



**Council Submission to the Local Government
Boundary Commission for England on Council Size
as part of the Electoral Review of
Three Rivers District Council**

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1. Introduction

This submission proposes reducing the size of the Council from 48 members. The Council's view remains that the Council size should be reduced by around 20-25%. Council had requested this review in order to achieve savings in the present economic climate without damaging services.

This will require ward boundary changes but, at this consultation stage of the Electoral Review, this submission is only proposing the reduction in council size. The Council has already voted to continue to elect by thirds and new Wards will be required to reflect this electoral cycle.

There is strong cross-Party consensus that Three Rivers would be best served by a return to the Committee system of governance and this is planned for 2014 alongside the expected implementation of the recommendations of the Boundary Commission for a reduced number of members and new ward boundaries.

Proposals for the continued effective operation of the authority are being developed to reflect how a reduced number of councillors will operate in line with both the statutory and representational aspects of local democracy.

2. District of Three Rivers

Three Rivers District Council is situated in south-west Hertfordshire and serves a population of 86,000. The district is 85 square miles in area and includes rural areas, villages and small towns.

Three Rivers offers an ideal mixture of beautiful countryside, excellent leisure facilities, good communications, historic buildings, purpose-built offices and well located parks and public open spaces. Its average wealth does, however, conceal great differences in life expectancy, health, educational attainment and prosperity, to such an extent that while one of its wards is the least deprived in England, other super output areas lie in the most deprived 10% in the country. There are concomitant demands on councillors.

Three Rivers District has an unusual shape, combining a number of individual local communities, diverse in character and size, and very geographically distinct. Many have historical origins and all have existed for many decades and their residents feel very strongly about the preservation and protection of these communities. While there is increasing recognition by residents that Three Rivers local authority area is an entity in its own right, distinct from other districts, there is nevertheless an affinity with smaller localities. If for no other reason than the name gives no indication of its location or principal urban areas, no-one would ever reply "Three Rivers" if asked where they live. They would give the name of their community, or if responding to someone not local they might say "just outside Watford" or "south-west Hertfordshire" or even "just north of London on the M25".

This affinity to local communities or sub-communities arises from the administrative history of the area. It was strong community feeling that led to the establishment of TRDC in 1974. The communities of Abbots Langley, Carpenders Park, Oxhey Hall and South Oxhey (then all in Watford Rural District), Chorleywood (Chorleywood UDC), Croxley and Rickmansworth (Rickmansworth UDC) all felt they had a far better chance of preserving the character of their communities by coming together than if they were absorbed into Watford.

This strong feeling is still very clear and demonstrated by the 'localism' that has existed in these communities long before Government started using the term. It is essential that it is respected as part of any changes.

Being on the outer fringes of London, communications in the area are generally good with road and rail links to London and elsewhere, including the M1, M25, the West Coast main line and the Metropolitan Line into central London. The planned Croxley Link would provide direct rail links with central Watford. Heathrow and Luton airports are nearby. However although communications into London and into Watford are good from all communities within Three Rivers, communications within the District are difficult. There are very limited transport links between (for example) Abbots Langley and Rickmansworth; or between South Oxhey and Rickmansworth, and these emphasise the distinctive communities that constitute the District.

The main urban areas in Three Rivers are:-

Rickmansworth
Chorleywood
Croxley Green
South Oxhey
Abbots Langley

The rural area is Sarratt which is at present a single District Ward. There are five Parish Councils in the District which cover Chorleywood, Croxley Green, Abbots Langley, Watford Rural (which covers the urban areas of South Oxhey, Carpenders Park and Oxhey Hall) and Sarratt.

