



PORTFOLIO: POLICY AND STRATEGY

CABINET - 6 MARCH 2002

PROPOSALS FOR PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY BOUNDARIES IN NEW FOREST DISTRICT

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 On 14 February 2002 the Boundary Commission for England published its proposals for revised Parliamentary Constituencies in Hampshire. The Commission reviews boundaries every 8 to 12 years, and the current review, which commenced nationally in 2000, must be completed between April 2003 and April 2007. Despite this relatively long timescale, there is only a one month statutory consultation period, and the Commission is not obliged to take account of any representations on the proposals made after 14 March 2002. (Although it will endeavour to take later representations into account, this cannot be guaranteed).
- 1.2 This report requests members to consider what, if any, representations on these proposals should be made to the Boundary Commission.
- 1.3 Details of the Commission's proposals for the whole of Hampshire have been placed in the Members' Room. Copies of the large scale maps of the proposals are on deposit at, amongst other places, Main Reception at Appletree Court and the Town Hall, Lymington. All members of the Council and all Parish and Town Councils in the District have been informed of the proposals that affect the District.

2. CRITERIA FOR THE REVIEW

- 2.1 In preparing recommendations, the Commission is required to give effect to the Rules for Redistribution of Seats contained in the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986. One of the main rules is that electorates of Constituencies are to be as nearly equal as practicable. The "electoral quota" is calculated as follows:

The total number of electors in England as at February 2000 (when the current review started), divided by the total number of seats. This leads to an "ideal" electorate of 69,934.

- 2.2 Departures from the Rules may be permissible to

- (a) avoid excessive disparities in the electorates;
- (b) take account of special geographical considerations; or
- (c) take account of inconveniences which would be caused and local ties which would be broken by changes to constituencies.

2.3 The Commission uses district wards as the building blocks for the constituencies, and does not divide wards between constituencies. The Commission's guidance in this regard states:

"Wards are generally indicative of areas which have a community of interest and the local political party organisations are almost always based on them, or groups of them. Any splitting of these units between constituencies is therefore very likely to break local ties, disrupt political party organisation, cause difficulties for Electoral Registration and Returning Officers and confuse the electorate".

2.4 The Commission is required to base their recommendations on the numbers of electors on the electoral registers at the start of a review, in this instance electors on the February 2000 register ("the enumeration date"). It does not base its recommendations on forecast or projected electorates or on populations, actual or projected. However, the Commission might take account of actual growth in electorates before making its final recommendations, but only in choosing between what would in all other circumstances be permissible options.

3. EXISTING CONSTITUENCY BOUNDARIES

3.1 Currently, the District Wards and Parishes are divided between Parliamentary Constituencies as follows. Parishes are not relevant for the purpose of the review but are included for members' information:

New Forest East

District Wards

Blackfield & Langley; Boldre; Brockenhurst; Colbury, Copythorne South, Dibden & Hythe North, Dibden Purlieu, Fawley Holbury, Forest North, Forest South, Hythe South, Lyndhurst, Marchwood, Netley Marsh, Totton Central, Totton North, Totton South

Parishes

Ashurst & Colbury, Beaulieu, Boldre, Bramshaw, Brockenhurst, Copythorne, Denny Lodge, East Boldre, Exbury & Lepe, Fawley, Hythe & Dibden, Lyndhurst, Marchwood, Minstead, Netley Marsh, Totton & Eling

New Forest West

District Wards

Barton, Bashley, Becton, Bransgore & Sopley, Downlands, Fordingbridge, Forest North West, Forest West, Hordle, Lymington Town, Milford, Milton, Pennington, Ringwood North, Ringwood South, Sway

Parishes

Bransgore, Breamore, Burley, Damerham, Ellingham Harbridge & Ibsley, Fordingbridge, Godshill, Hale, Hordle, Hyde, Lymington & Pennington, Martin, Milford on Sea, New Milton, Ringwood, Rockbourne, Sandleheath, Sopley, Sway, Whitsbury, Woodgreen

