

## **ELECTORAL REVIEW OF NEW FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL – COUNCIL SIZE SUBMISSION**

### **1. RECOMMENDATIONS**

That the Cabinet recommends to Full Council that:-

- (a) the proposed Council Size submission on behalf of New Forest District Council (Appendix 1) be approved and submitted to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE); and
- (b) authority be delegated to the Executive Head of Governance and Regulation, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, to make further editing changes, corrections and updates to the document prior to submission.

### **2. BACKGROUND DETAIL**

- 2.1 Views have been expressed by Members as far back as 2014 that the size of the Council could reduce. In September 2016, a Task and Finish (T&F) Group was established to consider the current position concerning an Electoral Review. After exploring various options and associated issues, the T&F Group recommended to the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Panel on 18 January 2018 that an approach be made to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) to review the District Council's electoral arrangements with the aim of reducing the numbers on the Council to approximately 48. The Cabinet endorsed these proposals on 7 February 2018 and the decision to make a formal request to the LGBCE was agreed by a large majority by the Full Council on 26 February 2018.
- 2.2 The last Electoral Review was carried out in 1999, prior to the introduction of the Local Government Act 2000 and the implementation of a Leader/Cabinet model in accordance with executive arrangements. Over time, this has brought about significant efficiencies to the way in which the Council has operated, and alongside streamlined decision making, has resulted in less need for as many elected members as historically to manage the Council's business. Furthermore, the emergence of the National Park Authority in 2005 as the Planning Authority for the area covering the national park, has brought about significant changes and a reduction to the number of planning applications dealt with by the District Council.
- 2.3 On commencement of the review, the Local Government Boundary Commission advised that even without the Council's request, their normal timetable had identified that the Council was due for a review in any event.
- 2.4 An Electoral Review comprises two key phases. Firstly, the determination of "Council Size" – that is, how many councillors are required for the Council to operate in the context of its governance and scrutiny arrangements, and the representational role of councillors in both their responsibilities to represent the Council on outside bodies and in their role as Ward Councillors.
- 2.5 The second phase of an Electoral Review involves the formulation of warding arrangements based on the LGBCE conclusion on Council size. Warding arrangements includes the number, names and boundaries of wards and the number of councillors to be elected in each ward.

- 2.6 The recommendations arising from this report deal solely with phase one of the Electoral Review, in determining the Council's official submission to the LGBCE on Council Size.

### **3. PROGRESS TO DATE**

- 3.1 The Cabinet established a new T&F Group in June 2019, chaired by the Leader of the Council, with the following terms of reference:-

1. To maintain a collaborative dialogue with the LGBCE throughout the Electoral Review of the District Council.
2. To consider and make recommendations to Cabinet and Full Council on any proposed submission(s) to the LGBCE on Council Size, Warding Arrangements or in response to any draft recommendations by the LGBCE.

- 3.2 To date, the Council Size submission has been developed by this T&F Group, comprising the following Members:-

Councillors Bellows, M Clark, Corbridge, Hopkins, Levitt, Reid, Rickman (Chairman), Tungate, A Wade, and J Ward.

- 3.3 The submission proposes that the number of councillors elected to New Forest District Council be reduced from its current level of 60 to 48. This figure has been reached by assessing the Council's governance arrangements in the context of the LGBCE criteria, and is further supported by a survey of all Members. The LGBCE is expecting to receive the Council's submission in respect of Council Size by no later than Friday 18 October 2019.

- 3.4 As part of the dialogue between the Task and Finish Group and the LGBCE, the Council's draft proposals have been shared with the LGBCE review team. To ensure any feedback from the LGBCE is adequately reflected in the Council's final submission, alongside the final outcome of the councillor questionnaire exercise, it is proposed that authority be delegated to the Executive Head of Governance and Regulation, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, to make further editing changes, correction and updates to the document prior to submission. It is anticipated that these will be minor in nature.

### **4. NEXT STEPS**

- 4.1 It is anticipated that the LGBCE will make a decision on Council size on 19 November 2019. It should be noted that this figure may subsequently be amended if necessary, to allow for a warding pattern to be developed which produces electoral equality as best as possible. Any such amendments would likely be minor, i.e. +1 or -1.
- 4.2 Once the Council Size submission is completed, the T&F Group will focus efforts on developing warding pattern proposals for submission in early 2020.
- 4.3 The process will conclude with the publication of the LGBCE final recommendations in Summer 2020, before the necessary parliamentary orders are laid and then made from late 2020 into early 2021. The new electoral arrangements will be implemented from the May 2023 quadrennial district elections.

