

Electoral Review of Test Valley Borough Council

2016 Proposal on Council Size

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1. Introduction

1.1. This submission addresses each of the Local Government Boundary Commission's (LGBC) key criteria as set out in its technical guidance to justify the proposal for council size in Test Valley:

- the governance arrangements of the Council and how it takes decisions across the broad range of its responsibilities;
- the scrutiny functions relating to its own decision making, and the Council's responsibilities to outside bodies; and
- the representative role of Councillors in the local community and how they engage with people, conduct case work and represent the Council on local partner organisations.

1.2. This submission proposes a reduction in the number of elected councillors for Test Valley Borough Council from its current level of 48 to 43. This figure has been reached by assessing how much work (or "councillor hours") will be required for councillors to fulfil their roles and run the Council in 2022. In arriving at this figure, we have anticipated that less time will be spent on the decision

making role by virtue of a reduced number of councillors participating in this function, whilst recognising that the level of community representation work will increase as a result of a growing population.

- 1.3. The last electoral review of Test Valley Borough Council was undertaken in 2000 with the changes coming into effect from the 2003 borough elections. At that time it was agreed that Test Valley Borough Council should be served by 48 councillors representing 24 wards. This represented an increase in the number of councillors by 4 and modification to ward boundaries to increase the number of wards from 23 to 24 to ensure electoral equality. The current position can be seen in Appendix 1.
- 1.4. Test Valley Borough Council has all-out elections every four years.
- 1.5. The arrangements as set out above have now been in place for 13 years. During this time the borough has seen an increase in population along with a number of other factors such as changes in service provision, a shift in the way residents communicate with councillors and access council services and the emphasis placed on councillors to act as community leaders/ facilitators as a key part of their role.
- 1.6. The current position in Test Valley when measured against the Commission's criteria for electoral equality shows that 30% of wards (7) have a variance of greater than +/-10%, of which 4 wards have a variance greater than +/-20%. The variance for each ward is set out in Appendix 2. A variance in electoral equality means that the total number of electors per councillor is either higher or lower than the average.
- 1.7. This proposal seeks to meet the LGBC's criteria for electoral equality whilst allowing for convenient and effective local government.
- 1.8. As well as the three criteria specified by the LGBC, other factors that affect how the council operates and the impact on the workload of councillors have been taken into account. These include:
 - changes in technology,
 - the way many residents interact with the council and councillors,
 - public expectations, and
 - the support available to councillors.

2. Governance arrangements and decision making

- 2.1. Under the Local Government Act 2000, Test Valley Borough Council operates a leader and cabinet model of executive arrangements. The leader is elected by Council for a term of four years and appoints a deputy leader, determines

membership of the cabinet and determines those functions which are retained by the leader and those delegations of portfolio holders.

- 2.2. Test Valley has a stream-lined decision making structure with delegations to councillors and officers as set out in the Council's Constitution. Cabinet comprises 8 Councillors and has scheduled monthly meetings, with the exception of August. It is not considered that a reduction in council size would have a significant impact on the operation of the executive function bearing in mind the delegations that currently exist.
- 2.3. Full Council takes decisions it is required to do so by law and those decisions which are deemed to be significant in relation to the budget and wider policy as well as those decisions which have significant implications for the borough.
- 2.4. The council has a number of key policies and strategies including the Medium Term Financial Strategy which reviews the financial implications of the Council's work and helps set the annual budget, and the Corporate Plan, which outlines the council's vision and priorities over a four year period. These, along with a range of other key policies and strategies such as the Local Plan, form the basis for the day-to-day operational business of the council.
- 2.5. The council has two planning committees, one covering the north of the borough and the other covering the south. All councillors are members of one of these planning committees depending on their ward location. Two councillors, who serve the central ward of Broughton and Stockbridge, are members of both planning committees. Area planning committees are held every three weeks.
- 2.6. Planning is an important issue for communities of the Borough. The balance between providing development to meet local needs and protecting the rural nature and designated landscapes of the borough is a difficult task for the councillors.
- 2.7. As well as the two area planning committees the council also operates a Planning Control Committee, comprising 17 councillors, who determine those applications that have been referred to it by one of the area planning committees. In the twelve months to 31 August 2016, the Planning Control Committee met on 8 occasions.
- 2.8. The number of planning applications received and included in the returns to the Department of Communities and Local Government over the last three years was:
 - 2015/2016 – 1,753
 - 2014/2015 – 1,587

- 2013/2014 – 1,574

2.9. The council's Licensing Committee comprises 15 councillors and is scheduled to meet once a month. The committee deals with any matters set out in the Licensing Act 2003, the Gambling Act 2005 and any other associated regulations including taxi licensing. In the twelve months to 31 August 2016, the Licensing Committee met on 4 occasions. In the twelve months previous to that, to 31 August 2015 the committee met on 3 occasions.

