

1 INTRODUCTION

The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) is an independent body whose main activity is to carry out electoral reviews of principal local authorities in England. The Commission is carrying out a review of East Sussex County Council in a coordinated process alongside simultaneous reviews of all five districts and boroughs within East Sussex.

The Commission will ultimately make recommendations to Parliament on the electoral arrangements of the six local authorities in East Sussex, namely:

- a) **Council size**: the total number of councillors elected to each authority.
- b) The **boundaries of all wards (for district and borough councils) and divisions (for the county council)** – but not the external boundary of any of the authorities.
- c) The **number of councillors** elected to each ward and division.
- d) The **name of each ward and division**.

The new electoral arrangements will come into effect from the next County Council elections in May 2017; Hastings Borough Council elections in 2018 and other district and borough council elections in 2019.

Reason for the review

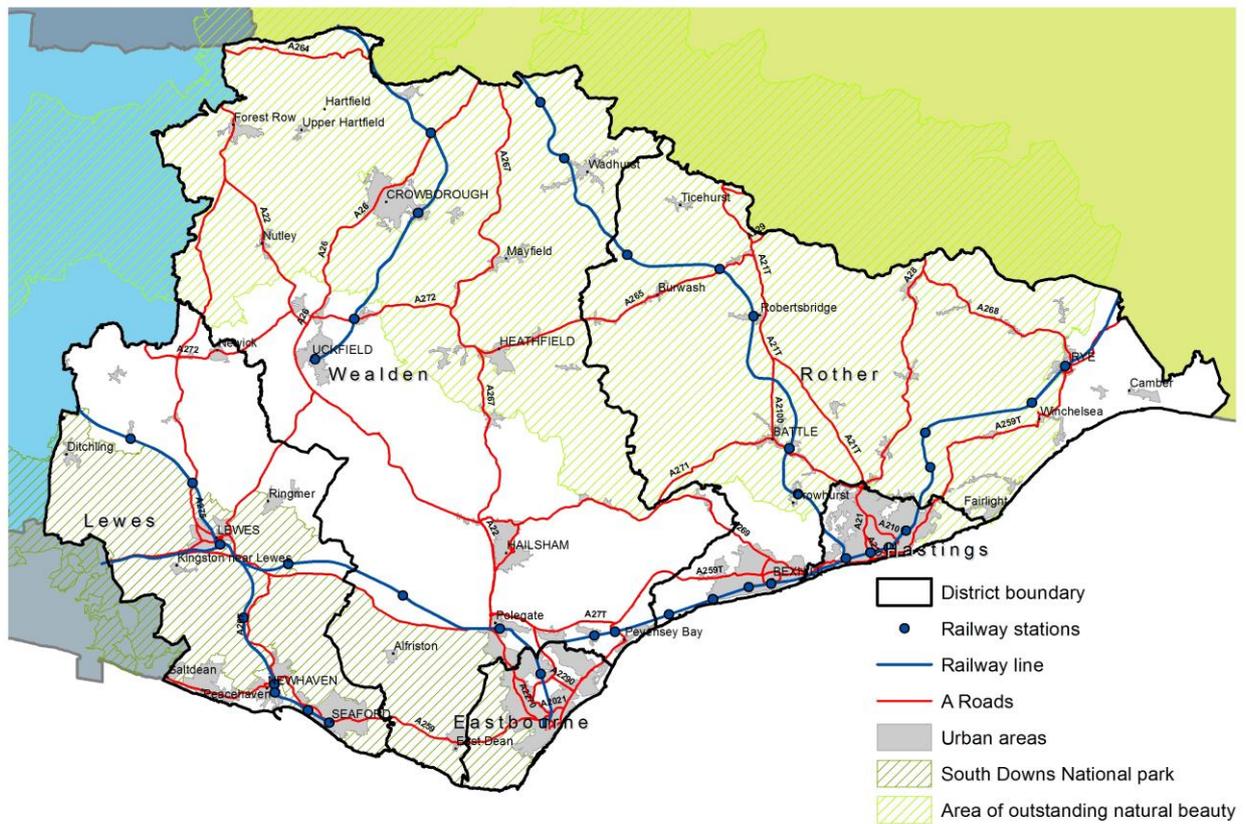
This review has been triggered because East Sussex County Council meets the Commission's intervention criteria due to electoral inequality. The Commission has found significant levels of electoral inequality between county electoral divisions. Since the last review, through development and movement of people, some county councillors now represent many more, or many fewer, electors than other councillors. In addition, the Commission considers that two district/borough councils in East Sussex also meet the criteria for review. Even though only three councils have triggered a review, this review will include the county and the five districts and boroughs.

