



To: Sir Tony Redmond
Local Government Boundary Commission for England
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Ask for: Peter Sass

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Dear Sir Tony,

Kent County Council Boundary Review

On behalf of KCC's political group leaders, thank you for visiting County Hall on Monday of this week for the purpose of providing us with a further opportunity to provide evidence to justify a Council size of 84, in light of your recommendation that it should reduce to 81.

The group leaders were of the view that, by basing your recommendation that the council size should be restricted to 81, simply because this is near the maximum figure currently shown in the range of Kent's 'family' of CIPFA of local authority partners, leaves us with the overriding impression that the Commission's rationale is based predominantly on statistical convenience and little else. The group leaders were keen to be assured that account has been taken of Kent's local circumstances as set out in the County Council's very detailed submission on council size, which detailed the onerous governance arrangements at Member level and the heavy and increasing workload of all Members, both in relation to formal meetings and locally in their divisions, not to mention the significant projected increase in the electorate population increase expected in Kent compared with many of its CIPFA comparators.

The ratio of electors to Kent County Councillors within the CIPFA group is already one of the highest. If the council size for Kent County Council is 81, this will only make this ratio even more disproportionate, as the attached table shows. We are concerned at the significant impact this will have on the ability of Members to continue to serve increasingly large numbers of electors, at the same time as being much more involved in commissioning, and also concerned from the electorate's point of view about getting access to and help from their local County Member. The Commission needs to explain in far greater detail their decision on Council size from this "democratic deficit" point of view.

We spoke on Monday about the County Council's decision to move to being a strategic commissioning authority, which will involve all Members working harder and in different ways. A new cross-party Commissioning Advisory Board has been set up since the Council's submission to the Commission on Council size, which will meet fortnightly and meeting dates have already been scheduled for the next 12 months. This is clear evidence of the strength of the Member-led authority here in Kent and the desire of all Members to be involved at a much earlier stage in deliberating and making recommendations as to how services should be commissioned going forward. The new approach to commissioning will also mean heavier workloads for other Committees, notably Cabinet Committees and the Scrutiny Committee, although this hasn't yet been quantified.

The point was also made about the ability of the County Council to deal effectively and successfully with any new powers that might be transferred to the regions in any future decision of Central Government on devolution. Reducing the Council size at this stage would be premature.

Whilst writing, I would like to reiterate that 4 of the 12 District and Borough Councils in Kent will not be in a position to release polling district information before 1 December because of their own boundary reviews, which then needs to be analysed in relation to electorate forecasts. Polling District information is crucial for political parties and others to be able to make their own recommendations and suggestions on division proposals and it is, therefore, our very strong view that the phase 1 consultation on division boundaries should not begin until the New Year to avoid having a consultation period that runs over the Christmas and New Year period.

I look forward to hearing from you following the Commission's Board meeting next week.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you require any further information.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Peter Sass', written in a cursive style.

Mr Peter Sass
Head of Democratic Services