

Bracknell Forest Council

Council Size Submission

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How to Make a Submission

1. It is recommended that submissions on council size follow the format provided below. Submissions should 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.
2. The template allows respondents to enter comments directly under each heading. It is not recommended that responses are should 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.

About You

3. 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, or an individual.

This submission is made by the full Council.

Reason for Review (Request Reviews Only)

4. 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

Local Authority Profile

Overview of Bracknell Forest

Bracknell Forest consists of a 1950's first generation New Town which has seen several phases of subsequent growth along with a number of older villages across a varied geographic area. The principle residential conurbation is the Bracknell New Town itself with secondary population centres built up around the historic towns and villages of Sandhurst, Crowthorne, Binfield, Warfield and Winkfield.

Each area has its own distinct identity or sub-identity and each is covered by the respective parish/town council areas.

Binfield

The village of Binfield is in the north of the Borough and is a traditionally self-contained community. A number of new, large residential developments has resulted in significant population growth in recent years which will continue as more of these dwellings are constructed and

occupied. There are community facilities, a library and shops situated towards the centre of the area which provide a focal point for the community.

According to the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) the least deprived areas within the Borough are situated in Binfield.

Bracknell Town

Established in 1949 as part of the post-war New Town development to help cater for post-war reconstruction and London overspill, the vision for Bracknell New Town was the development of seven self-contained neighbourhoods with their own shops, schools, doctors and other public facilities with a town centre devoted primarily to commercial development and other industry segregated away from residential areas. As a result individual local identities are particularly strong in these areas.

These self-contained communities have maintained their distinct characteristics, and each has well-established community hubs to which the local population looks. The original 1950's neighbourhoods of Priestwood, Easthampstead and Bullbrook were joined by further expansions in the decades following with Great Hollands, Harmans Water, Wildridings, Hanworth and Martins Heron developed at a later date.

Bracknell Town centre itself has undergone an extensive transformation and redevelopment in recent years which has brought about increased residential development in the area with a number of office conversions and new apartment buildings under construction. It is forecast that the town centre will have some of the most significant increases in residential growth over the coming years further changing the character and size of the area.

Given the nature of the future developments planned it is expected that the demographic profile of Bracknell Town centre will also change with a younger more transitional population occupying much of the new developments.

Crowthorne

Crowthorne is a village in the southern part of the Borough separated from Bracknell New Town by Swinley Forest (The Crown Estate). While most of the area is contained within Bracknell Forest Borough a portion of Crowthorne lies across the border and into Wokingham Borough.

The population of Crowthorne has been comparatively stable in recent decades but, future development on the site of the old Transport Research Laboratory will result in a significant increase of residential properties in the area.

Crowthorne is a generally affluent area with some of the lowest levels of deprivation in the Borough.

Sandhurst

Situated on the county border between Berkshire, Surrey and Hampshire, Sandhurst town maintains the second largest population centre in the Borough of Bracknell Forest. Sandhurst is geographically closer to Camberley (Surrey) than Bracknell Town itself.

Sandhurst, like the neighbouring village of Crowthorne, has some of the lowest levels of deprivation in the Borough.

Warfield

Warfield is a historic village in the north of the Borough again with particularly low levels of deprivation. Unlike other parts of the Borough that were developed with specific community areas in mind, the expansion of the Whitegrove development in Warfield focussed community facilities around a large supermarket where the library, parish council offices and community centre are also situated.

Winkfield

Winkfield completes the triple set of historic villages in the north of the Borough. Demographically similar to both Binfield and Warfield with low levels of deprivation it is a geographically large area with large rural spaces in between the population centres. The majority of residential properties are located in the North Ascot area of the parish with other residential properties along and off Chavey Down Road.

Boundaries

There are no notable natural boundaries within the Borough so the main through-roads or green spaces often act as accepted limits to urban areas with communities contained within. As detailed previously, where neighbourhoods were developed and specific community hubs established, communities have developed intangible borders along these lines. However, the A329(M) corridor does mark a distinct division running north west/south east through the Borough.

