

Response to Bath & N.E. Somerset Local Government Boundary Commission Review of Wards, from Bath & N.E. Somerset Green Party

The commission report asks for responses to set their comments against three criteria:

- That councillors should represent similar numbers of electors
- That ward patterns reflect community interests and boundaries
- That proposals promote effective and convenient local government

We feel the proposals fail on all three of these criteria.

At present the city of Bath is divided into 16 wards each represented by two councillors, with all wards of roughly similar size, though obviously development within the city, especially in the Western Riverside area, means that some change in wards is necessary in this area. In N.E. Somerset the main urban areas also reflect this pattern, while the rural areas are largely represented by one councillor in each ward. We feel this arrangement is mostly satisfactory, and in particular it has the following advantages over the proposals:

- Urban areas, where there are no lower level authorities, all have 2 councillor representation, which reflects the increased workload for these areas over those where there are also parish councils.
- This pattern is fairly simple for electors to understand.
- Two councillor wards allow for electors to split their votes between different parties or independents. This is notably more prevalent in Bath & N.E. Somerset than in many other authorities, which has led to a greater diversity of candidates being elected as councillors, and thus better scrutiny of council actions. In first past the post elections, it is vital that electors have this opportunity wherever feasible, as it is the only way they can cast their votes that more fairly reflects their views.

In terms of the three criteria:

1. The proposals will create wards adjacent to each other within the urban areas that are covering widely different numbers of residents. This is obviously unfair to both the residents and to the councillors who are elected, as some councillors will be able to share workloads with their fellow councillor and some will be lone councillors who will have to shoulder the full workload. As well as creating new one councillor wards, the proposals also create a new 3 councillor ward, which is far too large for reasonable representation, and makes no sense when set against all the criteria. The rural areas are similarly affected with adjacent areas having one or two councillor wards, without any obvious reasons for the difference.
2. Reflecting community interests. There are a large number of concerns being raised by communities across the authority's area, and especially within Bath, about how the proposals do not reflect community interests. Below we raise some examples we are particularly concerned about, though this is not a comprehensive list. In general, while we

recognise that some existing wards do not meet this criteria, the proposals seem to have moved further away from reflecting communities rather than achieving this aim. We hope that the commission will take on board all comments from local communities that are raising them, as well as our specific comments.

3. Effective and convenient local government. As stated previously, what is currently a fairly simple and easily understood pattern is proposed to be replaced with a far more complex pattern that makes little sense to any residents, and will thus lead to less effective government. The convenience of local government for residents will be similarly diminished, as many wards are proposed to become less representative of local circumstances.

Specific proposals that we are particularly concerned about.

1. N.E. Bath – here the existing 2 seat Lambridge ward will be abolished, with part going into a new one seat ward called Larkhall, and the rest being divided between an enlarged Walcot ward and the altered Bathavon North ward, which encircles north-eastern Bath. There are particular concerns that the existing communities that make up Lambridge ward are being cut off from each other, whereas they currently form a cohesive ward that does reflect community interests. We feel a two seat ward should be retained based on the existing Lambridge ward.
2. S.W. Bath – the existing ward patterns are not ideal, with the Oldfield Park area currently divided between two wards, and Western Riverside development making Westmoreland ward unduly large. However, the proposals do not tackle these problems sensibly, and will probably make a bad situation worse. The new Oldfield Park ward is actually less reflective of the Oldfield Park community than the existing Westmoreland ward, as it cuts off the southern part of this area, which is now being divided up into two other wards, which will make representing this community almost impossible for any councillor to do. Having a three seat ward adjacent to some one seat wards will also lead to huge confusion and resentment. It would seem more sensible to have a two seat ward that covered the Riverside area and a two seat ward that covered the area most residents would describe as Oldfield Park.
3. South Bath – we have particular concerns about the division of the Bear Flat area, which is currently mainly found within Lyncombe ward, into parts of three wards. It should be feasible to create a ward that centres on this area, and if necessary, joins in with Widcombe to create a two seat ward. The proposals across the whole of the area from Widcombe across south Bath to Oldfield Park need much revision if they are to be acceptable to local communities.