current review by 1 July 2023.

- 1.4 This report summarises the provisions of the 2020 Act and reports the initial proposals of the BCE in the current review for constituencies in Cumbria.
- 1.5 It also sets out a response to the proposals, including an alternative proposal considered by the Electoral Review Panel for Council to consider and approve, with the formal response to be submitted to BCE by 2 August 2021.

2. BACKGROUND TO THE REVIEW

- 2.1 Whilst retaining the overall number of constituencies across the UK at 650, the 2020 Act applies a distribution formula that results in an increase in the number of constituencies in England (From 533 to 543).
- 2.2 The Act require that every constituency across the UK (except five specified exceptions) must have an electorate that is no less than 95% and no more than 105% of the UK electoral quota. The electoral quota is 73,393. Every constituency (except the five protected constituencies) must have an electorate as at 2 March 2020 that is no smaller than 69,724 and no larger than 77,062.

3. NEW PROPOSALS FOR CUMBRIA

- 3.1 The North West has been allocated 73 constituencies – a reduction of two from the current number. The proposal for Cumbria is for six constituencies as it currently has.
- 3.2 Due to the population size of Cumbria, the figures are too large for the county to be allocated five whole constituencies, but too few for six. It is therefore, proposed that a sub-region be created by pairing Cumbria with Lancashire. More information can be found on page 7, paragraph 11 to 13 of the initial proposals document attached at appendix 1.

- 3.3 The proposals affecting Copeland are for a constituency called 'Copeland and the Western Lakes' made up of the 17 Copeland Borough Wards, together with two Allerdale Wards; Crummock & Derwent Valley and Keswick and four wards from South Lakeland; Ambleside & Grasmere, Bowness & Levens (Part), Broughton & Coniston and Windermere. Full details can be found on Page 13, paragraph 39 of the initial proposals document attached at appendix 1.
- 3.4 A detailed map for the new proposals is attached as Appendix 2 to this Report.

4 VIEWS ON THE PROPOSALS FOR CUMBRIA

- 4.1 The Electoral Review Panel recognises the Boundary Commission for England is working to criteria laid down by government, however it questions the apparent simplistic approach of basing the number of electors in each constituency, as in effect, the main criteria for this consultation.
- 4.2 The council were involved in the previous consultation regarding constituency boundaries in 2011 and 2016. In 2016 the Boundary Commission proposed to reduce the number of MPs in Cumbria from 6 to 5. Exceptions have been made for other areas, why not Cumbria based on its geographical size. Members feel that the 2016 proposal is still valid and are still in favor of such a move. Our proposal for a constituency based on West Cumbria closely follows our thinking in 2016.
- 4.3 The Electoral review Panel considered the proposals at a meeting on 1 July 2021, at which four members were present. Having considered the effects on the inhabitants of the Borough, the Panel members present strongly disagreed with the proposal to link Whitehaven and the rest of Copeland with Windermere for the following reasons:

4.3.1 Special geographic considerations

The proposed constituency is split roughly in half in terms of geographic area, with the main towns of Windermere in the east and Whitehaven in

the west. The two sides are separated by the high fells of Cumbria including the highest mountain in England, Scafell Pike. The only direct road access is over the tortuous and steep Hard Knott and Wrynose Passes. This route is inaccessible in winter due to snow and all year round to large or articulated vehicles. Even by this route the distance between Windermere and Whitehaven is 40.1 miles and AA Route finder optimistically quotes a travelling time of 1 hour and 49 minutes. The alternative routes either north via Keswick or south via Broughton in Furness have travel times of 1 hour 13 mins (48.8 miles) and 1 hour 30 mins (56.8 miles).

Journey times by public transport between the railway stations in the two towns are over 2 hours 20 mins and can be more than 3 hours. There are no direct bus or train services, and by either means of transport two changes are required.

The implications of the size and accessibility across the proposed constituency would affect any MP trying to represent the area, but also, disproportionately, constituents trying to access their MP and their office. It should also be considered that connectivity in the more rural areas is poor, which would also further restrict residents from contacting their MP.

4.3.2 Local ties

Not only is there a lack of any natural local tie between the two halves of the proposed constituency, but each side has strong ties with different towns.

