

Porter, Johanna

From: Fuller, Heather
Sent: 02 February 2015 09:13
To: Porter, Johanna
Subject: FW: Lincolnshire

From: ROBERT PARKER [REDACTED]
Sent: 31 January 2015 00:01
To: Bowden, Tim
Cc: Reviews@
Subject: Lincolnshire

Dear Tim

Thank you for your invitation for us to put forward a case for the future size of Lincolnshire County Council.

The Labour Group, the Official Opposition group on Lincolnshire County Council, does not support the Council's official response to reduce to 71 seats the future size of the council. Instead the Labour Group proposal is to retain the number of seats at 77.

In brief our case is based on two points

- 1) we are concerned over the reliability and accuracy of electorate forward projection figures
- 2) we are not persuaded by the arguments put forward by the County Council for a decrease in the number of councillors

I attach a number of documents which set out our position and provide supporting evidence.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you require further information.

Regards

Robert Parker
Deputy Leader of the Labour Group
Lincolnshire County Council

Electoral Review: Preliminary size submission for Lincolnshire County Council

The Labour Group on Lincolnshire County Council supports the council's position on retaining single-member divisions so as to maintain accountability between a single elected member and the electorate. The view is also taken that in a largely rural area there are also likely to be problems of management with a tendency to sub-divide one electoral division.

The Labour Group does not support the council position on reducing the number of elected members to 71 and proposes that the number should remain at 77.

Our submission is divided into two sections

Firstly, we are not persuaded by arguments put forward by the council to justify a reduction on the following grounds:

1. At paragraph 21 of the submission mention is made of the council moving towards a commissioning-based approach and that as a result of a review this could result in slightly fewer committees. No evidence is put forward for this view and indeed the council's submission notes 'We are unable to give an exact break-down of the effect this will have at present'. Not only that, but not even an inexact effect is offered! It is a contested view that becoming a commissioning council leads to less responsibilities for councillors. Rather the opposite could be argued that councillors need to be involved at all stages of the commissioning process from specification to monitoring. Certainly the scrutiny work of councillors will still be an important and no less time consuming part of our work. A recent Internal Audit report into the 'The future of the library service in Lincolnshire' indicated that on key projects more time on scrutiny work was both necessary and important.
2. At paragraph 22 mention is made that with a small number of electors per hectare as is the case in Lincolnshire greater distances have to be travelled in most of the county. Reducing the number of councillors from 77 to 71 would of which it is likely 4 would be in rural areas would increase the time commitment of some councillors
3. At paragraph 31 it is suggested that a council size of 71 members would strike a balance between having an achievable workload and maintaining the visibility of councillors in their divisions. However the geographically largest of the divisions, Ancholme Cliff and North Wolds in West Lindsey, Louth Wolds and Louth Marsh in East Lindsey and Colsterworth Rural and Folkingham Rural in South Kesteven are in divisions where four of the proposed six seats to be lost are located
4. At paragraphs 35 the council again refers to becoming a commissioning council and seeks to argue that as there will be a reduction in staff numbers there should be a corresponding reduction in councillors. That argument fails to acknowledge that the vast majority of services will continue to be delivered by commissioned contractors and for which the County Councillor will continue to have a responsibility to deliver quality services and achieve value for money.
5. At paragraph 48 mention is made that recent changes in local government means that that the council will have a more strategic role. No evidence or argument is put forward for this

claim nor for the suggestion that there may be a corresponding reduction in the committee commitments of councillors.

Secondly, we are not all convinced about the validity of the County Council projections of electorate figures for two reasons.

1. In the County Council submission mention was made of an all-party group which met periodically to consider a variety of possible options for the council's response. We quickly agreed on wanting to maintain single-member divisions. What was most troublesome was the quality of the figures being delivered to our group of the projections of electorate figures for 2020. On at least three occasions the member-led group refused to accept the validity of the figures given to us because of clear inaccuracies. That leads the Labour Group to question why the figures now being put forward are any more accurate than previous figures put to the member working group. Officers at the County Council can provide details of earlier emanations of the figures on which members should have based recommendations.
2. It seems to us that that there is a major inconsistency and clearly no level playing field between the approach in projecting electorate figures to the LGBC of the four Lincolnshire district councils and Lincolnshire Council over recent years. Details of the differences are shown in documents which are attached. What is of most concern is that whilst West Lindsey DC, East Lindsey DC, South Kesteven DC and the City of Lincoln Council all seem to have taken the same approach Lincolnshire County Council have taken a completely different approach. The consequence, as we would argue, is an undercounting of the projected number of electors of at least 17,000. Which of course takes no account of the likely undercounting in the County Council figures of the other three districts of Boston BC, North Kesteven DC and South Holland DC.

We want to draw the attention of the LGBC to these seeming disparities between the way that four District councils and the County Council have been projecting the numbers of Lincolnshire electors.

To conclude: the basis of the Labour Group case is that

1. Lincolnshire is a large rural county with a growing population and electorate and needs and can justify retaining the same number of councillors. We reject any starting assumption that fewer councillors are a 'good thing'. Any reduction needs justifying and we can see no justification put forward by the County Council. It has been said the justifications have to be made for maintenance of the status quo. That seems to be an argument based on norms or averages not on recognising the particular characteristics of a place. To pick a figure of 71 councillors as was done early on by a leading councillor which then led on to the Council submission seems to be based on looking for the answer first then seeking to find arguments.
2. The method of calculating the projected electorate figures used by the County Council are clearly not consistent for the reasons stated with those used by four Lincolnshire District Councils in recent years. That raises some important questions for the LGBC to consider.
3. For all these reasons, the most appropriate decision, in the absence of good argument or evidence for change, is for no change in the number of councillors on Lincolnshire Council.