

Cannock Chase Conservative Group

# Council Size Submission

Cannock Chase District 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.

Cannock Chase Conservative Group are the political group holding the majority of seats on Cannock Chase District Council. The Group currently hold 24 of the 41 seats.

## 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.*

Cannock Chase District Council meets the Commission's criteria for electoral inequality with one ward having a variance of more than 30% away from the average. Three wards have variances of more than 10% from the average.

## 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?

We believe the optimal number of councillors would be **37**.

The demographics across Cannock Chase have and continue to change, and the District is experiencing population growth. In addition to this, the manner in which the Council operate, the dynamics and the role of a 'councillor' has changed significantly over the past decade or so.

The Council's internal structure and governance arrangements have been periodically updated in order to implement incremental changes. On 8<sup>th</sup> December 2010, the Council adopted a 'Strong Leader and Cabinet Model' of executive arrangements following public consultation. This model was similar to the pre-2010 model, with the main difference being that the 'Strong Leader' model holds all executive powers along with the ability to delegate these to the Deputy Leader (which must form part of the Cabinet) and Cabinet Holders (see *Appendix 1 for Council Report dated 8<sup>th</sup> December 2010*).

The 'Strong Leader and Cabinet Model' has remained in place since this time and serves the Council well. All members of the Cannock Chase Conservative Group were surveyed in January 2022 and were asked "*Does the current structure best meet the needs of the Council and your ward community and do you have any comments in respect of alternative models*". From a range of political experiences, the 'Strong Leader and Cabinet Model' was overwhelmingly favoured by the group and comments received included "*well established both nationally and locally*", "*meets the needs with appropriate checks and balances through the 'call-in procedure'*", "*the Committee Model tends to be a talking shop with a lack of overarching vision and strategy (as experienced in Town Council which operates a Committee Model)*", "*... enhances the accountability and transparency of the Council. The system enables the Council to establish a coherent and attainable political agenda.... The system designates responsibility clearly to different Cabinet Portfolio Holders and therefore this enhances the overall function of the Council*" and "*it is a question of accountability, residents like a Leader and Cabinet Model as they feel they are able to hold Cabinet accountable*" (All responses received are contained in *Appendix 2*).

The Cabinet are scheduled to meet 12 times per year, including the budgetary setting meetings. In addition to this, an informal 'Cabinet Briefing' is held two weeks before each Cabinet meeting. All Executive functions (as defined by Statute) are exercised by the Leader

and the Cabinet. The Leader then determines which executive functions will be the responsibility of the Cabinet collectively and which shall be the responsibility of each Portfolio Leader. Any executive functions not allocated to the Cabinet collectively or to a Portfolio Leader shall be the responsibility of the Leader in accordance with Section 14 of the Council's Constitution (*Appendix 3*).

The make up on the Cabinet remains a decision for the Leader of the Council. In 2021, when Cannock Chase Conservative Group took control of the Council, the new administration reduced the size of the Cabinet from nine Portfolio Holders to seven Portfolio Holders.

Across society we are seeing the emergence of a far more collaborate approach to tackle emerging issues and to help address decreasing budgets, such as community partnerships and locality teams which have proved vital post Covid-19 pandemic. The Chase Community Partnership (Local Strategic Partnership) is made up of seventeen partnership organisations and is attended by Leader of the Council, Deputy Leader of the Council, Community Engagement and Health and Wellbeing Portfolio Leader, Housing, Heritage and Leisure Portfolio Holder and the Leader of the Opposition. The Chase Community Partnership helps the Council to deliver high quality services whilst also developing close working relationships with local communities across the district.

Similarly, it is imperative that internally within the Council departments covering specific remits and areas within the Council work in tandem to achieve collective goals and eradicate silo working. This belief in turn led to the reduction in Cabinet positions as it was felt that a number of portfolios could naturally be combined, with a single Portfolio Holder having oversight to avoid duplication and encourage greater awareness, such as the Community Engagement, Health and Wellbeing. The Cabinet are currently working on a new Corporate Plan (*Initial drafts contained in Appendix 4*) which outlines what they believe to be the four main priorities which, to greater or lesser extent, cut across all Cabinet Portfolios. Each of the new priorities is then reduced to more concise objectives and initiatives falling within the remit of a specific Portfolio Holder.

Cannock Chase District Council has a 'Shadow Cabinet' in place which mirrors and aligned with the Portfolio positions in the Cabinet. The Shadow Cabinet does not have any decision-making powers. The Shadow Cabinet are scheduled to meet 12 times per year with emergency meeting as and when necessary. The Shadow Cabinet meet on the Monday prior to each formal Cabinet and the agenda will mirror that of the upcoming Cabinet. The relevant Senior Officers will attend Shadow Cabinet to take any questions on upcoming reports. We would recommend that this remains in place.

In line with the new Corporate Plan, proposals are currently being worked on to increase the number of Scrutiny Committees from three to four to reflect the Council's new priorities. The Council currently has 3 committees which are Economic Recovery, Financially Resilient Council and Health and Wellbeing. The Committees meet 4 times per year and comprise of 13 members each, the political make up of those committees proportionately reflects the overall makeup of the Council. The controlling Group take the Chair positions, with the Opposition taking Vice Chair positions. Proposals to change and increase the number of Committees will not only encourage stronger scrutiny by providing each committee with a clear, well-defined remit, it will also create a fairer balance in respect of workload. There are currently three committees and one covers a far greater remit than the other two.

As is the case across the wider local government landscape, funding allocations to Cannock Chase District Council have decreased over recent years. The Council has implemented a 'Shared Services Arrangement' (*Memorandum contained in Appendix 5*) in 2011 which enabled 'back office' functions to begin to be shared with neighbouring Stafford Borough Council. The authorities each play 'Host' to different services to ensure a fair distribution across both Councils. Cannock Chase District Council lead on Finance (Revenue and Benefits), Audit, Risk, Resilience and Procurement and Building Control, whilst Stafford Borough Council lead on Human Resources, Legal and Technology. The existing 'Shared Service Arrangement' has helped to alleviate some of the pressures on resource which, in some instances, can unproductively lead to a lack of distinction between strategic leadership and operational delivery. In turn, the arrangement has enabled the implementation of best practice to ensure these services are delivered to a high standard for residents, it enabled resources to be pooled and savings to be made.

