

Gateshead

Personal Details:

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Organisation Name: (District or county councillor)

Comment text:

Related subject: Number of wards

I was concerned to learn that the number of Gateshead council wards was under review. The assumption has been made that this relates to demands by the Council's Opposition party for a reduction in the number of councillors, and thus a reduction in the costs borne by the general public.

It seems to me, at a time when the government opposition party - and, indeed, the government itself - is promising to devolve powers to local authorities that it would be madness to contemplate any reductions in the numbers of elected representatives. As you will know, the north east is currently in the process of developing a mayoral authority which will inevitably have an impact on local authorities. This may - or may not - increase the workload of locally elected councillors and it would be more sensible to review the numbers of councillors in the context of a working mayoral authority.

However, I am particularly concerned by the possible impact that a reduction in the number of councillors will have on councillors' ability to effectively scrutinise decisions taken by Cabinet and the longer term impact of those decisions.

For example, I am chair of the Housing, Environment and Healthy communities OSC. That's a huge remit in itself. I'm also a member of Families OSC, Corporate Resources OSC and the Strategic Housing Board. And of course I attend council meetings.

Attendance of committees is usually good, with members who are generally familiar with agenda papers (and thoroughly reading through agenda papers is easily a 3/4 hour job) and who participate in extensive and thorough discussion and debate at meetings. But being an elected representative is not only about attending meetings, it's also about actively supporting the local community centre (3 in my ward), participating on school governing bodies, as well as regularly meeting with constituents

I also work, part-time, and I can just about manage the work schedule.

If there were fewer councillors to attend the same number of Overseeing and Scrutiny committees, I'd probably have to fit in at least one additional committee, possibly two, in order to guarantee sufficient numbers of members present to achieve effective scrutiny. Frankly, that's not sustainable for anyone who also works. So the job of councillor could only ever be done by retirees or people not in work. Councils already tend to be overwhelmingly white retired men - a heftier workload would effectively rule out women like me who want/ need financially to work. And I think working experience enhances a members' view of issues that arise. I'd also question whether a councillor who has to attend 5 OSCs is actually going to be able to provide the effective scrutiny that is needed for modern governance

Attached Documents:

None attached