

Somerset

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Comment text:

Related subject: the Local Government Boundary Commission for England(LGBCE) consulting on a review of Somerset Council and the wards within with a view to reducing the number of Councillors on Somerset Council

Please see attached document

Attached Documents:

- councillor-simon-sharman-somerset-boundary-response.docx

Dear Recipient/Local Government Boundary Commission for England,

I am writing in my capacity as a councillor for North Petherton Town Council to respond to the consultation regarding the review of Somerset Council and the proposed reconfiguration of wards. I strongly believe that the current two-councillor ward structure should be retained. Below, I outline my concerns with the proposed changes and the rationale for retaining the existing multi-member ward:

Key Concerns with Proposed Changes:

- **Loss of Community Cohesion:**
 - Moorland and North Newton being placed in a new ward named King Alfred alongside parishes on the other side of the River Parrett risks severing historical and community ties.
 - The River Parrett acts as a natural boundary, and the communities on either side have distinct identities and priorities. Combining them undermines effective representation and community unity.
- **Inconsistent Geographic and Demographic Grouping:**
 - North Petherton being joined with the Dunwear part of Bridgwater Without parish is an illogical pairing. North Petherton is a semi-rural area with its own distinct identity, whereas Dunwear is more urban and closely aligned with Bridgwater's dynamics.
 - Stockmoor and Wilstock being combined with Durleigh lacks coherence. Stockmoor and Wilstock are rapidly growing urban developments with infrastructure needs vastly different from those of Durleigh, a predominantly rural parish.
- **Impact on Representation Quality:**
 - Reducing the number of councillors and replacing the current two-councillor ward with three single-member wards risks diluting representation. Single-member wards can lead to fragmented governance, as councillors may focus solely on the specific interests of their smaller wards rather than addressing broader community issues collaboratively.

Rationale for Retaining Two-Councillor Ward:

- **Enhanced Collaboration and Representation:**
 - Multi-member wards foster teamwork among councillors, enabling them to pool their expertise and address diverse issues effectively.
 - Residents benefit from having multiple points of contact, which ensures greater availability and responsiveness from their elected representatives.
- **Preservation of Community Links:**
 - The current two-councillor ward structure respects natural boundaries and long-standing community connections, ensuring that representation reflects shared interests and challenges.
- **Balanced Workload and Accountability:**
 - Multi-member wards distribute the workload among councillors, reducing the risk of burnout and ensuring that councillors can dedicate sufficient attention to their responsibilities.

- It also provides a built-in system of accountability, as councillors within the same ward can support and challenge each other to deliver better outcomes for residents.

Recommendations:

- Retain the existing two-councillor ward structure to ensure coherent and effective representation.
- Reconsider the proposed ward boundaries to reflect natural geographic divisions and community identities.
- Engage further with local councils and residents to gather comprehensive feedback and refine the proposals.

Thank you for considering this submission. I urge the Local Government Boundary Commission for England to prioritize community cohesion, effective governance, and equitable representation in its final recommendations.

Yours sincerely,

Mr Simon Sharman
Councillor, North Petherton Town Council

15th January 2025