Issues surrounding both capacity, the 'flat structure' of Cannock Chase District Council and strategic/operational delivery by officers have been raised in the past. The Local Government Association undertook a 'Corporate Peer Challenge Follow-Up' on 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> July 2019 (*LGA Follow-Up Report contained in Appendix 6*). This followed on from their initial Corporate Peer review which took place in 2016. In particular, LGA recommendations included '*Utilise informal and formal relationships to maximise influence and leverage, as part of the Council's 'leadership of place' role*', '*Review the democratic decision-making arrangements, including Overview and Scrutiny*' to better enable councillors to have a timely and proportionate opportunity to inform, influence and challenge decision making and policy development' and '*Consider how corporate leadership, organisational capacity and capabilities need to develop further to ensure that the Council has the skills and resources aligned to deliver future priorities*'. Since taking control of the Council in May 2021, Cannock Chase Conservative Group and, in particular Cabinet, have focused their energies on strengthening relations with partner organisations and further developing new relations. Although the Leader, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Portfolio Holders sit on formal boards and attend formal meetings with such organisations, focus has tended to be concentrated on introductory meetings and building relations in an informal manner.

Cannock Chase District Council is currently an active Member of two Local Enterprise Partnerships, Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP (GB LEP) and Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent LEP (SS LEP). The LEPs are locally owned and managed partnerships between local authorities and businesses which work together to help drive economic growth and support job creation. Cannock Chase Cabinet Members hold a number of roles operating within the LEPs which include the Deputy Leader of the Council who sits on the GB LEP, the Deputy Leader of the Council who sits on the GB LEP Supervisory Board and the District Development Portfolio Holder sits on GB LEP ESIF Committee. The District Development Portfolio Holder also sits on the SS LEP ESIF Committee.

In addition to this, both the Leader of the Council and Deputy Leader (also Community Safety and Partnerships Portfolio Holder) also regularly meet with the newly elected Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (PFCC), Ben Adams, to help identify and tackle any emerging issues and trends, whilst also helping to align wider priorities. These meetings take place in addition to the PFCC Panel which meets formally on a regular basis and is attended by the Community Safety and Partnerships Portfolio Holder. Similarly along the line of tackling crime and community safety, the Community Safety and Partnerships Portfolio Holder holds regular meetings with the local Chief Inspector, and attends meetings of the local Community Safety Hub which has again adopted a multi-partnership approach to tackling issues.



Within the Environment and Climate Change remit, the Portfolio Holder attends Cannock Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Joint Management Committee. This is of paramount importance given our locality and that the fact that we are lucky enough to have Cannock Chase on our doorstep. This is of upmost importance when considering distinct District identity later on in this submission.

The full list of Cabinet appointments is attached (*Appendix 7*).

Finally, in respect of partnerships, the new Cabinet are looking to establish closer working arrangements and methods of communication with both the Town Councils and Parish Councils within Cannock Chase. To that effect the Chief Executive is currently working to set up and establish regular meetings with the clerks of neighbouring lower tier Council in addition to a larger District/Town/Parish forum whereby each Council can consult and inform surrounding Council of local initiatives.

With regards to Scrutiny, the new administration are currently looking to work with Scrutiny Chairs to adapt the manner in which it currently operates to enable a greater focus on policy creation and periodic review. This would enable greater member influence over the implementation of policies, provide a more dynamic oversight of strategic direction and, it is hoped, a greater degree of meaningful scrutiny. At the request of Cabinet, a Scrutiny training session was recently provided so as to encourage cross party members and to encourage all members increase their participation. The natural introduction of these proposals will be alongside the new Corporate Plan and at the same time as increasing the number of scrutiny meetings for three to four.

The proposals to the Corporate Plan as already outlined allow for further consideration surrounding corporate leadership and strategic delivery plans will be developed as part of this implementation. This, again, will enable an opportunity for realignment in respect of workloads and consideration as to capacity.

Further to this, Margot Worton, Associate Consultant produced a report on behalf of West Midlands Employers (*Appendix 8*) in 2020 which also considered issues, including capacity. The report was commissioned by the former Leader of the Council with the aim of reviewing the Council's Management Structure, with a particular emphasis on concerns relating to capacity. Again, that report highlighted the importance of service reviews at that time and recommended that corporate priorities and strategic direction be agreed and clearly communicated, confirming the sort of Council that Cannock Chase District Council is to become and to identify any changes that are needed to the structure in order to support that. In addition to this, it was advised that consideration should be given to determine what transformation at Cannock Chase District Council will look like along with what resources and structure is needed in order to support implementation. West Midlands Employers noted that a smaller strategic team with an addition layer of management at an officer level may be a viable option for future consideration.

As a result of the issues outlined above, in addition to the resignation of the former Managing Director, the Council voted unanimously to begin sharing a Chief Executive with Stafford Borough Council on a temporary basis (*Council Report in Appendix 9*) on 17<sup>th</sup> May 2021 (the new administrations first full Council). The initial arrangement covers a period of 14 months whilst a business case is developed which considers the wider expansion of shared services, including options of sharing an officer Leadership Team and/or the continuation of a shared

Chief Executive. The political leadership of both Councils are clear that the Councils themselves will remain distinct and retain their different identities. Work is ongoing in this respect.

During this period, changes in respect of commissioning and scanning the horizon for commercial opportunities have been considered. In 2012, the Council outsourced leisure and cultural services which are now delivered through a Trust and managed by Inspiring Healthy Lifestyles. Inspiring Healthy Lifestyles work closely with officers and member input is sought in respect of strategic and directional decisions. This arrangement works well for the Council and the strength of the relationships between managers, officers, trustees and members have been of particular benefit during the pandemic when difficult decisions were required against a backdrop of great uncertainty.

In addition to this, the Council also previously outsourced waste collection to a commercial operator, Biffa. Again, the contract is managed through similar arrangements as outlined above with the Environment and Climate Change Portfolio Holder sitting on a Poplars Landfill Site Liaison Committee, which is where Biffa operate from. Both the Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Environment and Climate Change and Lead Officer also sit on the county wide, Staffordshire and Stoke-On-Trent Joint Waste Management Board which is creating a Staffordshire wide Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy and ensuring the effective management of municipal waste across the county. This work is now paramount in light of the national, indeed international, priority of tackling Climate Change and working towards Zero Carbon Targets.

Both the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive now sit on a Staffordshire Leaders Board (since May 2021 all Staffordshire Councils are now politically aligned) which aim to ensure that Councils across the county are working together as a collective to learn from each other, implement best practice, reduce waste, review resources and, where suitable, develop a joint strategic vision, such as through the current work being undertaken to develop a County Deal. The Staffordshire Destination Management Partnership has also been reviewed and recently updated to enable Staffordshire Councils to collectively develop a joint tourism strategy and promote 'Destination Staffordshire'. The District Development Portfolio Holder sits on the Staffordshire Destination Management Partnership.

Although the above services have been outsourced, the Council proudly retain a Housing Revenue Account and housing stock which includes 5,090 properties. To service those properties, Cannock Chase District Council manages an in-house repair and maintenance team.

