

Tunbridge Wells Borough Council

Council Size Submission: Final

By Tunbridge Wells Borough Council

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How to Make a Submission

It is recommended that submissions on future governance arrangements and council size follow the guidance provided and use the format below as a template. Submissions should be treated as an opportunity to focus on the future needs of the council and not simply describe the current arrangements. **Submissions should also demonstrate that alternative council sizes have been considered in drawing up the proposal and why you have discounted them.**

The template allows respondents to enter comments directly under each heading. It is not recommended that responses be unduly long; as a guide, it is anticipated that a 15 to 20-page document using this template should suffice. Individual section length may vary depending on the issues to be explained. Where internal documents are referred to URLs should be provided, rather than the document itself. It is also recommended that a table is included that highlights the key paragraphs for the Commission's attention.

'Good' submissions, i.e. those that are considered to be most robust and persuasive, combine the following *key success components* (as set out in the guidance that accompanies this template):

- Clarity on objectives
- A straightforward and evidence-led style
- An understanding of local place and communities
- An understanding of councillors' roles and responsibilities

About You

The respondent should use this space to provide the Commission with a little detail about who is making the submission, whether it is the full Council, Officers on behalf of the Council, a political party or group, a resident group, or an individual.

This submission has been prepared by officers on behalf of the Full Council on 6 October 2021.

Reason for Review (Request Reviews Only)

Please explain the authority's reasons for requesting this electoral review; it is useful for the Commission to have context. *NB/ If the Commission has identified the authority for review under one of its published criteria, then you are not required to answer this question.*

This review has been identified by the Commission.

The Context for your proposal

Your submission gives you the opportunity to examine how you wish to organise and run the council for the next 15 - 20 years. **The consideration of future governance arrangements and council size should be set in the wider local and national policy**

context. The Commission expects you to challenge your current arrangements and determine the most appropriate arrangements going forward. In providing context for your submission below, please demonstrate that you have considered the following issues.

- When did your Council last change/reorganise its internal governance arrangements and what impact on effectiveness did that activity have?
- To what extent has transference of strategic and/or service functions impacted on the effectiveness of service delivery and the ability of the Council to focus on its remaining functions?
- Have any governance or capacity issues been raised by any Inspectorate or similar?
- What influence will local and national policy trends likely have on the Council as an institution?
- What impact on the Council's effectiveness will your council size proposal have?

Governance Changes

Tunbridge Wells Borough Council last made a significant change to its governance arrangements in 2012 when it introduced the Cabinet Advisory Boards, making its governance system a 'hybrid' system. Since then the Cabinet Advisory Board system has allowed backbench members a significant opportunity to pre-scrutinise the work of the Cabinet, by reviewing all reports due for Cabinet committee two to three weeks in advance of the Cabinet meeting. This change meant that three Overview and Scrutiny Select Committees were disbanded (with three Cabinet Advisory Boards created), and the number of concurrent Overview and Scrutiny 'task and finish' groups were limited to two.

Alongside this, the Standards Committee and the Audit Committee functions were combined into one Committee (the Audit and Governance Committee), and a number of internal working groups which were not adding value to Council decision making were removed from the structure. This reduced the number of meetings being attended by Members and officers and allowed the Council to focus more fully on its work programme within the Five-Year Plan.

Following this, in 2013 the Council reduced its Western and Eastern Area Planning Committees down to one Planning Committee. This again reduced the number of meetings and site visits members and officers need to attend.

In 2017 there was a change to Licensing policy which has resulted in a reduction in number of sub committees. The change allowed minor infringements to be dealt with directly by the Licensing Officers through the issuing of penalty points, rather than reporting to a Sub Committee.

Within the governance structure at Tunbridge Wells Borough Council are two community liaison meetings, the Parish Chair's Forum and the Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Forum. Both of these meetings are consultative with Cabinet members attending both (in particular the Leader), and members within the un-parished area of Royal Tunbridge Wells attending the Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Forum. The Town Forum was set up in 2005 and the Parish Chair's Forum around 2011. There have been minor changes to the frequency of meetings for the Town Forum, with the number of scheduled meetings reducing from nine to six over time.

