

Staffordshire County Council

Council Size Submission: Template

[Staffordshire County 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 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 made by Staffordshire County Council and is due to be approved and signed off by Full Council on 13th October 2022

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.*

N/A

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?

In 2002 Staffordshire County Council adopted a Strong Leader Cabinet Model, the Council's "Executive" for the purpose of the Local Government Act 2000. These arrangements are reflected in the Constitution. Since that time, we have continued to refine our governance arrangements to ensure that our arrangements are effective. Over the past 22 years we have regularly reviewed that structure: the Cabinet Portfolios and the remits of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees, to best reflect our vision and strategy. We demonstrate the commitment to Overview and Scrutiny by having a dedicated support to help non-executive members develop expertise in policy making and service provision.

Due to the nature and success of our governance and decision making, no petition for change has ever been proposed, demonstrating the confidence in which the community, businesses and public sector partners have in us.

Staffordshire recently had an Internal Audit Report on Delivering Good Governance - Corporate Decision-Making Arrangements. The purpose of the audit was to review compliance with the Council's corporate decision-making arrangements. The audit reviewed both Key Decisions taken by Cabinet and Delegated Decisions taken by Cabinet Members and Executive Officers. In addition, the audit reviewed processes in place for the appropriate completion of Community Impact Assessments (CIAs). Internal Audit were able to offer substantial assurance as the areas reviewed were found to be adequately controlled. Internal controls were in place and operating effectively and risks against the achievement of objectives were well managed.

Given the impact that our strong and consistent decision making has on our effectiveness, our proposal is that we retain 62 Elected Members, we believe that this will allow the Council to remain effective, and for Councillors to be able to deliver the three aspects to their role – strategic leadership, accountability, and community leadership.

If we were to reduce our council size, there would be a significant negative impact on our decision-making process and Members would not be able to effectively represent their communities due to having to attend more meetings and prepare for them. Our current size of 62 allows for an even distribution of meeting attendance, and good community representation. If we were to increase our council size, there are risks that this could cause additional challenges to our decision-making processes and greater inefficiencies.

The Council elects a Leader for a four-year term who then appoints Members to form a Cabinet. Under the Constitution the Cabinet may consist of up to 10 members, including a Leader and Deputy Leader. The Constitution allows for four Overview and Scrutiny Committees. The Overview and Scrutiny Committees investigate issues affecting the communities of Staffordshire. Each Overview and Scrutiny Committee has its own area of responsibility which is themed around the County Council's Directorates and reflect the priorities in the Strategic Plan.

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 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?

Staffordshire is large, predominately rural county, with several urban centres, located in the centre of the UK. Whilst 80% of the County is classified as rural, 75% of our population live in towns and large villages. The County covers an area of 1,012sqm (2,623KM2) and has

an estimated population of 876,100 people and it is estimated that the population will rise to approximately 912,500 people by 2028. Overall, the County is relatively affluent, however there are pockets of multiple deprivation, particularly in some of our towns, including Tamworth, Burton-on-Trent (East Staffordshire), Newcastle-under-Lyme and Cannock.

Recent data from the 2021 Census shows that the trend of population ageing continues across the county, with the highest population growth among older adults. Those aged 65+ increased by 24% from 2011 to 2021, from just under 157,000 to just over 194,000 respectively, whilst the ratio of working age adults to pension age adults has declined considerably between 2011 and 2021; from 3.2 to 1 in 2011 to 2.6 to 1 in 2021. Additionally, the number of children and young people (0-19) decreased by 4%, with a particular decline of 14% in those aged 15-19. However, the population growth and age profile does vary across our districts and boroughs, with a higher proportion of older people (65+) in Staffordshire Moorlands and South Staffordshire, a higher proportion of children and young people (aged 0-19) in East Staffordshire and Tamworth, and faster population growth across East Staffordshire, Lichfield, and Stafford.

Our central location is one of our many economic strengths. The county boasts a diverse economy with significant strengths in automotive, aerospace, energy, medical technologies, construction, logistics, digital and Agri-Tech to name a few. While the county is home to many world-renowned businesses, most of our businesses are small and medium enterprises. Supporting growth of our existing businesses and enabling people to start and grow their own businesses in the county is key to ensuring our economy remains vibrant and dynamic. In recent years, we have seen an increase in the percentage of our working age population with higher levels of skills, however challenges remain. Some areas of the county lag in terms of skills level, particularly within Cannock Chase, Tamworth, and parts of Newcastle-under-Lyme.

