

# Newsletter

Issue 3/2011

## This issue covers:

- Background to consultation
- Summary of responses received
- Conclusion to the consultation
- Analysis of responses
- Meeting with the representatives of the Parliamentary political parties
- The use of local government district ward boundaries
- Website updated and web address changed
- Summary table of consultation responses

## Background to consultation

1. In its Newsletter 2/2011 on 4 March 2011, the Boundary Commission for England announced that it was consulting on its proposal to use the European electoral regions as a template for grouping and allocating 500 constituencies across England (other than the Isle of Wight) and to use the Sainte-Laguë methodology for determining the initial allocation of constituencies between the nine regions. The following consultation question was asked:

“Do you agree with the Commission’s proposed use of the electoral regions and the Sainte-Laguë methodology for the initial allocation of constituencies?”

## Summary of responses received

2. The Commission received 29 representations by its deadline of 1 April. The table, at the end of this newsletter, provides a list of the responses received. As well as identifying whether the respondents were broadly in support or opposition to the proposals, the table also identifies the responses by type of respondent such as Council, political party organisation or member of the public.
3. Of the 29 responses received, 18 gave broad approval to the Commission’s proposals. Seven provided qualified approval, with three being considered as neutral. One represented outright opposition to the proposals.
4. Support for the use of both the Sainte-Laguë methodology and the European electoral regions was received from two of the three main political parties – the Conservative Party and the Liberal Democrat Party – and a number of respondents or organisations associated with local authorities. Similar support was also received from a joint response from four academics and several members of the public. The Labour Party supported the Commission’s proposed approach to the use of the regions.

5. The Labour Party supported the use of the Sainte-Laguë methodology but only with an amendment being made to the Commission's proposed approach to the Isle of Wight. One organisation (Democratic Audit) and two members of the public expressed support for this same, modified Saint-Laguë approach. This issue is considered in detail below.
6. Three Members of Parliament, representing between them the constituencies of West Worcestershire, Mid Worcestershire and Worcester, responded to suggest flexibility in respect of the boundary between the south of the West Midlands region and the north of the South West region. These representations are considered in detail below.
7. A response from Coventry City Council rejected entirely the Sainte-Laguë methodology and the use of the European electoral regions. This rejection was on the basis that the proposed approach would have a disproportionate impact on urban regions. This representation is considered in detail below.
8. A number of responses set out in varying degrees of detail a number of potential constituency schemes, or sub-divisions of regions, for the Commission's consideration. As these issues are outside the scope of the consultation question, they have not been considered further. Should these respondents wish the Commission to consider their schemes, it would be appropriate for them to resubmit their proposals during the consultation period on the Commission's initial proposals for the allocation of constituencies.

## Conclusion to the consultation

9. Of the responses received, the large majority were in favour of the Commission's proposed approach to the use of the regions. Taking this into account along with the reasoning in favour of the proposed approach set out in Newsletter 2/2011 and supported by many of the responses to the consultation, the Commission has decided to confirm that it will adopt the approach to the use of the regions set out in Newsletter 2/2011.
10. Most correspondents supported the Commission's proposed approach to the use of the Sainte-Laguë methodology for allocation of constituencies between the regions. Taking this into account along with the reasons set out below, the Commission has decided to confirm that it will adopt without modification its approach to the use of the Sainte-Laguë methodology as set out in Newsletter 2/2011.

