

Local Government Boundary Commission for England

Council Size Submission

Stratford-on-Avon District Council

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How to Make a Submission

1. It is recommended that submissions on council size follow the format provided below. Submissions should focus on the future needs of the council and not simply describe the current arrangements. Submissions should also demonstrate that alternative council sizes have been considered in drawing up the proposal and why you have discounted them.
2. The template allows respondents to enter comments directly under each heading. It is not recommended that responses be unduly long; as a guide, it is anticipated that a 15 to 20-page document using this template should suffice. Individual section length may vary depending on the issues to be explained. Where internal documents are referred to URLs should be provided, rather than the document itself. It is also recommended that a table is included that highlights the key paragraphs for the Commission's attention.

About You

3. The respondent should use this space to provide the Commission with a little detail about who is making the submission, whether it is the full Council, Officers on behalf of the Council, a political party or group, or an individual.

This submission is made by the Full Council of Stratford-on-Avon District Council.

Following the Council's review, the District Council's Audit and Standards Committee established a Task and Finish Group in July 2019, chaired by the Chairman of the Committee.

The Task and Finish Group comprised seven Members, reflecting the political balance of the Council incorporating varying levels of Councillor experience. The objective of the Task and Finish Group was to make suitable recommendations to the Audit and Standards Committee, and ultimately, to Council.*

** A Parish Councillor Representative was also invited to the meetings.*

The Task and Finish Group met on three occasions to review and agree the principles for the Council Size submission.

Council considered the final Council Size submission on 14 December 2020 and recommended that the document be submitted as the Council's official Council Size Submission to the LGBCE.

Stratford-on-Avon – Current Imbalance:

The last Electoral Review of the Council was completed in 2014, when the number of Councillors was reduced from 53 to 36. The Commission wrote to the Council in July 2019 and identified, based on electoral data, that 33% of electoral wards had a variance of greater than 10% from the average, with one ward having a variance greater than 30% (Clopton, -33%).

The Council recognises the importance of electoral equality for a fair democratic process by ensuring that each vote carries the same value as close as possible, whilst at the same time it must ensure that governance of the Council is maintained at a level which can best serve the electorate.

The aim of the preliminary stage of the Electoral Review is to determine the total number of Councillors to be elected to the Council from the next elections in 2023. The figure will be determined after considering the governance arrangements of the Council, its scrutiny function, the representational role of Councillors in the local community, and consideration of the total number of Councillors needed to most effectively take decisions, hold decision makers to account, discharge responsibilities and effectively represent local groups and people.

The Commission sets out that Councils should neither follow a strict mathematical formula nor simply adopt the size of comparable authorities in recommending a council size. At this stage, the council size is a 'minded to' intention because the final number of Councillors may be adjusted slightly (generally ± 1), where this would achieve a pattern that best reflects the three statutory criteria. The ultimate decision on Council Size cannot be taken until the Final Recommendations are presented to the Commission. These recommendations will bring together all the proposed electoral arrangements for formal approval.

Stratford-on-Avon Approach and Summary Conclusion: The Council's submission has been developed and approved by a cross party working group. All Councillors were invited to complete a questionnaire which resulted in 34 responses out of a possible 36. The Council's submission addresses the key points raised in the LGBCE's technical guidance which emphasises the importance of submitting 'well-reasoned proposals that are based on the individual characteristics and needs of each local authority area and its communities'.

In arriving at that conclusion a number of factors have been taken into account, which include: future potential changes in governance arrangements; local policy developments; and the representational role of elected members, with evidence gathered concerning the time commitments in discharging the functions of the elected member role. Consideration has also been given to population trends, any potential increase in electoral numbers through housing and other forms of growth and development.

In developing this submission, the Council considered the existing number of Councillors as the starting basis and then considered whether or not there was evidence to support a variation of that number. The analysis, summarised in this submission, concludes that an increase to between 41 and 43 Councillors is required to secure electoral equality for Stratford-on-Avon District Council.

The ultimate aim has been to reach a considered view as to what would deliver the most effective and efficient local administration system for the benefit of residents and communities within the District, in line with the Council's projected budget position.

Reason for Review (Request Reviews Only)

4. Please explain the authority's reasons for requesting this electoral review; it is useful for the Commission to have context. *NB/ If the Commission has identified the authority for review under one of its published criteria, then you are not required to answer this question.*

Not required

Local Authority Profile

5. Please provide a short description of the authority and its setting. This should set the scene for the Commission and give it a greater understanding of any current issues. The description may cover all, or some of the following:

- Brief outline of area - are there any notable geographic constraints for example that may affect the review?
- Rural or urban - what are the characteristics of the authority?
- Demographic pressures - such as distinctive age profiles, migrant or transient populations, is there any large growth anticipated?
- Are there any other constraints, challenges, issues or changes ahead?

Stratford-on-Avon District lies in the heart of England in the county of Warwickshire and covers almost half of the county's land mass. Most of the District to the north of Stratford-upon-Avon lies within the West Midlands Green Belt. The Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty extends into the southern fringes of the District. The town of Stratford-upon-Avon is the largest settlement. There are also a number of important rural centres, including the market towns of Alcester, Shipston-on-Stour and Southam. The District has a predominantly rural character. This is reflected in the fact that 77% of its residents live outside the main town of Stratford-upon-Avon. Some 45% of residents live in parishes with a population of less than 3,000. In all, there are around 250 communities of varying sizes spread across a predominantly rural area covering 979 square kilometres. It is one of the largest Districts in lowland England. The population density is relatively low, making delivery of, and access to, services a major issue for residents. Stratford-upon-Avon is famous the world over for being the birthplace of William Shakespeare. With this comes significant economic benefits but also major challenges in managing the 2.7 million trips made to the town each year. The rest of the District sees 3.8 million trips made a year, which reiterates the importance of tourism to the area.

