

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		
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 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>
	Analysis	<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

		<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>

		<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>

	<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	
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>

	<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 - Tourism and Economic Development 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>Analysis</p>	<p>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.</p> <p>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:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holding surgeries – dealing with queries, providing advice and engaging with constituents face-to-face • Constituency matters – emails, written, telephone responses • Community / Resident meetings • Working with and / or offering support to community groups and local organisations: • Attending Town and Parish Council meetings • Contact with Parish/Town Councils. • Articles for parish/village magazines and newsletters, blogs and/or websites and social media <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>There have been 16 Neighbourhood Development Plans adopted. The Council continues to support parishes that wish to develop a Neighbourhood Plan.</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>								

		<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.*

Electoral Review: Councillor Workload Survey 2020 Results

All 36 councillors were emailed an online questionnaire designed to find out their workload, in order to inform the Electoral Review Working Group and their submission to the Boundary Commission.

34 councillors completed the questionnaire in the timeframe allowed of 22 October to 2 November, with a further four-day extension added. A response rate of 94.4%.

This report contains the following sections:

1. Profile of Councillors
2. Outside Bodies
3. Other Councils
4. District Council Business Workload
5. Communication
6. Other Comments

1. PROFILE OF COUNCILLORS

14 councillors (41%) have been in the role for less than two years.

Q1	How long have you been a Councillor at Stratford-on-Avon District Council? (Total number of years, if not consecutive)	
	14 (41%)	Up to 2 years
	1 (3%)	3 to 5 years
	13 (38%)	6 to 10 years
	4 (12%)	11 to 15 years
	1 (3%)	16 to 20 years
	1 (3%)	Over 20 years

10 councillors are self-employed and a further 9 retired.

Q2	As well as being an elected member, what is your occupation status?	
	8 (24%)	Full-time
	5 (15%)	Part-time
	10 (30%)	Self-employed
	9 (27%)	Retired
	0 (0%)	Unemployed
	1 (3%)	Other

10 respondents are members of the Cabinet.

Q3	In addition to your role as a councillor, what other position(s) do you hold within the Council?	
	10 (32%)	Cabinet Member
	0 (0%)	Scrutiny Chair
	1 (3%)	Scrutiny Vice-Chair
	3 (10%)	Committee Chair
	3 (10%)	Committee Vice-Chair
	0 (0%)	Member Champion
	0 (0%)	Task Group Chair
	6 (19%)	None
	14 (45%)	Other

If other to Q3, please state role - 19 responses

Chair of Licensing
Chairman of the Council until May 2021
Chairman, Cash Management Wkg Grp; Vice Chairman, Electoral Review Wkg Grp; Member, Employment & Appointments Comm; Member, Housing Investment Panel; Member, Member Development Wkg Grp; Member. Council Recovery Advisory Group; Observer, Audit & Standards Comm; Observer, Health & Safety Comm.
Community Safety Partnership, Audit & Standards, Community Partnership Next work. x 3 Parish Councils
County and Town Councillor
Deputy Leader Opposition
I was a cabinet member until October
Leader of Opposition Group
Leader of the Council
Licensing Chairman. Regulatory Chairman.
Member of committees
Member of Planning and Regulatory Committees
Member of Planning, Licensing, O&S, Audit & Standards, Regulatory Committees
Parish Champion
Planning
Planning Committee
Planning Committee member
Planning Committee Member
Special representative for SDC to the People's Republic of China, Armed Forces Liaison, Representative on the WCC HOSC.

2. OUTSIDE BODIES

38% of councillors responding to the survey have been appointed by the Council to represent it on outside bodies.

Q4 Have you been appointed by the Council to represent it on any outside bodies?

13 (38%)	Yes
21 (62%)	No

Please list the organisation(s) and outline your role(s) on this body - 13 responses