3. Strategic Objectives of Council (from decision of Council February 2012)

Each year, Three Rivers District Council updates its Strategic Plan. This emerges from the Sustainable Community Strategy, the five themes of which are:

1. Reducing anti-social behaviour, crime, and fear of crime
2. Reducing inequalities, (including health, poverty, access to services and employment)
3. Improving the environment
4. Improving children's and young people's access to education, skills and training
5. Improving the supply and standard of affordable housing

The Council plays a major role in the Local Strategic Partnership's work programme; Three Rivers District Council's Strategic Plan focuses on those areas where the Council has a lead role, or can play a key part in delivering or influencing the outcomes. It identifies the Council's priorities and the measures it will use to assess their delivery. It focuses on those areas where the Council has a lead role, or can play a key part in delivering or influencing the outcomes. The Plan is available on the Council's website <http://www.threerivers.gov.uk/Default.aspx/Web/StrategicPlan>

Thus, out of the above five Community Strategy objectives, we have decided to concentrate our energies on three major thematic areas of activity: safety and well-being, clean and green, economic opportunities and customer service, and our aims for these are set out below.

- (1) Safety and well-being - We shall work with partners to make the district a safer place and we shall provide a safe and healthy environment.
- (2) Clean and green - We want to provide equal access to services and facilities for the public within the district and surrounding area and in particular address the needs of vulnerable residents such as elderly, disabled and young people. In addition, we want to maintain a high quality local environment and reduce the eco-footprint of the district.
- (3) Economic opportunities – We shall work in partnership to promote the economic prospects for all our communities.
- (4) Customer Service - We shall deliver services to a standard that meets the needs and expectations of all of our customers and provides exemplary value for money.

Central to our strategy is to recognise that the average high wealth of the District masks areas of real deprivation, as outlined previously. We believe such concentrated work demands sufficient councillor resource, and this requirement is reinforced by our political management, as set out below.

4. Political Management

The Council operates the strong Leadership Model of Governance but, in accordance with the wishes of the administration, delegates as far as possible the Leader's decision-making responsibility to the Executive Committee. This Committee comprises representatives from the main three political parties on the Council. There is no individual delegation to Portfolio Holders.

Details of the Role and Function of the Executive Committee and Policy and Scrutiny Committees are in the Council's Constitution which is available at <http://www.threerivers.gov.uk/Default.aspx/Web/Constitution>

These Committees are politically balanced, contain 9 Councillors each and currently meet four times per year. The Majority Group attempts to ensure all geographical areas are represented on committees, with added criteria being Members' preferences and experience. Attendance at Committee meetings is good (see Appendix 3 for the breakdown), but this Group believes that, despite their laudable democratic features, these demonstrate duplication of activity as their reports and debates are replicated at Executive Committee, which alone has the right to make a decision.

The Council also has "regulatory" committees viz. Planning, Licensing, Regulatory Services and Audit Committees. Their terms of reference are outlined in the Constitution. The Planning Committee is the committee which meets the most frequently, i.e. on a monthly basis. The overall number of meetings and their frequency was reduced from May 2011 to take account of reduced staffing. The Calendar of meetings which sets out nearly all the Member meetings over the year is also available on the Website.

There is a strong tradition of all-party working and this is supported by all parties on the Council. There is clear consensus that the committee system would provide the most appropriate method of governance for the Council and there is a cross-party commitment to maximise the scrutiny of all decisions by members, preferably before decisions are made. Even during the period when Executive/Scrutiny arrangements were mandatory, Three Rivers ensured almost all decisions were discussed by members in all-party committee prior to decision by the Executive; and the Executive itself has always had places reserved for opposition parties. It is agreed by all parties that a committee system should be implemented in May 2014 and we need to ensure that there are sufficient members available to sit on these committees and sufficient committee places to allow democratic representation.

The Council has decided to return to the Committee System in 2014, once the Boundary Commission's proposals have been implemented. The Council is currently developing the details of the new Committee structure (see Appendix 1 which is an indicative arrangement).

5 Statutory Criteria

(i) Community Identity

As indicated above, the Community Identity of the District is based on the Parish Council and the unparished (Rickmansworth) areas (map attached). However, within those areas, there are recognised other communities viz.

