

Formal response to document on council size

This is a formal response to the document *Electoral Review of the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames: Stage One – Council Size: Submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England by the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames*.

This response is by the Kingston Local Campaign Forum (short form: Kingston Borough Labour Party). This comprises Kingston & Surbiton Constituency Labour Party and part of Richmond Park Constituency Labour Party. It is the body that decides Labour Party policy in respect of local government matters in the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames.

As we disagree with aspects of the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames (RBK) document, Labour is sending this directly as a submission to the LGBCE.

Introduction

The RBK document was made available online on Monday 11 March. This response is dated Sunday, 24 March 2019. After the meeting of the Finance & Contracts Committee on 18 March 2019, about two minor changes were scheduled to be made to the RBK document.

This response does not attempt to address every section of the RBK document. A skirmish in the English Civil War may be interesting background reading for the Local Government Boundary Commission for England but requires no comment from us.

In the time available, detailed comment on Appendix 1 – Electorate Forecast Methodology has not been possible.

Review of document

Appendix 2 – Committee and Outside Bodies Memberships

This appendix gives the number of councillors on each entity but not the frequency of meetings. The number of meetings a year is given elsewhere for just four committees. The RBK document does the council a disservice by failing to give an immediate picture of the councillors' workload.

In the following tables, Labour attempts to quantify the workload more precisely. As we do not have access to the council's resources, there might be inaccuracies. The titles of some committees appear to have been used inconsistently. Where either the frequency or the number of councillors is to be determined then the attendances are given as zero.

Table 1 captures much of the councillors' workload. A total of 1396 meetings is around 29 meetings a year per councillor. A backbench councillor with no other responsibilities is expected to attend 12 meetings a year. In practice, all councillors are expected to attend at least 17 meetings a year.

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Table 1: Calculation of meeting workload

Committee	Frequency per year	No of cllrs	Attendances	Notes
Full Council	7	48	336	
Neighbourhood committees (aggregated)	5	48	240	
Neighbourhood planning sub-committees (aggregated)	0-5	48	0	Optional. Can meet up to 5 times per annum.
Neighbourhood committees (engagement meetings)	0-4	48	0	Optional. Can meet up to 4 times per annum.
Achieving for Children Joint Committee Joint Committee for Achieving for Children	3	3	9	
Audit, Governance & Standards Committee	5	5	25	
Blue Badge Appeals Committee	0	5	0	Last met in 2017
Children and Adults Care and Education Committee	5	11	55	
Community Engagement Committee	5	11	55	
Corporate Parenting Panel	?	4	0	
Development Control Committee	9	11	99	Frequency may vary
Environment and Sustainable transport Committee	5	11	55	
Finance and Contracts Committee	5	11	55	
Health and Wellbeing Board	5	6	30	
Health Overview and Scrutiny Panel	5	11	55	
Home To School Travel Appeals Panel	?	5	0	
Joint Appointments Committee with LBRUT for Director of Children's Services Joint Appointments Committee	?	3	0	Last met 12/9/16
Licensing Committee	4	15	60	
Licensing Sub-Committee	15	3	45	Meetings often cancelled. 3/15 councillors attend.

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The London Pensions Common Investment Vehicle Joint Committee	?	1	0	
Member Development Session	15	48	48	Presume all councillors attend at least one session.
Pension Board	5	4	20	
Pension Fund Panel	6	5	30	
Safeguarding of Children Review Panel	?	7	0	
Schools Forum	4	2	8	
Scrutiny Panel	8	7	56	
Senior Staff Panel	9	5	45	Meets as needed?
South London Partnership Joint Committee	0	1	0	Last met 26/5/15.
South West London Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee	4	2	8	
South London Joint Committee on Waste Disposal South London Waste Partnership Joint Committee	2	2	4	One member is non-voting
Staff Consultative Committee	?	5	0	
South West London and Surrey Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee or Standing Joint Health Overview And Scrutiny Committee	3	1	3	Last met 26/6/18.
Staff Appeals Panel / Committee	?	5	0	Meets as needed
Standing Advisory Committee for Religious Education	0	3	0	Last met 14/3/16
Strategic Housing and Planning Committee	5	11	55	
Teachers' Appeals Committee	?	5	0	Meets as needed
Total			1396	

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Table 2 gives the individual Neighbourhood committee meetings (already aggregated in Table 1). Licensing Sub-Committees exist for some purposes but there is no evidence of their meeting recently.