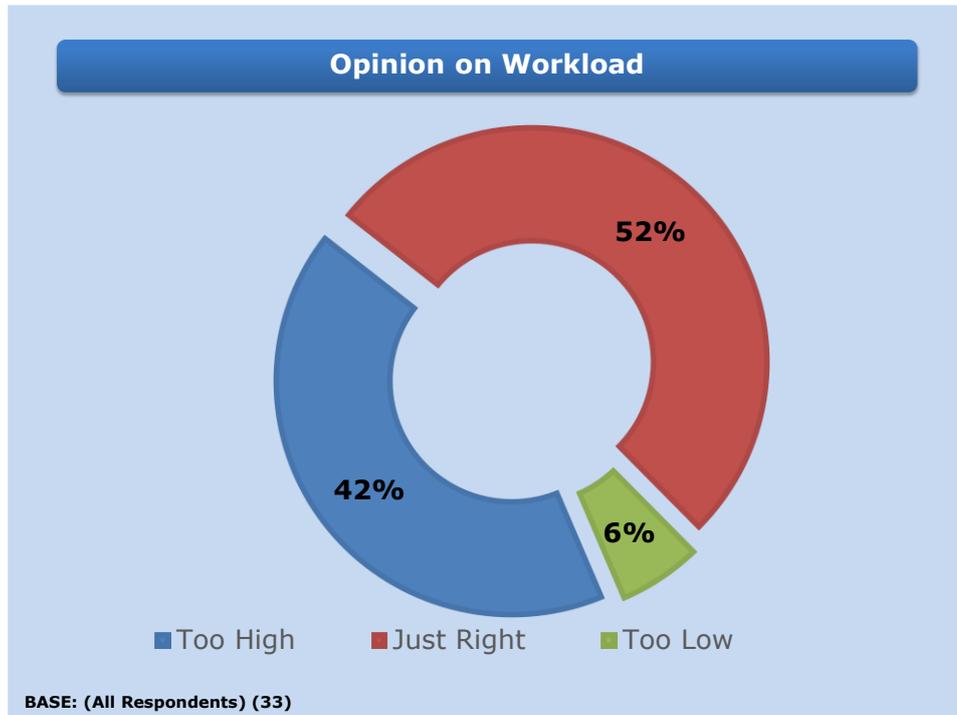
A46 partnership
Age Concern (Shipston) - To provide a liaison point between this organisation and SDC. Decided in October 2020 that this role was no longer required.
BID Shakespeare's England
Community Safety Partnership, Audit & Standards Committee, Community Partnership Network, Homicide Review Panel
Cotswold AONB / board member, Police and Crime Panel Member, Safer Warwickshire Partnership Board, Parish Champion,
CWLEP and Audit and Governance Committee WMCA and Investment Board and Economic Recovery Group West Midlands Employers
PATROL - review parking regulations outside London Market Forum - review contractual issues surrounding markets in Stratford on Avon Board Member - BID - represent in the Council or observe in relation to business issues affecting the Town
See previous response. Representative of the OSC on the WCC HOSC committee
Shakespeare's England - Destination Management Organisation Stratford BID - Business Improvement District
Southam Community Centre
SWFT board Safeguarding panel Health and WELLBEING BOARD

The Grange, Southam

Tourist Board

Taking into consideration the number of committees, outside body organisations and partnerships that you have been appointed to sit on by the District Council, 42% felt the associated workload was too high, 52% just right and 6% too low.

Q5 *Taking into consideration the number of committees, outside body organisations and partnerships that you have been appointed to sit on by the District Council, do you think that the associated workload is just right, too low or too high?*



Please comment below on your answer to Q5 – 22 responses

Although I have ticked "Just right", I do seem to spend an awful lot of time on Council matters and many local issues in my Ward.
Am just about coping - though some weeks are manic...
As a relatively new councillor I am a member of some committees and at the moment I think the associated workload is right.
As a triple hatter, I am always on call. Currently with C19 restrictions, Zoom/Teams calls mean less travel but we still hold the same number of meetings
As I don't sit on other committees relating to District Council, I find the work load is ok. However, I feel that much more would be too much,
Being on one committee along with my ward workload works with my current vocational workload.
But I am mindful of additional training and support I need to meet these responsibilities
Extensive amount of papers to read, understand and respond to as well as emails
Finding the time to properly go through reports and agendas is difficult with a full time job. But I of course find the time. I don't think the public are aware of the non-casework work we have to do such as committees.
From October 2020 onwards, I have no external representative role for SDC. As an alternative, I have been asked to join the Electoral Review Working Group.
I find that being on just planning it gives me more time with residents problems and planning applications
I have purposely balance my Council commitments with my work and being a single parent however I am aware other Councillors do undertake heavier workloads.

