

Submission to LGBCE concerning Runnymede

I am writing as an Egham resident and a member of the Egham Residents Association (ERA) to express my support for the proposal of the ERA that the Boundary of Egham Town ward be left largely unchanged during any ward restructuring. This is on account of the need for Egham Town ward not to lose an integral part of its community to Englefield Green East, only to be replaced by an area from a different community, which it might be argued has more in common with neighbouring Staines than with Egham. In this regard, people living in the residential streets off The Causeway normally shop in nearby Sainsburys, and can much more easily cross Staines Bridge by foot to shop in Staines than walk into Egham High Street, negotiating two roundabouts, one being the large Runnymede roundabout currently under reconstruction. This separation between these two communities was recognised by your previous boundary review in 1997. I support the proposal that Englefield Green East be represented by 2 councillors, which would allow it to retain its existing boundaries, and would prevent the carving up of the Egham community, which could also retain its current boundary.

In addition, I would like to oppose the recommendation of Runnymede Borough Council in the Council Size Consultation, that Runnymede should only have 3-member wards. Englefield Green East should be the exception in Runnymede, and have 2 members. This option does not appear to have been explored at all by Council members during the Council's discussions, and the evidence suggests that they did not consider it as an option because they did not know it was an option - even though your Electoral Reviews – Technical Guidance (4.56) indicates that this is an option in certain circumstances. Thus in October 2017, Runnymede Council made its submission to the LGBCE on the Council Size Consultation and recommended that Runnymede should have 42 councillors, Runnymede Officers not themselves knowing that it is possible to have a 2-member ward within the 3-member ward system which elects by thirds. My evidence for this is that subsequent to the RBC's Council Size Consultation submission, in response to a query from an Egham Councillor and an ERA representative, Runnymede Council Officers advised on Jan 12th 2018 that only 3-member wards were allowed in a council that elects by thirds. On being pressed for certainty by the councillor and ERA representative, the Officers sought further advice from the LGBCE and subsequently changed this advice later on the same day, saying that 2-member wards could be an option in certain circumstances. The RBC's recommendation to the LGBCE in the Council Size Consultation, that all wards should be 3-member wards, is therefore flawed because it was made without understanding fully what the options were.

I have further concern over the Council's decision-making process, having read the Minutes of the Corporate Management Committee dated 12th Oct 2017 (p235 paragraph 2) <https://www.runnymede.gov.uk/media/17357/Corporate-Management-121017-Minutes/pdf/12.10.17.pdf>. These Minutes suggest that decisions were made in a hurry and without Councillors being properly informed. The Minutes express regret that *"Unfortunately, there was a breakdown in communication"* (between RBC and the LGBCE), and hence *"Officers had not had an opportunity to brief Councillors fully on the matter and discuss the format of submissions the Council would have to make prior to the report"*. And as you can see from the Minutes there was no discussion of the possibility of anything other than 3-member wards, although 39 and 36 councillors were suggested as possible alternatives to 42.

I support the proposal of the Egham Residents' Association that the total number of RBC councillors should be 41, including 2 from Englefield Green East, and 3 from Egham Town Ward whose boundaries should be retained to reflect the realities of the communities on the ground.

Isabel Mullens (member of the public)