

BOUNDARY COMMISSION PROPOSALS

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The Boundary Commission for England will be publishing new proposals for English constituencies . As with the previous proposals in 2013, which were stopped by the Lib Dems in the Coalition after Conservatives failed to support House of Lords Reform, the number of constituencies will be reduced from 650 to 600 across the UK but with two constituencies guaranteed for the Isle of Wight in the Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Act 2011.

The Commission will use the figures of electorates for constituencies and wards as of December 2015. There are some problems with this as it was the first register that required every individual, rather than just one person in the household, to fill in the form so that some people in multi-occupied renting housing and some younger people may have been left off and, in addition, many people registered to vote in the EU Referendum but their numbers will not be counted. Both these factors are probably less prevalent in the Isle of Wight.

Across the rest of the country the legislation requires no constituency to be 5% larger or smaller than the average. Across England this means their electorates will be between 71,000 and 78,500. There is no requirement for the Isle of Wight constituencies to obey the 5% rule and, of course, they will both be much smaller than on the mainland but in 2013 the Commission said that they would want them to be more or less within the 5% rule.

In December 2015, the Isle of Wight electorate was 105,448 and so Commissioners are likely to want the two constituencies to be between 50,088 and 55,360.

The Commission publish proposals and anyone can then oppose them and suggest alternative boundaries or support them. There can also be a discussion over the names of the constituencies though this is less likely in relation to the Isle of Wight as last time the Commissioners used straight forward names . The Commissioners are generally lawyers and try to reach logical conclusions independent of the effect on the political parties.

The sequence of events after Tuesday is:-

- There is a 12 week period for people to make representations of opposition or support. Opposition that proposes an alternative is likely to carry more weight than simple opposition. Representations can be made in writing or at a public hearing. There used to be public inquiries that allowed for more questioning but these were abolished in 2011). The public hearing covering the Isle of Wight proposals is unlikely to be on the Island as there will only be 5 across the South-East. In fact, written representations are likely to be just as effective in the absence of a public inquiry.
- After the 12 week period the Commission will publish the representation received. There will then be 4 weeks for people to comment on and support or challenge the initial representations.

- The Commissioners will then produce proposals that may contain changes from their original representations. There will then be 8 weeks for people to comment on these but no more public hearings or comments on comments.
- The Commissioners sent their final report to the Government. This will not be until 2018
- The Government lays the proposals before Parliament which has to approve them. Since reducing the number of constituencies to 600 means lots of changes and the abolition of the constituencies of a number of Conservative MPs there may be some problems in Parliament, if Teresa May has not held a general election and achieved a larger majority by then.

Any general election held before Parliament has approved the changes will be on the old boundaries i.e. a single Isle of Wight constituency. Even after Parliamentary approval any by-election before a general election will also be on the old boundaries.

Although the political parties calculate the electoral implications of the new boundaries they can only object using the criteria that the boundary commission sets out and those relevant for the Isle of Wight are:-

- special geographical considerations, including in particular the size, shape and accessibility of a constituency. 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, islands, rather than to human or social geography.
- any local ties that would be broken by changes in constituencies. This includes matters of culture, history, socio-economics and other possible aspects of non-physical geography.
- The Commission will want to avoid dividing a local government ward between constituencies though it accepts that it may have to do this in a few cases to meet the 5% rule.

There is only two ways to divide the Isle of Wight to create two constituencies, north-south or east-west. The Commissioners initial proposals in 2013 were to create a North constituency consisting of Cowes, Ryde, Newport and the areas in between and the rest of the Island in a South constituency. This was supported by Labour and the Conservatives but the Lib Dems persuaded the Commissioners to recommend, in their revised proposals, an East-West split with Cowes and Newport in the East and Ryde to Ventnor in the West. Part of the reason was that if all of Newport and Ryde was included in a North constituency then it would be rather bigger than the South constituency. With new electoral figures that may no longer be a problem.