2.10. The council has a Licensing Sub-Committee which comprises 3 Councillors from the membership of the Licensing Committee. In the twelve months to 31 August 2016, the sub-committee met on 2 occasions and in the twelve months previous to that, to 31 August 2015, the sub-committee met on 4 occasions.

2.11. The council also has a General Purposes Committee which comprises 11 councillors and deals with a range of matters relating to staffing, health and safety and conduct of councillors. In the twelve months to 31 August 2016, the committee met on 2 occasions and in the twelve months previous to that, to 31 August 2015, the committee met on 2 occasions. General Purposes also has a number of sub-committees which rarely meet. The General Purposes Employment Appeals and Ethics Sub-Committee met on 1 occasion in 2015.

2.12. As well as the formal decision making committees of the council, councillors are involved in a range of steering and advisory groups that meet to help shape and develop particular areas of work that are priorities for the Council.

2.13. For example, there is a Member and Community Development Member Group comprising 5 councillors that meets every 2 months to consider programmes of work relating to the council's corporate aim to invest in Test Valley as a place to 'contribute to and be part of a strong community'. There are also councillor groups that meet to consider the development of the borough's two large towns Andover and Romsey. In both cases, these groups comprise all councillors from the wards that make up the two towns and meet regularly as well as undertake a range of other associated activities such as public consultation events.

2.14. The number of steering groups that a councillor sits on and the workload across these varies. Around two thirds of councillors are a member of at least 1 of these groups.

3. Scrutiny functions

3.1. The council has a single Overview and Scrutiny Committee that undertakes the overview and scrutiny function required by the Local Government Act 2000. The

Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSCOM) comprises 17 councillors and is scheduled to meet monthly following the Cabinet schedule of meetings.

- 3.2. In the twelve months to 31 August 2016, OSCOM met on 11 occasions. In the twelve months previous to that, to 31 August 2015 the committee met on 9 occasions. Generally meetings of OSCOM last around two hours.
- 3.3. OSCOM is supported by Task and Finish Panels which are councillor groups established by the main committee to look in specific detail at particular areas or processes identified as a priority by OSCOM members. Typically there are around 3 to 4 OSCOM Panels operating at any one time. The panels themselves determine their workload and timescales, which varies depending on the subject being considered and the membership of the panel itself. Generally it is expected that reviews should take no more than 5-6 meetings over six months to one year.
- 3.4. OSCOM also has a Budget Panel which meets twice a year to consider financial management in specific detail, and an Audit Panel which meet four times a year to consider the council's risk management framework and internal and external audit control.

4. Decision making and scrutiny summary

- 4.1. The information set out in sections 2 and 3 illustrate that from a political and managerial perspective the council has a reasonably streamlined decision making process with Council and Cabinet meetings not generally lasting more than an hour, and the other committee meetings rarely lasting more than a couple of hours. The only regular exception to this is the area planning committees.
- 4.2. It is not considered that 48 councillors are required to continue to run the business of the council through the current decision making system. This is reflected in the fact that 10 councillors do not sit on either Cabinet or any of the main council committees (Overview and Scrutiny, Licensing and General Purposes), with the exception of planning.

5. Representative role of councillors

- 5.1. Test Valley has many diverse and different communities, ranging from small rural communities to larger urban settlements.
- 5.2. The principal urban areas are the towns of Andover in the north and Romsey in the south. As well as these towns, there are a number of other large settlements such as North Baddesley, Nursling and Rownhams and Valley Park. These urban settlements are covered by 11 ward areas and are served by 30 elected councillors.

