

Shropshire

Personal Details:

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Organisation Name: (District or county councillor)

Comment text:

Dear Tom,

I am writing to you, as I wish to make some comments in a personal capacity, on the proposals made by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England regarding the Shropshire Review, which are now being consulted upon in the County.

I am a long serving Wem Town Councillor of 20+ years as well as one of the two elected Shropshire Councillors for the Division of Wem, Wem Rural and Whixall. I am also the Deputy Leader of the Independent Group in Shropshire Council and so have been part of the Cross-Party Leader Discussions in working this through with the BGCSE as we have sought the best and most equitable outcome for the fair representation of all our residents. I have therefore, in all these roles, consulted widely with residents in these three Parishes/Town areas as well as discussed them with fellow Councillors.

I understand that this process began because of an increasing imbalance in the number of residents in the various Shropshire Divisions due to new housing, particularly in the east of the county in areas such as Shifnal. Shropshire Council were, at the time this process started, requesting at least 1 extra Shropshire Councillor (if not the hoped for two!) to help accommodate the rising number of residents with the hope that that Divisions could all become 1 member divisions. However the LGBCE has regrettably told us that we only need 74 Shropshire Councillors, so this causes a major problem in creating 1 member divisions across the county – in fact making it impossible to achieve given our rurality and geography, with significant hills and rivers, major roads, townships, etc causing barriers. These factors must be taken into consideration in trying to achieve equality of representation of 3594 residents in each Division. The number of residents must not be the sole reasoning in determining

Division boundaries.

My Shropshire Division of Wem, Wem Rural and Whixall is, as you know, at present a 2 member division. It is proposed that this is divided to create two single-Councillor Divisions with one being the majority of Wem Urban and the other Wem Rural, Whixall and a segment of Wem Urban, using the railway line as a boundary. I am strongly opposed to this proposal on the following grounds:-

1. I do not believe that this arrangement meets the Commissions objectives to “reflect community identities and provide for clear and identifiable boundaries”. Wem Town is a relatively small, ancient, coherent ‘market town’ community (served by Wem Town Council) with people living both sides of the railway line forming part of that community. To remove the South East section of Wem would alienate them from the Town where most of their services and infrastructure lie and lose their community identity and cohesion.
2. It is appreciated that creating a Division from the whole of Wem Urban would not be feasible in terms of electoral numbers but I consider that removing part of the town into a different Division is not logical. If this proposal by the Boundary Commission is based largely on achieving single member divisions with electoral numbers between 3235 and 3953 with 3594 as the mean average, then:
 - the proposed division numbers of 3231 for Wem Rural, Whixall and a small wedge of Wem Urban would be -10.1 % below the mean average.
 - The proposed Division numbers of 3958 for the remainder of Wem Urban would be +10.1 % above the mean average.
3. The BGCSE proposals conclude that, notwithstanding the suggestion of creating two separate Divisions, “We remain open to the possibility of retaining a two-member division in this area”. Wem Town Council and all locals, without exception, when informed of these LGBCE Proposals feel that this would be the best course of action. This was the decision that was also arrived at, after full consideration by the LGBCE, when the Unitary authority was formed in 2009. Nothing has changed.
Consequently I believe that the current Division works effectively in serving the needs of both the whole town and rural areas and strongly favours the retention of the present two-member Division because it:
 1. Would mean a total number of residents of 7145 for the two members to represent which is only -0.6% below the average – so this then also gives better electoral equality of representation.
 2. Complies with clear and identifiable boundaries, that reflect three differing communities identities of Wem Urban, Wem Rural and Whixall as shown by their Parish Boundaries.
 3. Eases ongoing administration, as well as representation, because the Division Boundary then follows those of the outer edge of the three Parish Boundaries that currently make up this Division.
 4. The current proposals are suggesting two 2 member Divisions so the Commission is making allowances for these to continue where to do otherwise would be problematic. I feel that the Wem Division is another such Division where allowance needs to be made because of the reasons I am giving, that are in-line with the Shropshire County response that you will be receiving shortly.
 5. Nothing has changed in the electoral balance in this area since the Boundary Commission agreed that this should be a Dual Member Division when the Unitary Authority was created in 2009, so to do otherwise would be arbitrary and inconsistent.If the Boundary Commission still needs more convincing of this, you would be very welcome to make a site visit to Wem prior to any final decision being taken.

I hope that these comments are helpful to you and will be taken into consideration.

Kindest regards,

Edward

Edward Towers - Shropshire Councillor for Wem, Wem Rural and Whixall

Attached Documents:

None attached