

# Council Size Submission:

**Thurrock 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 is being made on behalf of members of Thurrock Council, represented by a cross party Member Working Group.**

## Context

*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?*

Thurrock Council is currently in government intervention. On 2 September 2022, the Government appointed Best Value Commissioners to work with the council (this was originally Essex County Council but has since changed to 3 individually named Commissioners). This intervention was in response to concerns about levels of financial risk and debt, and ongoing governance issues.

One of the requirements of intervention was for the council to “address systemic weaknesses in the Authority’s governance function, to secure improvements in transparency and formal decision making.”

Since September 2022, the council – alongside Commissioners and government advisors - has been undertaking a complete, in depth and multi-faceted review of all elements of its governance functions in order to address the issues raised by the government’s Directions and the findings of the [Best Value Inspection Report](#), published in June 2023.

Our [Improvement and Recovery Plan](#) was approved at a meeting of Full Council on 25 October 2023. This sets out the future direction of the Council, the key objectives to deliver improvement and recovery and the measures by which the council will be assessed. It also highlights the need for a completely new operating model to be developed. This is not just about service delivery but every aspect of the council – members and officers.

This work is still in progress and is subject to many interdependencies, including internal consultation, engagement and further analysis. Therefore, it is not possible to respond to all of the questions within this submission with the level of options analyses requested.

The council asks, therefore, that the LGBCE considers this submission in this context.

The last [Boundary Review for Thurrock](#) took place in August 2002 and came into effect in the June 2004 elections (moved from May to coincide with the European Parliament Elections), whereby the borough was divided into twenty wards bearing the names which are currently in place and the number of councillors to be elected in each ward.

In February 2016, a report was taken to the council’s [Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee](#) recommending members discuss and debate information in relation to any perceived electoral imbalance which might prompt a boundary review.

The LGBRE guidance at that time stated that to initiate a review, more than 30% of a council’s wards should have an electoral imbalance of more than 10% from the average ratio for that authority. The other criterion for initiating a review was if one or more wards had an electoral imbalance of more than 30%. The data did not evidence either of those criteria and therefore no review was initiated at that time.

## 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?*

Thurrock is situated on the north side of the River Thames bordering Essex, Kent and East London. Thurrock has a mixed landscape of homes and communities, fields and countryside, jobs and infrastructure. Three international ports punctuate 18 miles of riverfront with cranes and gigantic container ships, while industrial parks line the A13, all within driving distance of the major London airports.

Rural villages and market towns are set into the 70% of the borough which is green belt. Nature reserves, heritage locations and sites of special scientific interest abound. Thurrock is also home to Lakeside Shopping Centre and Retail Park and over recent years this area has also seen significant housing development.

Thurrock's main town is Grays, with other larger conurbations being Aveley, Purfleet-on-Thames, South Ockendon, Tilbury, Chadwell St Mary, Stanford-le-Hope and Corringham. There are also small, rural villages such as Orsett, Horndon-on-the-Hill, Bulphan, East Tilbury and West Tilbury.

There are currently 20 wards served by 49 councillors. The wards are split between two parliamentary constituencies – Thurrock Constituency and (part of) South Basildon and East Thurrock (SBET) Constituency. South Basildon and East Thurrock constituency is shared with Basildon Council.

The **2023 Review of Parliamentary constituencies in England** made some changes to the existing constituency configuration which will take effect at the next UK Parliamentary election.

Currently, Thurrock Constituency is comprised of fourteen (14) wards and SBET has six (6) wards within Thurrock local authority boundary. The order will change the constituency boundary and Chadwell St Mary will be contained within the SBET constituency (a move from Thurrock constituency). The Returning Officer for Thurrock Council will be appointed the (A)RO for both constituencies once the order is made.

The future arrangements will be:

- Thurrock constituency - 13 wards
- SBET (part constituency) - 7 wards. Two (2) full wards and two (2) part wards from Basildon Council will make up the remainder of the SBET constituency.

Local Elections in Thurrock are currently held by thirds. Elections are held every three years in a four-year cycle. The Best Value Inspection report recommended that the council move to elections every four years. Subsequently this was included in the Secretary of State Directions to the council.

May 2024 will be the last local election by thirds, with election to 17 seats. A whole council election will be held in May 2025 and thereafter every four years.

The borough has a relatively low voter turnout. In the local elections in 2023 the average voter turnout was 26.89% - with a lowest ward turnout of 19.38% (Grays Riverside) and a highest of 34.96% (The Homesteads).