- 5.3. Test Valley has substantial rural areas, particularly in the north, though central Test Valley and down the western side of the borough towards the New Forest. These rural areas contain a variety of settlements from hamlets and larger villages though to the small town of Stockbridge in central Test Valley. These areas are covered by 13 ward areas and are served by 18 elected councillors.
- 5.4. The Council appoints representatives to 59 outside bodies ranging from local charities and organisations through to partnership boards and national bodies. The number of representatives appointed to any one outside body can range from 1 up to 4. In 2016/17 60% (29) of councillors hold a position as a council representative to an outside body.
- 5.5. The workload associated with these appointments varies according to the nature of the position. Overall, the number of outside bodies that the Council appoints representatives to has seen a reduction year on year over the last 15 years. In 2001/2002, representation was required on 167 outside bodies. This has reduced to 59 in 2016/17, which is a reduction of 64.7%
- 5.6. There is an expectation that borough councillors will attend parish and town meetings that take place within their ward. This is particularly notable in rural wards where borough councillors are seen as a key link with the borough council and a mechanism for getting things done. In some rural wards this obligation can translate to attending up to 8 parish councils on a regular basis which can at times be problematic due to the large areas some rural wards cover. This is illustrated in Appendix 1.
- 5.7. Test Valley has 59 Parishes, 51 of which have parish or town councils with 8 being parish meetings. Test Valley has one parish group, West Tytherley and Frenchmoor in the ward of Dun Valley. Across all parish and town councils there are 408 parish/ town councillor positions. In many cases parish councils have a good understanding of how Test Valley Borough Council operates and are often seen by residents as a link with Borough Council services and getting things done. Borough councillors continue to work to build strong relationships with parish councils through initiatives such as the Test Valley Resilience Forum, Test Valley Association of Parish and Town Councils and through work at a more local level helping communities to prioritise and plan for the future. A recent councillor survey showed that on average councillors spend 7 hours a month liaising with their town or parish councils.
- 5.8. The Borough Council operates in a two tier system with 7 Hampshire County Councillors covering county functions across Test Valley.
- 5.9. Community representation work varies across the district with anecdotal feedback suggesting that workload comes in peaks and troughs depending on a

number of factors including the time of the year and what might be happening locally. However, the results of a recent survey showed that on average councillors spend 8.1 hours a week on the community representation role with a further one hour a week spent on attending the meetings and activities of outside bodies and organisations for which they are appointed to by Council.

- 5.10. Over the past five years or so, one of the Council's key priorities as laid out in its corporate plans, which were developed with extensive councillor and public input, has been to support councillors and communities to resolve issue that are important to them and to prioritise and plan for the future. This area of work is set out in the current Corporate Plan under the theme 'contribute to and be part of a strong community' and is seen by councillors as a key part of their role as elected representatives.
- 5.11. The Council has put in place a number of initiatives and tools in order to support councillors as community leaders/ facilitators and to help communities better understand their needs and priorities across the whole community. This work has included being part of an LGA national pilot scheme called 'Keep it Real' which aimed to develop and support the role of councillors as community representatives and showcase best practice to other local authorities.
- 5.12. In better understanding community priorities councillors are in a stronger position to help develop plans to mitigate any changes in circumstance arising from things such as development and demographic change and to support community groups to develop initiatives and projects to identify opportunities and tackle challenges.
- 5.13. It is anticipated that the Council will continue to develop this local democratic role of individual councillors.

6. Representative role of councillors summary

- 6.1. Sections 2 to 5 have outlined the time spent by Test Valley Borough Councillors in their work; this information is collated in the table in 8.14. These figures broadly align with what might be expected in comparison to national figures.
- 6.2. The LGA Census of Local Authority Councillors 2013 sets out the average hours worked per week by councillors in England, broken down by the various elements of their role. The report states that shire councillors spend an average of 20.6 hours per week on both council and political business, but does not break this down by role. If the average proportion of hours spent by all councillors on each of the aspects of their work is applied to the shire councillor hours per week, assumptions can be made about the average hours spent by English shire councillors the various elements of their role.

6.3. When broken down by role, the average shire councillor in England spends an average of 8 hours per week on the community representation role, which broadly aligns with the work done by councillors in Test Valley.

