

Lancaster City Council

Personal Details:

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Organisation Name: County Councillor for Lancaster South East

Comment text:

Good Afternoon On Thursday 11 November, University and Scotforth Rural ward elected Cllr Fabiha Askari as their new councillor. Fabiha is going to be an excellent councillor, she already has a history of service & campaigning for both individuals (providing material support to refugees & asylum seekers arriving in Lancashire) & action on systemic racism in higher education. Both issues of keen concern to her residents and engaging not only the largest employer in her ward, but one of the largest employers in the district. Fabiha also happens to be someone very rare within local government, as she describes herself, she is a 'young, brown, outspoken Muslim woman' & in a campaign where all her opponents had the benefit of being both white and male, she is the candidate who took the most personal abuse. A sad reality for too many women in public life today. Fabiha represents University and Scotforth Rural ward, which is very much a ward of two parts. The numerically dominant part is the students resident at Lancaster University – a younger than average, multi-cultural mix representing a cross-section of England and the Commonwealth. The other part of the ward is rural and agricultural. University and Scotforth Rural ward is special amongst council wards in that it routinely elects young people – late teens & early twenties. It's also a ward that has repeatedly elected BAME councillors in recent years, a feature distinct from many others in the Lancaster district. This does lead to some tensions, there's one farm where every time I've knocked in the last five or so years, I've had the same conversation: that Scotforth Rural residents feel unrepresented by their young councillors and overwhelmed by the interests of Lancaster University. They assume their councillors to be transient, although Fabiha has lived in Lancaster for a decade, going to school as well as university here. This feeling appears to have led to Scotforth Rural Parish writing to the Boundary Commission urging that they be separated from Lancaster University's resident student population in the current re-warding that is taking place. Disappointingly the Boundary Commission appears to have accepted this argument. Doing what is all too often done in public policy and public administration – privileging older people over younger people in the electoral system. As a researcher and board member of the World YWCA, I know that many institutions are moving to strengthen young people's voices and participation in public policy and as policy makers. For example, take the work currently being funded by the World Health Organisation and the United Nations Foundation working with big six youth organisations (YWCA, YMCA, Scouts, Guides, Duke of Edinburgh Award, and the Red Cross/Crescent). As former Leader of Lancaster City Council, I also know that rural issues have strong representation from many wards across the district. As the county councillor for Lancaster South East, which includes all of University and Scotforth Rural ward, I'm grateful for the opportunity to represent those rural residents, their communities and the issues important to them. I am, after all, the niece of a dairy farmer. Bringing this all together, while I understand the concerns of Scotforth Rural Parish Council and rural residents of the University and Scotforth Rural ward, I think the larger injustice is for the Boundary Commission to abolish the ward that routinely elects young people and young BAME people to the city council. I call on the Boundary Commission to re-examine its proposals for University and Scotforth Rural ward and to instead respect the importance of having young people as representatives and policy makers in Lancaster City Council. Yours sincerely Cllr Dr Erica Lewis
County Councillor for John O'Gaunt Ward County Councillor for Lancaster South East

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