

# Council Size Submission:

Bromsgrove District Council

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## How to Make a Submission

It is recommended that submissions on future governance arrangements and council size follow the guidance provided and use the format below as a template. Submissions should be treated as an opportunity to focus on the future needs of the council and not simply describe the current arrangements. **Submissions should also demonstrate that alternative council sizes have been considered in drawing up the proposal and why you have discounted them.**

The template allows respondents to enter comments directly under each heading. It is not recommended that responses be unduly long; as a guide, it is anticipated that a 15 to 20-page document using this template should suffice. Individual section length may vary depending on the issues to be explained. Where internal documents are referred to URLs should be provided, rather than the document itself. It is also recommended that a table is included that highlights the key paragraphs for the Commission's attention.

'Good' submissions, i.e. those that are considered to be most robust and persuasive, combine the following *key success components* (as set out in the guidance that accompanies this template):

- Clarity on objectives
- A straightforward and evidence-led style
- An understanding of local place and communities
- An understanding of councillors' roles and responsibilities

## About You

The respondent should use this space to provide the Commission with a little detail about who is making the submission, whether it is the full Council, Officers on behalf of the Council, a political party or group, a resident group, or an individual.

## Reason for Review (Request Reviews Only)

Please explain the authority's reasons for requesting this electoral review; it is useful for the Commission to have context. *NB/ If the Commission has identified the authority for review under one of its published criteria, then you are not required to answer this question.*

[Click or tap here to enter text.](#)

## The Context for your proposal

Your submission gives you the opportunity to examine how you wish to organise and run the council for the next 15 - 20 years. **The consideration of future governance arrangements and council size should be set in the wider local and national policy context.** The Commission expects you to challenge your current arrangements and

determine the most appropriate arrangements going forward. In providing context for your submission below, please demonstrate that you have considered the following issues.

- When did your Council last change/reorganise its internal governance arrangements and what impact on effectiveness did that activity have?
- To what extent has transference of strategic and/or service functions impacted on the effectiveness of service delivery and the ability of the Council to focus on its remaining functions?
- Have any governance or capacity issues been raised by any Inspectorate or similar?
- What influence will local and national policy trends likely have on the Council as an institution?
- What impact on the Council's effectiveness will your council size proposal have?

### **Previous Electoral Review & Changes**

The Council's Size was last changed in the Bromsgrove (Electoral Changes) Order 2014, when the number of councillors was reduced from 39 to 31.

In 2015, Bromsgrove District Council conducted a community governance review which focused on Hagley and Clent parish councils and their boundaries. As a result of this review, The Bromsgrove District Council (Reorganisation of Community Governance No.1) Order 2016 was made in February 2016. The order amended the boundaries of both existing parishes to ensure effective community governance which reflected the identities and interest of the community.

Whilst there have been no other changes to governance arrangements since the 2014 order, several undertakings have been made in more recent years to evaluate the effectiveness of the Council.

### **Corporate Peer Challenge**

In December 2022, Bromsgrove District Council commissioned a corporate peer challenge (CPC) with a request for specific focus on the governance and culture theme, in order to provide an understanding of improvement requirements around governance systems and decision making.

The feedback report<sup>1</sup> detailed that the council has successfully established collaborative partnerships with Redditch Borough Council while maintaining their political sovereignty. The peer team acknowledged that the council take pride in their dedicated and long-serving staff who feel a deep sense of belonging to the organisation. They noted that while the council has a clear vision and priorities, there's room for enhancing communication and implementing a robust performance management framework to better align efforts with their objectives.

The peer team noted that there's a commitment to economic regeneration, and while there may be capacity challenges at senior levels and in project management, these can be addressed positively. It was noted that Elected Members are highly motivated and focused

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<sup>1</sup> [LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Final Report 2021 \(bromsgrove.gov.uk\)](https://www.bromsgrove.gov.uk)

on improving the quality of life for residents as well as being actively engaged in the council's mission.

