

Submission on Council Size

by the

CONSERVATIVE GROUP

of



to the

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

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1. **Introduction and Summary**

Three Rivers District Council had requested this review in order to reduce the number of Councillors to achieve savings in the present economic climate without damaging services. We on the Conservative Group believe that a reduced number of councillors should also reflect the reduced responsibilities of the Council (set out elsewhere in this paper).

This submission proposes reducing the size of the Council from 48 members to 30. We have always supported the original view of the Constitution Working Party that the Council size should be between 30 and 35 members. Given the LGBCE rule that a Council going to election in thirds should have three-member wards, and that the Council has already voted to continue to elect by thirds, we have concluded that 30 is the optimum number to satisfy all of the LGBCE's criteria.

The above proposal will require ward boundary changes but, at this consultation stage of the Electoral Review, this submission is only proposing the reduction in council size. However, new Wards will be required to reflect this electoral cycle.

This reduced council size would be complemented by a reduction in the number of council meetings, bodies and committees, as set out in the report received by the Constitution Working Party in December 2011 and the elements of which are reproduced below.

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

Background to the Conservative Group Submission.

This proposal is based on the report and recommendations of the Council Officers submitted to the Constitutional Working Party meeting of the 12th March 2012. The report concluded that the number of councillors should be reduced to 33. The recommendation was within the range previously agreed by the working party of 30 to 35. The Liberal Democratic administration, however, rejected the report's findings and raised the number of councillors to 39. The Conservative Group disagreed with this outcome and decided to submit its own report.

2. Geography and Demography 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 large 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 one of its wards is the least deprived in England and other super output areas lie in the most deprived 10% in the country. There are concomitant demands on councillors.

Being on the outer fringes of London, communications in the area are very 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. There are good communications within the District.

The main urban areas in three Rivers are:-

Abbots Langley
Chorleywood
Croxley Green
Rickmansworth
South Oxhey

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

Many who live in Three Rivers consider it unique. As a place to live it certainly has unique qualities: low crime, good services, idyllic countryside and picturesque towns and villages. It is, however, geographically and demographically very similar to many other districts in Hertfordshire, with clusters of urban development separated by tracts of open farm land and Green Belt. Comparisons drawn later in this report with other areas of the County in terms of representation and average ratios of voters to councillors are therefore perfectly valid.

The Localism Act & Its Impact on Local Democracy.

The Coalition Government's flagship policy relating to local democracy is the Localism Act. It is designed to provide local communities with more influence over their immediate environment and services. The Act seeks to provide local Parish Councils and, in unparished areas, local representative groups the opportunity to engage in defining and developing their local area.

The success of this policy will be in its implementation. Local community groups will need leadership and assistance in developing networks of activists sufficiently interested in their role as community representatives. That leadership role is perfectly designed for the District or Borough councillor.

All democratic institutions require empowerment to be successful. They derive that power from their relevance to the communities they represent. Duplication of that representation confuses people and detracts from the establishment of identity. If

Localism is to become relevant to local people then sufficient space needs to be created in the layers of local government for local representative groups or Parish Councils to exercise their influence and become relevant to the community they seek to represent.

District Councillors will need to ensure that, while providing leadership, they do not stifle the establishment of those local representative groups. If the local community considers their local District or County Councillor as their only democratic representative then those local community groups will be crowded out and fail to become established. A key factor in determining the appropriate environment to nurture that democratic representation is the ratio of councillors to voters. Too many, and the public will always revert to them; too few, and they will be unable to offer the community leadership required to establish those important local groupings.

We have offered in this report our opinion on the relative ratios which we consider would facilitate the objectives of the Coalition Government's Localism agenda.

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.

Whilst we concentrate on helping the most deprived areas and most vulnerable residents, there is no sphere of activity that makes it imperative that we have more councillors than other districts or makes us unusual so that special considerations apply in our approach to electoral representation, other than that we are a lean, highly efficient and demonstrably effective council in our spheres of activity.

