

Statement to be introduced formally by the Assistant Commissioner on behalf of the Boundary Commission at the opening of the local inquiry

Introduction

1. In making their provisional recommendations for parliamentary constituencies, the Boundary Commission are under a statutory duty to apply the provisions of the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986 (as amended).
2. Basically the Rules for Redistribution of Seats provide that:-
 - a) constituencies should not normally cross county or London borough boundaries - although these boundaries may be crossed if the Commission consider that this is desirable in order to avoid excessive disparities in the electorates; and
 - b) the electorate of a constituency should be as near the electoral quota as practicable. The electoral quota is found by dividing the total parliamentary electorate of England on the electoral register on 17 February 2000 by the number of constituencies. The electoral quota is 69,934.
3. The Commission may depart from the strict application of both of these requirements, if they consider that special geographical considerations including the size, shape and accessibility of a constituency make a departure desirable. The Commission may also depart from the above Rules, but they have a duty to take account, so far as they reasonably can, of inconveniences attendant on altering constituencies (other than those required to reflect county boundaries) and of any local ties which would be broken.
4. Where boroughs are divided between parliamentary constituencies, the Commission consider that the constituency boundaries should follow the lines of ward boundaries in order to avoid confusing local electors, as well as for the convenience of local political party organisations and electoral registration and returning officers.
5. The Commission wish to stress that these provisional recommendations relate solely to parliamentary constituencies and do not affect the structure or arrangements of local government (London Borough Councils) or the services they provide.
6. The Commission are an independent and totally impartial body. They wish to emphasise very strongly that the results of previous elections do not, and should not, enter their considerations when they are deciding their proposals. Nor do they consider the effects of their recommendations on future voting patterns. It follows that such considerations must not be argued at this inquiry.

7. The Commission are not required to enter into consultations with local authorities, political parties or other groups before deciding upon their proposals and indeed consider that those decisions can best be arrived at without regard to conflicting suggestions made to them beforehand. They are therefore in a position to act wholly impartially.

8. The Commission are statutorily required to publish their proposals stating that representations may be made within a period of one month from the date of publication. The proposals for the London boroughs of Bromley and Lewisham were published in local newspapers on 1 February 2001 and copies of the recommendations with an illustrative map were placed on deposit for public inspection at council offices and libraries in the boroughs.

9. The Commission are required to take into consideration those representations made about their provisional recommendations and to hold a local inquiry if any objection is received from an interested local authority or from a body of 100 or more electors. The Commission may also hold a local inquiry, if they think fit, in respect of any constituency or constituencies.

10. Such objections have been received by the Commission about their proposals, and this local inquiry has been arranged accordingly. Any interested person may attend the inquiry and, if they wish, take part by making an oral submission, whether or not they have previously submitted a written representation to the Commission. Those who intend to speak at the inquiry from a prepared written note are asked to assist the inquiry by providing a minimum of four photocopies of their text.

Provisional recommendations

11. The Commission noted that Bromley has a 2000 electorate of 222,759, giving it a theoretical entitlement to 3.19 seats and, on the basis that three seats are allocated, a borough average of 74,253. They also noted that Bromley has a current allocation of three seats. Although Bromley does not require a partner, it was noted that the neighbouring borough of Lewisham does. Lewisham's neighbouring boroughs are Bromley, Greenwich and Southwark. However, Greenwich and Southwark are already paired with Bexley and Lambeth respectively and the Commission have provisionally decided to retain those existing pairings.

12. Lewisham has a current allocation of three seats. The borough has a 2000 electorate of 175,035, giving it a theoretical entitlement to 2.50 seats. If three seats were retained, the borough average would be 58,345. Therefore, each seat would, on average, be 11,589 below the electoral quota (1,589 outside the 10,000 threshold mentioned under "Constituencies that cross London borough boundaries" in the news release at Annexe 7). The Commission have provisionally decided to pair Bromley and Lewisham. They recognised that some major changes would have to be made to the existing constituencies within each borough, but considered such changes necessary in order to avoid excessive disparities and to bring electorates closer to the electoral quota in accordance with Rule 5.

13. The parliamentary electorate of the combined boroughs of Bromley and Lewisham on the enumeration date was 397,794 which, when divided by the electoral quota of 69,934, produces a theoretical entitlement to 5.69 seats. The Commission provisionally decided to allocate six seats to the combined area.

14. The allocation of six seats produces a borough average of 66,299, which is 3,635 below the electoral quota of 69,934, and closer to the quota than both the individual borough averages.

Beckenham and Biggin Hill BC

15. The Bromley borough wards of Hayes and Coney Hall (no.14) and Shortlands (no.21) are divided between the existing Beckenham BC and Bromley and Chislehurst BC. The Commission propose that the constituency boundary is realigned to include the whole of these divided wards together with five other Bromley wards in a newly created Beckenham and Biggin Hill seat. The five other Bromley wards are: Biggin Hill (no.2), Copers Cope (no.8), Darwin (no.12), Kelsey and Eden Park (no.15) and West Wickham (no.22). This seat would have an electorate of 64,139.