The first phase of the electoral review, and the subject of this report, is a consideration of council size (the number of councillors elected to the authority).

2. BACKGROUND

Local Authority Profile

East Sussex is a county of 660 square miles. About two thirds of the county is designated as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty: the High Weald and the South Downs National Park. East Sussex is an attractive place to live with a generally peaceful atmosphere; an overall low crime rate; high quality natural environment, countryside and coast; vibrant towns and attractive villages with unique characteristics and histories.



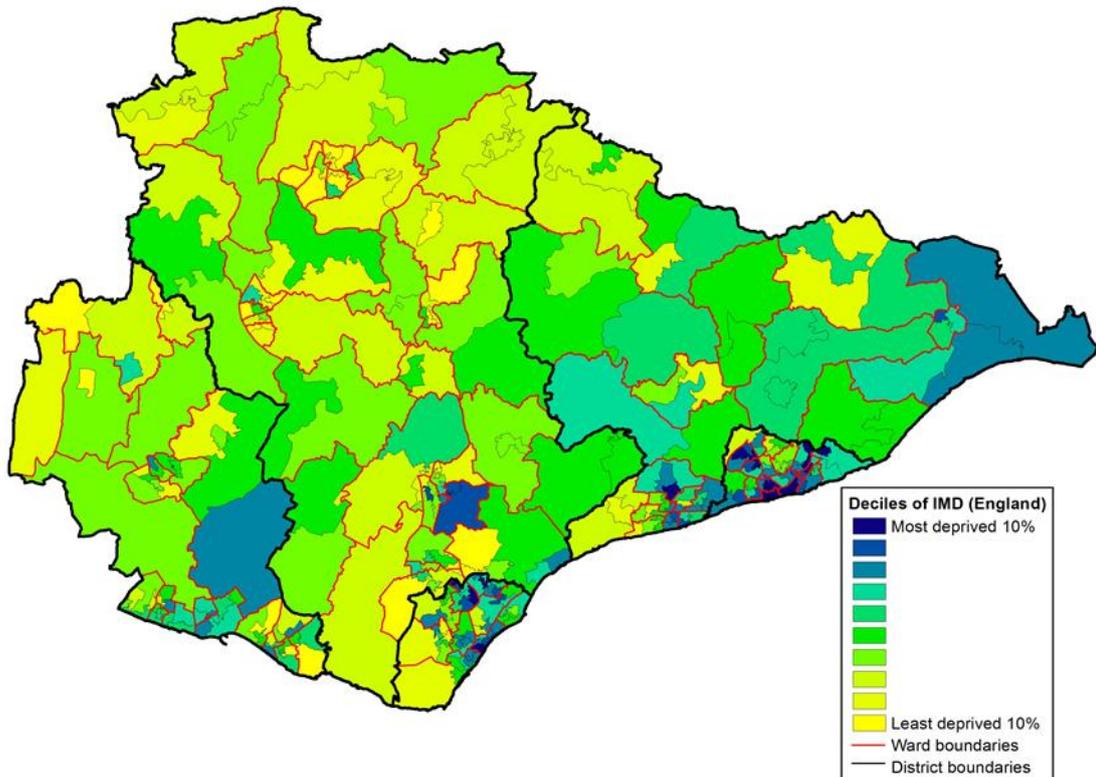
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East Sussex has no motorways and a limited trunk road network. Only short sections of the major roads are dual carriageways. A high quality, efficient and safe road network is considered vital to and a major factor governing the prospects for economic growth. Our Local Transport Plan sets out schemes that aim to improve transport infrastructure in the county over the next 15 years. Schemes that offer the best impact on communities and provide greatest value for money are carefully prioritised.