## **5. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

- 5.1 The LGBCE are responsible for determining the Council Size, regardless of the submissions made by the deadline. Therefore, whilst the Council could choose not to submit a response, it would not be in the Council's interest, as the determination could be made without regard to the Council's views on an appropriate Council Size.

## **6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 The Council has set aside a total of £30,000 within the current Medium Term Financial Plan, covering the two years commencing 2021/22, should any unknown costs arise. It is not envisaged that there will be any additional costs that the Council will bear other than internal resourcing of the review.
- 6.2 Should the Council Size reduce to 48 from 60, there will be an approximate saving of £78,000 per annum in Members' Allowances.

## **7. CRIME & DISORDER IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 There are none directly arising from this report.

## **8. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 There are none directly arising from this report.

## **9. EQUALITY & DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 A successful Electoral Review of the District Council will bring about more representative democracy in the New Forest, as electoral inequality would have been addressed as far as possible as part of the review.

## **10. PORTFOLIO HOLDER COMMENTS**

- 10.1 I would like to thank the members of the Task and Finish Group for all their hard work in bringing this matter forward, and I will support their recommendations.

## **Appendices**

Appendix 1 – Council Size Submission

### **For further information contact:**

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### **Background Papers:**

Cabinet report – 5 June 2019  
<https://www.lgbce.org.uk/how-reviews-work>  
Task and Finish Group documents

New Forest District Council

# Council Size Submission

New Forest District Council

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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 of New Forest District Council.

Following the Council's formal request for the review, the District Council's Cabinet established a Task and Finish Group in June 2019, chaired by the Leader of the Council, with the following terms of reference:-

1. To maintain a collaborative dialogue with the Local Government Boundary Commission throughout the Electoral Review of New Forest District Council.
2. To consider and make recommendations to Cabinet and Full Council on any proposed submission(s) to the Local Government Boundary Commission on Council Size, Warding Arrangements or in response to any draft recommendations by the Commission.

The Task and Finish Group comprised 10 Members, reflected the political balance of the Council, was made up of varying levels of experience on the Council and also drew its membership from Councillors representing Wards across the District Council's area.

The Task and Finish Group first met on Thursday 18 July 2019 to understand the review timeline and agree the principles for the Council Size submission. As the Council had already made a formal request for a review with a view to a reduced Council Size of approximately 48, the Task and Finish Group revisited this number, alongside the alternative models proposed and agreed that the evidence still supported an approach for 48.

The Task and Finish Group next met on Friday 2 August 2019 to consider a draft version of this submission. The Group further endorsed the principles for a Council Size submission of 48 and particularly cited the Leader/Cabinet model of governance and advancements in technology as key efficiencies that had led to a need for less Elected Members to run the District Council efficiently and effectively.

The Task and Finish Group met for the final time as part of phase one of the Electoral Review on Tuesday 10 September 2019, to endorse a final draft of this Council Size submission. The Group also undertook an initial review of questionnaire responses by Council Members. The Task and Finish Group agreed that the submission should continue to be updated by officers in consultation with the Leader of the Council, subject to feedback received from the Local Government Boundary Commission and the outcome of the Councillor Questionnaire exercise.

### 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.*

The principle of requesting the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) to undertake a review of New Forest District Council's electoral arrangements with a view to reducing the number of Members on the District Council has been considered on two occasions since 2013. In 2013, a Working Group was appointed and, in 2014, recommended that the Council seek a reduction in its numbers from 60 to around 46. That recommendation did not gain the support of the Council and the Council on 14 April 2014 decided not to request a review. At the Council meeting the view was expressed that the matter was one that should be left to the new Council elected in May 2015.

Arising from a question to the Leader of the Council at the Council meeting on 12 September 2016, a new Task and Finish (T&F) Group was established to consider the position again. After exploring various options and associated issues, the T&F Group recommended to the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Panel on 18 January 2018 that an approach be made to the LGBCE to review the District Council's electoral arrangements with the aim of reducing the numbers on the Council to approximately 48. The Cabinet endorsed these proposals on 7 February 2018 and the decision to make a formal request to the LGBCE was agreed by a large majority by the Full Council on 26 February 2018.

