

By email

28 January 2019

Dear Ms Kerswell,

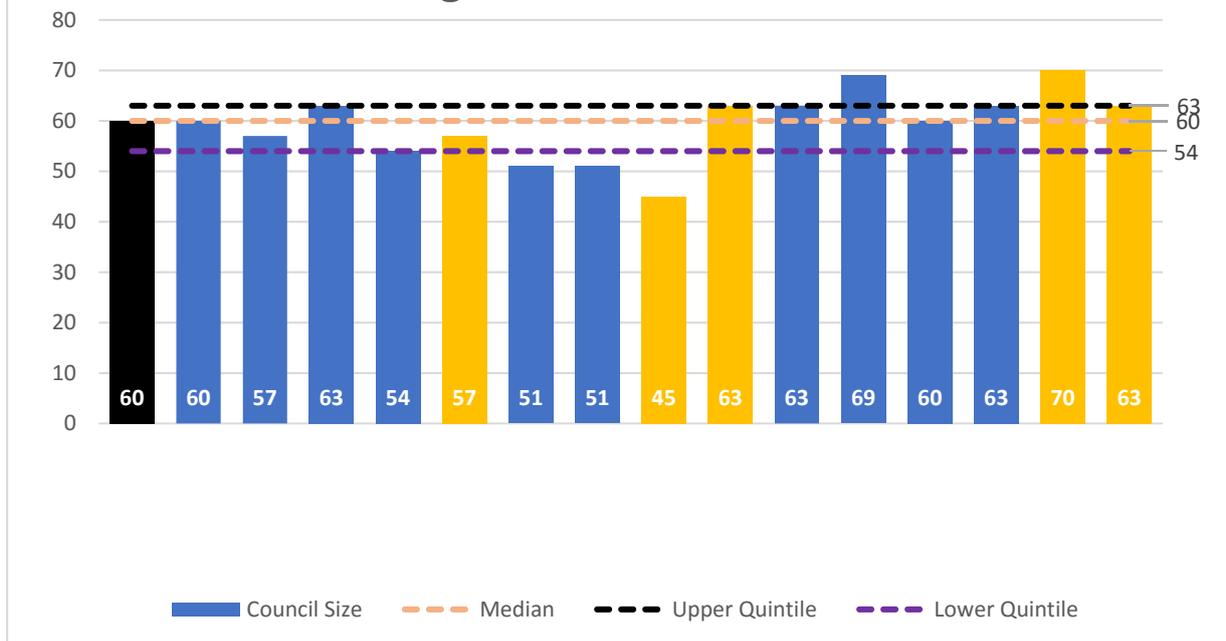
Newham Council Size

Thank you for the submission outlined in Daniel Fenwick's letter, dated 18 January, containing your Council's proposal for 72 councillors.

Frequently, we seek additional information and evidence before the Commission considers such submissions formally, especially where a significant change in size is being proposed. Given the scale of the change proposed in Newham, I have discussed the submission informally with the Lead Commissioner with the purpose of identifying what additional information might be helpful to the Commission when making its decision. The Commission is scheduled to take its decision on the number of councillors for Newham at its meeting on 19 February 2019.

As explained in our technical guidance, in order to provide context, we refer to CIPFA's Nearest Neighbour figures to see how council size proposals stand alongside 'statistically similar' authorities. Whilst it is recognised that all authorities are different – Newham's submission, for example, helpfully highlights distinctive issues such as significant growth in the borough, high levels of deprivation, lower than average levels of electoral registration and electoral churn – it is noted that a council size of 72 would make it larger than any of its 'nearest neighbours'. (See graph below – the names listed nearest to Newham in the graph are those that are most statistically similar). Such an increase would also be inconsistent with national trends.

Newham Council & its CIPFA Nearest Neighbours - Council Size



Accordingly, given both the scale of the proposed change and how Newham compares with similar authorities, we believe that it would be helpful to seek further information in support of your proposal in relation to the following areas:

- Scrutiny function:** The submission indicates that scrutiny is playing an increasing role in Newham and that new scrutiny arrangements have been established. It would be helpful to understand how twelve additional members are required to effectively fulfil these (or other anticipated but not yet introduced) scrutiny roles. Could you also expand on the pre-scrutiny role and how this will require additional members? How would the Council make this work if the numbers remained as at present or the increase was a more modest one?
- Regulatory and licensing function:** The submission suggests that additional members are required to undertake the work of regulatory and licensing committees which is considered to be an expanding role. Could you provide further detail on this, for example setting out which committees additional members would sit on and how this is different in Newham to other similar boroughs? Are enhanced or alternative regulatory committees being proposed, or will the additional members simply sit on the existing committees to assist in responding to the high-level of applications?
- The issues that Newham faces, particularly in relation to the levels of deprivation and the proportion of residents who are not on the electoral roll and, therefore, do not feature in electoral calculations, are recognised. The

significant levels of expected growth are also acknowledged. However, a significant part of the case for the increase in council size is based on the assumption that the current electoral ratio should be maintained. The Commission is often presented with evidence about considerable forecast electoral growth but does not regard the maintenance of an existing councillor: elector ratio as a compelling objective per se. It would be helpful, therefore, to understand why such an objective is important in Newham.

- *Community representation:* The submission stresses the importance of community representation and the voice of the electorate. It would be helpful to know more about the role of citizen assemblies and democratic participation and, in particular, why additional members are essential to such endeavours and in what way? How would such bodies function with existing numbers or with a smaller increase?
- *Partnerships:* It is asserted that an increase of twelve members is required for partnership working. How will the increase enable the council to be fully and effectively represented in partnership working?

The Commission always expects widespread debate and challenge amongst elected members during the preparation of a submission; this is especially important in authorities where only one political party is represented in order to reassure that alternatives have been fully assessed and considered. Accordingly, it would be helpful to see the reports that went to the Council's Boundary Commission Committee and, specifically, evidence of the robust challenge described in your submission.

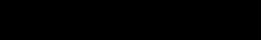
This additional information will assist the Commission to understand better the request for such a large number of additional councillors beyond the objective of maintaining a current councillor-electors ratio which, in itself, may not be sufficiently persuasive evidence for the Commission. Rather, it is likely that the Commission will be looking for more specific evidence about why, and how, twelve additional councillors will ensure the effective delivery of the Council's business while maintaining an effective representational role for members.

In order to allow us to assess all of this further information in advance of 19 February, we would welcome a response to the questions posed above by 5 February. Needless to say, if any of this is unclear please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Yours sincerely,



Alison Evison
Review & Programme Manager



Local Government Boundary Commission for England
1st Floor, Windsor House, 50 Victoria Street London SW1H 0TL