The Bexhill Hastings Link Road is due to open later in 2015 and will benefit residents and businesses in the area by creating space and access for up to 2,000 new homes, business developments, and employment opportunities.

Employment deprivation is highest in the coastal towns and in the east of the county. However, there are pockets of deprivation in some rural areas:

Indices of Deprivation 2010: Indices of multiple deprivation



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Council priorities

The council has identified four overarching priority outcomes:

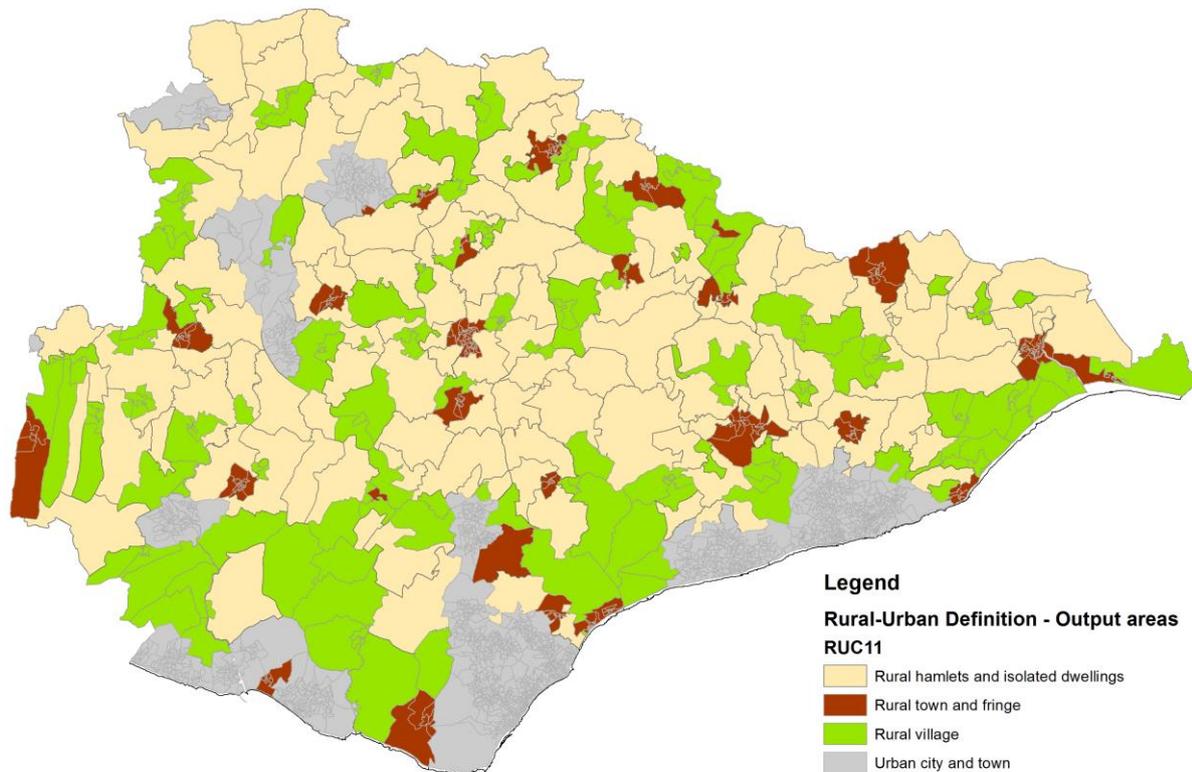
- Driving economic growth
- Keeping vulnerable people safe
- Helping people help themselves; and
- Making best use of resources.

