



· INSTITUTE · OF · HISTORIC ·
BUILDING · CONSERVATION

Making Heritage Work

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Dear Ms Patel

STRENGTHENING PARISH AND TOWN COUNCIL ACCOUNTABILITY

The Institute of Historic Building Conservation (IHBC) is the professional body for building conservation practitioners and historic environment experts working in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, with connections to the Republic of Ireland. The Institute exists to establish, develop and maintain the highest standards of conservation practice, to support the effective protection and enhancement of the historic environment, and to promote heritage-led regeneration and access to the historic environment for all.

Thank you for inviting us to participate in this consultation.

The Institute supports the principle of extending the remit of the Local Government Ombudsman to parish and town councils but questions the extremely limited scope that is proposed. By either the population or precept method of calculation the very high thresholds of 35,000 or £1m being suggested in the Consultation would result in fewer than 25 councils being subject to the Ombudsman, less than 0.3% of all Councils.

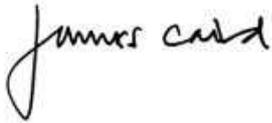
We do not think this degree of change would be widely regarded as "strengthening parish and town council accountability". Whatever the threshold on either of these bases there would always be cases in which complainants would be told that their complaint was ineligible for Ombudsman investigation, when in a neighbouring area it would have been eligible, merely because of the size of the population served. We do not think that the principle should be established in which parish and town councils are large enough to provide services but not large enough to be accountable for them.

Parish and town councils are increasingly taking on service delivery as agents for district and unitary councils and have some opportunities for wider responsibility through special provisions such as neighbourhood planning. So we think that the strengthening of parish and town council accountability should be introduced by **function** rather than **size**. We suggest that a further consultation be carried out on this with possible functions being subject to ombudsman complaint being:

- Grounds, leisure, open spaces, common land, churchyards.
- Markets, public conveniences and other facilities.
- Highways and rights of way functions.
- Neighbourhood planning.

This would bring many more parish and town councils within the scope of the regime but only to the extent of the services actually delivered. It would also bring a focus on the need for reasonableness and transparency in the management of their affairs by a much wider spectrum of councils.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James Caird". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'J'.

James Caird
Consultant Consultations Co-ordinator