

REPORT TO EXECUTIVE

Date of Meeting: 8 July 2021

REPORT TO COUNCIL

Date of Meeting: 21 July 2021

Report of: Electoral Registration & Returning Officer

Title: Parliamentary Constituency Boundary Review

Is this a Key Decision?

No

Is this an Executive or Council Function?

Council

1. What is the report about?

This report seeks the Council's view on the recently published Parliamentary Constituency Boundary Review as it affects both the existing Exeter and East Devon Parliamentary constituency's boundaries, as well as the City itself.

2. Recommendations:

It is recommended that the full Council:-

- (1) Decides which of either of the Pinhoe or Priory City Council wards should be suggested for inclusion in a revised Parliamentary Constituency to the east of the City;
- (2) Suggests that the name of any new parliamentary constituency to the east of the city includes a reference to the fact that it includes a significant proportion of the city within its boundary, with the suggestion being Exmouth and East Exeter; and
- (3) Instructs officers to inform the Boundary Commission for England of its views on its proposals.

3. Reasons for the recommendation:

3.1 To ensure that full Council makes a decision on this matter, thereby ensuring all councillors are part of the decision making process.

4. What are the resource implications including non financial resources.

None specific to this report.

5. Section 151 Officer comments:

There are no financial implications for Council to consider contained within this report.

6. What are the legal aspects?

The Council is, via its Returning Officer, obliged to run Parliamentary elections ensuring they follow relevant electoral law.

7. Monitoring Officer's comments:

This report raises no issues for the Monitoring Officer.

8. Report details:

8.1 It is worth pointing out at the very outset of the detail of this matter, that it the review being undertaken by the Boundary Commission, is only addressing the boundaries pertaining to parliamentary constituency boundaries, and therefore relates to the election of Members of Parliament. It does not impact on decisions of a local government nature relating to matters within the City Council boundary, which stay with the City Council itself. Similarly, decisions of a County Council nature which affect Exeter, will remain within the County Council for electoral divisions in the City.

8.2 Members will be aware that the City Council's administrative area straddles two existing Parliamentary Constituency boundaries – Exeter and East Devon, with some 80,676 of the city's electorate being in the Exeter constituency, and the remaining 11,512 of the city's electorate being in the East Devon constituency.

8.3 As such, all of the city wards, with the exception of parts of the Priory, St Loyes and Topsham city wards, form the Exeter Parliamentary Constituency, with an electorate of 80,676.

8.4 Parts of Priory, St Loyes and Topsham city wards, form part of the East Devon Parliamentary Constituency, which has an electorate of 75,387.

8.5 Periodically, the Boundary Commission for England undertakes a review of parliamentary constituency boundaries, so as to ensure that as far as possible each constituency has an equal electorate, thereby ensuring equality of representation in Parliament.

8.6 As far as possible, the Boundary Commission tries to have regard to local ties, geographic factors, local government boundaries, existing constituencies, and minimising disruption caused by any proposed change.

8.7 To do this, it uses local government wards as the building blocks for proposed constituencies, but would consider splitting a ward where there is a strong case for doing so.

8.8 Taking into account the electorate across England as at 2 March 2020, it has recommended in this latest review, that each constituency must have an electorate as at 2 March 2020, that is no smaller than 69,724 and no larger than 77,062, and it is the intention to put legislation into place for this, with this being currently expected to be done in late 2023.

8.9 The Exeter Constituency has a current electorate of 80,676 and is therefore deemed too large in the latest comparator figures. The current East Devon constituency which has an electorate of 75,387.

- 8.10 This has necessitated a review of the current boundaries of both these parliamentary constituencies to ensure they are within the parameters set for electorates, as well as to avoid the splitting of city council wards if possible, which, as stated above, is currently the case.
- 8.11 The Boundary Commission has therefore proposed that the existing arrangement be extended to include all of the Priory, St Loyes and Topsham city wards, thereby ensuring that the new Exeter parliamentary constituency electorate falls within the range set by the Boundary Commission, and does not continue the current practice of splitting city council wards.
- 8.12 This concept is to be welcomed in principle as it eases the administrative arrangements for all concerned when running a parliamentary election, including the electors themselves.
- 8.13 This would mean that in the case of the Priory ward, the proposed new parliamentary boundary would stretch into the city as far as Barrack Road. As such, this is an extension of the existing arrangement, and meets the Boundary Commission's criteria of not continuing to split electoral wards. However, it could be argued that this extension of the parliamentary boundary could be considered too far into the urban heart of the City, particularly when it would include the Royal Devon & Exeter Hospital site within its new boundary.
- 8.14 An alternative view would be for the existing Pinhoe ward to be included in the new parliamentary constituency instead of the Priory ward. This would ensure that all three of the most easterly city council wards, which border the east Devon administrative area, are included in the new constituency, allowing for there to be a contiguous boundary between the two authorities. It could also be argued that Pinhoe retains some of its rurality with a distinctive "village" centre, which may sit better with the more rural constituency of Exmouth. However, it would mean that electors in the whole of this area would be transferred on block to a new constituency (for them), which could lead to confusion at the time of an election.
- 8.15 Members may wish to note that the electorates for both the Priory and Pinhoe wards are identical at 6,399. As such therefore, this suggested switch of city ward would make no difference to the electorate of either the Exeter constituency, or the proposed Exmouth constituency (which the Boundary Commission state will be 71,713 and 76,661 respectively which sits within the limits set).
- 8.16 It is therefore suggested that the Council decides which of the two wards (in addition to St Loyes and Topsham) it feels most appropriate should be included in the new Exmouth constituency, and make representations to the Boundary Commission accordingly. Maps which show the two options are attached as appendices to this report.
- 8.17 Members may also wish to consider making representation on the name of the proposed new constituency so that it makes reference to the fact that almost 25% of the city's electorate (3 of its 13 wards) would be included in the new constituency. It is

suggested that the name be changed to Exmouth and East Exeter to recognise this fact.

8.18 The views of the Returning Officer of the East Devon constituency on the above suggestions is "I can see that Pinhoe rather than Priory makes more sense from a city perspective and certainly would sit better with Broadclyst and my "west end", your East of Exeter.

8.19 The full timetable for the Boundary Commission's review is set out at Appendix C.

8.20 It is also worth noting that the Boundary Commission's consultation period is open to anyone, with the closing date for comments on these initial recommendations being no later than 2nd August. Any comments should be sent direct to the Boundary Commission as the decision maker, rather than to the City Council which is a consultee.

9. How does the decision contribute to the Council's Corporate Plan?

9. Easily identifiable boundaries for all aspects of government and local government ensure that administrative arrangements for the running of elections are simplified, providing value for money for elections.

10. What risks are there and how can they be reduced?

10. The Returning Officer will ensure that appropriate arrangements are put in place to ensure that the legislative requirements arising from the Boundary Commission's review, are fully enacted to ensure the smooth running of the Parliamentary election.

11. Equality Act 2010 (The Act)

There are no equality issues arising specifically from the content of this report, or its implications. .

12. Carbon Footprint (Environmental) Implications:

No direct carbon/environmental impacts arising from the recommendation

13. Are there any other options?

To not comment on the Boundary Commission's draft proposals, although due to the impact on the city's electorate, it is felt better to comment.

Electoral Registration & Returning Officer, John Street

Author: Electoral Registration & Returning Officer

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1972 (as amended)

Background papers used in compiling this report:-

None

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