The Government's Levelling Up White Paper intends to build on the collaborative approach adopted during the Covid-19 pandemic and it looks at resetting the relationship between Central Government and Local Government. From this, Councils may take a greater role in delivering national priorities through an increased devolution of authority. This may present an opportunity to take a much more localised approach to ensure integrated skills and employment offers tailored specifically to the needs of the local economy within Cannock Chase and our residents, which would in turn help to strengthen our individual communities across Cannock Chase and allow strong local leadership. Our new Digital Skills Centre is an example of this. Our recent work and forthcoming proposals to strengthen local partnerships and to work closely with local councils will ensure that we are best placed to utilise such opportunities, should they arise. The benefits of such working can already be evidenced through the collective approach that the new administration took in respect of our 'Levelling



Up Bid' which resulted in the Council successfully securing £20 million funding announced in November 2021.

In addition to this, Cabinet's collective work with other Staffordshire Councils, including Staffordshire County Council, has resulted in suggestions for a County Deal being submitted for Government consideration with feedback pending. County deals are a nationally proposed mechanism by the Government to deliver sub-national devolution in England. Staffordshire's proposed County Deal was one of the first bespoke agreements to be submitted for Government consideration.

Our proposal suggests the optimum size of the Council to be 37 councillors.

We feel that the current number of 41 exceeds the requirements of the 74,684 electors across Cannock Chase. The role of a councillor has changed significantly over the last decade, with the development of technology and instant communication channels lessening the administrative burden. All formal papers are now available electronically and research resources are available through the Council's intranet and portal greatly reducing the time spent at the Civic Centre.

Due to this, we feel that councillors are instead expected to take a much more active role championing the local communities that they are elected to represent and undertaking an active part in leading community initiatives. The move towards a greater number of virtual meetings has been helpful. Despite the fact that formal meetings such as Councils or Committees are not permitted by legislation to take place virtually, a number of the more informal meetings that councillors are expected to attend such as working groups, Group meetings and some meetings of outside bodies have remained online, or in a hybrid format.

A reduction in the number of would better align us with similar neighbouring authorities, with the median number being 36 on the 2021 CIPFA Group and Councillor Counts. In consulting as a Group prior to this submission, we considered 36 with this being devisable by three and therefore enabling potential wards to be set with three councillors. However, we felt that an even number could present avoidable difficulties due to the potential lack of a majority.

Looking to 37, it would provide an approximate ratio of 2,074 electors per councillor. We do, however, acknowledge that it may remain the case that a mix of both two and three councillor wards be required. A total of 37 councillors would enable all outside body positions to be adequately fulfilled and, if the current size of the Cabinet is retained at 7, then it would effectively ensure that the Cabinet could be held to account as approximately four fifths of the Council would be available to undertake the scrutiny function. The overall size of the Scrutiny Committees would be reduced proportionately to reflect the make up of the Council. At 37, the Executive would represent 19% of the Council.

In addition to this, if the Council consists of 37 councillors then any political group would need at least 19 for a majority. With a Cabinet of 7, it would always be less than 50 of the controlling Group. Again this ensures further checks and balances as it ensures that the Cabinet are unable to overpower the controlling group of the same political alignment.

**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?

Cannock Chase is one of eight Districts which collectively form the County of Staffordshire. Cannock Chase borders with Lichfield, South Staffordshire, East Staffordshire, Stafford Borough and Walsall Metropolitan Council. Although situated just to the north of Birmingham, Cannock Chase remains separate from the wider West Midlands conurbation.

Primarily, the District of Cannock Chase comprises of three principal towns of Cannock, Rugeley and Hednesford which are surrounded by a rich rural environment consisting of Cannock Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), two areas of Special Areas of Conservation (SAC), three sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and thirty sites of Biological Interest. Amongst the rural landscape, there are many local nature reserves and conservation areas across Cannock Chase, seventy listed buildings and scheduled ancient monuments which include the Church Yard Cross at St. Luke's Church (Cannock), Castle Ring (Cannock Wood), Moated Site and Bloomery at Courtbanks Covert (Cannock Wood), a World War I trench system in Cannock Chase.

The three principal towns are surrounded by a number of smaller villages, all with very distinct identities, communities and characteristics. These include Etching Hill, Slitting Mill, Brindley Heath, Brereton, Ravenhill, Hednesford, Green Heath, Church Hill, High Town, Chads Moor, Broomhill, Old Fallow, Littleworth, Wimblebury, Rawnsley, Prospect Village, Cannock Wood, Heath Hayes, Hawks Green, Stoney Lea, Cannock, Rumer Hill, Bridgtown and Norton Canes and Pye Green.

The District was formerly a coal mining community and, prior to that, a collection of small market towns. Following the closure of the last nearby coal mine in Huntington, Littleton Colliery, in 1993 there has been significant change in the local area. The Power Station became the centre of local industry but, in 1996, Rugeley Power Station A closed. Many years later that was followed by Rugeley Power Station B in 2016. Retail, logistics, fulfilment and distribution gradually increased locally, eventually emerging as the dominant local industry with the development of the Amazon Fulfilment Centre on the Towers Business Park in Rugeley, the construction of Kingswood Lakeside in Cannock, the construction of the Orbital Plaza (including a hotel), the Orbital Retail Park and Cannock Gateway Park. More recently, we have welcomed McArthurGlen's £160 million West Midlands Designer Outlet which opened on 12<sup>th</sup> April 2021 with approximately 40 stores. The second phase of the development, which includes a substantial extension, is due to commence shortly following the success of phase 1.

In terms of local government structure, Cannock Chase is a two-tier area. Staffordshire County Council form the upper tier providing services which, amongst others, include education, highways and social care. Cannock Chase District Council are the lower tier authority responsible for providing planning, housing and waste collection services to name but a few.

The formation of Cannock Chase District Council occurred on 1<sup>st</sup> April 1974 when neighbouring Cannock and Rugeley Urban Councils merged and included Brindley Heath which previously fall within the boundary of the former Lichfield Rural District Council.

At present, the District is divided into fifteen wards and elections are held in cycles of thirds. The wards are Brereton and Ravenhill, Cannock East, Cannock North, Cannock South, Cannock West, Etching Hill and the Heath, Hagley, Hawks Green, Heath Hayes and Wimblebury, Hednesford Green Heath, Hednesford South, Hednesford North, Norton Canes, Rawsley and Western Springs. Cannock Chase is a mix of urban, commercial and residential developments.

In addition to Staffordshire County Council and Cannock Chase District Council, the District of Cannock Chase also has eight town and parish councils which form the lowest level of government in the District. The Town and Parish Councils include Brereton and Ravenhill Parish Council, Bridgtown Parish Council, Brindley Heath Parish Council, Cannock Wood Parish Council, Heath Hayes and Wimblebury Parish Council, Hednesford Town Council, Norton Canes Parish Council and Rugeley Town Council.

