

HOUSE OF LORDS

Select Committee on the Constitution

13th Report of Session 2019–21

Parliamentary Constituencies Bill

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Select Committee on the Constitution

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Committee staff

The current staff of the committee are Matt Korris (Clerk), Ava Mayer (Policy Analyst) and Dan Weedon (Committee Assistant). Professor Stephen Tierney and Professor Jeff King are the legal advisers to the Committee.

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Parliamentary Constituencies Bill

1. The Parliamentary Constituencies Bill was introduced in the House of Commons on 19 May 2020. The Bill was brought to the Lords on 15 July and received a second reading on 27 July. Committee stage is scheduled to begin on 8 September.
2. The Bill amends the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986 to provide for: the number of parliamentary constituencies, the setting of parliamentary constituency boundaries,¹ and the conduct of reviews by the four United Kingdom Boundary Commissions.
3. The Bill changes how recommendations made by the Boundary Commissions take effect following a boundary review. At present, Boundary Commission recommendations must be approved by Parliament to take effect. The Bill provides that Boundary Commission reviews are to be implemented automatically, by way of Orders in Council that are not subject to parliamentary procedure or approval.
4. Constituency boundaries ought to be determined independently of political influence and in accordance with rules protecting a robust and impartial determination process. **The removal of Parliament's power to block Boundary Commission recommendations is constitutionally appropriate and therefore welcome.**
5. However, automatic implementation of Boundary Commission recommendations will only protect against undue political influence if they are themselves genuinely independent. This makes the selection and appointment of impartial Boundary Commissioners, independent of political influence, all the more important.
6. During committee stage of the Bill in the House of Commons, proposals to strengthen the independence of the Boundary Commissions were suggested, including that:
 - the Commissioners should be appointed for a single, non-renewable term;
 - the Commissioners should be subject to the same political restrictions as the Local Government Boundary Commission for England;
 - the appointing minister should be required to appoint only from the names recommended by the selection panel; and
 - the deputy chair of each commission should sit on the selection panel.²
7. **The House may wish to consider what safeguards are required to ensure the independence and impartiality of the Boundary Commissions and their recommendations.**

1 The Government observes that the existing parliamentary constituencies in England are based on data from 2000 and that those in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland rely upon data from 2001–2003. Parliamentary Constituencies Bill, [Explanatory Notes](#), para 2

2 [Written evidence from Dr Alan Renwick and Professor Robert Hazell, Constitution Unit, University College London \(PCB03\)](#)