Patterns of representation in a large, rural county area, with the above characteristics presents challenges and differences between Divisions. This directly impacts on how our Elected Members engage with their residents, and on the types of casework that they encounter. We cover this issue in more detail later in the submission.

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	<div>Key lines of explanation</div> <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 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>
	<div>Analysis</div> <p>Staffordshire County Council operates a Strong Leader Cabinet model; the Council's "Executive" for the purpose of the Local Government Act 2000. These arrangements are reflected in the Constitution. Section 6 details the Cabinet. The Council elects a Leader for a four-year term who then appoints Members to form a Cabinet. The Cabinet is responsible in setting the strategic direction of the Council, leading the preparation of the Council's policies and budget, it leads the community planning process, and attainment of best value. This model is expected to continue.</p>

Under the Constitution the Cabinet may consist of up to 10 members, including a Leader and Deputy Leader. The Leader of the Council allocates each Cabinet Member responsibilities relating to the executive functions of the Council. The current Leader has appointed 9 Members to serve on the Cabinet, each with a portfolio. There is also one Cabinet Support Member with the portfolio of Public Health and Integrated Care. There are no plans to amend the number of members who sit on the Cabinet.

The table below identifies the number of members who are in receipt of a Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA). This is further detailed in Section 3 of the Constitution. The most recent Independent Remuneration Panel Report was presented to Council in March 2022 and can be viewed [here](#).

Special Responsibility Allowances (SRAs)	No. of elected members
Leader	1
Deputy Leader	1
Cabinet Member	9
Cabinet Support Member	1
Chairman of Council	1
Vice-Chairman of Council	1
Leader of the Principal Opposition	1
Deputy Leader of the Principal Opposition	1
Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee	4
Vice-Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee	8
Chairs and Vice-Chairs of:	8
Planning Committee	
Audit & Standards Committee	
Pensions Committee	

		<table><tr><td>Charities & Trusts Committee</td><td></td></tr><tr><td>Vice-Chair of Corporate Parenting Panel</td><td>1</td></tr><tr><td>Chair of the Police, Fire and Crime Panel</td><td>1</td></tr><tr><td>Total number of SRAs</td><td>38</td></tr></table>	Charities & Trusts Committee		Vice-Chair of Corporate Parenting Panel	1	Chair of the Police, Fire and Crime Panel	1	Total number of SRAs	38
Charities & Trusts Committee										
Vice-Chair of Corporate Parenting Panel	1									
Chair of the Police, Fire and Crime Panel	1									
Total number of SRAs	38									
Portfolios	Key lines of explanation	<div>➤ How many portfolios will there be?</div> <div>➤ What will the role of a portfolio holder be?</div> <div>➤ Will this be a full-time position?</div> <div>➤ Will decisions be delegated to portfolio holders? Or will the executive/mayor take decisions?</div>								
	Analysis	<p>Portfolios</p> <p>The portfolios of the current Cabinet are as follows:</p> <div><div>1. Leader</div><div>2. Deputy Leader and Economy & Skills</div><div>3. Health & Care</div><div>4. Infrastructure & Climate Change</div><div>5. Commercial Matters</div><div>6. Highways & Transport</div><div>7. Finance & Resources</div><div>8. Communities & Culture</div><div>9. Children & Young People</div><div>10. Education (& SEND)</div></div> <p>There is currently one Cabinet Support Member with the portfolio of Public Health and Integrated Care.</p>								

