

6th September 2020

Dear Daniel Fenwick,

As Chair of Havering's Residents Associations, I am writing on behalf of our members to submit evidence in relation to the H.R.A formal submission for an Independent Investigation, into claims and actions taken by Councillor Damian White as revealed in an audio recording taken at a Conservative Group meeting.

It came to our attention through the recording, that there had been a clear case of political manipulation 'gerrymandering' by the Leader of Havering Council, Councillor Damian White, with the alleged support of Romford MP Andrew Rosindell, and the suggested complicity on the part of Havering's Chief Executive Andrew Blake-Herbert and unnamed council officers, in regard to the formulation and processing of Havering's submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission review.

Attached to the email you will find an audio recording of a Conservative Party Group meeting of their councillors held in February 2020 (prior to the local authority submission) which is '**compelling**' evidence. Also attached is a full transcript of the meeting (including a key) with highlighted areas of significance. I can confirm that the transcript has been recorded by a retired Police Officer who is prepared to stand up in court as to the accuracy of the transcript. There is a separate information sheet to contextualise the comments in relation to Havering Councils submission to the Boundary Commission, a copy of the complaint we sent through to LGBCE asking for Havering Councils submission to be considered "null and void" and a timeline. It is also worth noting the Local Government Boundary Commission for England Draft Recommendations Report, that clearly takes into consideration Havering's submission and references it at numerous points.

The recording was shared with us by Councillor Bob Perry, who has resigned from the Conservative Group.

There are matters of concern throughout the audio recording, however we have highlighted a number of key areas as follows:

- Open discussion by the Leader of Havering Council on the best ways to manipulate the process in a way that would be '**politically advantageous**' for the Conservatives. (Page 2, 6,9,9)
- Open admission by the Leader of Havering Council that what they were doing was not allowed under Boundary Commission rules. (Page 9)
- Suggestion of complicity by Havering's Chief Executive to change the process of selection of the official option to be put forward to the Boundary Commission in the Conservative Group's favour, by putting the four options proposed by Havering Council officers to a Governance Meeting, where a Conservative Group (amended) option was put forward and accepted by the Conservative majority on the committee. This meant that none of the original options proposed by council officers were able to be voted upon by members at the Full Council meeting held on 04 March 2020. This effectively ensured that the Conservative Group's own option was the one submitted by Havering Council. (Page 2)
- Irregularity of a Cabinet Member Councillor Joshua Chapman's cousin being a 'council' officer in charge of the boroughs ward mapping process. (Page 3)
- Suggestion of complicity by Havering's Chief Executive by allowing one of the boroughs MP's Andrew Rosindell to influence the boroughs proposal. (Page 2)
- Advice taken from Conservative Central Office in the attempted manipulation of the process. (Page 4)
- The suggestion that the Conservative proposal of 56 Councillors (rather than the 54 proposed by the first part of the LGBCE review) would be advantageous to the Conservative Group and the local MP Andrew Rosindell's constituency. (Page 2, 3)

- The manipulation of ward boundaries to ensure major new residential developments in the Romford area fall into wards the Conservatives could sustain. (Page 3)
- The manipulation of the proposals for the wards in the south of the borough (where the Conservatives traditionally struggle to win seats) by creating one/two member wards, so the Conservatives could pick the best bits and target them. (Page 3,4)
- The consideration and assertion that through the manipulation of the council's submission to the Boundary Commission, that the Boundary Commission would be unlikely to put any effort into considering other options. (Page 2)
- The suggestion of complicity by other officers in preparing, processing and delivering Havering's proposal. (Page 9)

In addition to the points made above, and in stark contrast to the support clearly afforded to the Conservative Party by council officers (who did full calculations of projected elector numbers for their submission, in advance), Opposition members were given restricted access to information when preparing alternative submissions to the council and LGBCE. The Head of Democratic Services for Havering, Andrew Beesley, advised one of our members in an email (available if required) that they would not do the calculations of projected elector numbers for the group, stating that would be the same for all groups. This clearly was not true. Opposition Members therefore had to use the public websites to access information and only received official calculations seven days after the Full Council meeting. This led to the submission of official calculations for an opposition submission being sent to the LGBCE in a separate e-mail, well after the closing date for submissions.

The Boundary Commission makes it clear that "As independent and **politically** impartial bodies, the Boundary Commission do not take into account patterns of voting or the results of elections when reviewing constituency boundaries. Nor do the **political** parties' views on where boundaries should be have any more weight than those of members of the public". Whilst the Boundary Commission has not adopted the entire Havering submission, it is clear that it has formed the basis for and has significantly influenced their consultation option.

The recording demonstrates a clear and blatant abuse of Public Office with the intent to gerrymander a politically advantageous outcome which is not in the electorates best interest. Due to the serious nature and extent of the unethical Leadership of councillor Damian White and his political manipulation, the suggested influence of MP Andrew Rosindell, Conservative Central Office input, and the Chief Executive's apparent dereliction of duty in failing to ensure a non-partisan process in the development of Havering Councils submission to the LGBCE, we uphold our complaint

We therefore look forward to hearing your response to Simon Bell's letter and the reassurance that this serious matter will be given the independent and transparent scrutiny it deserves in the public interest. Please feel free to contact Councillor Gillian Ford if you require any further information; contact details can be found above.

Kind regards

Chair of H.R.A - Councillor Gillian Ford

Deputy Chair of the H.R.A - Councillor Graham Williamson

Leader of the Residents Association - Councillor Ray Morgon

Leader of the Upminster & Cranham Residents Association - Councillor Linda Hawthorn

Deputy Leader of the Upminster & Cranham Residents Association - Councillor Chris Wilkins

cc. Simon Bell



**Residents' Association
of Emerson Park**



**Hornchurch
Residents' Association**



**The Pettits Residents
Association**



**South Hornchurch
Residents Association**



**Upminster & Cranham
Residents' Association**