

Gateshead

Personal Details:

Name: Ms Leigh Kirton

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Organisation Name: Gateshead Council (District or county councillor)

Comment text:

Thirteen years of cuts to the Council's budget, coupled with the Cost of Living Crisis, has hit Gateshead's residents hard. Councillors are seeing a greater workload than ever before, as the number of residents in need of help and support has grown enormously.

Gateshead Council is also considering becoming a member of a proposed new Mayoral Combined Authority, which will bring with it various scrutiny roles to hold the new Executive to account, again increasing the workload of councillors.

An increase in workload is pushing the role of a local councillor into a full time job. I work full time alongside my councillor responsibilities, and already the level of casework is reaching the level where I am having to dedicate at least an hour a day to pick up urgent casework, and a morning every weekend to the less urgent issues. That is on top of all meetings, reading the papers for meetings etc. The more deprived wards, especially those with high levels of social housing, receive higher levels of case work, and especially emergency care work ie. a social housing tenant whose house is flooding, water has gone off, boiler has packed up with young kids etc. than better off wards.

I don't believe the level of case work is even across the country wards or indeed the borough's - my workload would be considerably less if the percentage of social housing was swapped with that of owner occupiers, and the number of benefit claimant who are having trouble with their claims was reduced to that of neighbouring, more prosperous wards.

I am struggling with the council duties and a full time job with the number of constituents as they are, and don't think it would physically be possible to maintain a family life if the number of residents I had to respond to each day grew. I don't have young children or caring

responsibilities and currently still find it a struggle, and I feel it would be impossible with them.

We currently have less than 10 of 66 councillors in Gateshead under the age of 50, and one of those is resigning their seat this year because she is a single parent and cannot fit council duties in with work and home life any more. It is very difficult as it stands to get younger people with careers and children interested in representing the community, and a reduction in councillors will make it a full time job and there will be almost no way of having Gateshead Council representative of the community. It will become a hobby of the retired rather than community representatives.

I don't believe that a reduction in councillors, which is a cynical ploy by the Liberal Democrats so that they can fill their leaflets with stories about how they want to reduce the number of politicians, and who also represent the well off wards in the borough and therefore receive significantly less casework, is healthy for democracy, or the best deal for residents.

Attached Documents:

None attached