

RESPONSE TO The Boundary Commission consultation on council size for Buckinghamshire

FROM THE – High Wycombe Conservative Association

ABOUT US

We are the local Conservative party association to the Wycombe parliamentary seat (herein “WCA”). Nationally Conservative associations are organised along MP constituency lines. 30 seats on the new BUCKS unitary council fall within our borders and we contested them all in 2021 with 30 active candidates. 18 were successful.

This response is authorised by our Executive Council and Management Committee. It represents decades of experience within the constituency at parish, town committee, district council and county council level. High Wycombe has been a consistent Conservative voting area.

This response is the collective knowledge of the constituency and the experience of our 18 councillors elected to the Council.

CONCLUSION

Our request is that the number of councillors remains at 147

REASONING

The Wycombe constituency is split in to 10 wards, each ward currently holds 3 seats. We note a distinction between – an entirely held ward (a ward with 3 conservative councillors) and a mixed ward.

It is the experience of councillors in entirely held wards that work loads are excessive. This work is primarily case work for ward residents. Councillors are unable to be away from e-mail contact for even short periods of time. Holidays require active ‘cover’ by fellow councillors.

Wycombe contains an oddity called ‘the unparished area’ – a good sized, if partially random, slice of the constituency contains no parish council. In those areas Councillors report even more case work.

We consider it natural and foreseeable that by merging district and county councillors (and in some cases parish) those workloads would correspondingly merge. That was no doubt the reasoning behind the original 147 Councillor number.

Any reduction in this number will impact Councillor workload. We expect that to become excessive. Already 3 of our councillors have indicated they will not seek re-election.

Councillors in mixed wards are facing additional pressures. The work load is as excessive as the load on entirely held wards, but the support network of colleagues is not present.

WCA worked hard to offer to the electorate our most diverse range of councillors ever – be that women, BAME and LGBT+ candidates. Many of these were elected (including, we believe, the youngest councillor in the country who is 18). But they are naturally from younger, working age councillors. If the number of councillors is reduced we anticipate a direct causative reduction in the diversity of the council.

Council work load, in addition to case work, is not excessively high. But already the act of merging all functions to County wide level, means travel time has to be factored in. It should not surprise the commission that our old district council was effective and well run because, by allowing evening meetings and be only a short distance from councillors, attendance could be high.

In our view the combination of the moving of function to Aylesbury, and the already extremely high workload, will limit our candidate pool to retired people. That would be disastrous for diversity and would severely restrict our ability to offer the best councillors to the people of High Wycombe.

NOTE

WCA had intended to remain neutral in this consultation. However, having reviewed the experience of our sitting councillors, we felt it necessary to respond.

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