

Report to COUNCIL

2018 Review of Parliamentary Constituencies – Response to the Boundary Commission Consultation

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Reason for Decision

An alternative option is proposed as a submission in response to the Boundary Commission for England to inform their consultation on the review of Parliamentary Constituencies.

Executive Summary

The Boundary Commission for England (BCE) announced the start of a review of the Parliamentary constituencies in England. The BCE is required to report to Parliament in September 2018. The BCE have published details of the process that the 2018 Review will follow including the public hearings to be conducted in the autumn.

The BCE have published the Guide for the review which is attached as Appendix 1.

Since the last review, the Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Act 2011 has been introduced. There is now required to be a fixed number of 600 constituencies for the whole of the UK. Currently there are 650 constituencies. The number of constituencies allocated to England for 2018 review is 501. The North West has been allocated 68. Currently, it has 75 constituencies.

Every constituency in England must have an electorate as the review date that is no smaller than 71,031 and no larger than 78,507. Currently, the Oldham West and Royton constituency is 71,377 and Oldham East and Saddleworth is 71,057. There are 15,390 electors in the Failsworth East and Failsworth West local government wards in the Ashton-under-Lyne Parliamentary constituency. Full detail on the rules for redistribution of seats is contained in Appendix D of the Guide.

The process:

- a) The BCE published proposals in September 2016 for consultation.
- b) The 2018 Review is being carried out under a new procedure that relies on a combination of written representation and oral representation at public hearings. The hearings are not inquiries. There will be 5 hearings in the North West between mid-October and mid-November 2016.
- c) There will be a 12 week consultation on the BCE's initial proposals. At the end of this period, the BCE will publish representations made and there will be a further 4 week period during which people can submit comments on the representations.
- d) The BCE will then issue a report on each region. If the proposals are revised from the initial proposals, there will be an 8 week period for written representations.
- e) The BCE submits a formal written report to the Government. Parliament then considers implementation.

Recommendations

That Council considers the alternative options as set out in the report.

2018 Review of Parliamentary Constituencies – Response to the Boundary Commission Consultation

1 Background

- 1.1 Oldham Council is opposed to the current proposals set out in the Boundary Commission for England's (BCE) consultation documentation for the 2018 Review of Parliamentary Constituency Boundaries.
- 1.2 We believe that in drawing up the proposed boundaries the BCE has not taken account of its own guidance as set out in the "*Guide to the 2018 Review of Parliamentary Constituencies*".
- 1.3 "According to Rule 5, Schedule 2, the BCE may take the following factors into account when establishing a new map of constituencies:
- Geographical considerations which include size, shape and accessibility of constituencies
 - Local government boundaries as they existed on May 2015
 - Boundaries of existing constituencies
 - Local ties that would be broken by changes in constituencies"
- 1.4 It is our view that the BCE has not taken any of these factors into account in the current proposals, as they apply to the twenty wards that make up Oldham Metropolitan Borough.
- There are significant geographical issues in the Boundary Commissions proposals for constituencies containing Oldham wards.
 - The proposals put the Oldham wards into three constituencies alongside wards from within a total of four Local Government Boundaries.
 - The proposals depart drastically from the boundaries of the existing constituencies of Oldham West and Royton and Oldham East and Saddleworth.
 - The proposals break strong community ties that exist within the existing constituencies.
- 1.5 It is clear that the aim of retaining existing constituencies where possible has not been well met in the North West with just 19% of constituencies remaining unchanged. This is most apparent in the east of the Greater Manchester conurbation.

