

# North Yorkshire

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## Comment text:

**Related subject:** Ouseburn Ward

Please see attached pdf file from Kirk Hammerton Parish Council

## Attached Documents:

- submission-to-the-local-government-boundary-commission-for-england-june-2025.pdf

# KHPC's Submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England North Yorkshire Council Electoral Review – Final Response to the Draft Warding Pattern (8 June 2025)

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## Overview

We welcome the Commission's commitment to ensuring that future electoral arrangements in North Yorkshire reflect three statutory criteria:

1. **Electoral equality** (equalising the number of electors per councillor)
2. **Community identity** (reflecting local ties and shared interests)
3. **Effective and convenient local government**

We broadly support the Commission's proposed **87 division structure** as a sound basis for future representation. However, we believe the proposed **89 single-member model** does not achieve a sufficient balance between the criteria. In particular, it:

- Reduces representation too far when viewed against the previous structure of 301 councillors under the two-tier system;
- Ignores rural workload disparities and urban complexity;
- Over-simplifies representation by defaulting to uniform single-member divisions;
- Misses the opportunity to strengthen democratic resilience without compromising electoral equality.

We propose a modest rebalancing: a hybrid model with multi-member representation in appropriate divisions, and a revised councillor total of **approximately 100**. This is a practical and proportional enhancement that better satisfies all three criteria.

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## 1. Electoral Equality: Functional, Not Just Numerical

We recognise that the proposed divisions fall within the Commission's  $\pm 10\%$  electoral variance. However, we argue that **numerical parity alone is not sufficient** in a county of this size and complexity.

Councillors in rural areas such as Hillside, Hammerton, or Upper Dales routinely cover:

- **20–30 parishes**
- **Travel distances of 30+ miles** to attend evening meetings
- **Limited digital infrastructure** and poor public transport options

Meanwhile, councillors in urban centres like Harrogate, Scarborough, or Selby manage thousands more electors, dense planning activity, and overlapping service requests.

Equalising elector numbers cannot and does not equalise workload. That is why we propose:

- Multi-member divisions in high-density urban areas with >8,000 electors;
  - Additional representation in geographically large or parish-heavy rural divisions;
  - A total of ~100 councillors across the existing 87 divisions, consistent with  $\pm 10\%$  variance.
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## 2. Community Identity: Described, But Not Reflected

The draft proposals correctly identify physical features like the A1(M), River Ure/Ouse, and market town centres as structuring elements in community identity.

Yet the proposed divisions:

- Split grouped parish councils
- Create long east-west divisions that stretch from Harrogate to York
- Cross major natural boundaries without reflecting service or school catchment ties

We support the Green Party's proposal for a revised "Hammerton and Tockwith" division and "Tollerton and Monkton" division, which preserve key rural alignments and recognise:

- The distinct east/west service footprints of communities near Harrogate vs. York;
- The Ure/Ouse as a historic and logistical boundary;
- The importance of respecting grouped parish identities.

These refinements perform equally well on elector numbers but much better on community identity and local coherence.

While we support the Commission's work in defining a geographically logical map of 87 divisions, we believe that certain boundary lines — notably in the Hammerton/Tockwith/Tollerton area — merit **fine-tuning**, rather than wholesale redrawing. These adjustments strengthen, rather than challenge, the Commission's intent by better fulfilling the community identity criterion.

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## 3. Effective and Convenient Local Government

The Commission's objective of effective governance is most at risk under the proposed 89-member model. The Council itself acknowledges that:

- Most councillors now serve full-time;
- Members sit on 3+ committees and outside bodies;
- Some divisions involve over 15 parishes, creating logistical clashes and missed meetings;
- There is no devolved governance (e.g. Area Boards or Local Networks) to share decision-making burden.

A councillor cannot be effective if they are perpetually overextended. Our model addresses this:

- More members = more manageable workloads;
- Shared representation in complex areas = broader availability and accessibility;
- Committee and scrutiny viability = improved governance outcomes.

The additional cost of increasing from 89 to 100 councillors is modest: **less than 0.03% of NYC's net revenue budget**, and would be offset by reducing demand on overstretched officers.

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#### 4. Number of Councillors: Reframing the Baseline

The Council's proposal of 89 councillors is described as optimal, largely on the grounds that it is an odd number — which they argue reduces the likelihood of tied votes in full Council. However, this justification does not withstand scrutiny.

Tied votes are rare in councils of this size, and when they do occur, established procedures allow the Chair or presiding officer to cast a deciding vote. The marginal benefit of avoiding occasional ties is greatly outweighed by the representational imbalance created by selecting a councillor number based on symbolic neatness rather than functional governance.

The authority previously operated with **301 councillors** across county and district tiers. Even an increase to 100 councillors would represent a **66% cut** in local democratic representation. The choice of 89 (a one-seat reduction from 90) appears symbolic. The Council's own submission makes no operational case for why 89 is materially superior to 90 or 91. It is a post hoc justification intended to demonstrate restraint rather than effectiveness.

In contrast, our proposal restores representational resilience while remaining lean, balanced, and evidence-led.

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#### 5. Multi-Member Divisions: Legal and Logical

The 2009 Local Democracy Act (Section 57) allows multi-member divisions where there are "sufficient reasons". We argue that these reasons are fully met in:

- Urban centres with >15,000 electors and high complexity

- Rural divisions with >100 km<sup>2</sup> and >10 parishes

The Commission has already proposed two-member divisions in Malton & Norton and Selby West. We simply ask that the principle be applied **consistently**, not selectively.

This approach better reflects community identity, enhances electoral equality (by avoiding forced splits), and supports convenient local government.

