

Submission from the Labour Party Group of Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council on the Draft Recommendations of the Local Government Boundary Commission.

The Labour Group are thankful of the opportunity to comment on the Commission's "Draft recommendations on the new electoral arrangements for Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council".

The Group was very disappointed that the Council's submission, agreed by a Council with No Overall Control, was not accepted by the Commission given that it offered least disruption for residents in 16 of the existing 26 Wards whose projected electorate for 2026 fell within the variance margins providing "good electoral equality" as defined by the Commission.

This disappointment was compounded by the Commission's admission that, instead, they generally based the draft recommendations on the proposals from the Conservative Group, which comprises less than 30% of the total Council Members. We believe their proposals are motivated by gerrymandering rather than a reflection of the identities of our established communities.

Nevertheless, the Labour Group had recognised that there was electoral inequality, created by the success of the Council's growth in the extreme north and the south of the Borough, that needed addressing. We believe that the proposals with regards to the **Billingham** Wards, submitted by the Billingham Labour Councillors in the first round, partly addressed that challenge. We would still contend that those proposals have merit but would reluctantly accept the Commission's proposals which at least retains the township of Billingham with some minor internal boundary adjustments.

With regards to other specific draft proposals:

- We agree the proposals for **Norton** Wards, including their renaming and the minor adjustment to Norton South's boundary with Stockton Town Centre.
- We agree with the recommendations for the wards within **Central Stockton** but would propose that the name of Parkfield & Oxbridge be changed to **Ropner**, given that what locals know as Parkfield is actually in Stockton Town Centre Ward, and Oxbridge would only describe one area of the whole Ward; the proposed new ward name reflects that it contains the well-known Ropner Park.
- Whereas we agree with the boundary of a new three member ward termed Hardwick & Bishopsgarth by the Commission, we would urge that this be named **Hardwick, Salters Lane & Bishopsgarth** to reflect the three distinct areas whose names are familiarly known and understood by local residents; in recent years, the Hardwick Ward was renamed Hardwick & Salters Lane on petition from the residents of the latter and to abandon Salters Lane from the new name of the enlarged ward would not be well received by those local residents.
- The existing **Roseworth** Ward is already within electoral equality tolerance, both now and looking forward to 2026, and is a distinct community reflected in its discrete eponymous Community Partnership, Residents Association and Big Local (National Lottery funded) programme, as well as its local shops, social club, library and care home. Therefore, we believe its boundary should not change. The proposed inclusion of the detached/isolated development of The Elms (Buckthorne Crescent)

appears to be based on relative geographical proximity rather than affinity; the traditional boundary between town and country, marked by the railway line, is also ignored. Moreover, Ragworth is a separate and distinct community with its own shops, community centre and primary school. Its residents associate with Primrose Hill in Newtown Ward rather than Roseworth Ward and even Little Ragworth across the current dividing boundary of the A1027 Ring Road. Should the Commission persist with their recommendation on grounds of electoral equality convenience for neighbouring wards, the Ward should be named **Roseworth & Ragworth** to recognise the individual identities of those two communities.