

Trafford Labour Group response to LGBCE's draft boundary proposals for Trafford (30/11/2021)

The following is submitted as the response of the Trafford Labour Group of councillors to the draft recommendations for revised electoral boundaries proposed to the borough of Trafford.

Background:

Trafford Labour Group is the largest political group in Trafford with 40 of 63 councillors. We are the ruling Group and the only Party with representation in all of Trafford's principal localities: Altrincham, Sale, Stretford, Urmston as well as Partington.

In formulating our response to the Commission's draft recommendations we will aim to articulate a clear position on both the elements of which we are supportive, and those areas where we would propose an alternative configuration. In doing so we will be cognisant of the Commission's three main considerations: electoral equality, community identity and effective & convenient local government. In doing so we will of course also be mindful of the average councillor to elector ratio of 2907 as specific to Trafford – effectively an average 3-member ward size of 8721.

We will also comment on the ward names proposed by the Commission in their draft recommendations.

Summary:

Overall the Labour Group is pleased with many of the Commission's recommendations. The proposals for the Stretford and Urmston areas, the Sale East area, the Broadheath and Timperley areas, and the Hale/Hale Barns area are agreeable and we feel these generally satisfy the three principle considerations guiding the Commission's work. We would add that these do not align in full to the proposals the Labour Group submitted at the previous consultation stage, but throughout we have sought to be reasonable and fair-minded in this process. On balance we consider that these would amount to justifiable and well thought out changes to the Borough's electoral boundaries and we are happy to support them.

However we are extremely concerned that the proposals for the Western Parishes, Ashton upon Mersey, Manor and Bowdon wards taken as a whole do not meet the Commission's three principle criteria particularly as they pertain to the recommendation for a Western Parishes Ward. It is our clear view that this Ward as proposed would fail to meet any of the Commission's three considerations and we will put forward our reasons for this – and a suggested alternative configuration that we consider would come closer to satisfying these considerations – later in this submission.

The Stretford area (Old Trafford, Gorse Hill, Stretford, Longford and Lostock & Barton wards):

Trafford Labour Group is extremely supportive of the suggested ward patterns for these 5 wards.

The decision to create a successor to the current Clifford Ward that is entirely focused on Old Trafford – and to bring the LOC polling district which is very much part of the Old Trafford community into the Ward – is most welcome. This is a common sense approach that enables the burgeoning Pomona area at the northern edge of the borough to move into Gorse Hill Ward. This is a natural fit in terms of community cohesion given the similarities this area has with the growing community along Talbot Road which is similarly made up largely of young professionals and those wishing to be close to and access amenities in the centre of Manchester.

The above arrangement enables the very sensible split of Lostock from Gorse Hill to join up with part of the current Davyhulme East Ward in a new Lostock & Barton Ward. This is most welcome as it allows for a more compact Urmston Ward focused on the town centre and importantly enables the communities of Lostock and the area around Kingsway Park/Lostock Road to be placed in the same ward. Many of these residents access the same local amenities (health hub/George Carnall Leisure Centre/local churches etc) and indeed many Lostock residents consider Urmston their principle town centre rather than Stretford in any event.

Turning to the proposed Stretford and Longford configurations the decision to utilise the A56 as a clear and robust boundary between these two wards is extremely positive. We particularly endorse the decision of the Commission to include the area around Humphrey Park (currently Urmston polling district URB) in Stretford. This establishes a clear boundary with the M60 which makes sense and it is our contention that it is better to breach this at Lostock than in this location. Finally the decision to move parts of the current Stretford Ward (areas around Bradfield Road) into Lostock & Barton is pragmatic and maintains community ties in the area. It is also positive in terms of electoral equality.

Overall it is the view of the Labour Group that this configuration meets all three of the principle considerations of the Commission. There is therefore only support from the Labour Group for these draft recommendations. However while we are supportive of the boundaries and of proposed ward names of Old Trafford, Stretford and Lostock & Barton on reflection we would ask the Commission to consider an amended name for the Gorse Hill Ward. Given the significant number of electors of the proposed ward who would not consider themselves Gorse Hill resident we would welcome an acknowledgement of the growing community in the north part of this ward. As such we ask that the name Gorse Hill & Cornbrook be adopted. We feel that the name Cornbrook very much works for this location as the culverted brook itself crosses City Road and provides the name of the Metrolink station linking into Pomona, without only reference Pomona which is an island area.

The Urmston area (Urmston, Davyhulme and Flixton wards):

Trafford Labour Group is hugely supportive of the Commission's draft recommendations for these wards, along with the proposed Lostock & Barton Ward discussed above.

