

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 19 July 2017 (Bill 9).

- These Explanatory Notes have been prepared by the Public Bill Office on behalf of Afzal Khan 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.
- These Explanatory Notes explain what each part of the Bill will mean in practice, provide background information on the development of policy and provide additional information on how the Bill will affect existing legislation in this area.
- These Explanatory Notes might best be 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 provides for a fixed allocation of 18 constituencies in Northern Ireland. The size of the electorate in all constituencies in Northern Ireland would be flexible by up to 7.5% above or below the average for Northern Ireland. Third the bill increases the flexibility permitted in the size of the electorate in most Great Britain constituencies from 5% to 7.5% of the average (excepting four island seats). Fourth, the Bill requires the calculation of the size of the total electorate (both in Northern Ireland and in Great Britain) to be based on registers of parliamentary electors published or the 2017 general election or the most recent general election thereafter. Fifth, the Bill requires the Boundary Commissions to complete their reviews of parliamentary boundaries by 1 October 2020 and thereafter to carry out reviews every ten years.

Policy and legal 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 are expected to apply to a subsequent general election, provided that the review recommendations are accepted by both Houses of Parliament in a vote in the autumn of 2018.
- 4 The Government has estimated that the reduction in the number of MPs will save approximately £13.1 million each year. However, since the Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Act 2011 was passed the UK has voted to leave the European Union. The broader context is that there will therefore be a reduction in the cost associated with 73 MEPs to offset keeping the House of Commons at 650 seats.¹ The requirement for the Boundary Commissions to report every ten years rather than every five years, as proposed in the Bill, would also result in potential savings.

Territorial extent and application

- 5 Clause 6 states that the Bill would extend to England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

¹ The annual salary of an MEP is 101,808.60 Euros.

Commentary on provisions of Bill

Clause 1

- 6 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. It provides for a fixed allocation of 18 constituencies in Northern Ireland, with the remaining 632 in Great Britain.

Clause 2

- 7 Clause 2 changes the current UK-wide requirement for constituencies (excluding the four island constituencies) to be within 5% of the electoral quota. It establishes two new quotas: one for Great Britain and one for Northern Ireland. In each case, there is a requirement for constituencies (excluding the four island constituencies) to be within 7.5% of the relevant electoral quota.
- 8 In the case of Great Britain, the electoral quota is the total number of voters in Great Britain (excluding the electorate of the four island seats) divided by 632 (that is the total number of Great Britain constituencies less the four island seats). The excepted constituencies are Na h-Eileanan Siar, Orkney and Shetland and two for the Isle of Wight.
- 9 In the case of Northern Ireland, the electoral quota is the total number of voters in Northern Ireland divided by 18 (that is the total number of Northern Ireland constituencies).
- 10 The clause also requires the quota to be based on the total number of voters derived from registers of parliamentary electors published for the 2017 general election or the most recent election thereafter. This would allow the 2.1 million electors registered after 1 December 2015 to be included in the review.

Clause 3

- 11 Clause 3 contains amendments consequential to the creation of the Great Britain electoral quota and the Northern Ireland electoral quota.

Clause 4

- 12 Clause 4 requires the Boundary Commissions to complete their reports, including the requirements set out in clauses 1 to 3, by 1 October 2020. The clause also requires the Boundary Commissions to report decennially by 1 October every tenth year rather than every five years as provided by the 2011 Act.

Commencement

- 13 Clause 6 states that the Bill will come into force on the day of Royal Assent.

Financial implications of the Bill

- 14 The Bill would require the Boundary Commissions to conduct reviews on the basis of 650 seats

rather than 600. This would require more work giving rise to additional expenditure.²

- 15 The Bill would also result in the number of Members of Parliament reverting back to 650 from the plan, under the current boundary reviews, to move to 600 Members of Parliament. This would mean that the savings from the planned decrease in expenditure on Members of Parliament would be foregone, and as a result the provisions of this Bill would give rise to a potential increase in expenditure, although the planned decrease in costs has yet to be realised. The potential increase in expenditure would be likely to include 50 additional salaries for Members of Parliament,³ associated Member expenses, pension costs, and election costs. The Government has estimated that the reduction in the number of MPs will save approximately £13.1 million each year.⁴
- 16 The Bill therefore requires a money resolution. Clause 5 provides, in the text of the bill itself, the consequent authority for any expenditure that is either incurred under the Bill, or attributable to the Bill.

² Government has estimated that the cost of undertaking the 2018 Review in England alone will be approximately £5.6 million [Boundary Commission for England, [FAQs for the 2018 Review](#), accessed 27 November 2017]

³ £76,011 per Member per annum, as of 1 April 2017 [IPSA]

⁴ Written question, [HL1051](#) [asked on 19 July 2017, answered on 6 September 2017]

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