Bracknell Forest Borough is bordered by the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead in the north; Wokingham Borough to the South/West and Surrey Heath District to the east. Two parliamentary constituencies cover parts of the Borough. Bracknell Constituency encompasses most of the borough 'taking on' the additional areas of Wokingham Without and Finchampstead from Wokingham Borough Council. Windsor parliamentary constituency includes the three northern parishes.

Demographics and pressures

The population of Bracknell Forest is 121,676 (ONS 2018 estimate) of which 90.8% are UK Nationals. The remaining 9% is comprised largely of EU Citizens (5.9%), East Asian (0.8%), South Asian (0.8%) and Sub-Saharan African (0.8%). The most recent census (2011) showed the ethnic breakdown of Bracknell Forest is 84% white and 15.1% BME. There is a sizeable and settled Nepali community in Sandhurst connected to the Gurkha regiment at The Royal Military Academy.

Bracknell Forest is, in relative terms, a wealthy and affluent place to live with low levels of deprivation on average across the Borough. Specific pockets of deprivation (as measured by the Index of Multiple Deprivation) can be seen in several areas primarily centred in the Bracknell New Town area comparative to residents in the more affluent northern and southern areas of the Borough. The five most deprived areas in the Borough are all contained within Bracknell Town.

Council Size

5. The Commission believes that councillors have three broad aspects to their role. These are categorised as: Strategic Leadership, Accountability (Scrutiny, Regulation 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

6. 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.

Topic		
Governance Model	Key lines of explanation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>What governance model will your authority operate? e.g. Committee System, Executive or other?</i> ➤ <i>The Cabinet model, for example, usually requires 6 to 10 members. How many members will you require?</i> ➤ <i>If the authority runs a Committee system, we want to understand why the number and size of the committees you have represents is most appropriate for the authority.</i>
	Analysis	<p>Bracknell Forest Council operates an Executive/Scrutiny form of governance. There are no plans to change this model which has generally worked effectively since its introduction in 2001. The Council has always been “Member led” with councillors providing political and strategic leadership. There is a confident and assured distinction between Member and officer roles underpinned by close and effective working based on mutual trust and respect.</p> <p>The Council’s Constitution provides for the Leader to appoint at least two and no more than nine Executive Members to sit on the Executive with him/her. There are currently eight Executive Members (including the Leader). The Executive has broadly operated at this level since 2001.</p> <p>Given the nature of the Borough which sees significantly lower unemployment levels than the rest of the country it has been a driving factor that the Executive should be representative of the local community and in particular should not preclude those who work. Two of the current Executive Members are employed in full time positions and five work in a consultative or self-employed basis. One Executive Member does not have any paid employment.</p> <p>The Council has traditionally taken a number of key principles into account when determining the size of</p>

		<p>the Executive.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Executive roles should be open to all councillors. Therefore, portfolios should not be so large that they are unmanageable for those who work full-time or have commitments outside the Council. • Cross-cutting portfolios are more effective than those based on organisational structures which can change. • The Leader of the Council should not have a wide personal portfolio so that they can focus on leading. <p>As a Unitary Authority, the Council is responsible for all local government services in its area. Individual portfolios can be drawn up in a variety of ways however there are five large service blocks that must be covered: Adult Social Care, Children’s Social Care/Education, Environment, Planning, Economy. In addition, there must be scope for all other functions including finance, transformation, leisure, housing, public protection and so on.</p> <p>Although it might be feasible to have an Executive membership as low as seven, the wide range of responsibilities across the Council and the requirement to represent the Borough’s demographic, strongly indicate that for the Executive to effectively cover all the services provided by a Unitary Council, membership should be towards the top end of the range – 8 or 9 Executive Members including the Leader.</p>
Portfolios	<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>How many portfolios will there be?</i> ➤ <i>What will the role of a portfolio holder be?</i> ➤ <i>Will this be a full-time position?</i> ➤ <i>Will decisions be delegated to portfolio holders? Or will the executive/mayor take decisions?</i>
	Analysis	<p>The Leader has currently appointed an Executive of seven members in addition to himself, and each Executive Member has a portfolio as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adult Services, Health and Housing (Deputy Leader) • Children, Young People and Learning • Council Strategy and Community Cohesion (Leader) • Culture, Delivery and Public Protection • Economic Development and Regeneration • Environment

