

St Albans City and District Council

Council Size Submission

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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.
2. The template allows respondents to enter comments directly under each heading. It is not recommended that responses are should 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 is a submission made by St Albans City and District Council and was approved by a full meeting of the Council on 10th July 2019.

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.*

[Click or tap here to enter text.](#)

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 constraint 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 transitional populations, is there any large growth anticipated?
 - Are there any other constraints, challenges, issues or changes ahead?

St Albans District is in the Green Belt of south west Hertfordshire, 25 minutes' train journey from St Pancras International. Its historic setting, beautiful landscape, low levels of crime and unemployment, good sports and cultural facilities, excellent schools and strong sense of community make it a very popular place to live, and to bring up families. These factors also make the district one of the most expensive places to live in the UK.

Much of the population is affluent. An indicator of the prosperity of the district is the fact that St Albans ranks 6th in the top income tax paying areas of the country. However, four sub-ward areas are in the 40% most deprived in the country (within Batchwood, Cunningham, Sopwell and Harpenden East) according to the Government's Index of Multiple Deprivation.

The popularity of the area for families has an impact on the activities of councillors, especially at ward/community level. In addition to the usual district council activities, other services such as school places and access to services for children with special needs take up district councillor time, despite these being county council functions. Also, limited access to affordable accommodation makes housing another issue that is high on district councillors' most asked about subjects.

Our population is highly engaged in many aspects of Council life, a particularly distinctive and noteworthy feature and something we celebrate locally as it contributes to our sense of community.

This engagement is illustrated by the commendably high level of turnout seen for elections of all types:

- District election turnouts routinely between 40% and 47% (UK average around 35%);*
- EU referendum 82.5% (UK average 72.2%);*
- UK Parliamentary election June 2017: St Albans constituency turnout was 78.3%, the 7th highest in the country. The 77.4% turnout in the Hitchin and Harpenden constituency was the 17th highest turnout;*
- EU Parliamentary election 23 May 2019, St Albans District turnout 47% - Eastern Region average 36%.*

According to findings from our Community Survey 2018, the proportion of residents who feel well informed about how they can get involved in local decision making has increased by 10 percentage points since 2015 to 46%. We also have high levels of volunteering with over 30% of residents saying they regularly participate in unpaid work (Community Survey 2018).

This level of engagement does, however, mean that councillors have a high rate of resident contact and demand. Therefore, whether in areas of deprivation such as those wards mentioned above, or in more affluent areas, both urban (such as those in St Albans and Harpenden) and rural (such as the large villages of Redbourn, Wheathampstead, Park Street and London Colney) local councillors have high workloads.

The population of St Albans has risen steadily over recent decades and is forecast to continue to do so. The Government predicts that our population could rise from 148,810 residents in 2018 to 154,717 in 2024 and to 158,038 residents by 2029. This is an increase of 5.8% between 2018 and 2029. In 1997, at the time of the last review, the population was approximately 127,327, so there has been an increase of 16.8% since the current governance arrangements were established. We also welcome an estimated 2 million visitors each year.

As part of the review process, the Council has prepared electorate forecasts for the period to 2023, having regard to the location and scale of housing development expected to take place. These forecasts were developed in accordance with the Local Government Boundary Commission for England guidance and are consistent with ONS expectations of growth.

St Albans has a highly qualified population, according to NOMIS which provides employment by occupation data derived from the ONS annual population survey. For the period January 2018 to December 2018 the following was noted:

- Social Group 1-3 (managers, directors and senior officials, professional occupations, technical) 65.7%;
- Social Group 4-5 (administrative & secretarial, skilled trades) 11.6%;
- Social Group 6-7 (caring, leisure, sales and customer services) 14%;
- Social Group 8-9 (plant and machine operatives, elementary occupations) 16.2%;

According to NOMIS, for the period Jan 2018 to Dec 2018, 50,300 hold NVQA and above which amounts to 56.5% of the population aged 16-64. This is higher than the average for the East (35.2%) and for Great Britain (39.3%)
<https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/lmp/la/1946157227/report.aspx?town=st%20albans>

The table below illustrates that St Albans has a high share of total employment in financial and business services at 36.7%. A report by the Hertfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) noted that the financial services sector was the industry most at risk by the withdrawal of EU migrant labour.