The decision to create an Urmston Ward that is centred much more on the Town Centre is sensible and pragmatic. Removing the area to the east of the M60 (URB) enables this, as does the removal of streets north of Flixton Road/west of Princess Road to a revised Flixton Ward. We particularly welcome the decision to move the Railway Road/Granville Road area into Urmston along with the areas off Canterbury Road/Moorside Road closest to the Town Centre (all from the current

Davyhulme East Ward). This reflects local community links, in terms of shopping and community facilities as well as access to public transport.

The above changes around Canterbury/Moorside roads also enable a much more robust boundary to be established along Hayeswater Road than is currently the case. This road is a natural boundary as a through route between Moorside Road and Lostock Circle/Barton Road. We consider this a significant upgrade to existing ward boundaries that reflects a natural break between the areas of Urmston Town Centre and Davyhulme.

In supporting the configuration of the proposed Davyhulme Ward we welcome not only the boundary above at Hayeswater Road but also in particular the boundaries as proposed both at the western edge of the proposed Ward, and at Marlborough Road/Irlam Road. The latter of these effectively moves the current FLD polling district from Flixton to Davyhulme. This is welcome not only in terms of electoral equality but crucially in that it unites the community around Woodsend Circle where residents share a range of amenities. This includes a health centre, library and the many shops around Woodsend Circle itself. It is a distinct community and we are pleased to see this recognised in the proposed Davyhulme Ward configuration.

Finally we also welcome the Commission's proposed changes to the Flixton Ward. The inclusion of the area to the western end of Irlam Road is welcome and correctly reflects that this community consider themselves to live in Flixton not Davyhulme. It is a sensible step that aligns neatly with the Commission's commitment to cohesive communities. The adjustment to the boundary at Flixton Road to include the area west of Princess Road is especially welcome in the interests of electoral equality.

Overall then the Labour Group is hugely supportive of the proposals for the Urmston area. It is our view that in uniting the community closest to Urmston Town Centre, and in bringing the community around Woodsend Circle together, the Commission has proposed revised boundaries that comfortably meet all three of their key considerations. The Labour Group is also very supportive of the straightforward ward names of Urmston, Davyhulme and Flixton which are obvious names for wards of this configuration.

The Sale East area – Sale Priory, Sale Moor and Brooklands wards:

The Labour Group is very supportive of the proposals for these wards, which reflect community ties and enable best elector equality for this locality. In particular we are happy to specifically endorse and support the single proposed boundary change to these three wards, with the shift of the Arnesby Road area from the existing Priory Ward into Sale Moor Ward. This is practical in terms of electoral equality and reflects the geographical location of this part of the current Priory Ward in that it is in relatively close proximity to Sale Moor Village.

Although supportive we would favour an alternative name for the Sale Priory Ward. This is not reflective of any name recognised by local residents. We would suggest a decision is made to name the proposed Ward either Sale Central – as it reflects the fact this is the Sale Town Centre Ward – or Priory, which is the Ward's longstanding name. Sale Priory feels effectively like an over complication and we would respectfully request that either of our alternatives is adopted. By contrast we feel that the Sale Moor and Brooklands ward names are entirely appropriate.

The Timperley area – Broadheath, Timperley North and Timperley Central:

The Labour Group is prepared to support the proposals for these wards. We are supportive of the proposed boundaries for Timperley North and Timperley Central and feel this is the most pragmatic configuration available.

That said we are concerned that the boundary of Broadheath and Manor wards places more of the Woodheys area into Broadheath Ward. This splits the Woodheys community (that south of Woodhouse Lane) further and we feel this is unfortunate. However we recognise that the Commission received several proposals for this boundary and on balance we are willing to accept this as a workable compromise in the interests of electoral equality.

It should also be noted that the boundary between Timperley Central and Hale Barns & Timperley South wards splits the Broomwood area in two. This is unfortunate and is a configuration we would have preferred to see avoided although we recognise that this is done in the interest of electoral equality.

Overall then the Labour Group is content to support these proposals and we are also supportive of the suggested ward names for these revised wards.

Altrincham and Hale area – Altrincham, Hale and Hale Barns & Timperley South wards:

The Labour Group is very supportive of these proposals overall. It is our view that the revisions to Altrincham Ward enable greater electoral equality and that the decision to relocate Oldfield Brow into Bowdon Ward is correct. We also feel that including more of the area around Moss Lane in Hale brings more of that community together in one ward (Hale). This is very welcome.

Hale Barns and Timperley South is an imperfect configuration and we are uncomfortable with the split of the Broomwood area but as discussed above can understand this given the need for electoral equality to be achieved as much as possible.