The Council also appoints members at each Full Council meeting to a number of Outside Bodies to represent the Council in different organisations that deliver a benefit to the people of the Borough. Over time, the number of appointments being made to these organisations has reduced.

The effects of these changes can be seen by the following results:

Decision Making Meetings

Number of committee meetings held in 2010/11 (first year recorded on the Modern.Gov system; actual meetings held rather than meetings scheduled) compared to 2019/20 (the last comparable year before the pandemic).

2010/11: 141

2019/20: 77

Working Groups of the Council

The number of appointments to working groups, Lead Members and Member Champions in 2010/11 compared to 2021/22 (this metric is not affected by the pandemic).

2010/11: 63

2021/22: 53

Outside Bodies

The number of appointments to Outside Bodies.

2010/11: 44

2021/22: 37

Community Meetings and Representation

The number of Parish Chair's Forum and Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Forum meetings held in 2012/13 (for Parish Chair's Forum as it was not established in 2010) and 2010/11 (for Town Forum) compared to 2021/22.

Parish Chairs Forum

2012/13: 4

2021/22: 4

RTW Town Forum

2010/11: 9

2021/22: 6

Changes as a result of the Pandemic

In February 2020 the Council purchased webcasting equipment which meant it was able to webcast all of its meetings online (when physically in the Chamber) and stream Zoom meetings through this system to the website. The system records the video of the meetings and publishes it online for later viewing. This has meant that members do not have to attend a meeting if they are interested in an item but can view it any time at home. Additionally, member briefings (where all members are invited to an informal briefing and Q&A session with a variety of different speakers) are now held virtually during the day, recorded, and stored on a microsite, so that members who can't attend are able to catch up later at home.

As a result of the Coronavirus pandemic, the Council moved all of its decision-making meetings and internal meetings online in May 2020, using the video conferencing and webcasting technology. A Covid-19 Panel was set up (which was disbanded in July 2021), and Cabinet Advisory Boards were suspended for the 2020-21 Municipal Year to allow officers scope to respond to the demands of the pandemic. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee temporarily took on the functions of the Cabinet Advisory Boards, increasing the number of its meetings to monthly, providing pre scrutiny of Cabinet reports, and receiving updates from the new Covid-19 Panel. When the Coronavirus legislation relating to local government decision making meetings lapsed in May 2021, physical committee meetings resumed, however a number of internal, non-decision making and working group meetings continue to be held virtually. This has significantly benefitted both members and officers, substantially reducing the requirement to travel across the borough (or from another work location) to attend a meeting at the Town Hall. Both the Parish Chair's Forum and the RTW Town Forum have remained as online meetings.

Services

Since the last Boundary Review in 2001, there have been a number of changes that have materially affected the breadth and scope of services provided. Given the financial pressures facing the Council (particularly since the start of 'austerity' in 2010), the Council has significantly reduced the number of services it provides and its operational footprint. Specific examples include the Council closing its offices and front counters in Cranbrook and Calverley Terrace, ceasing to provide a number of services (e.g. Pest Control) and entering into a number of partnership arrangements details of which are set out below. From April 2022 there will be a further rationalisation of premises with the Council's Gateway service, TIC service and Museum/Art services all co-locating with KCC's Library, Adult Education and Registration services under one roof in the new 'Amelia Scott' building.

As mentioned above, in terms of how it works, the Council has also invested heavily in improving and digitalising its approach to customer care which has arguably reduced the need for residents to contact their ward councillor(s). The approach has included the creation of a new 'Gateway' building and team (which is a dedicated customer-focused team dealing with the vast majority of customer inquiries and complaints), technology to underpin customer interactions and more proactive methods of communication including social media and an e-bulletin with content tailored to individual postcodes. The Council has also invested in digital technology which has improved its ability to respond to customer inquiries and complaints and to allow a greater degree of 'self-service' for customers. Finally, the Council has significantly improved its complaints handling processes with one of the best records on complaints handling (as judged by LGO annual reports) in the country.