The team identified that strong, trusting partner relationships exist at the senior levels through the Local Strategic Partnership, which is dedicated to improving local services and making a positive difference. They also stated that the Council has effectively navigated the challenges of the pandemic and is now well-positioned to adapt and thrive. This includes a potential post-pandemic reset of working arrangements to align with their priorities effectively.

Overall, findings show that residents have a positive perception of the Council and its services. However, there's an opportunity for even more effective communication and engagement to ensure that members, staff, and residents are well-informed about the council's activities and their positive impact.

As a result of the recommendations made by the peer team in their final report, the Council created a series of action plans in response to each recommendation made, and noted that work to address some of the issues raised had already begun since the review had been conducted. Considering the review, the Council revisited its current priorities to ensure that the council's mission and its resources are correctly aligned<sup>2</sup>.

The Local Government Association (LGA) undertook a CPC Progress Review in December 2023, and the feedback report will be considered by Council in January 2024. Whilst the report is not yet published reference is made to "the positive way in which the council addressed the recommendations of the Corporate Peer Challenge of March 2023, the actions it has taken so far, and the evidence provided to show the progress being made".

### **Council Review of Governance arrangements**

In May 2023, a motion was approved at the Annual Council meeting to review the council's governance system. The Overview and Scrutiny Board established a Governance Systems Task Group for this purpose. The task group aimed to assess available governance options for Bromsgrove District Council, considering cost implications and Member and Officer time commitments. Its objectives included ensuring effective decision-making, promoting cross-party engagement, fostering inclusive policy development and decision-making, and embedding principles of equality, inclusiveness, efficiency, and accountability within the constitution. The task group sought to make recommendations to the Council for the most suitable governance model that aligns with these objectives. The Local Government Association (LGA) arranged for support from the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) to assist the task group.

The Task Group began its work in July 2023, setting objectives to explore governance options, assess costs, and ensure inclusive and accountable decision-making. They held meetings throughout August, conducted interviews with experts and considered various models.

The following factors influenced the evaluation of governance systems and the recommendations for the most suitable model for the council:

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<sup>2</sup> [Agenda item - Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan - Orb](#)

- **No Universal Best Practice:** There's no single best governance model for local government; it should be tailored to each Council's needs.
- **Local Context Matters:** What works in one Council might not in another, highlighting the need to consider local circumstances.
- **Strengths and Weaknesses:** The review identified strengths (cross-party engagement, inclusiveness) and weaknesses (limited access to information, trust issues) in the current system.
- **Design Principles:** The report established design principles, including timely information, skills-based roles, consensus, resident-centred decisions, assurance, trust, and cost-neutrality.
- **Comparison with Governance Models:** The Leader and Cabinet model and the Committee system were assessed against the above design principles.
- **Active Participation of Backbench Members:** Considerations included Cabinet Advisory Panels in the current system and increased Committee meetings in the Committee system.

In its final report in September 2023, the Task Group recommended that the Council does not consider a move to the committee system, but rather adopts a hybrid Leader and Cabinet Model moving forward. It is believed that this model incorporates various features and considerations to ensure effective governance.

### **Proposed Hybrid Leader and Cabinet Model – Features:**

**Working Protocols:** The introduction of working protocols that detail expectations for cross-party working to maintain a collegiate approach to governance. These protocols would help allocate Chairmen of Committees that reflect the council's composition at the time.

**Cabinet Advisory Panels:** The introduction of Cabinet Advisory Panels, consisting of both Cabinet and backbench councillors. These panels would be responsible for reviewing and contributing to the development of critical strategies and policies. They would be chaired by relevant Portfolio Holders, offering backbench councillors more opportunities to influence decision-making.

**Improving Communication:** Steps to enhance communication with members, including inclusive Member-led work programming in the Overview and Scrutiny process, timely access to reports, and continued sharing of information through political group meetings. Additionally, raising awareness of resources available to members through ongoing training.

