

Boundary Review Consultation 2020

The electoral review will recommend:

- the total number of councillors that should be elected to the authority in the future ('council size')
- the boundaries, names and number of councillors to represent each ward

*The ward boundaries of every council in the country are reviewed from time to time to ensure they are in the right places and there is roughly the same number of electors in each ward.

Havering's last review took place in 1999.

****The article below details a secret recording of a Conservative meeting that details how political gain is on the agenda, not boundaries in the right places and roughly the same number of electors in each ward (see above). Wards that cannot be won by the Conservatives are targeted to be cut down in numbers and to 2 councillors from a consistent 3 in each ward at present.***

ROMFORD RECORDER NEWS ITEM – 16 JULY 2020

“Conservative councillors have been accused of trying to “manipulate” boundary changes in Havering after they were captured in a secret recording discussing proposals.

The audio, from a party meeting in February, was leaked to the Havering Residents Associations (HRA) by a former Conservative councillor.

The HRA has lodged a formal complaint with the Local Government Boundaries Commission for England (LGBCE), which is redrawing council wards.

The LGBCE is due to publish boundary change proposals for Havering this month, informed in part by a council submission.

Council leader **Damian White** is heard on the recording saying: **“We’ve come up with a set of proposals that I think are really politically advantageous for us.”**

The HRA claimed it showed the Conservatives had “manipulated” the council’s submission “to control wards and resident numbers to their own political advantage... through the restriction and prevention of debate on other options”.

The council maintains all groups were given an opportunity to influence its submission.

The audio, recorded at a private Tory group meeting at the Town Hall in February, captures the group discussing plans including:

Using council procedure to throw out council officers’ impartial proposals and replace them with new ones masterminded by the Conservatives.

-Grouping non-Conservative voters together in wards with more than the optimum number of residents, while Conservative voters are spread across more wards with smaller populations.

-Allotting Conservative leaning wards three councillors, while wards less likely to vote Conservative are only given two.

-Using boundary changes to split unpopular developments in Romford between different wards, to minimise their impact on the Tory vote.

On the recording, Cllr White claims the council's chief executive, Andrew Blake-Herbert, has allowed him to influence the council's proposals.

He tells the group: **“For these four walls... only recently, he has agreed for some reason to allow me to influence the proposals and, erm, I've been able to.”**

A council spokesperson strongly denied what Cllr White was recorded as saying, stating: “We can't comment on any covert recordings of private conversations. What we can say is that we utterly refute any suggestion that the chief executive was influenced in any way when pulling together the options for the boundary review.”

The recording also captured the group discussing how civil servants have drawn up four options, but the chief executive had agreed that the Conservative-controlled Governance Committee can **“filter”** them before Full Council makes a decision.

Cllr White is heard saying this will allow his group to **“pick the one we like”**, make any changes they want, then put it forward for consideration by Full Council.

He suggests the LGBCE is unlikely to discover what has happened, telling the meeting: **“When they look at it, apparently they will only look at what was discussed and debated at Full Council. So there will only be one option from the council.”**

He adds that the LGBCE could look at the Governance Committee papers, **“but they only have five members of staff, and highly unlikely they'll put the effort in to do that.”**

Havering Council said in a statement: “Council officers suggested options... based on objective criteria, and did not make recommendations. Four options were put forward which were first shared with all the council's political group leaders.

“The options were then considered by the council's Governance Committee, where changes to one of the options were agreed to be put forward to a special meeting of full council.

“At this meeting, other options were presented by councillors and an agreed option was adopted as the council's submission to the boundary commission.”

Cllr White added: **“As is entirely normal, the Conservative group discussed proposals in the consultation and how to respond and agree our own approach. All political parties put forward proposals for the boundary changes as part of the established consultation process. It is for the LGBCE to determine the number of councillors and the boundaries of wards, and it is right that local political parties take part within the consultation.”**

But Gillian Ford from the HRA said the recording showed Conservatives had gone beyond acting as a party and had used council processes and resources to “gerrymander” the formal council submission.

Jon Cruddas, Labour MP for Rainham, claimed it was an **“abuse of power”** which should render the current proposals **“null and void”**.

He said: “This must be taken further as it subverts the democratic process. The Havering Conservatives should be subject to a full investigation and I will be writing to the boundary commission this week. Government also needs to step in, to ensure there are no cover-ups.”

However, the LGBCE said it could not act on the recording.

A spokesperson said: “The allegations are about the motives behind a submission. This is not something the commission takes into account when analysing submissions.”

It said that after draft boundary changes were published later this month, the public would be given 10 weeks to respond.”
