

Leeds District

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Comment text:

I write on behalf of Leeds HMO Lobby to comment on the draft recommendations by the Local Government Boundary Commission for the Electoral Review of Leeds District.

1. Representation: The Lobby understands that the purpose of the Review is to ensure that "each councillor represents approximately the same number of voters." However, this does not take account of the fact that in some wards there is a significant discrepancy between the number of registered voters and the actual population. This discrepancy is greatest in Headingley Ward, where something like 65% only of the population is actually registered to vote. In the neighbouring ward of Hyde Park & Woodhouse, it is little better, at 67%. In most wards, the proportion of voters is far higher. This means that Headingley currently has the lowest electorate in the city (c13,000). But at the same time, it also means that Headingley has one of the highest populations (c20,000, third or fourth, with Armley, City & Hunslet and HPW). The proposed extension of Headingley Ward means that its population will become even larger, especially as it will be expanding into another ward which also has a low percentage of voters (it will become the largest ward in the city). The Lobby understands that number of voters, not populations, is the criterion for the size of wards - but it does consider that exception should be made where there are such significant discrepancies. There are good reasons for the disparity, namely that the population of Headingley is predominantly students, whose motivation is low (as temporary residents - who also have votes in their home towns). Our councillors have made heroic efforts to increase registration, to little avail. At the same time, the voter/population discrepancy does not affect the demand on councillors' time - they never enquire whether those who seek their assistance are registered or not. The Lobby therefore does not support the proposed expansion of Headingley Ward.

2. Communities: The Lobby also understands that the aim of the Review is to "ensure that the pattern of wards reflects the interests and identities of local communities." However, the boundary of the proposed Headingley & Hyde Park Ward does not do this. The western and eastern boundaries are acceptable, following as they do the railway line to the west and Woodhouse Ridge to the east. However, the northern boundary still cuts through Headingley Town Centre, so that what should be the focal point of a community is in fact split between two wards (Headingley and Weetwood). Meanwhile, to the south, the inclusion of Woodhouse Moor is welcome; but the area of Woodhouse itself has little relation to Headingley. The Review takes little account of community identity as indicated by the Neighbourhood Areas adopted by the local Neighbourhood Plans, for Headingley and for Hyde Park. The Lobby does not support the change of boundaries.

3. Government: Finally, the Lobby understands that another aim of the Review is "promoting effective local government." Again, the Lobby has its concerns. (a) On the one hand, many members who live in Headingley Ward find that their councillors do not always find it easy to respond to their needs. If the Ward is increased even further in size, becoming the largest in the city, then this problem can only be exacerbated. Their demands frequently arise from the fact that the majority of the population is students, which has two effects - firstly, noise and pollution problems, and other direct and indirect impacts of a student population; and secondly, the reduced number of long-term, committed residents means that there are far fewer residents to tackle these impacts. (b) On the other hand, the proposed re-organisation of wards means that almost all student HMOs would be located within just one ward. As well as leaving just one set of councillors to address all the problems of studentification, these same councillors will be the only ones to represent the problems to the Council. The consequence would be that these unique problems are likely to become even more marginalised. For these reasons too, the Lobby does not support the Review's proposals.

Uploaded Documents:

None Uploaded

