


Agenda Item No:	9	
Committee:	Council	
Date:	02 November 2017	
Report Title:	Parliamentary Constituency Review – Fenland District Council Consultation Submission	

## 1 Purpose / Summary

For Council to consider and agree the Fenland District Council consultation submission to the Boundary Commission for England in regards to the Parliamentary Constituency Review 2018

## 2 Key issues

- The 2018 Parliamentary Constituency Review was initiated as Parliament has specified that the number of Parliamentary Constituencies in the United Kingdom must reduce from 650 down to 600. In England that equates to a reduction of Parliamentary Constituencies from 533 to 501. More locally, the Eastern Region in which Fenland sits has been allocated 57 constituencies – a reduction of one from 58.
- The Boundary Commission for England has been tasked to review and recommend the new boundaries for those constituencies.
- The law requires that every new constituency (with the exception of two specific island constituencies) must have roughly the same number of electors, no fewer than 71,031 and no more than 78,507. As well as electoral equality, which aims to give everyone's vote the same weight, legislation also states that when deciding on boundaries the Commission may take into account:
  - Special geographical considerations, including the size, shape and accessibility of the constituency
  - Local government boundaries as they exist on 7 May 2015
  - Boundaries of existing constituencies and
  - Any local ties that would be broken by changes in constituencies
- On 13 September 2016 the Commission published initial proposals for new constituencies in England, which opened a twelve week consultation period. On 28 February 2017 the Commission published the responses to these initial proposals, which triggered the second statutory four week consultation period. On 17 October 2017 the Boundary Commission for England published their revised proposals in relation to Parliamentary Constituency boundaries, which triggered the final round of consultation, which runs until 11 December 2017.
- Members of the District Council are keen to submit formal consultation feedback to the Commission which is endorsed by full Council, to support the revised proposals and changes to the existing structure of the North East Cambridgeshire Parliamentary Constituency.

- The proposed North East Cambridgeshire Parliamentary Constituency will encompass all Fenland District Council wards and the East Cambridgeshire wards of Downham Villages and Sutton. The proposal moves the East Cambridgeshire District wards of Littleport East and Littleport West from the North East Cambridgeshire Parliamentary Constituency into a newly named Norfolk Constituency; Thetford and Downham Market.
- Previous consultation comments submitted to the Boundary Commission for England have put forward a number of alternative proposals for the North East Cambridgeshire Constituency. In the event that any of these counter proposals are resubmitted and reassessed for adoption by the Boundary Commission, it could result in the District of Fenland being dispersed across two or more Parliamentary Constituencies, which Elected Members have previously articulated would have a devastating impact on the consistency of central government representation across the area.
- The Fenland district has a strong sense of community and community ties; it is a rural area with four market towns surrounded by villages and hamlets. The current proposal that the Fenland District is kept together within one Parliamentary Constituency is strongly supported and considered to be reflective of existing, long established community ties.
- This is the final opportunity for Elected Members to submit consultation comments which may influence the Boundary Commission's approach to Parliamentary Constituency boundaries, which affect local representation. It is therefore important that Members utilise this opportunity to endorse the Boundary Commission's current proposals for the North East Cambridgeshire Parliamentary constituency.
- As well as Fenland District Council as a whole submitting a consultation response, individual Members are also able to submit consultation responses directly to the Boundary Commission for England.

### 3 Recommendations

For Council to agree the consultation response that the whole of the Fenland District be retained within the North East Cambridgeshire Parliamentary Constituency in accordance with the current proposals put forward by the Boundary Commission for England.

<b>Wards Affected</b>	All
<b>Forward Plan Reference</b>	
<b>Portfolio Holder(s)</b>	Member Working Group: Cllr Chris Boden Cllr Gavin Booth Cllr Virginia Bucknor Cllr Anne Hay Cllr Samantha Hoy Cllr Kay Mayor Cllr Will Sutton Cllr Fred Yeulett
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<b>Background Paper(s)</b>	Boundary Commission for England Review 2018 <a href="http://www.bce2018.org.uk">www.bce2018.org.uk</a>

#### 4 **Consultation Submission to The Boundary Commission for England in relation to the proposal for the future of the North East Cambridgeshire Parliamentary Constituency**