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning and Transport • Transformation and Finance <p>For the reasons set out above this allows effective oversight of services and there are no strong drivers to change the number of Executive Members.</p> <p>Executive Member responsibilities are set out in section 5 of the Council's Constitution.</p> <p>Executive Members liaise with partners and represent the Council externally on a number of organisations and joint committees/Boards. Executive Members also attend Overview & Scrutiny meetings and Portfolio Review Groups to give account of their actions and decisions.</p> <p>Being an Executive Member represents a significant time commitment. The Executive meets formally at least 10 times a year and Executive Members meet officers as required to take individual decisions. In addition, there are regular Executive and Leader's briefing meetings, and meetings with the Directors and senior staff responsible for services within their portfolios. Executive Members represent the Council at political meetings of local government associations and provide peer support to other authorities. These duties are carried out in addition to their representative role as a ward councillor and school governor.</p> <p>Although there is no full-time requirement for an Executive Member the challenges faced by the Council and its ambitions require a significant time commitment by Executive Members.</p> <p>Decision-making is taken collectively by the Executive and delegated to individual Executive Members depending upon the issue. In 2018/2019 there were 46 Executive decisions and 55 Executive Member decisions.</p> <p>Decisions are also delegated to Executive Committees, particularly concerning matters of political and strategic sensitivity. There are currently two such committees: Bracknell Town Centre Regeneration Committee and Commercial Property Executive Committee. Further details can be found in Part 2 Section 5 of the Constitution.</p>
Delegated Responsibilities	<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>What responsibilities will be delegated to officers or committees?</i> ➤ <i>How many councillors will be involved in taking major decisions?</i>

	Analysis	<p>Delegations to Officers</p> <p>The Council has agreed an extensive scheme of delegation to officers detailed in Part 2 Table 1 of the Constitution and the majority of decisions, particularly operational matters, are made by officers under delegated powers. The effective operation of the delegation scheme relies upon close co-operation and liaison between officers and Members.</p> <p>Delegations to Committees</p> <p>The Council discharges its function through a number of standing committees:</p> <p><u>Appeals Committee</u></p> <p>This comprises six Members. It meets relatively infrequently to determine school transport appeals.</p> <p><u>Employment Committee</u></p> <p>This currently comprises nine Members. It meets on average four times a year to maintain oversight of the Council’s HR policies and to determine all matters relating to the employment or dismissal of staff not otherwise delegated to officers.</p> <p><u>Governance & Audit Committee</u></p> <p>This comprises eight councillors and one independent member. It meets on average five times a year to consider the Council’s governance & audit functions. An important part of the role is to receive external audit reports to “those discharged with responsibility for governance”. The Committee advises on the Standards Framework for Members and considers any allegations of misconduct through Code of Conduct Panels drawn from its membership.</p> <p><u>Licensing & Safety Committee</u></p> <p>This comprises 15 Members, the maximum number permitted under legislation. It meets on average three times a year to discharge all functions required under the Licensing Act 2003, Health & Safety and relating to licensing and registration.</p> <p><u>Planning Committee</u></p> <p>This comprises one Member from each of the 18 wards to consider all planning matters not otherwise delegated to officers. Planning is inevitably one of the most contentious issues locally. The Planning Committee has operated with a varied size of membership since the last Boundary review and for a number</p>
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	<p>of years a decision has been taken to have a representative from each of the 18 wards. This ensures there is local representation involved in any significant planning decision and is an important local principle. This is however, at the limit of what is practically manageable. Therefore, if the number of wards were to increase, the Council would need to look at introducing area planning committees which is likely to increase the number of meetings and the involvement of councillors.</p> <p><u>Other</u></p> <p>Other committees include Appointment Committees and Personnel Appeals Panels which are established as required.</p> <p>Major Decisions</p> <p>All councillors are involved in agreeing the policy framework and all items included in it and in setting the budget at meetings of the Full Council. They support policy development and scrutinise budget proposals at overview and scrutiny meetings. Attendance by councillors at Council and Committee meetings is consistently high.</p> <p>An important local feature to ensure a wider group of Members can input to important Executive decisions are Portfolio Review Groups (PRGs). These have been introduced by the Majority Group to meet in advance of each Executive meeting to enable non-Executive Members to consider Executive reports and contribute their views before any decision is taken. PRGs do not constitute committees of the Council and have no decision-making responsibilities. The decision-making responsibility for Executive items remains with the Executive but the PRGs provide a forum for non-executive Majority Group Members to discuss reports which are due to be considered at the next meeting of the Executive and to advise the relevant Executive Member of their views on each item.</p> <p>Matters of Borough wide strategic significance are discussed by the Full Council even if the matter under consideration is for decision by the Executive, so that all councillors can be involved. The Executive will seek the views of the Council on its proposed response, resulting in an Executive decision which contains Council's views.</p>
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Accountability