4. Statutory Criteria

(i) Electoral Equality

National

The national average number of electors per District Council councillor is 1,694¹ and in Three Rivers this is currently 1,417 per councillor (current electorate 67,992 divided by 48). This ratio is well below the national average and shows an even greater discrepancy when measured against the ratio of other Hertfordshire Authorities which is 1,926 electors per councillor, based on 2009 electorates. 67,992 divided by 1,926 would in Three Rivers equate to 35 Councillors. The range of elector per councillor in Hertfordshire (other than Three Rivers) is from 1,533 to 2,098. The ratio for District and Unitary Authorities combined is 2,400. A council size of 39 would provide an average councillor/elector ratio of 1:1,743, which would be approximately 182 below the Hertfordshire average. A council size of 30 would provide an average councillor/elector ratio of 1:2,266, which would be approximately 340 above the Hertfordshire average, but would better meet the needs of a reduced organisation, as set out below.

Individual Wards

It is important also to note further points. We believe the three tiers of Local Authority are effective for their differing roles and note that each County Council division in Three Rivers contains between 13,915 to 8,879 electors i.e. that number per County Councillor, yielding an average of 11,332. At Parish level, the number of electors per parish councillor ranges from 174.5 in Sarratt to 1,423 in Watford Rural, yielding an average of 756 in the parished areas. We believe the responsibilities of a district councillor should be reflected in a number of electors per councillor that lies between 11,332 and 756. A halfway point would be 6,044 and would produce a council of only 11-12 members!

Whilst that figure is absurd in a UK context, we believe the ratio of electors to councillors should nevertheless remain at the higher end rather than the lower end of the Hertfordshire average as a consequence of the reduction in the Council's responsibilities regarding housing and sports venues in particular and in the light of the Localism legislation referred to previously. Our view is that the following would provide appropriate ratios of representation by the various layers of local government to ensure sufficient space is provided for each to operate efficiently.

County Councillor	10,000 -12,000	electors / councillor
District Councillor	2,100 – 2,500	electors / councillor
Parish Councillor or Community Rep	250 – 500	electors / representative

¹ Cathie Marsh Centre for Census and Survey Research

(ii) Community Identity

Consideration of Councillors' representative role &
Effective representation of constituents

The District is geographically based on the Parish Councils and the unparished (greater Rickmansworth) areas (map attached). However, within those areas, there are recognised other communities, viz.

Abbots Langley

Bedmond and Primrose Hill; Garston; Leavesden

Chorleywood

Loudwater

Rickmansworth

Moor Park; Eastbury; Maple Cross / West Hyde; Heronsgate

Watford Rural

South Oxhey; Oxhey Hall; Carpenders Park

In some cases there are physical barriers to the separation: Carpenders Park is separated from South Oxhey by the east coast main railway Line; Bedmond and Primrose Hill are separated from Abbots Langley, and Loudwater from Chorleywood, by the M25; Garston is separated from Abbots Langley by the A41.

However the size of the District and good road network means that the above are not barriers to effective representation, and the increasing use of electronic communication renders communities 'closer' than their geography suggests. An excellent example of this is the Ward of Moor Park and Eastbury. This ward is cut in half by the Metropolitan Line with Moor Park on one side and Eastbury on the other. It has not however prevented the councillors of that ward fulfilling their responsibilities to their constituents. In fact, it is also an excellent example of the benefits of three-member wards where each councillor provides cover for the others and shares the work load accordingly.

The Conservative Group finds it curious that the argument for community identity, however it is defined, never extends to County Council or Parliamentary boundaries, which are essentially set up for administrative convenience. We believe that, in an increasingly 'wired' and mobile world, in which each individual belongs to many different communities of age, taste, culture, ethnicity, hobbies or politics, the notion of community identity needs to be redefined. The strongest communities exist at a micro-geographical level at a sub-ward, or street level, where people do care about their immediate neighbours and locality. We do not believe that there should be too great an emphasis on the independent representation of individual community groups where those groups are smaller than an individual councillor ward. A much more productive approach is to consider grouping individual communities into a larger geographic ward giving more robust and effective representation than single- or two-member wards could possibly provide.

