

North Northamptonshire Council

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Comment text:

I am a resident and Wellingborough Town Councillor for Isebrook Ward in Wellingborough. I also live in the present NNC Finedon Ward. I wish to make some general comments about the present Ward sizes and a specific comment about the NNC Ward I live in. Generally, I would be concerned about any reduction in Cllr numbers. I do understand work is being done to make the system more affordable but it remains important that people and communities from across the whole of NNC can retain some connection with our local communities and be heard and not swamped within the massive areas of many present NNC wards. The recent local government reorganisation in Northamptonshire has done little to help our county, its identity and most importantly the people, business and services contained in it. I personally see a great deal of chaos reigning as people, business and Cllrs alike all try and work out who is doing what now, even after nearly two years of NNC being in existence. I and many people I speak to locally feel NNC is an entity that floats around in the ether above us, that has no real base or face and as result it's difficult to pin down, see or speak to any human being when trying to get help or signpost residents for help. The services in our area were greatly suffering before reorganisation but now things have become so much worse. Some of this is down to the general national financial crisis but a great deal of it relates to the way NNC and WNC were created (inheriting a great deal of debt from the start, and now building up so much more) and the way it is being run. There is also a level of what can only be called 'arrogance' by many of the Council leaders (members) where by they seem unable to collaborate with residents, communities, business and the voluntary sector. Many of us understand and have lived through the immense financial difficulties over the last 12 years in our area, but even when the actions of the old Councils began to shrink we generally found a way and a willingness from the previous Councils to collaborate. It was never an equal relationship, but it was so much better than now. The arrival of such large wards which often cut across natural communities, and seem to further amplify the sense of remoteness of the new NNC Council, has just made everything so much worse. The services were generally poor across the board before but by communities stepping up and taking the lead in so many ways we managed to close some gaps for the better, but now.... The new approach by NNC feels like (a) firstly you can't find them or the right person to speak to, (b) secondly if you are lucky enough to find some way of communicating a need it's difficult to get a reply from a human, (c) many statutory required functions don't seem to be accessible from some parts of the County, such as effective housing support and advice for Wellingborough residents (this used to be a pretty effective and fairly easy to engage with service, but now I am told Wellingborough residents are being advised to approach NNC staff based in Kettering to get their needs even heard, let alone met, (d) fourthly, it's almost impossible to collaborate with parts of the Council to support or co-deliver practical actions any more - before I became a Town Cllr, I was part of a community group that cleared tonnes of rubbish from our streets, alleyways and parks, in partnership with old councils or their partners, now I can't seem to get NNC to help just clearing a small section of pavement and road swamped with leaves and rubbish, even when we offer to do it with them - so it's like they can't come out and help because they are inundated, but they are don't support us to take the initiative ourselves either. The list goes on. The relevance to the boundary changes are that many people are extremely unhappy with the change, we have lost our sense of closeness with our council, and any sense that they are out there trying to 'bat for' or stand up for us. Cllrs play a key role in enabling and supporting that sense of 'going into bat' for people. But with the vast NNC Ward size at present, and even with 3 Cllrs covering this area, in our ward at least, they all seem very invisible. Often leaving Ward Town or Parish Cllrs like myself to be the front line of contact for people. The Finedon Ward in the NNC area contains the whole of Finedon Town /village and two significantly sized wards in Wellingborough. I would say 2/3's of the constituents live in the two wards in Wellingborough yet 2 of the 3 NNC Cllrs representing our area live in Finedon, and seem to have a view that most of

their work should be done there. The 2 Town wards they cover in Wellingborough are also the two most ethnically mixed in the town and one is one of the most deprived areas in the county and country, but it doesn't feel that any of these issues are matters that the NNC Councillors are really getting to grips with by supporting these significant differences between these key parts of the overall Ward. When you are planning boundary changes, please look to change Ward boundaries to fit more with natural areas of affinity, and communality between communities, as presently almost all of the eastern side of Wellingborough is not doing well because of linking to a completely different community, with a completely different set of needs and service requirements. The deprivation indicators which bring higher levels of funding and resource are being skewed for this area because the measures of support seem to be more based on assessments related to the smaller more affluent area, than the larger more deprived area. Matching up areas under NNC ward boundaries like this is really disadvantaging communities like these as a result, we are losing out on new money and services and even the levels of improved health support required because of the 'mismatch'. Perhaps the other thing to consider is how the Town and Parish Councils fit into the NNC Ward areas. These more grass roots level entities should help people feel more heard and supported at a very micro level, but the now vast mis-match in available resources between the two kinds of Council is just leaving a big whole where the much more local District and Borough Councils used to be, who were much better resourced, even if much less than the County Council. Now if NNC don't provide support, or are so stretched that they can't help people or communities, parish and Town Councils are just too small to offer help and fill the gap. So whilst you may see the need to rationalise boundaries, reducing numbers of Cllrs or making wards even more piecemeal (by adding unrelated areas together) could only serve to further destabilise what feels even more now like a failing local government system. You could point out to NNC that they need to help address some of these major service failings and 'being heard' imbalances now within our local decision making structures before looking to reorganise NNC ward areas at all. Without this any reductions in Cllrs numbers will just serve to make people and local communities feel even more alienated from each other and any sense of community identity which we may have had and enjoyed before. Most people I know don't see themselves as NN folk, much more we are village or town residents and Northamptonshire citizens. These other names (NNC and WNC) feel much more like administrative titles not groupings that many of us actually identify with. A further thing that could help is having clear role descriptions for local Councillors that residents or residents groups can hold them to account to, and some method of multi-Cllr wards having an agreement on where each Cllr should (geographically) focus their attention, making sure all parts of the Ward get served equally and fairly. Not leaving it to chance or any randomness of choice. My apologies if I have wandered from the point, but there is so much fundamentally 'not good' about what we are experiencing with NNC at present that to just focus on moving a line or boundary or two, would miss the urgency of the situation entirely. Thank you Cllr Marion Turner-Hawes Isebrook Ward Wellingborough Town Council [REDACTED]

Uploaded Documents:

None Uploaded