



Mr Max Caller CBE  
Chair  
Local Government Boundary Commission for England  
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Millbank  
London  
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**Sent by email**

23 May 2015

Dear Max,

### **Electoral Review of Birmingham City Council**

It was very helpful to meet Colin and Jolyon and I promised to write formally to confirm the Panel's position.

The Panel is most grateful to the Boundary Commission for England (BCE) for engaging with us. From our joint meetings we have concluded that the Commission is best placed to independently and impartially evaluate the number of councillors appropriate for Birmingham. The Panel understands that the BCE will take account of, for example, the Kerslake recommendations, representations and evidence from Birmingham City Council (the Council) and other stakeholders and the findings of local consultation that BCE undertakes. It is clear that the BCE will make a decision taking account of the changing context and particular circumstances of the Council, which we have discussed. The Panel appreciates that BCE is particularly well placed to draw on its unrivalled expertise, extensive experience and access to comparative data – including the background analyses that it has used to inform its own past decisions.

We are grateful to the BCE for inviting the Panel to suggest the appropriate number of councillors for Birmingham. However, having been asked to take the Kerslake recommendations as its starting point, the Panel is keen not to duplicate, or evaluate the findings of, the Kerslake inspection. The Panel therefore expects that the BCE will wish to take account of Sir Bob Kerslake's recommendations relating to councillor numbers. Although the Panel understands too that the BCE may itself wish to review the evidence and analysis the Kerslake inspection team used to inform its recommendation.

The Panel understands that the Council has made representations to retain the current number of councillors. Our main concern is that, whatever the number of councillors BCE ultimately deems to be appropriate for Birmingham, the Council must take the swift and sustained action needed to implement Kerslake's recommendations relating to the roles, behaviours and development of Birmingham's councillors.

The Kerslake report recognised that the Council needed to review and re-work the role of councillors, enabling them to engage much more effectively with the communities they serve. The Council has accepted this recommendation, but its proposals for addressing it are at a very early stage. While the precise future mechanisms are not yet developed, it is clear that councillors will have a demanding role in both engaging with local communities and in developing and working with partnerships relevant to their locality - involving other public agencies, the voluntary sector, and local businesses.

Taken together with the representative role of councillors in a very diverse and, in many parts deprived, city it does mean that the time and effort required of councillors is unlikely to reduce in the future. In addition the population level is predicted to increase.

While we are of the view that the current over complex scrutiny arrangements must be streamlined with some loss of work for councillors there will be an important new scrutiny role for all councillors appropriate to the local level.

The Panel, as you will appreciate, is focusing very heavily on supporting the Council and holding it to account in relation to its improvement programme. A key part of this requires the Council to develop and nurture an organisational culture that will foster a much more outward facing and learning approach, with councillors facilitating wider productive partnerships across all areas of activity. Whatever the number of councillors is they must all be clear about their roles, well trained, open to new ideas and provide, collectively, a coherent contribution to the achievement of the Council's objectives, and account to their electors for their activity and achievements.

Kind regards,

Yours sincerely

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**J R A Crabtree**  
**Chair**