Even if a district councillor lives outside the micro-community he or she represents, that councillor can serve the whole ward and its micro-communities effectively, with knowledge and with compassion. The councillor's role, in ward work, is to help residents navigate their way through the Councils administration. To signpost the correct agency to the resident, to help him or her through bureaucracy and ensure that the appropriate officer takes up the resident's case and in some instances to act as the resident's champion. These more demanding cases however are thankfully few and far between as we have highly valued and effective officers.

We believe that the community leadership role of the District Councillor is important, and that time must be spent here as well as on detailed ward work. Councillors need to take care, however, to ensure their activities promote and encourage the development of local representative groups. If they seek to wholly own local issues they will undermine the intention of the Localism agenda robbing communities of their leadership role. The District Councillor should be offering his or her services as a facilitator and not occupy the space intended for Parish Councillors and or local representative groups preventing them from establishing and exercising their intended expanded representative roles.

(iii) Effective & Convenient Local Government

a. 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 and the present Committee system is set out at Appendix 1.

In relation to Scrutiny, this Council operates a system of four Policy and Scrutiny Committees which advise the Executive Committee on policy matters and carry out the scrutiny function of the Council. 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 4 to 5 times per year. There are no geographic attempts to ensure all areas are represented on some committees, nor is there a limit to the number of councillors representing the same ward sitting on some committees. Attendance at Committee meetings is good (see Appendix 3 for the breakdown), but this Group believes that, despite their laudable democratic features, these demonstrate wasteful use of time 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.

The Council has decided to return to the Committee System in 2014, once the Boundary Commission's proposals have been implemented. This proposal has all-party support as it retains the democratic nature of the present system whilst removing the wasteful duplication of the Executive Committee. As described below, the present system of Executive + 4 committees reduce to 4 committees only, thus saving hours of committee time per year.

We support the thrust of the report accepted by the Constitutional Working Party in December 2011 and the proposal for the following Committee Structure besides the 'regulatory' committees of Planning, Licensing and Audit.

Finance & 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 7 (4:2:1 in 2014).

Its Terms of Reference are

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

The number of meetings per year will be FOUR.

Service Committees with executive powers

We believe only 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 2012) and 9 (5:3:1 2014).

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

* 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:-

- o Take all decisions on expenditure and allocation of resources within their allocated budget /resources as decided by the Finance & Strategy Committee
- o Take decisions not delegated to officers in respect of the provision of Services by the Council.
- o Keep under review the operational effectiveness of Services that lie within the Terms of Reference.
- o Review the performance via Heads of Service of the Services provided.
- o Approve the Service Plans developed out of the Strategic Plan and resourced from the Finance & Strategy Committee.
- o Scrutinise the effectiveness of Policies.

The number of meetings per year will be FOUR.

We believe the reduced number of meetings, combined with the executive functions that remove the present wasteful practice of taking every decision through two committees, will significantly reduce the workload on councillors, as described below.

b. Councillors' committee workload under the proposed governance system

Whatever the results of the survey into Councillor time spent on Council business, one fact is clear – all arguments about time spent on non-statutory committee work are called into question by the fact that a number of local authorities, have their executive decisions largely taken by an elected mayor. Thus subsequent arguments on time spent in these cases involve exclusively community leadership and representation.

We have opted for a more democratic system in Three Rivers and our proposed new democratic structure referred to above in (iii) will dramatically reduce the wasteful duplication of decision-making within the Council. At a stroke, the Executive Committee consisting of ten councillors will no longer be required. Executive members are barred from being members of other Policy Committees, and the Service Committees including the Finance & Strategy Committee proposed under the new system of governance will be the same in number as the Policy Committees under the existing system. The saving in Councillor time will represent the equivalent of ten Councillors.

