

PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCIES (AMENDMENT) BILL

EXPLANATORY NOTES

What these notes do

These Explanatory Notes relate to the Parliamentary Constituencies (Amendment) Bill as introduced in the House of Commons on 29 June 2016 (Bill 9).

- These Explanatory Notes have been produced by the Public Bill Office on behalf of Pat Glass MP in order to assist the reader of the Bill and to help inform debate on it. They do not form part of the Bill and have not been endorsed by Parliament as a whole.
- These Explanatory Notes explain what each part of the Bill will mean in practice; and provide additional information on how the Bill will affect existing legislation in this area.
- These Explanatory Notes are best read alongside the Bill. They are not, and are not intended to be, a comprehensive description of the Bill.

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Overview of the Bill

- 1 This Bill seeks to amend changes made by the Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Act 2011 to the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986. First, the Bill reverses the reduction in the size of the House of Commons from 650 to 600 Members. Second, it increases the flexibility permitted in the size of the electorate in most constituencies from 5% to 10% of the average (excepting four island seats). Third, the Bill requires the calculation of the size of the total electorate to be based on registers of parliamentary electors published in or after 2017. Fourth, the Bill requires the Boundary Commissions to complete their reviews of parliamentary boundaries by 1 October 2018 and thereafter to carry out reviews every ten years.

Policy background

- 2 The Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Act 2011, which amended the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986, set the number of UK constituencies at 600. With the exception of four island constituencies, the Act requires constituencies to be within 5% of an electoral quota. The quota is the total number of voters in the UK divided by the total number of constituencies (with the exception of the four island seats and their electorates). The excepted constituencies are Na h-Eileanan an Iar, Orkney and Shetland and two seats for the Isle of Wight.
- 3 Boundary Reviews (for England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales) to implement the legislation started in 2013. The 2013 reviews were postponed by the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013, which changed the date by which the Commissions were required to report from 1 October 2013 to 1 October 2018. The four Boundary Review Commissions published their initial proposals in September and October 2016. The new arrangements will apply to a general election held in or after 2018.

Territorial extent and application

- 4 Clause 5 states that the Bill would extend to England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Commentary on provisions of Bill

Clause 1

- 5 Clause 1 alters the change in the size of the House of Commons made by the Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Act 2011 from 600 to 650 Members.

Clause 2

- 6 Clause 2 changes the requirement for constituencies (excluding the four island constituencies) to be within 5% of the electoral quota to 10% of the quota. The quota is the total number of voters in the UK (excluding the electorate of the four island seats) divided by 646 (that is the total number of constituencies less the four island seats). The excepted constituencies are Na h-Eileanan an Iar, Orkney and Shetland and two for the Isle of Wight. The clause also requires the quota to be based on the total number of voters derived from registers of parliamentary electors published not earlier than 2017.

Clause 3

- 7 Clause 3 requires the Boundary Commissions to complete their reports, including the requirements set out in clauses 1 and 2, by 1 October 2018.
- 8 The clause also requires the Boundary Commissions to report decennially by 1 October every tenth year rather than quinquennially as provided by the 2011 Act.

Financial implications of the Bill

- 9 The Bill would require the Boundary Commissions which are well-advanced on reviews to achieve 600 seats to revert to 650 seats, which would give rise to nugatory expenditure and require more work giving rise to additional expenditure.

Commencement

Clause 6

- 10 Clause 6 states that the Bill will come into force the day after it receives Royal Assent.

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