2 **Boundary Commission Proposals**

2.1 **Geography**

- 2.1.1 The size and topography of the proposed Littleborough and Saddleworth constituency creates significant issues of accessibility. Saddleworth is a largely rural district and forms a part of the Peak District National Park and the South Pennines Countryside Character Area.
- 2.1.2 This proposal has not taken physical geographical considerations into account. The areas of population within the proposed constituency are separated by hills, moorland and a major motorway in the M62.
- 2.1.3 Transport links within this proposed constituency are poor. Winter weather conditions in this area can make travel between different towns and villages difficult or even impossible.
- 2.1.4 Because of these barriers, this proposed constituency presents difficulties in affording all constituents the ability to have reasonable access to their MP.
- 2.1.5 The proposed Failsworth and Droylsden constituency draws wards from four existing constituencies, with seven of the ten wards being drawn from Oldham Metropolitan Borough. The constituency stretches from Saddleworth West and Lees (currently in Oldham East and Saddleworth), in a swathe via the central Oldham wards of Alexandra (Oldham East and Saddleworth) and Werneth and then south through Medlock Vale and Hollinwood (these three currently in Oldham West and Royton). It then takes in Failsworth East, Failsworth West, Droylsden East and Droylsden West (these four are currently in the Ashton-under-Lyne constituency) then picks up Audenshaw from the Denton and Reddish Constituency. This creates a seat that draws 66% of its electors from within Oldham Metropolitan Borough.
- 2.1.6 The proposed seat is geographically incoherent. It is difficult to understand where an MP might locate an office that would be easily accessible to the whole of this constituency. For example, if the office were to be in central Oldham, according to Transport for Greater Manchester's journey planner an Audenshaw constituent would face a journey by road, tram and on foot that would take an hour and forty minutes each way. Over 40 minutes of this suggested journey is on foot, which would not be feasible for many constituents, and especially not for those with mobility issues. Similar issues would apply to the siting of a Littleborough and Saddleworth constituency office.

2.2 **Local Authority Boundaries**

- 2.2.1 The three new constituencies proposed for the wards of Oldham Metropolitan Borough are drawn from four local authority areas: Oldham, Manchester, Tameside and Rochdale. It is difficult to accept that local government boundaries have been taken into account. Currently, eighteen of the twenty Oldham wards are split between the Oldham West and Royton and the Oldham East and Saddleworth constituencies. Failsworth East and Failsworth West are the only two Oldham wards not contained within an Oldham constituency and they are in the Ashton-under-Lyne constituency.
- 2.2.2 The proposals across the North West seek to avoid any constituency containing wards from more than two local authority areas. Whilst this is achieved in these proposals it should be noted that the Oldham borough will share its three MPs with three other GM authorities. This brings its own administrative challenges, in particular for elections and especially for election counts when local and parliamentary elections fall on the same day.

2.3 Local Ties

- 2.3.1 Strong local ties have been ignored in these proposals.
- 2.3.2 Separating the two Royton wards is illogical and will be difficult for local people to understand. Prior to the formation of the Metropolitan Borough of Oldham, Royton was a self-controlling Urban District in its own right. After the Reform Act of 1832, Royton became part of the Oldham parliamentary borough constituency. Whilst Royton has found itself in different constituencies since then, the two wards have never been split.
- 2.3.3 Royton still retains its own Town Hall. Under Oldham council's strong commitment to localism, significant funding and decision making is devolved to local District Executives. For this purpose Royton is a two ward District Executive, with six councillors.
- 2.3.4 Roytonians identify with their place as a single town. It has its own town centre with a thriving shopping centre, a busy weekly market, its own library and only this year work was completed on a new Leisure centre.
- 2.3.5 Roytonians are also Oldhamers and are very proud that the name of the current constituency contains the name of their town Royton.
- 2.3.6 The Boundary Commission proposals split Saddleworth West and Lees from Saddleworth North and Saddleworth South. For the purpose of devolved district working the three Saddleworth wards form a single District Executive, with nine members. Saddleworth is parished and has its own civic hall in Uppermill. Although the Lees part of the Saddleworth West and Lees ward is **not** part of the Parish the rest, roughly half of the electorate, is. Saddleworth people do not distinguish between the ward boundaries.
- 2.3.7 It is welcome that these proposals make no attempt to separate the Chaddertons. Splitting these three wards would be as unacceptable as splitting Royton or Saddleworth. Chadderton retains its own Town Hall, its own sports centre within the Health and Wellbeing Centre, has a District shopping centre, and a nine member District Executive.