Thurrock has a diverse population that is increasing by over 10% every decade and is becoming more and more diverse with 66.2% of residents identifying as White British in 2021 compared to 80.91% in 2011.

Ethnic profile summary (Census 2021)	Thurrock	East region	England
White British (including White English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish and British)	66.2%	78.49%	73.54%
All White	76.8%	86.48%	81.05%
All Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African	11.9%	2.92%	4.22%
All Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh	6.99%	6.41%	9.61%
All Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups	3.00%	2.84%	2.96%
All Other ethnic groups	1.5%	1.36%	2.18%

Between the last two censuses (held in 2011 and 2021), the population of Thurrock increased by 11.6%, from around 157,700 in 2011 to around 176,000 in 2021.

This means that Thurrock's population increased by a greater percentage than both the overall population of the East of England (8.3%), and of England (up 6.6% since the 2011 Census).

This increase in population followed the trend from the previous Census in 2001 which saw an increase of approximately 10% between 2001 to 2011 (143,300 population to 157,700). So, the population has increased by over 30,000 (approx. 20%) residents since the last Boundary Review in 2004.

## Age profile

Between Census 2011 and Census 2021 the age profiles for Thurrock as a whole have changed significantly, with an increase of 19.4% in people aged 65 years and over, an increase of 8.9% in people aged 15 to 64 years, and an increase of 16.2% in children aged under 15 years.

The demographic profiles of each of the current wards vary considerably. According to the Census 2021 ward level data, the all age population counts per current ward structure range between 5,686 population (Corringham and Fobbing) to 13,799 (West Thurrock and South

Stifford), and for those over 18 years old the ward populations vary between 4,640 and 9,916.

<b>Electoral wards and divisions</b>	<b>All age population count Census 2021</b>	<b>18+ population count Census 2021</b>
Aveley and Uplands	10824	8069
Belhus	10473	7710
Chadwell St Mary	10621	7855
Chafford and North Stifford	8008	5921
Corringham and Fobbing	5686	4640
East Tilbury	7713	5654
Grays Riverside	13291	9784
Grays Thurrock	9836	7567
Little Thurrock Blackshots	7079	5414
Little Thurrock Rectory	6264	4939
Ockendon	11967	8855
Orsett	6416	5206
South Chafford	7691	5478
Stanford East and Corringham Town	8653	6778
Stanford-le-Hope West	7649	5893
Stifford Clays	6755	5190
The Homesteads	8452	6722
Tilbury Riverside and Thurrock Park	7976	5407
Tilbury St Chads	6845	4829
West Thurrock and South Stifford	13799	9916

### **Households and average house price**

The number of households in Thurrock (Census 2021) went up 6.5% from the previous Census to 66,400. The average number of people per household in Thurrock is the largest in Essex at 2.7 people.

The average house price (all property types) in Thurrock is £333,406. This is up from £326,901 in August 2022 and compares with a regional average of £353,937 and £311,309 for England. (UK House Price Index, August 2023)

### **EU citizens**

The Elections Act 2022 removes the rights of some EU citizens to vote and stand in some elections. There are some exemptions (eg where there are negotiated reciprocal agreements (currently Spain, Portugal, Luxembourg and Poland)). Other EU citizens will retain their voting and candidacy rights for local elections provided they have been given and retain settlement status.

The number of applicants from Thurrock residents to the EU Settlement Scheme between 20 August 2018 and 30 September 2023 was 31,680, of which over 27,000 have been concluded with settled or pre-settled status. This included over 4,000 from Polish Thurrock residents.

The Thurrock Electoral Register currently has circa 11,000 EU citizens registered. It is estimated there are 5,000 EU citizens on the register whose eligibility requires further checking.

All EU citizens on the electoral register need to have their eligibility to be registered, reviewed and removed from the register if ineligible.

However, this review cannot commence until at least 7 May 2024 (when the legislation comes into force) therefore final numbers will not be available within the timescales of this Review.

### **Deprivation**

According to the Indices of Multiple Deprivation 2019, Tilbury Riverside and Tilbury St Chads and Thurrock Park wards are the most deprived wards in Thurrock and include 5 (five) LSOAs (Lower Super Output Areas) which are in the 10% most deprived areas in the country.

