

# Cumberland

## Personal Details:

**Name:** Cllr Brian Wernham

**Email:** [REDACTED]

**Postcode:** [REDACTED]

**Organisation Name:** Cumberland Unitary Authority (Councillor)

## Comment text:

**Related subject:** Stanwix, North Carlisle

Response from Councillor Brian Wernham

Local Government Boundary Commission for England – Cumberland Review (North Carlisle)

I am writing as the current councillor for Stanwix Urban ward to comment on paragraphs 57 to 60 of the Commission's draft recommendations for North Carlisle.

I want to be clear at the outset that I support the Commission's recommendation in paragraph 57. The River Eden is a very strong physical and community boundary and, from lived experience of the area, it genuinely limits how far wards north and south of the river can be expanded in any meaningful or credible way. I therefore agree with the Commission's conclusion that accepting a higher-than-usual electoral variance in this part of the city is justified in order to preserve coherent and recognisable communities.

I also welcome the Commission's decision in paragraph 62 to accept the proposal to rename the wards as Stanwix West & Etterby and Stanwix East & Houghton. Those names reflect how my residents understand our communities, and for clarity I use those revised ward names throughout the remainder of my response.

Where I part company with the draft is in the two alternative options set out in paragraphs 58 and 59, which would introduce larger two- or three-member wards north of the River Eden. While I understand the numerical appeal of those options, I do not believe they would improve

representation or better reflect local communities.

My concern about multi-member wards is not theoretical. Before I became a Cumberland Councillor, the now superseded Carlisle City Council operated large three-member wards. During that period as a resident I was trying to establish responsibility for a local issue relating to Dalmeny Road, which is privately owned but also a highway thoroughfare potentially with City Council responsibilities for particular aspects of street cleaning. I had no clear idea which of the three Carlisle City councillors I should approach to understand what was happening. In the end I contacted all three. Each responded, but with different answers and different interpretations of responsibility. The experience was confusing, time-consuming, and ultimately unsatisfactory. It left me with no clear sense of which Councillor was accountable for resolving the issue.

That experience mirrors what I now see from the other side as a single seat ward Cumberland councillor. Stanwix Urban Ward residents value knowing who their councillor is and feeling confident about who to contact when something goes wrong. In larger multi-member wards, that clarity is lost. Responsibility becomes blurred, casework can be duplicated or passed around, and accountability is weaker rather than stronger.

The proposal to combine Lowry Hill & Crindledyke with Stanwix East & Houghton into a two-member ward would bring together areas with distinct identities and different local priorities. Perversely, that option whilst trying to address the Lowry Hill residents Association objection would have Stanwix split along Scotland Road (A7) with a Stanwix Primary school and Community Centre twinned with Lowry Hill a mile away, but with Stanwix shops, pub and other services on the west side of Scotland Road in a different Ward.

The other option of an even larger three-member ward covering the whole of North Carlisle would, in my view, no longer represent a place that residents recognise as a single community. In both cases, modest gains in electoral equality would be achieved at the cost of weaker community connection and confused representation.

Given that the Commission has already accepted, rightly in my view, that geography and community cohesion justify higher variance in paragraph 57, I do not think it is consistent to then pursue multi-member wards that would dilute those same community links. Retaining single-member wards north of the River Eden, even with modest variance, provides clearer accountability and better reflects how people experience their neighbourhoods.

These views are also supported by recent independent research. Studies commissioned by boundary bodies in the last few years, including work published in 2022 for the Local Government Boundary Commission for England and a 2024 study for the Local Democracy and Boundary Commission for Wales by Opinion Research Services, both note that residents in multi-member wards are less clear about who represents them and that accountability is stronger in single-member arrangements.

For these reasons, I support the Commission's recommendation in paragraph 57 and I do not support the multi-member ward alternatives set out in paragraphs 58 and 59.

## **Attached Documents:**

*None attached*