Whilst social, environmental and economic characteristics result in a high quality of life and opportunities for many of the District's residents, there are still many challenges to be addressed. Consultation and research suggests that the main issues are:

- The potential conflict between the demand for housing and associated amenities and the pressure this places on the District's distinctive and attractive character;*
- Above average life expectancy resulting in an ageing population. Life expectancy in the District is 84.7 years for women (England 83.1) and for men 80.9 years (England 79.6);*
- Relatively high property prices compared with the West Midlands region means that many people cannot afford to live in the District;*
- A need for additional attractive and relevant services for young people;*
- Crime levels are rising in line with national trends, with fear of crime disproportionate to the actual level of crime; and*
- Despite the general prosperity of the District, there are pockets of deprivation where people feel isolated and excluded from services, particularly in rural areas.*

Communities are attempting to recover from the recent COVID-19 pandemic. Stratford-on-Avon has been the fourth worst economically affected District in the UK due, in the main, to its exposure to the hospitality industry. The Council itself has also been significantly impacted, various work streams, including the Council Recovery Action Group, have been formed in response.

The population of Stratford-on-Avon District was estimated to be 130,098 in mid-2019, representing an estimated increase of 2,518 or 2% on mid-2018. The population is heavily weighted towards the older end of the scale. Over 65s make up 25.5% of the population (44th highest percentage out of 368 GB local authorities), with 56% aged between 18-64 years, and 19% under 18 years old. There are significantly fewer children and younger adults living in the District, compared to the West Midlands region or England as a whole.

The median age of the District is 48.2 years, while the England median average age is 40 years. This places Stratford-on-Avon District Council as the 47th oldest authority by median age population of 408 authorities within the UK.

The area of Stratford-on-Avon District is 978km². Stratford-on-Avon District has 133 people per square kilometre, 30th out of all 188 District councils, putting the District in the top 16% least dense.

The projected population of England is expected to increase by 5% by mid-2028, with the increase for the West Midlands projected to be 6.1%, according to Office of National Statistics (ONS) figures. The ONS figures show that the population of Stratford-on-Avon District is projected to increase by 14% in the same timescale, with an extra 17,810 people by mid-2028. By mid-2028, therefore the population of Stratford-on-Avon District is estimated to be 147,908. By 2043, just under 30% of the District's population will be aged 65 years or over.

According to data year ending 2019, Stratford-on-Avon District witnessed the second highest net migration for any District in England with a net inflow of 2,542 (Inflow 8,973 and an outflow of 6,431).

According to the Valuation Office list, there were 61,623 properties in the District in September 2020. Based on the known future developments of 60 or more properties at this time, this alone gives a new build figure of 4,287 anticipated by 2027.

The average house price for the District was £323,500 as at September 2020, significantly above both the England average of £261,800 and the Warwickshire average of £259,600. The median monthly rent payable in the District was £775. This was the second highest amount in the West Midlands, with only Warwick higher at £800.

The median house price to median earnings ratio in the District was 11.26 in 2019. This was the second highest ratio in the West Midlands, with only Malvern Hills higher at 11.27. By comparison, the ratio for Warwickshire was 8.32 and that for England was 7.83.

Stratford-on-Avon is the fifth most qualified authority within the West Midlands with 46.6% of adults aged 16-64 years having NVQ4 qualification or higher (NVQ4 is equivalent to an HNC, NVQ6 is equivalent to an undergraduate degree, NVQ3 is equivalent to A Level.) The average for Great Britain is 40.3%, while for the West Midlands it is 34.1%.

Manufacturing (includes automotive research and development) accounts for the largest number of jobs at 13,000. Nearly 20% of jobs were within manufacturing, higher than the average for both Warwickshire (11.9%) and England (8.1%).

In 2019, the number of businesses in the District stood at 8,450 enterprises. 90% of these were classed as micro-businesses (0-9 employees). There were 20 large businesses (over 250 employees).

- **Are there any other constraints, challenges, issues or changes ahead?**

One of the major challenges for the Council is its long-term financial sustainability as the result of reductions in Government support. It is inevitable that during the next few years, further significant reductions in costs will need to be delivered. The Council will continue to work with Warwick District Council with a view of sharing services and saving resources to ensure that as many services as possible are preserved. In addition, there is an expectation that a White Paper in relation to future devolution will be published that potentially could lead to a wider debate surrounding local government. With reducing budgets, priorities will have to be decided. The Council will have to remain resolute in targeting areas of highest need.

These are very challenging times for the Council. It is forecast that during 2020/21 the Council will have a net reduction in its revenue of £4.1m arising from COVID-19. Without certainty surrounding longer term support from Central Government, there will be extremely difficult budgetary decisions for the Council to make at a time when our communities need us the most. With these difficult budgetary considerations, whilst it is felt extremely important to increase the number of elected representative across the District, this must be balanced with the financial position facing the Council.

The Context for your proposal

Your submission gives you the opportunity to examine how you wish to organise and run the council for the next 15 years. The Commission expects you to challenge your current arrangements and determine the most appropriate arrangements going forward. In providing context for your submission below, please demonstrate that you have considered the following issues.