Area	Manufacturing	Construction	Wholesale and retail	Transport and communication	Financial and business services	Public admin, education and health	Other Services
Employment in area	1,750	3,750	11,000	6,250	26,450	12,900	3,750
Share of total employment	2.4%	5.2%	15.3%	8.7%	36.7%	17.9%	5.2%

Source: <https://www.hertfordshirelep.com/media/6882/brexit-hertfordshire-2018.pdf>

Proximity to London means that a high number of residents commute to work. St Albans is itself an attraction, providing employment, facilities and entertainment for many. In 2017/18, St Albans City railway station recorded over 7 million entries and exits, while Harpenden station recorded nearly 3.5 million.

*The city of **St Albans** is an important market town and retail centre featuring small specialist independent retailers, as well as high street multiples. The city has a wide range of restaurants and bars which contribute to a vibrant evening economy. Its heritage goes back to before Roman times. There are 19 conservation areas, and nearly 900 listed buildings and two Sites of Special Scientific Interest. The district is also rich in archaeological heritage with 18 Scheduled Ancient Monuments.*

*Located to the north of the city **Harpenden** is a charming and prosperous town with a thriving town centre and farmers market. Its population of over 30,000 is well served by shops, many being independently owned pubs and restaurants. Like St Albans it is a popular, if expensive place, to live with good rail connections direct to London, and is close to the M1, M25 and A1, with easy access to London Luton Airport. Harpenden has a town council and its own Mayor.*

***Wheathampstead** is a large village with Roman and pre-Roman heritage on the River Lea, to the north of St Albans. It has a number of famous landmarks and beautiful green spaces.*

***London Colney** is one of the biggest villages in Britain. Nearby is the Colney Fields out-of-town shopping centre with major high street stores. Arsenal Football Club has its training ground here.*

***Redbourn** is a delightful village lying on the old Roman Watling Street, 4 miles to the north west of St Albans. The village has been settled since at least Saxon times and is a thriving local community.*

***Colney Heath**, to the east of St Albans, includes the hamlets of Colney Heath, Smallford, Tyttenhanger Green, Sleapshyde, and Highfield. Colney Heath was part of the historic Watling Chase and boasts a one-thousand-year history.*

***Bricket Wood, Chiswell Green, Park Street and How Wood** together make up St Stephens, to the south of the district. The railway line to Watford Junction goes through the area, and this, together with the proximity of the motorway network make these areas popular places to live.*

***Sandridge, Marshalswick, Jersey Farm, Coleman Green and Sandridgebury** to the north of the district make up the parish of Sandridge, with a combined population of over 5,000 people. Heartwood Forest, the largest new forest in Europe, is being created at Sandridge.*

*Other hamlets include the historic **St Michaels** village in St Albans, and various locations that make up Harpenden Rural parish.*

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		
Governance Model	Key lines of explanation	<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 have represents is most appropriate for the authority.</i>
	Analysis	<p><i>St Albans Council operates under the 'Strong Leader with Cabinet' model in line with the provisions of the Local Government Act 2000 and the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. The Leader, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Portfolio Holders, a total of 7 positions, are the busiest roles within the Council's governance structures.</i></p> <p><i>The Leader is elected for up to a four-year term of office at the Annual Council meeting in May. Under the strong leader arrangements, the Leader of the Council determines the makeup of the Cabinet and also holds a Portfolio. This model of governance is expected to continue.</i></p>
Portfolios	Key lines of explanation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>How many portfolios will there be?</i> ➤ <i>What will the role of a portfolio holder be?</i> ➤ <i>Will this be a full-time position?</i> ➤ <i>Will decisions be delegated to portfolio holders? Or will the executive/mayor take decisions?</i>
	Analysis	<p><i>For 2019/20, each of the seven members of the Cabinet has responsibility for one of the following Portfolios:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Business, Culture and Tourism;</i> - <i>Climate and Environment;</i> - <i>Community, Leisure and Sport;</i>

- *Housing, Inclusion and Protection;*
- *Planning;*
- *Property, Commercial and Development;*
- *Resources.*

The key areas of work for the Leader are to:

- *provide political leadership to the Council;*
- *appoint other councillors to the Cabinet;*
- *represent St Albans City and District Council and act as an ambassador for the Authority;*
- *manage and lead the work of the Cabinet;*
- *participate in the collective decision making of the Cabinet;*
- *demonstrate a commitment to high ethical standards of behaviour and governance;*
- *work with Scrutiny;*
- *work with officers to lead the organisation;*
- *act for St Albans City and District Council on Hertfordshire County-wide bodies;*
- *lead partnership and community work.*