Making best use of resources is the 'gateway' priority through which any activity and accompanying resources must pass. The remaining three priority outcomes guide our activities, direct our resources and are reflected in our Council Plan activities and targets.

As resources tighten, we are evolving an ever sharper focus on these priority areas. This process requires us to define clearly the outcomes we wish to achieve and then to monitor our success in delivering these outcomes for the county's residents, communities and businesses.

Demographic pressures

Almost three quarters of the population in East Sussex live in urban areas. (See map below)



In 2013, East Sussex had a population of 534,402 (ONS mid-year estimates). East Sussex has had an older age profile compared to England and Wales and the South East for at least the last 30 years. Over half of the county's population is aged over 45, compared to 43% nationally and 44% regionally. In particular, the proportion of the population aged 75+ is almost 12%, compared to 8% regionally and nationally. East Sussex still ranks highest of all 35 counties in England based on its percentage of the population aged 90+ and second highest for 75+ and 85+ after Dorset.

At district level, Rother, together with Christchurch, is ranked highest of all districts and unitary authorities in the country for its percentage of the population aged 90+. It is also second highest for the 75+ and 85+ age groups. Eastbourne ranks fourth highest for the over 90 age group and is within the top 10 for 85+.

The pensionable age population is also relatively higher in East Sussex than nationally and regionally, representing 24% of the total population in 2013, compared to 17% in England and Wales and 18% in the South East.

On the other hand, there are fewer young people in the county compared to the national and regional picture. Younger generations, aged 20-39, only account for 20% of the total population, compared to 25% in South East and 27% in England.

The working age population, aged 16-64, accounts for around 59% of the county's population, which is also lower than the national and regional averages of about 64% and 63% respectively.

As a consequence of an ageing population, the elderly dependency ratio is 41% in East Sussex, compared to 27% nationally and 29% regionally. Rother has the highest ratio at 56% and Hastings the lowest at 29%.

By 2021, the total population is projected to increase by 5.8% to 565,197. The following projections take account of the housing to be developed in that time period. The districts and boroughs in East Sussex expect that over 12,600 dwellings will be built by 2021.

Districts	Estimates	Projected Population									
	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2013-2021	% change
Eastbourne	100,537	101,002	101,450	101,902	102,354	102,806	103,261	103,716	104,175	3,638	3.6
Hastings	90,754	91,054	91,383	91,967	92,489	93,007	93,522	93,963	94,467	3,713	4.1
Lewes	99,479	99,725	100,274	100,624	101,268	102,377	103,803	104,809	105,630	6,151	6.2
Rother	91,054	91,363	92,059	92,800	93,537	94,359	95,212	95,948	96,706	5,652	6.2
Wealden	152,578	153,890	155,366	156,841	158,317	159,793	161,268	162,744	164,219	11,641	7.6
East Sussex	534,402	537,034	540,532	544,134	547,965	552,342	557,066	561,180	565,197	30,795	5.8

Districts	Completed dwellings	Planned dwellings								Total
	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2014/15-2020/21	
Eastbourne	245	228	230	230	230	231	231	233	1,613	
Hastings	133	156	263	230	228	234	197	232	1,540	
Lewes	113	257	152	281	489	611	428	355	2,573	
Rother	157	326	352	345	381	395	341	352	2,492	
Wealden	560	635	635	635	635	635	635	635	4,447	
East Sussex	1,208	1,602	1,632	1,721	1,963	2,106	1,832	1,807	12,665	

During the next medium term planning period (2016/17 to 2018/19) there will be an increased demand for council services due to demographic pressures based on:

- a 1% rise in the overall population, with reductions in the absolute numbers and proportions of young people and working age adults;
- an increase in the number and proportion of older people, with the largest percentage rise in people aged over 85;
- a potential need for 7,500 new jobs to meet the increase in the workforce as the retirement age increases and to provide employment for those currently on Jobseekers' Allowance; and
- an increase in the number of primary age pupils in the middle of the period and a need for additional primary school places to provide places in the areas where new housing growth is providing pressures on places.

