

Constitution and Governance Committee

16 August 2023



Somerset
Council

2023 Boundary Review of Parliamentary Constituencies

At the meeting held on 20 October 2022, the Committee were presented with the proposals for the final consultation stage of the 2023 Boundary Review – Parliamentary Constituencies.

In the Avon, Somerset and Devon sub-region, the increase by two in the number of constituencies had meant that significant change to the existing pattern of constituencies was necessary.

The proposed Tiverton and Minehead constituency would cross the county boundary between Somerset and Devon and the proposed Wells and Mendip Hills, and Frome constituencies would cross the county boundary between Somerset and Avon.

There was a very in-depth debate held on the proposals, which led to the item being brought back to the meeting held on 21 November 2022, where the Committee agreed their final consultation submission.

Consultation Responses and Final Recommendations

In December 2022, the Constitution and Governance Committee submitted a response to the Boundary Review. Detailed below is the response with the final report recommendations:-

- 1) 'Taunton County Constituency' – renamed as 'Taunton and Wellington County Constituency' (reflecting in the name the second largest town in the constituency Wellington, which gave its name to its own constituency for much of the 19th century and the start of the 20th century) and to endorse the proposal to include Norton Fitzwarren and Staplegrove ward in the constituency.

= There was a considerable degree of support for calls to include the town of Wellington in the proposed Taunton constituency. They noted that the town did have a significant population and concluded that the proposal had merit. They therefore recommended that the Taunton constituency be renamed Taunton and Wellington.

Consultation Responses and Final Recommendations

2) Tiverton and Minehead County Constituency' – renamed as 'West Somerset and Tiverton County Constituency' (reflecting in the name the wider West Somerset area, which is a well known and understood geographical area and which is reflected in the name of its current constituency, placing 'West Somerset' first in the name reflects the fact that the larger part of the new constituency is in Somerset)

= no change was incorporated within the final recommendations.

Consultation Responses and Final Recommendations

- 3) 'Wells and Mendip Hills County Constituency' – renamed as 'Wells County Constituency' (a constituency called 'Wells' first returned MPs to the House of Commons in 1295 and has continued to do so almost uninterrupted for the last 727 years; unlike some other name changes, adding 'Mendip Hills' to the constituency name would not add any greater clarity to the name, in fact it would add confusion as there is already a division of Somerset County Council called 'Mendip Hills' which, under the Boundary Commission's proposals would fall mostly in the Frome constituency and the Mendip Hills AONB is split between the proposed 'Wells and Mendip Hills constituency' and the 'Weston-super-Mare' and 'North East Somerset and Hanham' constituencies).

= no change was incorporated within the final recommendations.

Consultation Responses and Final Recommendations

- 4) Raise concerns about the inclusion of Bruton in the Frome County Constituency as opposed to the Glastonbury and Somerton County Constituency, due to its historic ties with Wincanton.
- 5) Additionally raise concern that the proposed Frome County Constituency boundary divides the secondary school in Bruton, which falls in both the Bruton ward and the Tower ward (which forms part of the proposed 'Glastonbury and Somerton' constituency).

= In considering the evidence again, they proposed to further revise the proposals here and recommended that the Bruton ward be included in the Glastonbury and Somerset constituency, and that The Pennards and Ditchheat ward be included in the Frome constituency, as part of their final recommendations.

Next Steps

Submission of the final report and recommendations to the Speaker of the House of Commons took place on 28 June 2023 and concludes the Boundary Commission's involvement in the 2023 Boundary Review.

Once the reports of all four Parliamentary Boundary Commissions have been laid before Parliament by the Speaker, the Government must prepare a draft Order to implement the new constituencies for the whole UK. This should be provided to the Privy Council for approval within four months of the last report of the four Parliamentary Boundary Commissions for the UK being laid in Parliament.

Once the Privy Council approves the Order, the new constituencies will be used at the next General election following that date (any by-election in the meantime will continue to use the existing constituency).

Time for Questions

For further information, visit the Boundary Commission for England website: [The 2023 Review of Parliamentary Constituency Boundaries in England – Volume one: Report | Boundary Commission for England \(independent.gov.uk\)](https://www.independent.gov.uk)



Voter ID at the May 2023 Local Elections

At local elections in England on 4 May 2023, voters needed to show photo identification (ID) to vote in polling stations. These were the first elections in Great Britain where this requirement was in place. Elections took place in 230 areas in England and around 27 million people were eligible to vote.