4. PROPOSED CONSTITUENCY BOUNDARIES

- 4.1 The Commission is proposing only one change to the current Constituency boundaries within the District, specifically affecting the Parish of Boldre.
- 4.2 The current review is based on the new District Wards that come into effect in 2003. Under these new arrangements, Boldre and Sway will form a single District Ward. At present, these two Parishes, being two different District Wards, are in different Constituencies, Boldre in New Forest East and Sway in New Forest West. This will no longer be permissible. The Commission therefore proposes that the whole of the Boldre and Sway Ward form part of the New Forest West Constituency. The effect will be to transfer the Parish of Boldre from New Forest East to New Forest West. (See map at Appendix 1).
- 4.3 This would mean that the electorate of the redrawn constituencies, based on the February 2000 electorate, would be:

East	West
65,338	69,577

That is, based on 2000 figures, the East Constituency would be 6.1% smaller in electoral terms than the West - a figure which the Commission does not consider unacceptable.

- 4.4 The following is an extract from the Commission's News Release, which explains its reasoning:

"The Commission decided that the District of New Forest should continue to be divided between two whole seats. They noted that the Boldre and Sway ward was divided between the existing seats and decided that the ward should be included in the New Forest West seat as they considered it looks more to the west than to the east. Although this does not represent minimum change realignment in terms of area, it is minimum change in respect of the number of electors transferred. However, while such a realignment would produce a higher disparity than the alternative option, the Commission did not consider the resultant electorates unacceptable. The New Forest East and New Forest West seats would have electorates of 65,338 and 69,577 which are respectively 4,596 and 357 below the electoral quota".

5. CONSULTATION

- 5.1 The Commission publicises its proposals in local newspapers, and direct to local authorities, Members of Parliament, political party headquarters, and others.

Any individual or body is free to make its own representations direct to the Commission. This Council has consulted all members of the Council, and all Parish and Town Councils in the District, on the proposals. At the time of writing, views have been expressed to the Council as follows:

(a) Cllr Wise (local member for Boldre)

There has been insufficient time to sound out the views of the residents, but amongst those approached informally there appears to be a definite desire to remain in New Forest East. The matter is to be discussed at meeting of Boldre Parish Council on 4 March, but my initial views are that the Boldre and Sway Ward with its history of farming on the Forest has more in common with, and shares identity with, the parishes and wards to the north and east (Beaulieu, East Boldre and Brockenhurst), than those to the west. The greater part of the Forest lies to the north of the parish, and this is where the animals are grazed. As a result there are close ties with Beaulieu, East Boldre and Brockenhurst.

The primary schools in the hamlets in Boldre, South Baddesley, Beaulieu and East Boldre work closely together and are known as the "Forest Shore Cluster". The older children spend time together each year on a residential study week. Geographically, the Boldre and Sway Ward fits better with the east of the Forest. The main dividing southern feature is Passford Water, and the railway line from Lymington to Brockenhurst restricts paths and roads leading south and west. This division commences with Lymington Estuary in the south.

(b) Cllr Scott

Strongly opposed to moving Boldre Parish into New Forest West. Boldre is a widely dispersed rural parish and historically and currently with strong ties with its neighbouring rural parishes of Beaulieu, Brockenhurst and Sway. The Brockenhurst County Division encompasses the parishes of Beaulieu, Boldre, Brockenhurst, Burley, East Boldre, Exbury & Lepe and Sway. With the exception of Burley and Sway, these are all in New Forest East and the composition of the County Division supports the argument that Sway should move to New Forest East, rather than Boldre to New Forest West.

(c) Cllr Rickman (local member for Sway)

Sway Parish Council meets on 28 February when it will consider a response and I wait to hear the Parish's comments before arriving at my formal view. My initial thoughts, however, are that Sway has greater community identity with the parishes to the north and east, particularly Brockenhurst, rather than those to the west, and therefore that the new Sway and Bolde ward should be located in New Forest East, rather than New Forest West.

- 5.2 Any further views received between publication of this report and the Cabinet meeting will be reported orally at the meeting.