In relation to electoral equality, when measured against the Commission's criteria, 23.5% of wards (8) have a variance of greater than +/-10%, of which 1 ward has a variance greater than +/-20%.

The last electoral review commenced in 1999, prior to the introduction of the Local Government Act 2000 and the implementation of a Leader/Cabinet model in accordance with executive arrangements. Over time, this has brought about significant efficiencies to the way in which the Council has operated, and alongside streamlined decision making, has resulted in less need for as many elected members as historically to manage the Council's business.

### Local Authority Profile

5. Please provide a short description of the authority and its setting. This should set the scene for the Commission and give it a greater understanding of any current issues. The description may cover all, or some of the following:

- Brief outline of area - are there any notable geographic constraint 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 transitional populations, is there any large growth anticipated?
- Are there any other constraints, challenges, issues or changes ahead?

The New Forest is an area of southern England which includes one of the largest remaining tracts of unenclosed pasture land, heathland and forest in the heavily populated south east of England. It covers south-west Hampshire and extends into south-east Wiltshire and towards east Dorset. It is a unique place of ancient history, fascinating wildlife and stunning beauty and was established as a royal hunting preserve.

The local government administrative area of New Forest District Council (290 square miles) includes the New Forest National Park (206 square miles). Within the district there are 145 square miles of Crown land, managed by the Forestry Commission.

The New Forest is a working forest that has prospered for nearly 1000 years. Many of the agricultural practices conceded by the Crown in historical times to local people are still retained. The most significant of these is the depasturing of ponies, cattle, pigs and donkeys in the open forest by authorised local inhabitants known as Commoners. These unique agricultural communing practices are administered by the Verderers.

The District Council was created on 1 April 1974 and was a merger of the borough of Lymington, New Forest Rural District and part of Ringwood and Fordingbridge Rural District. The district is one of the most populated in England (179,236) not to be a unitary authority and is fully parished, with 37 active Town and Parish Councils within its boundaries. Hampshire County Council are responsible for upper tier services.

Operating within the heart of the district council area is the National Park Authority established in 2005. The National Park is the planning authority for its area. In other service areas there are shared responsibilities and close collaborative working with the district council. Approximately 70% of the population of the district live in the New Forest District Council authority area in a number of medium sized towns. To the south and east of the district border there lies 40 miles of coastline.

The broad range of organisations and community groups that exist means that the council works collaboratively with and in the community to deliver solutions.

The New Forest is home to the third largest economy in Hampshire, with a total Gross Value Added of £4.4bn. The district contains over 9,000 businesses in total, which is more than any other local authority in Hampshire, including the cities of Southampton and Portsmouth. 85% of businesses in the district are micro in size employing fewer than 10 people. Self-employment is relatively high at over 19% and unemployment is consistently lower than in the rest of the country. Leisure, tourism and marine along with their associated supply chains are significant employment and economic sectors within the district. The council works closely with the New Forest Business Partnership and 'Helping local business grow' is a priority.

Average earnings are low with 60% of the working population earning less than the UK average. This, and the high average house price, results in significant cross commuting between those who work in the forest but can't afford to live there, and those who can afford to live within the district but work elsewhere. The District Council is located between the two major conurbations of Southampton and Bournemouth.

The very special nature of the New Forest makes it an extremely attractive place to live; both for those in work and those wishing to retire (28.5% of the population is over 65). Housing development is made more difficult by many of the environmental constraints of the area.

Housing, and particularly affordable housing for local people is a particular issue in the district. The district council manages its own housing stock (over 5,000 properties) and there are in excess of 3,000 people on the housing waiting list.

The New Forest District Local Plan Review provides the opportunity to shape the district over the next twenty years and this will be an important process for the council to complete. Early indications are that not all identified housing need will be met. There are opportunities for a significant change, particularly in the Totton and Waterside area.

The vast majority of services are provided by in house teams. This includes the operation of five high quality Health & Leisure Centres, a Housing Services Building Works team as well as Refuse and Recycling, Grounds Maintenance and Street Scene. The Council employs 759 FTEs with a small number of services provided by third parties or through shared service arrangements.

The Council's assets consist of five Health and Leisure Centres, two depots, two administrative offices and a number of local town and amenity car parks. Other than these primarily operational assets, the council owns few investment opportunities.

