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Local Government Boundary Commission  
Via email: reviews@lgbce.org.uk

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Dear Local Government Boundary Commission

### **NEWCASTLE CITY BOUNDARY REVIEW - COUCIL SIZE SUBMISSION**

We should begin our submission by expressing our concern about the review that was undertaken in 2016. Changing wards can be quite disruptive for residents, provision of consistent Government data and the council itself.

Newcastle had consistent ward boundaries for 14 years between 2004 and 2018, yet the boundaries introduced in 2018 through the 2016 review will have been in place for just 8 years.

With the Cabinet system, responsibility for almost all of the key executive decisions in the council lies with the Leader, Deputy Leader and 6 Cabinet Members. At every opportunity, the council has voted against moving back to a committee structure and, since 2011, there have been increasing numbers of delegated decisions being made by fewer councillors.

Back-bench councillors have limited scope to influence the work of the council, for example, the 7 independent and Newcastle Independents councillors are represented on just 2 committees.

Given this, there is a strong argument for the city to have fewer councillors.

The 8 core cities in England have a larger number of residents on the electoral roll than Newcastle. For example, if the number of residents on the electoral roll for Liverpool and Manchester were applied to the population of Newcastle, Newcastle would have 52 councillors.

Many of the core cities have moved away from elections by thirds to all out elections once every four years with single member wards increasingly becoming the norm to give greater accountability between the councillor and individual electors. The latest example of a city council moving towards single member wards in all but 5 wards, elected every four years is Liverpool, as a consequence of the Max Caller Best Value review.

Of the core cities, Nottingham is the closest in size to Newcastle. It has a population 8% higher than Newcastle, yet Nottingham runs its business with 28 fewer councillors.

**Always Putting Local People First**

We believe that Newcastle should have a third fewer councillors representing a larger number of wards. Ideally, these should all be single member wards but we recognise that there may be an argument for two member wards in some areas.

Single member wards would create a much stronger link between the councillor and the people who elected them, and a larger number of wards would:

- Represent more meaningful individual communities rather than the fusion of communities in current wards - in some cases, the only real links between some communities is that they have been allocated to the same electoral ward;
- Have the potential to improve the accountability of each councillor to their electorate; and
- Deliver more meaningful ward level Government data across a range.

Single member wards has worked well in neighbouring Northumberland County Council, which covers a vast rural area, but does so with 61 elected members, with almost every one representing a single member ward.

The council often compares remuneration levels for Newcastle with other local authorities but, if the number of electors represented by each councillor is taken into account, Newcastle councillors are better paid.

Sadly, we were unable to bring a motion to move to all out elections to support our case but clearly turkeys will never vote for Christmas. Nevertheless, we have pulled this submission together because we believe we could strengthen council governance, improve accountability of individual councillors and establish more meaningful ward boundaries by:

- Reducing the number of councillors to 52;
- Increasing the number of wards to between 30 and 52; and
- Moving to all out elections every four years.

Yours sincerely

Tracey Mitchell  
Leader