

Mrs M.V.Brown

29th October 2013

For the attention of The Boundary Commission for England
Room 3/19
1 Horse Gards Road
London
SW1A 2HG

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Dear Sirs,

The current Coalition Government has passed into law the 'Localism Act 2012' and the 'Localism Act 2013'. The previous Government published the 2006 White Paper 'Strong and Prosperous Communities' which was followed by the 'Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007' which included many exhortations to Local Authorities to be more sensitive to and representative of the individual communities upon whose lives their Councils impacted. In many ways, those exhortations echoed those of the Local Government Boundary Commission to Sefton MBC in the Commission's November 1997 final report on the consideration of a proposal to split the present Sefton Borough in two, North-South at the River Alt.

In its 1997 Review conclusions, the Local Government Boundary Commission made plain that it was open to reconsidering the proposal to split Sefton MBC in two should the Borough fail to become more sensitive to the needs of and representative of the diverse Communities which it administered and controlled.

The attached brief appendix summarises some of the history of this issue and the manner in which, in our view, the governance of Sefton MBC, as it relates to the residents of Southport, has worsened rather than improved since that exhortation was made in 1997.

We, the undersigned, formally request that the the Local Government Boundary Commission should lay down a timetable for the reconsideration of the proposal to provide efficient, convenient and representative local government for the residents of our area, and to call for evidence to support such a Review. The Boundary Commission has informed us that it is not their general policy to undertake such reviews without direction from yourself. We would ask you to recognise that the situation of Southport within Sefton MBC is a special case where the Boundary Commission has previously-committed itself to be open to the prospects of a Review in the circumstances which unfortunately now prevail – and to direct the Boundary Commission to commence a fresh review at its earliest opportunity.

Yours Faithfully

Southport Liberal Democrats

The Southport Party

UKIP Southport

Summary arguments for there to be an early review of the Governance of Sefton MBC with particular reference to the needs of the people of Southport and Formby for 'efficient and convenient local government'.

1. In 1972, in the final Redcliffe Maude proposals for local government reorganisation, Southport was not originally proposed to be in either Sefton or Merseyside. The town was placed within those authorities by the government of the day only after the Southport Borough Council (without consulting local people) decided this should be so in a hurried vote.
2. In late 1987 the Local Government Boundary Commission commenced a general review of Sefton and Merseyside. The public and representative organisations were invited to comment. An astonishing 12,000 individual letters were received by the Commission from Southport and Formby, with over 10,000 from Southport; the overwhelming majority were for Southport or Southport and Formby to form their own council outside of Sefton.
3. The Commission responded and agreed initially that there was sufficient evidence to argue for the separation of Southport from Sefton to place the town together with more suitable partners in Lancashire. In the final determination, however, the Commission had a change of mind and were swayed by representations from the rest of Sefton (including Formby) to keep Sefton intact.
4. In 1995 a new campaign was launched, seeking a splitting of the Borough of Sefton into two. At the conclusion of that process, in November 1997, the Commission agreed that such a proposal was potentially-viable but, on balance, retained the status quo. The Commission argued that the Southport and Formby campaigners had failed to show support for the idea of splitting the Borough from the other residents principally affected by Sefton MBC: the residents of Maghull, Crosby and Bootle. There was also not deemed to be sufficient support for the 'splitting' of the Borough from elected councillors and voluntary bodies.
5. In its conclusions of the review, the Commission put it to Sefton Council that in order to provide 'convenient and efficient local government' the Council needed to take steps to address the grievances of the petitioners and in particular make the Council's activities more devolved and sensitive to the needs of the differing communities within the Borough. Not only has this recommended behaviour not happened, the reverse has taken place.
6. The Commission also concluded their final recommendations by leaving the door open to the people of Southport to re-approach the Commission should their grievances about perceived poor governance of Sefton MBC persist or worsen, which they hoped would not be the case. **It is our belief that this unwanted situation has arisen, persists and is worsening.**
7. At the time of the Commission's last determination, Sefton MBC was governed through a 'Committee system' in which all councillors from all parts of the Borough had a roughly equal input into decision-making for the Council. Since that time, a 'Leader and Cabinet' system of governance has been introduced.
8. The present Leader of Sefton Council has appointed a seven-person executive Cabinet, every one of the members of which represents a ward in the Bootle constituency, which is only one of the three parliamentary constituencies wholly-contained within the Borough of Sefton. Executive decisions are subject to a modicum of scrutiny through four Overview & Scrutiny Committees. Not one of the chairs of these committees represents a ward in Southport.

9. Shortly after the 1997 Boundary Review, Sefton MBC attempted to move towards a degree of decentralisation of decision-making with a pilot scheme initially being introduced in Crosby. This process has been withdrawn and is no longer being pursued.
10. A very limited amount of decision-making and power to hold advisory discussions on matters affecting different parts of the Borough was eventually allotted to Area Committees. The frequency of meeting of these Area Committees and their powers have both been reduced in recent years at the instigation of the ruling Cabinet.
11. Cabinet Members have a responsibility for decision-making and Councillors have a responsibility for policy-making throughout the Borough. Yet even longstanding Cabinet Members still have little familiarity with some towns they are meant to control/administer.
12. Departmental provision of a variety of services which require public interface with council officers (eg planning), which were previously provided in locations throughout the Borough, have been increasingly-relocated to offices in Bootle and away from the people of Southport.
13. Decisions which principally affect the town of Southport are now determined in meetings where not one of the councillors representing people living in the seven Southport wards are permitted to speak, let alone vote. An example is the development of car parking policy where the income raised via parking charges is very largely derived on the streets of Southport. Southport is a town of many small businesses yet there is not one single Southport councillor appointed by the Council to the Sefton Chamber of Trade & Commerce.
14. There are virtually completely different 'health economies' in the North and South of the Borough which is reflected in there being separate Clinical Commissioning Groups serving the two areas. Southport and Formby shares their principal hospital provision with the people of the West Lancashire district. Local Authorities have recently been legislated to have responsibility for determining health policy within their area. Yet Sefton Council does not include one single Southport councillor on the Sefton Health & Wellbeing Board which is the body through this responsibility for the health of Southport people should be executed.
15. The Sefton Council Cabinet is presently promoting the removal of further Local Authority powers to be executed in a 'Common Authority' for the (sic) Liverpool City Region. Such a transfer will involve more decisions being taken even further away from Southport in a forum where there is no opportunity for any Southport councillor to even observe and monitor let alone take part or vote. From a Southport standpoint, this entails an even greater 'Merseyside' focus than is currently the case. The interests of Southport are balanced between Merseyside, to the South, with which we have one quarter of our town's boundary and Lancashire, to the East and North, with which we share three quarters of that boundary.
16. The grievances of the people of Southport, about being governed through processes whereby not one of the 21 elected councillors representing Southport's seven wards has any input into the executive processes of the Borough are made worse by having a present electoral ward set-up in which the voters of the seven wards of Southport (and the two of Formby) have fewer councillors per elector representing them than is the case with the residents of the six wards which contain Bootle. For there to be equality of representation while retaining seven wards in Southport, there would have to be a reduction of the Council to 21 wards from the present 22, with the major re-warding taking place within Bootle. Such a re-warding might potentially mitigate the worst problems of unequal representation, associated with the present 'Bootle dominance' of the Borough of Sefton. It would not, however, address the main structural problems of Sefton Council.