

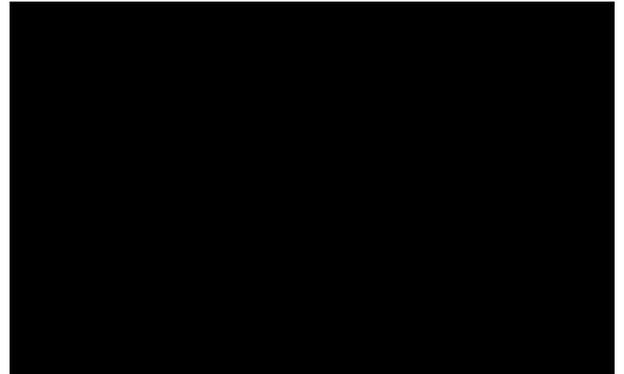


***Councillor Ryan Stephenson***

**Local Government Boundary  
Commission for England  
14<sup>th</sup> Floor, Millbank Tower  
Millbank  
London  
SW1P 4QP**



**Councillor Ryan Stephenson**



To whom it may concern,

**Re: Local Government Boundary Commission Review: Leeds City Council**

I hereby submit my individual response to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England's review of ward boundaries for the Leeds City Council local authority area.

1. The Council

It is my firm belief that Leeds City Council, like other local authorities, should seek to reduce its number of elected representatives. Such a move would reflect a similar approach to reform as that adopted by the Boundary Commission for England's review of Parliamentary Constituencies; that being an overall reduction in the number of Members of Parliament and the equalisation of electors within a constituency boundary.

2. Ward Formatting

I fully support the equalisation of ward boundaries to ensure a similar number of electors reside within each electoral area. At the same time, I believe reforms should redraw ward boundaries to a smaller size and to accommodate single Member representation, thereby removing the current format of each ward being represented by three Councillors and replacing them with a single representative. This format would provide for better representation, allowing Councillors to focus on issues in more detail within a small electoral area, as well as increasing accountability by eradicating confusion as to which Councillor residents should approach with a local concern. At present, some wards are represented by Councillors of different political affiliation meaning assistance with local issues is often duplicated by residents contacted all Councillors representing the ward, with each Councillor taking up the issue for political credit.



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With single Member wards electors know who their local representative is and can, crucially, remove that individual from office if they are unhappy with the level of representation they've received. Furthermore, single Member representation provides for a better relationship between electors and the individuals they elect to represent them in local government.

### 3. Electoral Cycle

Electing a Council by thirds is a costly and unnecessary process. Amending the electoral cycle in order to give Councillors a five year term of office, all elected at one "all-out" authority-wide election at a mid-term date fixed between General Elections, would allow the ruling administration to spend less time on an election footing and more time focussed on delivering its manifesto for local service delivery.

Such a cycle would also increase democratic accountability. Elections by thirds makes it impossible for the electors within the Leeds City Council area to change the ruling party on the Council. For example, at present Leeds City Council is comprised of:

63 Labour Councillors;  
19 Conservative Councillors;  
9 Liberal Democrats Councillors;  
5 Morley Borough Independents;  
3 Green Councillors

Under the current system of election by thirds there are only ever 33 seats up for election at any one time. This means, with a majority of 44 Councillors, even if every single electoral ward returned a Councillor not of the same party as the ruling administration, control of the Council would remain unchanged despite the will of the electorate demanding change.

This is undemocratic. Electors should have the power to sack individual Councillors and change the ruling administration of the Council via the ballot box and with one single vote.

### 4. Ward Patterns

Geographically, the location of the Ring Road provides a natural 'doughnut' formation of wards; inner-city wards share characteristics comparatively different to wards in the outer areas.

When considering ward patterns it is my belief that the Commission should seek to draw ward boundaries that group together towns, villages and parishes with similar characteristics and community interests. I submit the following justifications:



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i) Effective Representation

The electoral ward I represent (Harewood) is the largest geographical ward in Leeds and, I believe, the largest metropolitan council ward in England. As a grouping of rural and semi-rural villages the issues arising within the ward are broadly similar in nature; thereby allowing me to provide a balanced service of representation to all villages without having to focus more heavily on one particular area due to an unequal concentration of electors or residents' complaints.

ii) Shared Community Interests

Grouping together villages of similar characteristics also provides a cluster of broader interests shared by residents residing within the electoral area. It is often the case that such communities share the same transport links and therefore experience the same issues that arise from services on the network. Likewise, residents share amenities in neighbouring villages and communities, utilising local GP surgeries, schools and shops. I urge the Commission to take these shared interests into consideration when drafting new ward boundaries.

iii) Town & Parish Council Forums

By sharing similar community interests local Town and Parish Councils are able to work closely together in a productive forum. In the Outer North East area of Leeds City Council (comprising the Alwoodley, Harewood and Wetherby wards) this forum allows Councillors to focus in detail on policy areas affecting all communities within the area with ease, something that would become unbalanced and unproductive if Town & Parish Councils within the forum shared different community interests to one another.

iv) Multi-Agency Partnerships

Many partnerships between the Council and third party service providers are modelled around the wards served by Community Committees of the Council. For example, the constitution of the Outer North East Community Committee (comprising the Alwoodley, Harewood and Wetherby wards) provides a geographical boundary used by the Neighbourhood Policing Teams (NPT). At present, this means the NPT has to prioritise its resources across an area of similar characteristics, with broadly similar criminal activity. The area is served by a Farm Watch scheme, supported by Councillors, which focusses a resource on rural crime across the Outer North East. If ward boundaries changed to include communities urban in nature then pressures on resources would change in such a way that providing specific services based on the needs of rural communities would become unjustifiable in the larger context. This would not be a change that served the best interests of those electors living in rural communities. Likewise, for electors living in urban communities it would not be ideal for their local NPT to be dealing with crimes in outlying rural areas at the same time as dealing with, usually more frequent, crimes in urban communities.



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In conclusion, I sincerely hope the Local Government Boundary Commission for England uses this review of Leeds City Council ward boundaries as an opportunity to increase democratic accountability, reduce the cost of local government and the associated cycle of elections, whilst creating wards of equal size and fair representation.

Yours sincerely,



**Councillor Ryan Stephenson  
Harewood Ward**