Abbots Langley

- Bedmond / Pimlico
- Primrose Hill (Kings Langley)
- Garston
- Leavesden
- Hunton Bridge

Chorleywood

- Loudwater
- The Swillett
-

Croxley Green

Rickmansworth

- Moor Park
- Eastbury
- Mill End
- Maple Cross / West Hyde
- Heronsgate

Sarratt

Watford Rural

- South Oxhey
- Oxhey Hall
- Carpenders Park

In some cases there are there are physical barriers to the separation: Carpenders Park is separated from South Oxhey by the west coast main railway Line; Bedmond and Primrose Hill is separated from Abbots Langley and Loudwater from Chorleywood by the M25; Chorleywood is separated from Rickmansworth by the Metropolitan railway line. Heronsgate, which was founded as a Chartist colony, is separated from Chorleywood by the narrowing of the lanes connecting the two communities and is indeed isolated from any other urban area by the M25.

Furthermore, communities acknowledge themselves as separate. For example, Carpenders Park, Heronsgate, Rickmansworth and Eastbury each have their own residents' associations. Croxley Green, Oxhey Hall, Abbots Langley and Mill End all have their Community Associations. Loudwater and Moor Park have separate estate management organisations and they are to some degree gated communities and certainly physically separate from neighbouring habitation.

(ii) Effective & Convenient Local Government

a) Consideration of Councillors' Representative Role

The key issue is to ensure that residents can identify with their councillors. This in turn means respecting the boundaries of the distinct communities that make up Three Rivers.

The current district ward boundaries respect parish boundaries with the exception of the boundary between Chorleywood and the unparished area. This is also the only parish boundary that runs through a built-up area, all the other parish boundaries run through green belt and mark the divisions between the natural communities that make up Three Rivers.

Three Rivers has an unusual geography, in particular Abbots Langley and Watford Rural parishes are 'semi-detached' in that each is surrounded on three sides by the external district boundary (and on the fourth side by green belt). Unlike the remainder of the district, these two parishes are not in the WD3 postcode area.

It is therefore sensible at the stage of fixing total numbers of councillors to consider this unusual geography in order to minimise any requirement to create artificial wards combining parts of different communities; and as far as possible to respect parish boundaries.

We would propose to consider the following sub-areas of the district for this purpose (these are the same sub-areas considered for the previous review):

Abbots Langley (comprising Abbots Langley parish)

Croxley Green (comprising Croxley Green parish)

Watford Rural (comprising Watford Rural parish)

Rickmansworth & Chorleywood (comprising the unparished area and Chorleywood parish, since this parish boundary does not mark a natural division between communities)

Sarratt (comprising Sarratt parish) – note this parish is too small to justify a separate ward if the total number of councillors is under 40, so needs to be combined with an adjacent area.

The electorates of these sub-areas is as follows:

	Dec 2011	2016
Abbots Langley	14847	15825
Croxley Green	9917	10315
Watford Rural	15569	15934
Ricky/C'wood	25459	26071
Sarratt	1568	1596

Assuming a total number of councillors of 39, these are the numbers of councillors that could be allocated to each area:

Total Cllrs for TRDC	39	
Abbots Langley	9	
Croxley Green	6	
Watford Rural	9	
Ricky/C'wood }	15	
Sarratt }		(too small for one councillor so combined with part of Chorleywood)

39 members could enable the boundaries of all the sub-areas to be respected and (subject to detailed considerations at the next stage) at least retains the possibility for a pattern of 3-member wards within each sub-area (i.e. the number of councillors in each sub-area is divisible by 3).

b). Consideration of the development of Councillors' functions

Councillor Roles and Functions are set out in the Constitution <http://www.threerivers.gov.uk/Default.aspx/Web/Constitution>

Since the last review of this Council by the Boundary Commission (1997), the major changes for this Council have been in terms of reduction in staff, direct managerial responsibilities and Councillor oversight and engagement in the following areas.

Housing

The Council in 2007 transferred all its Housing Stock to a Social Housing Landlord (Thrive Homes). This involved the transfer of 100 staff and a reduction in the Council's expenditure of £15 million (Revenue) and £3 million (Capital). These transfers equated to one third of the Council's budget and staff.

The amount of casework handled by councillors in relation to Housing issues has, however, not reduced; and has if anything become more time-consuming due to the need to liaise with an independent organisation.

Leisure Management

The management of the Council's leisure facilities was transferred to private contractors. This involved the transfer of 20 staff and saving to the Council of £1 million over ten years.

