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Local Government Boundary Commission for England 19 April 2022

Dear Sir

### **Proposals for Liverpool City Council**

I refer to your website, inviting comments on the warding proposals for Liverpool. As when the wards were last reviewed, I was unaware that the process was taking place until late in the timetable. Last time round, you indicated that you felt that many of my suggestions had merit, but they had been put forward too late in the process to be acted upon. Potentially, I may be in same position again as, in addition to some detailed comments, I do wish to raise some matters of principle. As background, I have a doctorate in population geography, and considerable knowledge of historic administrative and ecclesiastic boundaries in the Liverpool area.

### **The government's intentions**

This review has been brought about through the government's dissatisfaction/concerns about the way Liverpool City Council has been run. My understanding was that the government intended a drastic change to the present arrangements – reducing the council to something like three dozen councillors. In that context, the government considered that single member wards would be appropriate – as three-member wards would be so large as to lose their 'local' aspect. A consequence of this approach would be that the whole council would need to be elected each time, as splitting the election into thirds would be confusing. The way the review has progressed, it seems that the main intention has been lost. What is now being proposed is a Council of broadly the same size as at present, but picking up on the single member ward theme which would only have been relevant if the council was much smaller. It seems very likely that, despite the proposed changes, the Council will end up with broadly the same councillors, be run in a similar way to the present council, and the government's purpose in instigating the review has been completely lost in the process.

### **Mix of single and 2 or 3 member wards**

You mention, numerous times, in your proposals the need to keep the number of electors per councillor within a narrow band, for reasons of equality. However, nowhere do you discuss or consider whether having a mix of single and 2 or 3 seat wards provides equality for the electorate. Successful candidates for election as ward councillors come from many backgrounds. They have varying levels of enthusiasm, and various personal qualities – such as the ability to perform well in council debates, or working to solve people's difficulties in the background. Each has their own skills and short-comings, expertise, experience, knowledge, and interests. If a resident lives in a 2 or 3 member ward, they will have a choice of representative to take an issue to, and can choose which of the ward's representatives they believe has the best skillset or attitude to assist them. A resident in a single-councillor ward has no such choice – they are 'stuck' with the one councillor representing that ward, who may, in the view of the resident, lack the knowledge, interest or skill necessary to satisfactorily take a matter forward. In multi-seat wards, the councillors for that ward can discuss local matters between them and allocate tasks; in single-member wards the councillor is on his/her own. I thus need to ask to what extent you have considered the equality/quality of representation achieved when most areas are single-member wards, but a proportion of the electorate will benefit from having the availability of more than 1 representative on the Council.

### **Whole Council elected every four years**

This matter may be beyond your remit. You will, of course, be aware that metropolitan and other large urban authorities generally elect their members one-third at a time in a four year cycle. My understanding is that Liverpool will have a local election only every four years and the whole council will be elected each time. The positives of the 'normal' arrangement are that the Council benefits from the 'barometer' of receiving direct public feedback generally annually on its performance, the make-up of the Council evolves gradually over time, and the electorate is given the opportunity to change the balance of the Council in most years. It seems that in Liverpool, with an election only every four years (frequently fought on national government performance rather than local issues), sweeping changes can occur very suddenly. A more concerning issue, insofar as democracy is concerned (which I understand was the government's concern in the first place) is that the winning party at an election knows that it can pursue whatever policies it chooses to for four years without challenge from the electorate. Have you challenged or asked for justification for this approach?

### **Arbitrariness of splitting or not splitting communities**

In some cases, you are proposing that a community area should have 2 (or 3) representatives, but in other broadly similar instances, you have split a community into number of single-seat wads. It appears that where you could find some easily definable line within an area that happened to result in an appropriate split in the size of the electorate you split an area into a number of single-seat wards, but in other areas where an easily defined split line would not produce the right balance in the number of voters you have been content to leave an area as a 2 or 3 seat ward. In naming wards as, for example, xxxx North and xxxx South, you have implied that this is a single community being split arbitrarily, because there happens to be a convenient dividing line. In many cases, these communities have a single main focal point/main shopping area, yet are being split, when other similar areas are not split.

