

From: [Haslam, Stuart \(Councillor\)](#)
To: [reviews](#)
Subject: Bolton Igbce review council size.
Date: 30 September 2020 23:28:24
Attachments: [Council numbers - TH ammend.docx](#)

Dear Sir,

Please find attached the case of the Conservative Group on Bolton Council for maintaining the size of Bolton Council at 60 members in the forthcoming local government review for Bolton MBC.

Please confirm receipt.

Thank you

Stuart Haslam (Councillor)
Secretary, Bolton Council Conservative Group



This e-mail and any attached files are confidential and may also be legally privileged. They are intended solely for the intended addressee. If you are not the addressee please e-mail it back to the sender and then immediately, permanently delete it. Do not read, print, re-transmit, store or act in reliance on it. This e-mail may be monitored by Bolton Council in accordance with current regulations.

This footnote also confirms that this e-mail message has been swept for the presence of computer viruses currently known to Bolton Council. However, the recipient is responsible for virus-checking before opening this message and any attachment.

Unless expressly stated to the contrary, any views expressed in this message are those of the individual sender and may not necessarily reflect the views of Bolton Council.

<http://www.bolton.gov.uk/>

Bolton – question of numbers

Bolton Council has had 60 members since the 1980 Boundary Review. This review implemented a reduction of 9 from the initial 69 members elected under the 1973 Local Government Act. Under that 1973 re-organisation there were also 10 members of the Greater Manchester Council from Bolton MBC until that body was abolished in 1986 and Bolton council assumed direct and indirect control of the former GMC functions.

The 60 members model has served Bolton and the electorate well with councils of varying majorities and varying political compositions, from an overall majority of 1, through to three parties with almost identical numbers to the present minority control. At all stages councillors have been able to maintain a balance between their representative role in the local community and the role as executive/cabinet members with scrutiny challenge. This has sometimes worked better than at other times but generally the balance has been about right.

From the issues around a growing population, one which is forecast to increase further in the immediate future, to the added pressures of a changing and increasing role for local government. Many such issues are important and add to the role and duties of elected members. It is not just the current Covid 19 pandemic but issues such as climate change, clean air policies and planning for future growth all of which are high on the political agenda both locally and nationally. Any major reduction in the current 60 members would place a serious and potentially unworkable burden on elected members.

There is an increasing role for members to serve on committees and groups under Greater Manchester Combined Authority as that body assumes greater devolved powers including wider functions, including but not limited to rail and transport delivery and spatial planning.

These place an even greater range of functions and duties on local government than those undertaken by the former Greater Manchester Council. Unless Bolton is properly represented, with sufficient members to develop policies and implement these duties and functions with others to independently scrutinise such functions, Bolton residents could be seriously disadvantaged.

The present political balance of the Council also brings an interesting dynamic. Since the executive model was introduced nearly 20 years ago parties generally, certainly the three parties which have run Bolton Council in that time have accepted that a cabinet/executive of ten members provides a reasonable and workable number of members undertaking the range of functions of the council. It also provides for a pool of councillors in the controlling group but not in the cabinet to serve on scrutiny committees, policy development groups and as chairmen of non-cabinet functions such as planning committee.

This helps to ensure transparency between the executive and scrutiny functions of the council.

In the matter of the role of councillors as “community champion” and representatives of their local community there is a further interesting dynamic. A good example of this is that increasingly during the current Covid 19 pandemic members have been asked and encouraged repeatedly to act as the local voice in helping to broadcast important messages. It seems increasingly to be the case that social media is playing a greater role in this and in many cases councillors are to the fore.

Any reduction in the number of elected members could also potentially lead to a less representative cross section of the Bolton community serving as members as younger people, balancing family life and careers could be less inclined to take on the additional duties of being an elected member. It would certainly place an unreasonable burden on members seeking to balance their executive and representative roles.

There are those who suggest a reduction in the size of the Council as a cost cutting exercise. To do so would for the reasons cited above seriously reduce the ability of councillors to work efficiently and to exercise proper democratic oversight of the duties with the purview of Bolton Council.

The current councillor/electorate ratio in Bolton is not dissimilar to other peer group councils, particularly those single tier authorities, mainly metropolitan boroughs, operating with increased and increasing devolved powers and duties.

There is no evidence (outside of the need for the current restrictions due to emergency pandemic response) to suggest members are carrying out less ward surgeries since the last review, indeed patterns, behaviour and best practice supported by local parties indicate the trend is for these to increase in number. Indeed as residents’ move online’ a reaction by local people who want to maintain a face to face contact has become more important and desired.

There is still demand and projection for extra housing within the borough which will lead to further population growth and therefore greater demand on the time of council members to serve new and extra residents.

For these reasons Bolton Council Conservative Group believes the current membership of Bolton Council at 60 provides for the most efficient and democratic operation of the council.