

Agenda Item No:	<b>12</b>	
Committee:	<b>Cabinet</b>	
Date:	<b>15 July 2021</b>	
Report Title:	<b>FDC Response to Parliamentary Constituency Boundary Review Consultation</b>	

## 1 Purpose / Summary

For Cabinet to agree the Fenland District Council response to the consultation from the Boundary Commission for England (BCE) on the future composition of parliamentary constituency boundaries.

## 2 Key issues

- The boundaries of parliamentary constituencies are reviewed periodically to ensure that constituencies are broadly equal in numbers of eligible voters whilst also respecting local ties.
- All constituencies recommended by the BCE (apart from 'protected' island constituencies) must have no fewer than 69,724 parliamentary electors and no more than 77,062. By law, these electorate figures relate to electorates as they were on 2nd March 2020.
- The 2nd March 2020 electorate for the District of Fenland was 70,806.
- The BCE initial proposals include the creation of a parliamentary constituency which is coterminous with Fenland District Council.
- It is the opinion of Fenland District Council that such an arrangement would provide very clearly defined boundaries and would respect local ties.
- A name change to the constituency is proposed.
- Other changes/comments on surrounding parliamentary constituencies are included in the FDC response.
- Any consultation responses must be received by 2nd August 2021.
- Individual consultation responses may be submitted by members if they wish.

## 3 Recommendations

It is recommended Cabinet:

- 3.1 Agrees to submit the proposed consultation response on parliamentary constituency boundaries to the Boundary Commission for England (BCE) as set out in section 5 of this report.
- 3.2 Supports the BCE's initial proposals with respect to the boundaries of its proposed "North East Cambridgeshire" and "East Cambridgeshire" parliamentary constituencies.
- 3.3 Strongly opposes the retention of the name "North East Cambridgeshire" for the BCE's proposed new parliamentary constituency covering the area of Fenland District Council, much preferring that that new parliamentary constituency be named "Fenland."

- 3.4 Agrees with the name proposed by the BCE for its "East Cambridgeshire" parliamentary constituency.
- 3.5 Believes that the BCE's initial proposal to create new "Peterborough" and "North West Cambridgeshire" parliamentary constituencies should be replaced with new "Peterborough North" and "Peterborough South & Ramsey" parliamentary constituencies.

<b>Wards Affected</b>	All wards
<b>Forward Plan Reference</b>	
<b>Portfolio Holder(s)</b>	Cllr Chris Boden - Leader of the Council
<b>Report Originator(s)</b>	Carol Pilson - Corporate Director Paul Medd - Chief Executive
<b>Contact Officer(s)</b>	Paul Medd - Chief Executive Carol Pilson - Corporate Director
<b>Background Paper(s)</b>	<a href="https://www.independent.gov.uk">2023 Review   Boundary Commission for England (independent.gov.uk)</a>

## **4 Background**

- 4.1 The boundaries of parliamentary constituencies are reviewed periodically to ensure that constituencies are broadly equal in numbers of eligible voters whilst also respecting local ties.
- 4.2 Following the passage into law last December of the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 2020 and the publication of the relevant parliamentary electorate data in January this year, the Boundary Commission for England (BCE) began a review of all parliamentary constituencies in England.
- 4.3 Application of the statutory rules to the published electorate data means that all constituencies recommended by the BCE (apart from 'protected' island constituencies) must have no fewer than 69,724 parliamentary electors and no more than 77,062. By law, these electorate figures relate to electorates as they were on 2nd March 2020.
- 4.4 The 2nd March 2020 electorate for the District of Fenland was 70,806.
- 4.5 On 8th June 2021 the BCE published its initial proposals in respect of the 543 English Constituencies. There is a statutory consultation period ending on 2nd August 2021 to allow views to be expressed on these proposals.
- 4.6 The BCE advises that support for, or opposition to, any proposal needs to take into account the knock-on effects that any proposal may have in neighbouring areas.

