

East Hertfordshire District Council

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Comment text:

Hertford and Stortford Labour Party Response to boundary commission's proposals to alter ward boundaries It is noted that the Boundary Commission has not in fact put forward any proposals. However, what they have said – and East Herts Council have agreed with them! – is that despite a projected increase of around 15% in the population of East Herts, there should be no increase in the number of councilors serving that larger population. They have arbitrarily set the number of residents each councilor is expected to provide a service to at 2614 – this figure does not appear to be based on any research into the ideal number of residents per councillor, but purely on mathematics: total expected population divided by 50. There is no indication why this figure has been selected as the ideal one. This is a startling proposal. A 15% increase in population will undoubtedly bring with it an increased workload for our councillors. This is especially true given the likely change in demographics, with a younger, more diverse population moving into our county. More homes can mean more disputes and difficulties – around parking, congestion, public transport, anti-social behavior. We challenge the assumptions made by the Council when agreeing this figure. It has been said that because of new technology, much of the contact councillors have with residents is online and there is no need to continue to "walk the wards" to contact residents. This is patently absurd. An increase in the use of social media and other online forms of communication mean that it much easier to contact your councillor and thus easier to raise issues with them. Another rationale for keeping the number of councillors the same is that the Council chamber only seats 50. This is frankly a ridiculous statement. Apart from the fact that it is rare for every singly councillor to attend full council, it can be pointed out that the House of Commons only seats 427 MPs and yet we have 650. Furthermore, the current review represents an opportunity to address some long-standing anomalies with ward boundaries in Bishop's Stortford. These have built up over time, do not reflect the existing communities in the town, and would not be recognised by most residents. Some wards - South and Central - use geographical descriptors, whereas others - Silverleys, Meads and All Saints - use labels that have only a tenuous relationship with the areas they represent. Since these wards were introduced large estates have been built on the outskirts of the town and more are being built. These estates such as Thorley Park and St Michael's Mead have been subsumed into existing wards rather than being given their own representation on the council, despite being distinct geographical communities. This problem will be exacerbated if the large estates under construction in Bishop's Stortford North (St Michael's Hurst and Stortford Fields) and South (St James's Park) are included in the existing ward structure. We believe these communities should be given their own council representatives. This will ensure their communities are properly represented and their voices are not lost amongst the more established communities closer to the town centre. We propose that the increase in population size is matched by an equal increase in councillors – which would mean an additional 8 councillors. Every ward will see an increase in numbers of their population. Not one will see a decrease. There are some where the increase is huge – Hunsdon and Bishops Stortford Silverleys for instance. We ask for new and separate representation for these new communities. We propose a new ward for Hunsdon to reflect the Gilston East development. The Tory leadership's refusal to consider an increase in the number of councillors serving our residents shows contempt for democracy and an indifference to the additional burdens this places on our hardworking councillors.

Uploaded Documents:

None Uploaded