Table 2: Neighbourhood committee workload

Neighbourhood Committee	Frequency per year	Number of councillors	Attendances required
Kingston Town Neighbourhood Committee	5	12	60
Kingston Town Consultation Forum	0-4	12	0
Kingston Town Planning Sub-Committee	0-5	?	0
Malden & Coombe Neighbourhood Committee	5	15	75
Malden & Coombe Neighbourhood Community Forum	0-4	15	0
Malden & Coombe Neighbourhood Planning Sub-Committee	0-5	?	0
South of the Borough Neighbourhood Committee	5	9	45
South of the Borough Consultation Forum	0-4	9	0
South of the Borough Planning Sub-Committee	0-5	?	0
Surbiton Planning Sub-Committee	0-5	?	0
Surbiton Neighbourhood Committee	5	12	60
Surbiton Consultation Forum	0-4	12	0
Total		48	240

Table 3 lists other committees mentioned on the RBK website. These are presumably committees that were renamed, abolished, or amalgamated.

Table 3: Renamed or superseded committees

Committee	Frequency per year	No of cllrs	Attendances	Notes
Adult and Children's Committee	2	0	0	
Kingston Strategic Partnership	0	1	0	Last met 4/2/16
Member Workshops	0	?	0	Last met 18/5/15
Religious Education Agreed Syllabus Conference	0	?	0	Last met 2/11/11
South West London Joint Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Committee	0	?	0	Probably defunct
Task and Finish Group (CRE Decant Policies)	0	4	0	Last met 2/11/17

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Growth Committee	2	5	10	Last met 27/3/18
Housing Sub-Committee	2	3	6	Last met 8/3/18. Probably now the Strategic Housing and Planning Committee
Residents Committee	2	5	10	Last met 21/3/18.
Treasury Committee	2	6	12	Last met 29/3/18.

Representation on external bodies

Table 4 lists the council's view of its representation on external bodies. This list does not include school governorships, which often are held by councillors.

Table 4: Council representation on external bodies

Organisation	Frequency	Cllrs	Attendances	Notes
2M Group (Heathrow)	?	1	0	
Chessington Charities	?	?	0	
Countryside Management Partnership Board		?	0	
Global Arts Kingston	?	1	0	
Greater London Employment Forum (GLEF)	?	1	0	
Henry Smith's Charity	?	1	0	Ex-cllr Andrew Day
Joint Waste Development Plan Document Member Working Group	?	2	0	
Kingston Arts Council	?	1	0	
Kingston Arts Council Executive Committee	?	3	0	
Kingston Centre for Independent Living	?	?	0	
Kingston Chamber of Commerce	4	1	4	
Kingston College Governing Body	?	?	0	
Kingston First	?	2	0	

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<u>Kingston Hospital Council of Governors</u>	4	2	8	Four formal meetings of + training and away-days.
Kingston Primary Care Commissioning Board	?	1	0	
<u>Kingston Safer Neighbourhood Board</u>	3	2	6	
Kingston Sports Council	?	1	0	To 2018
<u>Kingston Theatre Trust</u>	?	2	0	
<u>Kingston Town Centre Management Board</u>	?	?	0	
<u>Kingston University Liaison Committee</u>	?	?	0	
<u>Kingston upon Thames Society (Executive Board)</u>	?	1	0	
<u>LGA - General Assembly</u>	?	4	0	
<u>Local Children's Safeguarding Board</u>	?	1	0	
<u>London Councils - Annual General Meeting</u>	1	1	1	
<u>London Councils - Grants Committee</u>	1	1	0	
<u>London Councils - Greater London Employment Forum</u>	1	1	0	
<u>London Councils - Leaders' Committee</u>	1	1	0	RBK leader
<u>London Councils - Transport and Environment Committee</u>	?	1	0	
London Councils Limited	?	1	0	
London Health and Wellbeing Board Chairs Network	?	1	0	
<u>London Youth Games Ltd</u>	?	1	0	
NHS SWL STP Leadership Group – 1 year	?	1	0	
<u>Reserve Forces and Cadets Association for Greater London</u>	?	1	0	
<u>River Thames Alliance</u>	?	?	0	
Local <u>Safeguarding Adults Partnership Board</u>	?	1	0	
<u>South West London & St George's Mental Health Trust Council of Governors</u>	?	1	0	Ex-cllr Chris Hayes
<u>Sport Kingston</u>	?	?	0	
<u>Surbiton Racket & Fitness Club</u>	?	?	0	

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Surrey Countryside Partnerships Board (formerly Lower Mole Project Liaison Group)	?	1	0	
Thames Landscape Strategy	?	2	0	
Tolworth Hospital Community Forum (SWLSTG)	?	8	0	
Totals			19	

From: <https://moderngov.kingston.gov.uk/mgListOutsideBodies.aspx>

Based on the incomplete information given in the above tables, Kingston councillors have a demanding workload.

Sections 6–8

These sections are, in essence, a description of the Committee system (readopted in 2013) and devolution to Neighbourhood Committees (adopted in various guises since 1986).

