

Tunbridge Wells Borough Council

Personal Details:

Name: Paul Roberts
E-mail: Paul.roberts@tunbridgewells.gov.uk
Postcode: [REDACTED]
Organisation Name: TWBC

Comment text:

The proposed TWBC boundary commission review now results in rural councillors having to represent much larger wards. Whilst the commission's formula, sounds sensible, i.e. roughly 1 councillor represents 2500 voters, and is practical in single member wards, it fails in elections by thirds. Where elections by thirds are in place, the boundary commission now insists on 3 members per ward to further their aim of achieving democracy. The proposal is for each ward to cast their ballot 3 times every 4 years, which necessitates 3 councillors in every ward. The overall goal of delivering democracy, in theory is ideal and commendable, however in practice this formula potentially lets down the electorate. Under the new proposals where currently there are 3 councillors who represent a smaller ward, these will be expanded. Due to the population distribution in rural Tunbridge Wells, this has resulted in huge ward areas which cross multiple parish boundaries, these being necessary to accommodate 3 councillors per circa 7000 voters. As the boundary commission's goal is for each councillor to represent 2350 (In Tunbridge Wells) electors, in practice this isn't possible as the ward contains 7000 voters and the councillors have a duty to support all voters in their ward. A local agreement may be reached, if all elected councillors are from the same party, in which case the ward could be divided by three and a local agreement made on locations and areas of responsibility, though this may not be practicable for a number of reasons. For example, difficulty in travel perhaps through not owning suitable means or because of mobility constraints. Councillors standing for local issues, which may be at parish level and all-consuming to the possible detriment of the rest of the ward. Where a ward is made up of councillors from different parties, then co-operation on this basis is unlikely to happen since each councillor will be reluctant to relinquish parts of their mandate to someone of a different political persuasion. Effectively, each councillor will have to represent 7500 voters in order to deliver the support they have been elected to provide. This is impractical and will lead to a diminution of support available to voters. Essentially where elections by thirds have been chosen then the boundary commission should think outside the box by considering population density and adjusting ward sizes accordingly, and if this doesn't work then revert back to wards with fewer councillors. This will ensure their goal of perceived democracy doesn't inadvertently result in reduced support for residents, which is what the current proposal could deliver. An alternative strategy which Tunbridge Wells Borough Councillors could deliver would be to change the current election by thirds to all out elections. This would allow the boundary commission to rethink the ward sizes and allow for single member wards to be created in smaller rural community areas. This would support residents much more effectively than the proposed strategy. It would also have the added benefit of introducing significant cost savings at a time of current critical economic constraints.

Uploaded Documents:

None Uploaded