**Memorandum of Understanding:** The proposal to establish a Memorandum of Understanding between all political group leaders, aiming to maintain the working arrangements for at least the next four years, while allowing flexibility for the council to determine alternative working arrangements if needed.

It is noted in the report that these changes will lead to an increase in the number of meetings held, due to the introduction of Cabinet Advisory Panels. Further details have been included where relevant in the strategic leadership and accountability sections of this document.

The final report of the Overview & Scrutiny Board Governance Systems Task group is also available for more information<sup>3</sup>.

### **Consultation with Current Members**

Officers created a councillor workload survey to get a thorough picture of views on the council's current size and effectiveness, as well as the way in which councillors deal with their casework, and how they feel this has changed in recent years. The survey was conducted electronically in early November 2023 and received a response rate of 30%. A summary overview of relevant responses can be found in Appendix 1.

To summarise:

- Councillors generally felt that their overall workload was about right.
- Most Councillors felt that the current council size is about right.
- Councillors noted that the way in which they communicate with residents has changed in more recent years. With more casework arising via social media and a higher expectation placed on councillors to respond quicker. It was noted that issues are also still raised from residents via other channels such as email and telephone.
- It was noted that councillor face more complex issues from residents in more recent years, with factors such as the cost-of-living crisis attributed to this.

### **Comparison with Neighbouring Authorities**

Whilst it is acknowledged that each council is different, in order to assist with initial discussions on a proposed council size, a comparison against CIPFA nearest neighbours, as well as the other authorities within the Worcestershire County was conducted.

Bromsgrove <sup>4</sup>	31	75,538	2436
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#### Nearest Neighbours

Local Authority	Council Size	Electorate	Electors per Councillor
Stroud	51	96,307	1,888
Litchfield	47	82,021	1,745
Maldon	31	50,839	1,640
South Staffs	49	85,031	1,735
Harborough	34	72,831	2,142
Tewkesbury	38	71,171	1,873

#### Worcestershire County

Local Authority	Council Size	Electorate	Electors per Councillor
Redditch	29 (reducing to 27)	63,666	2,195 (2,358)
Worcester	35	76,340	2,181

<sup>3</sup><https://moderngovwebpublic.bromsgrove.gov.uk/documents/s54984/Governance%20Systems%20Task%20Group%20-%20report.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Based on 01 December 2023 electoral register

Malvern Hills	31	62,233	2,008
Wychavon	43	102,872	2,392
Wyre Forest	33	72,234	2,340

Whilst considering neighbouring council sizes, it was noted that Bromsgrove District Council currently has the highest electoral ratio when considering both neighbouring authorities within the county and ‘nearest neighbours’.

As described above, the Council has given significant consideration to future governance arrangements in recent years, including a critical evaluation of its current arrangements. The Council has a clear vision as to the proposed model of governance moving forward and is currently in the process of implementing any necessary changes, including recommendations identified during the corporate peer challenge. The consultation with members provided an insight into the ways in which members operate within the community and the impact that this has on the council’s function. After such consideration, it is felt that the Council is in a good position to suggest an appropriate council size moving forward.

### Local Authority Profile

**Please provide a short description of the authority and its setting, in particular the local geography, demographics and community characteristics.** This should set the scene for the Commission and give it a greater understanding of any current issues. The description should cover all of the following:

- Brief outline of area - are there any notable geographic constraints for example that may affect the review?
- Rural or urban - what are the characteristics of the authority?
- Demographic pressures - such as distinctive age profiles, migrant or transient populations, is there any large growth anticipated?
- Community characteristics – is there presence of “hidden” or otherwise complex deprivation?
- Are there any other constraints, challenges, issues or changes ahead?

Further to providing a description, the Commission will be looking for a submission that demonstrates an understanding of place and communities by putting forth arguments on council size based upon local evidence and insight. For example, how does local geography, demographics and community characteristics impact on councillor casework, workload and community engagement?