In terms of population, the last analysed Census was in 2011 which recorded a population of 97,462 living in 40,664 households. In terms of growth, the population of Cannock Chase increased by 0.65% between 2018 and 2019 to reach 100,762 residents. Since 2014, there has been a total population increase of 2.3%. There has been a greater number of birth than deaths, but the largest contributory factor to this growth was internal migration from neighbouring areas such as South Staffordshire, Lichfield and Walsall. In terms of density, Cannock Chase has approximately 1,277 per square mile which sits at the second highest district within Staffordshire.

On that Census, the vast majority of respondents identified as 'White British', although ethnic diversity within the district had positively increased since the Census prior to that which was undertaken in 2001.

A total of 62.9% of the population is deemed to be of working age between 16 and 64 years, which is above the West Midlands average of 61.7% and above the England average of 62.4%. However, 19.2% of the Cannock Chase population was aged over 65 years in 2019, again higher than the West Midlands average at 18.6% and England's average at 18.4%. An aging population is a factor that must be considered in the context of Cannock Chase, with a significant increase in residents aged 45+ having been identified between 2001 and 2011. The majority of this increase being in the age group of between 60 and 74 years. The average life expectancy for males in Cannock Chase is 78.7 years, ranging from an average of only 76 years in Cannock North to 83.6 years in Hednesford Green Heath. For females the average life expectancy rate is 82.2 years, ranging from 79.4 years in Western Springs to 102.3 years in Hednesford Green Heath.

Cannock Chase suffers with high Obesity rates that are above both the county and national averages. Looking first to reception aged children aged between 4 to 5 years that are deemed

to carry excess weight in accordance with the National Child Measurement Programme, the average across Cannock Chase is 25.5% (between 2017/2018 and 2019/2020), which again varies between wards with the average in Hagley decreasing to 21.2%, but Cannock East having the highest levels at 31.7%. Similarly, in children in Year 6 aged between 10 and 11 years during the same period the average carrying excess weight was above the England average of 34.3% at 36.5% and again with huge variations between wards, the highest percentage of children with excess weight falling within this age group was in Cannock East where it was a staggering 50%, and the lowest was in Hednesford Green Heath with 29.6%. In terms of adults within Cannock Chase, the data from Public Health England for the same period indicates that 74% of adults aged 18+ were deemed to be Obese, this being well above the average for England which sits at 62%.

Cannock Chase District Council is due to launch a new 'Cannock Chase Can' app this year which works to tackle both Obesity and the wider health inequalities with each of the local communities across Cannock Chase. In addition to this, it focuses more generally on helping residents to improve their lifestyles and over all wellbeing. An average of 31.1% of Cannock Chase residents are statically deemed to be living in the 'most deprived' areas in accordance with the Indices of Deprivation 2019 (national quintile). The highest area of deprivation in this respect was Cannock East with 41.8% of resident falling within that bracket. However, 9 of the 15 wards in Cannock Chase have 0% of residents falling into that category. Looking specifically to children, 17.2% of children under the age of 15 in Cannock Chase were deemed to be living in 'income deprived families', the most residing in Cannock North which has a rate of 30.2% with Hednesford South having the lowest rate at 7.4%.

Looking to education, the number of Key Stage 2 students achieving the nationally recognised standard in 2019 for reading, writing and maths was 61.2%, with huge variations between individual wards. Brereton and Ravenhill had the lowest attainment rates with 48.2%, and Cannock West having the highest at 82%. In older age groups, an average of 31.6% of students in Cannock Chase achieved a Grade 5 or above in English and Maths in 2019, the highest percentage being in 46.5% on Hagley to a low of 17.5% in Cannock North. Low attainment rates continually pose a challenge for the District. During that same period an average of 13.2% of children across Cannock Chase were eligible for free school meals, ranging from 27.1% in Cannock North down to only 4.4% in Hawks Green.

In terms of employment, in 2011 the largest proportion of residents in Cannock Chase identified as falling within the 16 – 74 age group and being employed in a 'skilled trade'. The most dominant employment industries being wholesale, retail, the repair of motor vehicles, construction, transportation, storage and distribution, namely due to the level of connectivity due to being surrounded by strong road and rail networks. On average, 5.4% of Cannock Chase residents aged between 16 and 64 years were claiming out of work benefits in March 2021 (which would have been impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic), with a high of 8.6% claiming such benefits in Cannock North, and lowest claimant rate being 3.4% in Hawks Green.

Looking now to future projections, the 2018 forecast indicated that the number of households in Cannock Chase would increase to 52,372 by the year 2043. This is a rise of approximately 21.8% and represents the highest increase in Staffordshire.

Referring back to the continually evolving demographics within the District, the projections indicate that leading up to 2043 aging households will continue to rise, with the largest growth being in households deemed to be 'older age'. Households where the majority of occupants

fall into the 75-to-84-year age bracket are expected to rise by 78.8% in this same period, whilst those aged 85+ are expected to vastly increase by 99.9% which is of concern. In addition to this, the number of single person households are expected to increase, in particular one-person, single households.

At present, work on a number of residential developments ongoing, including up to 2,300 new dwellings on the former Rugeley Power Station site, three developments in Norton Canes with up to 587 homes and a further 726 properties in Hednesford Green Heath. Such developments could potentially impact on the individual community identities, this is a particular concern for Norton Canes.

(DNA summary comparisons by District at Appendix 10 and DNA summary 2021 by wards at Appendix 11).

### 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	
<b>Governance Model</b>	<div> <div>Key lines of explanation</div> <div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ What governance model will your authority operate? e.g. Committee System, Executive or other?</li> <li>➤ The Cabinet model, for example, usually requires 6 to 10 members. How many members will you require?</li> <li>➤ 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.</li> <li>➤ 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?</li> <li>➤ 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.</li> </ul> </div> </div>
	<div> <div>Analysis</div> <div>As outlined when providing the Context to this proposal, our proposal is to continue with an Executive Model of</div> </div>