### Council Size

6. 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

7. 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                   |                                 |   |
|-------------------------|---------------------------------|---|
| <b>Governance Model</b> | <i>Key lines of explanation</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>What governance model will your authority operate? e.g. Committee System, Executive or other?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>The Cabinet model, for example, usually requires 6 to 10 members. How many members will you require?</i></li> </ul> |

|                          |  |  |
|--------------------------|--|--|
|                          |  | <p>➤ <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></p>   |
|                          | <p><b>Analysis</b></p>                 | <p>The Council operates a Leader/Cabinet model of governance, with the current and anticipated future arrangements outlined in the “Portfolios” section of this submission.</p> <p>We have 60 Councillors in total, with the political balance of the Council as follows as at September 2019, following all out elections in May 2019:-</p> <p>Conservative – 46<br/> Liberal Democrat – 13<br/> Independent – 1</p> <p>At its first meeting following the May 2019 elections, the Council allocated 111 seats on committees, based on the current political balance of the Council. Seats are appointed in accordance with the principles of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989, to ensure the majority group has the majority on all committees, to prevent domination by a single group, aggregating all seats and fair shares, and ensuring as far as practicable fairness on each committee. For each Non-Executive Member, this equates to 2.13 seats on committees and panels. Given the ad-hoc nature of committees and their associated hearings such as Appeals and Licensing, it is considered that a Council Size of 48 would bring about a more balanced workload of closer to an average of 3 committee/panel seats per Non-Executive Member.</p> <p>It is not envisaged that there will be a change from the Leader/Cabinet model of governance in the near future, which has brought about effective, efficient and accountable decision making.</p> |
| <p><b>Portfolios</b></p> | <p><i>Key lines of explanation</i></p> | <p>➤ <i>How many portfolios will there be?</i><br/> ➤ <i>What will the role of a portfolio holder be?</i><br/> ➤ <i>Will this be a full-time position?</i><br/> ➤ <i>Will decisions be delegated to portfolio holders? Or will the executive/mayor take decisions?</i></p>   |
|                          | <p><b>Analysis</b></p>                 | <p>The current Leader has appointed a Cabinet of 7 other Members. Including the Leader, all 8 Cabinet Members are Portfolio Holders with areas of responsibility as follows:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leader and Corporate Affairs</li> <li>• Planning and Infrastructure</li> <li>• Housing Services</li> <li>• Community Affairs</li> <li>• Finance, Investment and Corporate Services</li> </ul>   |

- Leisure and Wellbeing
- Environment and Regulatory Services
- Local Economy

A summary list of Portfolio Holder areas of responsibility can be found at the following link:-

<http://www.newforest.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=39379&p=0>

The Leader and Cabinet propose the statutory budget and key policy framework to the Full Council for approval. Within that agreed budget and policy, the Leader has legal responsibility for all executive functions. There is extensive delegation to Portfolio Holders within their own areas of responsibility, and further delegation to officers. The Council's financial regulations identify the agreed thresholds for decision making within the agreed Council budget. A summary of these regulations and agreed thresholds can be found at the following link:-

<http://www.newforest.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=39378&p=0>

Cabinet has 11 meetings scheduled each year, (monthly with the exception of January), and for the Council term 2015-2019 met 44 times.

Cabinet Members give political direction to Officers working within their areas of responsibility and support them in the implementation of policy. They are accountable for individual delegated decisions within their area of responsibility. Approximately 30 delegated decisions are taken per year in total by Cabinet Portfolio Holders. There is further extensive delegation to officers. This streamlines decision making.

Cabinet Portfolio Holders attend meetings of Overview and Scrutiny Panels, where they are held to account for their responsibilities, but also to collaboratively develop policy with Non-Executive Members.

Being a Cabinet Member involves more than formal decision making meetings. Cabinet Members hold regular briefings for Non-Executive Members, and also meet regularly with senior officers to track progress against strategic objectives. Cabinet Members are also likely to be appointed to one or more Outside Bodies, as a function of their Portfolio roles.