The key areas of work for all seven Cabinet members are to:

- *lead on their Portfolio;*
- *contribute to the setting of a strategic agenda and work programme for the Portfolio;*
- *provide representation for the Portfolio;*
- *report and communicate on progress and key issues within the Portfolio;*
- *lead on significant property transactions;*
- *take an active part in Executive meetings and decision making;*
- *work with Scrutiny;*
- *lead partnership and community work in their Portfolio areas.*

The Cabinet is scheduled to meet on ten occasions each year and is the main decision-making body of the Council. While the Constitution does provide for decisions to be made by individual Cabinet members, in practice this happens infrequently. Portfolio Holders do actively lead their Portfolios and, in common with Chairmen, ensure they are always well briefed in preparation for meetings. They are regularly consulted by

		<p><i>Heads of Service and are kept fully aware of service activity within their portfolios.</i></p> <p><i>The role of the Portfolio Holders is not considered to be full time. However, it is necessary for all Portfolio Holders to make a substantial time commitment to properly carry out their roles. Cabinet members have established informal panels and working groups to progress key issues and support wider member engagement. For example, a Car Parking Advisory Group has been established to provide guidance and assistance to the Portfolio Holder for Climate and Environment in connection with parking issues throughout the district. This Working Party meets on 4 occasions per annum and has 6 members including the Portfolio Holder.</i></p> <p><i>In addition to the formal Cabinet meetings, the Portfolio Holders are expected to represent the Authority on bodies outside of the Council. As senior representatives of the Council, Cabinet Members are called upon to participate in partnership and regional bodies, as well as certain voluntary organisations. The demands made by these bodies vary but are a significant call upon the time of Cabinet members.</i></p> <p><i>Cabinet members are, on occasion, requested to attend Scrutiny meetings to report on activity in their Portfolio area.</i></p>
Delegated Responsibilities	<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>What responsibilities will be delegated to officers or committees?</i> ➤ <i>How many councillors will be involved in taking major decisions?</i>
	Analysis	<p><i>The functions of the Cabinet are set out in Part 3 of the Council’s Constitution and include:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>making recommendations to Council on overall objectives, policy, priorities and budget (revenue and capital);</i> - <i>monitoring of the overall budget, including consideration of supplementary estimates within set financial limits;</i> - <i>providing advice to Portfolio Holders and officers on budget preparation;</i> - <i>making recommendations to Council on the level of Council Tax, Council Tax discount, housing rent levels, borrowing limits and treasury management policy and policy on discretionary rate relief;</i> - <i>setting policy and strategy on any matter not specifically reserved or delegated elsewhere under the Council’s policy and budget framework;</i> - <i>making decisions on behalf of the council within the policy framework set by the council, for instance in relation to the purchase and sale of land.</i>

	<p><i>Decision making at Cabinet is by all 7 Portfolio Holders, including the Leader.</i></p> <p><i>The need for rapid decision making and the efficient delivery of services to the public in a wide range of matters means that it is not possible for elected Council members to be directly involved in the detail of all decisions. Therefore, the Council has delegated a number of actions to officers and these are detailed in a Scheme of Delegation [in Part 3 of the Council's Constitution], which is regularly monitored and amended as required.</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	
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>St Albans City and District Council has two Scrutiny Committees, currently with 11 councillors serving on each. The Committees cover services for Business, Community, Environment and Sport in the first case, and Planning, Resources, Housing and Commercial Services in the second. The Council reviews the operation of these Committees periodically and, in the past, the size of these Committees has varied.</i></p> <p><i>The Scrutiny Committees ensure that their level of activity is manageable through their annual work programme, which is set by each Committee and reported to Council each year. The content of the work programmes is carefully considered to ensure that work areas are relevant to the Council's ambitions and the challenges it faces. Adequate resources are made available to Scrutiny and the contribution made by both</i></p>

Committees proves them to be beneficial to the effective and efficient operation of this Authority.

St Albans is a high performing Council, with a strong reputation for quality service provision, strong financial management and community leadership. The activities of the Scrutiny Committees helps maintain high standards. Chief Officers provide senior officer support to both Committees and, in turn, the Committees support the work of the Cabinet and the Council as a whole.

The work of the Scrutiny Committees leads to reports and recommendations being made to the Cabinet and the Council on proposed new policies and development of services. The Committees also monitor decisions made under the Council's Executive arrangements. Portfolio Holders attend meetings of the Scrutiny Committees on request to report on activities within their portfolio areas.