Planning

Successive Governments have encouraged delegation of decisions on planning application to Professional Planning Officers. At present approximately 90% of planning applications are delegated to officers for decision as recommended by the Department of Communities and Local Government.

Shared Services

There are increasing examples of sharing of services with Watford BC and other bodies, such as in ICT, Accountancy, HR, Revenues & Benefits, Health & Safety, Building Control, Road and Parking Engineering and Procurement.

In political management terms the transfer of the Housing Stock has been the most significant item with Leisure Management outsourcing the second.

There have been increased responsibilities in the following areas.

Waste Collection, Recycling and Grounds Maintenance

The contracts for recycling and grounds maintenance were successfully tendered and won by the in-house team, which involved 70 staff being re-employed by the Council, and decisions would still have had to be made concerning the level of the recycling service, now implemented.

Licensing

The transfer of responsibility for granting of alcohol and sex establishment licences to the Council from Magistrates' Courts.

Localism agenda

It is not yet clear what this will entail; but it seems likely that it will involve members in additional work, not least in enhancing their local leadership role within areas that reflect their geographical legitimacy.

Partnerships

The Council has entered into Partnerships such as the Local Strategic Partnership, Shared Services and the Health Partnership. The Council appoints Councillors to either a Joint Committee or Board to oversee these Partnerships.

c). Workload of Elected Members

In the Census of Local Authority Members recently undertaken, the average time spent per week on Council and political business was 15 hours for Three Rivers' Members. However, it appears that this was disproportionately weighted towards backbench councillors, so this result is not representative. A National Survey (2007) carried out by an independent body indicated that the national average for time spent on Council business by a Councillor was 24 hours per week.

An up-to-date survey of Three Rivers councillors has been initiated for the purpose of clarifying this issue and was conducted by officers. The results have been anonymised and appertain to the Liberal Democrat and Labour Groups, the Conservatives having retained their own results.

As can be imagined, the range of time spent was very wide, from 2 councillors spending less than 5 hours per week on Council business to 3 spending between 41-45 hours. The average hours for the Liberal Democrat Councillors is 29 hours per week, with 19 for Labour.

As expected, the number of hours spent by Group Leaders and Portfolio-Holders is greater than for 'backbench' Members, but the clear trend is that a large proportion of these Councillors' work is spent engaging with residents by dealing with their questions or problems. This is in line with the very customer-focused ethos of Three Rivers that demands high standards of customer care from Members and officers at all levels.

d) Officer Management

Following the Transfer of Housing, a review of the Senior Management Structure of the Council was undertaken, which resulted in the deletion of two Director posts. The reduced responsibilities and direct management were reflected in the Chief Executive's moving to four days per week contractual working and the imminent (2013) sharing of a Director of Finance/S151 officer. Further staff reductions have been implemented (and will continue to be implemented) to achieve the savings required in the present economic climate

(iii) Electoral Equality

National

The national average number of electors per District Council councillor is 1694¹ and in Three Rivers this is currently 1405 per councillor (current electorate 67,467÷48) although this would increase in light of the expected increase in the number of homes/electors in Three Rivers. The range of elector per councillor in Hertfordshire (other than Three Rivers) is from 1533 to 2098.

Note that councils with 'strong leader' model of governance cannot provide useful comparative information as this model allows for far less member involvement and less cross-party involvement in decision-making; by contrast the committee system, supported by all parties on Three Rivers, requires more members to enable proper democratic and cross-party scrutiny of and involvement in all decision-making.

A council size of 39 would provide an average councillor/elector ratio of 1:1730, which would be around the middle of the range for Hertfordshire and marginally higher than the national average. We believe given the need to generate cost-savings this ratio should be compatible with the minimum requirement for democratic involvement in decision-making.

Individual Wards

Please refer to the comments under Effective and Convenient Local Government above.

6. Conclusions/Recommendation

This paper has looked at the LGBCE's three statutory criteria for considering Council size - Community Identity, Effective and Convenient Local Government and Electoral Equality – as well as other recommended criteria.

