

This submission is made for and on behalf of Bromsgrove District Council's Labour Group and Wythall Residents Association in response to the Boundary Commission's proposals.

Introduction

We are pleased to have an opportunity to respond to the Boundary Commission jointly.

As you will be aware, following the failure to reach a council wide consensus on a proposed boundary submission for the District, the Labour group, along with the Wythall Residents Association wish to submit the following.

We are both supportive of the single member wards but are concerned that the low figure of thirty one members will have serious consequences for the sustainability of the services and exclude many residents from standing as councillors.

Approach to Developing Proposals

During the process of drawing up the response to the Boundary Commission's proposals, it became clear that there was little understanding that over the previous two years Bromsgrove District Council had abolished the: Performance Management Board (PMB), Overview Board and the Monitoring Board had ceased.

The Overview and Scrutiny Board (OSB) took over the work of the PMB and Overview but not the functions of the Monitoring Board.

The reduction of the number of Boards has resulted in less detailed scrutiny and fewer members involved in board work. The impetus for this was to reduce staff costs and members workload.

Comparing the past agendas of Overview and PMB demonstrates that the OSB does not have the detailed information/ data to scrutinise effectively and robustly as the previous boards had.

Certainly less topics are scrutinised through this single OSB than with the previous three Boards, probably because of insufficient time and staff to process

Furthermore the Conservative submission states clearly they wish to abolish the function of the Audit Board adding its role to the OSB thus losing its importance and direct scrutiny.

The size of the electorate can only increase with the proposed development and along with the expectation of Localism increase the workload of members not just in their attendance at the Council House but engaging more in the areas they represent.

Regulatory functions are served well at the Council consisting of 13 members on Planning and 13 members on Licensing. However, there are ever increasing demands on Planning Committee members related to greenbelt issues which has meant more and more training for members.

The present number of thirty nine members has meant that a great deal of pressure and work has been put on retired members or those who are able to be flexible at their place of work. Any decrease can only add to that workload.

A reduction to thirty one members would lead to workloads that would require those working to have a great deal of time off work. This could well lead to younger residents being unwilling to become councillors leaving civic duties to those older residents with the time on their hands.

This would also lead to more and more 'dual hatted members' and thus the likelihood of conflicting interests and less democracy.

Conclusion

We have serious concerns regarding the proposed reduction of members to thirty one. This we feel will have a direct effect on the wellbeing of the council and the role of scrutiny which goes to the heart of local government.

Both of our groups may have different ideas as to the exact number of members but we both believe that a reduction of eight will mean the services of the council will not be sustainable.