Previous boundary reviews

Until 1997, East Sussex County Council had 70 councillors, albeit representing a much larger population. Brighton & Hove became a unitary authority at that time and the County Council was reduced to 44 members by removing the 26 Brighton and Hove electoral divisions. Initially, no assessment was undertaken to determine whether the remaining 44 members was an appropriate size for East Sussex County Council.

However, in its submission to the Boundary Commission in March 2003, the County Council considered that there was justification for moving to a slightly larger Council of 49 members based on an assessment that determined:

- an increased emphasis on councillors' community leadership role and the additional partnerships and external bodies in which they were expected to become involved
- the need to better recognise community interests.
- The need to fulfil adequately the scrutiny process which required a slightly larger number of members to undertake the detailed work/studies involved.

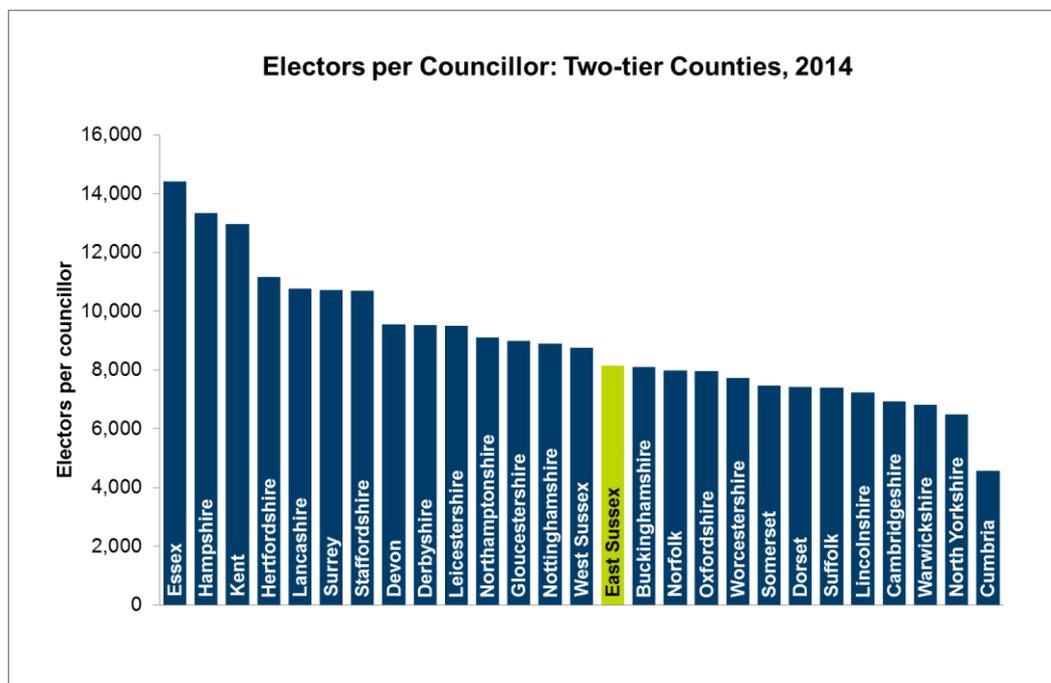
Developing this submission

A 'reference group' of Members, from each of the political groups represented on East Sussex County Council, met on 2 June 2015 to collate their evidence and experience and to formulate the basis of the Council's submission on council size. The group was supported by Kim Bloxham (Team Manager, Research and Information, ESCC) and Paul Dean (Member Services Manager).