We particularly welcome the ward names for these 3 wards. We are pleased to see Hale rather than Hale Central as this reflects the Ward more accurately. Moreover we are especially supportive of the recognition of Timperley South in the Hale Barns and Timperley South ward name. This is especially important given the additional parts of Timperley that are proposed to move into the new ward.

The area of concern – Western Parishes, Bowdon, Ashton upon Mersey and Manor wards:

Although supportive of the proposed boundaries for the rest of Trafford the Labour Group is deeply concerned – and therefore is unable to support – the proposal for this part of the Borough. It is our strong contention that the proposed configuration creates a ward (Western Parishes) that fails to meet any of the key considerations of the Commission. We would also assert that there is a highly practical alternative configuration to this which achieves greater electoral equality, is more robust in terms of community cohesion, and certainly provides more efficient and effective local government in terms of the ability of future elected representatives to effectively represent the Ward.

Initially let us turn to the problematic Western Parishes Ward and the reasons we feel this fails to meet any of the Commission's considerations:

Electoral equality – the proposed Western Parishes Ward is some 14% undersized (almost 1200 electors). We feel that this is too great a deviation and indeed that the Labour Group's alternative configuration would enable much improved electoral inequality across this four ward area as a whole. It is our strong view that a deviation of this magnitude is unacceptable and that anything over 10% should be rejected when there is such an obvious alternative for this Ward; indeed one that is

already in place given the boundaries of the current Bucklow St Martins Ward. It is noted in particular that no other proposal in Trafford breaches 10% deviation in either direction.

We would also add that this seat is to see rapid growth between 2021 and 2026 from an electorate of 6308 in 2021 to an estimated 7525 by 2026. This means that the 14% deviation seen in 2026 will be even higher in the years between 2023 and 2026 as new properties are built at pace, and that deviation of over 20% could be seen in the interim. We do not consider this necessary or acceptable.

Effective local government – the proposed Western Parishes is, in Trafford terms, enormous in size. Indeed it appears on a map to cover an area of more than a quarter of the Borough's total size. It is also largely rural and isolated. The Labour Group does not consider this Ward to be of a reasonable size to offer the high quality level of representation residents in other wards would be able to expect. It is not reasonable in our opinion to expect local representative to cover such a large – and indeed diverse – area as this. Transport links are poor, and maintaining contact with residents in a ward of this configuration would be very challenging.

Furthermore, this proposed configuration would see all 4 of Trafford's parish council included in one ward. We feel that this would significantly increase the workload of the councillors elected to this seat, with no other Trafford councillors having to work with parish councils at all. Although relationships are constructive it is fair to say that there are additional relationship management and workload requirements that come with representing wards with parish councils and we consider it unreasonable to place all of this on the members of just one ward. The current practice of splitting this between two wards enables effective representation from elected members who can meaningfully engage with their parishes. A Western Parishes ward with all 4 parishes would skew the workload of members in Trafford disproportionately as we fear the councillors elected to this ward would have considerably more stakeholder management/local meetings to attend than any other councillors in Trafford.

Cohesive communities – Trafford Labour Group are concerned that the Commission's suggestion is that because the four parishes of Partington, Carrington, Dunham and Warburton have poor public transport, this suggests the communities are united and share similar experiences. On the contrary this means that there are even more acute differences between the communities of Partington & Carrington on the one hand and Warburton & Dunham on the other. Poor public transport does not bring communities together it divides them. Indeed, one of the principal reasons why the Labour Group had proposed the maintenance of the existing ward boundary for Bucklow St Martins was because there are to be significantly enhanced transport links between Sale West and Partington via the Carrington Relief Road, and resultant investment in active travel solutions. Furthermore as the Carrington development grows in future years the area between Carrington and Sale West (BSF polling district in the current Bucklow St Martins Ward) will narrow considerably.

We also note with concern the suggestion in the Commission's report that the residents of Dunham and Warburton look outside of Trafford for their services. This is not the case. Indeed Dunham has been a historic part of Altrincham for centuries – residents use shopping, health, leisure and other community facilities in Altrincham and certainly do not use Partington as their main centre for any of these services. Similarly, although there is an argument for Warburton using services in Lymm (outside of Trafford) this is a small village and the primary town for accessing amenities remains Altrincham. Indeed this is where the limited bus service that is available travels to. It should also be noted that it makes more sense than ever to maintain Dunham in Bowdon Ward now that the Oldfield Brow area is proposed to move to Bowdon: this is the closest part of Altrincham to Dunham on foot and residents routinely travel between the two without even making use of a car.

