

Written Representation from Cllr Mark Warters, received 02/07/25

## **Agenda Item 7 Local Government Boundary Commission of England Electoral Review.**

Council size - Task & Finish Group.

It is concerning that the start of what will, if it follows the pattern of the last Local Government Boundary Commission of England (LGBCE) Electoral Review into City of York Council (CYC), be little more than an exercise in political gerrymandering run for the benefit of the political groupings on CYC is to start by keeping public involvement at arms length.

Why isn't there full and open public involvement of this - Council size - the most meaningful part of the process?

Why the need for a separate group of councillors to gather and no doubt sanitise public views before council members decide on a recommendation as to council size?

The LGBCE ought to be conducting the review of Council size in the same way as the rest of the review by fully disseminating information to the York public, Parish Councils and Residents Groups and inviting views on CYC size.

The views of political parties and politicians currently elected will of course be clouded by a degree of 'self-preservation' that will not be conducive to deciding upon Council size with proper objectivity.

How likely are the political parties going to be to advocate a decisive reduction in Council size to reflect current governance arrangements (which have changed on the regional level significantly since the last review) if such a reduction that is long overdue to reflect local financial circumstances would involve reducing numbers of politicians?

If the starting point of this Electoral Review is from such a position of political self interest then how can the process be deemed to have any real value?

This Electoral Review ought to offer real opportunity for change and a significant reduction in cost for York council taxpayers, but will this opportunity be taken?

Since the last Electoral Review in York CYC have along with North Yorkshire Council (NYC) agreed to the formation of another hugely expensive bureaucracy - the York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority with the elected Mayor.

This system has to date created a significant overlap of responsibilities and function with CYC and NYC so it is only right and proper to seriously consider why CYC and NYC need such large numbers of councillors, a

reduction in councillors to rebalance the cost burden of 'democracy' to the council taxpayer needs to be considered.

A significant reduction in council member size to reflect changed responsibilities would of course open the door to a reduction in senior staffer levels at both CYC and NYC not just in terms of governance but across all functions where responsibilities overlap with the Combined Authority (CA).

Just recently the CYC Director of Governance (DOG) was clear in a response to me that it was considered that CYC had no role to play in Community Safety and Policing with such responsibilities now with the CA and Mayor, just one small example<sup>1</sup>.

Since the last LGBCE review in York there has been much talk of returning CYC to a 'Committee System' of governance from the ongoing, expensive failure of the 'Executive' system (elected dictator system) but unfortunately that is all there has ever been - talk!

In opposition political parties talk about wanting to bring in a modern committee system but whichever party takes control of the Council at election power is then concentrated within a small 'Executive' with of course allowances to match, currently 8 members effectively sidelining the other 39 members for the full four year electoral cycle.

A glance over the other CYC Committees sees how the other roles are divided up but how many of these committees and roles are needed? How many are just talking shops that if the whole Council was organised along the lines of a committee system could see a reduction in the numbers of councillors needed with those on such a system making meaningful contributions?

There will shortly be pressure from Government to reduce the role of Councillors in the planning process with the likelihood that many applications going in front of planning committees will no longer do so, a clear reduction in role for councillors.

As for Scrutiny Committees there would be no need for such committees under the modern committee system of governance as I stated to the

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<sup>1</sup> *Note: in relation to the petition referred to above, the advice which was provided was that the petitioners would be better off petitioning the Combined Authority (which actually has the policing function) rather than CYC. ... as they acknowledge themselves, much of this is outside [CYC's] control, and therefore the petition should be directed to the combined authority, for the attention of the Mayor and the Deputy Mayor for Policing, Fire and Crime.*

recent scrutiny review, another compelling reason to look at reduction of CYC Council size.

There are plenty of reasons to advocate for a meaningful reduction in Council size in York leaving aside those above, the front line functionality of this and of course all other Local Authorities is much reduced, the effects of which are very noticeable to the people of York.

Shouldn't the size of the Council membership be reduced to reflect that new reality?

Shouldn't the question of reducing the size and cost of maintaining a huge political councillor system be put to the people who actually fund this? Questions asked directly by the LGBCE to the public rather than an 'arms length' CYC 'consultation' via a council grouping with a vested interest in maintaining the status quo?

I will be strongly advocating that CYC sets an example for the rest of the country and puts forward a significant reduction in Council membership to reflect the reduction in duties it has and services it provides - a sensible figure would seem to be 25.

Perhaps then with a committee system of governance there might be the opportunity for sensible and effective working which has clearly not been evident for many years under the current system.

This LGBCE review provides another opportunity for a sea change in direction of CYC, will that opportunity be taken?

I think most know the answer.

As a related matter - just what has happened to the 'Community Governance Review' here in York? it seems to be years out of time and without the review of Parish Boundaries and indeed the requests to create new Parish/Town Councils will cause a good degree of confusion should the LGBCE review tinker with Ward Boundaries across Parish Boundaries.

Councillor Mark Warters.

July 2nd 2025