



8 October 2011

The Review Manager (Hart)
The Local Government Boundary Commission for England
Layden House
76-86 Turnmill Street
London
EC1M 5 LG

Dear Sir

Electoral boundary consultation – Hart District

I refer to the consultation period for the draft report on the proposed electoral arrangements for Hart District Council and would ask that you consider my submission as set out below. Please note this submission is made in a personal capacity and not in respect of any local organisations to which I belong.

My specific area of interest is the proposed Hartley Wintney / Eversley (plus smaller parishes) ward (referred to below as the “Hartley Wintney / Eversley ward”). From 1995 to 2002 I represented the Hart District Council ward of Hartley Wintney (which comprised the parishes of Hartley Wintney, Elvetham and Winchfield). I am therefore familiar with the local communities and particularly the links between Hartley Wintney and Winchfield. I welcome and support the Commission’s intention to place Winchfield parish in the same district ward as Hartley Wintney parish.

I note the underlying purpose of the draft changes is to improve levels of electoral equality across the authority. The Commission’s proposals, and the majority of the consultation feedback, presuppose that three-member wards are suitable across the District and the “numbers game” of drawing the boundaries is driven by this assumption. Therefore on paper the proposed Hartley Wintney / Eversley ward meets the electoral equality requirement by pulling together all the parish wards left over from elsewhere. There is no specific mention on the quality of electoral representation these changes will bring and I will address this point later in my submission.

The desirability of three-member wards

Turning to the matter of whether a three-member ward is appropriate I would comment as follows.

The Commission's document "Electoral reviews: technical guidance April 2010" accessible on their website contains a section headed "Number of councillors in each ward of division". Section 5.27 states "Arguments have been made in the past that if all wards or divisions in an authority return the same number of councillors this helps the local electorate to understand and therefore engage with local government." I would assert this argument does not apply to the current district council wards that include the parishes contained in the proposed Hartley Wintney / Eversley ward. This is evidenced by the election turnout recorded under Past Election results on the Hart District Council website. For instance

Date of election	May 2011	May 2007 (the last time the District Council elections shown below did not coincide with a General or other election)
Average District-wide turnout	46.1%	35.85%
Eversley ward	49.61%	39.15%
Hartley Wintney ward	49.03%	39.68%
Odiham ward (Winchfield parish is in this ward)	50.78%	40.93%

- You will note the turnout in these wards (which are one-member (Eversley) and two-member (HW and Odiham) wards respectively) was greater than the District-wide average.
- The past results also indicate it is three-member wards that generally achieve below average turnouts.
- Additionally I had telephone conversations with the Parish Clerk to Hartley Wintney and the Parish Chairmen of Eversley and Winchfield who all confirmed they have never received a complaint from an elector that an election was taking place elsewhere in the district but no district election was taking place in their parish (ie in a gap year)

Therefore the evidence indicates the local electorate in the proposed Hartley Wintney / Eversley ward understand and accept that wards without three members will have years without an election, and they are more engaged in elections when they do take place.

Section 5.28 of the guidance says "We will seek to recommend that the appropriate number of councillors is returned from each ward. *The legislation is clear that the appropriate number for elections by thirds is three, or a number divisible by three, and the appropriate number for elections by halves is two, or a number divisible by two.*" I believe this overstates what the legislation says. In Schedule 2 to the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009, part 2 paragraph (3)(d) [as defined by paragraph (5)(c)] refers to "the **desirability** of securing that each electoral area of the district council returns an appropriate number of members of the council". I believe it is not desirable for the current Hartley Wintney and Eversley wards when considering the

“Effective and convenient local government” section of the Commission’s technical guidance document.

Quality of electoral representation

In section 5.25 of its technical guidance document the Commission specifically highlights the risk that effective and convenient local government is difficult to define and often overlooked as a consideration by people making proposals on warding arrangements. This section concludes that it is possible that proposals “prevent[s] a councillor from effectively representing the ward”. I would evidence there is a real risk of this occurring as set out below:-

- The proposed Hartley Wintney / Eversley ward is very large geographically. In places it is up to 10 miles from one side of the ward to another, with a car journey time through country lanes of 20 to 30 minutes (this is also at odds with section 5.26 requiring the ward “can be easily traversed”)
- The ward members will be expected to serve the needs of six different parish councils
- As a practical matter it could be argued that the members representing the ward could “divide” the parishes out between them. However this assumes the parish councils (and members of the public living in those parishes) would accept dealing with a nominated councillor rather than one of their choosing. (One of the Parish councils that I spoke with indicated this sort of arrangement would probably not be acceptable to them.)
- Additionally this also assumes the three councillors are from the same political party – however past election results on the Hart District Council website show that over the past 20 years the Hartley Wintney ward has been represented by Conservative, Liberal Democrat and Independent councillors – with “cross-party” representation occurring at the same time. The current county division that takes in the current Hartley Wintney and Eversley district council wards is represented by a Liberal Democrat councillor. Whilst cross-party working does take place, if there was a sole councillor from a particular group they would clearly wish to attempt to serve the full ward rather than be limited to a particular area.

Ward naming

I note the Hart District Council submission suggests the ward name “Northern Hart” for the following reasons:-

1. *[Hartley Wintney] Does not reflect other communities in the North.*
2. *Electors confuse Hartley Wintney District ward with the parish.*

Historically there has been no confusion in the minds of Winchfield parishioners when they were part of the Hartley Wintney ward (or as part of the Odiham ward). Similarly the smaller parishes clearly understand the difference between, say, Heckfield parish and Eversley parish even though the district ward is called Eversley. The level of electoral engagement in these wards also supports this.

If the Commission is minded to retain its recommendation for the current Hartley Wintney / Eversley ward then I would propose that is what it should be called. It will be very clear to the electorate that the current districts wards have simply been merged (and the people of Winchfield have been part

of Hartley Wintney previously) – this achieves the objective of reflecting the communities in the North.

I also believe this will assist in maintaining the level of electoral engagement. Saddling the new ward with a meaningless artificial name will create confusion in where the boundaries lie and risks a reduction in the level of electoral engagement. Hart District Council's second point of concern is not addressed by their proposed name as voters will struggle to comprehend what and where their district ward is.

Summary

The proposals by Hart District Council to achieve 11 three-member wards for the district failed to take account of how the ward boundaries could be drawn so as to also achieve effective and convenient local government across the district. As set out above, by simply pulling together the current Hartley Wintney and Eversley district council wards because they don't fit anywhere else leads to a very unsatisfactory ward. The current arrangements work in practice (as evidenced by the engagement of local electors), but there is a requirement to change them because they do not work in theory.

I would therefore ask the Commission to consider retaining the current Hartley Wintney and Eversley district council wards (albeit with Winchfield parish moving back to the Hartley Wintney ward). The number of electors broadly meets the average ratio requirement.

Yours faithfully

A solid black rectangular box used to redact the signature of Mark Sallis.

Mark Sallis