As mentioned above, in terms of how it works, The Council has entered into a significant number of partnerships with other authorities, most notably the Mid Kent Improvement Partnership (MKIP), which was established in 2009 with Maidstone Borough Council, Swale Borough Council and Ashford Borough Council. MKIP now has Audit, Environmental Health, Revenues and Benefits, Legal and IT services under its purview. The majority of officers working within these services are formally contracted to Maidstone Borough Council. An annual report on these services is circulated to members at Tunbridge Wells, and services are examined as and when issues arise, but aside from Revenues and Benefits and Audit service performance is not regularly monitored by members. This has reduced the need for

backbench members to be involved in day-to-day decision making on these services and streamlined reporting requirements.

In 2010 the Council entered into a Licensing Partnership with Sevenoaks District Council, Maidstone Borough Council and the London Borough of Bromley, and in 2019 the Council entered into a Waste and Recycling Partnership with Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council.

The Council also characterises itself as an 'Enabling Council' (see below) and has devolved a number of services to parish and town councils including car parking and toilets. Three parish/town councils now have a larger precept than the Borough Council.

The result of all these changes set out above (necessarily driven by reductions to funding) is that the Council now delivers a narrower range of services from a smaller number of premises with 25 per cent less staff than at the time of the last review in 2011.

Reviews

There have been no reviews highlighting governance or capacity issues.

The LGA conducted a Corporate Peer Challenge in 2016, and a follow-up in 2019, which concluded that the authority had "*strong political and managerial leadership*", and that "*the council had sound governance*" and "*very good relationships within the organisation*".

National & Local Policy

Nationally, the Council has been affected by a reduction in the resources available to it. Local Government has experienced the largest reduction in funding of any part of the public sector (a 60 per cent reduction) whilst having to cope with increases in demand in areas like adult social care. The Council has therefore had to change what it delivers and how it delivers those services (as set up below). In response to these financial pressures, the Council has sought to make wide-spread use of partnerships (described above) and has characterised itself as an 'enabling Council' in which it supports others to provide services or events which it is no longer able to provide.

There have been initially conversations locally around establishing a Tunbridge Wells Town Council or series of Councils for the un-parished area of the town although to date no further action has come of this.

To help inform its annual Budget and its Medium-Term Financial Strategy, the Council undertakes regular budget surveys. These surveys have consistently shown a desire on the part of the public to reduce the cost of its democratic overhead with 'Committee and Member Services' repeatedly topping the list of service areas where the public want to see cost savings delivered. The most recent survey allowed members of the public to model the Council's budget and, on average, saw them reduce expenditure in this area by 65 per cent.

Council Size Proposal

Our proposal is that the Council should have **48 Members** going forwards.

This would give the Council an elector ratio of 1,771. This compares against the median elector ratio for its Nearest Neighbours CIPFA group, which is 2,211.

Local Authority Profile

Please provide a short description of the authority and its setting, in particular the local geography, demographics and community characteristics. This should set the scene for the Commission and give it a greater understanding of any current issues. The description should cover all of the following:

- Brief outline of area - are there any notable geographic constraints for example that may affect the review?
- Rural or urban - what are the characteristics of the authority?
- Demographic pressures - such as distinctive age profiles, migrant or transient populations, is there any large growth anticipated?
- Community characteristics – is there presence of “hidden” or otherwise complex deprivation?
- Are there any other constraints, challenges, issues or changes ahead?

Further to providing a description, the Commission will be looking for a submission that demonstrates an understanding of place and communities by putting forth arguments on council size based upon local evidence and insight. For example, how does local geography, demographics and community characteristics impact on councillor casework, workload and community engagement?

The Borough of Tunbridge Wells is in Kent in the South East of England, sitting on the south-western border of Kent. It shares its southern boundary with authorities in East Sussex.