## Analysis of responses

11. The main issue of debate raised during the consultation related to the treatment of the Isle of Wight constituencies. On the Commission's proposed approach, the electorate for the Isle of Wight would be left out of the Sainte-Laguë calculation for the allocation of 500 constituencies between the nine English regions. Some respondents suggested an alternative, modified approach to the Sainte-Laguë methodology of allocating constituencies to the regions. This modified approach would involve the Commission allocating 502 constituencies across the nine regions (including the Isle of Wight), with the electorate of the Isle of Wight being considered as part of the total electorate for the South East region for the purposes of the Sainte-Laguë calculation. The practical effect of this would be a change in number of constituencies allocated to the regions of the South East and London: while the Commission's proposed approach would allocate these two regions 83 and 68 constituencies respectively, the alternative approach would allocate the two regions 82 and 69 respectively. No other region's allocation would be affected.
12. The Commission has given careful consideration to the points raised in support of this modified approach. It has, however, concluded that it should adopt the approach to the application of the Sainte-Laguë methodology for allocation of constituencies between the regions which it originally set out in Newsletter 2/2011. The Commission considers that that approach properly reflects the approach chosen by Parliament in the Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Act 2011 for the allocation of constituencies between the four parts of the United Kingdom. In the legislation, Parliament decided that the two Isle of Wight constituencies and two Scottish constituencies should be left out of the statutory

Sainte-Laguë calculation as special cases. The Commission considers it appropriate that it should adopt an approach similar to that determined by Parliament, treating the Isle of Wight as a special case which has been given its own allocation regime for particular reasons already fully considered by Parliament. The Commission's proposal to use a regional approach for the allocation of constituencies in England has not been put forward with a view to creating equality between the regions as such (including the Isle of Wight within the South East region), but rather with a view to assisting the Commission and the public to produce practical and focused proposals for the creation of the number of constituencies allocated to England according to the statutory Sainte-Laguë calculation all of which satisfy the statutory parameters applicable across the whole area covered by that calculation (that is, England excluding the Isle of Wight).

13. Other reasons raised by respondents in support of the modified Sainte-Laguë approach included that this approach would ensure that London is allocated the number of constituencies it "deserves", on the basis of London's "theoretical entitlement" of 68.7 constituencies (that is, the figure which results from dividing London's electorate by the electoral quota). The Commission has previously considered using such an approach based on "theoretical entitlements" and has rejected it, on the basis that it would produce too many constituencies for England: see paragraph 22 of Newsletter 2/2011. A further reason raised in support of adopting the modified Sainte-Laguë approach is that it would ensure less divergence in the average number of electors per constituency in each region (or, in other words, the "regional quotas" for each of the nine regions would be closer to each other under the modified approach). The Commission does not consider that this is a matter which outweighs the reasons given above for concluding that it should not adopt the proposed modified Sainte-Laguë approach. There will inevitably be some variation between the sizes of individual constituencies which will be the result of the Commission taking into account the set of factors identified in the legislation. The Commission does not consider it appropriate to super-impose on the statutory scheme a policy objective of trying to minimise divergence from the average number of electors per constituency within and between regions.
14. The three Members of Parliament representing constituencies in Worcestershire responded to suggest that local ties in Worcestershire were much stronger with areas of the neighbouring South West region than with the rest of the West Midlands region. The responses proposed that there should be flexibility in the crossing of the regional border between Worcestershire and Gloucestershire in the South West region. The response from Hillingdon Borough Council made a similar point about flexibility in crossing boundaries between the regions. Having considered this issue further, the Commission notes that on its proposed approach there will be flexibility to cross regional boundaries if arguments of sufficient weight are presented: see paragraph 26 of Newsletter 2/2011, which explains that the adoption by the Commission of the regional approach to the allocation of constituencies does not preclude anyone from making representations during the statutory consultation on the Commission's initial proposals for constituencies to the effect that regional boundaries should be crossed when identifying the boundaries of a particular constituency, but it is likely that compelling reasons would need to be given to persuade the Commission of that. The three Members of Parliament representing constituencies in Worcestershire and others will be able to make representations during the statutory consultation stage, including by reference to 'local ties' relevant to defining the boundaries of any constituency, which will be considered on their merits alongside all the other representations received at that stage. However, the Commission has concluded that to allow for greater flexibility than this in the approach to be adopted to the allocation of constituencies would substantially undermine the benefits outlined by the Commission in Newsletter 2/2011 to be derived from adopting a regional approach in the first place. The Commission is not persuaded that it would be right for the purpose of allocation of constituencies between regions to re-group Worcestershire with the South West region rather than with the West Midlands region, which is the relevant existing administrative region.
15. Coventry City Council rejected both the proposed use of the regions and the use of the Sainte-Laguë methodology on the basis that the effect would be to have "a disproportionate impact on urban regions", given that the West Midlands would have its allocation of constituencies cut by 8.5% compared to a cut of 6% across England. The Commission, however, notes that it is required by statute to produce