The draft submission was considered by Governance Committee which [will] forward its recommendations for consideration at Full Council (14 July 2015).

3. PROPOSAL

At present, East Sussex County Council has 49 elected Members and the ratio of electors to Members sits within an acceptable range of comparator authorities:



Forecast electoral growth

In 2021, the electorate is projected to increase to 431,900 in East Sussex. Electorate rates have been calculated by dividing the number of electors in the 5-year period 2009-2013 by the population aged over 18 for the same period. The projections were produced by applying the electorate rates to the population aged over 18 for each year of the period 2015-2021. The 2014 estimates of electorate were supplied by the districts and boroughs from a 'snapshot' of the electoral roll.

Districts	Estimate s	Projected Electorate						
	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Eastbourne	73,036	74,456	74,967	75,413	75,766	76,150	76,481	76,832
Hastings	57,998	63,639	64,187	64,643	65,043	65,446	65,745	66,087
Lewes	73,938	77,650	77,956	78,463	79,309	80,401	81,115	81,723
Rother	70,869	73,268	74,001	74,631	75,308	75,957	76,483	77,032
Wealden	119,172	122,936	124,372	125,625	126,821	127,962	129,071	130,228
East Sussex	395,013	411,949	415,482	418,775	422,245	425,916	428,895	431,902

Source: 2014 estimates are from the data supplied by the district/boroughs in 'Electorate Matrix for CEDs sub-district projections 19.01.2015'.

East Sussex County Council governance and decision making arrangements

Following local government reorganisation in 1997, the County Council embraced the 'democratic renewal agenda' and was the first council in the country, in May 1999, to establish a leader and cabinet model with the Cabinet comprising only members of the administration.

The Cabinet is responsible for the strategic management of the authority within the budget and policy framework agreed by the County Council. The eight Cabinet members have individual decision making powers within their portfolios. The time commitment for the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council was assessed to be equivalent to a full time post.

Cabinet meetings are well attended and all members are permitted to speak on matters on the agenda. All members are also able to speak at lead member decision making meetings.

The County Council itself approves the budget and policy framework and meets six times a year to consider draft policy documents, the outcome of scrutiny reviews (see below) and to discuss other matters of significant interest.

A number of other committees are required to fulfil a range of other responsibilities. The following table provides the list of current council bodies together with the number of county councillor sitting on them. .

Council body	No. of County Councillors
Full Council	49
Cabinet	
Leader of the Council	1
Deputy Leader of the Council	1
Other Lead Members appointed by the Leader	6
Scrutiny committees	
Audit, Best Value and Community Services Scrutiny Committee	7
Adult Social Care and Community Safety Scrutiny Committee	7
Economy, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Committee	7
Children's Services Scrutiny Committee	9
Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee	7
Members of the Cabinet may not serve on scrutiny committees but do attend scrutiny committee meetings to address issues relating to their area of responsibility.	
Other bodies	
Complaints Panels	3
East Sussex Schools Forum	1
School Admissions Forum	5
Regulatory Committee	18
Governance Committee	5
Planning Committee	7
Standards Committee	7
Pension Committee	5

Council body	No. of County Councillors
East Sussex Music Management Committee	5
County Joint Consultative Committee	5
Governors Panel	7
County Consultative Committee (Governors)	5
Joint Advisory Committee (Schools)	5
Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE)	5
Corporate Parenting Panel	7
Education Performance Panel	8
Transport and Student Support Panel	3
Adoption and Permanence Panels (2)	2
Fostering Panels	1
Recruitment Panels (as need arises)	5
Health and Wellbeing Board	4
Joint Strategic Planning Advisory Committee	6

Overview and scrutiny

Scrutiny is the method used by councillors, who do not sit on the Cabinet, to evaluate and make recommendations on almost any matter that affects East Sussex residents. Scrutiny works alongside the Cabinet to help make sure the Council is delivering services efficiently and effectively, and that the Council is responsive to the needs and opinions of the County's residents and organisations.