### Geography

Bromsgrove District Council is located within the West Midlands Region, situated 14 miles from the centre of Birmingham. It is a non-metropolitan district council operating as part of a 2-tier administrative structure, with Worcestershire County Council responsible for social services, education, and highways.

The 84 square mile district is predominantly rural, with approximately 90% of the land designated as Green Belt. There are population clusters including Alvechurch, Barnt Green, Catshill, Hagley, Rubery and Wythall, with the town of Bromsgrove being the main centre of population.



## Demography

Bromsgrove District has 99,200 residents. Population Projections for Bromsgrove<sup>5</sup>

Year	2024	2025	2026	2027	2030	2033
Bromsgrove	104,115	104,937	105,714	106,490	108,695	110,667

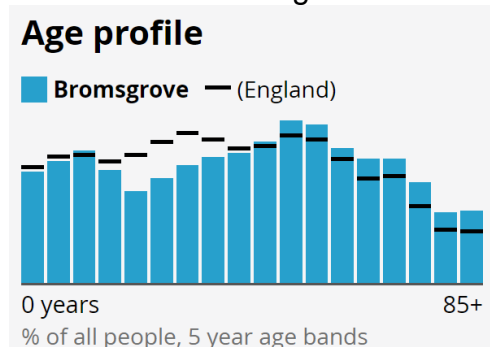
As per the 2018 based ONS statistics, Bromsgrove is projected to have an increase to its population of 6,552 between the years 2024 – 2033.

There are 45,000 homes and businesses in the district. Many residents commute to Birmingham, and the district has the highest % of self-employed and business start-ups in England.

The district has a higher percentage of economically active residents at 57.2% in employment (compared to 56.5% across the West Midlands) as well as a higher percentage of retired residents at 27.1% (compared to 22.1% across the West Midlands). Workers are employed in a variety of industries, with wholesale & retail trade, human health & social work activities and education the top three industries.

According to the 2019 Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD), Bromsgrove Ranked at 271 of the 317 local authorities in England.<sup>6</sup> Whilst the authority does have higher median income levels, it also has isolated areas of deprivation.

According to 2021 Census data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS)<sup>7</sup> The district has an above-average number of over 50s, when compared against the national averages.



Approximately 17.1% of the population are under 15 and 23% are over 65 years old.

Issues such as an ageing population, a lack of affordable housing and developing the local economy all impact on the district.

In January 2017, Bromsgrove District Council adopted its [Bromsgrove District Plan](#) which sets out the Council's vision and strategy for the area until 2023 and provides the basis for decisions on planning applications. The plan sets out the Council's economic, social and environmental characteristics as well as identifying 14 key challenges which the district faces. These include regeneration of the Town Centre, Maintaining the vitality of smaller villages attracting inward investment. It also identifies the need to ensure it continues to meet the needs of the community, in particular the provision of affordable housing and housing suitable for the elderly.

<sup>5</sup><https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationprojections/dataset/localauthoritiesinenglandtable2>

<sup>6</sup> [English indices of deprivation 2019 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/customprofiles/build/>

Bromsgrove currently has the following Neighbourhood Plans in place:

- Alvechurch Parish
- Lickey & Blackwell and Cofton Hackett
- Catshill & North Marlbrook Parish

### Council Size

The Commission believes that councillors have three broad aspects to their role. These are categorised as: **Strategic Leadership, Accountability (Scrutiny, Regulatory and Partnerships), and Community Leadership**. Submissions should address each of these in turn and provide supporting evidence. Prompts in the boxes below should help shape responses.