2.4 Alternative Proposal

- 2.4.1 Oldham is a growing Metropolitan Borough with a relatively young population of almost a quarter of a million people. Our current electoral numbers allow for two parliamentary constituencies wholly contained within Oldham Metropolitan Borough. This two constituency Oldham arrangement allows for the retention of the existing constituency names and involves minimum disruption. It also keeps within the electoral size limit of constituencies having no fewer than 71,031 and no more than 78,507 electors.
- 2.4.2 Creating two constituencies within the Oldham council local government boundaries can be achieved by bringing Failsworth East and Failsworth West into the Oldham West and Royton constituency. This would then necessitate moving one ward from the current Oldham West and Royton constituency into Oldham East and Saddleworth. Our proposal is that this should be the Medlock Vale ward. This configuration of wards is set out in Fig 1 below.
- 2.4.3 This proposal addresses:
- Geographical considerations which include size, shape and accessibility of constituencies
 - Local government boundaries as they existed on May 2015
 - Boundaries of existing constituencies
 - Local ties that would be broken by changes in constituencies”

- 2.4.4 It is important to note the rationale, primarily based on community ties, for the exact configuration of our two proposed constituencies.
- 2.4.5 Including Failsworth East and Failsworth West in the Oldham West and Royton constituency would reunite these two wards with Hollinwood, Hollinwood was removed from the Ashton-under-Lyne constituency in the last parliamentary boundary changes. Despite this, the two Failsworth wards retain strong links with Hollinwood. Many parts of the Failsworth East ward are still considered to be Hollinwood by local residents. The famous Housing Units of Hollinwood is actually in Failsworth East. The site of the former Roxy cinema, strongly identified by local people as Hollinwood, is also in Failsworth East.
- 2.4.6 An indicator of the relationship between the Failsworths and Hollinwood is the fact that the three wards retain a single nine member District Executive, which meets in Failsworth Town Hall. Although the geography of District Executives has been reviewed twice since the 2010 general election, members retain a strong preference for this arrangement.
- 2.4.7 Our proposal to include Medlock Vale in the Oldham East and Saddleworth constituency would make for a coherent geographical split between Oldham East and Saddleworth and Oldham West and Royton. There are very strong community links between the Alexandra ward and Medlock Vale. The wards are demographically similar. Both wards were part of the New Deal for Communities initiative in the last decade. NDC leaves as part of its legacy the excellent Honeywell Community Centre, which both communities share. Both communities also see Hathershaw school as their main provider of secondary education. There are strong transport links around the A627.

Fig 1 - Proposed Oldham retaining two MPs

Oldham East	
Alexandra	6212
Medlock Vale	7845
St James	7556
St Marys	8151
Waterhead	7924
Saddleworth North	7651
Saddleworth South	8030
Saddleworth West & Lees	8246
Crompton	8064
Shaw	7388
	77067
Oldham West	
Failsworth East	7687
Failsworth West	7386
Hollinwood	7171
Chadderton Central	7782
Chadderton North	8114
Chadderton South	7509
Coldhurst	7933
Werneth	7261
Royton North	7736
Royton South	8105
	76684

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- 3 **Options/Alternatives**
- 3.1 Option 1 – Do Nothing.
Option 2 - For Full council to make a submission to the BCE making the case for the alternative Parliamentary Boundaries as set out in the report.
- 4 **Preferred Option**
- 4.1 The preferred option is to support the alternative options as set out in the report.
- 5 **Consultation**
- 5.1 Members of Full Council are asked to consider the contents of the report.
- 6 **Financial Implications**
- 6.1 N/A
- 7 **Legal Services Comments**
- 7.1 The legal process is contained within the body of the report.
8. **Co-operative Agenda**
- 8.1 As set out in the detail of the report.
- 9 **Human Resources Comments**
- 9.1 N/A
- 10 **Risk Assessments**
- 10.1 N/A
- 11 **IT Implications**
- 11.1 N/A
- 12 **Property Implications**
- 12.1 N/A
- 13 **Procurement Implications**
- 13.1 N/A
- 14 **Environmental and Health & Safety Implications**
- 14.1 N/A
- 15 **Equality, community cohesion and crime implications**
- 15.1 N/A
- 16 **Equality Impact Assessment Completed?**
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16.1	No
17	Key Decision
17.1	No
18	Key Decision Reference
18.1	N/A
19	Background Papers
19.1	N/A
20	Appendices
20.1	N/A