

Pritchard, Rebecca

From: Heslop, Paul (Councillor) <Paul.Heslop@bolton.gov.uk>
Sent: 15 June 2020 17:34
To: Owen, David; reviews
Subject: Bolton MBC review

Categories: Submissions

Dear Sir/Madam,

Please see below my opinion on the upcoming discussion which looks at the number of councillors in the Metropolitan Borough of Bolton.

Number of Councillors needed – 69 (15% increase).

The town of Bolton lies in the centre of the Metropolitan Borough of Bolton but makes up less than half of the population of the borough. The remaining part of the borough consists of towns with very distinct identities that were, prior to the Local Government Act 1972 (LGA72), Urban Districts or a Municipal Borough.

The ‘other’ outlying towns in the borough are – in the vast majority – held by non-mainstream political parties or ‘hyper-local parties’ (me included) who will argue that they are doing a lot more in their wards than previous councillors; this view is not implying that former councillors were not working hard, but that there has been an increase in what is expected of a councillor in recent years. Many of the functions of a Council appear to be moved over into the voluntary sector and traditional functions of the Council are now being undertaken by groups such as community litter-pickers and groups like ‘Friends of Farnworth Library’ or ‘Friends of Farnworth Park’ or area-specific groups: ‘Friends of Moses Gate’. In my ward alone, since the beginning of this year, we have two bowling greens that have - due to funding cuts - become semi-autonomous and must become a constituted group and source funding from elsewhere. With many council services being reduced, residents feel that the Council is failing them and that residents need to explore other ways of getting things done in their areas. Usually, one of the first people that they contact is their Councillor who may help with the constitution and direct the newly-formed groups to sources of revenue/grants. Many newly-formed groups also feel re-assured that they are supported by their local Councillor who should be attending periodic meetings.

The upsurge in hyper-local political parties in the Metropolitan Boroughs may be a statement of the long-term failure of the LGA72 and that residents demand Councillors who are willing to put significant effort into the towns (wards) that they represent.

One of the biggest influences on expectations of Councillors is social media; Councillors are picking significant amounts of casework via social media and are also being criticised on social media if they are not taking an active role in trying to resolve issues in their area; in many cases these requests are way beyond what is achievable but these problems are very real to residents and not only adds to Councillors' workload but also the psychological pressures put on Councillors.

Like many other hyper-local party Councillors, I gave up my full time job to become a Councillor and having had discussions with a few fellow-councillors from the hyper-local parties it became apparent that hour with the hours effort that we put in as a Councillor, and the allowance that we receive for that effort, it equates to less than £3 per hour when compared to a conventional job.

As local government changes, the responsibilities of councillors – in their wards – appears to be increasing and it is worrying that pressures may deter good, effective councillors from seeking (or remaining in) political office. The distribution of workload to an additional nine Councillors across the borough will certainly alleviate many of these issues.

Kind regards,

Paul Heslop (Cllr)

Kearsley Ward

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