- When did your Council last change/reorganise its internal governance arrangements and what impact on effectiveness did that activity have?
- To what extent has transference of strategic and/or service functions impacted on the effectiveness of service delivery and the ability of the Council to focus on its remaining functions?
- Have any governance or capacity issues been raised by any Inspectorate or similar?
- What impact on the Council's effectiveness will your council size proposal have?

The Council last reviewed its Councillor numbers in 2014. Revised arrangements were implemented in the elections which were held in May 2015, when the Council reduced its number of Councillors dramatically from 53 to 36. This represented a reduction in the number of Councillors representing the District of over 30%.

Since the last elections in May 2019, the Council has reviewed its overriding objectives and priorities for the next decade. It has produced the Vision 2030 for the Council, which reads as follows;

2030 Vision

In 2030 we want Stratford-on-Avon District to....

...be well-known internationally for the culture, heritage and countryside across the District, and for the quality of its visitor experience, as well as for being Shakespeare's birthplace.

...have used its international reputation to support and sustain the development of future technologies and innovative businesses of all sizes.

...be one of the UK's first carbon-neutral Districts supporting zero carbon innovation, technology and construction and be at the forefront of climate change adaptation.

...benefit from the most advanced connectivity and accessibility across the District (including the best possible communications infrastructure) and an integrated transport system with excellent links to Birmingham, Oxford and London.

...enable all its residents to live safe and healthy lives, work, raise children and grow old in an excellent District for leisure, education and sport.

...have high quality, appropriate and affordable housing across the District.

In 2030 we want local government in Stratford-on-Avon to....

...put residents and communities across the District at the heart of what it does: providing high quality services in innovative ways, seizing opportunities and addressing challenges facing the District.

...have achieved long-term financial sustainability.

...make better use of technology to underpin new ways of working and new relationships with residents, businesses and local institutions.

...drive partnerships across all sectors and deliver seamless services with its local government partners.

From the vision shown above, it is clear that the Council wants a far more inclusive form of decision making which places significant importance on seeking views and opinions, not only from residents but also other stakeholders such as businesses and local institutions. The Council has commenced an ambitious transformation programme to assist in this objective. The challenges that we have faced as a local authority arising from the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated this area of work.

In addition to setting the objectives for the longer term, the Council targets prioritises within this to deliver over the period up to the next election, the main priorities being:

- **Working on regional, national and international stages**
- **Responding to the climate emergency**
- **Enhancing the quality of Stratford-on-Avon as a place**
- **Nurturing a thriving, innovative and inclusive economy**
- **Putting residents and communities centre stage**

In relation to the final bullet point above, the commitment has been made to listen to and engage with residents and communities, use what we hear to shape what we do, and to communicate the results.

| Ambitions | Actions |
|---|--|
| Ensure that residents are confident that the Council will convene focussed and timely discussions on issues of concern to them. | Use community forums and specially convened sessions to engage with residents on specific issues. |
| Communicate actively with residents and respond quickly to customers. | Encourage the use of Council petitions to initiate discussion on topics of concern to the Council and residents. |
| Be on the front foot in our media and communications activities. | Implement a media and PR strategy to promote the District, communicate effectively with and listen to the residents of the District. |

This approach in the 2030 Vision identifies the aspirations of the District. It is fair to say, however, that the impact of COVID-19 upon the Authority has had a major impact upon the ability of the Council to pursue all of these initiatives at present.

Stratford-on-Avon is a very large and predominantly rural District with over 113 individual parishes. This number of parishes is more than the rest of the County of Warwickshire combined.

The reduction in Councillors has resulted in some difficulties in meeting these objectives. When provided with the option of undertaking an Electoral Review, the Council was unanimous in its support for increasing the number of elected representatives for our area.

Stratford-on-Avon is also an area of significant growth in housing and it is not expected that this will diminish. This leads to the Council receiving an extremely high level of planning applications for determination. The Council has in place a scheme of delegation to enable as many decisions as possible to be delegated. Elected members, however, have an important role in providing responses to applications within their wards. For the last five years the Council has featured in the top 10 authorities nationally for the number of applications to be considered. In 2018, the Council received 1,787 planning applications. This means on average each Councillor would need to consider around 50 applications. For comparison, a neighbouring authority (Redditch) received 229 applications in the same period, equating to an average of only 8 applications per Councillor.

Council Size

6. The Commission believes that councillors have three broad aspects to their role. These are categorised as: Strategic Leadership, Accountability (Scrutiny, Regulation and Partnerships), and Community Leadership. Submissions should address each of these in turn and provide supporting evidence. Prompts in the boxes below should help shape responses.

Strategic Leadership

7. Respondents should provide the Commission with details as to how elected members will provide strategic leadership for the authority. Responses should also indicate how many members will be required for this role and why this is justified.