In contrast, South Chafford is the least deprived ward in Thurrock and one of the least deprived in the country (with 1 LSOA in the 10<sup>th</sup> decile (i.e. least deprived) and 3 LSOAs in the 9<sup>th</sup> decile. Both Chafford and North Stifford and The Homesteads wards also have 3 LSOAs in the 9<sup>th</sup> decile.

### **Life expectancy**

According to the latest Public Health England Local Authority Health Profile, life expectancy for both men (79 years old) and women (82 years old) is lower than the equivalent regional and England averages. Life expectancy is 8.4 years lower for men and 7.4 years lower for women in the most deprived ward of Thurrock than in the least deprived ward.

### **Census 2021 response rate**

Thurrock had one of the highest response rates to the Census – 99% of the population compared with 93% in 2011 and a national average of 97% and therefore is statistically very valid. There was only one area where the response was significantly less than the population estimate. This coincided with a large, hard to reach traveller site, which has a mixture of travelling show people, gypsy travellers and other private tenants. The exact population is not known but it is estimated at approximately 2,000 people.

## 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 alternative council sizes have been explored.*

Topic		
<b>Governance Model</b>	<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>What governance model will your authority operate? e.g., Committee System, Executive or other?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>The Cabinet model, for example, usually requires 6 to 10 members. How many members will you require?</i></li> <li>➤ <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></li> <li>➤ <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></li> <li>➤ <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></li> </ul>
	Analysis	<p>The Council currently operates a Cabinet (Executive) model. This model is supported by the Constitution and there is currently understood to be cross-party political support for it in principle. The analyses and scrutiny undertaken by Commissioners and the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny does not point to a problem with the model itself, but with the culture and relationships surrounding the operation of the model.</p> <p>This is, however, part of the ongoing review of governance, training, culture and relationships as part of intervention activities and as such further comment cannot be made at this time.</p>
<b>Portfolios</b>	<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>How many portfolios will there be?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>What will the role of a portfolio holder be?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Will this be a full-time position?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Will decisions be delegated to portfolio holders? Or will the executive/mayor take decisions?</i></li> </ul>
	Analysis	<p>There are currently 7 (seven) portfolio holders (Cabinet members) however, the council's <a href="#">Constitution</a> allows for up to 10 portfolio holders including the Leader. The number and allocation of PFHs is a decision for the Leader. The role and "Functions which the Leader has allocated to the Cabinet, Cabinet Committees or Individual Cabinet" is covered in the Constitution. None of the portfolio holder positions in Thurrock are full time.</p> <p>The analyses and scrutiny undertaken by Commissioners and the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny as part of the intervention process does not raise an issue with this model. However, this is part of the ongoing review of governance and updating of the Constitution as part of the intervention activities and as such cannot be stated at this time.</p>



<b>Delegated Responsibilities</b>	<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>What responsibilities will be delegated to officers or committees?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>How many councillors will be involved in taking major decisions?</i></li> </ul>
	Analysis	This is part of the ongoing review of governance and updating of the Constitution as part of the intervention activities and as such cannot be stated at this time. The current arrangements can be found in the <a href="#">Thurrock Council Constitution</a> .

## 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.**

<b>Topic</b>	
<b>Internal Scrutiny</b>	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.
<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>How will decision makers be held to account?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>How many committees will be required? And what will their functions be?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>How many task and finish groups will there be? And what will their functions be?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>What time commitment will be involved for members? And how often will meetings take place?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>How many members will be required to fulfil these positions?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Explain why you have increased, decreased, or not changed the number of scrutiny committees in the authority.</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Explain the reasoning behind the number of members per committee in terms of adding value.</i></li> </ul>
Analysis	<p>There are currently 6 overview and scrutiny committees: Cleaner Greener Safer, Corporate, Children's, Health and Well Being, Housing, Planning Transport &amp; Regeneration. There is also a separate Standards and Audit Committee.</p> <p>The Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) was commissioned by the council and the LGA to repurpose the overview and scrutiny function and associated scrutiny-related, activities.</p> <p>The key recommendation was to restructure to have fewer Committees with wider connected remits, having highlighted that the current structure of six Overview and Scrutiny Committees had been "in place for some time and could be reflective of the 'silo working' issues raised within the BVI report. A recalibration of Overview and Scrutiny to look at matters across a broader portfolio of work could support the Council to change its outlook."</p> <p>The CfGS have put forward three options:  Option 1: Reduce to one Committee  Option 2: Reduce to three Committees to cover cross cutting portfolios  Option 3: Reduce to four Committees to cover cross cutting portfolios and a separate education scrutiny committee</p> <p>The CfGS have recommended a committee size of 6-10 Members which they consider proportionate to the size of Committees and the Council. They have also recommended the committees meet every other month (except August).</p> <p>There is an ongoing review of the Task and Finish Group structure and protocol.</p> <p>These recommendations are still being considered. There has not been a final decision made at the time of writing this submission and as such anything more definite cannot be stated at this time.</p>
<b>Topic</b>	