	<p>'Strong Leader and Cabinet' as outlined in Section 6 of the Council's Constitution (<i>Appendix 12</i>). This reflects the overwhelming preference expressed by our Group who feel that this best meeting the needs of both the Council and our communities, namely, to allow full accountability whilst ensuring all checks and balances are in place through the Overview and Scrutiny function (See <i>Appendix 1</i> for all Group responses and reasoning). Responsibility for functions will remain in accordance with Part 3, Section 13 of the Council's Constitution (<i>Appendix 13</i>).</p> <p>Within this, we would retain a Cabinet size of 7 which must include a Leader and a Deputy Leader (due to reasons as set out above) which represents 19% of the Council and would never be more than 50% of the Controlling Group. The allocation of Portfolio responsibilities to Cabinet Members will stay in accordance with Section 15 of the Council's Constitution (<i>Appendix 14</i>).</p> <p>The new Conservative administration are currently looking to work with Scrutiny Chairs to adapt the manner in which it currently operates to enable a greater focus on policy creation and periodic review. This would enable greater member influence over the implementation of policies, provide a more dynamic oversight of strategic direction and, it is hoped, a greater degree of meaningful scrutiny. At the request of Cabinet, a Scrutiny training session was recently provided so as to encourage cross party members and to encourage all members increase their participation. The natural introduction of these proposals will be alongside the new Corporate Plan and at the same time as increasing the number of scrutiny meetings from three to four.</p> <p>In terms of the formation of strategic and operational policies, the thought process behind this is to enable Cabinet to refer policy proposals to Scrutiny for consideration and cross-party analysis and/or community consultation prior to a final vote on implementation being taken by Cabinet. It is hoped that the Scrutiny Committees will also retain the ability to periodically review policies and, where necessary, make recommendations for improvement to Cabinet.</p> <p>Our proposals would also retain a 'Shadow Cabinet' as referred to earlier in this paper and as outlined in Section 7 of the Council's Constitution (<i>Appendix 15</i>).</p>
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<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>
	<b>Analysis</b>	<p>As outlined above, our proposals would retain the current 7 Portfolios which are as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) Leader;</li> <li>(2) Deputy Leader and Neighbourhood Safety and Partnerships;</li> <li>(3) Community Engagement, Health and Wellbeing;</li> <li>(4) District Development;</li> <li>(5) Environment and Climate Change;</li> <li>(6) Housing, Heritage and Leisure; and</li> <li>(7) Innovation and High Streets.</li> </ul> <p>As previously stated, the allocation of Portfolio responsibilities to Cabinet Members will stay in accordance with Section 15 of the Council's Constitution (<i>Appendix 14</i>) and all Executive functions (as defined by Statute) will be exercised by the Leader and the Cabinet. As is currently the case, the Leader determines which executive functions will be the responsibility of the Cabinet collectively and which shall be the responsibility of each Portfolio Leader. Any executive functions not allocated to the Cabinet collectively or to a Portfolio Leader shall be the responsibility of the Leader in accordance with Section 14 of the Council's Constitution (<i>Appendix 3</i>). The majority of decisions will be taken collectively by Cabinet during formal Cabinet Meetings, as is currently the case. The Cabinet does not and would not wish to utilise the legal powers available in respect individual executive decision making (they would however continue to remain responsible for speaking on matters falling within their remit at Council, Cabinet, Committee meetings, or any other meetings to which they may be requested to attend.</p> <p>All decisions would then remain subject to the 'Call In' procedure as outlined in Part 4, Section 31 of the Council's Constitution (<i>Appendix 16</i>).</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>
	<b>Analysis</b>	<p>As outlined previously, the responsibility for functions will remain in accordance with Part 3, Section 13 of the Council's Constitution (<i>Appendix 13</i>).</p>

		<p>In accordance with Section 14 of the Council's Constitution (<i>Appendix 3</i>) the Executive may delegate any of its functions to Officers of the Council where the law permits.</p> <p>For the time being, our proposals would include retaining the current Scheme of Delegations as outlined in Section 26 of the Council's Constitution (<i>Appendix 17</i>). This could, of course, be subject to future constitution change should any amendments be considered and subsequently recommended to Full Council by either the Constitutional Working Group, Cabinet or new Shared Services Board who are working to develop a business case for the future of Shared Services as mentioned earlier in this submission.</p> <p>Cabinet functions will be discharged collectively by Cabinet in accordance with Section 30 of the Council's current constitution (<i>Appendix 18</i>). The quorum for a meeting of the Cabinet shall remain at 3 Cabinet members, just under 50% of the Cabinet.</p> <p>In relation to major decision, the Cabinet may make a recommendation to Full Council. Decisions of Full Council would be made in accordance with Section 27 of the Council's current constitution (<i>Appendix 19</i>), which requires that at least 25% of Full Council be present in order for the meeting to be deemed quorate.</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.
Key lines of explanation	<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? 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> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <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>Our proposals would enable decision makers to be held to account through the Overview and Scrutiny function.</p> <p>As outlined previously within this submission, we propose to increase the number of Scrutiny Committees to from three to four to reflect the Council's new priorities. The Council currently has three committees which are Economic Recovery, Financially Resilient Council and Health and Wellbeing. The remits of the four new Committees will align with the 4 priorities of the new Corporate Plan which are '<i>To reinvigorate Cannock Chase and create a District that thrives</i>', '<i>To empower residents to lead healthy, sustainable and independent lives</i>', '<i>To ensure Cannock Chase is a place that residents are proud to call home</i>' and '<i>To ensure that we are a modern, forward thinking and responsible Council</i>' (Initial drafts contained in Appendix 4). We feel that these proposals to change and increase the number of Committees will not only encourage stronger scrutiny by providing each committee with a clear, well-defined remit, it will also create a fairer balance in respect of workload. There are currently three committees and one covers a far greater remit than the other two.</p> <p>In line with our proposed reduction to the size of the Council, we propose that the political make up of those committees proportionately reflect the overall makeup of the Council. The size would also be proportionately reduced. As is currently, we propose that the controlling Group take the Chair positions, with the Opposition taking Vice Chair positions as this works well at present. The Leader of each Political Group, in private consultation with their Group, determines the appointment to each Committee which enables them to take account of each members preferences, time commitment and workload. In addition to this, each Political Group Leader also has the opportunity to appoint and train a 'substitute member' who is then able to step in should any apologies be given.</p> <p>As previously mentioned, the new administration are currently looking to work with Scrutiny Chairs to adapt the manner in which it currently operates to enable a greater focus on policy creation and periodic review. This would enable greater member influence over the implementation of policies, provide a more dynamic oversight of strategic direction and, it is hoped, a greater degree of meaningful scrutiny. At the request of Cabinet, a Scrutiny training session was recently provided so as to encourage cross party members and to encourage all members increase their participation. The natural introduction</p>

		<p>of these proposals will be alongside the new Corporate Plan and at the same time as increasing the number of scrutiny meetings from three to four.</p> <p>The Committees currently meet four times per year but this could be determined and reconsidered at the time that such changes are implemented.</p> <p>At present, each Scrutiny Committee has the ability to set-up informal 'Task and Finish' groups to focus in on particular aspects of their work. This is used often and is very much of an informal arrangement, allowing the Committee themselves to determine the make-up, format and frequency of such meetings – they are usually not facilitated by an officer. Any 'task and finish' group reports back or makes recommendations to the wider Scrutiny Committee, which then follows the usual, formal procedure of making recommendations to Cabinet or Full Council. Our proposals do not wish to change these arrangements.</p> <p>In terms of Council's officer structure, there is no dedicated Scrutiny Officer in post. Administration support is provided by Democratic Services, with the named 'lead' officer for each Committee being the relevant 'Head of Service'.</p> <p>In addition to the formal Scrutiny Committee structure, there is also the formal 'Call-In' procedure in place which enables Cabinet decisions to be called in for scrutiny and review in accordance with Part 4, Section 31 of the Council's Constitution (<i>Appendix 16</i>). This works well although there have only been four 'call-in' meeting in the past 12 years. We do not propose to change this.</p>
<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>	<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<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>
	<b>Analysis</b>	The Planning Control Committee is currently a council-wide committee which comprises of 15 elected members and

