

REPORT TO: East Lothian Council

MEETING DATE: 14 December 2021

BY: Executive Director for Council Resources

SUBJECT: Response to Boundary Commission Review

1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To advise Council of the ongoing review of UK Parliamentary boundaries and seek approval of a response to be submitted as part of the consultation exercise.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 To note the Boundary Commission for Scotland consultation on the proposed new UK Parliamentary Constituencies.
- 2.2 To approve the response to the Boundary Commission for Scotland as detailed in Appendix 1 to this report

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Boundary Commission for Scotland has published initial proposals for a new map of UK Parliamentary constituencies in Scotland. Scotland has been allocated 57 constituencies for the 2023 Review, two fewer than the present number of 59. The overarching intent is to equalise the electorate of each constituency in order that there is consistency in the number of votes required to elect a Member of Parliament. This aim is set out in the statutory remit given to the Boundary Commission by the UK.
- 3.2 An electoral quota was calculated by dividing the total UK electorate by the number of constituencies with the two island constituencies excluded. Other than the two island constituencies, the electorate for each constituency must be within 5% of the UK electoral quota of 73,392, therefore within the range 69,724 and 77,062. The electorate for the

current East Lothian UK Parliamentary constituency is 82,479, calculated from the data from March 2020, as used by the Boundary Commission.

3.3 In addition to the legal requirement to equalise electorate numbers, the Boundary Commission have developed their constituency design proposals with reference to their own policy principles which include:

- recognising community ties that might be broken by changes in constituencies
- special geographic considerations, including the size, shape and accessibility of a constituency and transport links
- other electoral and administrative boundaries, including Council boundaries

However, these principles are secondary to the statutory requirement to equalise electorate numbers.

3.4 The proposal from the Boundary Commission would see the western part of Musselburgh removed from the East Lothian constituency and joined with part of eastern Edinburgh to form a constituency called Edinburgh Eastern, with an electorate of 73,187. The remainder of East Lothian would form a constituency called East Lothian Coast, with an electorate of 73,939. The proposed change is shown on the map forming Appendix 2 to this report.

3.5 While this proposal would undoubtedly meet the electorate number requirements, it would also be contrary to a number of the policy principles set out in para 3.3 above. Whilst geographically close to eastern Edinburgh, Musselburgh is a distinct and separate town with its own identity and history. It is one of East Lothian's main towns and has a cohesive community across the town as a whole and a significant place within the county. There is no history of a split within the town, as is now proposed and there is no rationale for such a division, other than the need to meet the electorate quota. If this proposal is adopted, a number of residents of Musselburgh will be in different electoral areas for UK Parliamentary, Scottish Parliamentary and Local Government elections, which may lead to voter confusion and inconvenience. If this proposal was to be adopted, it is considered that the name of the new constituency should clearly reflect the inclusion of part of Musselburgh. In addition, there seems little justification for renaming the renaming East Lothian constituency, given that a significant part of the area is not coastal in nature.

3.6 The Boundary Commission states that it welcomes any comments or representations on its proposals by 8 December 2021. Given the date of this meeting, it agreed that the Council could submit a draft response before the deadline and confirm, change or withdraw this immediately following the meeting. Accordingly, a draft response in the terms set out in Appendix 1 to this report has been submitted as a holding response. The Boundary Commission requires that any comments on the proposals

should state whether they approve of, or object to, the proposals and to give reasons for approval or objection. Objectors should state what they propose in place of the Commission's recommendations, taking account of the statutory requirements, i.e. the electorate numbers, and the impact on surrounding constituencies and the wider area. They also welcome alternatives for constituency names.

- 3.7 Given these parameters, it is difficult to construct a robust alternative proposal on electorate numbers. As such the draft response has focused on the matters of principle and the constituency names. Members are asked to consider the draft response, adding any further comments if required and confirm whether they wish this to be formally submitted or withdrawn.
- 3.8 In early 2022 there will be a secondary six-week consultation period, including up to 5 Public Hearings, which will include publication of all comments received up to the 8 December. Following consideration of any evidence received, any revised proposals would be offered for public consultation in late 2022 with final recommendations submitted to the Speaker by 1 July 2023. The next UK Parliamentary Election is scheduled to take place in May 2024 and the new constituencies will be in place for this election.

