

Submission to Boundary Commission for England Consultation ending 27th March 2017

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I am responding as a member of the public. 13/3/17

Background

It is of great interest to look at comments made in response to the Boundary Review Initial Proposals during the initial consultation ending 5th December 2016. During that consultation I both commented [1] and spoke at the Stafford hearings [2] on the proposal for the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent sub-region of the West Midlands region only. I attended the first day of the Stafford hearings and have now watched the youtubes of the second day. The Boundary Review website allows comments to be filtered according to current constituency. I have read all the comments for Stone, Stoke-on-Trent South, Stoke-on-Trent Central, Stoke-on-Trent North and Newcastle-under-Lyme but have not read comments for the other Staffordshire constituencies. So I confine my comments at this stage of the consultation to this part of Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent only.

Key findings

Two main categories of comment seem to be prevalent. Firstly there is very considerable support for the Boundary Review Initial Proposals, particularly in respect of the arrangements for Newcastle-under-Lyme, with the Kidsgrove wards of the local authority included in Newcastle-under-Lyme constituency along with other urban wards and the more rural Wards being placed in the West Staffordshire constituency. Secondly there is significant disagreement about where the boundary between Stoke-on-Trent South and West Staffordshire should lie, very particularly in the Dresden area but also in the Blurton and Trentham areas.

Discussion

Where should the Kidsgrove wards go?

There is considerable support for the Boundary Commission Initial Proposals as a whole, including around 23 contributors who specifically focus comments on Kidsgrove in their support for the proposals which place them in the Newcastle-under-Lyme constituency. They cite in particular the urban nature of the wards, good social, economic and transport links, shared health and housing links and issues and of course sharing a local authority.

On the contrary there are only a few comments with a specific wish for the Kidsgrove wards to be in the Stoke-on-Trent North constituency. There is significant support for alternative proposals which place the Kidsgrove wards in Stoke-on-Trent North but this support largely arises from a wish to alter the Stoke-on-Trent South / West Staffordshire

border and is a knock on effect of attempts to do this. The main comments in favour of Kidsgrove in Stoke-on-Trent North come from the current MP Ruth Smeeth [3] and Cllr Jack Brereton for Baddeley, Milton & Norton [4], who cite community and transport links between Kidsgrove and Stoke-on-Trent North. Ruth Smeeth and Jack Brereton provide alternative proposals which are different from one another. Ruth Smeeth makes two comments that I find rather odd. One is that Kidsgrove Town Council passed a unanimous motion to be in Stoke-on-Trent North, but I cannot find a submission from Kidsgrove Town Council in response to the Boundary Commission Initial Proposals. The other is that Stoke-on-Trent City Council unanimously supports the city retaining 3 MPs. There is indeed a submission from Cllr Dave Conway, leader of Stoke-on-Trent City Council [5] confirming this. He expresses concern about the proposals breaking local community ties and rightly states that it is important to ensure that electors feel a real sense of common identity with their constituencies. However the statement about reducing Stoke-on-Trent to two constituencies cannot be right. The numbers are such that the Stoke-on-Trent local authority wards will for certain be represented by 3 constituency MPs, whichever way the constituencies are eventually arranged.

In light of all the comments I think the solution has to be to endorse the Boundary Commission Initial Proposals for Newcastle-under-Lyme but find a way to improve the Stoke-on-Trent South / West Staffordshire border, which my submission already made helps with.

I believe the Kidsgrove wards should be in the Newcastle-under-Lyme constituency.

How can the boundary between Stoke-on-Trent South and West Staffordshire be improved?

13 contributors, including myself, specifically refer to a dislike of the boundary being placed between the Lightwood & Normacot and Dresden & Florence wards. The concerns include that this splits one coherent community and splits worshippers attending the same mosque. Dresden & Florence is an urban area with an industrial history that has nothing in common with rural country hamlets. I am also concerned about separating Longton from its town park. The councillors for the two wards work closely together and it is easier to work with one MP.

Many of these contributors also endorse what I will call the 'Brereton' proposal [4] (only because I first saw this at Stafford when Jack Brereton presented it, I do realise it is a combined effort from a number of people. The trouble with the Brereton proposal is that it places Kidsgrove in Stoke-on-Trent North, contrary to considerable support for it being in Newcastle-under-Lyme.

My current MP Rob Ffello (who I like and respect) puts forward an alternative proposal [6], the same as Ruth Smeeth MP, which essentially keeps Stoke-on-Trent South largely as it is now but adds Springfields & Trent Vale ward to it. It is not an unreasonable proposal insofar as Stoke-on-Trent South and Central are concerned. It does some things that my suggestion also does; unites Dresden & Florence with Lightwood & Normacot, places Hanley Park & Shelton and Joiner's Square in the same constituency as Etruria & Hanley, places Abbey Hulton & Townsend in the same constituency as Bentilee & Ubbertley and creates a border between Springfields & Trent Vale and Booths & Oak Hill. However, its knock on effects are I think too disruptive to Newcastle-under-Lyme.

My proposal is, without wishing to appear too arrogant, better, because it solves the Dresden & Florence issue without any disruption to Newcastle-under-Lyme at all.

5 contributors are concerned about the Blurton East and Blurton West & Newstead wards being in West Staffordshire and would prefer them to be in Stoke-on-Trent South. I would actually agree that their character is more akin to the wards around Longton and they would be a better fit to Stoke-on-Trent South. My proposal is flawed because it does not do this but I am unable to find a good solution that will which does not have less acceptable knock on effects elsewhere.