The principal impact on the number of Councillors and other bodies within the Council's governance structure is that Cabinet Members cannot serve on the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Panels.

|  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
|  |  | <p>It is not considered that a reduction in the size of the Council envisaged would have a significant impact on the operation of the Cabinet in context of the statistics above, bearing in mind the current frequency of meetings and the delegations already in place to individual Cabinet Members and officers. In fact, it would bring about a more balanced workload for Councillors and enhance the Council's capacity to carry out effective decision making, as the governance arrangements have modernised ahead of the Council Size being reduced.</p> <p>Councillors are kept informed of decisions through the publication of agendas, reports and minutes, individual executive decisions and the Cabinet Forward Plan.</p>   |
| <p><b>Delegated Responsibilities</b></p> | <p><i>Key lines of explanation</i></p> | <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>   |
|  | <p>Analysis</p>                        | <p>As previously mentioned, in accordance with the Leader and Cabinet model, the 8 Cabinet Members, including the Leader of the Council, are those responsible for taking the majority of major decisions.</p> <p>Full Council takes decisions it is required to do so by law and those decisions which are deemed to be significant in relation to the budget and wider policy.</p> <p>The Council operates an extensive scheme of delegation to officers which can be viewed at the following link:-</p> <p><a href="http://www.newforest.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=39377&amp;p=0">http://www.newforest.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=39377&amp;p=0</a></p> <p>Full Council has seven scheduled meetings per year and met 30 times across the Council term 2015-2019. Significant time is devoted at each Council meeting for Member Questions to Cabinet Portfolio Holders and Committee Chairmen on the general work or procedures of the Council.</p> |

**Accountability**

8. 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                           |   |
|---------------------------------|---|
| <b>Internal Scrutiny</b>        | The scrutiny function of authorities has changed considerably. Some use theme or task-and-finish groups, for example, and others have a committee system. Scrutiny arrangements may also be affected by the officer support available.  |
| <i>Key lines of explanation</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>How will decision makers be held to account?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>How many committees will be required? And what will their functions be?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>How many task and finish groups will there be? And what will their functions be? What time commitment will be involved for members? And how often will meetings take place?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>How many members will be required to fulfil these positions?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Explain why you have increased, decreased, or not changed the number of scrutiny committees in the authority.</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Explain the reasoning behind the number of members per committee in terms of adding value.</i></li> </ul>   |
| Analysis                        | <p>In accordance with the Local Government Act 2000, the Council operates the following four Overview and Scrutiny Panels:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny Panel</li> <li>• Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Panel</li> <li>• Environment Overview and Scrutiny Panel</li> <li>• Housing Overview and Scrutiny Panel</li> </ul> <p>Terms of reference of each Panel can be viewed at the following link:-</p> <p><a href="http://www.newforest.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=17898&amp;p=0">http://www.newforest.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=17898&amp;p=0</a></p> <p>The current structure was introduced in May 2018. The consideration for change from the previous structure of three Overview and Scrutiny Panels arose from the fact that the Council had undergone much change in recent times as a result of the economic climate and increased responsibilities. The Portfolio for Housing and Homelessness had seen significant new legislation come into force and the new arrangements took action to respond to these new challenges.</p> <p>This new Overview &amp; Scrutiny Panel structure has helped to ensure that there is sufficient capacity for Members to engage in new policy initiatives as they are developed and to scrutinise delivery of the Council's services. The Panel dedicated solely to housing/homelessness issues is proving successful in meeting the Council's significant new responsibilities under Housing and Homelessness legislation. That being said, there</p> |

|                           |                                 |   |
|---------------------------|---------------------------------|---|
|                           |                                 | <p>is still significant capacity for a larger proportion of Council Members to have the opportunity to sit on one or more of the Council's four Overview and Scrutiny Panels, and a reduction in the Council Size to 48 would serve the efficient running of the authority in this regard. Members of these Overview and Scrutiny Panels gain a stronger understanding of Council services and this experience assists in the role of a Councillor in the community.</p> <p>Each Overview and Scrutiny Panel meets approximately four times a year. There are 10 seats on each Panel and currently this total of 40 seats are allocated amongst the 52 Non-Executive Members. With a proposed Council size of 48, every Council Member, subject to the political balance of the Council, could have the opportunity to either serve on the Cabinet (8 seats) or one of the four Overview and Scrutiny Panels (40 seats) and could therefore play a part in strategic leadership or accountability and challenge of this leadership.</p> <p>Consequently, it is not proposed that the governance structure is amended in this area, in fact that a Council size of 48 is more suited to the Council's current Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny Panel arrangements.</p> <p>Overview and Scrutiny Panels establish Task and Finish Groups to undertake more focused review work, ranging from Policy Development to more in depth scrutiny reviews. Task and Finish Groups have served as an effective mechanism to engage a wider number of back bench Members on a broad range of issues.</p> <p>A summary of the current Task and Finish Groups that have been commissioned can be viewed at the following link:-</p> <p><a href="http://www.newforest.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=39376&amp;p=0">http://www.newforest.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=39376&amp;p=0</a></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 Council has a single Planning Committee, currently comprising 20 Councillors. The Committee meets monthly to consider those applications not determined by the Chief Planning Officer under delegated powers.   |