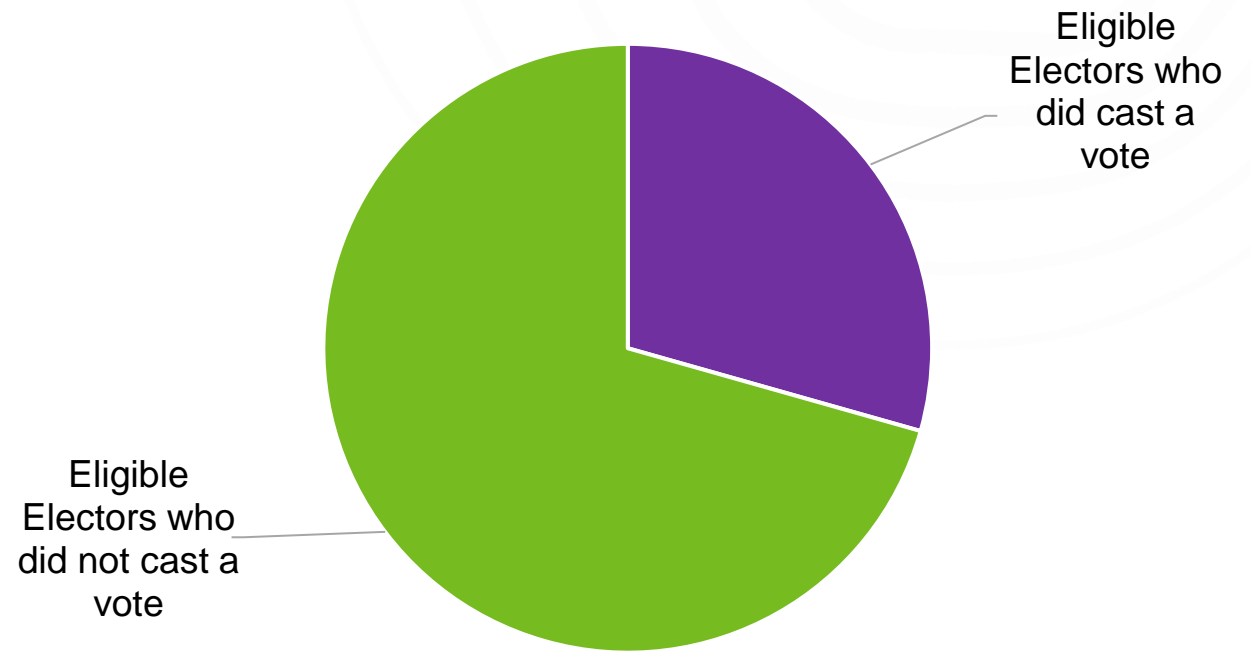
Taunton Town Council Election

Photo ID Statistics

For the election that took place on 4 May 2023:-

Eligible Electors = 41,701

Votes Cast = 12,254 (polling stations and postal votes)



Voter Photo ID

Figures collated from the Polling Stations

The number of electors who applied for, but were not issued with, a ballot paper was 39.

The number of electors who were not issued with a ballot paper and who later returned with accepted ID and were issued with a ballot paper was 23.