I returned to the Council in 2019 having previously served from 1997 to 2010. During my absence the number of members was reduced from 53 to 36 and my ward area doubled and the number of planning applications in my green belt ward takes up the majority of my ward enquiries and resident issues. I find that I need to spend far more time on these since the council has chosen to no longer provide householder pre app advice which it did previously, albeit at a fee, this has resulted in more residents asking for advice. The Council might reverse the policy but under current financial constraints is unlikely to do so.
If being a councillor is meant to be part time then the workload is absurd. Constant e mails and phone or teams calls. Many meetings and preparation for meetings with Agenda and papers well over 100 pages. Unpredictable nature of the workload. Issues can blow up out of nowhere and often take a lot of time to resolve. The workload can be remorseless
In the immediate aftermath of the pandemic and for 6 months afterwards the demands of being Deputy Leader has meant that this has pretty much become a full time role. Even before that there is a requirement for meetings every single working day. Even with officers trying to slate meetings at the beginning (from 8.00am) and end of the day (from 4pm) too many bleed into the working day. Even allowing for technology that has saved on travel time this workload is immense. Papers are complex and long, often running to 200+ pages for Cabinet. Overall I am spending something in the region of 40 hours per week on Council business (pre pandemic that would have been 25-28 hours. There is no realistic prospect of the time commitment of around 40 hours reducing in the foreseeable future.
It could be a full time job
On average, I work for up to 10 hours a day Monday to Thursday, 6 hours Fridays and 4 hours Sunday
The role, excluding being the elected representative of electors, and solving their issues, for Council related work takes up a significant proportion of the working day. Part of the problem is the shortage of Councillors resulting in each councillor having to sit on multiple committees. Given that some committees, planning, also meet in the evening, the role can end up being too time consuming.
The workload has increased significantly since Covid with the sheer volume of emails and is a reason why I have decided to give up my county role and will not be standing in May as I prefer the work with District
There are rarely days when there are no SDC tasks to complete. This is compounded by Covid 19 regulations. My Ward is very rural so vehicle trips are almost always required.
These are all assigned to the ruling Group
Too many communities and parishes (7 & 12 respectively) to cover

3. OTHER COUNCILS

Asked how many parish or town councils there are in their ward, this ranged from 10 councillors answering one, to 6 councillors having six or more councils. The highest is 9 for one councillor.

Q6	How many parish or town councils are in your particular district ward?	
	10 (30%)	1
	4 (12%)	2
	8 (24%)	3
	2 (6%)	4
	3 (9%)	5
	6 (16%)	6 or more

All but one of those surveyed before the pandemic would physically attend parish and town council meetings in their ward.

Q7	Before the pandemic, how often would you say you physically attended parish and town council meetings in your ward?	
	32 (97%)	Always
	1 (3%)	Sometimes
	0 (0%)	Hardly ever

Almost eight out of ten councillors (79%) have been attending virtual parish and town council meetings since March 2020.

Q7a	Since March 2020, how often have you been attending virtual parish and town council meetings?	
	27 (79%)	Always
	5 (15%)	Sometimes
	2 (6%)	Hardly ever

52% of those surveyed are also a parish or town councillor.

Q8	Are you a parish or town councillor?	
	17 (52%)	Yes
	16 (49%)	No

Almost a quarter of respondents are also elected members of Warwickshire County Council.

Q9	Are you an elected member on Warwickshire County Council?	
	8 (24%)	Yes
	26 (77%)	No

4. DISTRICT COUNCIL BUSINESS WORKLOAD

Councillors were asked to estimate the number of hours per month they spend on District Council business for a variety of aspects, including online, email, telephone or via video. Based on 34 councillors who did not answer every question, as the answer may have been zero.

- 15 councillors spend 6 to 10 hours a month attending Council Committees.
- 21 councillors spend up to 10 hours attending other Council meetings.
- 18 spend up to 5 hours a month on party political business.
- 18 attend external meetings as a representative of the Council, up to 5 hours a month.
- 24 hold ward surgeries for up to 5 hours a month.
- 24 attend member training for 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.
- 20 attend community or residents meeting up to 5 hours a month.
- 5 engage with constituents 11 to 15 hours a month.
- 11 deal with constituent enquiries over 10 hours a month.
- 13 deal with planning applications between 11 and 20 hours a month.
- 14 undertake policy development and research up to 5 hours a month.
- 6 read journals and newspapers in connection with being a councillor 11 or more hours a month.
- 14 work with and/or offer support to community groups and local organisations, up to 5 hours a month.
- 22 prepare for meetings between 6 and 15 hours a month.
- 8 attend workshops and conferences between 6 and 15 hours a month.
- 22 undertake travel related to Council business up to 5 hours a month.
- 13 spend 6 hours or more writing articles for parish/village magazines and newsletters, blogs and/or websites and social media.

