

Cllr Nicolas Heslop
Leader
Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council
Gibson Building
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Kent
ME19 4LZ

10 June 2020

Dear Cllr Heslop

We were pleased to meet you, Cllr Coffin, Julie Beilby and Adrian Stanfield yesterday to discuss the forthcoming electoral review of Tonbridge and Malling Council. These preliminary meetings are extremely helpful to us, both enabling us to outline the review process and assisting our understanding of key agendas and priorities for the local authority. It was disappointing, of course, that we had to talk via video conference in view of current travel restrictions, but I hope that you will share our view that that this did not prevent us having a helpful and productive meeting.

As explained, we are intending to undertake an electoral review of the Council because of the level electoral imbalances that exist within the authority which breach our standard criteria.

The initial tasks for the Council will be to develop thoughts on proposed council size (ie the number of elected members) alongside assembling five-year electorate forecast data. Commission officers will liaise with your officers on the latter aspect in order to ensure that figures are as robust as possible. In that context, it was helpful to learn that the Council is confident about future developments, and their location, that will build upon the growth that has already taken place in the area over recent years.

Importantly, this stage also provides the opportunity to consider the number of elected members and to reflect, from first principles, on the role and contribution of elected members in modern local governance. From our conversation, it is clear that the Council will take this opportunity to consider the issue of council size carefully and we trust that the framework we described, and which is available on the Commission's website, will assist you in this task.

We also discussed the potential timetable which you indicated was acceptable and I will ask colleagues to send you a copy of this separately for convenience. Also, Julie kindly agreed to liaise with Jolyon about the timing of the three briefings - group leaders, relevant officers and the full council. It would be good to get these in the diary.

We have yet to decide the Lead Commissioner for the review, but Richard Buck will be the Review Manager and Tom Rutherford the Review Officer, and first point of contact at the Commission.

We are keen to have a collaborative dialogue between officials throughout the process since we find that this leads to a better outcome and the reviews that proceed most smoothly are invariably those where the Commission and the local authority work closely with each other. From our meeting, I am confident that this will be the case in Tonbridge and Malling.

Also, we believe that the most productive reviews are those where the opportunity is taken to think about how the review might assist the council's own aspirations in terms of governance and similar.

Finally, I want to stress again our commitment to working with you in a way that not only allows the Commission to discharge its statutory responsibilities in respect of electoral fairness but will also be helpful to the Council in achieving its own ambitions.

Best wishes

Professor Colin Mellors
Chair

cc Cllr Martin Coffin
Julie Beilby, Chief Executive
Adrian Stanfield, Director of Central Services and Deputy Chief Executive