Let's take an example. You have proposed Garston North ward and a Garton South & Cressington ward – an easy to define line along the A561 has made it possible to produce two wards with satisfactory electorate numbers. But let us look at the Garston South and Cressington ward. It basically consists of two residential areas – Garston 'under the bridge' on the one hand, and Cressington and Grassendale Parks on the other. Not only are the two areas completely severed from each other physically by the freightliner terminal and Garson docks, but the gap between them in terms of housing type, and socio-economic characteristics is even greater, and they have no commonality of community facilities. The former area has much more in common with the main part of Garston village, and the latter with the proposed Grassendale ward to the north. Maybe you would have split the area in a different way if you could have found an easily defined NE to SW line to split Garson north (there doesn't seem to be one). My point is that you have split Garston into two one-seat wards, rather than one two-seat ward quite arbitrarily, because there happened to be an easily defined line, rather than because it makes community sense to do so. This has meant that Garston has been split, but as another example, Childwall has not. So Childwall residents will benefit from a choice of representative, whereas Garston residents will not. I would therefore urge you to recombine the two Garston wards into a 2-seat ward. Another example is that you have, in effect, split the Woolton and Hunts Cross area into two wards – one with one member, the other with two – so some Woolton residents will have a choice of 2 representatives, whereas others will have only one.

## **Overly optimistic development and population growth forecasts**

Lots of the proposed wards in the city centre and surrounding area have a 2019 electorate way below the threshold that you have set. I'm quite sure that in the current economic climate, the high levels of new development needed to increase their population to the levels estimated for 2027 will just not happen. The electorates of these wards are likely to be grossly over-represented – and it is also worth noting that these parts of Liverpool are renowned for extremely low turnout at local government elections – meaning that the number of active voters could be embarrassingly small. There is also the potential challenge that the ward disposition proposed will give one political party an unfair advantage over others, as the areas concerned tend to strongly favour Labour party candidates. I would recommend that where these inner wards are proposed to have two members, that they should have only one member in the 2023 elections (and Vauxhall combined with Waterfront North, and Ropewalks with one of the adjoining wards). If, as 2027 (or 2031) approaches, they could easily be converted to 2-member wards on a ward by ward basis. I realise that this would reduce the size of the city council in the interim - but I'm not clear why the Council needs to be as large as 85 members anyway.

## **Detail comments**

It is clearly a very difficult task to come up with a set of ward proposals which meet the strict criteria that you have been set so it is not my intention to nit-pick for the sake of it. I would say that estimating future population levels for very small areas is fraught with difficulties and, when 2027 arrives, I'm sure that many of the actual electorate sizes will be noticeably different to those which you have expected, which casts doubt on the virtue of trying to equalise electorates within the narrow limits you have been set. However, we must work within the constraints and information which we have been given. I think that there are a number of areas where you have attempted to claim that a commonality of interest exists across a proposed ward area when that isn't really the case. However, as I've already conceded, the constraints mean that this cannot be avoided.

I would, however question some of the proposed ward names that you have homed in on, and a few details of boundaries.

### *The Woolton and Gateacre area*

Whilst Hollytree Road makes an easily defined boundary between Woolton and Gateacre, a more accurate boundary (with minimal impact on electorate numbers) would put The Nook, Woodsome Park, Ribble Road, Cherry Vale and both sides of the eastern half of Hollytree Road in Gateacre, with all of Hunts Cross Avenue, both sides of the west half of Hollytree Road, and Glenville Close and also Oakgrove Gardens in Woolton.

### *The Allerton area and Calderstones*

The original township/civil parish boundary of Allerton was formed by Rose Lane and Green Lane to the north west, the railway line through Mossley Hill, West Allerton and South Parkway stations to the south west and south, and (slightly simplified) by Hillfoot Road and Menlove Avenue to the east side. The area was slowly transformed from isolated merchants' mansions of the nineteenth century to a residential suburb over the course of the twentieth century. In the mid-century, a large public sector housing estate was built in the south part of the area, and a new ecclesiastic parish of Springwood was formed to serve the area – so the naming of Springwood Ward is definitely appropriate. However, I would strongly recommend that the southern boundary of the ward be re-drawn along the more northerly railway line leading towards Hunts Cross station, rather than along

the southern line. Any changes, planning applications or issues relating to the Triumph Way industrial estate or the 'Hunts Cross' shopping park have a direct impact on the Hunts Cross area, and no impact at all on residents of Springwood – so the area between the two railway lines (which has no residents so therefore does not impact on electorate numbers) should be placed in Much Woolton and Hunts Cross ward rather than Springwood ward, so that the appropriate councillors deal with such issues.

Calderstones as an area has no historic status (ie it has never been the name of a ward, township, or ecclesiastic parish), but most residents of the area would be comfortable by defining it as being bound by Green Lane in the north west, the northern and eastern boundaries of your proposed Menlove Ward in the north and east, Yew Tree Road (including residences accessed from the SE side of that road) in the south east, Allerton Road in the south west, and either Harthill Road or Garth Drive in the west. Although the Ordnance Survey has regularly placed the name Calderstones overlapping some of the residential area to the west of Allerton Road, this is not correct. This is amply illustrated through there being two roads called 'The Beeches' in the area. The one located off Druids Cross Road is referred to as The Beeches, Calderstones, and the one off Allerton Road, as The Beeches, Allerton.