| Topic | | |
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| Governance Model | <p>Key lines of explanation</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>What governance model will your authority operate? e.g. Committee System, Executive or other?</i> ➤ <i>The Cabinet model, for example, usually requires 6 to 10 members. How many members will you require?</i> ➤ <i>If the authority runs a Committee system, we want to understand why the number and size of the committees you propose represents the most appropriate for the authority.</i> ➤ <i>By what process does the council aim to formulate strategic and operational policies? How will members in executive, executive support and/or scrutiny positions be involved? What particular demands will this make of them?</i> <p><i>Whichever governance model you currently operate, a simple assertion that you want to keep the current structure does not in itself, provide an explanation of why that structure best meets the needs of the council and your communities.</i></p> |
| | <p>Analysis</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>The Council has adopted the Leader and Executive governance model, together with the “Strong Leader” option. Once elected by Council, the Leader then chooses other members of The Cabinet. A copy of the latest version of the Leader’s Statement is attached. This document delegates executive decision-making powers to Portfolio Holders, nominates members to represent the Council on external bodies and lists the working groups tasked to advise The Cabinet.</i> ➤ <i>The division of services within individual portfolios generally aligns with management team responsibilities. There are no plans to change the governance model in the foreseeable future. The reasons for this are described below.</i> ➤ <i>The Cabinet increased from eight to nine members in September 2020. It comprises the Leader, a Deputy Leader and seven other members. The portfolios for each member are detailed in The Cabinet Structure. The Cabinet meets formally once per month to make decisions, having published details of any important forthcoming agenda items in its forward plan. There are no further plans to change the size of The Cabinet in the foreseeable future.</i> |

- *Strategic policy development for executive functions is initially a matter for The Cabinet or the relevant Portfolio Holder. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) also has a role to play where its contribution is likely to add value to the quality of any final decision. Regular dialogue between the Leader and the Chairman of the OSC ensures that the respective work programmes of The Cabinet and the OSC are synchronised. The OSC has separate dedicated officer support to deliver its work programme. This support enables the OSC to retain its independence and critical friend role. Executive support to The Cabinet and Portfolio Holders is provided by the Senior Management Team, as necessary. The Monitoring Officer oversees these processes to ensure that parity of respect is maintained between The Cabinet and the OSC.*
- *The Cabinet contributes to the development of strategic policies that form part of the Council's budget and policy framework. Much of this work relates to the local development plan which is now to be reviewed. A list of the main policies reserved to the Council are drawn from its Constitution. The current Council Committees and their relationship with the Executive and the OSC is shown in Meeting Structure. Officers within the Senior Management Team have delegated powers to create and amend operational policies and procedures, in consultation with Portfolio Holders where necessary.*
- *The current meeting structure we consider is lean. However, we do have members who sit on more than one Committee. There is scope for the Regulatory Committee, which currently has limited decision making, to be combined with the Audit and Standards Committee thereby reducing the number of Committee seats required.*
- *Policy development has become more complicated and time consuming with officer and member resources sometimes stretched. The increasing need for joint working with, and partnerships between public bodies to deal with public issues that cross traditional power boundaries is a factor. A good example is the West Midlands Combined Authority, of which Stratford-on-Avon District Council is a non-constituent member. Also, the level of multi-agency cross working necessary to develop policies that respond to the COVID-19 pandemic has increased.*
- *These changes in policy development translate into more time demands in preparing for meetings and longer and more frequent meetings, both within the Council and on external bodies.*

The existing governance model has been in operation since 2011. It complements the large number of town and parish councils (83) and parish meetings (30) in the District and provides clear lines for decision-making and public accountability. It includes the necessary checks and balances (for example, advance notice of key decisions and call-in provisions) to ensure that decisions are made lawfully and in accordance with the Constitution.

As explained, however, within the Vision in the introduction, the Council is committed to improving the involvement of residents in decision-making. This is impeded currently, however, by the excessive workload for our elected members due to:

- The large geographic size of the District; Stratford-on-Avon District Council's area makes up almost 50% of the entire County of Warwickshire and has more parish and town councils than the rest of the County combined;
- The relative size of The Cabinet to the overall size of the Council. A quarter of the Council sits on The Cabinet. This has placed pressure on the rest of the Council to fill all of the places on Committees, such as Scrutiny and the Regulatory functions;
- The Council receives a high level of planning applications. This places pressure on a limited number of elected members to respond to these. On average, each Councillor has more than 50 applications to respond to compared to neighbouring authorities where the figure is typically 8.

There are 36 Councillors covering 36 wards. We note from benchmarking that it is quite unusual to have single member wards for the whole of the District. Each Councillor is elected for a term of four years, with the last election held on 2 May 2019.

The current political representation on the Council is:

- Conservatives - 20
- Liberal Democrats - 12
- Green Party - 1
- Independent – 3

Under the Local Government Act 2000, the Council adopted a Cabinet style system with a Leader and Executive. The Council operates a "strong Leader" model whereby The Cabinet is appointed by the elected Leader. The Cabinet consists of nine members; the Leader (Policy and Partnerships), Deputy Leader (Place Portfolio) and seven Portfolio Holders who are each the Council's main representative and spokesperson for their nominated areas of responsibility, The Cabinet, therefore, is made up of a quarter of all Councillors on Council. The Leader has recently increased from 8 to 9 the members in The Cabinet due to capacity issues. The Cabinet carries out all of the functions which are not the responsibility of full Council or its Committees. The Cabinet meets formally once a month to make decisions, having published a Forward Plan to show which major issues will be considered. The role of the Leader, responsibilities of The Cabinet and the rules and