### Strategic Leadership

Respondents should provide the Commission with details as to how elected members will provide strategic leadership for the authority. Responses should also indicate how many members will be required for this role and why this is justified. **Responses should demonstrate that alternative council sizes have been explored.**

Topic	
Governance Model	<p><i>Key lines of explanation</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>What governance model will your authority operate? e.g. Committee System, Executive or other?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>The Cabinet model, for example, usually requires 6 to 10 members. How many members will you require?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>If the authority runs a Committee system, we want to understand why the number and size of the committees you propose represents the most appropriate for the authority.</i></li> <li>➤ <i>By what process does the council aim to formulate strategic and operational policies? How will members in executive, executive support and/or scrutiny positions be involved? What particular demands will this make of them?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Whichever governance model you currently operate, a simple assertion that you want to keep the current structure does not in itself, provide an explanation of why that structure best meets the needs of the council and your communities.</i></li> </ul>
	<p><b><u>Governance Model:</u></b></p> <p>Bromsgrove District Council completed a scrutiny Task Group review of governance structures in 2023. The review was launched after the Council elections held in May 2023 which resulted in a position of No Overall Control. A copy of the report and minutes from the extraordinary Council meeting held on 20<sup>th</sup> September 2023, when this report was considered, have been provided separately for information.</p>

This was a comprehensive review of the available governance structures, which was designed to enable the Councillors to determine which governance model was most suitable for Bromsgrove District Council and the communities the authority serves moving forwards. Evidence was obtained from a Deputy Leader of a Council that operates a Committee system as well as through interviews with a governance expert from the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS). The Task Group also received impartial advice from a representative of the CfGS throughout the course of the review.

As a result of this review and based on the evidence gathered, Members concluded that retaining the Leader and Cabinet model of decision-making would be the most appropriate governance option for Bromsgrove District Council moving forward. However, it was agreed that the Leader and Cabinet model should be retained in a hybrid form. Under this hybrid model, there will continue to be a Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny Board, with a new Cabinet Advisory Panel to be introduced to enable greater participation by backbench Councillors in terms of influencing the decision making and policy development process. Members were also keen to embed the more collegiate, cross-party methods of working that have emerged since the elections held in May 2023 and to ensure that there would be a requirement for opposition Members to be appointed to key roles, such as that of Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Board, in line with best practice.

A number of changes will need to be made to the Council's constitution and working practices moving forward in order to implement the Task Group's proposals. Currently, action is being undertaken to review the Council's constitution and it is envisaged that these changes will be put in place in time for implementation in the 2024/25 municipal year and subsequent years.

#### Cabinet – number of Members

The number of Members appointed to the Cabinet is determined by the Leader of the Council. In recent years, the Leader has tended to appoint either 6 or 7 Councillors to Cabinet; at the time of writing there are 7 Members on the Cabinet. It is envisaged that a

similar number of Members would continue to be appointed to the Cabinet in future.

The current membership of the Cabinet comprises representatives of two different political groups; the Conservative group and the 2023 Independents group. The Leader of the Council is the leader of the Conservative group, which is the largest group at the Council. The Deputy Leader of the Council is the leader of the 2023 Independents group. All of the members on the Cabinet represent particular portfolios, although they do not have individual decision-making powers. Instead, decisions are taken collectively by the Cabinet. This arrangement is something that the Councillors would be keen to continue moving forward to ensure that a collegiate approach to decision making remains in place in future, in line with the Governance Systems Task Group's findings.

#### Policy Development

The Council publishes a Cabinet Work Programme, which is the Council's Forward Plan. The Council aims to publish both key and non-key decisions on the Cabinet Work Programme and to provide more than 28 days' notice of these items wherever possible.

Following on from the Governance Systems Task Group review in August 2023, a Cabinet Advisory Panel is due to be established at the Council. The final arrangements for the operation of this Advisory Panel remain to be confirmed at the time of writing. However, it is envisaged that the Cabinet Advisory Panel, to be chaired by a member of the Cabinet, will consider key policies and strategic issues some time in advance of decisions being taken by the Cabinet on those subjects. The membership of the Advisory Panel will not be limited to Cabinet members only. Instead, the aim is to open up membership to non-executive Councillors to provide backbench Members with greater opportunities to influence the policy development and decision-making process. Suggestions put forward at meetings of the Cabinet Advisory Panel will be taken on board by report authors when drafting their reports.