Bexley Council moved from a Committee system to “a strong Leader and Cabinet model of governance”. However, their number of councillors is 45. This strongly suggests that there are no substantial reductions in the number of councillors to be made by switching to another system.

Section 8.6.4

The response rate to the survey is disappointingly low. As the respondents were self-selecting and presumably more conscientious, the survey is open to criticism. Presumably the 16 councillors who did not reply were either disorganised or possibly, in contrast, overworked.

Such criticism could have been forestalled by publishing objective data showing aggregate attendance at each committee, along with notified and unnotified absences, and substitutions. This data is available on the council’s website but not presented in the council’s document.

The overall 86% figure given in 8.6.2 suggests Kingston is broadly similar to many comparable local authorities.

Sections 8.6.5–8.6.10

These sections outline a councillor workload each month of 99 hours of Council business (8.6.8) and 17 hours of casework (8.6.10) – nearly 27 hours per week. A typical local government working day is 7.2 hours so 27 hours is equivalent to 3.75 working days.

Section 10.3 gives the basic allowance as £8,086 per annum. Therefore, a backbench councillor doing a full workload is being ‘paid’ around £5.81 per hour. Increasing the allowance to the £11,045 recommended by the Independent Remuneration Panel would raise that to a princely £7.93 per hour. (Raising allowances is, of course, outside the scope of a boundary review.)

For comparison, the National Minimum Wage will be £8.21 from April 2019.

The London Living Wage, which the council has adopted, is £10.55 per hour.

Sections 8.6.11–8.6.12

These sections persuasively summarise councillors' concerns at the consequences of asking councillors to work long hours for a nugatory financial reward.

In particular, a major concern was "that a reduction in the number of Councillors would lead to an increase in the workload for those remaining in office".

There is a danger that becoming a councillor will only appeal to retired people on fairly comfortable pensions, the self-employed, and the unemployed.

This is hinted at in the final sentence "There is a risk that over time this could lead to the Council no longer being representative of the community it serves."

Section 10

Sections 10.4 and 10.5 give the costs of a councillor as around £9,000 per annum.

Section 11

Section 11.4 argues, "There is no strong financial case for a reduction given the relatively marginal savings which could be achieved, estimated at no more than approximately £9,000 per Member."

Section 11.2 and 11.3 recapitulate the pressure on Member capacity given in section 8.6.

In contrast, section 11.1 contends that the costs of a councillor which are "relatively marginal" in section 11.4 are somehow significant when contemplating an expansion in numbers.

In the context of a boundary review, the only way of reducing the Member workload is to increase the number of Members.

The council's document fails to grasp that nettle.

Geographical implications of council size

Kingston borough is shaped rather like an inverted isosceles triangle and carved into sections by the A3; three railway lines, often in cuttings or on embankments; and the Hogsmill River with its wide floodplain.

These barriers make the construction of coherent wards difficult.

For example, the A3 is a major barrier, often in a cutting. It is difficult to argue that residents on opposite sides of the A3 comprise a community.

The council had 50 Members before 2002.

This pre-2002 council had just one ward, Tolworth East, that crossed the A3.

See Map 1 on page 4 of the 1999 document *Final Recommendations on the Future Electoral Arrangements for the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames*.

However, the post-2002 council with 48 Members has three wards that cross the A3: Tolworth and Hook Rise, Alexandra, and St. James. There was also one

strangely shaped ward, Beverley, that crossed a then-constituency boundary and straddled a railway line in two places to get to the correct size.

See Map 2 on page 21 of the same document.

It is worth spending some time comparing these maps. The 48-seat council has wards with contrived and convoluted boundaries. In contrast, the 50-seat council has wards with simple boundaries, sometimes these are almost straight lines.

The 1999 review took into account the "possibility of London boroughs having annual elections with three-member wards so that one councillor in each ward would stand for election each year."

There is no such stipulation for three-Member wards in the current review. Therefore, there is flexibility to introduce one- and two-seat wards that may ameliorate the problem of contrived wards.

However, a 48-seat council limits the ability to create wards that reflect communities.

A larger number of Members would allow more flexibility.

Conclusion

The RBK document cogently argues against a reduction from 48 Members.

"Any reduction would place unacceptable pressure on the workloads of remaining Members and their ability to effectively represent the interests of their local communities."

However, it does nothing to ameliorate Members' workload through the available means of increasing the number of Members.

Increasing the number of Members would reduce workload and enable the creation of wards that better reflect their communities.

The financial implications of each extra Member are marginal.

There clearly must be some upper limit.

Therefore, the Kingston Borough Labour Party concurs that there should be at least 48 councillors but propose that the Council should return to 50 councillors.