When appropriate, the Scrutiny Committees establish task groups to undertake more detailed scrutiny and investigation. In the past year, 7 task groups were established or continued, and each met on about 2/3 occasions. Examples of their work last year included looking at Section 106 payments; pay policy; dropped kerbs; budget scrutiny; planning enforcement; rail consultation and community safety. In 2018/19 they made 8 referrals to Cabinet, and 7 referrals to Portfolio Holders.

In previous years Scrutiny recommendations resulted in:

- a public realm strategy with important input from external sources;*
- the construction of houses and flats on the site of former garages;*
- the establishment of a tourism website in recognition of local attractions (enjoystalbans.com);*
- the employment of a Compliance and Monitoring Officer to improve planning committee processes;*
- provision of school bus parking bays and improvement to traffic flows around schools;*
- the use of fixed penalty notices to deter fly tipping and littering.*

The Committees also have a strong external focus, supporting the Council's role as community champion. External partners and stakeholders are invited to be part of the work of these Committees. This provides Members with an opportunity to hold external bodies to account for their performance to residents and businesses. For example, in the past, Scrutiny recommended that consideration be given to seeking a Judicial Review against the Department for Transport for lack of consultation over train timetable changes and funding of £50k was agreed. Also, following the expression of concern over the lack of bus transport for school children

	<p><i>from Redbourn to Harpenden, the Department for Transport funded such a service.</i></p> <p><i>The Scrutiny Committees are chaired by Members outside of the largest political group. There were six meetings of each Committee in 2018/19. No meetings have been cancelled because a quorum was not achieved. The volume of work considered by the Scrutiny Committees is expected to remain stable for the foreseeable future.</i></p> <p><i>The Scrutiny Committees cover a wide variety of activities, covering all aspects of Council service and performance, as well as the service and performance of external organisations and stakeholders. The twenty-two councillors who sit on our Scrutiny Committees provide initial thoughts on new policy initiatives and refine service developments. It is critical, therefore, that the membership of these committees continues to be drawn from a wide range of councillors. The scrutiny function is very important to the successful operation of the Council and the participation of 22 councillors must be borne in mind when determining the size of the Council.</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> ➤ <i>What will be the time commitment to the planning committee for members?</i>
	<p>Analysis</p>	<p><i>The Council has five Regulatory Committees: the Planning (Development Control) Central Committee [9 members]; the Planning (Development Control) North Committee [8 members]; the Planning (Development Control) South Committee [9 members]; the Planning (Development Control) Referrals Committee [10 members]; and the Licensing & Regulatory Committee [14 members].</i></p> <p><i>The North and South Planning Committees are each scheduled to meet twelve times a year, while the Central Planning Committee meets on eleven occasions. Their main function is to determine planning applications that are reported to them, along with recommendations from the Head of Planning and Building Control. The membership of each of these three area Committees is politically balanced based on the political representation in the Wards covered by the Committee. The Council has decided that a two-year term limit be applied to the position of Chairman of the Planning (Development Control) Committees.</i></p>

The Planning (Development Control) Referrals Committee meets 12 times a year and decides on those planning applications which raise district-wide issues; are contentious; or are of a strategic nature; along with those planning applications made by councillors, officers or their close relatives.

*The Council operates a 4-weekly cycle for our planning committees. Each of the area committees and the Planning Referrals Committee meet regularly to enable the Local Planning Authority (LPA) to meet statutory timescales for determining planning applications. Major applications are required to be determined within 13 weeks and all other applications need to be determined within 8 weeks. The Government closely monitors the speed of decision-making for every Local Authority and is able to place Authorities which fail to make decisions within statutory (or agreed) timescale into special measures. **St Albans City and District Council has the highest numbers of planning applications of any district tier authority in England.***

Around 5% of applications received by the Council will be decided by a planning committee meeting. The Council receives around 3,500 applications per annum. Therefore, the number of applications decided by a committee equates to around 175 applications a year. During the financial year of 2018/19, the Council held 10 meetings of the Planning Referrals Committee and it decided 41 applications. This equates to around 4 applications per meeting. Given that the Planning Referrals Committee is expected to consider the more complex applications, a typical agenda of around 4 applications is considered appropriate and provides a manageable amount of work for each committee.

