

PART A

Report to: Council Functions
Date of Meeting: 23 November 2011
Report of: Head of Legal and Property Services
Title: Parliamentary Boundary Review

1.0 SUMMARY

- 1.1 The Parliamentary Boundary Commission has issued a consultation paper on proposed changes to Parliamentary Constituencies following Parliament's decision to reduce the number of MPs from 533 to 502 in time for the next General Election.
- 1.2 Attached at appendix 1 is a copy of the consultation document. The consultation closes on 5 December 2011.

Council is asked if it wishes to make a formal representation on the proposals as they affect Watford.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 To agree the representation to the consultation as set out in paragraph 3.1.4 below.

Contact Officer:

For further information on this report please contact Carol Chen telephone extension 8350. Email carol.chen@watford.gov.uk.

Report approved by: the Managing Director.

3.0 DETAILED DISCUSSION

3.1 Parliament has decided to reduce the number of MPs from the current 533 to 502 in time for the next General Election. It has tasked the Parliamentary Boundary Commission to come up with proposals on how this will be achieved. The Commission's remit is that every constituency, except the Isle of Wight, must have an electorate of between 72,810 and 80,473, which is 5% plus or minus the ideal of 76,641.

3.1.2 The factors that the Commission must have regard to when putting forward their proposals are:

- Special geographical considerations including size, shape and accessibility of a constituency
- Local Government boundaries as at 6 May 2010
- Boundaries of existing constituencies
- Local ties that would be broken by the changes

3.1.3 The Commission have produced a consultation paper outlining their proposals for the new constituencies, the proposals for Watford which is part of the Eastern Region is attached at appendix 1. The specific proposals for Watford are included at paragraphs 31 and 32 of that appendix.

It is proposed to retain a Watford Constituency but there are proposed changes to the wards that are currently in the constituency that are taken from Three Rivers.

The consultation closes on the 5 December 2011.

3.1.4 Following discussions with the Mayor and Portfolio Holders it is proposed that the Council submits the following response to the consultation.

The Council notes the draft recommendations of the Parliamentary Boundary Commission and in particular the constraints under which the Commission works, including the statutory minimum and maximum electorate and the decision of the Commission not to create constituencies crossing the regional boundary or splitting local government wards.

Accordingly the Council comments on the proposals relating to its own area as follows:

1. Watford Borough:

Watford Borough Council notes that the proposals include a constituency bearing the 'Watford' name and that this incorporates the entire borough, with none of its wards moved to neighbouring districts. The council believes it is very important that the borough remains entirely within one parliamentary constituency. On this point, therefore, **the Council supports this element of the Commission's proposal.**

2. Additional wards included within the Watford Parliamentary constituency

The Council recognises that, as has been the case since 1983, on its own its electorate is not large enough to form a parliamentary constituency and that necessarily some neighbouring wards need to be included to ensure that the constituency has the requisite number of electors. The Council has the following comments on the Commission's proposals for including/excluding wards from its neighbouring district within the constituency.

Carpenders Park Ward – The Council recognises that Carpenders Park cannot easily be included in either the Watford constituency or the South West Hertfordshire constituency without breaching the maximum number of electorate; nor is it possible to remove other electors from those constituencies in order to accommodate Carpenders Park without very significant disruption to other constituencies in Hertfordshire. Due to the inability to cross the regional boundary the only remaining option is to include Carpenders Park in the Hertsmere constituency as proposed by the Commission so **on this basis the Council supports the Commission's proposal.**

Oxhey Hall Ward – The Commission proposes to retain this ward in the Watford constituency. This ward is clearly part of the built-up area of Watford with no green space dividing the ward from Watford. At least two roads cross the boundary so that some houses are in Watford Borough and others in Oxhey Hall Ward. **Accordingly the Council supports the Commission's proposal.**

Abbots Langley, Langleybury, and Leavesden Wards – The boundary between Watford Borough and these wards runs through a built-up area. In several cases the ends of culs-de-sac cross the boundary between Watford Borough and these wards; and in one case a block of flats is divided by the boundary.

Furthermore, the Abbots Langley, Langleybury and Leavesden Wards have all been part of the Watford constituency since 1983 – that is ever since it was deemed necessary to incorporate wards outside Watford Borough within the Watford constituency. In addition, several hundred properties in Abbots Langley (mainly Langleybury Ward) are owned by Watford Community Housing Trust (formerly Watford Borough Council) and nomination rights to these properties are retained by Watford Borough Council. Therefore there are long-standing connections between these wards and Watford Borough Council for parliamentary and local government purposes. There are excellent transport links between Abbots Langley and Watford. There are many community connections between Watford and Abbots Langley and many voluntary and local sports groups operate across the boundary.

Therefore, these wards should not be detached from the Watford constituency if it is not absolutely required to meet the statutory requirements for numbers of electors.

The Ashridge, Hayling and Northwick Wards in South Oxhey and Moor Park & Eastbury Ward – these four wards are currently in the South West Hertfordshire constituency and there is a clear green belt boundary between them and the built-up area of Watford. The Moor Park & Eastbury Ward would normally be regarded as having stronger community and communication links with Rickmansworth than with Watford.

The Commission has proposed swapping the three Abbots Langley wards from Watford constituency to South West Hertfordshire constituency; and in exchange swapping the three South Oxhey wards and Moor Park & Eastbury Ward from South West Hertfordshire constituency to Watford constituency. If all these wards remain with their current constituency, both constituencies still remain within the statutory electorate requirement. Maintaining all these wards in their current constituency avoids unnecessary disruption to over 24,000 electors. This also avoids splitting the three Abbots Langley wards from Watford, which would create an arbitrary boundary through the built-up area, and ensures that the constituency boundaries all run through green belt between communities.

Watford Borough Council therefore proposes that the three Abbots Langley wards be returned to the Watford constituency and the three South Oxhey wards and Moor Park & Eastbury Ward be returned to the South West Hertfordshire constituency.

Summary of recommendations

- A) The Council supports the Commission's proposal to retain a constituency bearing the Watford name and incorporating the entire borough within one constituency.
- B) The Council supports the Commission's proposal to include Carpenders Park Ward in the Hertsmere constituency
- C) The Council supports the commission's proposal to retain Oxhey Hall Ward in the Watford constituency
- D) The Council proposes that the three Abbots Langley wards (Abbots Langley, Langleybury, and Leavesden) be returned to the Watford constituency; and the three South Oxhey wards (Ashridge, Hayling, Northwick) and Moor Park & Eastbury Ward all be returned to the South West Hertfordshire constituency

4.0 IMPLICATIONS

4.1 Financial

The Head of Strategic Finance comments that there are no financial implications arising directly out of this report.

4.2 Legal (Monitoring Officer)

The Head of Legal & Property Services comments that there are no legal implications

4.3 Potential Risks

Potential Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Overall score
The Commission proceeds with its proposed recommendations	3	1	3

Background Papers:

None

Appendices

1. Consultation from Parliamentary Boundary Commission