Q10	On average how many hours per month do you spend on District Council business for the following aspects? This includes online, email, telephone or via video.				
	<i>1 to 5 hours</i>	<i>6 to 10 hours</i>	<i>11 to 15 hours</i>	<i>16 to 20 hours</i>	<i>Over 20 hours</i>
Attendance at Council Committees	7 (24%)	15 (41%)	6 (18%)	5 (15%)	1 (3%)
Attendance at other Council meetings	11 (36%)	10 (32%)	7 (19%)	1 (7%)	2 (7%)
Time spent on party political business	18 (55%)	11 (33%)	2 (6%)	2 (6%)	0 (0%)
Attendance at external meetings as a representative of the Council	18 (72%)	5 (20%)	2 (8%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Ward surgeries	24 (89%)	2 (7%)	0 (0%)	1 (4%)	0 (0%)
Attending member training	24 (75%)	5 (16%)	2 (6%)	1 (3%)	0 (0%)
Attending town or parish council meetings	10 (34%)	14 (41%)	6 (19%)	2 (6%)	0 (0%)
Contact with town or parish councils	17 (53%)	10 (31%)	3 (9%)	2 (6%)	0 (0%)
Community/Resident Meetings	20 (67%)	8 (27%)	1 (3%)	0 (0%)	1 (3%)
Engaging with constituents, e.g. home visits	19 (59%)	8 (25%)	5 (16%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Dealing with constituents enquiries, e.g. casework	7 (22%)	14 (44%)	9 (28%)	1 (3%)	1 (3%)
Dealing with planning applications	9 (27%)	10 (30%)	8 (24%)	5 (15%)	1 (3%)
Policy development and research	14 (48%)	9 (31%)	3 (10%)	2 (7%)	1 (3%)
Reading journals & newspapers in connection with being a councillor	18 (55%)	9 (27%)	3 (9%)	1 (3%)	2 (6%)
Working with and/or offering support to community groups and local organisations	14 (45%)	12 (39%)	3 (10%)	1 (3%)	1 (3%)
Preparing for meetings	6 (21%)	13 (36%)	9 (27%)	3 (9%)	2 (6%)
Attending workshops, conferences etc.	15 (65%)	7 (30%)	1 (4%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Travel related to councillor business	22 (76%)	5 (17%)	1 (3%)	1 (3%)	0 (0%)
Articles for parish/village magazines and newsletters, blogs and/or websites and social media	18 (58%)	7 (23%)	5 (16%)	0 (0%)	1 (3%)
Other	2 (50%)	0 (0%)	1 (25%)	0 (0%)	1 (25%)

If you selected 'Other', please state the Council / political business below – 5 responses

Dealing with the influx of emails on a daily basis.
In addition to the above I spend time looking at what other local authorities are undertaking and checking on its relevance to Stratford District Council.
Reading and responding to daily emails
Reading, commenting on and amending draft minutes and papers to be circulated in support of meetings of The Cabinet and the Council.
Travel to both the People's Republic of China and the Chinese Embassy as required and liaison with their representatives
Varies a lot. Assumes pre Covid conditions.

Since the pandemic started, just over three-quarters of councillors (77%) feel their workload has increased with the increase in virtual meetings/events.

Q11	Since the pandemic started, how much has your workload changed with the increase in virtual meetings/events?	
	26 (77%)	Increased
	8 (24%)	Stayed about the same
	0 (0%)	Decreased

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. The distribution is shown in the table below.

Q12	How many cases/issues do you deal with, on average, per month?	
	4 (12%)	Up to 5
	19 (58%)	6-10
	5 (15%)	11-19
	5 (15%)	20 or more

When compiling a response to a constituent, 22 councillors “very frequently” fully deal and respond to a request. 26 councillors very or fairly frequently contact a SDC officer for input/advice before they responded. 13 councillors would send a query to a SDC officer to respond on their behalf on a very frequent or frequent basis.

Two-thirds of councillors (68%) will very frequently or frequently liaise with another SDC member on a matter. Three-quarters (74%) very frequently or frequently liaise with another member who is a County Council or Parish/Town Council member.

Q13	When compiling a response to a constituent...				
		<i>Very Frequently</i>	<i>Frequently</i>	<i>Infrequently</i>	<i>Never</i>
	How frequently do you fully deal and respond to a request?	22 (65%)	12 (35%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
	How frequently do you contact a SDC officer for input/advice before you respond?	4 (12%)	22 (67%)	7 (21%)	0 (0%)
	How frequently do you send the query to a SDC officer to respond on your behalf?	4 (12%)	9 (27%)	17 (50%)	4 (12%)
	How frequently do you liaise with another SDC Member on the matter?	4 (12%)	19 (56%)	10 (29%)	1 (3%)
	How frequently do you liaise with another Member, e.g. County Council or Parish/Town Council on the matter?	4 (12%)	21 (62%)	9 (27%)	0 (0%)

26 out of the 34 councillors responding to the survey feel they spend more time on council business than they expected when first becoming a councillor.

Q14	Is the time you spend on council business what you expected when you became a councillor?	
	8 (24%)	Yes
	0 (0%)	No - I spend less time on Council business
	26 (77%)	No - I spend more time on Council business

Asked what duties have increased the most, there was a variety of responses. However issues such as longer meetings due to being on video, more queries than ever from residents, dealing with complex issues, and the associated research needed to be done for planning matters were amongst those mentioned. The issues caused by the pandemic was another element of councillor work raised.