7. 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.

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.
<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>How will decision makers be held to account?</i> ➤ <i>How many committees will be required? And what will their functions be?</i> ➤ <i>How many task and finish groups will there be? And what will their functions be? What time commitment will be involved for members? And how often will meetings take place?</i> ➤ <i>How many members will be required to fulfil these positions?</i> ➤ <i>Explain why you have increased, decreased, or not changed the number of scrutiny committees in the authority.</i> ➤ <i>Explain the reasoning behind the number of members per committee in terms of adding value.</i>
Analysis	<p>Decision makers are primarily held to account through the overview and scrutiny process. Executive Members and senior officers attend the Overview & Scrutiny Commission on a regular basis and each will be subject to an annual 'deep-dive' review.</p> <p>Overview & Scrutiny Arrangements</p> <p>The Council has adopted an innovative approach to scrutiny which relies on the active involvement of a significant number of non-executive Members to deliver effectively. This approach recognises the importance of non-executive Members' involvement in policy development and pre-decision input and scrutiny.</p> <p>The overview & scrutiny structure does not mirror officer or Executive Member structures. Instead it focusses on the thematic delivery of the Council Plan and is based on a strategic Overview & Scrutiny Commission and three Overview & Scrutiny Panels. The Overview and Scrutiny Commission needs to comprise a minimum of ten Members; the chairman and vice-chairman of the Commission, the six Panel chairmen and vice-chairmen; and at least two Members from the opposition parties. The current composition is twelve Members. The Commission meets nine times a year, following Executive meetings, to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a four-year strategic work programme aligned to the Council Plan following input from scrutiny members, the Executive, CMT, partners and the public, ensuring that it is flexible enough to accommodate urgent short-term issues. • Co-ordinate the work of the three thematic Panels to make the best use of available resources which will include allocating topics to Panels and agreeing the scope of activity. • Commission Panels to undertake deep dive reviews and focussed support and input to policy

development, chaired by the relevant chairman or vice-chairman.

- Prioritise scrutiny activity to ensure that the overview and scrutiny function concentrates on the delivery of work of genuine value and relevant to the work of the Council.
- Discharge the Council's crime and disorder responsibilities
- Discharge strategic health responsibilities
- Manage call-in
- Review the policy framework
- Scrutinise the budget proposals
- Hold the Executive to account for performance within the Council Performance Overview Report

Overview & Scrutiny Panels

The three Overview & Scrutiny Panels conduct focussed enquiries and deep dive reviews across a wide range of topics which support the delivery of the Council's objectives for the next four years. Each Panel is responsible for considering topics under two (of six) themes within the Council Plan 2019 - 2023. Activities range from 'one and done' Panel meetings to a number of six months' focussed reviews.