We regard Community Identity as a priority and we need to ensure we retain sufficient councillors to properly implement a Committee system that will retain democratic scrutiny of all decision-making and all-party involvement on all committees. We are confident that Effective and Convenient Local System Government can be accommodated under the proposed return to the Committee System.

It is important that the significant number of new homes is taken in to account in establishing the new wards and number of members.

In view of the decision to elect by thirds, and therefore the presumption in favour of 3-member wards we recommend that the number of TRDC members be reduced to 39, enabling each of the main sub-areas within Three Rivers to be represented by a number of councillors that is divisible by 3.

DRAFT ANNUAL COUNCIL – 22 MAY 2012

APPOINTMENT OF PLANNING, REGULATORY, LICENSING, POLICY AND SCRUTINY, AUDIT, AND COUNCIL TAX SETTING COMMITTEES (DCRG)

1. Summary

1.1 To appoint members to the Planning, Regulatory, Licensing, Policy and Scrutiny, Audit and Council Tax Setting Committees in accordance with Council Procedure Rules 27 and 29, and the Local Government and Housing Act 1989.

2. Details

2.1 The Council has agreed that the Planning, Regulatory, Licensing, Policy and Scrutiny, Audit and Council Tax Setting Committees should be appointed with terms of reference as set out in the Council's Constitution. Council is reminded that no Member of the Executive Committee may sit on a Policy and Scrutiny Committee.

2.2 At the Council meeting on 24 May 2011 (Minute CL13/11) the Council allocated seats as follows:-

Body	Seats Available	English Dem	Con	Labour	Lib Dem
Council Tax Setting	6	0	2	0	4
Planning Committee	12	0	3	1	8
Regulatory Committee	11	0	4	1	6
Licensing Committee	11	0	4	1	6
Sustainable Environment PSC	9	0	2	1	6
Leisure & Community Safety PSC	9	0	2	1	6
Public Services and Health PSC	9	0	2	1	6
Resources PSC	9	0	3	1	5
Audit Committee	7	1	2	0	4
TOTAL	83	1	24	7	51

2.3 Section 15 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 determines that appointments to the above bodies should be made in the following priority order:-

- Not all seats on a body can be allocated to the same political group.
- The majority party must have a majority on each body.
- The total number of seats on committees should be allocated in the same proportion as members of the group on the authority bear to the total membership of the authority.
- Subject to the above, seats should be allocated on individual committees as far as possible in the same proportion. (Roundings in

the calculations inevitably mean that some adjustments have to be made.)

2.4 Regulation 8 of the Local Government (Committees and Political Group) Regulations 1990 (SI 1990 1553) states that to qualify as a political group there have to be at least two members in that group.

2.5 Members can agree alternative proposals that should be circulated prior to the meeting. These must conform to the rules above or be agreed by the Council with no dissent.

2.6 Following the above rules, officers have prepared the table below:-

Committee	Con	Lib Dem	Labour	Total
Council Composition (Groups)	14	28	6	48
Proportional Allocation *	0.2917	0.5833	0.125	1
Total Allocation				

* Divisor 48

2.7 The Council is asked to approve the following allocation of seats for 2012/13:-

Body	Seats Available	Con	Labour	Lib Dem
Council Tax Setting	6			
Planning Committee	12			
Regulatory Committee	11			
Licensing Committee	11			
Sustainable Environment PSC	9			
Leisure & Community Safety PSC	9			
Public Services and Health PSC	9			
Resources PSC	9			
Audit Committee	7			
TOTAL	83			

2.8 The changes proposed are:-

Body	Seats Available	Con	Labour	Lib Dem
Council Tax Setting				
Planning Committee				
Regulatory Committee				
Licensing Committee				
Sustainable Environment PSC				
Leisure & Community Safety PSC				
Public Services and Health PSC				
Resources PSC				
Audit Committee				
TOTAL				

3. **Options/Reasons for Recommendation**

3.1 The recommendation is made in order to appoint members to the Council's committees.

4. **Policy/Budget Reference and Implications**

4.1 The recommendations in this report are within the Council's agreed policy and budgets.

5. **Legal Implications**

5.1 In accordance with the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 the Council has a duty to allocate seats on Committees in proportion to the number of seats held by Political Groups on the Council. The Council is not obliged to follow the proportionality rules and may make different arrangements provided the procedures set out in Section 17 of the Act are followed:-

- (i) Due Notice is given in the Agenda.
- (ii) No Member of the Council votes against the proposal although there may be abstentions.

