

Gateshead

Personal Details:

Name: [REDACTED]
Email: [REDACTED]
Postcode: [REDACTED]
Organisation Name: (Member of the public)

Comment text:

I currently live in the Deckham ward, but my postal address, post code, children's primary school (based on catchment area) and the local services I access are all in Low Fell. I don't really mind where the boundaries are - it makes no difference to me if my ballot paper says Deckham or Low Fell, but as I access local services in Low Fell, I do sometimes feel that I get no say in the community we're part of due to an arbitrary electoral boundary. It's not a huge issue for me, but something that's work taking into account given you're currently asking for views.

At the moment, the current set up of Gateshead Council is, sadly, not working as efficiently as it should - or at least not to an outside observer. We're seeing cuts to essential services, the closing of leisure facilities despite huge opposition from residents, lack of investment in public spaces despite facing very high levels of council tax. I'm not sure if changing the ward boundaries would actually address any of this, but I feel like we have to try something different as, at the moment, there seems to be no ambition or vision for the borough. It doesn't feel like an inspiring place to live at the moment and I'm considering if it's somewhere I actually want to bring up my young children, despite having lived in Gateshead all my life apart from when I was at university. Perhaps an overhaul of the ward boundaries and their representatives would address this; perhaps not. But if the current set up isn't working, then maybe we owe it to the residents of the borough to try something different.

For what it's worth, I appreciate the council are in a really difficult - nigh on impossible - position with cuts and the rising costs of things like EHCPs and adult social care. I am more than happy for my council tax to go towards supporting our most vulnerable residents across the borough, not just in my ward - that's what I want it to be used for. However, I think the council should be more transparent about funding and spending - although it is complex and there are numerous competing priorities and quite simply not enough funding, it can be frustrating to see (or perceive) residents' views not being taken into account or the council paying lip service to 'consultations' when decisions have already been made.

Councillors should be mindful of how they speak to and about residents - there are a lot of unacceptable comments levelled at the council on social media, but quite often I've seen councillors respond rudely or dismissively to people who are politely making valid points or simply raising a question. This erodes trust in the council as a whole, creates reputational damage and further breeds the misconception that councillors don't care or see themselves as 'above' the average resident of Gateshead.

Additionally, it can be frustrating to see the council sometimes making what appear to be rash and poorly thought through decisions and then the resultant U-turns. It creates an impression of mismanagement, lack of foresight and wasting already stretched financial resources. Examples include the cardboard bin trial that never came to fruition beyond a minimal number of streets, turning the flyover into a cycle lane, or the proposed segregated cycleway on Valley Drive (I add here that I am in favour of LTNs but to gain wider public support they need to be properly planned, researched, communicated and thought through). Schemes are either started and abandoned or left to fizzle out. Perhaps new boundaries with councillors who are more representative of each ward could tackle this sort of thing more effectively.

Attached Documents:

None attached