Each Panel has a core membership of eight. This is considered the minimum number of core Members to deliver the work programme effectively. All non-executive Members are invited to attend Panel meetings and contribute to reviews. This enables the overview & scrutiny function to tap into the skills and knowledge of Members across a wide variety of topics. This also allows working councillors to be involved effectively based on their availability, interests and knowledge.

The Council recognises the importance of an effective overview & scrutiny function that adds measurable value. As such two dedicated officers are provided to support the function and there is good engagement by senior officers in each service area across the Council for enquiry and review work. However, as the financial landscape becomes more challenging Members inevitably need to undertake more of their own research through thorough reading of evidence packs and by being involved in evidence gathering activities and then providing feedback to the relevant Panel.

One impact of this model is that it requires a greater time commitment from non-executive Members, not just in meetings but also in preparation and other activities. As a result, the Council needs an adequate number of non-executive Members to deliver the workload as the arrangements will not deliver to their full potential if Members are spread too thin. This has been taken into account for the purposes of this submission.

Statutory Function	This includes planning, licencing and any other regulatory responsibilities. Consider under each of the headings the extent to which decisions will be delegated to officers. How many members will be required to fulfil the statutory requirements of the council?	
Planning	<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>
	<i>Analysis</i>	<p>Determination of planning applications</p> <p>The current threshold for referring a planning application to Committee is five objections. This was raised from three to five in 2017 and has resulted in a reduction in the number of applications being considered by the Committee and a reduction in the length of meetings.</p> <p>For the first six months of 2019-2020 96% of decisions were taken by officers under their delegated powers. This has broadly been the pattern for the last few years. 2018-2019 saw a slight rise in the number of applications referred to Committee at Members' requests in line with the Council's procedure.</p> <p>The Council has one Council wide Committee and, although there is no proposal to change this arrangement, this would need to be reviewed if the number of wards across the Borough is increased. As explained earlier the Council believes that the Planning Committee should have a representative from each of the 18 wards. This is at the limit of what is manageable therefore if the number of wards were to increase the Council would need to look at introducing area planning committees which is likely to increase the number of meetings and the involvement of councillors.</p> <p>Executive Members can sit on the Planning Committee and there are four who do so this Municipal Year.</p> <p>Time commitment</p> <p>In the last 12 months the average Planning Committee has sat for 1.5 hours per meeting. The average length of Planning Committee meetings has decreased. In addition to meeting time, however, Members attend Saturday site visits, and viewing plans prior to each meeting. Members tend to attend site visits if there is a site of interest to them and can also propose sites to be visited from the agenda.</p> <p>The Planning Committee process has been streamlined and is now manageable for Members. There is limited capacity to make further changes that will reduce the workload significantly.</p>

		Although the time commitment at Planning Committees has decreased Members report an increase in their work as ward councillors to deal with planning matters. Importantly, it is anticipated that this increase in planning related ward work will continue to increase with the de-regulation of planning permissions where more small-scale works will go ahead without the requirement for an officer or Committee decision. This increase in work at the ward level has been recognised in this submission.
Licensing	<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>How many licencing panels will the council have in the average year?</i> ➤ <i>And what will be the time commitment for members?</i> ➤ <i>Will there be standing licencing panels, or will they be ad-hoc?</i> ➤ <i>Will there be core members and regular attendees, or will different members serve on them?</i>
	Analysis	<p>Licensing Panels</p> <p>There are on average seven Licensing Panels a year which sit for approximately 2.75 hours per hearing. There is approximately 1-2 hours required to prepare for the hearing.</p> <p>Panels are appointed as required. All members of the Licensing & Safety Committee are invited to put themselves forward for Panels, and Panel membership is rotated as much as possible based on availability. There is a core of nine Committee Members who regularly sit on Panels which provides some potential to reduce the size of the Licensing & Safety Committee to ten.</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 range of other committees and their membership is set out above. These are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appeals Committee • Appointment Committee • Employment Committee • Governance & Audit Committee • Licensing & Safety Committee • Personnel Appeal Panel <p>Appendix A sets out the membership of core committees, overview and scrutiny and working groups/panels, and shows the average number of seats overall per councillor based on a range of numbers considered. The current average is 4.5 seats per councillor. The information in the appendix demonstrates that the overall</p>