St Albans District contains a number of areas with distinct characteristics (as described in the Local Authority Profile), a fact that has led to the creation of three area Planning Committees to reflect those differences. The membership of each of the three planning committees is drawn from councillors representing Wards in those areas. This practice allows those councillors to have a more local understanding of a planning application and it gives confidence to local residents that those hearing an application have local knowledge.

Both the higher income and the educational achievements of many residents are evident in the efforts made to either support or oppose many planning applications. It is not unusual for planning consultants to be engaged by residents and much research and effort is often made by residents before presenting substantial documentation to a councillor. Experience suggests that few other local authorities face the level of planning lobbying as experienced by St Albans district councillors. For the future, the Planning Department and Planning Committees are likely to face more pressure when the country's economic outlook improves.

Ward councillors, who are not members of the Planning Committee, can speak at the Planning Committee. Members of the public are also allowed to address the Committees on planning applications. The meetings of all these Committees are held at the Civic Centre in St Albans, and attendance is high. There have been no occasions when a Committee has not been quorate.

The Council has adopted the practice of not usually appointing the Leader, Deputy Leader or Portfolio Holders to the Planning Committee. This is considered best practice by the Local Government Association but limits the number of councillors available to support this function.

The discharge of development control responsibilities by St Albans is a matter of considerable importance. There is often a high degree of sensitivity attached to planning applications and many give rise to distinct and polarised opinion. Planning Committee Members are also aware that an erroneous decision can see substantial costs awarded against the Council and know that litigation is an option open to aggrieved parties. In these circumstances the Council expects a high level of professionalism from all councillors serving on the Planning Committees, and extensive and thorough training is provided for all members of these Committees and refreshed every other year. No councillor can sit on a Planning Committee unless they have completed this training. Membership of these Committees brings with it significant responsibility.

While the Council operates a scheme of Officer Delegation in relation to development control, the volume of applications dictates that the work of councillors serving on planning bodies is onerous, particularly now that the Council faces pressure to determine planning applications within an eight-week period. Members of the Planning Committees often undertake site visits ahead of the Committee meetings, and the volume of reports put to the Planning Committees is often higher than for other Committees. Planning matters and enquiries make up a significant proportion of work for Ward Members.

The current number of councillors serving on the four Planning (Development Control) Committees [36] who consider planning applications needs to be maintained to ensure that the Council can continue to deal professionally and speedily with the very large volume of planning applications.

The Council also has another planning related body, the Planning Policy Committee. Its purpose is to make recommendations to Cabinet on the Local Plan.

The current configuration of the Planning Committees allows local councillors to determine the planning applications that are relevant to the ward they represent. This ensures that councillors on the Planning

		<p><i>Committee are aware of local circumstances, and it is expected that this arrangement will continue. The high volume of Committee business and the sometimes intense lobbying, when combined with site inspections, make this a high-volume work area for councillors. It is therefore important to allocate enough councillor capacity to continue the chosen method of handling planning applications.</i></p>
Licensing	Key lines of explanation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>How many licencing panels will the council have in the average year?</i> ➤ <i>And what will be the time commitment for members?</i> ➤ <i>Will there be standing licencing panels, or will they be ad-hoc?</i> ➤ <i>Will there be core members and regular attendees, or will different members serve on them?</i>
	Analysis	<p><i>The Licensing and Regulatory Committee, made up of 14 councillors, is scheduled to meet four times a year during the evening. It is responsible for reviewing the policies of the Council relating to licensing and regulatory functions and a wide variety of licence applications. The Committee also has responsibility for health and safety, taxi licensing, markets, elections and pensions. It is lobbied by the active taxi trade in relation to licensing conditions or fare increases and sometimes receives petitions. The Committee also receives reports from scrutiny committees when they are related to licensing functions.</i></p> <p><i>The Council appoints Licensing Sub-Committees to consider premises licences, club premises certificates, temporary events notices and personal licences in the district related to the sale and/or supply of alcohol and the provision of regulated entertainment and late-night refreshment where representations have been made. A Licensing Sub-Committee of 3 members is drawn from the main Committee and daytime meetings are held to consider applications. A named reserve councillor is appointed to ensure that the quorum can be achieved even if the Sub-Committee is called at short notice.</i></p> <p><i>The dates of the meetings are determined by the necessity to consider any matters within their remit. Six meetings of the Licensing Committee were held during the 2018/19 Municipal Year.</i></p> <p><i>The level of licensing activity in the district is high, typical of an area with a flourishing night-time economy and the level of licensing activity is expected to increase in the future. While many decisions are made by staff under delegated powers, the role of councillors on both the main Committee and the Sub Committee is a necessary and important function for elected representatives. We have very active resident groups who complain about licensed premises and large events and object to many of the licensing applications. For this quasi-judicial function, the Council must provide for activity at no less than present levels.</i></p>