If you then take into account the proposed reduction in the frequency of meetings typically from five to four times per year, there is clearly scope for further reductions without any effect on councillor committee workload. A further reduction of 20% on the reduced number of 38 councillors (48 less Executive Committee of 10) would produce 30.4 councillors rounded down to 30 - the Conservative Group's proposed level. This means that in Councillor time saved, a reduction of 18 in total, the new governance system, to be adopted in 2014, will mean that 30 councillors will be able to achieve the same outputs as 48 do now under the current system. This will also be achieved without any increase in additional councillor work load.

Concerns regarding the overall workload of councillors taking into account the statutory committees can be addressed by further comparisons with the existing system. The statutory committees, Planning, Licensing/Regulatory and Audit, have 12, 11, and 7 members respectively. These numbers can easily be replicated under the new structure without the necessity for duplication.

Under the current system, it is common practice for councillors to serve on at least two committees and some on three. Under the new system each councillor would commonly serve on two committees: a statutory committee and one of the three Service Committees.

The chairmen of the Service Committees and the Leader of the Council would also serve on the Finance & Strategy Committee with the principal members of the other political groups so as to provide political balance (4x2x1). There would, as a consequence, be a limited number of members who would serve on three committees, which does not differ from the current position. It must be acknowledged, however, that most of those members (Leader of the Council, Committee Chairmen, Leaders of the Political Groups) would be doing so as a consequence of their additional responsibilities and compensated accordingly through their enhanced allowances, which acknowledge the time spent on Council work, and differentiates them from the rest of the councillor body.

Taking into account our proposed reduction in the number of councillors to 30, it can be demonstrated that, in terms of both the number of committees each member would attend and their respective work load commitments, there would be no increase from the existing system. We calculate that each 'ordinary' cllr would spend some 8 hours per committee meeting. This would include preparation, briefing and attending the meeting.

In the case of Committee work

The average number of committee meetings each councillor would attend is:

3 Service Committee membership	
3 committees 9 members 4 meetings per year	108 mm
1 Finance and Strategy Committee	
1 committee 7 members 4 meetings per year	28 mm
Statutory Committee membership	
Planning 12 members 12 meetings	144 mm
Licensing and Regulatory 11 members 4 meetings	44 mm
Audit 7 members 4 meetings	28 mm
Full Council meetings 30 members 5 meetings	150 mm
Total	502 mm
Total Hours @ 8 hours per meeting	4016 hours
Divided by 30 councillors	133.8 hours per Cllr
Cllr Hours per year div 48 working weeks	2.8 hours per week

mm = member meetings

As referred to previously this is no greater than the existing system.

Having analysed the work load commitments of councillors in the light of the revised committee and governance proposals from the top down and compared it to the existing system we have also modelled the new proposals from the bottom up.

It has already been demonstrated that 30 councillors are sufficient to provide the same membership levels on statutory committees as exist now. The Three Service Committees would have a membership of 9, politically balanced (5x3x1). This is the same membership level as the existing Policy and Scrutiny Committees under the current system. A total of 27 councillors would fill the required places (3 x 9 = 27). The Finance & Strategy Committee would be populated by members of the other three committees except perhaps for Group Leaders. They may wish to exclude themselves from membership of the three Service Committees preferring to appoint senior members of their respective Groups to the role of Chair or Group spokesperson. In that event, it would require an additional 3 councillors, making a total of 30.

A Political Group would need the election of at least 16 councillors to win an outright majority. This figure would provide the administration with adequate councillors to populate the politically balanced Service Committees requiring 15 councillors in total. It would also provide the Leader of the Council the opportunity to restrict their committee membership to the Finance and Strategy committee for reasons referred to previously.

It is not often that you can square a circle but in this instance 30 provides the most economic and efficient use of councillor time on committee work.

