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From: John Stevenson [REDACTED]

Sent: 06 August 2013 08:01

To: Reviews@

Subject: Wyre Forest District Council -proposal to reduce the numbers of Councillors and change the boundaries

Dear Sirs

I understand that my District Council are proposing to reduce the number of Councillors in a proposed attempt to save money.

But they have already gone to a cabinet system of government which has reduced the answerability of Council to the electorate and they have refused to reduce their excessive allowances to those recommended by the Independent Review Panel.

Taken together with their proposal to go for four yearly elections rather than the current three years in four; this looks very like an attempt at gerrymandering and aims to reduce the answerability of the Council to the electorate. It also looks to be quite largely driven by the self-interest of certain councillors ('snouts in troughs'?)

If the final proposal involved moving boundaries, unless this merely rejigged the concatenation of the current sub-ward (polling) areas into new Wards (eg by a move to the County Divisions), then this would inevitably involve considerable administrative costs in preparing new road and house number listings for the new Wards. It would also provide opportunities for further clerical error and cause considerable confusion with the electorate and the various party workers. (Vide the mess that happened in Stourport in May because the Returning Officer's staff 'forgot' that there were two County seats in the Stourport Division.)

The argument that the work load has gone down because of the 'transfer' of the housing stock is negated by the representation on the Board, Vestia and Audit of the Community Housing Group (CHG) and the problems caused in deprived and severely deprived areas by the failure of CHG to maintain and to encourage utilisation of the 'inherited Community Centres' in these areas.

Reducing the number of Councillors in a Ward would reduce the choice an elector has as to whom (s)he approaches with an issue - at least one ward has currently three Councillors from three different political parties.

It has been claimed that the allocation of seats on Committees is done in a manner that would achieve 'political balance' - however observation would suggest otherwise, in particular for 'Cabinet' who appear to form an exclusive cartel which fails to heed the arguments of Councillors and electors of other political persuasions. The new single Scutiny Committee is also not clearly working effectively. (Still no challenge of the detailed costs and problems of the 'single site' Wyre Forest House or the anticipated costs of the new 'Leisure Centre' for example.)

It would appear that an all out election in 2015 would cause massive confusion and lead to a period of disfunction until the new Council settled down under a new Leader and Deputy, Chair and Vice Chair.

The towns of Stourport on Severn and Bewdley have Town Councils, all of the outlying Parishes have Parish Councils (except Ribbesford), whilst Kidderminster has not despite a very significant number of petitioners supporting the proposal to form such a Council. The recent decision by Council to reject the proposal for a 'Parish Council' for Kidderminster based on a very small survey result (compared with the number signing the petition) where the survey question and its background was deliberately skewed to achieve a 'no' result. This reduces localism and accountability to those who fund the Councils through their rates and precepts.

Finally any change to the current arrangement would have to be rethought if, as seems likely within five years, we were to go to a Unitary Authority Structure across Worcestershire. And this would make the costs of the current proposed changes totally wasted.

I therefore urge the Commission to look very seriously at the economics of the idea of changes to the makeup of the Council at this time - in my view it would be relatively costly to implement and the anticipated payback would not be achieved (as arguments about 'increased workload' would allow Councillors to increase their already over generous allowances), would cause massive disruption and would likely be undone within five years.

Yours faithfully

John Stevenson

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