

Gateshead

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Comment text:

Please find attached a submission to the Commission.

John Adams

Cllr John Adams

Secretary
Labour Group
Gateshead Council

Attached Documents:

- 230710 - boundary commission.docx

GATESHEAD COUNCIL LABOUR GROUP

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10 July 2023

Dear Sir / Madam

Re - Electoral Review of Gateshead: Number of Councillors

I am writing as part of the public consultation you have launched inviting proposals for how many councillors Gateshead should have on and after 2026.

I note that your Chief Executive Jolyon Jackson has written to Sheena Ramsey as Gateshead Council Chief Executive on 16 May. This letter explicitly said:

“In deciding the new number of councillors, we will consider:

- The way the Council is led, makes decisions, and operates.*
- The way the Council’s work is scrutinised by councillors in order to ensure that the Council is properly run and publicly accountable.*
- The Council’s interaction with, and representation, on other local and regional bodies”*

I take it from this paragraph, that your review does not seek to decide how the Council is led or makes decisions, that it will not decide how the Council’s work is scrutinised, nor how we interaction with other local or regional bodies. Rather that these are decisions for us as a Council.

I am also aware of a submission made by the Gateshead Liberal Democrat Group, which makes very specific and detailed proposals on how many Cabinet Members there must be, how the Senior Management of the Council should be organised, how many Overview and Scrutiny Committees should exist, and so on. This submission does not “consider the way the Council is led, makes decisions, and operates” – rather it seeks to change it. It does not “consider the way the Council’s work is scrutinised” – rather it seeks to change it.

If I may submit, the way to change the arrangements in the way the Council is organised is not through the work of the Local Government Boundary Commission, it is by changing the constitution. The submission should be ignored in these respects.

I note also that the submission says “there is no regular system through which portfolio holders are made accountable to backbenchers”. This is incorrect. I think they mean that there is currently no specific agenda item on the Council Agenda which says “Cabinet Report”, which did used to exist in Gateshead and allowed a discussion on a report which contained *ad hoc* items of interest. However, Cabinet members are accountable for all substantive reports which need to be approved at Council. The Housing portfolio member is clearly accountable for 30 Business plan of the Housing Revenue

**Leader
Cllr Martin Gannon**

**Chairman
Cllr Kevin Dodds**

**Secretary
Cllr John Adams**

Account, which needs to be approved by Council every year. Naturally there are many more similar examples.

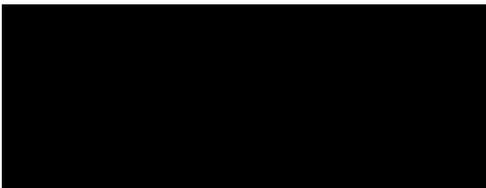
Furthermore, the Council's Constitution specifically says that Cabinet Members may be asked questions at full council (see Part 4 of the Constitution, Council Procedure Rules, para 8). The Opposition have not availed themselves of this option for many years, and only once to my recollection in nine years on the council, as the Council's minutes will confirm. Rather than try to use the Local Government Boundary Commission to change the governance and decision-making structure of the Council, they should avail themselves of existing provisions within the Constitution.

Another point I would make is that the submission says that "The argument that reducing the number of councillors would deter residents from standing for election would require evidence from other authorities but none is provided." There is a large body of research which concludes that time pressures dominate the list of potential barriers to people becoming councillors, particularly those with employment of caring responsibilities.¹ Time poverty clearly represents a significant barrier to many people becoming councillors. Long working hours, lone parents or both parents working, and an ever-widening range of opportunities for filling spare time can act to deter people from becoming councillors.

Clearly, if the number of councillors is cut the amount of case work will not - there will be a higher workload for each councillor. Similarly, the potential creation of a Metro Mayor will lead to an increase in Councillors' interaction with, and representation on, other local and regional bodies. You may end up concluding that this is a justifiable increase, but it is a simple fact that there will be an increase.

Finally, I would argue that Gateshead is an inclusive council, not one where a small number of people make all the decisions. Our motto is "In Unity, Progress", and achieving unity means debate, discussion and inclusivity. Excluding elected members is not the Gateshead way.

Yours sincerely



Cllr John Adams

Secretary
Labour Group
Gateshead Council

¹ Hands, D., Taylor, S., Featherstone, R. & Bovaird, T. (2007) Research Report 2. Understanding the Barriers and Incentives to Becoming or Remaining a Councillor in England. London: CLG