	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.
Other Bodies	Analysis	<p><i>The Council has several other Committees including the Standards Committee; the Audit Committee; St Albans Health and Wellbeing Partnership; and the City Neighbourhoods Committee.</i></p> <p><i>The Standards Committee has 5 Members and is scheduled to meet once per annum, with other meetings held as required. For example, this Committee met in March 2019 to consider the report of the National Committee into Standards in Public Life and it is due to meet again in July 2019. The main responsibility of the Standards Committee is to promote standards within the Council and to monitor the operation of the Code of Conduct. Where required, it may establish a Hearing Sub-Committee to hear and determine complaints of alleged breaches of the Codes of Conduct by district or parish councillors referred to it by the Monitoring Officer. Meetings of this Committee will be called when an allegation of a breach of the Code of Conduct has been alleged. In the period from 11th July 2012 to 31st July 2018 there were 11 complaints against district councillors and 7 complaints against parish councillors. No hearings were held as none of the complaints proceeded to an investigation.</i></p> <p><i>The Standards Committee is also responsible for receiving reports from the Monitoring Officer on the operation of the Council's Executive arrangements and reviewing data on the number of corporate complaints, Ombudsman decisions and FOI and Data Protection Act requests.</i></p> <p><i>The main responsibilities of the Audit Committee (9 members) are to consider the annual accounts; risk management; fraud prevention; the audit plans of the External Auditor and the Internal Auditor; monitor Internal Audit performance; and monitor management response to both Internal and External Audit recommendations. The Audit Committee met on five occasions in 2018/19 and Members are expected to possess a degree of financial understanding to properly discharge their responsibility as a member of this Committee. No member of the Executive may serve on this Committee and a maximum of two councillors serving on Scrutiny may sit. The Council has decided that a two-year term limit be applied to the position of Chairman of the Audit Committee.</i></p> <p><i>The St Albans Health and Wellbeing Partnership has 9 members and is responsible for overseeing health and wellbeing issues in St Albans District. It met on 4 occasions in 2018/19. The Partnership has evolved from the previous Community Health Committee and the Health and Older People Partnership of St Albans District</i></p>

Local Strategic Partnership. Its aim is, in the context of wider national health reforms, to provide stronger local representation and accountability, strategic decision-making and a focus on project delivery to promote health and wellbeing for the district's residents. The St Albans District Health & Wellbeing Partnership is a formal committee of the Council with nine councillors appointed. Other members are from health partners working in the district.

In the absence of a Parish Council structure in the unparished area of St Albans City, a City Neighbourhoods Committee (CNC) of 9 members was established in June 2013. It leads on the implementation of localism in the unparished areas as suggested in the Localism Act 2011 and other relevant legislation. The unparished area covers 40% of the district (8 Wards: Ashley, Batchwood, Clarence, Cunningham, Marshalswick South, Sopwell, St Peters and Verulam).

The Committee has delegated authority from Cabinet to:

- review policy and budget decision making for non-strategic city centre assets (parks, war memorials, allotments etc);*
- support the development of Neighbourhood Forums;*
- explore opportunities to devolve assets to Neighbourhood Forums and community groups;*
- make recommendations to Cabinet and Scrutiny;*
- consider wider agenda items put forward by co-opted members;*
- share good practice and experiences across the unparished area;*
- co-ordinate the delivery of the Community Right to Bid, and the Community Right to Challenge;*
- support groups to develop Resident Associations;*
- allow time at each meeting for consideration of questions from members of the public.*

The Committee has appointed a sub-group to scrutinise the CNC's budget. This group reports its findings to CNC.