Q15	What aspects of your duties have increased the most?
	33 responses
	As Southam has expanded and due to increased public awareness as often promoted by myself over the past few years the workload has expanded due possibly to my engaging nature.
	Attendance at meetings.
	Case work, meetings are now longer as they are being done remotely.
	Complexity of residents issues needing more time to resolve
	Dealing with discontent members of the public
	Dealing with emails. Helping residents.
	Dealing with resident enquiries and planning matters
	Dealing with residents problems and planning
	Dealing with residents problems and planning
	Dealing with residents queries and problems
	Dealing with universal credit and housing association cases. Community COVID 19 responses.
	Emails, complaints and queries from constituents
	Engagement. District Councillors are expected by the public to know everything. County Councillors appear to be less in the public eye.
	Has always been like this since I was elected but the need to research and read has increased
	In my ward I have to deal with Housing Associations frequently due to complaints and as I don't always get a response, I spend more time chasing,
	Joining the Council for the first time involves a steep learning curve. Appointment to a Cabinet Portfolio at the same time involves an even steeper learning curve. The time required for training activities alone has been considerable - some 70 hours in my first year. Every councillor has to become at least familiar with the Core Strategy in order to be able to respond to planning applications. Contentious planning applications can devour time. There are issues arise that demand time for research, reflection and discussion e.g. local government reorganization based on a unitary authority. Ad hoc matters arise - e.g. being the subject of a complaint - that can similarly devour time.
	Meetings
	Meetings to ensure the running of the council, policy and strategic development both internal and external. Meetings with CE / DCE and SMT External meetings representing the Council including resident groups, through partner authorities, local and national businesses and employers, MP's, Regional (WMCA) and National government
	Meetings, e mails, length and complexity of papers. Meetings where I represent the council. Coordination to make sure that "we are all on the same page"
	None except on Teams Committee & Zoom meetings with Parish Councils
	Planning
	Planning applications and liaising with neighbours etc
	Planning issues, site visits, very long planning meetings.
	Planning matters
	Planning, Affordable housing, Environmental health, Finance and budgeting
	please see previous comments on earlier question, but in simple terms planning takes up far more now with a larger ward and changes in planning service
	Putting government policy into achievable action
	Responding to various enquiries, longer meetings, communicating with residents
	Significant increase in resident concerns especially planning and policy related
	Supporting individual residents
	The workload across the board is greater than I anticipated

Too many communities. Workload is related to that rather than elector numbers.

Volume of emails

With the pandemic, social work has increased and community leadership role. Planning takes a lot of my time, as I tend to have large applications with several documents and assessments to study. Researching on topics and policies so that I can contribute meaningfully and critically to any council related debate and decision. Community casework relating to a variety of issues, from anti-social behaviour to environmental concerns, to environmental health and planning.

Councillors were asked the percentage of time spent on five key aspects for the Review.

In terms of strategic leadership, the 24 responses received ranged from 10% to 100% of their time. In terms of accountability, first for scrutiny, the range was from 0% to 30% of their time, for regulatory it ranged from 0% to 70% and partnerships the range was 0% to 40%. There was a wide range for community leadership from 5% to 100% of time spent.

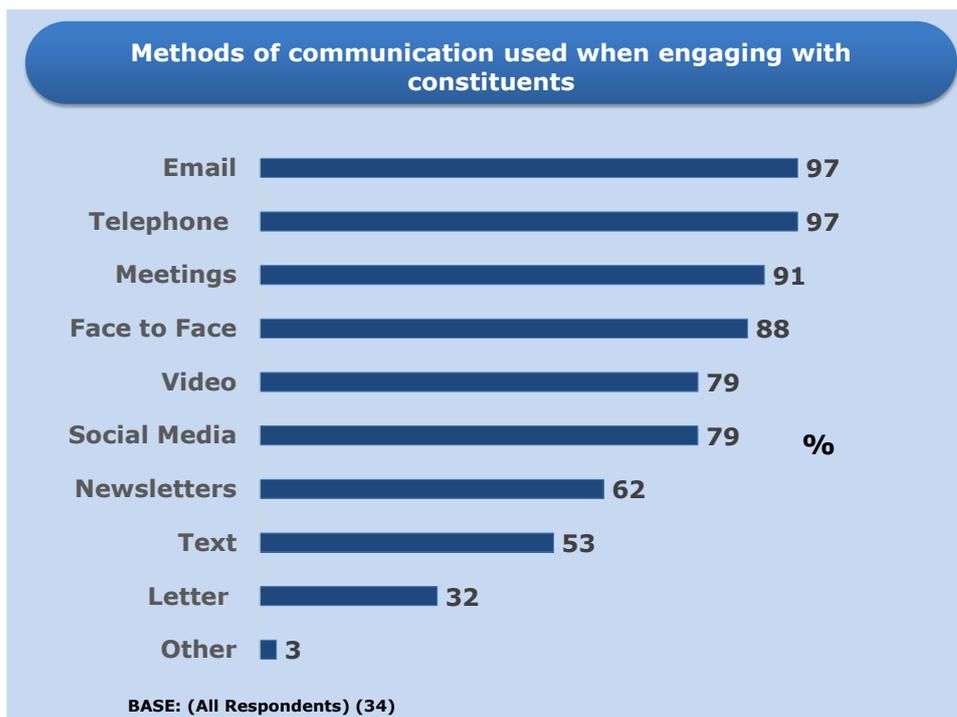
Taking the average percentage, this ranged from 34% of councillor time on community leadership to 13% for scrutiny.