5.2 Regulation 8 of the Committees and Political Group Regulations 1990 (SI 1990 1553) states that to qualify as a political group there has to be at least two members in that group.

6. **Financial, Equal Opportunities, Staffing, Environmental, Community Safety, Customer Services Centre, Communications & Website, Risk Management and Health & Safety Implications**

6.1 None specific.

7. **Recommendation**

7.1 That the Council reconstitutes the Committees as listed in paragraph 2.7 above.

7.2 That the party balance on those Committees be determined accordingly and Members be appointed to serve thereon.

Report prepared by: Elwyn Wilson, Democratic Services Manager
Sarah Haythorpe, Principal Committee Manager

Data Quality

Data sources: Election Return; Council Composition

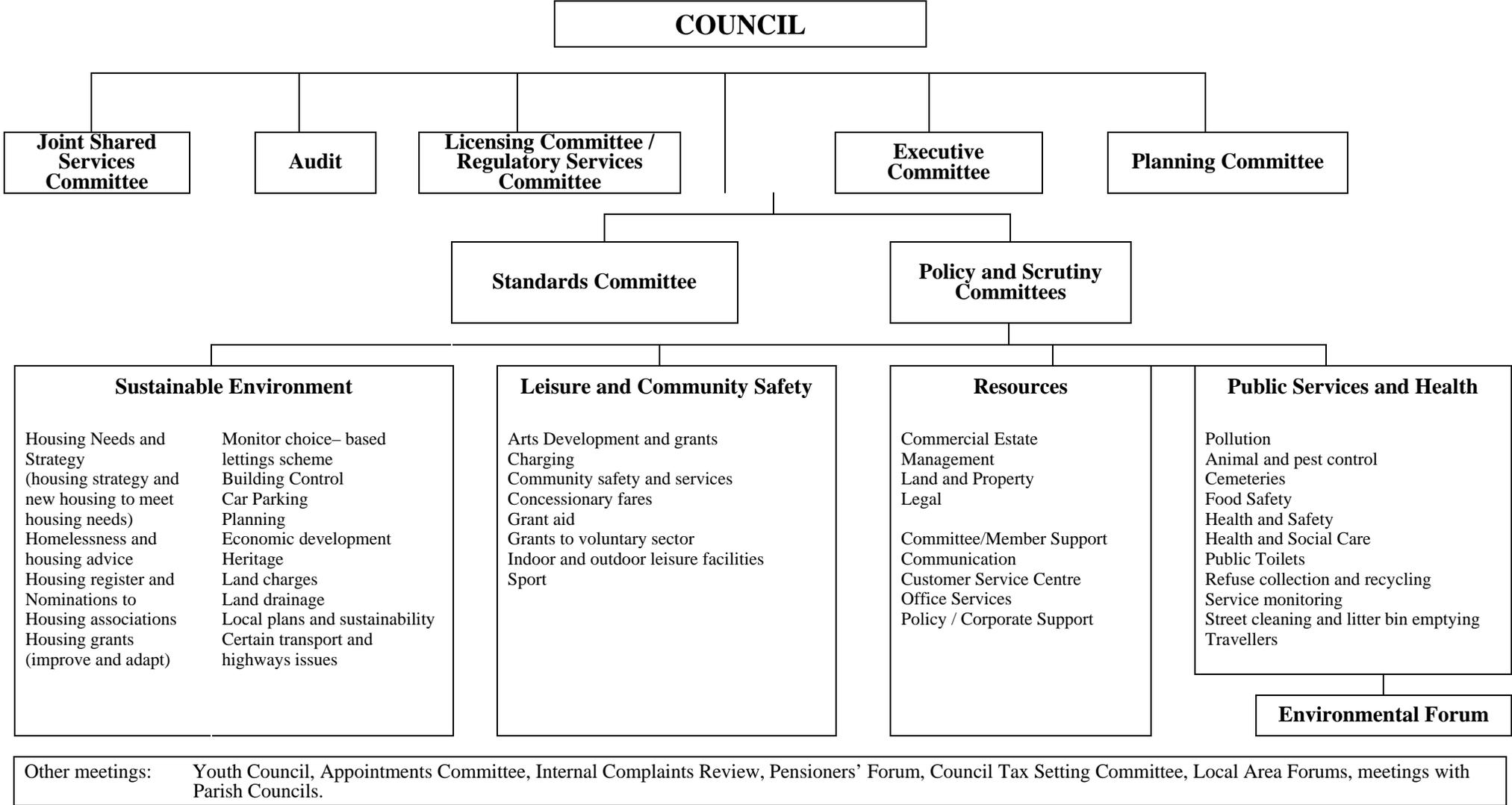
Data checked by: David Gardner – Dr of Corporate Resources & Governance

