

Councillor Graham Gibbons  
Chairman of the Electoral and Boundary  
Review Committee  
Kent County Council  
Members' Suite  
Sessions House  
County Hall  
Maidstone ME14 1XO

19 September 2012

*Dear Councillor Gibbons*

COUNTY COUNCIL ELECTORAL DIVISIONS

Thank you for your letter of 12 September to the Commission's Chief Executive, Alan Cogbill, about the Commission's work in a number of Kent districts, and its potential impact on Kent county divisions.

As you recognise in your letter, there are no direct implications for county divisions resulting from these district reviews. Equally, however, you are correct that in any electoral review of the County's electoral arrangements, the Commission would seek to use existing district wards (and parishes) as the building blocks for new divisions.

The Commission has no current plans to review the County's electoral arrangements. However, from the electoral data available to us (December 2008 electoral registers), it would appear that the County meets our criteria for a review to address electoral imbalances. The data indicates that 36 per cent of divisions have electoral variances in excess of 10 percent of the average for the county council area and one division (Romney Marsh) has a variance of 38 per cent from the average.

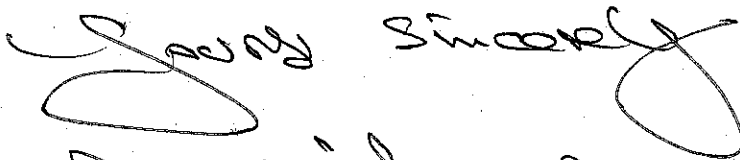

Clearly, this data is some four years' out of date, and the Commission will wish verify the current position following the publication of this year's registers. However, there would be no prospect of the Commission considering any review of Kent until 2015/15 financial year at the earliest.

I note your point that the Council would not wish to see any increase in the number of multi-member divisions, or any difficulties in reducing the number of such divisions, as a

consequence of a review. Clearly, the Commission does have the power to recommend multi-member electoral areas. However, since the last review of the County, new legislation has been introduced. Under section 57 of the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009, a local authority that elects by whole council (as Kent does), can request the Commission to undertake a single-member electoral area review. There is a presumption in legislation that the Commission should accede to such a request, and seek to provide single-member electoral areas throughout the local authority area.

Of course, the Commission cannot guarantee to deliver a uniform pattern of single-member electoral areas. If such a pattern were to conflict with the Commission's statutory criteria in terms of electoral equality, community identities and interests, and effective and convenient local government, the criteria takes precedence.

I hope this is helpful. If you have any other queries, please do not hesitate to contact me.

  
  
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