Q16 What % of your time is spent on the following aspects?		0% to 10%	11% to 20%	21% to 30%	More than 30%
Ave:					
26%	Strategic Leadership	7	7	6	4
13%	Accountability - Scrutiny	15	7	2	1
15%	Accountability - Regulatory	13	9	2	1
15%	Accountability - Partnerships	9	8	1	1
34%	Community Leadership	5	4	7	11

5. COMMUNICATION

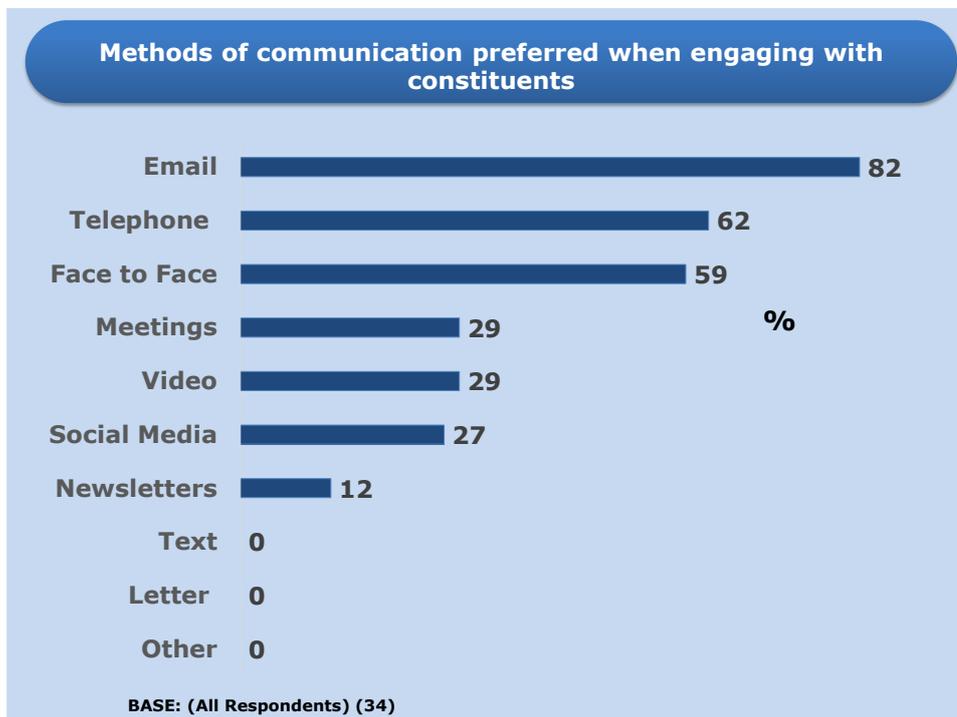
97% of councillors use email and the telephone to engage with constituents, 91% attend meetings and 88% have face-face meetings.

Q17 What methods of communication do you use when engaging with your constituents?



Asked for their top three methods of communication preferred when engaging with constituents, 82% prefer email, 62% the telephone and 59% face-to-face.

Q18 What are the top three methods of communication you prefer to use when engaging with your constituents?



82% of those responding to the survey feel the balance is right for them to communicate effectively with their constituents. There were a variety of responses on whether they felt the balance was right. In the ideal world, dealing with issues face-to-face with the constituent would be beneficial, but this was currently more difficult.

Q19 Do you feel the balance above is right for you to communicate effectively with your constituents?

