

Sefton

Personal Details:

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Organisation Name: Conservative Party (Political groups)

Comment text:

Good afternoon,

Please find attached Response sent on behalf of the Sefton Conservative Group.

Attached Documents:

- boundary-commission---feedback---final---29-february-2024.docx



LOCAL GOVERNMENT BOUNDARY COMMISSION

DRAFT PROPOSALS

RESPONSE FROM THE SEFTON CONSERVATIVE GROUP

Councillor Mike Prendergast – Leader - Dukes Ward

Councillor Tony Brough – Deputy Leader – Ainsdale Ward

Councillor Mike Morris M.B.E- Whip – Cambridge Ward

Councillor Sir Ron Watson C.B.E – Dukes Ward

Councillor Joe Riley – Harington Ward

29th February 2024



The Sefton Conservative Group are grateful for the opportunity to provide feedback on the draft proposals you have put forward in respect of the internal boundaries of the Borough.

We note that you would welcome further comment from interested parties and that you do have an open mind about your draft recommendations.

We have benefitted considerably from now being able to read the submissions put forward by the majority Labour Administration and by the Liberal Democrat Parties.

We will comment further on their submissions later in this response to your document.

You mention in the document the fact that as a Party we made specific reference to the governance arrangements within the Borough but have pointed out that you have no remit to consider issues of this nature.

We have no difficulty in accepting this point and it was mentioned only on the basis that all interested parties were actually invited to comment on this issue as it forms part of the overall picture.

We do have to indicate that we have had concerns from the outset when we were advised there was a statement to the effect that the argument “if it ain’t broke don’t fix it” would not be considered acceptable and that there would be change.

We consider that this was an unfortunate comment which to a very large extent pre-empts the decision on a significant number of points which we have made based on local knowledge.

We note that there has been virtually no interest from the population as a whole on this issue and that out of an electorate within the Borough of 212,040 you received representations and comments from only 22 people which clearly indicates that there is little public appetite or recognition of any need for substantial change.

We also note that in most instances the representations made were either imprecise or did not meet the criteria for consideration that was in your original briefing document on a potential review.

You have recognised, for which we are grateful, that our principal concern relates to the fact that we see no justification for a complete review of internal boundaries.

We wish to reemphasise that there remains only one Ward where the number of electors does not fall within the accepted tolerance level between areas and we are disappointed that this has not been recognised.

We would now like to turn to the submissions that have been made by the Labour Party and the Liberal Democrat Party.

When preparing our response we base this entirely on what we know to be a rigid rule for the Commission – namely that there are no circumstances in which they can take into account the advantage and/or disadvantage to any individual Political Party.



We know from experience however that this is precisely the criteria that Political Parties do use when considering any level of representation on any proposals made.

There is therefore a significant contradictory approach but we hope you will acknowledge that this does not apply to any of the observations we have made.

We have looked in detail at what are quite detailed proposals, often road by road in any given Ward, and it is our view that with one exception the submissions made are based on the criteria that you must not follow – in other words, they are predicated to a very large extent on the perception and local knowledge of possible political advantage.

The changes put forward as you have indicated with the Liberal Democrats in particular are not persuasive by any objective criteria.

The proposals from the majority Labour Party, in our view, definitely go against the core principle under which you have to make your decisions and whilst we do not think it appropriate to go into a road by road detail anyone who knows the area and has been able to assess voting patterns over a period of time will have no difficulty in understanding the point we have made.

We therefore consider it unwise for the Local Government Commission to state in quite unequivocal terms that they agree with the Labour Party proposals.

Whilst we have no doubt that you would seek to argue that this situation is coincidental we do not believe that such an approach would be considered acceptable by those who know the area on an intimate basis.

We turn now in a more general sense to the fact that the current proposals will result in an 'all-out election' in 2026.

We regret that no mention of the observations we made in respect of this issue had been made but we wish to repeat and reemphasise the fact that in Metropolitan Districts with elections by thirds such an electoral situation is highly undesirable, disruptive and inherently unfair on most existing Councillors and potential candidates.

Some Members currently serving as Councillors will find their terms of office shortened and others elected will have terms of office that result in between terms of 1, 2 or 4 years and past experience in many areas shows that the number of votes separating the Councillors is often very small indeed.

We also note you have made no reference to the added complication that on the actual ballot paper there is likely to be 15 plus candidates ranked in alphabetical order and as the majority of the public in the Metropolitan Borough have no experience of such a system there is bound to be an unwelcome element of both political and personal confusion.

Such an election therefore can only be justified where there is an overwhelming case for this to occur and we therefore take this opportunity to reassert the key element that any of the changes proposed do not meet any criteria based on the 10% element in particular in the vast bulk of the Borough.



Whilst again you may wish to argue that this is a matter of no concern to you, Elected Members in particular are very conscious of the financial implications of all-out elections, the cost of which in Sefton has currently been estimated at approximately £606,000.

We do hope that we have put forward a pragmatic and rational point of view based on a combination of the current criteria you have to work to together with our own detailed knowledge of the Borough.

We therefore feel justified in saying to you that at the very least you should investigate whether or not you have the authority to address what is a very minor problem in electoral numerical terms in respect of one Ward only and potentially come forward with a limited change that would address this one particular issue.

We remain always prepared to clarify and discuss directly with you any of the issues we have raised and we await your response when you have had the opportunity to discuss representations in general which you may receive from interested parties.

Sefton Conservative Group

February 2024