Preston and Wyre Liberal Democrats believe Preston City Council should be reduced by 28% to 42 members as resolved at our local party meeting on the 19th January.

A membership of 42 allows for a Cabinet of 8 members, a Scrutiny Committee, a Planning Committee, a Licensing Committee and a Housing Committee, each also consisting of 8 members, as well as a Mayor and a Deputy Mayor, without any duplication.

We refer to Exeter City Council, which is of a broadly similar population to Preston City Council, and has been widely successful in governing their 124,000 residents with 40 councillors – a district council in a two-tier system which is mainly urban can clearly be shown as a success with a small number of councillors.

Additionally, councils of a broadly similar area to Preston City Council’s 14,229 hectares have demonstrated the viability of such numbers of councillors – Brentwood and Bolsover have 37 councillors apiece, and Basildon, which is both geographically and population-wise similar to Preston, has our desired number of 42 councillors.

Our geographically largest current ward – Preston Rural North – forecast at 6,776 electors in 2021, would fall within the 10% limit either way for the Commission’s boundaries using the 2021 predictions with 42 councillors – as such, it cannot be suggested that a reduction in council numbers to this point would adversely affect rural communities; the boundary could quite possibly not change.

The most recent council figures available on your website (for the year 2015) show that a council with 42 members would have 2,227 electors per Councillor – roughly 20% below the UK average for local authorities. This would result in Preston City Council having 14 wards with three councillors each, a reduction from the current 22 wards.

Additionally, a reduction of 28% would save approximately £62,000 per annum in allowances, with other associated costs being potential savings on top of this figure.