

**Submission to the
Local Government Boundary Commission for England
on Council Size as part of the Electoral Review of
Hartlepool Borough Council**

Introduction

Given the Electoral Review of Hartlepool Borough Council commenced on the 20th July 2010 we feel it is important to provide a submission on behalf of the Rossmere Ward Councillors.

Background

Hartlepool is a unique town located on the North East coast within the Tees Valley sub region. Hartlepool also has a significant port facility and a world-class marina. Approximately 90,000 people live in the town of which only 1.2% are from black and minority ethnic communities whilst almost a fifth are at or above retirement age. The town as a whole combines dense urban areas, an established marina and expanding suburbs with a number of distinct rural villages set in attractive countryside. It is a proud town steeped in history and maritime heritage and the people of the Borough have a strong sense of local identity.

Councillor Roles and Functions

As a unitary local authority we have a directly elected mayor and cabinet political structure, which is complimented by a diverse range of back bench Councillors who have embraced the key principles of modern local government. Our role is:

- To effectively represent the views of our constituents;
- Act as a collective as the 'Full' Council;
- Actively participate in the membership of committees and sub-committees; and
- Actively ensure through participation Hartlepool has a robust mechanism of overview and scrutiny committees.

The back bench local councillors complement the Council's strong tradition of partnership working in the Borough, more recently through the Hartlepool Partnership, which brings together the public, private, community and voluntary sectors. This includes those close links with the other major service providers sharing the local authority boundary including NHS Hartlepool (the Primary Care Trust), the Police Basic Command Unit, the Probation Service and the local team of the Learning and Skills Council.

Community Identity

Despite a range of Government funded interventions Hartlepool continues to have high levels of deprivation, which is demonstrated by poorer health, higher crime rates and other indicators of disadvantage that are consistently worse than the national average. Such areas are most acute in the Neighbourhood Renewal Areas of Hartlepool. In the 2006 Household Survey undertaken for the Hartlepool Partnership by MORI only 28% of residents felt that they can influence decisions that can affect their area. This was significantly lower in certain wards e.g. Rossmere and Owton (16% and 15% respectively). We feel this would only be further exacerbated should there be any reduction in member involvement as it is their advocacy and close community involvement, which has in recent years endeavoured to rectify this anomaly.

In terms of tackling disadvantage, Councillors play a pivotal role in driving forward the Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy that set out the terms of reference for Neighbourhood Action Plans (NAP's) developed for the 8 priority neighbourhoods within the borough. The year on year incremental improvements have strengthened the community within Hartlepool and have been such a success as they clearly set out a detailed understanding of residents' priorities for improvement together with an analysis of current plans. Member involvement compliments and assists in the progression of these plans by tackling disadvantages at a neighbourhood level.

The Hartlepool Voluntary and Community Sector comprises of almost 600 community groups who between them seek to tackle a wide range of needs and issues. In order to be effective these local groups

require the range of support elected members can provide. Members engage with the majority of organisations, partnerships and networks relevant to the Voluntary and Community Sector. They also provide direct capacity building support to a number of the groups and individuals. This may range from one off help to ongoing concentrated support.

In the Hartlepool Borough Council survey of the Voluntary and Community Sector (2006) it showed that from the 55 groups responding to the survey they employed 235 full-time and 321 part-time staff with the majority of Hartlepool's population accessing their services in any one year. This clearly indicates the pressures upon members with regards to support and development as well as how integrated their work has become in recent years in promoting a strong community identity.

There are three distinct communities in the Rossmere Ward. Two are clearly divided by the A689 and the third area is adjacent to the Foggy Furze Ward. Rossmere Park is central to the area and provides an array of play facilities as well as being in close proximity to a planned & approved 'Skateboard' park and an additional 'Multi Use Games Area' MUGA. These facilities have received active support by members who have been instrumental in consultation with the community. The Ward also has a Community Centre at Jutland Road, two shopping parades, a Youth Centre and cemetery. Other community facilities include Rossmere Community Building and a Scout Centre. The ward is also represented by three active Residents' Associations with a further group in its infancy.

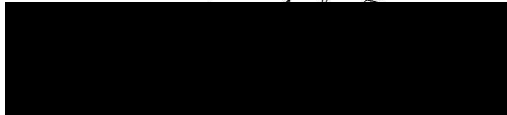
Conclusion

Members have an ongoing ambitious plan to endeavour to involve those who are not already engaged at both neighbourhood and community level. Should the current level of 47 members not be retained it will not be possible to reach out to the broader range of individuals or those whom are seldom heard.

Recommendation

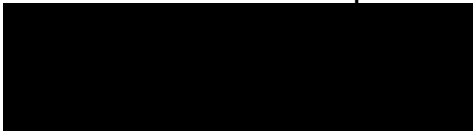
That the Council retains its current Council size of 47 elected Councillors in order to safeguard the future of the Local Authority as an excellent Council with an ethos of strengthening communities.

Signed:



Councillor Christopher Akers-Belcher for and on behalf of:

Councillor Christopher Akers-Belcher



Councillor Trisha Lawton



Councillor Ann Marshall