Training is obligatory for all St Albans City and District councillors. Under the Constitution, all new councillors must undertake Code of Conduct and Standards Training. They undergo a thorough induction process and receive additional training and support in Licensing and Regulatory matters, Safeguarding and Planning. We have a Councillor Development Steering Group which determines the training councillors will undertake. As a consequence of a Democratic Review, it has been recommended that councillors now be trained in chairing

		<p><i>skills.</i></p> <p><i>All the Chairmen of our regulatory bodies, along with members of the Cabinet, spend time making thorough preparations for each of their meetings. All councillors holding leading positions invest significant time and effort to ensure they have an understanding of the matters on each meeting agenda.</i></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>
<i>Key lines of explanation</i>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>Will executive members serve on decision-making partnerships, sub-regional, regional or national bodies?</i> ➤ <i>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?</i> ➤ <i>What other external bodies will members be involved in? And what is the anticipated workload?</i>
Analysis		<p><i>A number of councillors are appointed as the Council's representative on a range of different local, regional and national external organisations.</i></p> <p><i>Locally, ward councillors are appointed to four Park Consultative Forums which are administered by the Council. These are Clarence Park, Rothamsted Park, Batchwood, and Verulamium Park. There are three councillors on each forum. These forums meet at least twice a year and provide an active line of communication for local groups, organisations and sports clubs with an interest in the well-being and future enhancement of the parks. In addition to these park forums, there are also Joint Committees for Nomansland Common, Bricket Wood and Jersey Farm Woodland. These Committees are administered by Parish Councils, 2 or 3 councillors are appointed to them, and they hold 3 or 4 meetings a year.</i></p> <p><i>Portfolio Holders serve as the Council's representative on several external organisations such as the Strategic Partnership, a group of key local public, business and voluntary/community sector organisations working together to improve the quality of life for everyone in the district. The St Albans Visitor Partnership works to support the continued growth and prosperity of the visitor economy. Other partnerships include St Albans City of Expertise and the Green Triangle. These partnerships each hold approximately 4 meetings per year.</i></p> <p><i>There are a number of other local and regional groups that councillors are appointed to such as 'Look! St Albans', a community-led neighbourhood planning group which holds 2 formal meetings a year.</i></p> <p><i>The Cabinet receives an <u>update</u> on the nature of Council representation on these groups twice a year.</i></p>

	<p><i>In addition to the local and regional partnerships listed above, some councillors are appointed to outside bodies via the Licensing and Regulatory Committee. These appointments to outside bodies are listed on the Council's website, and reported to the Licensing and Regulatory Committee when representation changes or expires.</i></p> <p><i>In June 2019 there were 19 separate councillor appointments to 16 outside bodies. These organisations are a mix of local or regional charities, and partnerships. For example, the Council appoints one representative to Groundwork Hertfordshire (4-6 meetings per year, focussed on sustainable development), two representatives to the Duchess of Marlborough Charity (Almshouses, 2 meetings per year) and 1 representative to the CAB Management Committee (Citizens Advice Bureau, 4 meetings per year).</i></p> <p><i>An example of the local partnerships that are appointed to, are the Luton Airport Consultative Committee (4 meetings per year), and the Herts Police and Crime Commissioner Panel (4 meetings per year).</i></p> <p><i>There are also organisations which Portfolio Holders are appointed to such as the East of England LGA (4 meetings per year), St Albans Museum and Galleries Trust (12 meetings per year), Herts Waste Partnership (4 meetings per year) and West Herts Joint Crematorium (2 meetings per year).</i></p>
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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	<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<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> ➤ <i>How do councillors seek to engage with their constituents? Do they hold surgeries, send newsletters, hold</i>

		<p><i>public meetings or maintain blogs?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>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?</i> ➤ <i>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?</i> ➤ <i>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?</i>
	<p>Analysis</p>	<p><i>The latest Local Government Association (LGA) National Census of Local Authority Councillors found that one of the key reasons an individual becomes a councillor is to serve the community. It is therefore expected that councillors will spend a significant proportion of their time engaging with residents on issues that arise within their ward. The LGA census found that a typical councillor spent some 6 hours per week on such work.</i></p> <p><i>In St Albans City and District Council the picture is quite different; here councillors spend near double that time, an average of 11.7 hours per week, carrying out work in their constituencies. Residents of the district readily engage with the Council and have an expectation that an elected representative is always contactable. All political parties have been aware of the benefits of active local councillors, with the result that many councillors enjoy a high profile with their constituents. Anecdotal evidence from longer serving councillors suggests that the demands made by constituents is continuing to grow.</i></p> <p><i>In preparation for this electoral review, we surveyed all 2018/19 councillors to find out more about what they do in their wards. The survey was in depth and achieved an 80%+ response rate and showed what activities were carried out by St Albans District councillors in their wards and how they operate.</i></p> <p><i>We are aware that the community involvement activities of a St Albans District councillor is not typical and would like provision made for our local practices in the outcome of this review.</i></p> <p><u><i>Survey findings</i></u></p> <p><i>Residents contact their councillors through expected means, such as email, letter, face to face, text and social media.</i></p> <p><i>The average time spent by respondents on ward work is 11.7 hours per week. The survey asked councillors to</i></p>