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| | | <p>procedures are set out in the Council's <u>Constitution</u> and the <u>Leader's Statement</u>. The recent increase in the number of members of The Cabinet is a response to three separate influences:</p> <p>(1) In recent years the Council has developed a closer relationship with two Chinese Provinces, which has opened up a potential for economic opportunities within our District;</p> <p>(2) In assessing the economic impact of COVID-19 on the regions for the second quarter of 2020, the Office for Budget Responsibility placed our District as the fourth worst hit economy in the United Kingdom. Hence, the additional Cabinet Member is to provide extra capacity for these factors;</p> <p>(3) In recent months, a closer working relationship has developed with Warwick District Council with ambitions, should the relationship develop satisfactorily, to merge the two Councils into one super District Council at some future date.</p> |
| <p>Portfolios</p> | <p>Key lines of explanation</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ How many portfolios will there be? ➤ What will the role of a portfolio holder be? ➤ Will this be a full-time position? ➤ Will decisions be delegated to portfolio holders? Or will the executive/mayor take decisions? |
| | <p>Analysis</p> | <p>The Leader role continues to expand, due to the growth in partnership working and policy development. This has recently led to the delegation of further decision-making powers from the Leader to Portfolio Holders. For example, policy development in response to HM Government initiatives arising directly from the COVID-19 pandemic is a case in point.</p> <p>Further delegation of decision-making powers to Portfolio Holders is likely, together with representation on external bodies and possibly Cabinet working groups. If so, the role of a Portfolio Holder will become more onerous, in the demand on their time and also the scrutiny and accountability that comes with increased decision-making powers. It is too early to say whether these changes will eventually result in the Portfolio Holder roles becoming full-time.</p> <p>The Portfolios broadly match the structure of the organisation, these being:</p> <p>Community Transformation and Digital Operations Finance and Assets People</p> |

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| | | <p><i>Place – Deputy Leader Policy And Partnerships – Leader Regulatory Tourism and Economic Development</i></p> <p><i>The structure and breakdown of these can be viewed at The Cabinet Structure and the Portfolio Role Description</i></p> <p><i>The full Terms of Reference of The Cabinet can be viewed at Terms of Reference</i></p> <p>➤ <i>The Leader of the Council is responsible for all executive functions as defined in the Local Government Act 2000 as amended. These may be made by the Leader of the Council, The Cabinet collectively, exercised under joint or area arrangements or delegations to individual Portfolio Holders or officers.</i></p> <p><i>The Cabinet can delegate to individual members of The Cabinet and to officers.</i></p> <p><i>Delegations are set out in Leader's Scheme of Delegation</i></p> |
| Delegated Responsibilities | <i>Key lines of explanation</i> | <p>➤ <i>What responsibilities will be delegated to officers or committees?</i></p> <p>➤ <i>How many Councillors will be involved in taking major decisions?</i></p> |
| | Analysis | <p><i>The Scheme of Delegations to Officers allows officers to decide operational policies, procedures and the ability to determine individual issues, including planning and licensing applications, save for contested applications, which are determined by the relevant Committee. Planning delegations have increased in recent years, in response to rising number of applications and the need to reduce workload pressure on the Committee.</i></p> <p><i>Terms of Reference for Council Committees are limited to strategic issues, save for the Licensing Panels and the Planning Committee, which determine contested applications. Due to the high volume of planning applications, different ideas have been tested over recent years to attempt to reduce its workload. The latest initiative was the merger of Planning Committees A and B into a single Planning Committee (12 members) which meets as frequently as necessary to keep pace with its workload, with the Chairman and two Vice-Chairmen rotating, if required, to chair individual meetings.</i></p> |

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| | <p><i>Major decisions - or “key decisions”- are matters for the Leader, The Cabinet or individual Portfolio Holders. This comprises nine Councillors. In addition, all 36 Councillors make major decisions on the budget and the policy framework. The most significant decisions in practice relate to the Local Development Plan (LDP). Adopted by the Council in 2016, work on the LDP is ongoing and still requires involvement of both The Cabinet and Council. The Council has now committed to work with Warwick District Council to develop a joint development plan for both Councils, which will require additional joint bodies - for example, a joint member planning working group.</i></p> <p><i>The Council has in place a specific scheme of delegation as part of its Constitution which sets out delegations made to officers <u>Officer Delegations</u>.</i></p> |
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Accountability

8. Give the Commission details as to how the authority and its decision makers and partners will be held to account. The Commission is interested in both the internal and external dimensions of this role.

| Topic | |
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| Internal Scrutiny | The scrutiny function of authorities has changed considerably. Some use theme or task-and-finish groups, for example, and others have a committee system. Scrutiny arrangements may also be affected by the officer support available. |
| <i>Key lines of explanation</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>How will decision makers be held to account?</i> ➤ <i>How many committees will be required? And what will their functions be?</i> ➤ <i>How many task and finish groups will there be? And what will their functions be? What time commitment will be involved for members? And how often will meetings take place?</i> ➤ <i>How many members will be required to fulfil these positions?</i> ➤ <i>Explain why you have increased, decreased, or not changed the number of scrutiny committees in the authority.</i> ➤ <i>Explain the reasoning behind the number of members per committee in terms of adding value.</i> |
| Analysis | <p><i>The Council has one Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC), which holds decision makers to account through the call-in procedure. Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, call-in has been limited to key decisions. This will be reviewed when the pandemic is over.</i></p> <p><i>The Committee meets approximately every month with meetings lasting between 2 to 3 hours. These provide an opportunity for members to hold to account Cabinet members and senior officers, review and monitor performance, and contribute to policy development through the consideration of draft proposals. Alongside</i></p> |