We also consider that it is vitally important to ensure that each councillor is fully engaged with Council business. It is often overlooked that councillors seek election to make a difference in their community. The sad fact is that the greater the number of councillors, the less involved they are in Council business. Membership of a Service Committee and a Statutory Committee for each councillor would ensure their full participation in the Council's workload; 39 councillors as proposed by the Council's current administration would leave at least nine without the benefit of that involvement and commitment. The most common complaint by members is that their presence at Council makes little or no difference as decisions are made without the necessity of their involvement. Valuing each and every member's contribution is essential in

ensuring their commitment, hence the Council's declared objective to return to committee decision-making.

c. 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.

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.

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. However, after an initial spike in work, the decisions to be made have substantially reduced.

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.

The Three Rivers Conservative Group contends that, in relation to convenient local government:

- New wards with three members each will enhance the elected representatives available to residents when compared to the existing single or two-Member wards, for a 3-member ward has more representation to cover for ward work than a 1-member ward, where any dearth of energy, ability, or good health cannot be covered by another councillor.
- A smaller number of Members will lead to a smaller maximum majority, making each councillor more valuable to each party and, by implication, necessitating a greater commitment to the electorate.
- Convenient Local Government is provided in part by the Parish Councils. This could be supplemented in the unparished area by Neighbourhood Forums under the Localism Act or by considering any application to parish the unparished area.

What are the demands of time on elected members?

&

Could the council operate more effectively with a different number?

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. (The Conservative Group has relied on the Council Officers providing this independent statistical information without bias or seeking to question its validity.) 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 week². (See note below ##) If the number of Members was reduced by a third, the additional time required to be spent on Council business would still be in line with the national average (See calculations provided below.) However, it is recognised there is a wide range in the time devoted by individual Councillors to council duties. Care must be taken, however, to ensure that those councillors who do take on additional representative roles such as Parish and County Councillor position, as well as executive functions within the District Council, do not allow these to become confused with the workload associated with their individual ward role.

Furthermore, it is often accepted that a County Council division should encompass a larger group of electors than a district ward. Yet a county councillor is expected to deal not only with the strategy of the 'big services' such as Adult Care and Education, but respond to residents' concerns over the most local of faults, a pothole. The district councillor deals rarely with equivalent 'big' matters, but continuously with local matters, so should not argue that the local nature of all the matters means that there should be a far greater number of them than county councillors.

² The Council has over the past few years invested significantly in a top class vertically integrated Customer Service Centre. This department has highly skilled operatives manning the Council's enquiry helpline. It has been this Council's policy to integrate this service with our backroom delivery teams and it is now possible to deal with most queries raised by residents and relating to the services provided by the Council, at their first telephone call. This has significantly reduced the questions asked of Councillors. We believe that this innovative development in customer care has been a contributing factor in reducing Councillor workload.

d. Results of the Conservative Group Survey on Representative Roles and Casework

Interviews were conducted with a representative sample of the Conservative Group to determine the difficulty of separating the different representative roles each performed. This included those councillors who represented both District and County and those who were both Parish and District Councillors.

General Observations.

Significant differences were reported by those councillors who were also County Councillors and or Parish Councillors in separating the various responsibilities at the margins of their roles. It is important to differentiate between the two functions if a true apportionment of workload is to be achieved. It was appreciated by all Councillors who take on more than one representative role that they should not confuse the additional time they put in as a reflection on their time commitment to any one. If they wish to take on an additional role they must be prepared to set aside the additional time to do so.

The same could be said for those Councillors who take on executive roles: in doing so, they are accepting additional time commitments but also benefitting from additional allowances to compensate.

Appendix 4 attached to this report shows the additional roles of each of the 48 Councillors at Three Rivers.

On casework, the results of an independent survey of time commitment provided by District Councillors, referred to above, was 15 hours for Three Rivers Councillors. The anticipated change in this as a consequence of the proposed reduction in the numbers of councillors can be assessed as follows.

The amount of ward work undertaken on average as a consequence of the reduction in councillors from 48 to 30 is therefore:

$48 \times 15 / 30 = 24$ hrs/week/councillor, equivalent to the national average.