East Sussex scrutiny has an excellent record of informing Cabinet decisions and using evidence to draw conclusions and provide constructive challenge that ultimately improves the lives of people living and working in East Sussex. Scrutiny is seen by the Cabinet as a supportive force on issues where evidence, rather than politics, and strategic insight, rather than parochial concerns, are allowed to surface and develop into practical ideas.

The work of scrutiny in the County Council is divided between five scrutiny committees which each meet four times a year. Four scrutiny committees mirror the County Council's Cabinet portfolio responsibilities and a fifth, the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC), scrutinises health services. The current structure of the scrutiny committees was agreed by County Council in 2011 and the model has remained in place with only minor alternations since then.

Sitting on the 5 scrutiny committees are 7 or 9 county councillors plus external representatives on some committees.

Scrutiny committee meetings typically last three hours and are open to the public. Each scrutiny committee sets its own work programme and undertakes a number of in-depth scrutiny projects each year. These projects have increased in complexity and importance in recent years and include:

- scrutiny reviews lasting several months;
- increasing numbers of short 'table top' (ie. short and focussed) scrutiny reviews;
- increasing numbers of meetings associated with 'budget scrutiny' (a process in East Sussex known as Reconciling Policy, Performance and Resources) as the authority's finances become increasingly constrained;
- complex service transformations requiring ongoing scrutiny reference groups;

- detailed health scrutiny work arising from additional Public Health responsibilities acquired by the Council since 2014 and the implications for scrutiny responsibilities arising from the Francis Inquiry.

Meetings of HOSC and Children's Services Scrutiny Committee are webcast live and recordings are available for six months on the Council's website.

The councillor time commitment for scrutiny has therefore been maintained since 2000 and indeed the scrutiny role has, if anything, become more complex and demanding. This has been reflected, for example, by an increasing demand from members for 'awayday' events to focus on member training and scrutiny skill development.

Representatives on outside bodies

County councillors sit on a wide range of external bodies as part of the Council's partnership working arrangements. These arrangements are not intended to provide 'figureheads' but the appointments come with a range of obligations and responsibilities that enable members to contribute effectively to the bodies concerned. In the Council currently makes 85 member appointments to 32 external bodies.

Councillors' representative roles

The general consensus of East Sussex County Council Members is that the amount of time spent by councillors' in undertaking their representational roles has, on average, not reduced significantly in recent years. However, the nature of the role *has* changed and continues to evolve, and there are broad differences in the nature of work for councillors representing the county's urban and rural areas.

Councillors' casework has expanded into areas that were previously rare: for example, health and NHS related issues. Councillors say that health related cases have been particularly noticeable since April 2013 when the County Council took over responsibility for public health.

These factors combined with the geographic and demographic factors described above indicate that the current average size of county electoral divisions are broadly in line with councillor workload.

Deprivation factors and low electoral registration

If councillors are to represent their electoral division or ward effectively, then it is logical that the total population ought to be taken into consideration rather than just those registered on the electoral roll; this is especially so where deprivation is a significant factor. Demographics and deprivation are clearly major factors affecting caseload in our experience, but since East Sussex is not, on average, a high income County, most electoral divisions have a degree of deprivation.

Over the five years from 2009 to 2013, only 68% of the total population aged 18+ in Central St Leonards and Gensing were on the electoral roll. This compares to 94% average for the county as a whole. Yet, half of all the Lower level Super Output Areas in the electoral divisions of Central St. Leonards and Gensing; Devonshire; and Braybrooke and Castle are in the most deprived 10% of local authorities in England.

These figures are further reflected in councillors' perceptions of a high and increasing volume and complexity of casework in the County's urban areas which is particularly noticeable in Hastings. Hastings county councillors in particular report relatively high caseload levels that are of significant complexity. Councillors report having to attend meetings of residents' forums and ward forums which generate significant workloads. They consider that any reduction in the number of county councillors in Hastings would impair their ability to manage their responsibilities effectively.