		<p>functions in accordance with Section 17 of the Council's Constitution (<i>Appendix 20</i>).</p> <p>As all Members sitting on the Planning Committee require specialist training, each Political Group Leader also has the opportunity to appoint and train a 'substitute member' who is then able to step in should any apologies be given. The Leader of each Political Group, in private consultation with their Group, determines the appointment to each Committee which enables them to take account of each members preferences, time commitment and workload.</p> <p>As with the other Committees, the Chairman is a member of the controlling group and the Vice-Chairman from an opposition Group, Chase Community Independents &amp; Green Group.</p> <p>Both the Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Community Engagement, Health and Wellbeing and the Portfolio Holder for Housing, Heritage and Leisure currently sit on the committee. There is usually least one Cabinet member serving.</p> <p>At present, the committee meets on a three-weekly basis, but it is proposed to reduce this to a four-weekly cycle with effect from May 2022. The proposed reduction in the frequency of meetings would provide additional time for officers to write reports and prepare for each meeting, as well as more time after each meeting for any follow up work.</p> <p>In a number of instances, once the Committee have had the opportunity to review the papers, they take the decision to make a site visit. This is then scheduled for the following meeting, which is also when the Committee consider the application.</p> <p><b>Awaiting information on number of applications determined by Committee</b></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 is currently a Licensing and Public Protection Committee and 10 elected Members sit on this Committee. Again, the Leader of each Political Group, in private consultation with their Group, determines the appointment to each Committee which enables them to take account of each members preferences, time commitment and workload. Also, each Political Group Leader also has the opportunity to appoint and train a 'substitute member' who is then able to step in should any apologies be given.</p> <p>The Committee does not have a formal schedule of meetings but instead meets on an ad-hoc basis when there is a requirement to consider updates to policies, responses to</p>

		<p>consultations and determine applications (excluding those submitted under provisions of the Licensing Act 2003). To provide an overview, the Licensing and Public Protection Committee met twice in 2018/2019, three times in 2019/2020 and once in 2020/2021.</p> <p>As mentioned earlier in this submission and as with the other Committees, the Chairman of the Committee is a Conservative member (and the current Deputy Leader of the Council) and the Vice-Chairman is an opposition Labour member.</p> <p>The Licensing and Public Protection Committee delegates to the Licensing Sub-Committee all of its functions under the Licensing Act 2003. Members are then appointed to sit on the sub-committee meetings based on their availability at the time. As with the main committee, meetings of the sub-committee are only convened when required. Again, to provide an overview the Sub-Committee met twice in 2018/2019, once in 2019/2020 and twice in 2020/2021.</p> <p>The Licensing and Public Protection Committee functions in accordance with Section 19 of the Council's Constitution (<i>Appendix 21</i>) and the Sub-Committee in accordance with Section 18 (<i>Appendix 22</i>).</p>
<b>Other Regulatory Bodies</b>	Key lines of explanation	<p>➤ <i>What will they be, and how many members will they require?</i></p> <p>➤ <i>Explain the number and membership of your Regulatory Committees with respect to greater delegation to officers.</i></p>
	Analysis	<p>The Council has both a Standards Committee and Audit &amp; Governance Committee which undertake regulatory duties. The Standards Committee function in accordance with Section 20 of the Council's Constitution (<i>Appendix 23</i>) and the Audit &amp; Governance Committee functions in accordance with Section 21 (<i>Appendix 24</i>).</p> <p>Seven elected Members as chosen by Political Group Leaders sit on each of the Committees and they are both scheduled to meet four times per year, although meetings are regularly cancelled if there is no business to discuss. In addition to elected Members, an 'Independent Person' also sits on the Standards Committee alongside representatives from each of the eight parish and town councils located in the District (who also fall under the rules of the Standards Committee). Both the Independent Person and parish and town members are non-voting members of the Committee. Each political Group Leader also elects a 'substitute' for both Committees, should they be required if any apologies are submitted.</p> <p>Again and as with the other Committees, the Chairman is from the controlling Conservative Group and the Vice-Chairman from the Labour opposition.</p>



<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.
<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <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></li> <li>➤ <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></li> <li>➤ <i>What other external bodies will members be involved in? And what is the anticipated workload?</i></li> </ul>
Analysis	<p>As outlined earlier in this submission, the Leader, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Portfolio Holders are appointed to sit on decision-making partnerships, sub-regional, regional and national bodies. Such bodies include Cannock Chase Area of Outstanding Beauty Joint Management Committee, Cannock Park Golf Club Committee, GB LEP Board, GB LEP Supervisory Board, GB LEP ESIF Committee, Local Government General Assembly, Chase Community Partnership, Norton Canes Community Partnership, PATROL (Parking and Traffic Regulations Outside London) Joint Committee, Poplars Landfill Site Liaison Committee, Staffordshire Destination Management Partnership, Staffordshire Police, Fire and Crime Panel, Community Safety Hub, Staffordshire and Stoke-On-Trent Joint Waste Management Board, Staffordshire Playing Fields Association, Stoke-On-Trent and Staffordshire LEP ESIF Committee and West Midlands Employers (Cabinet appointments are outlined in <i>Appendix 7</i>). In addition to these meetings, the Leader of the Council attends a regular meeting with all Staffordshire Leaders and CEO and the Economic Growth Board. The Deputy Leader also meets regularly with the Chief Inspector and attends regular meetings with the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner.</p> <p>The Leader of the Council, in private consultation with Cabinet, determines each appointment taking into account of each members preferences, time commitment and workload. Cabinet appointments are chosen to align with Portfolio remits. In meetings where Cabinet Members hold voting rights, they do take general decisions. However, specific decisions relating to the particular Partner organisation and the Council, particularly if there are financial considerations, will be take collectively by Cabinet through the formal Cabinet channel. Cabinet representatives appointed to external bodies are responsible for providing updates to the external body and feeding any relevant information back to Cabinet by way of a full update.</p> <p>More widely, the Council appoint representatives to 30 outside bodies, such as community groups, local societies, charities</p>

	and sports organisations based across Cannock Chase. These appointments do not have to be Cabinet members (but can be) and, on some bodies, there may be more than one appointment. There is no formal procedure for selecting these appointments, however, Political Group Leader tends to make a recommendation. Group Leaders will make such suggestions having privately discussed this with the potential appointee, taking into account their experience, preferences, time commitments and workload. All positions then have to be voted on/ratified at Council's Annual General Meeting. The full list of outside body appointments is detailed in <a href="#">Appendix 25</a> ).
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## 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>➤ <i>In general terms how do councillors carry out their representational role with electors?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Does the council have area committees and what are their powers?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>How do councillors seek to engage with their constituents? Do they hold surgeries, send newsletters, hold public meetings or maintain blogs?</i></li> <li>➤ <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></li> <li>➤ <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></li> <li>➤ <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></li> </ul>
	Analysis	Ahead of drafting this submission, the Conservative Group undertook a SurveyMonkey survey and each of our 24 councillors were asked to identify the different manners in