The eastern half of the proposed constituency looks to Kendal further south and east for the majority of its services including maternity and other hospital services, retail and as a major centre for employment. It is also where inhabitants would access the west coast mainline, either directly or via connecting trains on the Windermere branch line.

Whitehaven is the major service centre for most of the western half of the proposed constituency, containing a district general hospital, shops and

employment opportunities. Access to rail services is via the Barrow to Carlisle branch line along the Cumbrian coast.

4.3.3 Economic Considerations

The eastern half of the proposed constituency relies heavily on tourism, *the* service industry and agriculture for its economic lifeblood and employment opportunities. There is little history or tradition of heavy industry. By way of contrast, the western half of the area, particularly the larger population centres on the West Cumbrian coast, rely heavily on the nuclear industry at the Sellafield site and its associated service sector for employment. These areas are also characterised by substantial stocks of both modern social housing and high density nineteenth century homes associated with the extractive industries which dominated both the economy and the landscape of the West Cumbria coastal plain in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

- 4.4 For the above reasons, and particularly the topographical division of the area by the Cumbrian Fells, the Council considers that the proposed constituency would have little real sense of place; and that its two distinct eastern and western halves would have little in common in historical, economic, social or cultural terms. In effect it would have a devastating detrimental impact on the loss of the individual identities of the very different East / West communities.

5. ALTERNATIVE PROPOSAL

- 5.1 The Electoral Review Panel firmly believes that there is a strong imperative in favour of retaining a parliamentary constituency based on the West Cumbria coastal plain as was proposed by the Boundary Commission in 2016, for the following reasons:

- 5.1.1 The area's unique topographical characteristics separated as it is from the remainder of Cumbria by the Cumbrian Fells mountain range, and poor lateral infrastructure links.
- 5.1.2 The economic reliance of the area on the largest industrial site in the UK at Sellafield and its associated service industries.
- 5.1.3 The nature of the housing stock in the main population centres in the coastal plain.
- 5.2 The Electoral Review Panel is therefore proposing that Council support the recommendation of an alternative to the Commission's initial proposals, a **West Cumbria constituency**, consisting of the following wards of the Borough of Copeland:

Arlecdon & Ennerdale, Beckermet, Cleator Moor, Corkickle, Distington, Lowca & Parton, Egremont, Gosforth & Seascale, Hillcrest, Kells, Moor Row & Bigrigg, Moresby, Sneckyeat, St Bees, Whitehaven Central and Whitehaven South.

The following wards of the Borough of Allerdale:

Harrington & Salterbeck, Flimby, Maryport North, Maryport South, Moorclose & Moss Bay, Seaton & Northside, St John's, St Michael's and Stainburn & Clifton.

Total Electorate – 79,318

6. CONCLUSION

- 6.1 For the above reasons the Electoral Review Panel considers there is a strong case for retaining a constituency that recognises the integrity of West Cumbria as a coherent geographical entity and that retains the West Cumbrian nuclear sites.
- 6.3 The Electoral Review Party recognises that the electorate figures are above the 5% allowance, however, it is felt that given the large geographic area of Cumbria, an exception should be considered.

7. STATUTORY OFFICER COMMENTS

- 7.1 Legal Comments; No legal issues arise from this report
- 7.2 Monitoring Officer Comments are: No issues arise from this report
- 7.2 The Section 151 Officer's comments are: No financial implications arise from the report.
- 7.3 EIA Comments: No issues arise from the report
- 7.4 Policy Framework: Not applicable
- 7.4 Other Consultee Comments, if any: none

8 HOW WILL THE PROPOSALS BE PROJECT MANAGED AND HOW ARE THE RISKS GOING TO BE MANAGED?

- 8.1 The review will be managed by the Electoral and Democratic Services Manager.

9 WHAT MEASURABLE OUTCOMES OR OUTPUTS WILL ARISE FROM THIS REPORT?

- 9.1 Council response to consultation submitted by 2 August 2021.

List of Appendices

Appendix 1 – Initial Proposals for North West Region

Appendix 2 – Proposed Copeland and the western lakes constituency map

Appendix 3 – alternative proposal Map

List of Background Documents: All documents relating to the review can be viewed at bcereviews.org.uk

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