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From: Rowland Eustace <rowlandeustace@yahoo.co.uk>
To: Parish Clerk <parishclerk@ymail.com>
Sent: Sunday, 29 April 2012, 19:23
Subject: Re: The Electoral Review

Dear Martin,

I had a look at reviews@lgbce.org.uk where the Herefordshire Council has made a submission to reduce the number of council members from 58 to 54. I think that it has failed to make a case to justify this reduction.

The main arguments in favour of reducing numbers would appear to be the reduction in business by abrogating Planning matters to council officers, the reduction of cabinet positions and hence their cabinet support members, as well as a more efficient Overview and Scrutiny committee.

There is also an understandable wish not to overburden councillors - Para. 18.13 "The Council would also wish to make the role of a councillor attractive to as many people as possible, and to encourage a widely representative cross section of the public to stand for election. This means that the Council's meeting arrangements should be compatible with councillors in employment, and allow sufficient capacity and flexibility in the system for individuals to carry out both roles."

Having excluded 14 councillors from the 'pool' – para. 18.4, the submission comes up with a figure of 40, but fails to show that this is a better number than say 39 or 41 or the existing 44. It makes great play that "The 40 available councillors would therefore take on average around 3.75 places each." The trouble is that this is a fairly meaningless figure, even if it were correct (it is 3.775) because the committees which are to be divided among them vary so much in workload. There are 46 high workload statutory committees. By reducing the number to 40, increases from 5% to 15% the number of councillors doubling up on these committees. Only 50% or fewer councillors can sit on the medium workload ordinary committees. Does two low workload committees equate with one medium workload? How can this be compared to the 3.43 places each if numbers stay the same or against those of previous years? Are there economic savings or reduction in council officials?

In considering the numbers of electorate per councillor, the projected figures for 2018 should be used which increases the figure to 2,740 – para. 18.19. The submission seems to imply that the reduction in councillors would help in the reduction of three member wards and thus a rearrangement of the Hereford wards though this is likely to exacerbate the variance of electorate to councillor within wards. Whilst there is validity in the concept of equally populated constituencies for national government, this should not follow through to local government. It goes against the current concept of localism. There is no intention that 'neighbourhoods' should be of equal number of electorates. The danger of a unitary authority like Herefordshire is that Hereford and its suburbs will dominate the rural areas. Stretching the number of parishes within rural wards to achieve 2,740 would also increase the workload of its councillor. If it was still felt necessary to equate numbers of electorate to councillors, then by leaving numbers the same the two largest variances – excess of 20% - could be ameliorated by transferring Much Birch to Hollington and Pipe & Lyde to Sutton Walls.

Regards,

Rowland Eustace