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Local Government Boundary Commission for England
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Dear Alison,

Thank you for your letter of 28 January 2019, requesting additional information and evidence following the Council's formal submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission's consultation on Council size.

The Council considers that Newham's exceptional population growth, its extremely high levels of deprivation and electoral churn create unique challenges for scrutiny and effective representation. Following careful consideration by the Council's Boundary Commission Committee, the Council considers that an uplift of twelve elected members would best enable the Council to fulfil its scrutiny, representative and governance functions.

This position was reached after robust debate and challenge at the meetings of the Council's Boundary Commission Committee and the minutes of these meetings can be found here: <https://mgov.newham.gov.uk/mgCommitteeDetails.aspx?ID=1521>

In your letter you requested further information on:

1. Scrutiny functions

The Council considers twelve additional members are required to effectively fulfil its scrutiny functions. Scrutiny in Newham has a significant and rapidly growing workplan and it is recognised that it plays a crucial role in reviewing and helping to shape Council policy.

The Council has recently identified the urgent need to enhance internal controls and augment the role of scrutiny. It was recently agreed in the January 2019 meeting of full Council that that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee would need to review its terms of reference and enhance its role to complement the work of the Administration, the Audit Committee and a new Internal Control Commission and in transforming the Council's internal control and governance. The full Council report and minutes can be found here: <https://mgov.newham.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=295&MId=12433&Ver=4>

Member oversight and strengthening of Overview and Scrutiny has been identified as paramount to support and ensure successful improvements in the council control systems and processes. The Council is also committed to further enhancing and strengthening its role.

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The Council's view is that if numbers remained as at present or the increase was a more modest one, elected members would struggle to fulfil their scrutiny function, in light of the huge and growing volume of casework that members respond to. This is compounded by the high level of need and material deprivation in the borough.

A number of Members are currently on two or more Scrutiny Commissions and it is the Council's position that in order to effectively discharge scrutiny requirements this workload needs to be better shared between an increased number of members to deliver the ambitious but required workplan.

While neighbouring London Boroughs have between five and eight Council meetings per municipal year (including their respective meetings of Annual Council Meeting), Newham's constitution sets out at least 10 full Council meetings per year. This is in addition to the considerable workload of the five scrutiny commitments and further working parties outlined in Part 7 of the Council's formal submission. For example, the recent Budget Working Forums, spanned a three month period and required considerable involvement from over twenty councillors.

At the same time, there is also an increased expectation for pre-scrutiny and involvement by non-executive councillors before decisions are made as one of the ways to improve decision making through wider consultation and involvement.

Pre-scrutiny in Newham is relatively new and, whilst it has an important role in challenging the decision making process of the executive and is supported by the executive, the current high workload of members means that actual capacity to fully engage in the pre-scrutiny process is limited. Increasing the complement of elected members by twelve would add greatly needed resources for this important and developing area for scrutiny in Newham.

2. Regulatory and Licensing function

Additional members are required to undertake the work of regulatory and licensing committees. The workload of these committees vastly exceeds that of neighbouring boroughs given the rapid development that is taking place in the borough. The Council envisages that additional licensing and planning sub-committees together with additional scrutiny committees would lessen the significant regulatory and licensing workload on current members.

Newham is a clear outlier in London in terms of the demand on its licensing and planning committees.

Between April 2017-August 2018, Newham received 76 licensing applications. This vastly exceeds all neighbouring boroughs. For example, the London Borough of Tower Hamlets receives less than half the number of applications (35 applications), and the London Boroughs of Waltham Forest (21 applications) and Redbridge (17 applications) receive less than a third of the number of applications as Newham.

The rapid level of regeneration and development in the London Borough of Newham is unique and this creates significant workloads for planning committees, and in turn requires a significant time commitment for elected members. This is only going to increase as the London Borough of Newham has the highest housing target of all London boroughs.

The London Borough of Newham's (LBN) recently adopted Local Plan sets out the borough's housing target (excluding the LLDC area) which seeks to provide a net increase of additional quality homes exceeding 43,000 between 2018 and 2033.

[The Draft London Plan: The Spatial Development Strategy for Greater London \(Draft for Consultation December 2017\)](#) with minor suggested changes July 2018), in seeking to meet regional housing targets has outlined an annualised average housing target for Newham of 5335 homes over a ten year period (inclusive of the LLDC area).

This figure is the highest housing target of all the London boroughs, being 1309 homes in excess of the second highest annual target for Newham's neighbouring borough, Tower Hamlets.

By comparison, under the existing London Plan (GLA, March 2016) Newham's annual housing target falls to be 3076 homes per annum between 2015 and 2025 (including the LLDC area).

