

Buckinghamshire Council

Personal Details:

Name: Katrina Wood
E-mail: katrina.wood@buckinghamshire.gov.uk
Postcode: [REDACTED]
Organisation Name: Buckinghamshire Council

Comment text:

Whilst acknowledging that the current numbers of 147 is very large and was only for the first term of the Council to address public concerns of a democratic deficit, it is becoming more and more apparent that the workload has increased immeasurably for Councillors and many are struggling to manage all the meetings and responding to residents. I myself am finding this, and having spoken to many other elected members, both first time members and veterans, all without exception have said how much the workload has increased, even those who were "twin" hatters before who you would expect to have a similar workload. There are many more committee meetings, a lot more ward work and when you add in, committee meetings, Parish meetings, NAG meetings, resident association meetings, it is a struggle to fit everything in and it is a struggle to fit meetings in when people can attend. This is not a good democratic representation for our residents and an issue that was of public concern when the Unitary was first mooted. Buckinghamshire is a long narrow County and travelling to meetings has in the majority of cases also added to time constraints. One option would be to decrease meetings to allow for a reduction in councillors, but there is a danger that robust scrutiny, accountability and relationships with local communities will fall away or not be carried out effectively and the original vision for a Unitary in Buckinghamshire will not work and it will become a dysfunctional representation of its former self. The danger with decreasing numbers too far and increasing workloads to full time is that only one type of person will have the time to be a councillor in the future if the numbers are reduced too much. Whilst there is nothing wrong with older retired people, indeed they bring a wealth of experience; to be truly representative of the population, Councillors should come from a wide range of backgrounds, ages, knowledge and experience. The amount of time to do this role effectively is directly comparable to the type of person able to stand for election and no one should be precluded by working full time or having young children or indeed caring for someone. There has to be a work life balance and it must not be considered to be a full-time role or a substitute for working full time. If someone wants to offer themselves for public duty, then it must be open to all and no-one should be precluded. The Council is now up and running and the it is unlikely that the way it runs will change. If anything, more and more things are being undertaken. The public had a real concern when this was first mooted of a democratic deficit which is why the original number of 147 was introduced. Going forward there will still be the same workload for councillors in relation to meetings and partnership working, and with the reduction in Councillor numbers there will be an increase potentially in this and in casework which could take the number of hours to more than what can reasonably be achieved. I therefore consider the number of Councillors should be set at 120 which would equate to 3500 electors per Councillor, which is projected to increase with the expansion of housing in Buckinghamshire and is in line with a number of comparable unitary councils. The work of Local Government is increasing year on year as more things are devolved down from Government and I cannot see this decreasing in the future. The world of Local Government has changed in the last 18 months and I cannot see it going back to the way it was before Covid. If elected local members are to continue to make a difference and set the policies and direction for Councils using their local knowledge, then they need to be diverse and have enough time to do this effectively. I hope the Boundary Commission will take comments on board.

Uploaded Documents:

None Uploaded