7. Electoral forecast

7.1. The Test Valley Electorate at September 2016 was estimated to be 96,006. Forecasts to 2022 show an overall increase in electors of 7,666 to a total of 103,672 electors. This represents an increase of 8%. A full breakdown of current and forecasted electorate figures can be seen in Appendix 2.

7.2. Some of the largest percentage increases in electorate are seen in the existing urban areas of Alamein and St Mary's wards in Andover (20% and 38.5% respectively), Abbey ward in Romsey (11.3%) , and the ward of Chilworth, Nursling and Rownhams (15.4%).

7.3. The largest percentage increase of 52.6%, is seen in the rural ward of Romsey Extra. The increase in electorate in Romsey Extra is in part due to it being a ward which surrounds the town of Romsey, therefore new developments being undertaken on the outskirts of the town have a direct impact on this ward.

7.4. Over Wallop in central Test Valley is a rural ward which shows an increase in electorate of 18.5%. This is likely to be in part due to the large presence of HM Forces personnel and their families located in this ward.

7.5. In contrast, the Romsey town ward of Tadburn shows a decrease in electorate of 4.6%. The other urban area to show a significant change is the ward of Valley Park which shows a decrease in electorate of 5.2% by 2022.

7.6. The rural wards of Bourne Valley, Anna and Harewood show a decrease in electorate of 8.3%, 4.3% and 4.4% respectively.

8. Council size justification

8.1. A Member Working Group was established to inform the current electoral review of Test Valley. This Group comprised seven councillors from across both political parties and met on several occasions to review a range of data and information alongside the benefit of their own experience to consider the council size for Test Valley.

8.2. As well as considering existing data, the Group undertook a survey of all councillors to better understand the amount of work across the borough that exists for councillors in relation to their community role and the time they spent on these various duties.

- 8.3. The initial view of the Group was that a council size of between 36 and 58 councillors should be considered, this being the range from Councils' across Test Valley's CIPFA nearest neighbours. The CIPFA nearest neighbours model provides a list of authorities that are similar to Test Valley in terms of their population demographics and geographical profile.
- 8.4. The average council size across CIPFA neighbours who have undertaken a review of council size is 43.2.
- 8.5. The forecasted electorate for Test Valley shows an increase of 8% which equates to an increase of 7,666 individuals.
- 8.6. When looking at the time councillors spend across their roles as borough councillors and how this may change in the future, it was predicted that the proportion of time spent on the councillors' *representative* role would increase in the future driven by population increase as outlined above. After consideration, this increase of workload (based on a larger electorate), was not applied to other areas such as decision making and scrutiny processes as it was felt that these would continue at a similar level as they represent the day-to-day business and decision making required in order for the council to function.
- 8.7. Other potential changes that could impact workload were also considered. These included the continued change in use of technology allowing on one hand, residents to look up information and contact councillors more quickly regarding issues. However, on the other hand, it was considered that the increased use of technology would make it easier and quicker for councillors to respond to queries from members of the public.
- 8.8. The councillor survey asked members "what if any changes do you foresee in the coming 10 years or so that may influence how you interact and work with your communities?" The most popular answer to this question concerned the use of modern technology and the subsequent reduction in workload. This is reflected in the Council's Digital Transformation Strategy, which articulates a commitment to ensuring our elected members have the appropriate digital skills and knowledge to undertake their roles effectively.
- 8.9. The use of technology means that:
- responses to queries can now be typed and sent electronically rather than in the past when a written letter or phone call was required
 - queries from the public can be received and responded to 'on-the-go' through mobile technology

- seeking clarification with respect to particular issues is often easier and quicker
- information can be passed on to officers in a timely manner without the need for a phone call or visiting the council offices
- following-up on outstanding issues is quicker and easier
- Use of email means that information can be sent to multiple people at once reducing any repetition e.g. making multiple calls to different people regarding the same issue
- information can easily be shared or passed on to outside organisations if appropriate
- it is easier to look up information about an issue or organisation online to help in resolving issues
- use of online mapping including tools such as Street View, means that it is easier for people receiving information to understand the context and nature of an issue

8.10. In many cases anecdotal feedback from councillors suggests that they now spend less time having to visit residents or sites directly as this can be done through electronic communication and the use of pictures and mapping available via the internet.