		<p>number, and hence the level of current average workload per Member, can be maintained with a reduction of the number of councillors to 40 provided some minor reductions to numbers of seats are made. The Council also has the flexibility to reduce numbers further in order to increase capacity for ward work although the figures show that this is marginal.</p> <p>Figures in respect of committees and panels/working groups that meet as required are not included. When they are required to meet this impacts on councillors' time commitment as preparatory reading and research is required in order to contribute effectively at meetings.</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 executive members serve on decision-making partnerships, sub-regional, regional or national bodies?</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>Partnerships and External Organisations</p> <p>Each Municipal Year the Council makes appointments or nominations to a number of external organisations, joint committees, panels, groups and partnerships. A number of these bodies are decision-making and /or have strategic significance. These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Berkshire Leaders' Group • Berkshire Local Transport Board • Berkshire Pension Fund Advisory Panel • Children & Young People's Partnership Board • Civilian Military Partnership • Downshire Homes Board Ltd which is a wholly owned subsidiary of the Council • Economic & Skills Development Partnership • Health & Wellbeing Board • Improvement & Efficiency Social Enterprise • Joint Minerals & Waste Plan Board (with Reading, RBWM and Wokingham) • Joint Waste Disposal Board (with Reading and Wokingham) • Local Government Association • PATROL (Parking and Traffic Regulations Outside London) Adjudication Joint Committee

- Public Protection Partnership Joint Committee (with West Berks and Wokingham)
- Royal Berkshire Fire Authority
- South East England Councils
- South east Strategic Leaders
- Standing Advisory Council on religious Education
- Thames Basin Heaths Joint Strategic Partnership Board
- Thames Valley Adoption Panel
- Thames Valley Berkshire City Deal
- Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership
- Thames Valley Police & Crime Panel (Joint Committee)

Executive Members represent the Council by being appointed to outside bodies at a ratio of 3:1 to non-executive Members. These outside bodies include decision-making partnerships, sub-regional, regional or national bodies directly related to their portfolio. Over the last four years all Executive Members have been appointed to external bodies, on average having six appointments each.

On average 77% of all councillors sit on external organisations. Over the last four years back benchers have, on average two appointments to external bodies each.

Councillors are nominated to voluntary sector organisations as representatives in a non-management capacity with no role in the governance of the organisation. Nonetheless, such roles are designed to allow councillors to act as conduits for communication between the Council and the organisation and as observers at the organisation's meetings. Where a councillor is nominated as a representative, they may not subsequently accept a role on the organisation's board as a Trustee/Director or in any other management capacity such as Treasurer, although they may accept these roles in their own capacity and several of them do so.

The time commitment will vary.

Community Involvement

8. 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?

Topic		Description
	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>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>
Community Leadership	Analysis	<p>A general expectation of work can be found in the Ward Councillor Role Profile: here</p> <p>Councillors undertake the following ward-based activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ward surgeries - Ward walks - Newsletters - Social media activity (Facebook, Twitter) - Participate in local community groups <p>In addition, the Council appoints five 'Champions' to act as a positive focus for the local community at elected Member level in respect of the relevant section of the community that they represent. These are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Commuters' Champion - Large Business Champion - Older People's Champion - Small Business Champion - Voluntary Sector Champion <p>These are all non-Executive Member roles. This requires an additional time commitment by these Members in addition to their community representative role and as members of committees, panels and working groups.</p> <p>Democratic Engagement</p> <p>A programme of democratic engagement activities is commissioned each year by the Council. This ranges from general marketing activities around democratic involvement, visits to schools, school council elections, taking part in local democracy week and 'Take Over' day. A range of Members are involved with these activities and average commitment of participating councillors is 5 - 10 hours a year.</p>

