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27 August 2012

The Review Officer (Three Rivers)
Local Government Boundary Commission for England
Layden House
76-86 Turnmill Street
London
EC1M 5LG

Dear Sir

Electoral Review of Three Rivers: Consultation on Council Size

This letter is sent on behalf of the Eastbury Residents' Association Committee in response to the request for views on the proposal to reduce the number of District Councillors from 48 to 39.

The area covered by our Association is within the ward of Moor Park & Eastbury (MP&E), the present electorate of which is approximately 4600. Our Association includes just over 1200 households representing approximately two thirds of the ward's electorate. MP&E ward, which is unparished, currently has three district councillors providing a ratio of approximately 1530 electors per councillor.

Members of our committee, including myself as Chairman, together with other members of our Association, regularly attend public council meetings, including Local Area Forums, Planning Committees and meetings of Council. We are therefore aware of how the Council operates, the level of participation by councillors at various meetings and the part they are able to play in the decision making process.

We note that Three Rivers is to return to the Committee based system of governance for 2014. We appreciate that this is not an issue for consultation. We do however consider that this system will be a more efficient and effective form of governance if there are fewer councillors debating the issues who each represent a larger number of the electorate. Currently our impression from attendance at meetings is that there are too many councillors representing small numbers of the electorate whose presence at council meetings make little or no difference to the decisions made.

Based on our Association's experience, there are insufficient issues which need assistance from our district councillors to warrant three councillors for our ward. Issues which need

assistance from our district councillors mainly relate to planning, waste collections, the maintenance of a Council owned recreation ground and children's play area and tennis courts rented from Three Rivers by our Association and used by our members. Other matters relating to the environment, such as overhanging trees, and maintenance of highways and footpaths come under the County Council's jurisdiction.

In addition over the last few years there has been an overall reduction in councillors' functions. This is because of the Council's reduced responsibilities in Social Housing, Leisure Facilities, Planning and Shared Services although there are increased responsibilities in Waste Management and Licensing.

On the other hand it is good to have three district councillors to call on for advice and assistance when necessary. Each has their own strengths and areas of expertise and knowledge of council matters and council personnel. At least one councillor is usually available to assist with issues as they arise and having three councillors for our ward can be helpful in bringing pressure to ensure that our members' interests are best represented.

We strongly support a reduction in the total number of councillors to encourage more efficient local government and more meaningful involvement of councillors in the decision making process, whilst continuing to provide effective support to voters as their elected representative.

We note that the view of the Three Rivers Constitutional Working Party was that the Council size should be between 30 and 35 members. Based on our experience and following consideration of the submissions made by the three political parties, we think that the number of councillors should be at the lower end of the spectrum.

We consider that the proposal for 30 councillors giving an average ratio of 1:2266 would be sustainable within a system of 3 member wards and allow for effective representation of our members.

Yours faithfully

Elizabeth Willetts
Chairman