<b>Statutory Function</b>		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?											
<b>Planning</b>	Key lines of explanation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>What proportion of planning applications will be determined by members?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Has this changed in the last few years? And are further changes anticipated?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Will there be area planning committees? Or a single council-wide committee?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Will executive members serve on the planning committees?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>What will be the time commitment to the planning committee for members?</i></li> </ul>											
	Analysis	<p>There has been no appetite or call for adoption of area planning committees, therefore it is anticipated that a single council wide Planning Committee will continue.</p> <p>The Constitution allows for executive members to serve on the planning committee, although none do at present.</p> <p>On average planning committee members attend one meeting every 6 weeks plus site visits (averaging one per month), plus attendance at training sessions and the reading of the documentation, which can be technical and/or lengthy. This may increase and/or be busier than other comparative council areas given the situation of Thurrock as an area of significant economic growth centre.</p>											
<b>Licensing</b>	Key lines of explanation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>How many licencing panels will the council have in the average year?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>And what will be the time commitment for members?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Will there be standing licencing panels, or will they be ad-hoc?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Will there be core members and regular attendees, or will different members serve on them?</i></li> </ul>											
	Analysis	<p>There are approximately ten licensing sub-committees each year, plus training and low to moderate requirements to attend site visits. There is currently – and likely to be going forward – the need for both standing panels and ad hoc panels. The current committee has a core membership of 15 members which act as a pool for the sub committees (which consist of 3 members each). There has been no appetite or call for changing this model.</p>											
<b>Other Regulatory Bodies</b>	Key lines of explanation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>What will they be, and how many members will they require?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Explain the number and membership of your Regulatory Committees with respect to greater delegation to officers.</i></li> </ul>											
	Analysis	<p>As previously mentioned there is a whole-scale review of the governance function currently taking place so it is not possible to predetermine the next steps in relation to this. However, the current structure of other regulatory bodies meetings is as follows:</p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th style="width: 70%;">Meeting name</th> <th style="width: 30%;">Current no. of Thurrock council members</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Corporate Parenting</td> <td style="text-align: center;">8</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Constitutional Working Group</td> <td style="text-align: center;">8</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Investment Advisory Panel</td> <td style="text-align: center;">8</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Freeport Sub Committee</td> <td style="text-align: center;">3</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Standards and Audit Committee</td> <td style="text-align: center;">6</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>The Standards and Audit Functions are likely to be split into two separate committees from one, which will see an increase in meetings for this function from 4 to potentially 8. The full breakdown of current committee makeup can be found at: <a href="#">Full Council on Wednesday, 24 May, 2023, 7.00 pm</a></p>	Meeting name	Current no. of Thurrock council members	Corporate Parenting	8	Constitutional Working Group	8	Investment Advisory Panel	8	Freeport Sub Committee	3	Standards and Audit Committee
Meeting name	Current no. of Thurrock council members												
Corporate Parenting	8												
Constitutional Working Group	8												
Investment Advisory Panel	8												
Freeport Sub Committee	3												
Standards and Audit Committee	6												
<b>External Partnerships</b>		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.											

Key lines of explanation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ 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?</li> <li>➤ 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?</li> <li>➤ What other external bodies will members be involved in? And what is the anticipated workload?</li> </ul>
Analysis	<p>The current breakdown of current committee makeup can be found at: <a href="#">Full Council on Wednesday, 24 May, 2023, 7.00 pm</a></p> <p>There are currently no plans to change. However, it is likely that the future operating model of the council will include more partnership working, and therefore this will be kept under review.</p>

## 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"> <li>➤ In general terms how do councillors carry out their representational role with electors?</li> <li>➤ Does the council have area committees and what are their powers?</li> <li>➤ How do councillors seek to engage with their constituents? Do they hold surgeries, send newsletters, hold public meetings or maintain blogs?</li> <li>➤ 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?</li> <li>➤ 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?</li> <li>➤ 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?</li> </ul>
	Analysis	<p>Councillors carry out their representational role with electors via a number of different mechanisms, including attendance at council/committee meetings, direct engagement via ward surgeries, emails, telephone calls and social media.</p> <p>The council does not operate area committees and does not currently have plans to do so.</p> <p>The council operates a very active and proactive <a href="#">Youth Cabinet</a> who are elected through the local schools and meet councillors, council officers and other decision-makers to give their views and raise concerns of young people</p> <p>Some councillors are directly involved with local community groups and attend forums within their ward areas.</p>