Large parts of the Borough are rural and are characterised by farmland and historic village settings; this is particularly so in the eastern half of the Borough. The main town is Royal Tunbridge Wells which predominates the western side of Borough. The other main settlements are: Southborough, Paddock Wood, Cranbrook and Hawkhurst.

To the immediate north of Royal Tunbridge Wells is the town of Southborough, which is smaller, distinctive in character and community, has its own Town Council and sees itself as very much its own separate entity to Royal Tunbridge Wells. Economically, demographically, and because of significant road links (the A26 which runs through the middle of, and links up both towns), the two towns are very much intertwined.

To the west of Royal Tunbridge Wells is an area called Rusthall, which is included as part of the town area, but again has its own identity and community, and it's own parish council established in 2011. Further north and west of the town are the rural areas of Speldhurst and Bidborough. To the north east is the village of Pembury, which again is its own distinct community, with its own parish council.

The towns of Paddock Wood, Cranbrook and Hawkhurst are the main settlements east of Royal Tunbridge Wells with their own identities and communities.

There are no demographic issues that are notable as making Tunbridge Wells different to the average for England, but the area is expecting to see significant housing development to 2027.

The Council is currently producing a new Local Plan to guide development in Tunbridge Wells borough from 2020 to 2038. The current Local Development Scheme anticipates that the emerging Local Plan will be adopted in Summer 2022. Within this Local Plan (with a base date of 01 April 2020), a number of major developments are proposed across the borough and includes/is in addition to a number of sites already with extant planning permission. While these allocations are not yet adopted, the Plan envisages significant growth at two major strategic site allocations across the Capel and Paddock Wood wards, totalling approximately 6,000 dwellings from 2025/26 to 2037/38, which is in addition to major extant permissions on three previously adopted site allocations (expected to all be delivered over 2020/21 to 2028/29).

There is also approximately 2,500 dwellings planned across the Royal Tunbridge Wells wards over the Plan period. As part of the dispersed growth strategy in the emerging Local Plan, major development (both site allocations and extant planning permissions) is also planned across a number of the borough's smaller settlements, the details of which can be found from page 29 of the [Housing Supply and Trajectory Topic Paper](#) (separated by parish). Further and more up-to-date information on site allocation and extant planning permission phasing will be provided as part of the forecasting work.

Council Size

The Commission believes that councillors have three broad aspects to their role. These are categorised as: **Strategic Leadership, Accountability (Scrutiny, Regulatory and Partnerships), and Community Leadership**. Submissions should address each of these in turn and provide supporting evidence. Prompts in the boxes below should help shape responses.

Strategic Leadership

Respondents should provide the Commission with details as to how elected members will provide strategic leadership for the authority. Responses should also indicate how many members will be required for this role and why this is justified. **Responses should demonstrate that alternative council sizes have been explored.**

Topic		
Governance Model	Key lines of explanation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>What governance model will your authority operate? e.g. Committee System, Executive or other?</i> ➤ <i>The Cabinet model, for example, usually requires 6 to 10 members. How many members will you require?</i> ➤ <i>If the authority runs a Committee system, we want to understand why the number and size of the committees you propose represents the most appropriate for the authority.</i> ➤ <i>By what process does the council aim to formulate strategic and operational policies? How will members in executive, executive support and/or scrutiny positions be involved? What particular demands will this make of them?</i> ➤ <i>Whichever governance model you currently operate, a simple assertion that you want to keep the current structure does not in itself, provide an explanation of why that structure best meets the needs of the council and your communities.</i>
	Analysis	<p>The Council will retain its hybrid governance structure established in 2012, which it feels combines the best features of both the Cabinet and Overview & Scrutiny model and the Committee model. There is broad cross-party support for this model to continue.</p> <p>The model has proved to be effective in ensuring a wide range of members are involved in Cabinet's decision making, which increases the involvement and engagement of members without reducing the efficiency and capacity for Cabinet to act and lead the organisation effectively. This can be seen through the small number of call-ins received over the period, as Cabinet Advisory Boards are able to effectively voice concerns before the Cabinet decision is made.</p>