6 contributors are concerned about Trentham & Hanford ward being in West Staffordshire and would prefer it to be in Stoke-on-Trent South. Two of these are my councillors Daniel Jellyman and Terry Follows [7] (both of whom I like and respect). They say numerous residents have expressed concerns about being in West Staffordshire. They also refer to 3 residents' associations (which do not cover the whole ward). I am a committee member of one of these 3 and receive minutes for this and another of the 3 and whilst I do not attend every single meeting I have not been aware of a huge level of disquiet. From past experience if something happens in Trentham that residents really don't like, there won't be just a handful of comments, there will be dozens at the very least. The concerns that have been submitted include a dislike for the West Staffordshire constituency in terms of a lack of commonality between communities, poor transport and having wards from 3 local authorities. But there are 5 other more general contributions which specifically support the Boundary Commission Initial Proposals for West Staffordshire, stating that rural wards are well aligned and socially cohesive, as well as the many comments approving of the Newcastle-under-Lyme local authority contribution to West Staffordshire.

I believe the best improvement that can be made to the Stoke-on-Trent South / West Staffordshire border, given the numerical constraints is as in my submission already made: move Dresden & Florence ward from West Staffordshire to Stoke-on-Trent South and move Springfields & Trent Vale ward from Stoke-on-Trent South to West Staffordshire and to get the electorate numbers within range and further improve the proposals move Abbey Hulton & Townsend ward from Stoke-on-Trent North to Stoke-on-Trent South, move Hanley Park & Shelton ward from Stoke-on-Trent South to Stoke-on-Trent North and move Joiner's Square ward from Stoke-on-Trent South to Stoke-on-Trent North.

A personal view on Trentham:

Quite a number of contributors have discussed community identity, where a community faces, where its centre of place is and where people typically shop. This has prompted me to think about this more deeply for myself in Trentham.

There are actually two parts of Trentham, the larger residential area including where I live, in Stoke-on-Trent and a smaller residential area and large leisure and shopping area 'The Trentham Estate', which are situated in Swynnerton & Oulton ward in Stafford Borough. The Trentham Estate has developed massively in recent years and includes Trentham Shopping Village. The West Staffordshire constituency would actually unite these two parts of Trentham. So there may be concerns about the new constituencies but there are also advantages.

Where do I shop? Because I am an outdoor type of person with a love of the countryside and walking, in actual fact I do most of my shopping for clothes and equipment in

Trentham Shopping Village because it has a number of very good shops for outdoor kit and some other clothes shops. But I also travel to Hanley, Stafford and further afield if necessary for such things. In terms of food shopping I actually do a fair bit of that in Stone, but that is because a fair amount of my personal, social and leisure time is spent there. I am currently chair of Stone Ramblers. I also shop in Springfields & Trent Vale ward because that is where I go to the gym, Broadway & Longton East ward because it is near to my dentist in Fenton East ward and also in Penkhull & Stoke ward and Blurton West & Newstead ward. I shop for food all over the place as convenient.

Perhaps I fit well in West Staffordshire constituency because I am willing and able to travel. But for some others in Trentham the picture may be very different.

Constituency names:

There have been some suggestions regarding constituency names. I don't have especially strong views except that I dislike names that become too long with lists of places. I am happy with the name West Staffordshire for the constituency I would live in. There have been suggestions that West Staffordshire could be renamed North West Staffordshire. I have no objection to this either, especially if Tamworth is renamed South East Staffordshire because of the symmetry to this. There has been a suggestion of a Stoke-on-Trent South & Stone constituency in the 'Brereton' proposal. This certainly describes well where I place myself, so I wouldn't object to this name in place of West Staffordshire, but I do somewhat prefer West Staffordshire or North West Staffordshire because these are more general and inclusive across the whole constituency.

Conclusion

Before the Boundary Commission Initial Proposals were released I developed 3 possible proposals, 1a, 1b, 1c, of which I preferred 1a (which is similar to but not the same as the 'Brereton' proposal). When the Boundary Commission Initial Proposals were published I liked them better than my initial ideas. But I still considered there were changes that could improve them further and I arrived at my version 2, sheet "StaffordshireAreaNickyDavis2" of

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1w_F7VwY6SA52jJ0kwXqwdnpKHiyXUEt1p449sRixtQY/edit?usp=sharing

This differs from the Boundary Commission Initial Proposals by the movement of just 5 Stoke-on-Trent local authority wards between 3 constituencies, keeping electorate numbers within the required limits and is what I presented previously and have reiterated in the discussion above.

In attending the Stafford hearings and reading the comments from others I have been perfectly open to changing my ideas further. I regret that I cannot find any further change to resolve the imperfection that aligns Blurton with Trentham in West Staffordshire rather than with Longton in Stoke-on-Trent South, but numerical constraints are tight.

I consider that my version 2 proposals are still best as far as the West Staffordshire, Stoke-on-Trent South and Stoke-on-Trent North are concerned and retain Newcastle-under-Lyme as in the Boundary Commission Initial Proposals.

I thank you for your consideration and look forward to reading the review findings.

- [1] Davis <https://www.bce2018.org.uk/node/15573/view>
- [2] Davis @ Stafford <https://www.bce2018.org.uk/node/32071/view>
- [3] Smeeth <https://www.bce2018.org.uk/node/32240/view>
- [4] Brereton <https://www.bce2018.org.uk/node/26833/view>
- [5] Conway <https://www.bce2018.org.uk/node/31655/view>
- [6] Ffello <https://www.bce2018.org.uk/node/29654/view>
- [7] Jellyman & Follows <https://www.bce2018.org.uk/node/31689/view>