		<p>Descriptions of Cabinet Member Portfolios are provided at Appendix 1 of Section 6 of the Constitution. Cabinet portfolio holders are responsible for making the day-to-day executive decisions concerning the strategy of the Council as set out in Part 6 of the Constitution. The Constitution does allow for delegated decision by individual portfolio holders.</p> <p>Cabinet portfolio holders are not full-time positions. Many of the current Cabinet have external employment and 8 of them are also District/Borough Councillors.</p> <p>Considering the above evidence any reduction in Council size would pose a significant risk in being able to maintain the current Governance arrangements that work well for Staffordshire. Whilst an increase could potentially provide greater resilience in being able to fill positions in our governance arrangements, it would also lead to inefficiency in our operation.</p>
Delegated Responsibilities	<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<p>➤ <i>What responsibilities will be delegated to officers or committees?</i></p> <p>➤ <i>How many councillors will be involved in taking major decisions?</i></p>
	Analysis	<p>The power for Senior Leadership Team Members to take decisions on the day-to-day provision/administration of the Council's services are set in the Council's Scheme of Delegation to Officers.</p> <p>Each Directorate has its own sub-delegation scheme in which the relevant Senior Leadership Team member delegates authority to other officers within their directorate to take decisions on day-to-day operational issues. Where officer decision making is concerned, only individuals can make decisions. There is no officer group, panel or board that collectively makes decisions – this includes SLT (Senior Leadership Team).</p> <p>Cabinet Members have individual executive decision-making powers within their portfolios and act as the Council's main representative and spokesperson for their nominated areas of responsibility. The Cabinet</p>

		<p>carries out all the local authority's functions which are not the responsibility of any other part of the authority. Some of these decisions / plans / policies / strategies require the approval of Full Council e.g., Strategic Plan, Medium Term Financial Strategy, Council Tax setting. There are approximately 12 formal meetings of the Cabinet per year and monthly informal briefings.</p> <p>The Cabinet may collectively take any decision on any matter delegated to the Cabinet by the Leader or has been referred to the Cabinet by a Cabinet Member, the Chief Executive or any Chief Officer or is one which the Cabinet have specifically reserved for decision to them. Key Decisions can only be taken by the Cabinet.</p> <p>The Cabinet have no power to take decisions on matters reserved to the full Council or matters which may not, by law, be determined by the Cabinet or change the delegation of any Local Choice Function.</p>
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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	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><i>Key lines of explanation</i></p>	<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>
<p>Analysis</p>	<p>Good scrutiny is an essential part of the Council's governance framework and is integral to decision making. Overview and Scrutiny Committees in Staffordshire fulfil the statutory responsibility placed on local authorities to review and scrutinise decisions and actions taken, and they play a vital role in influencing services and shaping policies and plans which affect our business and our citizens.</p> <p>The Constitution allows for four Overview and Scrutiny Committees. The Overview and Scrutiny Committees investigate issues affecting the communities of Staffordshire. Each Overview and Scrutiny Committee has its own area of responsibility which is themed around SCC (Staffordshire County Council) directorates and reflect the priorities in the Strategic Plan.</p> <p>The terms of reference are approved by Council and are set out in Section 7 of the Constitution.</p> <p>The County Council members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees will be appointed, in accordance with the relevant political balance provisions, at the Annual meeting of the County Council as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee (13 members) • Health and Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee (13 members + 8 District and Borough Members)

- Prosperous Overview and Scrutiny Committee (10 members)
- Safeguarding Overview and Scrutiny Committee (10 members)

They consist of a chairman, two Vice Chairman and members. Some committees also have co-opted members who are District or Borough Councillors or who are co-opted for their expertise. Each Overview and Scrutiny Committee is scheduled to meet 7 times per year and at other times as may be appropriate.

Each Committee develops a draft work programme of matters that fall within their Terms of Reference. Work programmes are reviewed at each Committee meeting to account of new information and emerging priorities, to ensure they remain relevant and timely. Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs hold regular triangulation meetings with Executive Members and senior officers to discuss emerging matters and priorities that might impact on the work programme. The Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee is the overarching scrutiny body with responsibility for developing and agreeing the combined work programme for the Council's overview and scrutiny function. In September 2022 Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee received an update on the [Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme 2022-23](#), contained within this report are links to the individual 2022-23 work programmes for each Committee.

The Health and Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee is responsible for scrutiny of matters relating to the planning, provision and operation of health services in the Authority's area, including public health, in accordance with regulations made under the Health and Social Care Act 2001 and subsequent guidance including the Local Authority (Public Health, Health and Wellbeing Boards and Health Scrutiny) Regulations 2013. In accordance with these Regulations the County Council has agreed for these regulations to be discharged through the designated Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Health and Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee has the power to make reports and recommendations to NHS bodies conferred by the Health and Social Care Act 2001.