		<p>The Council has six Cabinet members as this suits the Council's arrangements. The broad portfolio areas have remained consistent over a number of years, enabling the Council to deliver a strategic vision through its Five Year Plan and Cultural Strategy, and deliver multi-million pound developments in the form of The Amelia (cultural and learning hub).</p> <p>Cabinet continues to have ad-hoc and time limited working groups looking at specific areas of policy to inform Cabinet on a cross-party basis. Currently, there are four working groups fulfilling this function: the Climate Emergency Advisory Group; the Housing Advisory Group; the Property Assets Oversight Panel; and the Planning Policy Working Group. This system allows for the wider membership to be involved in policy development, but crucially ensures they are Portfolio Holder led so that any policies produced have Cabinet buy-in.</p>
Portfolios	<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>How many portfolios will there be?</i> ➤ <i>What will the role of a portfolio holder be?</i> ➤ <i>Will this be a full-time position?</i> ➤ <i>Will decisions be delegated to portfolio holders? Or will the executive/mayor take decisions?</i>
	Analysis	<p>The Council will have six portfolio holders to ensure the projects in the Five Year Plan continue to be delivered. Portfolio Holder roles have delegated decision making powers from the Leader, but in actuality the majority of decisions are made together as a Cabinet. This enables the Cabinet Advisory Boards the opportunity to pre-scrutinise decisions (which would not be the case in delegated decisions were increased). Portfolio Holder roles are not full-time.</p>
Delegated Responsibilities	<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>What responsibilities will be delegated to officers or committees?</i> ➤ <i>How many councillors will be involved in taking major decisions?</i>
	Analysis	<p>Delegations to officers and committees are set out in the Constitution. As set out earlier, major changes were made in 2012, 2013 and 2016 which should be taken into account when deriving a suitable Council Size. No further significant changes are anticipated at this time.</p>

Accountability

Give the Commission details as to how the authority and its decision makers and partners will be held to account. The Commission is interested in both the internal and external dimensions of this role. **Responses should demonstrate that alternative council sizes have been explored.**

Topic	
Internal Scrutiny	<p>The scrutiny function of authorities has changed considerably. Some use theme or task-and-finish groups, for example, and others have a committee system. Scrutiny arrangements may also be affected by the officer support available.</p>
Key lines of explanation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>How will decision makers be held to account?</i> ➤ <i>How many committees will be required? And what will their functions be?</i> ➤ <i>How many task and finish groups will there be? And what will their functions be? What time commitment will be involved for members? And how often will meetings take place?</i> ➤ <i>How many members will be required to fulfil these positions?</i> ➤ <i>Explain why you have increased, decreased, or not changed the number of scrutiny committees in the authority.</i> ➤ <i>Explain the reasoning behind the number of members per committee in terms of adding value.</i>
Analysis	<p>As previously explained the role of the Cabinet Advisory Boards allows a significant opportunity for backbench members to pre-scrutinise Cabinet decisions. There are three that fulfil this function, which are topic based around the portfolios that Cabinet has. As there are no proposed changes to Cabinet portfolios, there should be no changes to the CABs at this time. There are at least eight non-executive members at each CAB. Less than this may start to compromise the ability of backbench members to scrutinise decisions properly.</p> <p>Members have discussed the membership of the CABs. Currently a portfolio holder performs the Chairmanship role. This may change in the future, but there will remain a requirement for the relevant portfolio holders to attend the CABs, so this is unlikely to have significant impact on the number of members who need to be involved in the operation of the CABs.</p> <p>The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is a legal requirement of a Cabinet model of governance. Currently there are twelve members on the committee. There is potential for this to reduce slightly in the future to take account of the reduced number of working groups the Committee is able to run (set at two concurrently in 2012 – although it is rare for the Committee to operate more than one working group at a time).</p>