28 (82%)	Yes
6 (18%)	No

Why do you think this? – 26 responses

Based on the feedback from residents I have received. Based social media feedback. Based on comments made to people who have fed comments back to me.
Because engagement with residents is important because being a Councillor is representing residents
Because everyone likes to communicate in different ways and I often use text to check in the first instance if it is convenient to telephone.
Contact with my residents tends to be on an individual basis when they want to raise an issue with me. I try to treat them as individuals and communicate with them on a personal basis. Speaking to them face to face or by telephone is preferable. Emails, however, have the great advantage of speed.
Face to face is definitely the best, but COVID 19 is restricting this.
Happy with it
I am not skilled in social media. Ward too large to meet everyone.
I do not feel under pressure
I feel the balance is right for me as the residents in my Ward usually prefer a face to face meeting although this has changes somewhat due to the Covid crisis
I feel there is no substitute for a face to face situation, people can see and tell if you are sincere, and are more likely to trust you.
I get lots of e mails and telephone calls

I had planned to do more surgeries and meetings, when the pandemic hit, I feel nothing replaces in person communication.
I have all the tools in place for local residents to contact me easily. It's a small Ward geographically and live here so am accessible through real live meetings as well as using the other methods mentioned.
I prefer to be visible and interact with residents on a 2 way basis on the issues that matter to them. In the current climate that precludes meeting and face to face and so video has come to the fore. Social media is important but limiting in terms of only being appropriate for broad brush responses. Confidentiality precludes dealing in detail with residents on public platform Traditional written methods of newsletter tend not to be as effective for this
I was only allowed to put 3 but as well as emails, telephone and face to face I often organise meetings with groups of residents and I pick up a huge amount of casework on social media and residents contact me a lot through social media.
I would like to undertake regular councillors' surgeries in the village halls of my parishes, but I need to wait until it is safe for us to do so.
It allows me to deal with issues quickly and more effectively in a way that seems to suit my residents' current way of life.
More physical newsletters would be useful to reach out to those who do not have access to the information digitally.
Most enquiries from my constituents come via email or phone and most seem happy to follow-up with phone, email and zoom meetings. I have my own zoom account so this is easy for me to facilitate but I try to respond to meet individual needs
My vote increased substantially at my first re-election - the biggest swing to the C's in the country.
Real difficulties with Covid19. Trying to be as inventive as possible but I fear I am not reaching the hard to reach as I used to when you could meet face to face. I am not holding any face to face meetings at the moment
Reasonable although it may change over time
Seems an odd question, if I thought that other means would be better I would use those instead of the three I have indicated.
Seems to work!
Social media is too invasive. I have Facebook and Twitter for personal use and it gets mixed up with residents tagging me. I need to dissociate the two. If I stand for re-election I'll create a proper page and remove my own Facebook from community groups.
Speed of response is essential together with a personal approach

6. OTHER COMMENTS

Councillors were asked for any further comments relevant to the Council's submission on Council size.

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 being a positive move.

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 may lead to younger residents trying 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. It was suggested cross party briefings should be trialled.

Q20	<i>Is there anything else about your experience as a Stratford-on-Avon District Councillor that might be relevant to the Council's submission on Council size?</i>
	30 comments
	At the moment I think we are at the right numbers of Councillors however, should the District increase much further there will be a need to increase the number of Councillors or increase the allowance for in effect full time Councillors.
	Difficult to decide how best to engage with our residents especially when they have a real issue they need sorting. Also many of the recent issues take a period of weeks to sort out. I thoroughly enjoy my work at SDC however it is interesting to note that the more we seem to do as councillors the less we are appreciated and respected for it. This may be a blowback from the Covid crisis which has changed society for the worse. I can safely say my councillor workload has risen significantly since I started
	Due to the size of the District I find that Full council meetings are too long, and start too late. If a meeting is going to last 4+ hours then it needs to start earlier than 2pm. I have young children, and having lengthy meetings running into evening is difficult.
	Experience shows that a significant proportion of councillors who have the most time to devote to council responsibilities are those who are retired from full time work. Some councillors who have full time jobs are very capable but do not have enough time to take on the additional responsibilities e. as members of The Cabinet or Chairman of a busy committee. Whilst these members may well be able to fulfil their responsibilities as a ward councillor, this tends to increase the workload of those members who are less time pressured. The implication is that prospective councillors need to fully understand the demands that will be made on their time. There needs to be a sufficient number of councillors in total to ensure there are enough councillors who have both the time and the desire to accept additional responsibilities above their ward responsibilities.
	Hathaway Ward is due to grow with at least 800 more homes, so the number of residents will increase, this will need to be taken into account.
	I am of the strongest opinion that the reduction in the number of councillors which occurred during my absence from the Council was too great a reduction and needs to be addressed. The Council must be able to encourage a wide breadth of councillors from all sectors of our community, to enable younger residents who have full time employment, and a full family life to become involved requires that the workload and time commitments need to be reduced, otherwise there is a risk of either too many elderly councillors or too many financially well off residents taking on the roles which would lead to possible bias in the outlook of policies etc.
	I feel that the Council has been cut to the bone we need the appropriate number to deal with all responsibilities of the Council
	I like the German model of fewer residents - in the order of 3-5k represented by one person. You know your patch and your people and can do the job better.
	I really think multi member Wards would be hugely beneficial to all.
	I think the SDC should be far more open with members. Cross party briefings should be trialled Works very well at County
	I wasn't a Councillor when we had more members, but colleagues tell me that our workload is much bigger since the reduction in member numbers. In my own village we have 767 more houses than 3 years ago. More residents usually mean more work.
	If we wish to bring younger people in to politics it is essential that we make it more flexible to their working pattern and/or pay for the lost earnings otherwise it will consistently be comprised of over 50's. It is a difficult balancing act because compensating for lost earnings pushes up council's cost whilst more meetings in the evening's means that, in say the case of licencing, applicants might be expected to appear at a time when they would be earning. Maybe restricting meeting lengths to 2 hours max. After 5 pm might help. Engaging younger residents to join Parish Council's is hard, District Council's harder and is problem faced in Magistrates Courts as well. No easy answer to this.
	It is difficult to gage the hours etc., with more notice I would have kept a record/diary of particular hours %
	It is important to recognise the very different work loads of rural to urban wards and what might be a "Standard feature" of one may be exceptional for others. An urban member may be able to respond to issue by having a local surgery in the ward. That would not work in rural ward with multiple parishes as firstly each parish would expect a local meeting and the agendas would be