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## A Missed Opportunity for a Proportionate Response

Both the Council's submission and the Commission's draft recommendations describe North Yorkshire as **exceptional in scale, complexity and geography**. Indeed:

- The Commission notes that North Yorkshire is the **largest unitary authority in England by area**.
- The Council highlights the **dispersed nature of rural communities**, the **legacy of two-tier governance**, and the **lack of formal devolution at sub-council level**.
- Both documents acknowledge the **challenge of representing isolated or multiply-parished divisions**, and the fact that **most councillors serve in a full-time capacity**.

Yet having described an **exceptional governance challenge**, the response from both parties is oddly conventional.

The Council proposes a councillor number (89) that:

- Represents a **70% reduction** in elected representatives since 2022;
- Was selected primarily to appear streamlined rather than to reflect representational need;
- Enforces a uniform single-member model across a county with **some of the widest rural-urban disparities in England**.

The Commission's draft accepts this figure and structure, while **introducing only two multi-member divisions** — despite the clear presence of other divisions (urban and rural alike) that meet or exceed those same thresholds.

This is, in short, a missed opportunity.

The evidence gathered by both bodies could and should point to **a more differentiated model**, tailored to match the county's unique demands. Instead, the result is a design that **acknowledges exceptional circumstances** — and then defaults to ordinary practice.

We believe the logic within both documents **supports a bolder conclusion**: that North Yorkshire merits a councillor structure which is not just numerically sufficient, but operationally sustainable and democratically credible.

The effectiveness of local government is not only a question of workload and structure, but of *who* is being represented and *how*.

## Demographic Representation

North Yorkshire's current council chamber is overwhelmingly unrepresentative of its electorate:

- **Gender:** Women make up more than half the electorate but hold fewer than one-third of council seats.
- **Age:** Councillors skew significantly older than the median voter. Many divisions, particularly in market towns and new housing areas, are under-represented by working-age or early-career voices.
- **Ethnicity:** The Council does not publicly report ethnicity statistics for elected members, but available data and observation suggest that **ethnic minority representation is virtually non-existent**, in contrast to the growing diversity of communities in urban areas such as Selby, Scarborough and Harrogate.

A larger councillor body with multi-member representation would increase the opportunities for gender-balanced and demographically varied representation, particularly in urban centres and newer residential areas. This is both a matter of **fairness and effectiveness**: a council better able to reflect the full experience of its communities is better able to understand and serve them.

## Political Representation

North Yorkshire Council currently operates an Executive system. Following the most recent elections:

- The ruling party holds **100% of Cabinet positions**;
- Yet secured **only 41.2% of the popular vote** across the county.

In a system where executive power is so concentrated, the broader pool of councillors carries even greater importance for scrutiny, challenge and community voice. A lean council structure with minimal backbench capacity not only reduces representational breadth — it **undermines democratic legitimacy**.

Expanding the number of councillors would increase scrutiny capacity, allow for greater policy debate, and **rebalance power away from the Executive towards the wider council**.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

We recommend that the Commission:

1. **Retain the overall structure of 87 electoral divisions**, which offers a sound and geographically coherent basis for representation, but remain open to **targeted refinements** in individual cases where proposed boundaries conflict with established community identity or local governance structures (e.g. Hammerton and grouped parishes).
2. **Adopt a hybrid representation model**, using clear criteria to allocate 1, 2, or 3 councillors per division where justified.
3. **Increase the total number of councillors to ~100**, bringing functional fairness and resilience without compromising electoral equality.
4. **Apply multi-member representation consistently**, including in Harrogate, Scarborough, and high-growth areas.
5. **Endorse local refinements**, such as the Green Party's proposed Hammerton/Tockwith/Tollerton groupings.

This revised structure would deliver electoral equality that is not just numerical, but fair and functional; community identities that are visible and respected; and a council structure equipped to deliver effective, representative, and convenient local government for the long term.

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## Appendix A: Comparative Data & Illustrative Cases

### A1. Councillor Numbers Before and After Reorganisation

Structure	Councillors	Change	% Reduction
Pre-2023 (Two-tier)	301	–	–
Current (post-LGR)	90	–211	–70%
Proposed (Council)	89	–212	–70.4%
Proposed (This Model)	~100	–201	–67%

### A2. Large Rural Unitaries – Area and Councillor Comparison

Authority	Area (km <sup>2</sup> )	Councillors	Area per Cllr (km <sup>2</sup> )	Devolved Governance
North Yorkshire	8,053	89 (proposed)	90.5	No
North Yorkshire	8,053	100 (proposed)	80.5	No
Wiltshire	3,255	98	33.2	Yes (Area Boards)
Somerset	3,452	110	31.4	Yes (Local Networks)

### **A3. Illustrative Division: Hammerton & Surrounds**

The proposed Hammerton division covers a wide east-west corridor, crossing the A1(M) and splitting grouped parishes. One councillor would be responsible for 20 parishes, spread across poor rural transport infrastructure. Some grouped parishes (e.g. Cattal, Hunsingore, Walshford) are split across divisions, disrupting local governance and risking community confusion.

A better alignment, as proposed by the Green Party, groups Hammerton, Tockwith, Moor Monkton and allied communities into a coherent rural division that respects shared identity, catchment areas, and parish cooperation.

### **A4. Cost Impact of Additional Councillors**

- Estimated cost per councillor (allowances + overhead): ~£20,000/year
- 11 extra councillors = £220,000/year
- North Yorkshire Council net revenue budget (2023): ~£800m
- Cost impact: ~0.0275% of net budget

This investment would significantly improve accessibility, scrutiny and resilience without burdening the public purse.

KIRK HAMMERTON PARISH COUNCIL