		<p>which they engage with electors. The responses can be summarised as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monthly 'drop-in' surgeries at libraries, leisure centres and community centres.</li> <li>• Pre-arrange house visits;</li> <li>• Messaging facilities through social media platforms;</li> <li>• Emails (particularly in relation to casework);</li> <li>• Telephone communications (all councillors publish their contact numbers on the Council's website).</li> <li>• A number of our councillor have dedicated 'councillor' Facebook pages (such as Cllr Olivia Lyons, Councillor Martyn Buttery or Councillor Louis Arduino), others have set up Group pages dedicated to the wards/communities (such as the Heath Hayes, Wimblebury Councillors or Rugeley and Brereton Councillors);</li> <li>• Dedicated councillor 'Twitter' accounts;</li> <li>• Many of our councillors also sit as Parish and Town Councillors, others are not elected Parish or Town Councillors but choose to attend the meetings anyway to ensure they keep up to date;</li> <li>• Six of our District Councillors also sit on the County Council;</li> <li>• Community events such as fates, markets, sports events and fundraisers.</li> <li>• Members of community groups such as 'In Bloom' groups, environmental groups, community support groups, Covid-19 response groups, residents associations, church groups, litter picking groups, park adoption groups, amongst others. A number of councillor volunteer for such groups in their own time and hold Committee positions for these groups but this is personal choice to be made in light of their existing commitments, workload and time.</li> <li>• One of our councillors is a Director of a local Housing Charity.</li> <li>• Political seasonal newsletters and leaflets (we elect in thirds so campaigning tends to remain a priority all year round);</li> <li>• Door-to-door canvassing;</li> <li>• Next Door Neighbour App; and</li> <li>• Letters (regarding specific casework) or wider mail merged letters to update residents on particular issues.</li> </ul> <p>All answers of Conservative questionnaire in respect of this contained in <i>Appendix 26</i>.</p> <p>As mentioned, many (if not most) of Conservative councillors are active members of community groups such as 'In Bloom' groups, environmental groups, community support groups,</p>
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		<p>Covid-19 response groups, residents associations, church groups, litter picking groups, park adoption groups, amongst others. A number of councillor volunteer for such groups in their own time and hold Committee positions for these groups but this is personal choice to be made in light of their existing commitments, workload and time. Council candidates tend to be 'community champions' and therefore they are often members of such groups and active members within local communities prior to becoming a councillor.</p> <p>Although many councillors either sit on or attend regular Town or Parish Council meetings, the District Council does not currently have specific area Committees. As mentioned earlier, the new Cabinet are looking to establish closer working arrangements and methods of communication with both the Town Councils and Parish Councils within Cannock Chase. To that effect the Chief Executive is currently working to set up and establish regular meetings with the clerks of neighbouring lower tier Council in addition to a larger District/Town/Parish forum whereby each Council can consult and inform surrounding Council of local initiatives. We are also looking at how best to increase and enhance our engagement with community groups and third sector organisations.</p> <p>There are challenges in reaching and engaging with younger residents, although there is a Youth Council that has been sent up in one of our local towns, Rugeley. The local councillors work closely with the Youth Council and they are working collectively on a joint project. In addition to this, it is understood that a similar Youth Council is being established in Hednesford.</p> <p>As a political Group, we hold fortnightly Group meetings (more frequent if necessary, such as during the pandemic) so that we can ensure we are all kept up to date with what is going on and share information.</p>
<b>Casework</b>	<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<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>
	<b>Analysis</b>	<p>Again, prior to completing this submission we asked this question in a questionnaire that was distributed to the Conservative Council Group. The responses illustrated that the majority of councillors deal with their casework via email, however a fair percentage is also dealt with either over the</p>

		<p>telephone, via social media 'messenger' platforms or with face-to-face appointments. Three councillors confirmed that they received the vast majority of their casework via email, tended to deal with it and then respond to residents via letter making use of the electoral register.</p> <p>All councillors confirmed that the majority of casework falling within Cannock Chase District Council's remit is dealt with via email by sending the enquiry onto the relevant officer (using the officer directory provided upon election) and then they continue to keep the residents updated and follow up as the matter progresses. Occasionally, enquiries are dealt with over the phone and communications are also made to officers over the telephone. There are no specific officers designated to assist Councillors with their casework, it instead tends to be directed to the relevant Head of Service who then forwards it on the relevant member of their team.</p> <p>The Group tend to have a rule that councillors tend to try to assist and support a resident, however they can. If a enquiry relates to a matter falling within the remit of the County Council then councillors will either refer and discuss the matter with the County Councillor for their area, or report it on behalf of the resident via Staffordshire County Council's 'Report It' online facility and continue to keep the resident updated. We try no to say 'this is outside of our responsibility'. There are instances where we refer residents to our local Member of Parliament, Amanda Milling.</p> <p>Similarly, if an enquiry relates to a third party such as GP surgeries, rail companies, Schools, utility companies, Canal and River Trust etc then we again would explain to the resident that the enquiry falls outside of our remit and we have no authority over third party organisations. We would however offer to make enquiries with the relevant third-party organisation on behalf of the resident and keep the resident updated as the matter progresses</p> <p>In terms of technology, all Conservative councillors now undertake most of their casework electronically. The general view of the group is that advancing technology has simplified casework, meaning matters can be dealt with in a more timely matter. However, in some instances, social media has caused problems by both making councillors appear accessible 24/7 and by making responses instantaneous. This does make it somewhat difficult to manage the publics expectations in some instances.</p> <p>As mentioned earlier, the move towards a greater number of virtual meetings has been helpful. Despite the fact that formal meetings such as Councils or Committees are not permitted</p>
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		by legislation to take place virtually, a number of the more informal meetings that councillors are expected to attend such as working groups, Group meetings and some meetings of outside bodies have remained online, or in a hybrid format.
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## Other Issues

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

## Reduction in the overall size of the organisation

Over the past fifteen years, the organisation itself has significantly reduced in size and there has been a cumulative reduction in core funding. Fifteen years ago, the higher tiers of the organisational structure at Cannock Chase District Council consisted of one Chief Executive, one Deputy Chief Executive, three Directors, ten Heads of Service and twenty-nine Service Managers. By comparison, the current structure consists of one Chief Executive currently shared on a temporary basis with Stafford Borough Council (with work ongoing to build a business case as to whether this is a viable longer-term option), five Heads of Service alongside a further three Heads of Service which are shared with Stafford Borough Council and twenty Service Managers. During the same fifteen years, there has been a 40% decrease in the overall staffing at a Senior Management level, this represents a decrease from 44 in 2007 to the current figure of 26.