		<p><i>exclude time spent preparing for meetings, attending formal meetings or on political business. 22% of respondents say they spend 20 hours + per week on ward business, while 31% spend 5 hours or less per week.</i></p> <p><i>In St Albans 95% of responding councillors communicate regularly with their local residents, via email; face to face; phone or social media. Newsletters and leaflets are also used by around 51% of responding councillors. The frequency of communication varies with 60% of councillors saying that they are in touch at least once a week, while 29% are in daily contact with local residents.</i></p> <p><i>Public meetings are another method of informing or hearing from residents. Around 60% of responding councillors say they hold a public meeting at least once a year. Of those who hold public meetings the average attendance is 45 people.</i></p> <p><i>Social media is used by 42% of responding councillors to keep residents informed, with more than half of these councillors using it daily or a couple of times per week.</i></p> <p><i>In other calls on their time, 92% of responding councillors attend meetings of their Parish Council or local resident associations. With 44% attending one or more such meeting a month. Attempts have been made by 36% of responding councillors to make contact with young people, while 50% have made efforts to reach elderly residents. A further 17% have tried to contact other minority groups.</i></p>
Casework	Key lines of explanation	<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>
	Analysis	<p><i>The average number of contacts made by residents with each responding councillor is 22 per week. Not all of these result in casework for the councillor, but around 60% of respondents create up to 3 cases per week, with six councillors saying that they create 6 or more cases per week. Of all the cases that arise in a typical week, 25% will see the councillor involved in four or more associated responses.</i></p> <p><i>Assistance for councillors' ward work is secured through fellow councillors and local volunteers. Officers do help through provision of information, but this is usually communicated to residents by a councillor.</i></p> <p><i>Technology has greatly impacted on councillors by improving their accessibility to residents.</i></p>

Other Issues

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

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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.

For more than 10 years, over 90% of residents have, when surveyed, repeatedly said that they are satisfied with this area as a place to live. Two thirds of those surveyed are satisfied with the operation of St Albans City and District Council. When satisfaction is expressed at these levels it leads us to believe that the Council is doing many things right.

The present manner of Council operation has been honed over time and responds to a number of features which render this Authority unique among district councils. We have a district with a city / rural split; many well-educated residents; we are a sought-after destination for families and have a particularly engaged population.

The Council has considered carefully the question of its future size and concluded that a reduction to 57 councillors would be appropriate. During the course of our deliberations we considered the implications of reducing the number of councillors to 51 and to 54. However, neither of these two figures would allow us to continue to provide the present level of representation and service to residents. The reasons for concluding that 57 is appropriate are detailed below.

We have looked at the present arrangements for strategic leadership and wish to continue with 7 councillors serving on our Cabinet. This number includes the Leader and all members of the Cabinet will have Portfolio responsibilities.

The accountability functions of the Council have been customised to provide services that make a real contribution to the successful operation of the Council. Our scrutiny work holds decision makers to account, while also contributing fresh thinking on new and existing services. The scope of scrutiny and its level of activity calls for the participation of no fewer than the existing number of councillor places (22).

The planning work undertaken by councillors is particularly relevant to the consideration of Council size as our planning arrangements respond to the expectation of residents. As the busiest district Planning Authority in the country, the challenges we face are significant. Our chosen method of splitting the district into three areas for planning purposes serves us well and allows councillors from an area to decide on planning applications from that area. This system permits the local knowledge of councillors to be fully utilised and allows a reasonable number of planning applications to be considered at each Committee meeting.

We also appoint a dedicated Appeals Panel to deal with employment and market related hearings. Not including planning or scrutiny bodies, the committees appointed by Council have a total of 53 councillor places and make an important contribution to the successful operation of this authority. Given our responsibilities and future challenges, we are of the opinion that a continuation of present committee arrangements is necessary.

A striking feature of St Albans City and District Council is the time, effort and commitment offered by our councillors to their constituents. Our survey found that councillors work for twice the time identified for ward work in the last LGA Member survey (2013). This is a very important aspect of being a St Albans District councillor, as the expectations of residents coupled with the desire of councillors to serve results in nearly 12 hours of ward work being carried out by each councillor per week.