The number of planning applications received and included in the returns to Central Government for the last three years are:-

| Year | Number of applications |
|------|------------------------|
| 2016 | 1553                   |
| 2017 | 1600                   |
| 2018 | 1536                   |

Of these, the percentages dealt with under the respective arrangements are as follows:-

Planning Committee - 7%  
Delegated - 92%  
Other – 1%

It is important to note that, as the local planning authority for the area covering the national park, the New Forest National Park Authority, established in 2005, has taken over responsibility from the District Council for planning matters in this area. This has significantly streamlined decision making in planning.

Despite that, Planning Committee does have a steady workload and during the 2018/19 Council Year, Committee Members considered on average 9 applications per meeting. A Council Size of 48 would ensure that knowledge of one of the Council's most active regulatory functions is shared across a greater proportion of the total Council membership. The Task and Finish Group considered whether a reduction in the size of the Planning Committee was necessary in view of the proposed Council Size of 48. In ensuring that the Planning Committee retained a good geographical spread of Members from across the District area, the Group agreed on balance that retaining 20 Planning Committee Members was preferred. Whilst it was acknowledged that the size of the Planning Committee could be reviewed in the future, the ad-hoc nature of other regulatory Council functions indicated that a Council Size of 48 could adequately support a Planning Committee of 20 Members.

The recently conducted Councillor Questionnaire highlights a clear correlation between Planning Committee Members and a greater time spent on attending formal meetings, in addition to preparing for these meetings. Being a Planning Committee Member involves significant meeting preparation to ensure familiarity with the applications due to be considered.

|                                |                          |  |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| <b>Licensing</b>               | Key lines of explanation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ How many licencing panels will the council have in the average year?</li> <li>➤ And what will be the time commitment for members?</li> <li>➤ Will there be standing licencing panels, or will they be ad-hoc?</li> <li>➤ Will there be core members and regular attendees, or will different members serve on them?</li> </ul>  |
|                                | Analysis                 | <p>The Council has a General Purposes and Licensing Committee which consists of 15 Councillors. The Committee determines all matters and duties on the authority imposed by legislation, regulations, orders, codes, and similar provisions for:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All activities under the Licensing Act 2003 and Gambling Act 2005</li> <li>• Reviews the Council's Statement of Licensing Policy</li> <li>• Health, safety and welfare in connection with work</li> <li>• Advises the Council on all matters relating to electoral registration and elections</li> <li>• Advises the Council on Standing Orders and the Constitution</li> <li>• Varies the maximum hackney carriage fares in the District</li> </ul> <p>The full Committee meets on average five times a year. Sub-Committees, comprising of three members drawn from the membership of the full Committee deal with hearings. On average Sub-Committees also meet five times a year, predominantly to deal with applications under the Licensing Act 2003 where representations have been received and not withdrawn. These Sub-Committees are arranged on an ad-hoc basis, and membership is rotated to take into account experience, political balance and interests. It is demonstrated particularly in the ad-hoc nature of individual licensing hearings that the current Council Size of 60 does not serve the efficient running of the authority, as these 15 Council Members are used in rotation throughout the year to meet on average five times a year. Individual Committee Members may be involved in just one hearing a year in addition to the more strategic policy work of the full Committee. A reduction to a Council Size of 48 would allow these 15 Members to take on other responsibilities to balance their workload because of the reduced Council Size, and serve the efficient running of the authority.</p> |
| <b>Other Regulatory Bodies</b> | Key lines of explanation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ What will they be, and how many members will they require?</li> <li>➤ Explain the number and membership of your Regulatory Committees with respect to greater delegation to officers.</li> </ul>  |
|                                | Analysis                 | <p>The Council has an Audit Committee of 8 Members, responsible for a range of functions relating to the Council's Accounts, Internal and External Audit and Risk Management. The Committee meets 4 times a year. It is not anticipated that the membership or role of this Committee will change in the near future, particularly as the Council monitors the impact of financial reductions.</p>   |

