

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 boundaries - although the county 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 69,932.
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 possible, the Commission try to take account of district boundaries, but this is often not possible. Where districts 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 (County, District, Town or Parish 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 county of Cumbria were published in local newspapers on 6 July 2000 and copies of the recommendations with an illustrative map were placed on deposit for public inspection at council offices and libraries in the county.

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. Cumbria currently has six constituencies with a 2000 electorate of 384,332. This number of electors when divided by the electoral quota (69,932) produces a theoretical entitlement to 5.50 seats. The Commission have therefore provisionally decided to continue to allocate six seats to Cumbria. With six seats the average constituency electorate is 64,055. The electorates of the six existing constituencies in the county range from 54,071 in the Copeland seat to 70,303 in the Westmorland and Lonsdale seat, producing a disparity of 16,232 which the Commission's provisional recommendations will reduce to 9,095.

12. The only changes to local authority boundaries in Cumbria since the last general review have been to district ward boundaries following the Periodical Electoral Reviews by the Local Government Commission. Three of the new wards in the county are partly in one of the existing constituencies and partly in another.

13. The Commission do not divide district wards between constituencies and decided that, in each case where a ward was divided between seats, the constituency boundary should be realigned so that the ward was wholly contained within one seat.

14. The Commission propose that the divided wards of Crake Valley, Stanwix Urban and Waver are respectively included in the Barrow and Furness, Carlisle and Workington seats.

15. The Commission were concerned about the very low electorates of the Carlisle and Copeland seats, and the very large geographical area of the Penrith and The Border seat. In order to improve the electorates and to reduce the geographical area of the Penrith and The Border seat, the Commission propose that:-

- the City of Carlisle ward of Wetheral be transferred to the Carlisle seat;
- the Allerdale Borough wards of Marsh, Wampool and Wigton be transferred to the Workington seat;
- the Allerdale Borough wards of Clifton, Dalton and Harrington be transferred to the Copeland seat;
- the Allerdale Borough ward of Boltons be transferred to the Penrith and The Border seat; and
- the South Lakeland District ward of Broughton be transferred to the Copeland seat.

16. In forming their proposals, the Commission have taken into account, as much as possible, Cumbria's geographical features.

Barrow and Furness County Constituency

17. The current seat contains the whole of Barrow-in-Furness Borough, plus seven wards of South Lakeland District, and part of the Crake Valley ward of that district. The Commission propose that the constituency boundary is realigned so that the whole of the Crake Valley ward is included in the Barrow and Furness seat. The electorate would be 67,279.

Carlisle Borough Constituency

18. The current seat contains thirteen wards of the City of Carlisle, plus part of the Stanwix Urban ward of that district. The Commission propose that the constituency boundary is realigned so that the whole of the Stanwix Urban ward is included in the Carlisle seat. The Commission also propose that the Wetheral ward of the City of Carlisle, which is currently in the Penrith and The Border seat, is included in the Carlisle seat. The electorate of the Carlisle seat would be 63,001.

Copeland County Constituency

19. The current seat contains the whole of Copeland Borough. The Commission propose that the Clifton, Dalton and Harrington wards of Allerdale Borough and currently in the Workington seat, and the Broughton ward of South Lakeland District, which are currently in the Westmorland and

Lonsdale seat, are included in the Copeland seat. The electorate of the Copeland seat would be 61,048.

Penrith and The Border County Constituency

20. The current seat contains the whole of Eden District, plus eight wards of the City of Carlisle, and part of the Stanwix Urban ward of that city; and four wards of Allerdale Borough, plus part of the Waver ward of that borough. The Commission propose that the constituency boundary is realigned so that the whole of the Stanwix Urban ward is included in the Carlisle seat, and the whole of the Waver ward is included in the Workington seat. The Commission also propose that the Wetheral ward of the City of Carlisle, which is currently in the Penrith and The Border seat, is transferred to the Carlisle seat. They also propose that the Marsh, Wampool and Wigton wards of Allerdale Borough, which are currently in the Penrith and The Border seat, are transferred to the Workington seat. The Commission further propose that the Boltons ward of Allerdale Borough, which is currently in the Workington seat, is included in the Penrith and The Border seat. The electorate of the Penrith and The Border seat would be 58,303.

Westmorland and Lonsdale County Constituency

21. The current seat contains thirty-nine wards of South Lakeland District, plus part of the Crake Valley ward of that district. The Commission propose that the constituency boundary is realigned so that the whole of the Crake Valley ward is included in the Barrow and Furness seat. The Commission also propose that the Broughton ward of South Lakeland District, which is currently in the Westmorland and Lonsdale seat, is transferred to the Copeland seat. The electorate of the Westmorland and Lonsdale seat would be 67,303.

Workington County Constituency

22. The current seat contains twenty-six wards of Allerdale Borough, plus part of the Waver ward of that borough. The Commission propose that the constituency boundary is realigned so that the whole of the Waver ward is included in the Workington seat. The Commission also propose that the Marsh, Wampool and Wigton wards of Allerdale Borough, which are currently in the Penrith and The Border seat, are included in the Workington seat. The Commission also propose that the Clifton, Dalton and Harrington wards of Allerdale Borough, which are currently in the Workington seat, are transferred to the Copeland seat. The Commission further propose that the Boltons ward of Allerdale Borough, which is currently in the Workington seat, is transferred to the Penrith and The Border seat. The electorate of the Workington seat would be 67,398.

23. The Commission have proposed this distribution of seats in Cumbria for the following reasons:-

- a) to increase the very low electorates of the Carlisle and Copeland seats;
- b) to reduce the very large geographical area of the Penrith and The Border seat;
- c) to realign constituency boundaries with new ward boundaries, so that no ward is divided between constituencies;

- d) to reduce the disparity between the electorates of the seats from 16,232 to 9,095;
and
- e) to bring the electorates of the six seats to within 5,752 of the county average of 64,055.

Representations

24. The Commission have received 86 representations, the majority of which object to their provisional recommendations. The main issues which have given rise to objections are:-

- a) A counter-proposal submitted by the Labour Party and Cumbria County Council;
- b) A counter-proposal submitted by the Conservative Party;
- c) A counter-proposal submitted by Mr Stuart Sexton;
- d) A counter-proposal submitted by Mr Michael Steed;
- e) Whether the electorate of the Carlisle seat should be increased, and if so which ward(s) should be added to it;
- f) Whether the electorate of the Copeland seat should be increased, and if so which ward(s) should be added to it;
- g) Whether the geographical area of the Penrith and The Border seat is too large, and what changes (if any) should be made to it; and
- h) Which seat the South Lakeland ward of Crake Valley (no.7) should be in.

25. The issues listed at a) – h) above will be discussed at the inquiry. However, they 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.**

26. 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.

27. Further copies of this statement will be made available at the inquiry which will commence at 10.30am on Tuesday 16 January 2001 in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Carlisle, before the Assistant Commissioner, Mrs Suzan P Matthews QC.

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