8.11. The Group also acknowledged that not all residents had access to, or were comfortable using technology and therefore a need for councillors to be available via other forms of contact was necessary.

8.12. It was noted the council and councillors were working with communities to increase community resilience and to help them put in place plans and processes so they are able to resolve issues of local importance themselves. Over time, it was expected that this work would lead to a reduction in the need for the council and councillors to be so heavily involved as communities would be more proactive and issues would be resolved at an earlier stage. It was noted however that councillors would retain a key role in communities as leader/ facilitators and as an important contact for guidance and support.

8.13. In order to determine the council size requirement in 2022 given the considerations outlined above, the Group applied the following methodology which estimated the time required to manage council business based on the criteria as set out by the LGBC in its guidance.

8.14. Using a range of information including the Legal and Democratic service's information regarding committee hours, the councillor survey and other councillor feedback, it was determined that the following total number of hours were required across the various roles:

Role	Hours per week required in Test Valley 2016	Projected hours per week required in Test Valley 2022 (*adjusted for population increase)
Decision making	301	301
Scrutiny	86	86
Community representation	389	420*
Other (e.g. outside bodies)	48	48
Total	824	855

8.15. The hours per week required for the decision making and scrutiny elements of the model are sensitive to the number of councillors undertaking these elements and, in particular, to the number of councillors on Council and the Area Planning Committees. The figures of 301 and 86 used in the table above reflect the decision making and scrutiny hours required in 2016 with a council size of 43 councillors. If the total number of hours spent on these functions by our current council size of 48 councillors was used as a base, then the total number of hours work required for these elements when projected for 2022 would be overstated in the model. This is because the projected work required would reflect more councillors participating in the decision making and scrutiny functions than would be the case.

8.16. This same rationale does not apply to the community representation and other work elements of the model as all the work being undertaken by the current 48 councillors would still need to be carried out regardless of council size.

8.17. To estimate the total hours required in 2022, an increase of 8% was applied to the hours of community representation to take into account the rise in electorate. This results in an increase to the community representation role to a total of 420 hours a week.

8.18. To take into account the potential impact of changes in the use of technology and other factors as set out in 8.6 to 8.9, and therefore more accurately project a required number of hours for councillors in 2022, a reduction of 10% was then applied to the number of hours required across all four roles.

8.19. This resulted in a total of 770 hours of work required to manage the business of the council in 2022.

8.20. In order to assess the required council size, the Group agreed that it was reasonable to expect councillors to work an average of 18 hours per week in order to fulfil the requirements of their role. It was noted that the workload of councillors was driven by the changing nature of the role.

8.21. This broadly aligns with the average number of hours spent by councillors in a shire district on council business as shown in the LGA Census of Local Authority Councillors 2013. As outlined in 6.2, the census shows that on average, councillors spent 20.6 hours a week on council and political business which included time spent:

- attending council meetings and committees,
- engaging with constituents,
- conducting surgeries and answering queries from member of the public,
- working with community groups,
- attending meetings of external bodies, and
- training activities.

The figure of 20.6 hours includes an allowance of 17.1% or 3.5 hours for group/party business. Therefore the average time councillors in shire districts spent on council and political business was 17.1 hours.

8.22. It was noted that the figure of 18 hours a week that TVBC councillors would be expected to spend on council and political business does not include any provision for time spent on group/party business.

8.23. The total hours required was then divided by the hours it was reasonable for a councillor to work which results in a council size of 43. This results in an average electorate of 2,411 per councillor.

9. Conclusion

9.1. Using a range of information including the Legal and Democratic Service's data on the number of hours currently spent in committee by councillors, a councillor survey and other councillor feedback, an assessment has been made of the number of councillor hours which will be required in 2022 for councillors to fulfil their community roles and run the Council. In addition, a judgement has been made as to the number of hours it would be reasonable to require councillors to work per week.

9.2. It is not expected that there will be a significant change to nor expansion of the Council's political management arrangements in the near future. However, it is

anticipated that the amount of work undertaken by councillors in their communities will increase.

- 9.3. Applying the above considerations it was determined that a total council size of 43 would provide Test Valley Borough Council with sufficient councillors to manage the business of the Council, to support convenient and effective local government, and to allow councillors to continue to fulfil their representational role.