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|                                 |   | <p>The Council has an Appeals Committee of 20 Members which meets as required with no scheduled meetings. The Committee considers specific issues such as Personnel Appeals for Council employees. It is considered that the current Council Size of 60 does not service the efficient running of the authority in this area, given the ad-hoc nature of its work, and a more balanced workload would be brought about by a reduction to 48 Members.</p> <p>In May 2019, the Council introduced a new HR Committee of 8 Members, responsible for monitoring the Council's performance in respect of the Health, Safety and Welfare of the Council's employees. This Committee meets four times a year.</p> |
| <b>External Partnerships</b>    | <p>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.</p>  |  |
| <i>Key lines of explanation</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>Will executive members serve on decision-making partnerships, sub-regional, regional or national bodies?</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>   |  |
| <b>Analysis</b>                 | <p>There are a number of organisations which are independent from the Council, but have an impact on its service areas. In order that the Council can maintain effective partnerships with a number of these, representatives of the Council, usually Elected Members, sit on the various committees and forums established in partnership with these local, regional and often national organisations.</p> <p>The Cabinet, at its first meeting following the May 2019 elections, made appointments to outside bodies. The full list of outside bodies are available to view on the Council's website at the following link:-</p> <p><a href="https://democracy.newforest.gov.uk/mgListOutsideBodies.aspx?bcr=1">https://democracy.newforest.gov.uk/mgListOutsideBodies.aspx?bcr=1</a></p> <p>The Council's agreed criteria for representation on outside bodies, states that in order for the Council to confirm an appointment, there should be a clear benefit to the Council and/or the inhabitants of the District through formal representation on that organisation, or that the Council has made or is continuing to make a significant financial contribution towards the establishment or operating costs of the organisation and that appointing a representative will help ensure good governance.</p> <p>The criteria for making appointments also suggests that where feasible, appointments to outside bodies should be made by office rather than by name. Consequently, more strategic outside bodies are generally</p> |  |

represented by the relevant Cabinet Member, where as more local, community based outside bodies are generally represented by one or more of the Local Ward Members.

31 Council Members are appointed across these various Outside Bodies. A Council Size of 48 would allow for a greater proportion of the Council membership to be engaged in Outside Bodies, again bringing about a more balanced workload for Councillors, further enhancing the representative role of Members. Many Outside Bodies provide the opportunity for Members to gain expertise in a particular subject area, which also enhances the role of the councillor in the community, as Members are better equipped to manage casework relating to the functions of the Outside Bodies they are engaged with.

## Community Involvement

9. 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   |
|----------------------|--------------------------|---|
| 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                 | <p>The Council operates in a three tier local government structure, with Hampshire County Council sitting above New Forest District Council as the upper tier authority, and 37 Town and Parish Councils forming the building blocks for the local communities represented by elected representatives across these tiers of local government.</p> <p>Many Councillors are twin and often triple “hatted,” in that they are the elected representative for more than one of the three tiers of local government in the New Forest District.</p> <p>In light of these governance arrangements, there is an increasing need to ensure that the electoral arrangements of the New Forest District are efficient, effective and aligned appropriately to best serve the local communities.</p> <p>Hampshire County Council implemented the outcome of their own electoral review to coincide with their 2017 elections, to better reflect the identities of communities across Hampshire, including the New Forest District. It is therefore timely to build on these arrangements to align effectively and appropriately with the County and the Town and Parish communities.</p> |

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|                 |                                 | <p>Councillors feel the public are more aware of them and their role along with a greater expectation of assistance and more opportunities for people to contact them. Social media and electronic mail provides the public with much greater access to them and there is a consequent expectation of instant replies. Councillor questionnaire responses indicate that advancements in technology have brought about significant efficiencies for dealing with casework.</p> <p>It is also important to reflect that councillors are seen more and more as advocates for their community and can get involved in issues that are not directly related to council services but serve and are of benefit to a wider public interest.</p> <p>Most Councillors are proactively involved within their wards as opposed to simply responding to case work and consider that they play an active part within their communities. The approach they take varies from member to member, but most Councillors are involved in some or all of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Holding surgeries – dealing with queries, providing advice and engaging with their constituents face-to-face;</li> <li>• Working with, and/or offering support, to community groups and local organisations;</li> <li>• Attending Town and Parish Council meetings. We have 37 Parish and Town Councils and the District is fully parished;</li> <li>• Maintaining blogs and/or websites and social media.</li> </ul> |
| <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> </ul>  |
|                 | Analysis                        | <p>Councillors are expected to take accountability for their casework, and manage their work appropriately, albeit with officer support. Usually, Councillors will contact officers directly – whether in person or via telephone / e-mail, and then respond to the individual. There is a sense of ownership and need to ensure the residents issue is satisfactorily resolved.</p> <p>Attendance by Councillors at the Town and Parish Council meetings within their ward is expected and positively encouraged to ensure there is a clear message about District Council activities and to discuss ward matters with them as appropriate. As mentioned above, the District area is fully parished with 37 active town and parish councils.</p>  |

