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North Lincolnshire Council

Paul Kingsley (Review Officer – North Lincolnshire)
LGBCE
PO Box 133
Blyth
NE24 9FE



Dear Paul,

RE: ELECTORAL REVIEW OF NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE

I write on behalf of the North Lincolnshire Labour Group in relation to the above review and thus make a submission in relation to part one and council size.

We recognise that there was a significant reduction in the number of Councillors upon the creation of the unitary authority of North Lincolnshire on its inception in 1995/1996.

The combined number of elected members on the predecessor authorities of Humberside County Council, Scunthorpe Borough Council, Glanford Borough Council and Boothferry Borough Council which were to make up North Lincolnshire totalled 117.

The number of Councillors on the then new Council was 42, this figure was used for the elections of 1995 and 1999.

Upon a review in 2001/2002 for implementation in 2003 this number was increased slightly to 43 to meet the essential criteria.

The same figure of 43 and warding arrangements have been utilised for the elections of 2007, 2011, 2015 and 2019.

We also recognise that North Lincolnshire is a Unitary Authority delivering the functions of both County and Borough/District previously delivered under a 'two-tier' system.

North Lincolnshire adopted and presently runs a Cabinet and Scrutiny system of local Government with the statutory functions of Planning and Licensing running alongside.

The Cabinet consisting of nine members with twelve members serving across four Scrutiny Panels. Planning consists of 10 Councillors, Licensing - 15 and Standards 7. There are additional sub-committees and working groups to compliment these.

We have concerns in relation to the effectiveness of Scrutiny Panels to hold the Executive to account under the present arrangements with the composition of the Panels being reduced from 5 to 3 members following the elections of 2019. The membership prior to 2019 being levied on a political basis of 3-2 and post 2019, 2-1. This does not allow for opposition members to offer any alternatives as sole members are restrained from having a seconder to any proposals offered up.

The review of 2001/2002 was based on a Councillor to elector ratio of 1 to 2,744 for 2000 and a projection of 1 to 2,933 for 2005.

The present ratio (2020) is 1 to 3,015 as per the electoral registers published on the 1st December 2020 and will undoubtedly increase as we move forward.

Each Councillor serves on a community panel known as a 'Neighbourhood Action Team' based on an electoral ward and incorporating representatives of the Police, Housing, Council, Town & Parish Councils, Neighbourhood Watch Groups, Residents/ Tenants Groups etc.

Councillors in the rural area feed back to their relevant Towns and Parishes while their urban counterparts respond to the Charter Trustees.

North Lincolnshire Council feeds into the wider Humber area with representatives on the Humberside Fire and Rescue Service and the Scrutiny of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Humberside.

The representative role of Councillors has changed over the years. With the externalisation of many local government functions - Housing and Education to a certain degree commanding differing ways of approach. Consequently, dealing with these as third-party organisations requires additional time and resources while residents' expectations of local members remains the same.

The latest pandemic has also seen the necessity for Councillors to approach their representative duties somewhat more imaginatively.

In summing up we would have major concerns regarding any major reduction in the number of Councillors and the ability of North Lincolnshire to carry out its Scrutiny role in relation to the Cabinet decision taking.

However, and despite the increase in electorate figures along with differing and new ways of working it wouldn't be fair to have any vast increase in Councillor numbers.

We would therefore advocate that members absorb the additional number of electors and any new working patterns into their current workload and base any review on a council size of 43.

While working towards a council size of 43, we are appreciative of the criteria in relation to equitable numbers, community identities etc and would look to a small degree of flexibility of one either way.

If you require any points of clarification or explanation, then please do not hesitate to contact me by email at [REDACTED]

Yours sincerely, [REDACTED]

COUNCILLOR STEVE SWIFT (NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE LABOUR GROUP SECRETARY).