Data rating:

1	Poor	
2	Sufficient	
3	High	✓

Background Papers - Council's Constitution; Local Government and Housing Act 1989

PRESENT STRUCTURE OF THREE RIVERS DISTRICT COUNCIL



Proposed New Committee System

The Council supports the thrust of the report accepted by the Constitutional Working Party in December 2011 and propose the following Committee Structure besides the 'regulatory' committees of Planning, Licensing and Audit. This has yet to be agreed formally. For the chart, see further below in this appendix.

Finance and Strategy Committee

This is the primary Committee of the Council, it will be politically balanced and its membership will be drawn from the Chairmen of, and lead members within, the Service Committees.

Recommended membership (as per the present proportionality): 10 (6:3:1 in 2012) and 10 (as now) or 9 (5:3:1 in 2014).

Its Terms of Reference are

- To receive, amend and approve TRDC's contribution to the Community Strategy and any other major strategies
- To develop and either recommend to, or decide new Policies for, the Council to achieve the Strategic Plan
- To develop and modify the Local Development Framework
- To recommend Strategy and the Strategic Plan to Council.
- To allocate Resources / Financial / Staffing / Assets etc between Committees.

The number of meetings per year will possibly be FOUR.

Service Committees with executive powers

We believe at least three Committees are needed, as set out below, and the flexibility over workload will be in the number of meetings.

Their recommended membership: 11 (6:3:2) and 11 (6:3:2) or 9 (5:3:1) in 2014.

Leisure Community and Public Services	Sustainable Environment	Corporate Resources
Areas of Responsibility As existing Policy and Scrutiny Committees covering the operational area of DCE	Areas of Responsibility As existing Policy and Scrutiny Committees covering the operational area of DCE	As existing Resources Policy and Scrutiny Committees covering the operational area of the present Directorate of Community Resources and Governance.*

* It will also take on the TRDC responsibilities of the Joint Shared Services Committee, which is likely to be abolished. For that function, we shall also welcome to the Committee councillors from Watford Borough Council.

The Committees will have delegated authority to:-

- Take all decisions on expenditure and allocation of resources within their allocated budget /resources as decided by the Finance & Strategy Committee

- Take decisions not delegated to officers in respect of the provision of Services by the Council.
- Keep under review the operational effectiveness of Services that lie within the Terms of Reference.
- Review the performance via Heads of Service of the Services provided.
- Approve the Service Plans developed out of the Strategic Plan and resourced from the Finance & Strategy Committee.
- Scrutinise the effectiveness of Policies.

The number of meetings per year will possibly be FOUR.