Appended to this submission is a document labelled Appendix 5. It is a letter dated 19th April 2012 from the Conservative Group Leader, Councillor Chris Hayward, to the Chief Executive of Three Rivers District Council. The letter records the Conservative Group's objections to the Council's Political Administration undertaking a survey of Councillors' time commitment. The letter is self-explanatory and accuses the current administration of seeking to manipulate the statistical record to support their own proposals.

e. 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.

f. Geographical Considerations

We have noted that, in the section of the Council's submission referenced 7(ii) *Effective and Convenient Local Government*, an argument has been put forward for a

certain number of councillors based on the co-terminosity of Parish and Ward boundaries. At meetings attended by the Conservative Group, the LGBCE's representatives were at pains to emphasise that, at this stage of the process, (determination of Council Size), the number and shape of wards and their relationship to Parish and County Districts was not a criterion for determining the number of councillors. We also contacted the LGBCE to confirm this and were reassured that this was the case. As a consequence we have not addressed this issue in our submission on Council Size and have made the assumption that any arguments put forward to support a particular number of councillors based on this premise will not be taken into account.

5. Conclusions

This paper has considered the LGBCE's three statutory criteria for determining Council size - Electoral Equality, Community Identity and Effective & Convenient Local Government.

As indicated when discussing Electoral Equality, the evidence above demonstrates that, when compared with other comparable authorities, Three Rivers District Council has a greater elected representation per 1,000 voters, and a reduction to 30 will bring the Council closer in line with other Hertfordshire authorities in terms of the ratio of electors to Councillors and demonstrating Three Rivers' enviable reputation for efficiency and lean political and managerial management.

Community Identity Given our belief that the strongest communities exist at a micro-geographical level such as a sub-ward, or street level, where people do care about their immediate neighbours and locality, it follows that we do not believe that there should be too great an emphasis on the independent representation of individual community groups where those groups are smaller than an individual councillor ward. From this arises our conviction that grouping individual communities into a larger geographic ward gives more robust and effective representation than single- or two-member wards could possibly provide.

The direct service-managing responsibilities of this Council have significantly reduced in recent years. As this reduction equated to one third of the Council's budget, a guide to effective and convenient local government would be to reduce the present numbers by one third (16) which would mean the number to be elected would be 32. Even more effective and convenient local government can be accommodated under the proposed return to the Committee system. It can be supplemented, as now, by Parish Councils, and Neighbourhood Forums may be introduced (although Local Area Forums already exist). We therefore contend that 32 are still too many and our proposals can produce even greater value for money.

Just as the workforce has been reduced given the reduction in managerial functions, similar reductions are now being considered in the number of councillors required to undertake policy development and scrutiny of the Council while providing adequate representation of the residents of Three Rivers. We believe the evidence offered above demonstrates that 30 councillors are adequate to meet the demands of decision-making, policy development, community leadership and representation.

6. Recommendation

That the Boundary Commission be recommended, using its published methodology and criteria, to reduce the number of Three Rivers District Councillors to 30.

