

Kingston Liberal Democrats' views on Stage One of LGBCE review of Kingston Council electoral arrangements

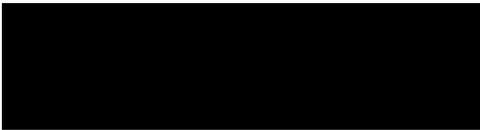
1. The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) is reviewing Kingston Council's electoral arrangements. Stage One decides the number of councillors the Council requires. The Commission has asked the Council to make recommendations as to the number of councillors it needs, and a full response will be submitted by 25 March 2019. This document sets out, briefly, the views of the Liberal Democrats in Kingston. The Liberal Democrats are the majority party on the Council and provide the administration.
2. The Liberal Democrats note that the GLA population forecast, which takes into account planned housing development, predicts an increase in the population of the Borough from 180,600 to 228,500 by 2050 and the number of residents aged 65 and over is projected to nearly double from 24,800 to 45,100 by 2050. All these factors will increase pressure on the Council and its councillors.
3. Kingston Liberal Democrats maintain that Kingston Council should retain the existing number of 48 councillors to fulfil its statutory functions and democratic accountability. Although Kingston is the smallest London Borough it has the same number of statutory functions as the larger boroughs, which also have a larger number of councillors. The present number of councillors is required to ensure effective governance considering the number of leadership roles which councillors are required to fulfil.
4. Councillors are also appointed to represent the Council on a wide variety of organisations the Council has an interest in, including the South West London and Surrey Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee, local charities, partnership boards, pan-London bodies and panels. In total there are 43 Kingston councillor representatives on 29 outside bodies.
5. A decrease in council size would lead to an increase in individual councillor workload (for what is for most a voluntary activity rather than a paid job) and would have an additional impact on each councillor's personal and professional lives. A recent survey of Kingston councillors showed that they were on average devoting 23 hours per week to Council business¹. An increase in individual councillor workload could deter and effectively prevent many people from standing for election who have rival commitments such as childcare, care for elderly parents, or full-time employment. This would mean the elected councillors would be less representative of their community².

¹ Finance and Contracts Committee report 18 March 2019.
<https://moderngov.kingston.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=658&Mid=8653&Ver=4>.

² The Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA), in a national review in 2007, said councillors reported spending an average of nearly 22 hours a week on council and party business. Nearly 41% of councillors in the census were retired, compared to just over 22% of England's adult population. Source - <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2007/mar/14/localgovernment>

6. The present number of councillors is also required to ensure sufficient representation given the administration's commitment to 'hardwiring' effective public engagement by involving residents in the design of local services and introducing new ways to participate in decision making. This will require increased representation of elected councillors at re-empowered Neighbourhood Committees, open democracy platforms, Citizens' Assemblies, community events, forums and citizen panels, for example. In a time of overall reduction in local government financial support from central government, while demographic pressures on statutory services are increasing, it is especially important that local representatives have the time to consider the issues and engage with local people in the important decisions required by the council to enable a legal budget to be set.

Signed on behalf of the Kingston Borough Liberal Democrats by



Jimmy Kent

Chair of the Kingston Borough Liberal Democrats

25/3/19