Areas of low registration levels in East Sussex therefore do not indicate low levels of demand for councillors' time; indeed the opposite appears to be the case. Our statistics show that if registration levels in these wards were to increase to the county average then there is no case for reducing the number of county councillors in Hastings.

Relationships with parish and town councils

In the country's rural areas, maintaining relationships with parish and town councils creates significant and increasing demands on county councillors' time. East Sussex has 82 parish and 10 town councils situated in Lewes, Rother and Wealden. There are no parish councils currently in the coastal towns which are represented by 21 county councillors in Hastings, Eastbourne and Bexhill.

In the rural areas, a county councillor reports to several parish councils each of which can meet monthly; many parishes also hold an annual parish assembly that can be attended by large numbers of people with questions posed to the county councillor. Many parishes now have additional 'liaison' meetings with county council where the local county councillor is expected to attend; traffic issues, for example, loom large at these meetings and councillors report that casework is growing. Parish meetings can use up to six evenings in some months.

Councillors with a town council within their area may also have one or two parish councils. In addition and on the coast what were once relatively small parish councils cover increasingly populous areas.

Elections

Hastings Borough Council elects by halves with the presumption of two-member wards. (The other four districts and borough have whole-council elections every four years). Each county electoral division in Hastings is coterminous with, and includes, two borough wards (four borough councillors). Any reduction in the number of county councillors might therefore logically require a proportionate reduction in the number of borough councillors in order to maintain a clear and logical structure. Hastings Borough Council is arguing to remain at its current council size.

Technology and social media

Email has overtaken postal correspondence as the most popular means used by residents to contact their local councillor. Councillors now say that they receive *more* emails than they did letters previously. The reasons for such an increase are complex, however one factor is likely to be the relative ease of sending an email compared to a letter. As a consequence, county councillors consider that they have become involved in increasingly varied and complex casework. Whilst technology has improved case handling efficiency, the *volume* of cases has increased so there is no evidence of any reduction in the *time* commitment required by county councillors overall.

The explosion in the use of email and social media has led to councillors being 'copied in' to a far wider range of matters than they were previously. Councillors report not having enough time to give their full attention to some issues that come before them.

Coterminosity and single member electoral divisions

Effective and convenient local government is best achieved where district ward and county division boundaries are coterminous; and parish and town councils are not split between county divisions or district wards. East Sussex district and county councillors agree that split electoral areas and split parishes increase the challenges involved in creating and maintaining effective local relationships in an already complex world.

Currently East Sussex County Council comprises 44 divisions and 49 councillors. Five two-member divisions (Bexhill King Offa; Crowborough; Hailsham & Herstmonceux; Peacehaven &

Telscombe Towns; and Polegate, Willingdon & East Dean) were created following the last boundary review in 2005.

County councillors have highlighted strong concerns and challenges in managing in the two-member divisions. Particular problems have occurred in case load management in two-member divisions with casework being unfairly distributed and confusion with liaison with parish/town councils. We consider that the boundary review should seek to eliminate two-member divisions whilst retaining the same total number of county councillors.

4 Recommendations

- 1. The current number of members on the County Council should remain unchanged at 49 whilst also maintaining the current number of county councillors in each of the five districts and boroughs.**
- 2. If there is an absolute need to change the size of the Council (for example to address electoral inequalities that cannot be resolved by any other means) then the number of councillors in Hastings and/or Rother should not be reduced; instead, a marginal increase in council size to 50 would be acceptable.**
- 3. There should be a consistent picture of single-member county electoral divisions across the county (with no multi-member divisions).**
- 4. There should be coterminosity between county electoral division and district/borough ward boundaries; under no circumstances should any county electoral division straddle a district or borough boundary.**