The Governance Systems Task Group recognised the value of the Overview and Scrutiny process at Bromsgrove District Council. The proposal was made for there to be a scrutiny prioritisation session at the

		<p>start of the municipal year, whereby scrutiny Members could identify key policies and strategic issues that they feel should be subject to scrutiny that year. This will be incorporated into the Council’s calendar of meetings and Member development process from the 2024/25 municipal year onwards.</p> <p>In addition, the Overview and Scrutiny Board receives a copy of the Cabinet Work Programme for consideration at every meeting. Members can and do identify items from the work programme which they feel would benefit from pre-decision scrutiny and these items are then scheduled for consideration at subsequent meetings of the Board. Any recommendations arising from pre-scrutiny of reports are reported for the consideration of the Cabinet. As Overview and Scrutiny is a Member-led process, the Councillors on the Overview and Scrutiny Board determine which items they wish to scrutinise.</p> <p>It has been recognised by elected Members that there will be a need to ensure that the Cabinet Advisory Panel and Overview and Scrutiny Board do not duplicate work. As part of the actions that are being taken following agreement of the Governance Systems Task Group’s recommendations, this will be reviewed further.</p>
<b>Portfolios</b>	<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>How many portfolios will there be?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>What will the role of a portfolio holder be?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Will this be a full-time position?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Will decisions be delegated to portfolio holders? Or will the executive/mayor take decisions?</i></li> </ul>
	Analysis	<p><u>Number of Portfolio Holders</u></p> <p>It is likely that there will continue to be 7 Members appointed to the Cabinet in future years. The exact number is determined by the Leader of the Council.</p> <p><u>Role of a Portfolio Holder</u></p> <p>At Bromsgrove District Council, Portfolio Holders do not have individual decision-making powers. Instead, decisions are taken collectively by the Cabinet.</p> <p>At the Council, Portfolio Holders do the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Act as spokespersons for the services/projects within the remit of their portfolios. This includes being consulted on and providing quotes for press releases/in response to press enquiries.</li> </ul>

- They are consulted on the content of draft reports within their remits.
- Meet with senior officers to discuss actions/services within their remit.
- Present reports at Cabinet for items within their remit.
- Help to present reports to Overview and Scrutiny meetings for items within their remit.
- Attend Overview and Scrutiny Board / Finance and Budget Working Group (on budget matters) / Scrutiny Task Group meetings when invited to provide answers to questions from scrutiny Members.
- Present Annual Portfolio Holder reports at meetings of full Council.
- Attend Cabinet Surgeries, which are held in private and at which Portfolio Holders answer questions from other Members about areas within their remits. (This is a new arrangement introduced during the 2023/24 municipal year).
- Attend meetings of the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee to answer questions from Members where invited to do so. (The lead Cabinet Member for the budget attends every meeting of the Committee to answer questions and help present reports, although is not permitted to be a Member of the Committee).
- Represents the Council on external organisations where appointed to outside bodies in an ex officio capacity.
- Answers questions raised at Council meetings by other Members which relate to issues within their Portfolio remit.

#### Time Allocated to Being a Portfolio Holder

Portfolio Holders do allocate additional time to fulfil their roles, for which they receive remuneration in the form of Special Responsibility Allowances (SRAs). The SRA for the position of Portfolio Holder is assessed on an annual basis by the Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP) for Worcestershire.

Whilst the role of Portfolio Holder does take more time than that for standard Councillors, it is not a full-time job. Bromsgrove District Council holds most meetings during the evening and many of the functions listed above can be fulfilled during the evenings. Some of the Portfolio Holders hold full-time jobs alongside their roles as Portfolio Holders.