<p>very different. The amount of work also depends on the proactivity of both other tier councillors, WCC, and of neighbouring ward members.</p>
<p>My ward has high levels of deprivation. It's has high levels of social housing. Case work can be quite complex when you dealing with debt, poor quality housing, poor mental health and poor physical health. It not just the number of cases I deal with it's also the time needed to deal with the complexity as well.</p>
<p>My ward is a very large rural ward, set to increase in electoral numbers in the next few years. It includes at the moment 5 parish councils and 2 parish meetings. I have been able to meet regularly (virtually) with most of my parishes councils and keep in touch via email and regular reports, newsletters and so forth. I also use a variety of means to keep in touch with my residents. Some of the issues I deal with everyday are the same across the ward, but some are specific to a particular village. I would say that on balance I currently spend more time doing community-related casework with constituents. This could be linked to the current pandemic and the heightened needs of communities to be signposted and assisted more often on several issues. I also find that I also need to liaise with the County Councillor on certain issues affecting the communities in our ward/division. The other large casework for me is planning, often linked to large developments in my ward, and when I write my representations these can be quite a few pages long, and therefore take time to write. I suppose I want to show the reasoning behind my objections or support, and I want to link my decisions to, or evidence these with, current local and national planning policies. The result is that often my other work (part time non-council work) does get behind. I do believe that such a large ward would be served better by having perhaps two ward members, co-sharing workload.</p>
<p>My Ward was previously a three member Ward, which meant work was shared. I am now the single member in a disadvantaged area.</p>
<p>Number of constituents to the ward and also the size of the rural area ... town ward councillors do not have to attend so many parish council meetings and be so involved as the town council seem to do everything.</p>
<p>See above cases are very variable. 10 small cases can = 1 big one. Some just don't get fixed for years and soak up time.</p>
<p>Since the pandemic workload has increased tremendously, virtual meetings, which I agree the need for, are making meetings take longer.</p>
<p>The nature and complexity of the role as a District Councillor has significantly increased and expanded, particularly, in the last 5 years. At the same time the complexity of issues facing the Council and the demands upon members to deliver for residents has grown exponentially. At this point there are far too few elected members to spread responsibilities and duties load evenly and operate on a reasonable workload basis. This lack of bandwidth poses a serious risk to the running of the council, our ability to deliver the services our residents want and to effect the changes in their lives they want to see. It is also clear that the current burden on members is not sustainable and will be a significant disincentive to potential new councillors</p>
<p>The number of Parish Councils I work with is effective whereas other councillors appear to have too many.</p>
<p>The role takes up a lot more time than I expected, more Councillors would reduce this</p>
<p>The work load which is seven days per week can be high at times. Therefore, going back to a two member Ward would be very helpful.</p>
<p>The workload has increased with single ward councillors, but the benefits of this is that constituents know who to contact.</p>
<p>There is a huge difference between being a backbencher and being a Cabinet member. There is a need for a larger pool of talent to select members of Cabinet from.</p>
<p>This could easily be a full-time job & that's not a complaint, merely a comment. I think residents want the members they elect to represent their views and, when appropriate, champion their causes. Were wards to become much larger this connection between electorate and councillor could be lost leading to the 'democratic deficit' and subsequent loss of confidence in local government and reduced participation in the democratic process, the 'What's the point' scenario.</p>
<p>When the ward was shared the work was shared. The workload has increased hugely and is a lot for one councillor. Having said that as I am a town and County Councillor as well I am able to combine the 3 council responsibilities quite well even though my county ward is 3 times the size of my district ward. With Covid and the increase in virtual meetings I would say that I spend around 50-60 hours a week on combined council work including many weekend meetings.</p>