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| | <p><i>this, there are ad-hoc Task & Finish Groups (approximately 3-4 a year) that look at specific issues and focus primarily on policy development. Over the last 12 months, groups have been set-up on the Budget, Climate Emergency and Housing.</i></p> <p><i>As recognised by the 2019 Local Government Association Peer Challenge, OSC has made considerable progress since the appointment of a dedicated support officer two years ago. There has been a renewed focus on internal scrutiny and a greater contribution to policy development. This has, however, increased the workload of Councillors. As an example, the work of the Climate Emergency Task & Finish Group involved eight meetings (each of approximately two hours duration) for members between August and November 2019 with a significant amount of reading and research between meetings. This means that, under the present arrangements, it has become a challenge for the Council to effectively fulfil all of its scrutiny functions. The OSC is aware of this, and has recommended organisational changes that were considered and subject to minor wording changes accepted by The Cabinet in November 2020.</i></p> <p><i>How will decision makers be held to account?</i></p> <p><i>The OSC has changed in recent years, with more focus on internal policy development and service performance, rather than on external bodies. It will continue to establish Task and Finish Groups, but it is impossible to predict how many Groups will be required. By their nature, they are ad hoc groups.</i></p> <p><i>The number of OSC Committees required will partly depend on the value-added principle, but the capacity of Councillors to fill seats and the staffing resource to service meetings is currently limited by the Council's financial position.</i></p> <p><i>It is likely, however, that a joint OSC will be established with Warwick District Council. This will initially focus on policy development for the joint review of the development plans for both Districts.</i></p> |
| Statutory Function | <p>This includes planning, licencing and any other regulatory responsibilities. Consider under each of the headings the extent to which decisions will be delegated to officers. How many members will be required to fulfil the statutory requirements of the council?</p> |
| Planning | <p><i>Key lines of explanation</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>What proportion of planning applications will be determined by members?</i> ➤ <i>Has this changed in the last few years? And are further changes anticipated?</i> ➤ <i>Will there be area planning committees? Or a single council-wide committee?</i> ➤ <i>Will executive members serve on the planning committees?</i> |

➤ *What will be the time commitment to the planning committee for members?*

At the Annual Meeting of the Council on 16 September 2020, it was agreed to replace the two Planning Committees (A & B) which had been in operation since May 2019 with a single Planning Committee. Prior to May 2019, there had been two area based Planning Committees (East and West). Executive members are permitted to serve on Planning Committees with the exception of The Leader of the Council and the member of The Cabinet with responsibility for planning policy/development control. The new Committee comprises 12 members and meets fortnightly. There is a maximum duration of meeting length of three hours. Along with the appointment of a new Chairman, the Council also appointed two Vice-Chairmen with a view to sharing the workload.

Analysis

| Year | No. applications determined (majors, Minors and others) | No. delegated & % | No. Committee & % |
|-------------------------------|---|-------------------|-------------------|
| April 2020 to 16 October 2020 | 1025 | 926 90% | 99 10% |
| 2019/20 | 2093 | 2012 96% | 81 4% |
| 2018/19 | 2157 | 2029 94% | 128 6% |
| 2017/18 | 2240 | 2037 91% | 203 9% |
| 2016/17 | 2332 | 2159 92.5% | 173 7.5% |
| 2015/16 | 2512 | 2260 90% | 252 10% |

Planning performance information is provided as a member Information Sheet, which can be found at [Planning Performance](#).

| | | |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| Licensing | Key lines of explanation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ How many licencing panels will the council have in the average year? ➤ And what will be the time commitment for members? ➤ Will there be standing licencing panels, or will they be ad-hoc? ➤ Will there be core members and regular attendees, or will different members serve on them? |
| | Analysis | <p>The membership of the Council's Licensing Panel is drawn from the Regulatory Committee on an ad-hoc basis. There are currently three Councillors appointed as Chairman of the Panel and their attendance is rotated.</p> <p>Delegated powers are allocated to officers for licensing applications. With rare exceptions licensing decisions are made by authorised officers (2019/20 – 99% of applications).</p> <p>The average time for meetings is three hours, which includes deliberations. There are four meetings of the Licensing Panel timetabled into the calendar. Others are called as and when required. In 2019/20 the Panel met on 12 occasions. A Panel of three members (plus a reserve) is drawn for each meeting.</p> |
| Other Regulatory Bodies | Key lines of explanation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ What will they be, and how many members will they require? ➤ Explain the number and membership of your Regulatory Committees with respect to greater delegation to officers. |
| | Analysis | <p>The Council has a number of other Committees including a Regulatory Committee (11 members), an Audit and Standards Committee (11 members) and an Employment and Appointments Committee (9 members).</p> |
| External Partnerships | | <p>Service delivery has changed for councils over time, and many authorities now have a range of delivery partners to work with and hold to account.</p> |
| Key lines of explanation | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Will council members serve on decision-making partnerships, sub-regional, regional or national bodies? In doing so, are they able to take decisions/make commitments on behalf of the council? ➤ How many councillors will be involved in this activity? And what is their expected workload? What proportion of this work is undertaken by portfolio holders? ➤ What other external bodies will members be involved in? And what is the anticipated workload? |
| Analysis | | <p>For external bodies whose work relates to Council functions, members of the Council are appointed as representatives for a four-year term at the Annual Meeting of the Council following an all-out election. These can be viewed at Outside Bodies.</p> <p>For external bodies whose work relates to the Council's executive functions, the Leader represents the Council on these bodies:</p> |