		<p>Community Meetings/Parish & Town</p> <p>Councillor participation at community meetings etc. varies across the Borough and individual ward activities. The Council can and does appoint some councillors to act as the Council's representative on several community groups in a non-managerial function.</p> <p>Some councillors attend a variety of community meetings as ward members, not directly appointed to do so by the Council.</p> <p>The Borough is fully parished. Good governance requires effective working relationships with the parish and town councils. Following the elections in May 2019 76% (32/42) of Borough councillors are twin-hatted and sit on both the Borough and a parish/town council. In order not to dilute both roles it is imperative to have an adequate number of councillors.</p>
<p>Casework</p>	<p><i>Key lines of explanation</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>How do councillors deal with their casework? Do they pass it on to council officers? Or do they take a more in-depth approach to resolving issues?</i> ➤ <i>What support do members receive?</i> ➤ <i>How has technology influenced the way in which councillors work? And interact with their electorate?</i>
	<p>Analysis</p>	<p>There is no case management system in place to support Members' ward work and Members each manage their ward work differently depending on a range of factors e.g. sensitivity, demographics, local issues etc.</p> <p>The most recent survey of Members' activity was undertaken in September 2019. Many Councillors report that they are increasingly required to take an in-depth approach to dealing with some specific cases where they have felt their input has been appropriate or necessary. This has resulted in an additional time burden on top of their normal duties. The planning de-regulation regime is increasing this workload.</p> <p>Members report spending between 30%-40% of their time on ward work i.e. activities that relate directly to dealing and responding to resident enquiries from their ward. Whilst in the main the level of work is manageable, its complexity is increasing. There are some national changes in the pipeline that may displace discussion from the Borough to the ward level impacting directly on councillors in their representational role. It is also likely that ward councillors will be required to deal with more residents' queries as a result of the challenging financial climate within which the Council continues to operate and an increase in unpopular decisions that may need to be taken.</p> <p>In order to enable the Council to reduce by two seats and maintain the split between ward work and Council business at its current level, consideration would be given to reducing the number of seats on committees. This</p>

		<p>is set out in appendix A – chart showing overall seats per Member for each council size.</p> <p>The pressure on Members’ time will grow as the elector:councillor ratio increases so it is important to ensure that the number of councillors is adequate to cover all the roles required and manage an increased ward workload.</p> <p>Member Support</p> <p>Members have access to officer expertise and time as required. There are dedicated teams for Member Services, overview & scrutiny and committees. The Member Services Team provides support to all Members (majority and minority groups) plus dedicated support to the Leader and the Mayor.</p> <p>All Members are provided with individual IT equipment and a Council email address. Members report that while IT has streamlined a range of their duties it has also altered residents’ expectations in terms of access, expected response times and the number of routine queries they receive that are ultimately passed onto officers.</p> <p>Members also have access to officers across the Council and are well supported in all their roles i.e. Executive, overview & scrutiny, Champion, committees, working groups and as ward councillors.</p> <p>A full learning and development programme is offered which ensures that Members can take proper and well-informed decisions and have all the skills and knowledge appropriate to their roles. Members report that they spend between 5-10% of their time on learning and development activities. It is vital that this level of commitment to continuous development continues and in order to ensure this the number of councillors should be set at a level to ensure that they are not spread too thin.</p> <p>Council Facing Activities</p> <p>The number of hours spent per week by Members on Council work varies significantly depending on a range of factors. i.e. whether a Member sits on the Executive, whether they are a Champion or whether they have specific ward-based issues that are particularly time-consuming.</p> <p>The most common number of hours spent by Members on Council based work ranges between 16-25 hours a week for a non-Executive Member.</p> <p>In terms of splitting activity this equates to, on average, 30%-40% of ward work i.e. resident facing activity and 30%-40% of Council facing work. i.e. preparing for and attending meetings.</p> <p>The remaining time is spent on learning and development activity and representing the council on outside</p>
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Other Issues

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

All issues are covered in the submission.

Summary

10. 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 number of councillors required to represent the authority in the future. Use this space to summarise the proposals and indicate any 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.

