

Mrs M.V. Brown  


6 December 2013

Dear Mrs Brown,

### **Local government arrangements in Sefton**

Thank you for your letter of 29 October 2013, co-signed by representatives of Southport Liberal Democrats and UKIP Southport, requesting that the Local Government Boundary Commission for England conducts a review of local government arrangements in the area covered by Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council.

The Local Government Boundary Commission for England may conduct principal area boundary reviews of local authorities either at the request of the Secretary of State, at the request of a local council or on its own initiative. Generally, the Commission would not commence a review on its own initiative without the support of those local authorities which may be affected by it. The Commission is also unlikely to undertake a review of county boundaries in the near future. The Commission is also advised that Ministers are not currently minded to request a boundary review.

As you note in your letter, the Commission (then the Local Government Commission for England) last completed a review of local government arrangements in Sefton in November 1997. The Commission concluded that no changes should be made to the current pattern of local government in Sefton, and stated that the creation of two separate local authorities “would carry with it a risk to the continued delivery of services and have adverse financial implications”. In drawing this conclusion, the Commission noted that Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council may wish to consider new democratic arrangements such as the establishment of Area Committees, the establishment of new parish and town councils, and the decentralisation of service provision, in order to address the concerns of those local residents who did not feel they were being well-served by existing arrangements.

As you note, since 1997 new governance arrangements have been introduced for local authorities throughout England, as a consequence of which Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council has moved from a committee system to an executive system of decision-making. You state that executive positions are currently filled exclusively by members representing wards in the Bootle parliamentary constituency and that this results in a deficit in representation for other parts of the borough. However, the

wards represented by executive members and scrutiny chairs are ultimately a matter for the Council and are not fixed. The Commission does not, therefore, consider this issue when determining whether a principal area boundary review may be necessary for a specific authority.

Similarly, while the Commission stated in 1997 that it may be desirable for decentralised governance arrangements to be established in Sefton in order to address the concerns of residents, the Commission had and has no power to impose such arrangements, which are a matter for the Council. Nor does it have the power to intervene where such arrangements have not been established or where they have since been removed or amended.

A number of the points you raise concerning the representation of Southport councillors on external committees or their participation in other areas of decision-making are also ultimately a matter for the Council to determine. They do not in and of themselves constitute grounds for the Commission to consider a review.

I note also your points regarding electoral imbalances between the areas of Southport and Bootle. However, on the most recent electorate figures available to us, Sefton does not meet our intervention criteria for a review of warding arrangements as only three of its 22 wards (14%) have electorates which vary by greater than 10% from the borough average. The Commission would only seek to intervene where 30% of wards varied by more than 10% from the borough average or where one ward varied by more than 30%.

Overall, therefore, I am not currently persuaded that there are grounds for the Commission either to commence a principal area boundary review of Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council on its own initiative, or to commence an electoral review of its internal warding arrangements.

I am sorry that I cannot be more helpful.

Yours sincerely

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