

Developing proposals – requirements and policy

Statutory electorate range

23. The Act sets out a number of Rules in Schedule 2 which are relevant to the detailed development of proposals for individual constituencies.⁸ Foremost among these is Rule 2, which provides that – apart from four specified exceptions – every constituency **must** have an electorate (as at the review date) that is no less than 95% and no more than 105% of the ‘UK electoral quota’. The UK electoral quota for the 2013 Review is, to the nearest whole number, 76,641.⁹

24. Accordingly, every constituency in England must have an electorate as at the review date that is **no smaller than 72,810 and no larger than 80,473**.

25. The specified exceptions to this in England are the two constituencies on the Isle of Wight.¹⁰ However, in all other aspects of the 2013 Review, the Isle of Wight is treated in the same way as other parts of England.

Other statutory factors

26. Rule 5 in Schedule 2 provides for a number of other factors that the BCE may take into account in establishing a new map of constituencies for the 2013 Review, specifically:

- **special geographical considerations, including in particular the size, shape and accessibility of a constituency;**
- **local government boundaries as they existed on 6 May 2010 (see paragraph 16 above);**
- **boundaries of existing constituencies; and**
- **any local ties that would be broken by changes in constituencies.¹¹**

Special geographical considerations

27. The BCE considers that special geographical considerations that may have an impact on the ability to form a constituency with an electorate within the statutory electorate range will primarily relate to

physical geography such as mountains, hills, lakes, rivers, estuaries and islands, rather than to human or social geography. Matters of culture, history, socio-economics and other possible aspects of non-physical geography are more likely to arise as issues when considering the separate factor of ‘local ties’.

Local government boundaries and local ties

28. The BCE may take into account local government boundaries. These include both the external boundaries of local councils and their internal – ward or electoral division – boundaries.

29. While the BCE proposes to identify constituencies by reference to local authority external boundaries as far as practicable, it is nevertheless often necessary to cross these boundaries in order to form constituencies that comply with the statutory electorate range.

30. The BCE uses wards (in district and borough council areas) or electoral divisions (in areas of unitary authorities that have a county status) as the basic building block for designing constituencies. The use of the term ‘ward’ throughout the rest of this document should be taken to include electoral divisions in unitary authorities.

31. The BCE seeks to avoid dividing wards between constituencies wherever possible. Wards are well-defined and well-understood units, which are generally indicative of areas which have a broad community of interest. Any division of these units between constituencies would be likely to break local ties, disrupt political party organisations, and cause difficulties for Electoral Registration and Returning Officers. The BCE’s view is therefore that, **in the absence of exceptional and compelling circumstances – having regard to the specific factors identified in Rule 5 – it would not be appropriate to divide wards in cases where it is possible to construct constituencies that meet the statutory electorate range without dividing them.**

Boundaries of existing constituencies

32. The BCE intends to have regard generally to existing constituencies as far as possible, as it does not consider that it would be appropriate to start from a ‘blank sheet of paper’. However, this does not mean that an existing constituency should be automatically considered to be ‘protected from change’, simply on the basis of its electorate figure already falling within the statutory range. One of the effects of reducing the overall number of constituencies allocated to England, together with the requirement of the statutory electorate range, is that many of the existing constituencies that have an electorate that is within the statutory range will, nonetheless, need to be altered as a result of the need to create viable constituencies in the surrounding area.

Interplay of the considerations

33. The policy of the BCE is to take into account all the factors listed in Rule 5 as far as possible, subject to the primacy of the statutory electorate range under Rule 2.

34. The Act does not require the BCE to seek to achieve constituency electorates that are ‘as close as possible to’ the UK electoral quota. Nor does the BCE consider it appropriate to superimpose on the statutory scheme a policy objective of trying to minimise divergence from the UK electoral quota. Such an objective would undermine the ability of the BCE to take properly into account the factors listed in Rule 5 in accordance with the policy at paragraph 33 above. Therefore, by way of illustration, the BCE would prefer to identify a constituency that had, say, a 4% variance from the UK electoral quota, but which respected local ties, in preference to an alternative that produced a constituency with only a 1% variance, but which would split communities.

35. As far as possible, the BCE seeks to create constituencies:

- from wards that are adjacent to each other; and

- that do not contain ‘detached parts’, i.e. where the only physical connection between one part of the constituency and the remainder would require travel through a different constituency.

Factors the BCE will not consider

Impact on future election results

36. The BCE is an independent and impartial body. It emphasises very strongly that existing voting patterns and the prospective fortunes of political parties **should not and do not** enter its considerations during a review.

New local government boundaries

37. The local government boundaries that the BCE may have regard to are – as stated above – those that existed on 6 May 2010. Consequently, the BCE will not generally take into account new boundaries that came into effect at local council elections in May 2011, or in subsequent years.

38. However, in the limited circumstances (if any) where the BCE has to consider whether it should divide a ward (as it existed on 6 May 2010) between constituencies in order to meet the statutory electorate range, and if so how it should be divided, the BCE is prepared to take into account as appropriate any new ward boundaries introduced after 6 May 2010.

Changes to electorates after the review date

39. The BCE is required to work on the basis of the numbers of electors on the electoral registers at the ‘review date’. It is unable to take account of any under-registration or over-registration of electors that may be claimed in some areas.

40. However, the BCE does not take the view that it is obliged to shut its eyes entirely to growth (or decline) that has occurred since the review date, which it may be aware of from the annual updates of electorate figures it receives, or that it is satisfied is likely to occur.

Such a factor may be taken into account in choosing between two or more competing options for the same area that satisfy the statutory rules.

Naming and designating constituencies

41. In making its recommendations, the BCE is also required by the Act to specify a name and designation for each proposed constituency. The Act contains no guidance on these points.

Naming

42. The BCE's policy on the naming of constituencies is that, when constituencies remain largely unchanged, the existing constituency name should usually be retained. In such cases constituency names are likely to be altered only where there is good reason for change.

43. Generally, the BCE considers that the name should normally reflect the main population centre(s) contained in the constituency, though if a suitable alternative name is proposed which generally commands greater support locally than that proposed by the BCE, it will usually be prepared to recommend that alternative.

44. The BCE adopts compass point names when there is not a more suitable name. The compass point reference used will generally form a prefix in cases where the rest of the constituency name refers to the county area or a local council, but a suffix where the rest of the name refers to a population centre. Examples of existing constituencies that demonstrate these principles are North Shropshire and Reading West.

Designating

45. The Act also requires that each constituency is designated as either a 'county constituency' or a 'borough constituency'. The BCE considers that, as a general principle, where constituencies contain more than a small rural element they should normally be designated as county constituencies. In other cases they should be designated as borough constituencies.

The designation is suffixed to the constituency name and is usually abbreviated: BC for borough constituency and CC for county constituency.

46. The designation generally determines who shall act as Returning Officer for Parliamentary elections. The Returning Officer in borough constituencies is a district council chairman or mayor. For county constituencies it is the high sheriff.

47. The designation also determines the limit on the amount that a candidate is allowed to spend during a Parliamentary election in the constituency. The limit is slightly lower in borough constituencies, to reflect the lower costs of running a campaign in an urban, usually compact, area.