At 42 Members Bracknell Forest is already under the lower quantile of 49 for our 2018 CIPFA group and only one other member of that group has fewer councillors (40).

The Council's existing governance arrangements are working well and have been strengthened by recent changes to overview & scrutiny arrangements. However, the governance structure is relatively streamlined with only the Council, the Executive, five standing committees and the Overview & Scrutiny Commission meeting on a regular cycle. This structure is supported by six committees/panels and three overview and scrutiny panels meeting as required to discharge the Council's functions within their remit. There are no issues that indicate any significant changes to the Council's governance structure are required other than to review the allocation of seats.

Bracknell Forest is forecast to have significant population growth over the coming six years and beyond. A total of 4,064 new dwellings have planning permission and are forecast for construction in the years leading up to 2025. This is not taking account of smaller planning changes that increase population density in existing developments and other population trends.

Taking account of these changes the upper end of Bracknell Forest's own electorate forecast takes the Borough's electorate number to 107,406. Recognising that build out rates can vary and the possibility that not all developments will be occupied by 2025 a mid-point figure of 101,484 between the LGBCE's forecast and BFC's is proposed for the purposes of this submission. While this may mean that the elector:councillor ratio is lower in some areas when the new arrangements are introduced it allows for the reasonably anticipated increase in the population to be adequately absorbed within new arrangements reducing the risk of future electoral inequality and any subsequent governance issues that may arise from too significant a reduction.

A reduction to 40 should continue to make it possible for councillors who work to take an active part in the Council's regulatory and overview and scrutiny functions and to sit on the Executive.

The Council has considered other options. The first was to look at 32 councillors which is a 24% reduction in current numbers. The elector:councillor ratio that would result at 3171 is 14% above the 2018 CIPFA group median of 2729 and is close to the top of the upper quantile. This number would not provide sufficient capacity for the governance arrangements to be supported, even if membership was reduced significantly. Members would struggle to perform their representational role and would be spread too thin. This would have a particularly adverse impact on the Council's ability to attract councillors who work or who have commitments outside the Council.

The Council also considered 36. This represents a 14% reduction in current numbers with an elector:councillor ratio of 2819 which is 3% above the median. Purely considering the numbers of electors per councillor, a Council size of 36 or 37 could be justified. However, a reduction of six councillors would require significant reductions in committee membership and probably in the number of Executive Members. The risk remains that Members will be spread too thinly to be effective representatives or important roles would be confined to those with more time available. The concern is that this will dissuade working people from standing for election or taking on roles such as Executive Member or Chairman.

Reducing the number of councillors below 40 will compromise councillors' ability to fulfil all of their roles effectively and to adequately future proof their ability to support an increased electorate and more complex ward work.

A Council size of 40 represents a 5% reduction in current numbers and is a 7% lower elector:councillor ratio than the median. However, it is closer to the median than to the lower quantile. This affords the Council a degree of tolerance between electoral equality if developments do not proceed as planned and conversely allows the Council to absorb elector numbers at the upper end of the forecast if all developments are delivered by 2025. 40 also represents an adequate number of councillors to create a ward pattern with a lower elector:councillor ratio in those wards with higher levels of deprivation if this is considered appropriate. It provides good capacity for working Members to contribute effectively. There should also be capacity for Members to continue to take advantage of the robust learning and development programme to improve their skills and knowledge. There will be capacity to reduce the number of seats on some committees in order to free up more councillor time to deal with ward-based issues if the elector/councillor ratio increases beyond the anticipated number.

A Council size of 40 is equal to the smallest councillor count compared to 2018 CIPFA Group. Any greater reduction in numbers will dilute the Council's ability to meet future challenges to:

- provide effective representation to a larger electorate
- deliver new innovative overview and scrutiny arrangements
- respond at ward level to significant national changes in the pipeline such as planning deregulation

In summary a Council of 40 Members provides minimal disruption to the Council's sound governance arrangements. It allows Members to fulfil their roles as strategic leaders, community leaders and to deliver effective scrutiny, regulation and partnership working and future proofs against planned population growth.