Archie Gall
Director
Central Bedfordshire Unitary Authority Review
The Boundary Committee for England
Trevelyan House
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Fax no: 0845 849 6116
Your ref:
Our ref: BD/ER
Date: 14 October 2009

Dear Mr Gall

Electoral Review of Central Bedfordshire Council

Thank you for your letter of 2 October 2009 in response to our submission on Council size. I am pleased to note that the Committee has, with the exception of 'discounting' members of the Development Management Committee from more than one additional committee role, accepted our rationale for the number of Councillors necessary to provide strong, effective and accountable leadership for the communities of Central Bedfordshire.

I would like to thank the Boundary Committee for the opportunity to discuss the submission in more detail before it takes a final decision on council size. The points raised in your letter regarding the workload of the Development Management Committee since the introduction of the Planning Act 2008, as well as the current economic climate and the subsequent downtown in the number of planning applications coming forward at this time, are acknowledged. However, I would wish to place on record that the Council's argument for the Development Management Committee was based on the long term future for Central Bedfordshire and the fact we are included within three growth area strategies with the inherent number of planning applications that will be generated.

If the Boundary Committee is not persuaded that all members of the Development Management Committee should be "discounted" for the purpose of allocation of more than one additional seat, then it is contended that there is a strong case for the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of that Committee not being allocated additional committee seats.

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Analysis conducted with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman themselves, Planning and Committee Services officers has indicated that the office holders carry out the following additional duties:-

(a) Attendance at site visits – now held monthly and lasting on average 2 hours;

(b) Attendance at Chairman's briefings – now held monthly and lasting on average 1 hour per meeting (excluding travel time);

(c) Preparation for meetings - an average of 3 hours per meeting;

(d) Reviewing draft minutes and decision schedules and providing comments to committee services officers – average of 30 minutes per meeting;

(e) Dealing with correspondence in relation to planning committee related work and enquiries – an average of 3 hours per week;

(f) Telephone enquiries and direct public contact – an average of 1 to 2 hours per week;

(g) Specialist planning research and reading – average of 1 hour a week;

(h) Meeting with Planning Officers at both Dunstable and Chicksands offices to discuss on going applications and new applications – average of 1 – 2 hours per week: and

(i) Attendance at large project briefings.

In addition to the above, the Chairman or Vice-Chairman would normally sit upon the Luton and South Bedfordshire Joint Planning and Transportation Committee (JPTC) which meets 6 times a year.

It is worth noting that the Independent Remuneration Panel recognised the additional responsibilities that fall upon the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Development Management Committee, with the Chairman being awarded the highest Special Responsibility Allowance of all committee chairmen (including overview and scrutiny chairmen) and the Vice-Chairman being one of very few such offices to have been awarded a Special Responsibility Allowance.

Part 4 of the Council's submission set out the methodology used to determine the size for Central Bedfordshire Council – namely to establish the total

number of committee places and the members' availability to sit on them. In determining the number of councillors, we looked at various exemptions based on a perceived workload and concluded that the Executive, the Chairman of the Council and the Development Management Committee (DMC) should be limited on their availability to serve on other committees. Using the approach below, the figure of 66 councillors was obtained.

No of seats	194
less: Executive only places	21
Sub total to be allocated	173
less: DMC (18 members x 2 committees)	36
New Sub total to be allocated	137
Divide by IDeA national average 3.7	37
add back: Executive, DMC, Chairman	29
Total	**66**

If the Boundary Committee is persuaded by the argument that it is not reasonable to expect the Chairman and Vice-Chairman to sit upon other committees (except the Luton and South Bedfordshire JPTC), then using the same methodology as above would produce the following result:-

No of seats	194
less: Executive only places	21
Sub total to be allocated	173
less: Chairman & Vice Chairman places on DMC & Luton & South Beds JPTC	3
New Sub total to be allocated	170
Divide by IDeA national average 3.7	46
add back: Executive, Chairman, Chairman & Vice Chairman DMC	13
Total	**59**

The Council in its submission was mindful of the potential 'democratic deficit' caused by the significant reduction in the number of elected Members following local government re-organisation in Bedfordshire, with the total number of councillors reducing from 136 councillors to 66 for Central Bedfordshire. It was also conscious of the need to ensure that the Council has sufficient capacity to enable ward councillors effectively to carry out their role as representatives of, and advocates for, their local communities. It is recognised that 'one size does not fit all' and whilst including the revised calculation for 59 members above, I would reinforce the view set out in the Council's submission that it is essential that Central Bedfordshire Council has sufficient capacity and representation to provide a uniformed approach to

deliver our community engagement strategy across all the whole of the area (for reference, I have enclosed the draft strategy, scheduled for implementation from April 2010, which was considered and accepted by the Executive at its meeting yesterday).

The responses received to the Boundary Committee's consultation upon council size for Central Bedfordshire have been reviewed. Whilst one respondent argues for a council size of 48 and one for a council size of 84, a number of those responding to the consultation indicated that they would not wish to see the council size reduce significantly below the current number. I would therefore, respectfully request that in acknowledging that the methodology used indicates a Council size of 59, due consideration be given to the responses from the Town and Parish Councils, who, together with the North East Bedfordshire Labour Party, have independently supported a retention of the existing Council size. As you will know, Central Bedfordshire is fully parished. In respect of this point, the Leader of the Council wishes to emphasise the community leadership role that each Member is expected to embrace, and she believes that a Council of 60 members would be a more appropriate number to meet the needs of our towns, parishes and local communities.

I thank the Boundary Committee for seeking our further comments and hope that the above information will be of assistance to the Committee in reaching its final decision.

Yours sincerely

Peter Rawcliffe
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Chairman Electoral Review Working Group

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