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

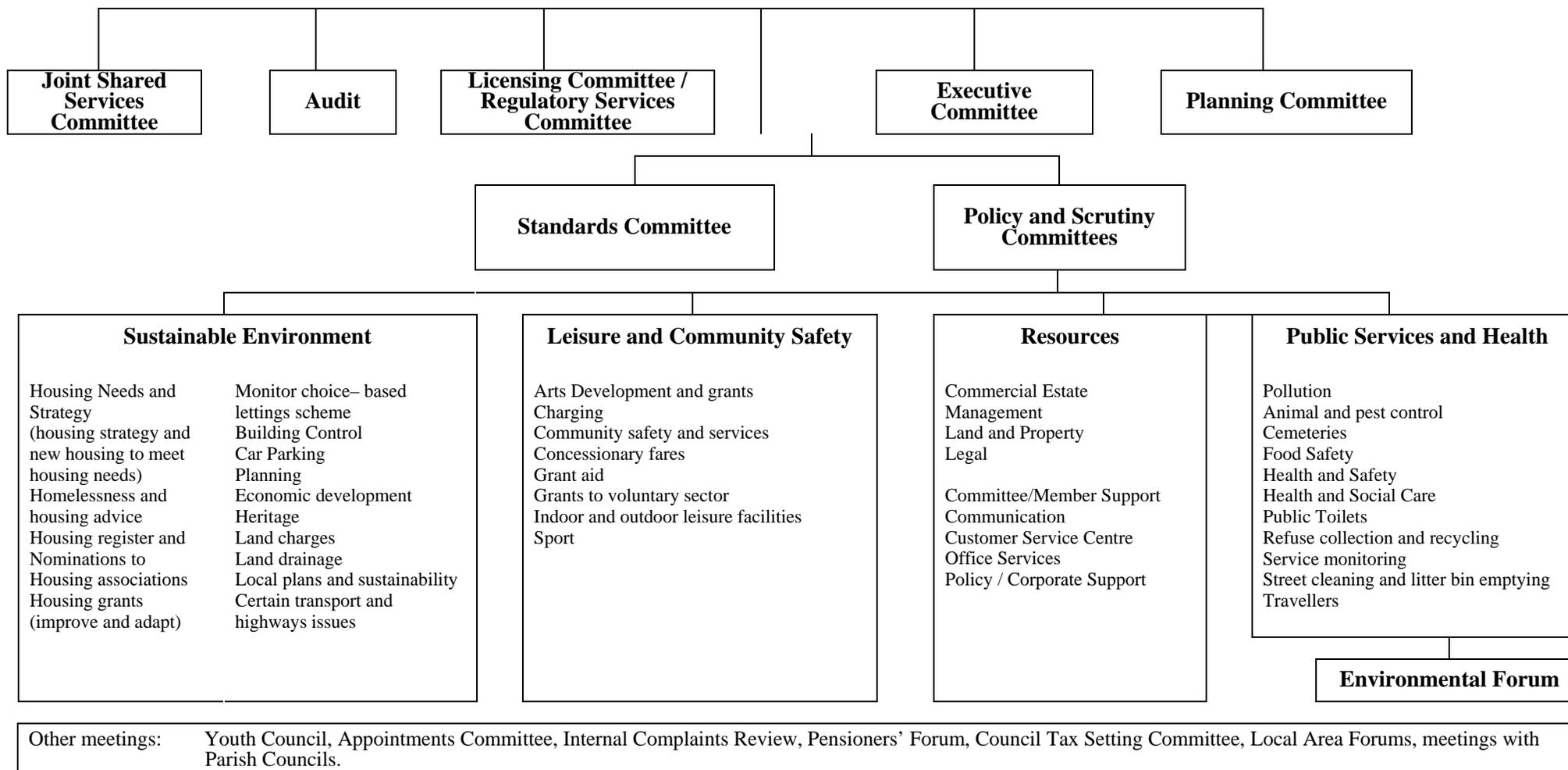
Data rating:

1	Poor	
2	Sufficient	
3	High	✓

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

PRESENT STRUCTURE OF THREE RIVERS DISTRICT COUNCIL

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) & 7 (4:2:1 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 only 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 9 (5:3:1) in 2014.

<p>Leisure Community and Public Services</p> <p>Areas of Responsibility As existing Policy and Scrutiny Committees covering the operational area of DCE</p>	<p>Sustainable Environment</p> <p>Areas of Responsibility As existing Policy and Scrutiny Committees covering the operational area of DCE</p>	<p>Corporate Resources</p> <p>As existing Resources Policy and Scrutiny Committees covering the operational area of the present Directorate of Community Resources and Governance.*</p>
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* 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 probably be FOUR.

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

The number of committee places that will need to be filled from 2014 are:

Finance & Strategy	7
3 x Service Committees	each 9 = 27
Planning (Dev Cont)	12
Licensing/Regulatory	11
Audit	7
Total Committee places	64

PROPOSED STRUCTURE OF THREE RIVERS DISTRICT COUNCIL (May 2014)