District Councillors are expected to brief their Parishes on key issues affecting their area and help to identify ways in which the District Council can support the resolution of Parish level issues.

Officers produce an Information Bulletin to assist with consistent information being conveyed to Town and Parish Council meetings, examples of which can be found at the following link:-

<http://www.newforest.gov.uk/article/7561/Information-Bulletin>

More recently, the Council has piloted a modified version of the Bulletin which is sent directly to Councillors and Town and Parish Council clerks by email.

Councillor responses to queries from their constituents can now be typed and sent electronically rather than in a written letter or phone call. These queries can also be received and responded to 'on-the-go' with improved mobile technology. This can make it easier to seek clarification on particular issues from Council officers or partners. Use of email means that information can be sent to multiple people at once reducing any repetition.

In many cases anecdotal feedback from councillors suggests that they now spend less time having to visit residents or sites directly as this can be done through electronic means.

In supporting the modernisation agenda and electronic working, the Council has recently recruited a dedicated officer to support Members and the democratic processes of the Council generally on making the best use of electronic devices, programmes etc. This will further support a new Council Size of 48 in fulfilling Councillors' Community Involvement role.

## Other Issues

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

It is worth drawing specific attention to the emergence of the National Park Authority which was established in 2005. As the local planning authority for a significant area within the New Forest District, this has brought about a reduction in the number of planning applications that are the responsibility of the District Council.

## Summary

11. 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.

In general terms, as the Council has modernised significantly since the previous review commenced in 1999, both from a governance perspective and also in relation to the way in which Councillors undertake their role in the community, it is considered that a Council Size of 48 is an appropriate and proportionate reduction to ensure the Council is run efficiently and to support a balanced workload for Councillors in their community leadership roles. In considering the case for change, the Task and Finish Group established to develop proposals for this Council Size submission reflected on the fact that 10 Non-Executive Members do not sit on either the Planning Committee or one of the Council's four Overview and Scrutiny Panels which make up a significant part of Non-Executive Council business as demonstrated earlier in this submission. With the Leader and Cabinet model, the 8 Executive Members have significant responsibility in the context of the day to day business and decisions of the Council. The Group considered alternative options and models such as a reduction to 46, and the status quo of 60. On balance, the Group felt that a reduction to 46 would not support the alignment of Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny Panels, having supported the principle that the 40 seats on Overview and Scrutiny Panels was most suited to a Council with 40 Non-Executive Members. Furthermore, it was expected that housing development would increase in the District over the new Local Plan period and therefore a further reduction beyond 48 introduced the risk of leaving the authority too low on Councillor numbers to adequately perform the representative role of Councillors. In considering the current Council Size of 60, the Group concluded that 60 Councillors does not serve the efficient running of the authority, in view of the ad-hoc nature of a number of Council functions and therefore it was not appropriate to put forward the status quo as an option.

Whilst the financial implications of the Electoral Review are not one of the key drivers for change, it is worth noting that a reduction in the Council Size to 48 would save the Council in the region of £78,000 a year in Members' Allowances. Therefore, in achieving a more efficient and effective Council Size, there is a positive impact on the Council's financial position that should be recognised.

The proposed Council Size will particularly support Councillors in their community leadership roles, as all Non-Executive Councillors are more likely to have a greater breadth of knowledge by having an increased opportunity to serve on one or more of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Panels and/or the Planning Committee. Non-Executive Members will also have an increased opportunity to represent the Council on the more

localised Outside Bodies, which gives these Members the opportunity to develop expertise in a subject area that is likely to be of local importance, further enhancing the effectiveness of Councillors in their casework with local residents. 48 Councillors for New Forest District Council achieves the right balance in supporting the efficient discharge of all necessary functions in accordance with the Council's current and anticipated future governance arrangements, whilst allowing for the predicted growth in population within the District and the expected impact on the role of the Councillor in the community.