		<p>The Annual Overview & Scrutiny Report 2021/22 was presented to Council in July 2022. The webcast for the agenda item can be viewed here: The Annual Overview & Scrutiny Report 2021/22</p> <p>As evidenced above, each committee is well represented and provides room for challenge. A reduction in Council Size would have a significant detrimental impact on the effectiveness of Overview and Scrutiny and being able to fill all the positions.</p>
Statutory Function		<p>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?</p>
Planning	<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<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	<p>The Terms of Reference for Planning Committee can be found at Section 8 of the Constitution.</p> <p>The Planning Committee currently has 15 members and operates as a single council-wide committee.</p> <p>The Committee is scheduled to meet once a month – dependent on business need.</p> <p>In addition, the Planning Committee has established a Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Panel of seven members of the Planning Committee with full delegated powers to deal with matters</p>

		<p>detailed in Section 8 of the Constitution. The membership of the CROW panel was increased from 5 to 7 in March 2022.</p> <p>In addition, the Planning Committee has an established Licensing Panel (convened when required) of five members of the Planning Committee with full delegated powers to deal with the matters detailed Section 8 of the Constitution.</p>
Licensing	<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ How many licencing panels will the council have in the average year? ➤ And what will be the time commitment for members? ➤ Will there be standing licencing panels, or will they be ad-hoc? ➤ Will there be core members and regular attendees, or will different members serve on them?
	Analysis	<p>A Licensing Panel will be appointed by Planning Committee when necessary to deal with matters. The last licencing panel was over 5 years ago. Should a Licencing Panel be required the preparation for it would be done at the Planning Committee who would select members to serve on the Panel.</p>
Other Regulatory Bodies	<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<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>The Council has several other Committees. These are listed below and detailed in Section 8 of the Constitution.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audit & Standards Committee (15 members) • Charities & Trusts Committee (5 members) • Pensions Committee (10 members plus 4 co-opted) <p>In terms of committee mapping analysis, each member serves on average, approximately 2.4 committees. An average of 4-5 hours of time is needed per meeting attendance, this includes any</p>

		<p>time to prepare and read papers. In addition, there are also working groups which take a lot of time commitment from Members, more so than the Committees themselves at times. Chairs of each Committee will have an additional amount of time spent preparing for each meeting also.</p> <p>The evidence above further supports earlier analysis that any reduction in Council Size would have a detrimental impact on being able to fill committee positions. Members would be required to sit on more committees, increasing their workloads. Members would have to distribute their time across more committees. Whilst an increase in Council Size could potentially provide greater resilience in being able to fill committee positions, it would also lead to inefficiency in our operation.</p>
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		<p>The County Council currently has 42 out of the 62 members appointed to outside bodies, equating to over two thirds of all members. The total of the workload and responsibility varies from appointment to appointment dependent on the remit of the Outside Body and its contribution towards the Council's strategic priorities. Some bodies are small and locally based, which value from having input from local Elected Members, others are highly significant locally, regionally, or nationally. We also know that many of our Elected Members also serve on various organisations that support their local communities as part of their community leadership role, e.g., school governors and local community groups.</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 diverse 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	The responsibilities of Elected Members are set out clearly in Section 3 of the constitution. Practice will vary between Elected Members; Members are expected to actively and positively engage with their communities and act as a community leader for their areas.