4 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 If these proposals are accepted, the change in electoral boundaries will have impacts for representation of voters, delivery of elections and for residents, staff and Elected Members engaging with Members of Parliament.

5 INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 5.1 The subject of this report does not affect the wellbeing of the community or have a significant impact on equality, the environment or economy

6 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Financial - none
- 6.2 Personnel - none
- 6.3 Other - none

7 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 7.1 Appendix 1 – draft response to the Boundary Commission

7.2 Appendix 2 - Map showing proposed new boundary for East Lothian UK Parliamentary Constituency

AUTHOR'S NAME	Morag Ferguson
DESIGNATION	Head of Corporate Support
CONTACT INFO	mferguson@eastlothian.gov.uk
DATE	26 th November 2021

Appendix 1

DRAFT RESPONSE TO BOUNDARY COMMISSION FOR SCOTLAND

2023 REVIEW OF UK PARLIAMENT CONSTITUENCIES PUBLIC CONSULTATION INITIAL PROPOSALS: CONSULTATION RESPONSE

I refer to your letter of 13 October 2021 regarding the current consultation on the Commission's initial proposals as a result of the 2023 Review of UK Parliament Constituencies.

Your letter and enclosures provided the background to the review, its timeline, the basis on which the electoral quota had been identified and proposals for the boundaries of the new 57 UK constituencies in Scotland. I should be grateful if you could treat this letter as East Lothian Council's draft response to the Commission's initial proposals. As agreed with your office, this response will be confirmed, amended or withdrawn following our Council meeting on 14th December 2021. I am grateful to you for your indulgence on this matter.

I note that the proposals represent a significant change for the East Lothian constituency. The proposal that the existing constituency should be reduced in size, with the western half of Musselburgh moved to the Edinburgh East constituency is clearly of some concern to the Members of the Council.

Given the applicable legislation and, specifically, the requirement to equalise the electorate across constituencies, it is difficult to argue with the numbers behind this change. However, it is the view of East Lothian Council that that any changes to Parliamentary boundaries should not be driven entirely by numbers and that the Commission's own principles should carry some weight.

The Commission's proposal for East Lothian breaks strong community ties, splits a community between two constituencies across two local authority areas, disregards the geographic, transport, business and community links between the two parts of community it proposes to split between two constituencies and existing electoral and administrative boundaries.

There is a strong historic and community connection between Musselburgh, as a whole, and the wider East Lothian area. In recent years, the Council has undertaken extensive work with community groups within Musselburgh to build a sense of place in the town as a whole and this proposal draws an arbitrary line down the middle of that town, and the community. Musselburgh is a town with a distinct and separate identity and to simply split it in half and 'add a part of it on' to an existing Edinburgh constituency in a different local authority seems to entirely disregard that sense of place.

From an administrative perspective, it would be the preference for the East Lothian constituency to be wholly within the Council area allowing a more accurate route to data analysis, a simpler alignment of political representation and avoid any cross-boundary issues in electoral administration.

However, given the population changes and the electoral quota, it is appreciated that the scope for alternative boundaries is limited. That said, the Council would like to make a strong representation in respect of the suggested names for the two constituencies. Firstly, if western Musselburgh is to be added to eastern Edinburgh, its place in that constituency should be reflected in the name. We would suggest 'East Edinburgh and West Musselburgh'. Secondly, there seems to be no rationale for renaming the remaining area of East Lothian as East Lothian Coastal. A significant part of the constituency is rural or inland towns with no immediate link to the coast. As such, we would propose that the current name of 'East Lothian' be retained.

This Council looks forward to any revised proposals that may result from this consultation and will again consider those when they are published.

2023 Review of UK Parliament Constituencies - Initial Proposals

East Lothian Coast County Constituency - Electorate 73,939

Appendix 2

© Crown Copyright and database right 2023. All rights reserved. Ordnance Survey Licence no. 10002279.