6. COMMENT ON THE COMMISSION'S PROPOSALS AND OTHER OPTIONS

6.1 It is considered that the proposal to continue to divide the District between two whole seats should be welcomed. With two constituencies slightly smaller numerically than the electoral quota, there is a possibility of at least one cross-district constituency, as was the case prior to 1997. Coterminous Parliamentary/District Council boundaries bring a host of advantages, such as a member or members of Parliament representing only one District.

6.2 On the question of where the division between the East and West Constituencies should be, the Commission's practices require that the District Ward of Boldre and Sway to be in the same Constituency. Locating the new ward in New Forest West, as proposed by the Commission, results in the following electorates (based on the February 2000 electorate)

New Forest East	New Forest West
65,338 (4,596 below the quota) (an electoral difference of 4,239 or 6.1%)	69,577 (357 below the quota)

6.3 The officers consider that the only feasible "minimum change" alternative would be to place the new District Ward of Boldre and Sway in New Forest East, as suggested by Cllrs Wise, Scott and Rickman. This would result in the following electorates (based on the February 2000 electorate):

New Forest East	New Forest West
69,644 (290 below the quota) (an electoral difference of 4,373 or 6.27%)	65,271 (4,663 below the quota)

6.4 The figures resulting from the option in 6.3 are only marginally different to those arising from the Commission's proposal. It is to be hoped that this alternative would be acceptable to the Commission on the electoral quota consideration.

6.5 Bearing in mind the Commission's guidance that it might take into account electorate projections for the purpose of assessing the most appropriate of alternative permissible schemes, the Cabinet should note that the 2004 electorate projections used for determining the new District Wards, would mean the following electoral quotas:

Commission's Option (Boldre & Sway in New Forest West)

New Forest East	New Forest West
71,709 (an electoral difference of 2,867 or just under 4%)	68,842

Alternative Option (Boldre & Sway in New Forest East)

New Forest East

73,303

(an electoral difference of 6,055 or 8.25%)

New Forest West

67,248

Thus, the electoral difference based on 2004 projections will be greater under the alternative suggested.

- 6.6 The Commission has justified its proposal on the ground that it considers that Boldre and Sway "looks more to the west than the east". No information on the Commissioners' reasons for this view is available. From the responses received to date, it appears that the local view is that the new Boldre and Sway Ward might more appropriately be located in New Forest East, and the Cabinet should therefore consider objecting to the Commission's proposals in respect of the future Boldre and Sway ward.
- 6.7 Members may wish to note that if the Commission receives objections from a District Council (among others), a Local Inquiry must be held.

7.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 If the Cabinet objects to the Commission's proposals, a public inquiry will be held. Costs to this Council would relate principally to employees' time and could probably be contained within existing resources. It is understood that, depending on the extent of local interest and persons seeking to appear at the Inquiry, the element of the Inquiry that will deal with the New Forest constituencies is likely to take approximately half a day.

8. ENVIRONMENTAL AND CRIME & DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 None arising directly from this report.

9. CONCLUSION

- 9.1 Parliamentary Constituency boundaries are reviewed every eight to ten years. The current review of Hampshire will be completed by April 2007. The current proposals, on which the Commission is consulting, suggest the "status quo" for the New Forest area, apart from the Parish of Boldre which is required to be in the same Constituency as Sway, and which the Commission suggests should be included in the New Forest West Constituency.

- 9.2 Preliminary views expressed by three members are that the Boldre and Sway Ward would be more appropriately located in New Forest West. The formal views of the Boldre and Sway Parish Councils, and of the local members, will be available at the meeting. If the Cabinet wishes to object to the Commission's proposals on the grounds that the Boldre and Sway Ward should be located in New Forest East, arguments in support of the objection will need to be developed.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 10.1 That the Boundary Commission be informed that this Council welcomes the proposal that the New Forest District should continue to be divided between two whole seats; and
- 10.2 That the Cabinet decides whether to object to the Commission's proposals for the new Boldre and Sway Ward to be located in New Forest West.

Further Information

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Background papers

Published documents