Statutory Function		This includes planning, licencing and any other regulatory responsibilities. Consider under each of the headings the extent to which decisions will be delegated to officers. How many members will be required to fulfil the statutory requirements of the council?
Planning	Key lines of explanation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>What proportion of planning applications will be determined by members?</i> ➤ <i>Has this changed in the last few years? And are further changes anticipated?</i> ➤ <i>Will there be area planning committees? Or a single council-wide committee?</i> ➤ <i>Will executive members serve on the planning committees?</i> ➤ <i>What will be the time commitment to the planning committee for members?</i>
	Analysis	Analysis of changes to the planning and licensing delegations, and changes to the committee meetings has been provided earlier in the document. There are no further changes planned at this time.
Licensing	Key lines of explanation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>How many licencing panels will the council have in the average year?</i> ➤ <i>And what will be the time commitment for members?</i> ➤ <i>Will there be standing licencing panels, or will they be ad-hoc?</i> ➤ <i>Will there be core members and regular attendees, or will different members serve on them?</i>
	Analysis	As above.
Other Regulatory Bodies	Key lines of explanation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>What will they be, and how many members will they require?</i> ➤ <i>Explain the number and membership of your Regulatory Committees with respect to greater delegation to officers.</i>
	Analysis	<p>Analysis of changes to Audit and Standards within the Council has been provided earlier in the document. These functions were combined into the Audit and Governance Committee in 2012 to take account of significant changes to the Standards regime. There are eight members of the Council on this committee. Less than this would risk the ability of the committee to perform its role properly.</p> <p>General Purposes Committee has remained fairly static in terms of membership overtime, but it now meets much less frequently. This is the result of fewer staffing issues and restructures being taken through the committee due to changes made around 2011 to take account of the role of Unison within the council and the Head of Paid Service. General Purposes now meets infrequently to consider electoral matters. It is likely that in the medium term the committee will need to meet more frequently as the results of the Electoral Review and any subsequent Community</p>

		Governance Reviews are considered and dealt with, but this is time limited. There are eight members on the General Purposes Committee which provides a good mixture of views on the Council.
External Partnerships		Service delivery has changed for councils over time, and many authorities now have a range of delivery partners to work with and hold to account.
<i>Key lines of explanation</i>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>Will council members serve on decision-making partnerships, sub-regional, regional or national bodies? In doing so, are they able to take decisions/make commitments on behalf of the council?</i> ➤ <i>How many councillors will be involved in this activity? And what is their expected workload? What proportion of this work is undertaken by portfolio holders?</i> ➤ <i>What other external bodies will members be involved in? And what is the anticipated workload?</i>
Analysis		As the Council operates a Cabinet system, any decision-making partnerships or roles on regional or national bodies fall to the relevant portfolio holders. Portfolio Holders can made delegated decisions, but in reality, the majority of decisions are discussed through Cabinet and scrutinised in advance by the CABs. There are no proposed changes to the current model that is being operated by the Council.

Community Leadership

The Commission understands that there is no single approach to community leadership and that members represent, and provide leadership to, their communities in different ways. The Commission wants to know how members are required to provide effective community leadership and what support the council offers them in this role. For example, does the authority have a defined role and performance system for its elected members? And what support networks are available within the council to help members in their duties? The Commission also wants to see a consideration of **how the use of technology and social media by the council as a whole, and by councillors individually, will affect casework, community engagement and local democratic representation. Responses should demonstrate that alternative council sizes have been explored.**

Topic		Description
Community Leadership	Key lines of explanation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>In general terms how do councillors carry out their representational role with electors?</i> ➤ <i>Does the council have area committees and what are their powers?</i> ➤ <i>How do councillors seek to engage with their constituents? Do they hold surgeries, send newsletters, hold public meetings or maintain blogs?</i> ➤ <i>Are there any mechanisms in place that help councillors interact with young people, those not on the electoral register, and/or other minority groups and their representative bodies?</i> ➤ <i>Are councillors expected to attend community meetings, such as parish or resident's association meetings? If so, what is their level of involvement and what roles do they play?</i> ➤ <i>Explain your approach to the Area Governance structure. Is your Area Governance a decision-making forum or an advisory board? What is their relationship with locally elected members and Community bodies such as Town and Parish Councils? Looking forward how could they be improved to enhance decision-making?</i>
	Analysis	<p>Generally Councillors fulfil their representational role with elected members by sitting on committees at the council, taking part in working groups as required, canvassing the opinions of their electors through conversations on the doorstep, on social media and by talking with key stakeholders, including community leaders and members of the business community, and communicating council decisions and political debates that may be of interest or may affect local residents. For many councillors this makes up the majority of their work.</p> <p>The Full Council meeting also provided both members and members of the public a significant opportunity to represent the views of the public, to ask questions, to raise issues and to voice concerns.</p>

