

North Yorkshire

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Comment text:

Related subject: All

See file

Attached Documents:

- lgc-amended-draft-response-to-lgbce.docx

Local Government Boundary Commission for England
7th Floor
3 Bunhill Row
London
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Dear Commissioners,

Electoral review of North Yorkshire Council

I write on behalf of the members of the North Yorkshire Labour Party Local Government Committee which represents all the Constituencies in North Yorkshire in response to the Commission's consultation.

The North Yorkshire Labour Party Local Government Committee (LGC) works with Labour Councillors on our electoral programme, co-ordinates local election campaigning, and provides opportunities for Party members and the public to engage in local policy issues.

The consultation closing on 9 December is the first opportunity to express strong support for the proposal submitted by the Labour Group to increase the number of North Yorkshire Councillors. The arguments for an increase were cogent and compelling and do not need to be repeated at any length.

As a public body, the Commission should provide its reasons for concluding there should be a reduction to 89 Councillors. The electors of North Yorkshire are entitled to know why, just a month before, the Commission decided there should be half as many electors per Councillor in Westmorland & Furness (2,845 per Councillor) or why electors in neighbouring County Durham warrant better representation with one Councillor for 4,150 electors.

In general terms, North Yorkshire is not characterised by high levels of poverty and deprivation but there are concentrations in some areas - mostly represented by Labour Councillors. The Labour Group's submission gave details of heavy workloads carried by our Councillors arising from constituents' casework. Issues such as homelessness, housing disrepair, children's educational attainment, support for disabled people, the complexity of welfare benefits are concentrated in deprived areas. There needs to be enough Councillors overall for Labour Councillors to have the capacity to fulfil their aspirations to serve their communities.

Similarly, there are people and families living in acute poverty but dispersed over the rural areas. Their Councillors should have the time to reach out and engage with them in order to understand and represent their needs.

There are no counter arguments from North Yorkshire Council to justify reducing the number of Councillors.

As a body that works across the whole Council area, the LGC is acutely aware of the differences between the numerous communities separated by huge distances. In rural areas the number of electors relates directly to the geographic size of the divisions. The more electors, the larger the area to be incorporated. Many of the existing North Yorkshire divisions are massive with no meaningful identity for the people living in them - 35% of the population. The Review may change boundaries but not the overall situation.

Only Harrogate, Scarborough have sufficient populations to generate a range of options for divisional boundaries and also have places that provide community focal points outside the main centres.

Harrogate & Knaresborough CLP have considered the proposals submitted to you by North Yorkshire Council and suggested a number of detailed adjustments to the proposed boundaries in the Harrogate town area. The LGC supports those suggestions.

There are a number of larger towns where the centres provide common focal point for the built up areas and the size of population requires two or more divisions. How divisional boundaries are drawn within these built up areas will have little impact on people's lives provided that polling district arrangements are suitable. The Commission's prime aim in such areas should be to create boundaries that respect the common interests and

identity of the communities in the built-up areas. Town areas should not be unnecessarily divided with outlying settlements incorporated simply to 'make the numbers work'.

This point applies particularly to Whitby - please see the response from Scarborough & Whitby CLP, which this LGC supports.

In the case of the small town of Pickering, the Commission should interpret the legislative requirement of '*...as nearly as possible*' to allow for the contiguous area to form one division albeit with 12% more electors than the average (if there are to be only 89 Councillors).

The LGC strongly supports the comments made by Thirsk & Malton CLP that, unless absolutely unavoidable, Council divisions should not be split across Parliamentary constituencies. The proposals submitted by North Yorkshire Council would create 9 split divisions - 5 in Thirsk & Malton alone. The LGC supports the alternatives suggested by Thirsk & Malton CLP.

The Commission's publicity does not indicate if it has formed a view on whether there should be a mix of single and multi-member divisions. There are places where a multi-member division would better enable the integrity of an areas to be preserved. This should be considered for example in Selby and Malton / Norton.

Yours faithfully

Jan Marshall (Ms)
Chair
North Yorkshire Labour Party Local Government Committee

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