Thus, having no impact on electorate numbers as it contains only parkland, it would be much less confusing if the southern boundary of your proposed Menlove Ward, instead of being drawn along Menlove Avenue and Calderstones Road, instead followed Yew Tree Road, Allerton Road and Harthill Road, placing Calderstones Park in that ward – and renaming the Menlove Ward as 'Calderstones'. Your currently proposed Calderstones ward should more appropriately be renamed 'Allerton'.

#### *Childwall and Broadgreen*

The electorate for Childwall is slightly too large, and for Broadgreen too low. This can be improved by moving the boundary line west of Rocky Lane, keeping Glendevon Road and Staniforth Place in Childwall, but transferring Bowring Park Road and Orchard Avenue to Broadgreen ward, as these properties have no connections through to the area to the south, and are indeed considered locally to lie in Broadgreen, despite the obstruction caused by the M62 motorway.

#### *Knotty Ash and Dovecot*

Knotty Ash village is actually located in the proposed Sandfield Park ward. The majority of the populated part of Knotty Ash (the rectangle formed by Queens Drive, Alder Road, the loop line former railway, and the north boundary of Broadgreen hospital) is located in the proposed Broadgreen ward. The Blackmoor Drive roundabout marks the division between Knotty Ash and Dovecot. Thus the proportion of Knotty Ash which actually falls within the proposed Knotty Ash ward is minimal. In addition, the retail centre of Dovecot – Dovecot Place, on the south side of East Prescott Road is in the proposed Knotty Ash ward. Furthermore, only a small part of the proposed Dovecot North ward is actually thought of as Dovecot. I would therefore recommend the following name changes – Knotty Ash to be Dovecot South and Brookside; Dovecot South to be Dovecot Central; and Dovecot North to be Dovecot North and Princess.

#### *Croxteth Country Park and Aintree*

These two wards have taken their names from dominant features within their boundaries. However neither of these features are residential (Croxteth Country Park and Aintree Industrial Estate); and names for electoral wards should seek to associate themselves with the residents of the areas. The

population of the proposed Croxteth Country Park ward are almost entirely found within an area known simply as Croxteth Park – so the word ‘Country’ should be dropped from the name.

From a residential perspective, ‘Aintree’ is a parish in Sefton Council area, some distance to the north. There have been times when the name has ‘overflowed’ the City boundary, and in the past parts of Walton (as far south as the Black Bull/Longmoor Lane) have been part of a church of England parish bearing the name Aintree. Why the name Aintree was given to the Long Lane industrial estate many decades ago is unclear, but this area (certainly the residential part of it) is clearly part of Fazakerley. The name ‘Pirrie’ (after Pirrie Road, however this does not lie within the proposed ward) has been used historically as a ward name for the area, but the area is quite simply Fazakerley south west and that should be its ward name.

Historically, the relevant part of the township boundary between Walton and Fazakerley ran along Higher Lane and Seeds Lane – so half of the proposed Fazakerley West ward is not actually in Fazakerley. A more appropriate name would be Fazakerley North, or Fazakerley North & Melling Road.

#### *Toxteth and Dingle*

Toxteth Park was originally an ‘extra parochial’ area – outside of the historic parish system. Whilst it is difficult to believe today, it was once the monarch’s hunting ground with minimal development within it. So as development encroached on it at speed during the nineteenth century, there were no small settlements that could give their names to the new developments (unlike in the huge West Derby township). The Dingle (literally, a deep wooded valley or dell) was an attractive dell which ran from what is now the junction of Aigburth Road and Ullet Road to the Mersey following a line to the south west of Dingle Lane. A few large houses (including Dingle East and Dingle West) were located here. In 1835, the Borough of Liverpool was extended far as what became known as Dingle Lane, with The Dingle just beyond the Borough boundary. When development reached as far as Dingle Lane, the area ‘borrowed’ the name Dingle. The Dingle brook and dell have long since been destroyed, but the name has been retained by the area in the immediate vicinity of Dingle Lane – an area less extensive than the proposed Dingle South Ward. The name Toxteth has been adopted by the area whose focal point is the shopping area and geographic summit straddling Park Road near High Park Street. It would thus be far more appropriate for the Dingle South ward to be named simply Dingle Ward, Toxteth to be Toxteth East ward, and the Dingle North ward to be Toxteth West Ward.