		<p>Surgeries were more commonly held in the past but are much less frequent today. Members now take the opportunities presented through social media to contact segments of the electorate directly.</p> <p>For rural members, attendance at parish council meetings for at least some of the time is normal. For members in the un-parished wards of Royal Tunbridge Wells, attendance at the Town Forum for at least some meetings is normal. There is no formal requirement to attend either parish council or town forum meetings however.</p>
Casework	<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>How do councillors deal with their casework? Do they pass it on to council officers? Or do they take a more in-depth approach to resolving issues?</i> ➤ <i>What support do members receive?</i> ➤ <i>How has technology influenced the way in which councillors work? And interact with their electorate?</i> ➤ <i>In what ways does the council promote service users' engagement/dispute resolution with service providers and managers rather than through councillors?</i>
	Analysis	<p>Members deal with casework in different ways within the authority, and this is very much dependent on the person. There is no formal requirement for members to handle casework in a particular way.</p> <p>To support members in their role, frequent (almost weekly) all member briefings are provided on a range of 'hot topics', to ensure members stay up-to-date and well informed. A weekly newsletter is also produced containing vital information about council services and about issues and events in the borough.</p> <p>Members have access to a Microsoft account and Skype for Business and will be receiving Microsoft Teams in due course. Each member is offered a tablet when they start with the Council, but the Council is device agnostic, and so members may use their own bought equipment if they wish. An IT allowance is consolidated into their main member allowance. Where members need specific support (around connectivity, use of equipment, etc.) this has been provided by the IT service and Democratic Services.</p> <p>Members have access to a 'GoAnywhere' microsite which stores video recordings of member briefings as part of a digital reference library. Other large documentation (such as the emerging Local Plan) is also stored on this site for reference.</p> <p>Complaints about Council services are not managed by members. The Council has a robust complaints</p>

		<p>management system, which allows complaints to be made by the public online, via email, telephone, letter or face to face. Regular training on complaints management is provided to officers to ensure complaints are channelled into the complaints system. The first stage for complaints is a response at Head of Service level, and the second stage is a response by the Chief Executive or director. After this the complainant can complain to the Ombudsmen.</p>
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Other Issues

Respondent may use this space to bring any other issues of relevance to the attention of the Commission.

None.

Summary

In following this template respondents should have been able to provide the Commission with a robust and well-evidenced case for their proposed council size; one which gives a clear explanation as to the governance arrangements and number of councillors required to represent the authority in the future.

Use this space to summarise the proposals and indicate other options considered. Explain why these alternatives were not appropriate in terms of their ability to deliver effective Strategic Leadership, Accountability (Scrutiny, Regulation and Partnerships), and Community Leadership.

Our proposal is that the Council retains 48 Members.

Many councillors take a hands-on approach to handling issues raised by local residents and responding to questions in a thorough manner. During the consultation Tunbridge Wells Borough Council carried out on council size, there was clear feedback that residents were eager for their councillors to manage casework to a very high standard. This can be very time and effort intensive. If there were fewer councillors we believe councillors would be less likely to be able to manage casework in line with the expectations of local people.

We believe that reducing the numbers of councillors will lead to the remainder taking on a higher workload. We are concerned that this will make the role less attractive to people who are in full time work and/or have childcare commitments. We believe that this will have a disproportionate impact on women and younger people, who are currently already underrepresented in the council. This would make the council less representative of the people it represents which may impact its effectiveness and credibility.