## **5 FDC Consultation response on Parliamentary Constituency Boundaries**

- 5.1 Fenland District Council had an electorate on 2nd March 2020 which would allow a Parliamentary Constituency to be created which is coterminous with the District Council area. The BCE initial proposals include the creation of a parliamentary constituency which is coterminous with Fenland District Council.
- 5.2 It is the opinion of Fenland District Council that such an arrangement would provide very clearly defined boundaries and would respect local ties.
- 5.3 However, given the proposed coterminosity between the local parliamentary constituency and the local District Council, it makes no sense, and could create confusion, that the proposed parliamentary constituency does not have the same name as the District Council. Fenland District Council, whilst supporting the BCE's proposed new boundaries for its North East Cambridgeshire parliamentary constituency, would therefore strongly urge that the new parliamentary constituency be named "Fenland".
- 5.4 There are knock-on effects, both by commission and by omission, affecting neighbouring areas if a new parliamentary constituency is formed which is coterminous with the area of Fenland District Council.
- 5.5 To the south-east of the new proposed constituency, the old parliamentary constituency of North East Cambridgeshire would lose the East Cambridgeshire wards of Littleport, Downham Villages and Sutton. The BCE proposals are that these three wards would be included with all of the other wards in East Cambridgeshire District, together with a small number of wards from South Cambridgeshire District Council, in a new parliamentary constituency to be named "East Cambridgeshire".
- 5.6 In the opinion of Fenland District Council it makes sense to combine all of the wards within the East Cambridgeshire District Council area within a single parliamentary constituency, with the shortfall in electorate being made up from wards from South Cambridgeshire District Council.

- 5.7 On Fenland's western border we have the BCE's proposed revised parliamentary constituencies of Peterborough and North West Cambridgeshire.
- 5.8 The electorate in the area covered by Peterborough City council is only slightly short of the numbers required for two parliamentary seats.
- 5.9 On casual inspection of the map, given the topography of the area, it may appear to some to be appropriate to include the Town of Whittlesey with the City of Peterborough to make up the numbers for the two new Peterborough parliamentary constituencies.
- 5.10 Fenland District Council opposes any such suggestion of combining Whittlesey with Peterborough because (a) there is little sense within the Town of Whittlesey that its inhabitants identify themselves as part of Peterborough and (b) including Whittlesey with Peterborough would unnecessarily disrupt the very sensible initial proposal of the BCE that a new parliamentary constituency should be created which is coterminous with Fenland District Council.
- 5.11 The BCE initial proposals suggest that three wards from Huntingdonshire should be added to the City of Peterborough to create an electorate sufficiently large to support two parliamentary constituencies. Given the alternative option involves disrupting the proposed new parliamentary constituency which is coterminous with Fenland, Fenland District Council supports the BCE initial proposal to include those three Huntingdonshire wards with the City of Peterborough to create sufficient electors to support two parliamentary constituencies.
- 5.12 However, the BCE's proposed division of that area to create a new "Peterborough" parliamentary constituency and a new "North West Cambridgeshire" parliamentary constituency flies in the face of the fact that the area covered by these two new proposed parliamentary constituencies is basically Peterborough City Council, with just three (smaller) wards from Huntingdonshire District Council to "make up the numbers". It makes little sense that the BCE's proposed new "Peterborough" seat will no longer contain residential areas immediately adjacent to the City Centre, whilst the proposed new "North West Cambridgeshire" parliamentary constituency has been so drawn that the overwhelming majority of the electors of that proposed parliamentary constituency do not even live in Cambridgeshire and have not done so since local government reorganisation twenty years ago.
- 5.13 Rather than clinging onto the remnants of bygone parliamentary constituencies in that area which no longer correspond with local government boundaries, it makes more sense that the size of the electorate in the City of Peterborough be recognised by creating two Peterborough parliamentary constituencies. Given the aforementioned anomalous geographical location of Whittlesey in relation to the area of the City of Peterborough, no east/west split of Peterborough into two parliamentary constituencies would make sense, but a north/south split most definitely would.
- 5.14 Fenland District Council therefore supports the creation of a "Peterborough North" constituency and a "Peterborough South and Ramsey" constituency, created from the wards of the City of Peterborough together with the three most northerly Huntingdonshire wards already identified for inclusion with Peterborough by the BCE in its initial proposals. The dividing line between "Peterborough North" and "Peterborough South & Ramsey" being the river Nene, apart from the necessary inclusion of City Centre voters within "Peterborough South & Ramsey" to approximately equalise the electorates of the two parliamentary constituencies.