The wider workforce has also significantly decreased over this period, with a change of approximately 28% between 2005 and the present day. This is the result of a number of factors, including the outsourcing of both the leisure and waste provision as discussed earlier. Reductions in staffing were also made when back-office services began to be shared with Stafford Borough Council, as referred to earlier, in addition to redundancies and the cessation of some services when previous measures were taken in order to deliver savings.

## Changes in customer behaviour

In an ever-evolving technological society, the expectations of the residents we serve is constantly changing. The Council has and continues to invest in technical advances and update its process, including the manner in which residents can report issues to the Council and make enquiries (including via direct email and social media). A recent example of this would be the new portal that has been developed to manage planning applications and the new, online payment systems. This makes the Council easier than ever to engage with and means that customers can deal with matters at a time that suits them given that online services are accessible 24/7. This reduces the likelihood and frequency of residents needing to directly contact elected representatives in order to request that they raise enquiries on their behalf.

## 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 suggests the optimum size of the Council to consist of 37 elected representatives.

In terms of strategic leadership, ahead of drafting this submission a survey was undertaken as mentioned previously and the majority of councillors within Cannock Chase Conservative Group agreed that the 'Strong Leader and Cabinet' Model serves the Council, and the communities that we represent, well. Overall, it was felt that primarily it provided both clear transparency and accountability. Whilst enabling the Leader and the Cabinet to provide strategic leadership, the system enables decision makers to be held to account by ensuring that the appropriate checks and balances are in place through the 'Call-In' procedure, the Overview and Scrutiny function and Shadow Cabinet.

As outlined above, the new administration reduced the size of the Cabinet from nine Portfolio Holders to seven Portfolio Holders in May 2021. The emergence of a far more collaborative approach within society in order to tackle emerging issues has been noted, and it is felt that this approach is now of utmost importance post Covid-19 pandemic. It was felt that internally, it was crucial that different departments and areas work together to achieve a similar approach by encouraging teams to work in tandem to achieve collective goals and eradicate silo working. This led to the reduction in Cabinet positions as it was felt that a number of portfolios could naturally be combined, with a single Portfolio Holder having wider oversight to avoid duplication and encourage awareness (for example, Community Engagement and Health and Wellbeing). Naturally this then led to a reduction in the size of the Shadow Cabinet which is designed to mirror the Cabinet. In drafting this response, our Conservative Group spent some time considering an alternative 'Committee Structure', however it was collectively felt that such systems tend to become too diluted, potentially leading to a lack of overall direction and accountability as has been experienced by a number of our Group's councillor who also serve on Town and Parish Councils that operate under a Committee structure.

In terms of the Scrutiny Committee framework, our proposals outline the proposed changes which are currently being considered to reflect the new Corporate Plan and to align with Council's four overarching priorities. In addition, from increasing the number of Scrutiny Committees from three to four, our proposals look to encourage greater cross-party engagement in respect of policy development where the current structure falls short. It is felt that this will provide each Committee with a clear, well defined remit whilst also ensuring a fairer distribution in terms of workload as under current structure one Committee has a significantly larger remit than the other two. The makeup of the Scrutiny Committees will continue to reflect the political make up of Full Council and the size of each Scrutiny Committee would reduce proportionally in size in accordance with the reduction of the overall size of Full Council, as suggested by our proposals. As Scrutiny Committees adopt a collaborative approach to the work they undertake, any proportional reduction in size is unlikely to make any significant impact. The continuation of the use of 'task and finish' groups will be at the discretion of each Scrutiny Committee as they currently work well.

The development of a new Corporate Plan will provide an opportunity to further consider any challenges currently faced by the Council's corporate leadership given that strategic delivery plans will be developed as an aspect of implementation. This, again will enable a chance for realignment in respect of workloads and officer capacity.

As is the case across the wider local government landscape, funding allocations to Cannock Chase District Council have decreased over recent years. In line with this, there has been an evident decrease in the overall size of the organisation over the past fifteen years including a 40% reduction in the Senior Leadership Team as outlined above and approximately a 28% reduction in the wider workforce with a number of services having been commissioned or ceased. In addition to this and as outlined above, work is ongoing in respect of developing a business case to further explore sharing additional services with Stafford Borough Council. The recent reduction to both the size of the Cabinet and our proposals to reduce the total number of councillors to 37 would further reflect and align with such reductions in terms of the Council's Political Leadership.

As outlined earlier in this submission, we feel that the current number of 41 exceeds the requirements of the 74,684 electors across Cannock Chase. The role of a councillor has changed significantly over the last decade, with the development of technology, the increase in popularity of either virtual or hybrid meetings and instant communication channels lessening the administrative burden. Alongside this and as mentioned previously, the expectations of the residents have shifted. Advances in technology have enabled and made it much easier for residents to report issues and make enquiries directly through the Council's direct channels of communication, including social media. This can be done at a time that suits them with online services accessible 24/7. Again, this reduces frequency and likelihood of residents needing to directly approach councillors.

Instead, councillors are expected to take a much more active role championing the local communities they serve and lead on community initiatives. This does not necessarily increase the workload of councillors, as candidates tend to be 'community champions' with the decision to stand as a local councillor being a natural extension of this role. Many councillors in our group were involved in the community aspect of their work many years prior to taking the decision to stand as a councillor.

As previously mentioned a reduction in the number of would better align us with similar neighbouring authorities, with the median number being 36 on the 2021 CIPFA Group and Councillor Counts. As a Group we considered 36 due to this being divisible by three and therefore enabling potential wards to be set with three councillors. However, we felt that an even number could present avoidable difficulties due to the potential lack of a majority.

Again, looking to 37, it would provide an approximate ratio of 2,074 electors per councillor. We feel that this would enable all outside body positions to be adequately fulfilled and, if the current size of the Cabinet is retained at 7, then it would effectively ensure that the Cabinet could be held to account as approximately four fifths of the Council would be available to undertake the scrutiny function. The overall size of the Scrutiny Committees would be reduced proportionately to reflect the make-up of the Council. At 37, the Executive would represent 19% of the Council.

In addition to this, if the Council consists of 37 councillors then any political group would need at least 19 for a majority. With a Cabinet of 7, it would always be less than 50 of the controlling Group. Again, this ensures further checks and balances as it ensures that the Cabinet are unable to overpower the controlling group of the same political alignment. In addition to this, it is again worth noting that Political Group Leaders make appointments to outside bodies taking account of each personal councillor preferences, time commitments, workload and flexibility.

In light of all of the above, we request that the Boundary Commission consider reducing the size of Cannock Chase District Council down to 37 councillors and we thank you in advance for taking the time to consider our submission.