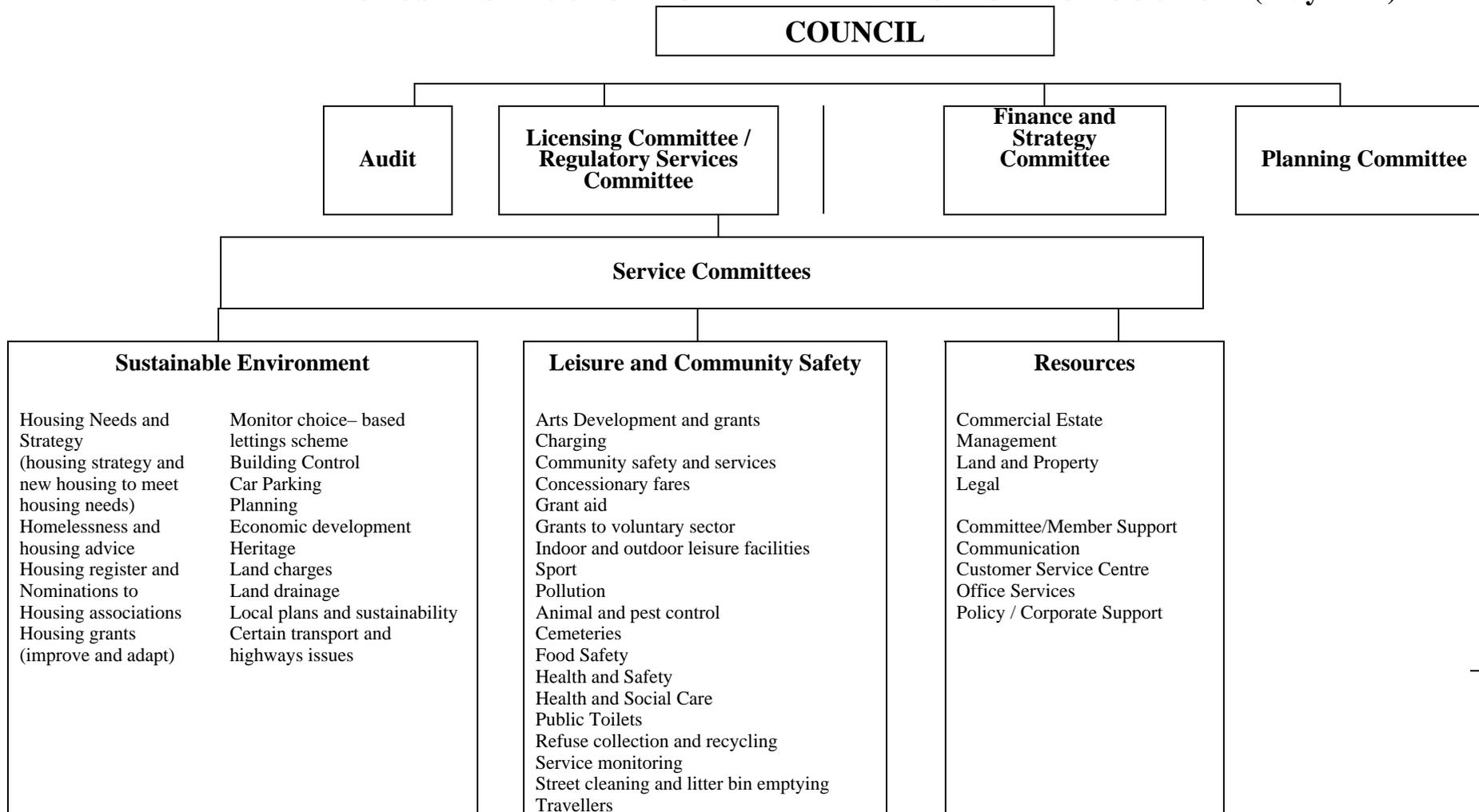
We believe the reduced number of meetings, combined with the executive functions that remove the present duplication of taking every decision through two committees, will reduce the workload on councillors.

Nevertheless there will be a significant number of committee places that will need to be filled from 2014:

Finance & Strategy	9 or 10
3 x Service Committees	each 9 or 11 = 27-33
Planning (Dev Cont)	9 or 10
Licencing/Regulatory	9-11
Audit	7
Total Committee places	61-71

Note even at the lower end of this range, there will be a requirement for the majority of councillors to sit on more than one committee.

PROPOSED STRUCTURE OF THREE RIVERS DISTRICT COUNCIL (May 2014)



Other meetings: Youth Council, Appointments Committee, Internal Complaints Review, Pensioners' Forum, Council Tax Setting Committee, Local Area Forums, meetings with Parish Councils. Environmental Forum