

## **Starkie, Emily**

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**From:** Pat Rooney [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** 20 February 2017 11:18  
**To:** Starkie, Emily  
**Subject:** South Gloucestershire Council Size

Dear Ms Starkie

I am emailing on behalf of the Labour Group on South Gloucestershire Council in response to your request for input from the political groups on the issue of the Council's future size.

We are surprised to be in this position because for many months the Council leadership had led us to believe that there would be a Council-endorsed submission which we assumed would be based on a scientific piece of actuarial work conducted by professional officers. The majority Conservative Group has only recently informed us that this will not now happen. We are surprised by this change of attitude because the desire to reduce the number of councillors in South Gloucestershire has been driven by the Council having a substantial savings target against the 'Cost of Democracy'. We would have expected that the ruling Group would be keen to progress this particular piece of work.

As an opposition group we have not had access to any actuarial work on this other than the raw planning data. In addition, you will be aware from your visit here on 30<sup>th</sup> November that the majority group plans to implement a radical change in the Council's governance arrangements in May 2017, and we know no more about this than a structure diagram. In particular we have no detail about the workloads of particular roles from May. In these circumstances, any submission from us cannot be scientifically-based and has the danger of being a 'finger in the air'.

That said, there has been a clear, if not formalised, assumption that the Council size should not reduce below 60 members. We understood this to be the majority Conservative Group's thinking whenever we pressed the Leader of the Council on the matter. As his Group has the power to determine the Council's 'official' submission we therefore assumed this would be the number going forward.

We would certainly not want to see the size of South Gloucestershire Council reduce below 60 councillors. South Gloucestershire is an area of growth – rapid in some parts of the district – so even a stand-still position would lead to an increase in the elector/councillor ratio. We believe that a more substantial reduction would be detrimental, both in terms of community interests and identity and effective and convenient local government.

A large-scale reduction in councillors at a time of population growth would inevitably affect every single ward. Many of our wards have existed for a long time and have been designed by your predecessors to reflect established community interests and identities. Whilst we are not naïve or sentimental about the effect that your review will have on existing boundaries, we do believe this should not be wilfully exacerbated.

We also believe that a large-scale reduction in councillors would impact on the effectiveness and convenience of local government in South Gloucestershire in general, and on the ability of individual councillors in particular to represent their areas effectively. The population in 3-seat wards would grow into five figures, which is high in an area like ours that is not densely urban. In our most rural wards, the land area needed to deliver even 1 councillor at the average ratio could become unmanageable.

For these reasons, Labour Group suggests that the size of South Gloucestershire Council should not be reduced below 60 members.

**Councillor Pat Rooney**  
**Labour Group Leader**  
South Gloucestershire Council

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