		<p>Elected Members use a range of different methods to engage with electors including face-to-face meetings, phone, email, social media, and newsletters. In a recent survey, 57% of Elected Members who responded stated that they held resident surgeries, and 70% stated they had a social media presence.</p> <p>Elected Members also have strong links with the District, Boroughs, Parish, and Town Councils in their areas, however not all parts of the county have Parish and Town Councils. As of August 2022, 47 of our Elected Members are also District/Borough Councillors, which brings additional value and insight into their role at the County Council. They also have strong links with a range of different local community groups.</p> <p>The COVID 19 pandemic brought to the fore the benefits and advantages of all tiers of local government in Staffordshire working together. We are building on those solid foundations to further our two-tier working. Staffordshire needs stability and consistency in its governance arrangements to be able to realise the full benefits of the collaboration taking place.</p> <p>Staffordshire's geography, population, and context, all have a significant impact on how our Elected Members carry out their representational role with electors, and the casework issues they are responding to. As an example, one of our more rural divisions, Leek Rural (Staffordshire Moorlands), has a current electorate of 11,480 spread over an area of 328 km². The division primarily consists of a number of small villages. Representing and engaging electors in this Division, and the types of casework that Elected Members receive, presents different challenges to some of our more urban divisions such as May Bank and Cross Heath (Newcastle-under-Lyme). This has a similar size electorate of 10,904 but in a much smaller geography of just 4 km². There are also some divisions which have both urban and rural elements within them, which also presents different challenges for Elected Members to deal with the distinct challenges of the differing places within their division.</p>
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Whilst we note that the Commission recommends that responses focus on the structure of the Council when considering council size, and not on comparisons with other local authorities, it is evidence that we have considered in formulating our proposal. The table below demonstrates the CIPFA stats neighbours:

Local Authority	Electorate for Financial Year ending in 2023	Total Councillors	Electorate per Councillor
Cumbria	387,489	84	4,613
Suffolk	569,261	75	7,590
Warwickshire	443,920	57	7,788
Somerset	434,384	55	7,898
Worcestershire	455,560	57	7,992
Lincolnshire	566,353	70	8,091
Norfolk	693,144	84	8,252
Gloucestershire	396,825	43	9,228
Nottinghamshire	617,973	66	9,363
West Sussex	659,680	70	9,424
Derbyshire	618,815	64	9,669
Leicestershire	539,750	55	9,814
Staffordshire	663,673	62	10,704
Lancashire	911,852	84	10,855
Essex	1,117,011	75	14,893

This table demonstrates our number of electors per Member is higher than the median, therefore there is no evidence to suggest a reduction in the number of elected members.

		Upper Quintile	9,992	<p>The Council's current electoral arrangements include two divisions with two Elected Members. The Council's view, based on feedback from the relevant Elected Members, is these arrangements do not provide the most efficient conditions for community representation. Representing a larger electorate presents difficulties, and although the Elected Members representing these Divisions have been able to establish effective working arrangements between themselves, it is acknowledged that it can be difficult to equitably divide casework. Having two Elected Members can also make it difficult for electors to easily identify who 'their Councillor' is. As such, the County Council is formally requesting a single-member division review.</p> <p>Our Elected Members have funding available to support a vast range of community activities via our Members Fund. Each county councillor has up to £2,500 to allocate for supporting projects which help our communities to look after their own health and wellbeing, support vulnerable people within their own communities, and help groups to look after the neighbourhood spaces where they live.</p> <p>This funding has a significant impact across Staffordshire. Because our communities are so varied, having flexible funding for councillors to use however it's needed locally makes a huge difference. The funding is vital for helping new community provision to get off the ground, and for helping existing projects to expand what they do or get back on a sustainable footing after Covid-19. It helps to energise and inspire more activity locally, and already this year we are seeing £3 raised by the community to match every £1 the fund has spent.</p> <p>The Climate Action Fund is open for the third time after supporting 217 projects to combat climate change so far. Every county councillor has £1,500 to award to projects in their area. Councillors must give £500 minimum</p>
		Lower Quintile	7,876	
		Median	9,228	

		<p>per project, but organisations can approach more than one councillor to receive up to £3,000. The grant can be used to fund new projects that can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce carbon impact • Improve air quality • Reduce waste • Improve natural environment • The fund is open to non-for-profit groups such as community groups, charities, parish councils and schools.
Casework	<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<p>➤ <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></p> <p>➤ <i>What support do members receive?</i></p> <p>➤ <i>How has technology influenced the way in which councillors work? And interact with their electorate?</i></p> <p>➤ <i>In what ways does the council promote service users' engagement/dispute resolution with service providers and managers rather than through councillors?</i></p>
	Analysis	<p>Elected Members are required to undertake their own casework. Where there is a difficult or complex issue an Elected Member may request support or guidance from an officer. Member and Democratic Services provide support to Members when needed. Members also have contact with the relevant officers in each department to ensure members can remain as efficient as possible.</p> <p>The County Council is a 'Digital First' local authority, due to our commitment to digital ways of working, we were able to swiftly respond when the Covid-19 pandemic hit. Elected Members are supported to make the most of the benefits that digital technology offers to both engage with the electorate and respond to casework. This is key to ensuring that casework is manageable for the size of electorate in Staffordshire.</p>

