

Review Officer (Kingston upon Thames)
The Local Government Boundary Commission
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Kingston Conservative Group
Guildhall
High Street
Kingston upon Thames
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25 March 2019

Dear Sir/Madam,

**Kingston upon Thames Boundary Review – Stage 1 Number of Councillors
Kingston Conservative Group Submission**

We write as the Conservative Opposition Group in support of Kingston Council's submission on councillor numbers. Members of our Group took part in the cross party working group set up by the Council to discuss and agree its submission. The working group met several times and was collaborative and constructive in nature.

Conservative Councillors voted in favour of Kingston Council's recommendation, at a meeting of the Finance & Contracts Committee on 18 March 2019, that the Council should retain the existing number of 48 councillors based on the evidence presented in the Council's report.

We agree with the evidence laid out in the Council's submission and consider that to reduce the number of councillors would have an adverse effect on maintaining the conditions for a fair and representative democracy at local level and we are mindful of the core principle of Local government Boundary Commission that councils should play a major part in promoting local democracy, encouraging people to register as electors, providing information about local issues and providing pathways by which people can influence decision making.

We concur with the Council's analysis that any reduction from the currently level of 48 Cllrs would place unacceptable pressure on the workloads of remaining Members and their ability to effectively represent the interests of their local communities. It would also make it more difficult for the Council to appropriately fill all the necessary leadership roles required of Members within a unitary authority operating under a committee system.

Whilst the electorate to councillor ratio is lower than many other London Boroughs, Kingston Council is one of the smallest London Boroughs by population size; it is felt that there is a minimum number of councillors required for the Council to deliver effective governance and representation. Also Kingston Council operates a committee system with a scrutiny committee for community call-ins and is planning to expand the number of

decisions made at neighbourhood committee level. This increases the time commitment on councillors as opposed to the committee system now operating in many other councils. Therefore reducing the number of councillors purely to have a ratio of electors to councillors more in line with other London Boroughs would result in insufficient Members to deliver the necessary functions required under the current and also the revised governance system currently being proposed by the current Liberal Democrat Administration.

The Conservative Group did consider the possibility of reducing the number of councillors but felt that the disadvantage of the extra burden on councillors, given that Kingston operates a full committee system with neighbourhood committees, did not outweigh the benefit of the relatively small predicted savings. If we compare to other equivalent councils, there are only two London Boroughs currently with fewer councillors than Kingston: Tower Hamlets with 45 (operating an elected mayor and cabinet system) and Hammersmith & Fulham with 46 (cabinet system). We are aware that Bexley's recent Boundary Review concluded that the number of councillors should be reduced to 45, but again this Council is operates on a cabinet system. It is recognised that a full cabinet system of council governance requires fewer councillors to operate effectively than a committee system.

Therefore we conclude that due to the fact that the Liberal Democrat Administration in Kingston plan to continue operate a committee system with four local neighbourhoods, Kingston Conservative Group consider that the number of councillors should remain at the current level of 48.

Yours faithfully,

KINGSTON CONSERVATIVE GROUP