#### *Clubmoor Area*

The Tue Brook marked the western boundary of the Walton on the Hill township and parish. In the last century, the Tue Brook was culverted and a road (Richard Kelly Drive) built broadly on the line of the stream. The Clubmoor parish can be broadly defined as lying west of the loop line former railway, and east of Richard Kelly Drive, Maiden Lane, Delamain Lane and Mill Bank. So almost no part of Clubmoor lies within the proposed Clubmoor West ward. That area lies within Walton, so that ward should really be named Walton South East. The ‘East’ descriptor can be removed from the Clubmoor East ward name.

#### *Paddington*

‘Paddington’ was originally a road which extended Brownlow Hill towards the top of Edge Hill. It was removed in the 1960s when ‘Paddington comprehensive school’ was built across it. The school became Archbishop Blanch school which was then relocated a few years ago and the area is in the

process of being redeveloped as Paddington Village. However it is not a residential 'village' – more an office/educational campus. The Paddington name is thus only associated with a very small area in a corner of the proposed ward. The majority of the residential element of the ward is the famous Georgian/early Victorian grid streets further south. The name 'Abercromby' (as a place, ward and even a Parliamentary constituency name) has been associated with the area covered by this proposed ward for over 100 years. So my strong preference would be to name this ward Abercromby as much better reflecting the residential part of the ward. I am aware that in the last few years, some have used the name 'Canning' to describe the Georgian area, so that could be an alternative name choice for the ward.

### **Alternative Warding Proposal**

It had not been my intention to put forward an alternative warding proposal. But having made all the points above, I am convinced that the electorate as a whole would be being offered a more equitable proposal if all the wards had two members. So I have examined the current proposals to see if single member wards could be combined in a genuinely meaningful way to produce such a scheme. I believe that such an arrangement is possible. Given that (subject to the minor amendments I've outlined above) I am not (with small exceptions below) creating new boundaries, the 2027 electorate size for each of these wards should be acceptable. Whilst I am firmly of the view that the population growth assumed for many of the central area wards is quite unrealistic, knowing that you would reject my further combining these wards, I have not put forward a plan which focuses on the current electorate size.

So my alternative warding arrangement keeps all the multiple member wards that you have already proposed, refers to my preferred ward names, and combines the remaining wards as follows (words in parenthesis are not part of the proposed names, but are there to avoid doubt as to the plan):

- Garston (includes north and south)\*
- Allerton (Springwood, and your Calderstones, my Allerton)
- Woolton Park & Gateacre
- Mossley Hill & Grassendale\*
- Aigburth & Riverside (includes Festival Gardens and half of Waterfront South)
- Sefton Park & St Michaels
- Greenbank & Penny Lane
- Church & Calderstones (your Menlove)
- Wavertree (Garden Suburb and village)
- Edge Hill & Arundel
- Princes Park & Dingle
- Toxteth (includes your Dingle North)
- Old Swan (east and west)
- Knotty Ash (ie Broadgreen, plus the ward you have called Knotty Ash, and I've called Dovecot South and Brookside)
- Dovecot (ie your Dovecot south and north, my Dovecot central and north/Princess)
- Stoneycroft & Sandfield Park
- Tuebrook
- Leyfield & Deysbrook (or it could be called West Derby)
- Croxteth Park & Muirhead
- Norris Green South (ie Norris Green East & west)
- Norris Green North & Clubmoor

- Fazakerley East & Croxteth
- Fazakerley West (includes your Aintree, my Fazakerley SW ward)
- Walton Vale & Orrell Park
- Walton Hall (includes your Clubmoor West, my Walton SE ward)
- Kirkdale (including Melrose)
- Everton (north and south)
- Vauxhall & Waterfront (includes waterfront north and half of waterfront south)

\* - given these combinations, I would propose moving the Long Lane area from your proposed Grassendale ward to my combined Garston ward, and part or all of Grassendale and Cressington Parks from your Garston south ward to my proposed Mossley Hill and Grassendale ward.

Note – Ropewalks to be split and absorbed into the four surrounding wards, all of which are short of electorate. There are an odd number of contiguous single member wards, hence my need to split Waterfront south. An alternative, keeping the council size to 85, would be to split your 2 member City Centre South ward – combining half with Ropewalks, and the other half with Waterfront South.

This plan would produce a slightly smaller number of councillors (83), but it would provide equality of representation for all citizens, and provide an option for two-yearly elections with half (42 then 41) the councillors elected at each election. I commend it to you.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposals. I trust that you will find my input of assistance.

Yours faithfully