- 4.1 Fenland District Council strongly **supports** the revised proposals for the North East Cambridgeshire Parliamentary Constituency boundaries.
- 4.2 The Boundary Commission for England adhere to strict criteria when making decisions in regards to Constituency boundaries. These are:
- Electoral equality
  - Special geographical considerations, including the size, shape and accessibility of the constituency
  - Local government boundaries as they exist on 7 May 2015
  - Boundaries of existing constituencies and
  - Any local ties that would be broken by changes in constituencies
- 4.3 **Electoral Equality**
- a) We note that the proposal for the North East Cambridgeshire Parliamentary Constituency meets the legislative requirement of every constituency having between 71,031 and 78,507 electors. The proposed North East Cambridgeshire Parliamentary Constituency will have 75,727 electors.
  - b) We accept that the current Constituency is too large to meet the legislative requirement regarding the number of electors and the Fenland District Council local government boundary would be too small. Fenland District Council supports moving Littleport West and Littleport East in to the Thetford and Downham Market Constituency and retaining Downham Villages and Sutton within North East Cambridgeshire as this complies with a number of the legislative criteria and allows Fenland, Downham Villages and Sutton, which are so closely interlinked, to be kept together.
  - c) The Fenland District has been wholly retained in the North East Cambridgeshire constituency since its creation in 1983, emphasising the community identity and strength of local ties.

#### 4.4 **Special geographical considerations, including the size, shape and accessibility of the constituency**

- a) The Commissioners will know that the Fens have very special geographic characteristics which define this area of the country. Drained in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the Fens are characterised by its waterways, flat landscape, agricultural economy and attractive market towns and villages. The proposals for the North East Cambridgeshire Parliamentary Constituency reflect and contain these special geographical qualities, which change once you cross the boundary in to the more built up and urban areas of Ely, Peterborough, Huntingdon and King's Lynn.
- b) The background to North East Cambridgeshire Parliamentary Constituency is important when considering future Parliamentary Constituency boundaries as it illustrates the attractions and potential challenges associated with the area. Due to the strength of local community ties and synergy across Fenland as a whole it makes a compelling case for retaining the entire district within one Parliamentary Constituency where the prevailing issues can be effectively addressed and represented by one Member of Parliament.
- c) Located in East Anglia, Fenland covers approximately 200 square miles and is one of five districts within the county of Cambridgeshire. Fenland is a rural and sparsely populated district with many rural communities. Fenland has strong community spirit and pride in its heritage.
- d) Over 98,000 people live in the district, with 75% living in the four market towns of Chatteris, March, Whittlesey and Wisbech. The remaining 25% of the Fenland population lives within the 29 villages and hamlets located across the district.
- e) With the lowest house prices in Cambridgeshire and plentiful availability of commercial land, Fenland is an attractive place to live and do business in. As such, our population is growing quickly and by 2031 it is predicted that there will be over 113,000 people living here.
- f) Fenland does face some challenges which would be most effectively addressed by the whole District being represented within one Parliamentary Constituency. For example:
  - Fenland is 80<sup>th</sup> (out of 326) most deprived area in the country which presents issues around education and health. The local MP has recently lobbied government for Fenland to be included in Opportunity Area funding and has successfully attracted £6m. We do not want to lose influence on these issues from a dilution of voice in Westminster from having more than 1 MP representing the area.
  - Our population is also getting older. 25% of our residents are pensioners, and this is expected to increase to 41% by 2024. We know that 1 in 7 pensioners in Fenland live alone.
  - Lowest levels of healthy eating and exercise in the East of England.
  - Highest levels of smoking in the East of England.
  - High levels of migration into the district – particularly from Eastern Europe leading to issues of community cohesion, housing and access to services – this has recently been well recognised by government through £850,000 funding from the Controlling Migration Fund.
  - One of largest populations of Gypsy Travellers in the country.
  - Public transport links and infrastructure in need of improvement.

- Other issues also exist within the district, which are not as visible such as rural isolation, literacy levels and levels of caring for family members. These complex challenges have led the Council with its partners to generate proactive and innovative solutions which have improved quality of life for the residents of Fenland with the support of a single MP covering the whole area.