Bromley and Chislehurst BC

16. The Bromley borough wards of Bromley Common and Keston (no.3) and Bromley Town (no.4) are divided between existing seats. The Commission propose that the constituency boundary is realigned to include the whole of these divided wards together with four other Bromley wards in the Bromley and Chislehurst seat. The four other Bromley wards are: Bickley (no.1), Chislehurst (no.6), Mottingham and Chislehurst North (no.16) and Plaistow and Sundridge (no.20). This seat would have an electorate of 62,562.

Orpington BC

17. The existing Orpington seat is reduced in size to exclude the Biggin Hill (no.2) and Darwin (no.12) wards, which are provisionally included in the new Beckenham and Biggin Hill BC. The proposed Orpington seat comprises the following six Bromley wards: Chelsfield and Pratts Bottom (no.5), Cray Valley East (no.9), Cray Valley West (no.10), Farnborough and Crofton (no.13), Orpington (no.17) and Petts Wood and Knoll (no.19). This seat would have an electorate of 67,167.

Lewisham East BC

18. The Lewisham borough wards of Catford South (no.4), Rushey Green (no.15) and Whitefoot (no.18) are divided between existing seats. The Commission propose that the constituency boundary is realigned to include the whole of these divided wards together with four other Lewisham wards in the Lewisham East seat. The four other Lewisham wards are: Blackheath (no.2), Downham (no.6), Grove Park (no.9) and Lee Green (no.11). This seat would have an electorate of 67,833.

Lewisham West and Penge BC

19. The Bromley borough wards of Clockhouse (no.7), Crystal Palace (no.11) and Penge and Cator (no.18) together with the Lewisham borough wards of Bellingham (no.1), Forest Hill (no.8), Perry Vale (no.14) and Sydenham (no.16) combine to form the new cross-borough constituency of Lewisham West and Penge. This seat would have an electorate of 68,411.

Lewisham, Deptford BC

20. The Lewisham borough wards of Crofton Park (no.5) and Lewisham Central (no.12) are divided between existing seats. The Commission propose that the constituency boundary is realigned to include the whole of these divided wards, together with five other Lewisham wards in the Lewisham, Deptford seat. The five other Lewisham wards are: Brockley (no.3), Evelyn (no.7), Ladywell (no.10), New Cross (no.13) and Telegraph Hill (no. 17). This seat would have an electorate of 67,682.

Reasons

21. The Commission have proposed this distribution of seats in Bromley and Lewisham for the following reasons:-

- a) to create only one cross borough boundary constituency;
- b) the disparity between the seats with the highest and lowest electorates would be reduced from 22,196 to 5,849;
- c) all six proposed seats are within 3,737 of the combined borough average; and
- d) to realign constituency boundaries with new local government ward boundaries.

Representations

22. The Commission have received 53 representations, the majority of which object to their provisional recommendations. The main issues which have given rise to objections are:-

- a) the pairing of Bromley and Lewisham at all on the basis that they could be reviewed separately;
- b) the wards of Darwin (no.12) and Biggin Hill (no.2) (which includes Cudham) being included in the Beckenham and Biggin Hill seat rather than the Orpington seat (twenty-one representations specifically refer to this area) with a consequential change to the name of the Beckenham and Biggin Hill seat. The objectors claim both wards look to Orpington;
- c) the Clock House ward (no.7) being included in a seat with Lewisham wards (five representations specifically refer to this area). The objectors claim that Clock House ward has ties with Beckenham and Bromley rather than with Lewisham;
- d) the Bromley Common and Keston ward (no.3) being in the Bromley and Chislehurst seat. The objectors think it should be in a seat with Beckenham;

- e) the location of the Lewisham Central (no.12) and Rushey Green (no.15) wards (ten representations specifically refer to this area). The objectors counter-propose that the Lewisham Central ward be included in the Lewisham East seat, and the Rushey Green ward be included in the Lewisham, Deptford seat;
- f) the Cray Valley wards being in Orpington; the objectors think they would be better placed in a Chislehurst seat; and
- g) the naming of the cross-borough seat as Lewisham West and Penge.

23. The issues listed at a) - g) above will be discussed at the inquiry. However, that are not necessarily the only issues that will be raised and those who are content with the provisional recommendations of the Commission or with any of the counter-proposals submitted, should take the opportunity to attend the inquiry and make their views known. **It should be noted that the Commission rarely arrange a further inquiry.**

24. For example, were it to be counter-proposed at the inquiry that changes should be introduced to a boundary which has not been recommended for change by the Commission nor by any of the counter-proposals published before the inquiry commenced, it is nevertheless possible that the Commission would recommend such changes. If electors do not attend this inquiry, and find that they are in an area covered by such changes, they would have lost the opportunity to state their case on the changes.

25. Further copies of this statement will be made available at the inquiry which will commence at 9.30am on Thursday 26 July 2001 in the Council Chamber, Bromley Civic Centre, Stockwell Close, Bromley, before the Assistant Commissioner, Miss Claire Andrews.

26. Should you have any queries relating to the Commission's proposals for Bromley and Lewisham or the procedures for the local inquiry, please contact the Commission at the address contained at the bottom of page 1.