Earlier in 2022, the Local Government Association (LGA) carried out the ninth Census of Local Authority Councillors in England. Staffordshire Members were encouraged to take part, with 15 completing the survey. Of those who took part, 5 were Cabinet Members.

One of the questions asked Members about the time they spent on Council business. The results for Staffordshire are provided below. As can be seen, the average total number of hours is 34.1 – slightly under what would be considered a full-time working week. Of the 34.1 hours, a little under a third of that time (10.7) is spent attending meetings. The largest amount of time spent by councillors is engaging with constituents (12.1).

Time spent on council business	
Total (average weekly hours)	34.1
Attendance at council meetings	10.7
Engaging with constituents	12.1
Working with community groups	5.9
Other	5.5

Any reduction in Council Size would lead to Members having to spend more time on Council business, and potentially more time in council meetings, due to there being less Members to fill committee positions. Any increase in Council Size could cause a reduction in the number of hours that Members spend on Council business.

Elected Members receive a comprehensive induction programme. After the last elections in 2021, a programme of induction was developed to give members everything they needed to know in the first few weeks and months of the political term. A range of different topics were covered, including Member Code of Conduct, social media

		<p>training and equality, diversity, and inclusion. Towards the end of 2021, the Member Development Forum was established. This is a cross party group of members who come together to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review and consider the support and facilities required by elected members to enhance their ability to perform their role effectively. • Underpin Staffordshire County Council's continuing commitment to developing its elected members and encourage individual members' commitment to learning and development. • Oversee and evaluate Member Development activity. • Act as Member Development Champions within political groups and introduce accountability in relation to Member Development Activity. • Explore ways to encourage, engage and involve all members in matters relating to the County Council and their wider representative role.
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Other Issues

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

N/A

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.

It is the Council's view that the evidence set out demonstrates that the current size of 62 Elected Members supports efficient and effective governance arrangements and supports Elected Members to effectively deliver Strategic Leadership, Accountability and Community Leadership.

The Council also requests that a single-member division review is undertaken, to address the difficulties of dual-member division as outlined in this submission.

We recognise that the size of the Council needs to be appropriate not just for now, but for the future. In formulating our proposal, we have carefully considered three options – reducing the council size, retaining the current council size, and increasing the current council size. A summary of each option is provided below:

Reducing

Any reduction in the number of Elected Members would lead to Members representing an electorate more than the current average of 10,704 which is already well above the average for other similar local authorities. A reduction would have a significant increase on the workload of Elected Members across all three aspects of their role – Strategic Leadership, Accountability and Community Leadership – and potentially reduce the effectiveness of the Council.

Retaining

The evidence outlined in this submission shows that the Council is operating effectively with the current council size of 62 Elected Members. We feel that the council size will support the forecasted growth in electorate, with the support provided to Elected Members and the further adoption of digital technology. Our current council size fits the governance model we have, with sufficient representation of committees to ensure that

debate is informed by a wide range of opinions. Our governance model is not subject to significant change. Staffordshire continues to develop and find new ways of working, to ensure that we continue to represent our communities, whilst reducing bureaucracy.

Increase

There is some evidence to suggest that an increase in Council Size could lead to improved community representation, due to our higher-than-average electors per Elected Member. However, to have a meaningful impact on how Staffordshire's communities were represented, and therefore the casework that Elected Members are required to manage, a significant reduction in the elector to Member ratio could only be achieved by increasing the council size to between 70-80 Elected Members. This would result in a significant increase in the 'cost of democracy'. There would also be significant challenges in developing division arrangements that effectively represented community identifies for such a significant increase in divisions.

The proposal to retain our 62 councillors provides the best fit for how Staffordshire operates now and for the future, taking a balanced approach across the three key areas of strategic leadership, accountability, and community leadership.