

**REPORT TO: THE MORAY COUNCIL ON 20 DECEMBER 2011**

**SUBJECT: REVIEW PROPOSALS FOR UK PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCIES**

**BY: CORPORATE DIRECTOR (CORPORATE SERVICES)**

**1. REASON FOR REPORT**

- 1.1 To inform members of the proposed changes to the UK Parliamentary constituency in the Moray Council area.
- 1.2 This report is submitted to Committee in terms of Section 9 of the Council's Administrative Scheme relating to electoral boundaries.

**2. RECOMMENDATION**

- 2.1 **That the Council discuss the proposals made by the Boundary Commission for Scotland for the Moray Council area.**
- 2.2 **That the Council agree the consultation response, suggested in section 4.0 for submission to the Boundary Commission for Scotland.**

**3. BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 The Boundary Commission for Scotland (BCS) has been tasked by the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986 to undertake a review of UK Parliamentary constituencies to reduce the number of Scottish constituencies from 59 to 52. The BCS must submit their recommendations to the Scottish Secretary of State and the revised constituencies will be used in the General Election scheduled in 2015.
- 3.2 All UK Parliamentary constituencies in Scotland must now contain an electorate between 72,810 and 80,473 unless its area exceeds 12,000 km<sup>2</sup>, with the exception of Na h-Eileanan Siar constituency and Orkney and Shetland constituency.
- 3.3 The Moray Local Authority area (LA) is currently covered by one UK parliamentary constituency of *Moray*, the boundary of which is co-terminous with the LA boundary and a current electorate of approx 68,500.
- 3.4 The BCS published initial proposals for 52 new constituencies on 13 October 2011, seeking any **responses by interested parties by 4 January 2012**.
- 3.5 In respect of the *Moray* constituency, the initial proposals include the extension of the current *Moray* constituency to encompass Ward 21 (Badenoch and Strathspey) of the Highland Council area and the renaming the constituency "*Moray and Strathspey*".
- 3.6 Initial analysis, by the Elections Office, of the proposed *Moray and Strathspey* constituency suggests it is unlikely that the proposals will cause significant added difficulty in elections administration, other than the large distances involved, particularly with the administrative centre of Elgin being situated at

one end of the proposed constituency. Implications are outlined in section 4 of this report.

- 3.7 During a BCS hearing held in Inverness on 24 November 2011, focussing on Highlands and North East of Scotland proposals, a number of submissions by interested parties and The Highland Council were made to counter the initial proposals made by the BCS. This included submissions proposing the extension of the current *Moray* Constituency westwards to include Nairn, and not Strathspey/Badenoch. This would reinstate a former UK parliamentary constituency of *Moray and Nairn* in place previously between 1918 – 1983. This proposal was due to be further discussed, at time of writing, at a meeting of The Highland Council on 15 December 2011.

#### 4. **REPORT**

- 4.1 It is welcomed that the whole Moray local authority area is wholly contained within one constituency. However it is suggested that the resurrection of a *Moray and Nairn* constituency may be more beneficial in the interests of the electorate who may share commonality in local issues faced along the coast and A96 corridor. In addition the suggestion of a *Moray and Nairn* constituency would pose less risk to the elections administration process by lessening the geographical and logistical impact.
- 4.2 The addition of the 'Strathspey' area to the *Moray* constituency could be regarded as not being in the best interests of the voters in the newly adjoined area, being geographically remote to some parts of the Moray LA area and with poorer transport links to Elgin compared with Inverness. This may cause significant issues for electorate accessing their elected representative, member's surgeries or local authority election office. In addition the distances involved also pose some logistical challenges for elections administration centred in Elgin, which in turn introduces added risk to the elections process.

## 5. **SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS**

### (a) **Single Outcome Agreement / Service Improvement Plan**

Proposals will potentially be at the detriment of the ability of the Elections Office to strive for National Outcome 15 – Continuous Improvement – in respect of “public services being responsive to local people’s needs” particularly within expected and statutory timescales during elections in the Strathspey area.

### (b) **Policy and Legal**

The geographical distances involved in transporting ballot boxes from as far as Laggan or Dalwhinnie to Elgin may mean that the Returning Officer is unable to successfully complete verification within 4 hours as required under Rule 45(3A) Sch. 1 of the Representation of the People Act 1983, as amended by the Constitutional Reform & Governance Act 2010.

### (c) **Financial implications**

None identified currently, elections administration costs in respect of holding a UK Parliamentary election are met through Scotland Office provision.

### (d) **Risk Implications**

The potential dis-engaging of electorate from the ‘*Strathspey*’ area due to the lack of commonality and distance with parts of Moray.

Increased logistical burden and risks to the Elections Office processes in supporting Polling Places and voters due to the geographic size of the constituency.

For elections administration, BCS proposals add increased risk for the timely return of Postal votes. In the ‘*Strathspey*’ postcode area returned postal votes pass through the Royal Mail’s Edinburgh Delivery Centre for sorting before being transported back to the delivery area. Therefore any “sweep” of the Mail centre would require Postal votes to be transported back to Elgin and during an overnight count this would delay the count whilst delivery and verification is completed.

### (e) **Staffing Implications**

None at this time, it is likely with an increase in constituency size in respect of the requirement for election staff for Polling Places, additional temporary staff can be sourced from the temporary election staff pool for the area administered by Highland Council, with their agreement.

### (f) **Property**

A larger constituency will result in an added workload at the count centre, usually based in Elgin Town hall. This will place some pressures on the current venue and as a result a count for the a General Election will take longer, particularly given the distances for ballot box transport in the proposed constituency of *Moray and Strathspey*.

**(g) Equalities**

There is an expectation these changes will not put one or more groups of people at a disadvantage through direct discrimination but may disadvantage some groups by geographical remoteness and thereby access to the electoral and democratic process. This may have a negative impact on voter participation and awareness.

**(h) Consultations**

Links to the BCS Consultation documents were circulated in October 2011 to all elected members. Consultation has also been undertaken with the Returning Officer, the Elections Manager at The Highland Council and Royal Mail's local Business Customer Advisor.

**5. CONCLUSION**

- 5.1 It is recognised that the Moray UK Parliamentary Constituency will increase as a result of the Boundary Commission for Scotland's review. It is welcomed that Moray LA area is wholly contained in the new constituency. However initial proposal of a 'Moray and Strathspey' constituency by the BCS has been subject to counter proposals from other interested parties supporting the creation of a 'Moray and Nairn' constituency. These arrangements may, on reflection, suit both the interests of the voter and electoral administration arrangements more favourably than the initial proposals.**

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Background Papers:

- 1) Boundary Commission for Scotland, Sixth Review of UK Parliament Constituencies - Summary of Initial Proposals.
- 2) Memo to Elected Members on 13 October 2011(Ref: ELECT/BCS UKP2011)
- 3) Map of the newly proposed *Moray and Strathspey* constituency (available in Members Lounge).
- 4) Statement by the Boundary Commission of Scotland, Public Hearing, Inverness, November 2011.
- 5) Report to the Highland Council on Parliamentary Voting Systems and Constituencies Act 2011: Sixth Review of UK Parliamentary Constituencies, 15 December 2011.

Ref: n/a