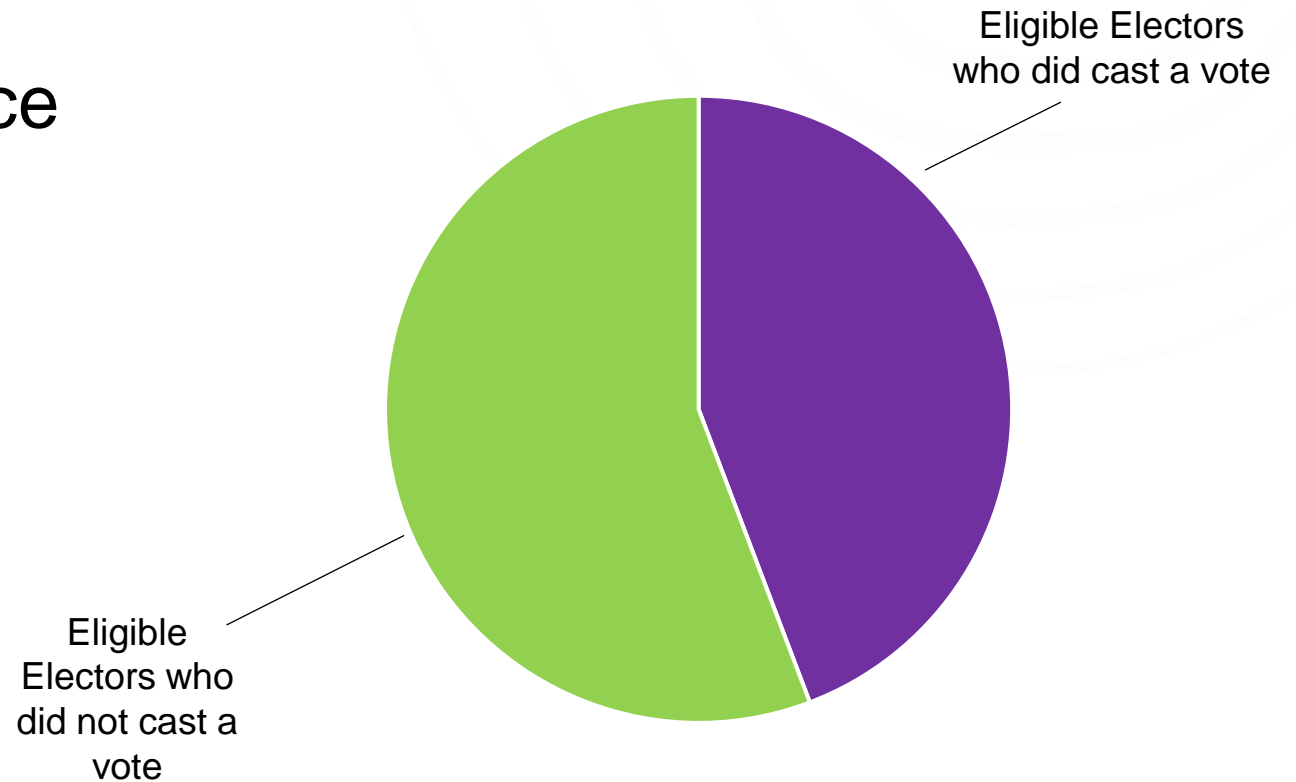
Somerton and Frome Parliamentary By Election

Photo ID Statistics

For the election that took place
on 20 July 2023:-

Eligible Electors = 87921

Votes Cast = 38885 (polling
stations and postal votes)



Voter Photo ID

Figures collated from the Polling Stations

The number of electors who applied for, but were not issued with, a ballot paper was 189.

The number of electors who were not issued with a ballot paper and who later returned with accepted ID and were issued with a ballot paper was 130.



Electoral Commission Interim Analysis

Voter ID at the May 2023 Local Elections in England

87% of people in England were aware that they needed to show photo ID to vote at a polling station.

Approx. 89,500 people applied for a Voter Authority Certificate, with around 25,000 certificates used as a form of ID on 4 May.

Around 4% of all non-voters said they didn't vote because of the voter ID requirement.

Voter ID at the May 2023 Local Elections in England

At least 0.25% of people who tried to vote at a polling station were not issued with a ballot paper because of the ID requirement.

0.25% of polling station voters at these elections equated to approximately 14,000 voters who were not issued with a ballot paper because they could not show an accepted form of ID.

At least 0.7% of people who tried to vote at a polling station were initially turned away but around two-thirds of those people (63%) returned later in the day and were able to vote.

Absent Voting Changes (1)

Draft Regulations relating to changes in postal voting differ from the initial plans for the transitional arrangements for postal voters.

The change means postal voters who had to reapply for their postal vote by 31 January 2024 and 31 January 2025 are no longer required to.

Instead, all existing postal voters who provided a signature prior to 31 October 2023 will be required to reapply for their postal vote by 31 January 2026.

The ERO will now have to write to those who applied for a postal vote over a six-year period in 2026. This will create a peak in workload in 2026 and subsequently every three years.



Absent Voting Changes (2)

A new digital service for applications for an absent vote will launch on Tuesday 31 October 2023, as part of the implementation of the Elections Act 2022. The ERO Portal, previously developed so election teams can process Voter Authority Certificate applications, has been further developed to allow EROs to now also process applications for absent votes made both online and on paper.