- *Coventry, Warwickshire, Hinckley and Bosworth Economic Prosperity Joint Committee for Economic Growth & Prosperity*
 - *District Councils Network (DCN)*
 - *Local Government Association (LGA)*
 - *West Midlands Combined Authority Board*
 - *Coventry and Warwickshire LEP Board*
- Portfolio Holders are appointed to the following bodies:*
- *South Warwickshire Community Safety Partnership – Community Portfolio Holder*
 - *Warwickshire Police and Crime Panel - Community Portfolio Holder*
 - *Warwickshire Safer Partnership Board - Community Portfolio Holder*
 - *Shakespeare’s England DMO - Tourism and Economic Development Portfolio Holder*
 - *Stratford-upon-Avon Market Forum-Operations Portfolio Holder*
 - *SPARSE - Community Portfolio Holder*
 - *Stratford-upon-Avon Market Forum-Operations Portfolio Holder,*
 - *Warwickshire Health and Wellbeing Board - People Portfolio Holder*
 - *Warwickshire Safeguarding Children Board - Community Portfolio Holder*
 - *Warwickshire Waste Partnership - Operations Portfolio Holder*
 - *Local Government Information Unit - Policy and Partnerships Portfolio Holder*
 - *West Midlands Employers - Community Portfolio Holder*

Community Involvement

9. The Commission understands that there is no single approach to community leadership and that members represent, and provide leadership to, their communities in different ways. The Commission wants to know how members are required to provide effective community leadership and what support the council offers them in this role. For example, does the authority have a defined role and performance system for its elected members? And what support networks are available within the council to help members in their duties?

| Topic | | Description |
|----------------------|--------------------------|--|
| Community Leadership | Key lines of explanation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>In general terms how do councillors carry out their representational role with electors?</i> ➤ <i>Does the council have area committees and what are their powers?</i> |

| | | |
|--|---|---|
| | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ How do councillors seek to engage with their constituents? Do they hold surgeries, send newsletters, hold public meetings or maintain blogs? ➤ Are there any mechanisms in place that help councillors interact with young people, those not on the electoral register, and/or other minority groups and their representative bodies? ➤ Are councillors expected to attend community meetings, such as parish or resident’s association meetings? If so, what is their level of involvement and what roles do they play? ➤ Explain your approach to the Area Governance structure. Is your Area Governance a decision-making forum or an advisory board? What is their relationship with locally elected members and Community bodies such as Town and Parish Councils? Looking forward how could they be improved to enhance decision-making? |
| | <p style="text-align: center;">Analysis</p> | <p><i>The Council operates in a three tier local government structure, with Warwickshire County Council as the upper tier authority, and 83 Town and Parish Councils and 30 Parish Meetings. These form the building blocks for the local communities represented by elected representatives across these tiers of local government.</i></p> <p><i>Councillors are actively involved within their wards and most consider they play a pro-active part in the communities they represent. The approach taken varies from Councillor to Councillor, but all are involved in some or all of the following as part of their engagement with constituents:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Holding surgeries – dealing with queries, providing advice and engaging with constituents face-to-face</i> • <i>Constituency matters – emails, written, telephone responses</i> • <i>Community / Resident meetings</i> • <i>Working with and / or offering support to community groups and local organisations:</i> • <i>Attending Town and Parish Council meetings</i> • <i>Contact with Parish/Town Councils.</i> • <i>Articles for parish/village magazines and newsletters, blogs and/or websites and social media</i> <p><i>Councillors completed a workload survey to obtain a picture of how much time is spent on various aspects of their role. The results can be found in the Appendix attached to this submission.</i></p> <p><i>This Council has a high level of uptake on the Electoral Register and following the Parliamentary Election in December 2019, the Electoral Register reached its highest ever levels peaking at 106,000 electors on 1 January 2020.</i></p> <p><i>There have been 16 Neighbourhood Development Plans adopted. The Council continues to support parishes that wish to develop a Neighbourhood Plan.</i></p> |

| | | <p><i>The areas in which the Council would like to enhance its approach to the involvement of communities in decision-making was approved last October. These include:</i></p> <table border="1" data-bbox="546 316 2132 794"> <thead> <tr> <th data-bbox="546 316 1339 363">Ambitions</th> <th data-bbox="1339 316 2132 363">Actions</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td data-bbox="546 363 1339 523"> <p>Ensure that residents are confident that the Council will convene focussed and timely discussions on issues of concern to them.</p> </td> <td data-bbox="1339 363 2132 523"> <p>Use community forums and specially convened sessions to engage with residents on specific issues.</p> </td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="546 523 1339 683"> <p>Communicate actively with residents and respond quickly to customers.</p> </td> <td data-bbox="1339 523 2132 683"> <p>Encourage the use of Council petitions to initiate discussion on topics of concern to the Council and residents.</p> </td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="546 683 1339 794"> <p>Be on the front foot in our media and communications activities.</p> </td> <td data-bbox="1339 683 2132 794"> <p>Implement a media and PR strategy to promote the District, communicate effectively with and listen to the residents of the District.</p> </td> </tr> </tbody> </table> | Ambitions | Actions | <p>Ensure that residents are confident that the Council will convene focussed and timely discussions on issues of concern to them.</p> | <p>Use community forums and specially convened sessions to engage with residents on specific issues.</p> | <p>Communicate actively with residents and respond quickly to customers.</p> | <p>Encourage the use of Council petitions to initiate discussion on topics of concern to the Council and residents.</p> | <p>Be on the front foot in our media and communications activities.</p> | <p>Implement a media and PR strategy to promote the District, communicate effectively with and listen to the residents of the District.</p> |
|--|---|--|------------------|----------------|--|--|--|---|---|---|
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| Casework | <p><i>Key lines of explanation</i></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>How do councillors deal with their casework? Do they pass it on to council officers? Or do they take a more in-depth approach to resolving issues?</i> ➤ <i>What support do members receive?</i> ➤ <i>How has technology influenced the way in which Councillors work? And interact with their electorate?</i> ➤ <i>In what ways does the council promote service users' engagement/dispute resolution with service providers and managers rather than through councillors?</i> | | | | | | | | |
| | <p><i>Analysis</i></p> | <p><i>Councillors take accountability for their casework and manage their workload appropriately. All Councillors stated that they 'very frequently' and 'frequently' fully deal and respond to a request themselves and 62% said they would 'infrequently' or 'never' pass on a request for an officer to respond to on their behalf. Officer support is available to assist Councillors as and when requested to give information, technical and professional advice and guidance. Continuing improvements to the Council's website have increased the amount of information and number of transactions with the Council that customers can access directly without necessarily needing to involve a Councillor in the first instance.</i></p> | | | | | | | | |