constituencies of broadly equal size, even though this will inevitably see some areas' allocations of constituencies reduced to a greater, or in other cases lesser, extent than others. In terms of the operation of the statutory scheme, the Commission does not consider that any 'disproportionate' impact on urban regions is involved in the adoption of the approach which it has set out.

## Meeting with the representatives of the Parliamentary political parties

16. Following the announcement in Newsletter 2/2011, the Commission held a meeting with representatives of three of the English Parliamentary political parties on 4 April. The meeting was held to discuss processes for the 2013 Review; it did not consider any specific boundary proposals. A note of the meeting will be published on the Commission's website in due course. It was agreed that a further such meeting will be held, specifically to discuss processes relating to public hearings.

## The use of local government district ward boundaries

17. In paragraphs 10 and 11 of Newsletter 2/2011, the Commission confirmed that its policy for the 2013 Review would be that, as provided for by the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986 (as amended), in forming its proposals it would take into account the local government boundaries as they existed on 6 May 2010 and that consequently it would not take into account new boundaries that came into effect at local council elections in May 2011, or in subsequent years.

18. Some representations since made to the Commission have queried how this policy would apply, particularly in those limited cases where the Commission has to consider whether it should divide a local government district ward (as it existed on 6 May 2010) between constituencies in order to meet the statutory requirement that all constituencies must have an electorate that is within 5% of the electoral quota. The Commission can confirm that, in considering whether it is necessary to divide such a district ward and if so how it should be divided, it is prepared to take into account as appropriate any new ward boundaries that have been introduced after 6 May 2010. The Commission's approach in relation to such questions will be that set out in paragraph 17 of Newsletter 2/2011.

## Website updated and web address changed

19. The Commission's website has been updated to reflect the start of the 2013 Review. Electoral data for each of the nine regions can be found under the section entitled **Current review**. The Commission will publish details about the consultation on new boundaries and how interested parties can participate under the **Have your say** section later in the year.

20. Please update bookmarks and favourites to reflect the Commission's new web address, which has changed to [www.independent.gov.uk/boundarycommissionforengland](http://www.independent.gov.uk/boundarycommissionforengland)

### Contact details

The Boundary Commission for England

35 Great Smith Street

London

SW1P 3BQ

T: 020 7276 1102

E: [information@bcommengland.x.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:information@bcommengland.x.gsi.gov.uk)

W: [www.independent.gov.uk/boundarycommissionforengland](http://www.independent.gov.uk/boundarycommissionforengland)

## Summary table of consultation responses

21. Summary of the representations made in respect of the Commission's consultation on the use of the English regions and the Sainte-Laguë methodology.