#### 4.5 Any local ties that would be broken by changes in constituencies

- a) The Fenland District is a cohesive set of settlements characterised by their rural characteristics with similar issues and outlook – all served by one District Council. The maintenance of the whole Council area within the North East Cambridgeshire boundary of the Parliamentary Constituency is essential to maintaining community ties, community spirit and the collective heritage the District has. The area has a great collective affinity stretching back to 1974 when the District Council was created and the Parliamentary Constituency reflected and strengthened that in 1983 when it was created. The current proposals recognise the strong community cohesion that has been built up over a number of years which is reflected in the interaction between the towns and villages in the District in relation to access to the road network, amenities and shopping.
- b) The Fens are a defined geographical area identified by the many waterways, drains and rivers, which is a common heritage shared across the four market towns of Chatteris, March, Wisbech and Whittlesey and the surrounding villages including Downham Villages and Sutton. Even though Downham Villages and Sutton are within the East Cambridgeshire District Council boundaries, this area is very much an extension of the same fenland landscape and have a lot of commonality with the rest of Fenland.
- c) Chatteris, March, Whittlesey and Wisbech as well as Downham Villages and Sutton have a natural affinity through the road network including A47, A141 and A142 to the other Fenland towns for shopping, education and amenities. Students from across Fenland attend local secondary schools such as Cromwell Community College in Chatteris, Neale Wade Academy in March, Sir Harry Smith Community College, Whittlesey and the Thomas Clarkson Academy in Wisbech, therefore it is important these ties are maintained by the inclusion of the whole district within the North East Cambridgeshire Parliamentary constituency.
- d) There is a distinct boundary in the A10 which separates the proposed Constituency with Littleport East and Littleport West therefore Councillors can see the sense in amending the current Constituency in this way to ensure electoral equality.
- e) Residents from all four of the market towns identify themselves as very much part of the wider district and associate themselves as such.
- f) Each of the four market towns experience many of the issues which are relevant to other wards across the district including quality of life, an ageing population, migration, access to employment, and transport and infrastructure related issues. It is the view of elected members that the whole of Fenland District should be represented by one Member of Parliament to ensure the key issues are understood and addressed in a consistent manner.
- g) Fenland District Council were pleased that the Boundary Commission for England agreed with our assessment that the District should remain within one Parliamentary Constituency. Previous proposals had implications for Chatteris, Doddington and

Wimblington with the previous suggestion from other consultees that these areas could potentially move in to the North West Cambridgeshire Parliamentary Constituency. Fenland District Council would strongly object to this proposal being reintroduced and would reiterate the local concern conveyed to them by constituents of this potential outcome.

- h) Chatteris, Doddington and Wimblington all have access to the A141 with transport links to Chatteris and March. March is the main shopping centre for the area and numerous residents travel to March in order to gain access to the busy train station with access to Peterborough, as well as employment.
- i) Children attend the primary schools located within the villages however in relation to secondary school education children travel in increasing numbers to Chatteris to Cromwell Community College or Neale Wade Academy in March.
- j) Doddington and Wisbech are the homes to the local non-emergency community hospitals which are the hubs of local health provision across Fenland. As a result Fenland residents travel from across the district to access local accessible health care.
- k) Chatteris, Wimblington and Doddington have been an integral part of Fenland District since its inception in 1974. Whilst we appreciate that is not in question as part of the Parliamentary Constituency Review, what that does emphasise is the strong, consistent and stable sense of community has existed for a generation. It is therefore the strong belief that the proposal to retain these communities within the North East Cambridgeshire Parliamentary Constituency would recognise and endorse those strong community ties which have existed successfully for so long.

#### **4.6 Local government boundaries as they exist on 7 May 2015**

- a) Fenland District Council strongly supports and endorses the whole of the District Council area being retained wholly within one Parliamentary Constituency of North East Cambridgeshire.

#### **4.7 Boundaries of existing constituencies**

- a) Fenland District Council strongly supports and endorses the minimal changes made to the North East Cambridgeshire Constituency to ensure electoral equality as it ensures that the common ties and links between the respective towns and villages within the area are maintained.

#### **4.8 Summary**

Fenland District Council fully endorses the original Boundary Commission proposals in respect of the North East Cambridgeshire Parliamentary Constituency Boundary. This proposal would contain in its entirety the Fenland District as this achieves the legislative requirement in relation to electoral equality and is also reflective of the strong and long established community ties in the area.