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| | | <p><i>In May 2019 following all-out elections, 18 new District Councillors were elected to the Council. An induction training programme was provided to all new and existing Councillors in the months following the election. The Council also has an extensive training programme for members, which is instigated and monitored by the Member Development Working Group. Each year there is an extensive internal training programme to inform and support members including Code of Conduct, Equality and Diversity, Scrutiny, Public Speaking and Personal Safety. During COVID-19 this has been continued and delivered via MS Teams.</i></p> <p><i>The Democratic Services team provides a first point of contact for members' enquiries, signposting guidance on the Member constituency role. Technical and professional support is always available from specific officers.</i></p> <p><i>Prior to COVID-19, all Councillors had been offered an iPhone to enable a more direct and responsive point of contact for public and officers, and for the Councillor to use for Council business and to access their emails. In addition, remote access is provided. During the current pandemic and in order to facilitate virtual Council meetings, Councillors were offered a Tablet and MS Teams. All meeting agendas, minutes and communications are sent electronically, although those serving on the Committee are still sent a paper copy.</i></p> |
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Other Issues

10. Respondent may use this space to bring any other issues of relevance to the attention of the Commission.

Forming an integral part of the review and to support and validate the case made for the Council Size proposal all Councillors were requested to complete a survey focusing on the average time spent each month on Council business, details of their workloads relating to governance and decision-making, responsibilities for scrutiny and their representative role, as well as assessing the way each Councillor communicates with their constituents. 34 out of 36 councillors responded to the survey in October/November, with the survey results set out in the Appendix to this submission.

Some of the key points:

- 41% of councillors have been in the role for less than two years.*
- Taking into consideration the number of committees and outside body appointments, 42% felt the associated workload was too high, 52% about right and 6% too low.*
- 52% of those surveyed are also a parish or town councillor.*

- 21 councillors spend up to 10 hours a month attending other Council meetings.
- 18 attend external meetings as a representative of the Council, up to 5 hours a month.
- 8 attend town or parish council meetings 11 hours a month or more.
- 27 have contact with town or parish councils up to 10 hours a month.
- 13 councillors deal with planning applications between 11 and 20 hours a month.

Asked how many cases/issues Councillors dealt with on average per month, this ranged from 3 to as many as 50. The median figure is 10 and the mean average 12 cases per month. 97% of Councillors use email and the telephone to engage with constituents, 91% attend meetings and 88% have face-face meetings.

22 wide-ranging comments were received, which included the need to increase the number of Councillors in time, recognising there has been a workload increase in recent times, Council meetings taking too long, and multi-member wards possibly being a positive move. (NB. The Working Group had given a steer of single member wards remaining). Other comments covered the differing workloads of rural and urban wards, having a ward with higher levels of social housing which leads to more complex cases, having more Councillors could lead to younger residents coming forward to get elected, and larger wards could lead to a loss of connectivity with the electorate. It was recognised the complexities for those with multiple parishes in their ward.

Population Growth

In respect of expected growth, three ways of calculating it was used. The Office for National Statistics saw an estimated electorate per ward (based on the current 36 wards) of 3,177 in 2028. The Forecast Tool was used and in 2027 forecasts a figure of 3111. Our own estimate based on Valuation Office data and local knowledge see an estimate in 2028 of 3232. Therefore we would foresee in 2027 electorates on average of between 3100 and 3200. We also assumed that 80% of the total population were of voting age.

Summary

11. In following this template respondents should have been able to provide the Commission with a robust and well-evidenced case for their proposed council size; one which gives a clear explanation as to the number of councillors required to represent the authority in the future. Use this space to summarise the proposals and indicate any other options considered. Explain why these alternatives were not appropriate in terms of their ability to deliver effective Strategic Leadership, Accountability (Scrutiny, Regulation and Partnerships), and Community Leadership.

The Council size proposal put forward demonstrates that since the last review and the decrease in Councillors from 53 to 36, the workload for councillors has increased. In arriving at this conclusion the Council has considered future potential changes in governance arrangements; local policy developments; and the representational role of elected members, with evidence gathered concerning the time commitments in discharging the functions of the elected member role. Consideration has also been given to population trends, any potential increase in electoral numbers through housing and other forms of growth and development.

Whilst a higher number of Councillors may have been suggested, given a reducing Council budget amidst a backdrop of continuing austerity and the COVID-19 pandemic, the Council is confident to recommend that a council size of between 41- 43 councillors is justified to enable each to deliver/fulfil their responsibilities and duties as elected ward representatives and secure electoral equality.

The need for additional Councillors to share the workload arises from:

- Population growth that has already occurred and growth which is projected and being planned for.*
- The large size of many rural wards and the accompanying challenges in engaging with residents, including attending parish meetings.*
- A change in how residents see the role of a Councillor, including the advent of modern communications raising expectations of Councillors.*
- The fact that the Council is expected to do more with less in the context of reduced resources and increased demand for services.*