The scale of development taking place in Newham is also demonstrated through comparative analysis of GLA Annual Monitoring Reports, which monitor a number of housing indicators. Total net completions against London Plan benchmarks for years 2014/15 to 2016/17 as outlined in the GLA London Plan Annual Monitoring Report 14 (published September 2018) shows Newham as the 5th highest London borough in terms of total net housing completions, the 3rd highest in total net conventional affordable housing completions by tenure 2014/15 to 2016/17, 3rd highest in total conventional housing pipeline at 31/03/2017, 2nd highest in total net-conventional housing approvals 2016/17 and 2nd highest in total rooms of net non-conventional housing approvals in 2016/17.

Newham was also the location of the largest planning permission in 2018, with the Former Parcellforce Depot providing approximately 4000 homes in Stephenson Street, West Ham. Whilst this data provides a historic snapshot of Newham's housing monitoring during the relevant years, the data demonstrates the scale of approvals and completions the borough deals with, generating resourcing requirements on planning committees to ensure the Council's planning function continues to operate effectively to meet both the Borough's and regional housing needs.

3. Community Representation and participation

The introduction of Citizens' Assemblies in May 2018 has expanded the community role of a ward councillor. It has also enhanced councillors' representative role and added significantly to their workloads as ward councillors are actively encouraged to attend and participate in Citizens' Assemblies. Every ward has a regular Citizen Assembly and there have already been over 30 Citizens' Assemblies to date since May 2018. It is envisaged that this model of citizen participation will play an even greater role going forward. The full list of upcoming Citizens' Assemblies is published on the Council's website: <https://www.newham.gov.uk/Pages/ServiceChild/Having-your-say-on-council-decisions.aspx>

The Council has just announced a Democracy Commission, which seeks to further strengthen the relationship between citizens and councillors. It is envisaged that an additional twelve councillors would enable the Council to best meet the Commission's objectives of enhancing accountability and scrutiny. The full report can be read here:

<https://mgov.newham.gov.uk/documents/s125947/Cabinet%20report%20February%205%20CMT%20final%20draftrevised%202.pdf>

The Commission will be tasked to address the following questions in its terms of reference:

- How we ensure we have decision making arrangements that are enabling, clear, co-ordinated, agile and take place at the right level.
- How we ensure transparency, accountability are in place in relation to the balance between resident and member democracy.
- How we understand and resolve the tensions and opportunities between representative and participatory democracy.
- How we improve the representative role whilst facilitating and enabling wider participation.
- What the role of the councillor is in the context of communities doing more themselves.
- The most appropriate models of governance to meet the Council's aspirations.

This greater participatory role will place additional workloads on elected members and is best shared by an uplift in the number of councillors.

4. Partnerships

The Council has also recently adopted a Community Wealth Building approach, which requires an even stronger relationship between elected members and the community, especially local businesses. We anticipate that councillors will take on an enhanced and even more “hands on” role with the community, encouraging local innovation and actively promoting local economic growth. As part of this approach councillors will be encouraged to proactively engage with new and existing small business in their wards. Since Newham currently has over 10,000 micro businesses alone, it is anticipated that this new approach will have a notable impact on councillor workloads.

Overview and further information

The London Borough of Newham is an outlier among London Boroughs and other local authorities in relation to its rapid population growth and the scale of development that is taking place.

Newham is also proud to be the most diverse local authority in the country and has high levels of migration. Newham also has the youngest population in the country with one in four (24.6%) of Newham's residents under the age of 18. This means that a significant number of the residents that our councillors represent are not on the electoral roll.

In 1998, Newham had an overall population of 235,001. Based on the current 60 councillors, this represented a population to councillor ratio of 3,851 residents to councillor. In 2018, Newham's population was 355,187 and the current ratio is 5,920 residents to councillor, an increase of 53.7% compared to 1998 when the Council size was first determined.

At the same time there is high population churn as our residents are highly transient, which is not captured in the raw population data. For example in 2015, 21% of people had lived in the borough for less than two years. The rapid population growth and the transient nature of the population together with the high levels of deprivation means that the casework and overall demands on our councillors are considerable. I have enclosed a copy of the findings of our recent report, [Understanding Newham 2017: Findings from Wave 9 of the Newham Household Panel Survey](#), which highlights some of the significant challenges the borough faces.

The current demands on Newham's elected members are substantial and there is a very real danger that individuals will be discouraged from standing as councillors if this imbalance is not addressed. This would have significant implications for the diversity of representation, which is particularly important in an area like Newham - the most diverse local authority in the country.

I hope this letter clarifies the Council's position and further illustrates the requirement for an uplift in the number of elected members. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you would like any further clarification on any of the information contained in this letter or the Council's formal submission.

Yours sincerely,

Daniel Fenwick
Director of Legal and Governance and Monitoring Officer