By contrast the residents of Partington do not use Altrincham for their services and are a community in their own right. Partington is the most isolated part of Trafford and has the highest level of deprivation in the Borough. It has little in common with the very wealthy areas of Dunham and Warburton. Indeed it is particularly hard to see any cohesion or community links between the largely farming communities of Dunham and Warburton and the people of Partington. Similarly Carrington – although a community that is likely to grow and change in the next years – has absolutely nothing in common with Dunham and Warburton. These residents look to Sale more than Altrincham for their amenities and cannot travel to Dunham or Warburton by public transport: indeed neither could a local representative for this ward who did not drive. This proposal is in stark contrast to the current ward boundary which brings part of Sale West into a ward with Partington and Carrington. These communities are similar in socio-economic terms and although the BSF polling district area is in Sale it experiences similar issues of isolation given it is at the extreme edge of Sale with poor transport links. This community will grow closer to Partington and Carrington over the next few years as road and public transport links are improved as per the Council's approved strategy.

In short, it is our contention that the Commission has proposed a configuration for a Western Parishes Ward that meets none of its three main considerations. The communities are divided both geographically and socio-economically and do not interact; the Ward is large and unwieldy in Trafford terms and therefore does not enable effective local government; and most crucially the proposed Ward is significantly undersized. We would therefore like to propose a solution that resolves these issues without hugely altering the Commission's broader proposals.

Alternative proposal to address size, community and representation issues in the Western Parishes – impacting on proposed Bowdon, Manor and Ashton Wards also:

As set out above it is the Labour Group's view that the Western Parishes Ward does not satisfy the Commission's criteria. We would therefore propose an unchanged Bucklow St Martins Ward.

Such a change is easy to accommodate, and clearly beneficial particularly in terms of electoral equality. It can be achieved by placing BDE and BDF polling districts (Warburton and Dunham) back into Bowdon Ward. This change is actually beneficial to the electoral equality of the Commission's proposed Bowdon, leaving it less than 2% oversized instead of 6% undersized as per current proposal. In exchange the BSF polling district – currently proposed to be split between Ashton upon Mersey and the new Manor – could be placed back into the Ward. This would give a ward size that, rather than being 14% undersized, would be only 3% undersized. We consider this to be much fairer to all Trafford residents who would expect electoral equality where possible across the board.

The ramifications of this for Ashton and Manor would to revert back to an unchanged Ashton upon Mersey Ward. This would be just over 7% undersized which as the outlier for this area in size terms is much more reasonable than a 14% undersized Western Parishes Ward. The shift to an unchanged boundary at the north end of Manor (when set the boundaries of its predecessor St Marys) would also be advantageous for electoral equality. This would take the proposed Ward from 7% oversized to just 2.3% oversized.

This would deliver a solution that is much closer to the status quo in this part of the Borough. We feel it recognises the clear link between Dunham and Altrincham; acknowledges the even clearer differences between the communities of Partington & Carrington and Warburton and Dunham; and splits the workload of managing Trafford's 4 parish councils between 2 sets of local councillors thus enabling more effective representation. It is also unquestionably superior in terms of electoral equality.

Summary on Western Parishes, Bowdon, Ashton upon Mersey and Manor proposals:

We hope that the Commission will give serious consideration to both our concerns and our proposed solution. It is the Labour Group's view that there are obvious flaws in the current configuration for this part of the Borough that must be rectified to satisfy the Commission's three principal considerations.

It should be added that where we have not proposed changes to boundaries in Ashton, Manor and Bowdon it is because we only disagree with these as they pertain to the border with Western Parishes. Other ward boundaries – although not necessarily as proposed by the Labour Group in all cases – are considered reasonable in the circumstances.

Turning briefly to names we are supportive of the retention of Ashton upon Mersey and Bowdon and welcome the shift from St Marys to Manor. We do feel that Western Parishes is inappropriate and certainly if the Commission was minded to accept the Labour Group suggestion as an alternative the retention of Bucklow St Martins would be acceptable. Alternatively as St Martins Church is not in the Ward, Bucklow (the ward name until 2004) would be optimal. Other options may include more place-based names for example Partington, Carrington and Heatherway.

Conclusion:

As stated at the outset we are broadly very pleased with the proposals for Trafford. We would hope there will be a reconsideration of the proposals for Western Parishes and its adjoining wards in the interests of electoral equality, community cohesion and effectively local government.

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Appendix 1 - Ward sizes of the Manor, Ashton upon Mersey, and Bucklow St Martins wards proposed as an alternative by Trafford Labour and more even in electoral equality terms

Trafford Labour Proposal	Electorate	Size versus average
Bucklow St Martins	8454	This is 3.06% undersized
Bowdon	8882	This is 1.85% oversized
Ashton upon Mersey	8085	This is 7.29% undersized
Manor	8928	This is 2.37% oversized

Source – Boundary Commission report calculations