Broad Approval		
Rep	From	Comment
Councils		
1	Blaby District Council	Supports use of regions. Raises the issue of the use of ward boundaries in view of future ward boundary reviews.
2	Northampton Borough Council	Supports use of regions and Sainte-Laguë methodology. Also queries impact of new ward boundaries due in 2011 – responded to separately.
3	South Tyneside District Council	Supports use of regions and Sainte-Laguë methodology. Also argues that South Tyneside should not be split between more than two constituencies.
4	Wandsworth Borough Council	Supports use of regions and Sainte-Laguë methodology. Also proposes borough-based hearings.
Council officials		
5	Andrew Smith, ESM of Islington Borough Council	Supports use of regions and Sainte-Laguë methodology. Queries the impact of forthcoming polling district review.
6	Mark Heath, RO for Southampton City Council	Supports use of regions and Sainte-Laguë methodology. Also suggests more than one hearing in the South-East.
Political Party Organisations		
7	Conservative Party (Roger Pratt)	Supports use of regions and Sainte-Laguë methodology for initial allocation of constituencies in England.
8	Liberal Democrat Party (Mark Pack)	Supports use of regions and Sainte-Laguë methodology for initial allocation of constituencies in England.
9	Cllr Neville Patten, Wolverhampton City Council Conservative Group	Agrees on using the regions and Sainte-Laguë methodology for allocation of constituencies to the regions, but proposes subdivision for West Midlands region.
Academics		
10	Prof Iain McLean, Prof Ron Johnston, Michel Balinski, Prof H Peyton Young	Support use of the regions and Sainte-Laguë methodology.
11	Michael Steed	Supports use of regions and broadly supports Sainte-Laguë methodology, but argues alternative approach to Sainte-Laguë.
Other organisations		
12	Dotted Eyes (G.I.S. provider)	Support use of regions and Sainte-Laguë methodology, and proposes scheme for West Midlands region.
Members of the Public		
13	Chris Felton	Supports use of regions and Sainte-Laguë methodology.
14	Derek Jacobs	Supports the use of the regions.
15	Peter Kingswood	Supports the use of the regions.
16	John Lodge	Supports use of regions and Sainte-Laguë methodology, but queries whether continued growth or decline will be taken into account.
17	Phillip Matthew	Supports use of regions and Sainte-Laguë methodology.
18	P Mills	Supports use of regions and Sainte-Laguë methodology.

Qualified Approval		
Rep	From	Comment
Councils		
19	Lloyd White, on behalf of Hillingdon Borough Council	Supports use of regions and Sainte-Laguë methodology, although supports inclusion of a ward from adjacent region if it avoids division of wards elsewhere within region.
Political Party Organisations		
20	Labour Party (Greg Cook)	Supports use of regions and broadly supports use of Sainte-Laguë methodology, but argues that Commission should retain flexibility on whether to include IoW in the South East region for initial allocation.
Members of the public		
21	John Cartwright	Agrees allocation of constituencies to the regions should be based upon Sainte-Laguë methodology, but that it should not be adopted as a rigid rule.
22	Michael Coleman	Agrees on using Sainte-Laguë method for allocation of constituencies to the regions, but proposes regions should be framed around ceremonial counties of England.
23	Adam Gray	Broadly supports allocation method. But opposes allocation of 68 constituencies to London. Proposes 69, with South East region losing one seat.
24	Kevin Larkin	Agrees in principle with the use of regions and Sainte-Laguë methodology, but opposes allocation of 68 constituencies to London. Proposes 69, by including IoW's electorate in the calculations, with South East region consequently losing one seat.
Other organisations		
25	Lewis Baston, Democratic Audit	Agrees in principle with regional allocation and Sainte-Laguë methodology, but opposes allocation of 68 constituencies to London. Proposes 69, by including IoW's electorate in the calculations, with South East region consequently losing one seat.
Neutral		
Rep	From	Comment
Members of Parliament		
26	Harriett Baldwin MP (West Worcestershire)	Advocates a flexible approach in her constituency area, stating that her constituents in West Worcestershire (West Midlands region) have close affinity with Gloucestershire (South West region).
27	Peter Luff MP (Mid Worcestershire)	Supports Harriet Baldwin's representation, namely that constituencies in Worcestershire have closer affinity to the South West region (Gloucestershire) than the West Midlands.
28	Robin Walker MP (Worcester)	Similar to Harriet Baldwin's representation, that Worcester has closer affinity with Gloucestershire (South West region) than the West Midlands.
Objection		
Rep	From	Comment
Councils		
29	Coventry City Council	Opposes use of regions and methodology on the basis that it would have a disproportionate impact on urban regions. Also argues that there should be local public enquires.