		<p>We do not currently operate an Area Governance model, however as part of the activities surrounding the intervention, future of the council and the operating model, the role of the council, its officers and its members as community leaders is going to be more significant than ever before. This has the potential to increase the workload/casework of individual ward members – but this work is still in its early stages and as such is too early to predict or predetermine future requirements.</p> <p>Thurrock does not have any town or parish councils and there are no calls for this to change currently.</p>
<p><b>Casework</b></p>	<p><i>Key lines of explanation</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <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></li> <li>➤ <i>What support do members receive?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>How has technology influenced the way in which councillors work? And interact with their electorate?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>In what ways does the council promote service users' engagement/dispute resolution with service providers and managers rather than through councillors?</i></li> </ul>
	<p>Analysis</p>	<p>Members are responsible for their own casework. However, officers within members services are available to support all members onboarding, general enquiries on administration matters such as IT, equipment, ward surgeries, members allowances, diaries for learning and developing and signposting to Council services. Plus, specific support to the Mayor and Leader of the council.</p> <p>From April 2022 to March 2023 there were 4,157 members enquiries submitted to the council by 53 members (this is more than the 49 seats as some of the members changed in the May local election). This is an average of 53 enquiries per member, or 84.8 enquiries per seat.</p> <p>There was a review of the members services officer support structure in June 2023. This created additional resource for two political assistants – one for each of the two main parties.</p> <p>This support restructure was predicated on support for 49 members across 20 wards. Additional support would require additional resource during a time of significant financial challenges both now and for future lifespan of this review period.</p> <p>As part of the intervention activities, members have feedback that a ticketing system to support casework enquiries is needed. This is being considered as part of the governance review.</p>

## Other Issues

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

The [report of the Independent Remuneration Panel](#) on Members Allowances in 2023 which went to Council in November included some useful information including the results of a questionnaire to members on how many hours they spent on Council business a week. This varied between approximately 6hrs and 60 hrs.

An Electoral Review Member Working Group - consisting of two Conservative members, two Labour members and one member representing NPAIC (Non-Political Alliance of Independent Councillors) - was set up to consider this project.

At a meeting on 18 December 2023, this submission was discussed.

- All members present (representing Conservative and Labour parties) agreed that there was no rationale nor appetite to increase the number of ward councillors from the current 49.\*
- Based on the evidence available, it was felt that there was a sensible argument to keep the status quo in the current climate – ie 49 members – to support and continue with the recovery of the Council out of intervention.
- As the timescale of this review is only looking for 6 years – ie to 2029 – if it is felt that a new review is required once the council has come out of intervention and recovery is well embedded, this can be requested towards the end of the review cycle.
- The working group members however, wished to caveat that they would wish to be able to compare data with other unitary authorities to consider whether Thurrock is an outlier in terms of average number of electors per ward councillor,
- Whatever number is agreed, all members of the working group at the meeting agreed that it should remain an odd number to prevent as far as possible, the need for the Mayor to have a casting vote.

\*NPAIC was not in attendance at the meeting, but their representative subsequently fed back that their view was that there should be more members but was happy to support the majority decision on overall size of Council.

## 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.*

Thurrock Council is currently undertaking a thorough and robust review of its whole governance framework, including the structure of committees. This is a critical part of the improvement and recovery plan which has been necessitated by the government and Commissioner intervention which started in September 2022.

As such, some of the questions within this submission cannot be pre-determined.

This submission has been reviewed by a cross party member working group, and overall the feeling is that the current composition of 49 ward councillors is appropriate. However, the working group would be interested to see how Thurrock compares with other unitary councils.

Overall members of the working group would also welcome the opportunity to request an additional review within the next 10 years once the impact on electorate numbers is known from developments on current permitted sites and new sites potentially coming on board from the Local Plan which is currently out for consultation.

A potentially good timescale could coincide with the council having had two rounds of all out elections to show the impact of the new framework and would also be a timely reflection on the revised O&S scrutiny committee structure proposed to come in in 2024 and a review of where the council is post-intervention and recovery.