		<p>The position of Leader of the Council (and to some extent the Deputy Leader of the Council) is closer to a full-time job than Portfolio Holder, due to the volume of meetings that the Leader is required to attend in addition to the Leader also holding a Portfolio at the Council. These additional duties are reflected in the level of remuneration granted in SRAs to the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council.</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>The Council has an Officer Scheme of Delegations, which is included at Part 6 of the Council’s constitution. The Officer Scheme of Delegations details the delegations granted to officers on an ongoing basis per department. The content of the Officer Scheme of Delegations is reviewed on an annual basis, usually at the Annual Council meeting held in May, to ensure that the delegations remain appropriate for the Council and the communities it serves.</p> <p>The Officer Scheme of Delegations at the time of writing can be accessed from the attached link: <a href="#">6 Scheme of Delegations May 2023.pdf (bromsgrove.gov.uk)</a></p> <p>Members sometimes delegate specific actions to particular Officers when considering reports at Cabinet meetings. Officers are required to complete Officer decision forms, once these “one off” delegations have been enacted, in order to ensure transparency in the decision-making process.</p> <p>The terms of reference for the Committees are detailed at Part 5 in the Council’s constitution. Again, the content of the terms of reference are reviewed on an annual basis alongside the review of the political balance at the Council. The agreed terms of reference for Committees at the Council at the time of writing can be accessed from the attached link: <a href="#">Committee Terms of Reference - May 2023</a></p> <p>The majority of Committees at the Council comprise a membership of 11 Councillors; the exceptions to this are the Cabinet and Electoral Matters Committee, with 7 members each as well as the Appeals, Appointments and Statutory Officers Disciplinary</p>

	<p>Panels, which each have a membership of 5 Councillors.</p> <p>The Council recently established a Council Housing Company and there will be a Shareholders Committee for this company, comprising a membership of elected Members. It is likely that 7 Councillors will be appointed to this Committee.</p> <p>Key decisions are taken collectively by Councillors serving on the Cabinet. Full Council, comprising all Members, reserves the right to make decisions that would impact on the budget framework and on items within the Policy Framework, which is detailed in The Articles at Part 2 of the constitution.</p>
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### Accountability

Give the Commission details as to how the authority and its decision makers and partners will be held to account. The Commission is interested in both the internal and external dimensions of this role. **Responses should demonstrate that alternative council sizes have been explored.**

Topic	
Internal Scrutiny	The scrutiny function of authorities has changed considerably. Some use theme or task-and-finish groups, for example, and others have a committee system. Scrutiny arrangements may also be affected by the officer support available.
<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	The Council has a single Overview and Scrutiny Board that commissions time limited Task and Finish reviews, referred to as Task Groups at the Council. The Board holds the Cabinet to account by scrutinising decisions taken by the Cabinet as well as through pre-decision scrutiny of items on the Cabinet Work Programme. The Overview and Scrutiny process is Member-led at Bromsgrove District Council; Members



determine what they wish to scrutinise, what evidence to gather and what recommendations they wish to make.

During the Governance Systems Task Group investigation, Members proposed that in future there should be a constitutional requirement for the positions of Chairmen of both the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee and the Overview and Scrutiny Board to be members of opposition groups. Whilst opposition Members have been appointed to these positions in recent years, this is not currently a constitutional requirement and has therefore been with the consent of the majority group(s). The requirement to appoint opposition Members to these positions would be in line with what is considered to be national best practice and helps to ensure that there is some separation between the executive and scrutiny functions.

There is also a permanent, cross-party Finance and Budget Working Group at the Council. The working group, which is chaired by the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Board, meets in private and takes a lead on scrutinising important budget documents. The lead Portfolio Holder for finance attends every meeting of the working group and answers Members' questions at these sessions. As well as scrutinising budget figures, the group also makes recommendations to Cabinet where Members feel this to be appropriate.

The number of Task Groups at the Council varies from year to year; at the time of writing, there is a single Task Group investigating community shops and food banks in the District. Task Groups can focus on a range of issues that impact on the local community, not just Council services. In previous years, reviews have focused on issues as diverse as car parking, libraries, flooding and homelessness. The Overview and Scrutiny Board determines the scope of a Task Group investigation and sets the deadline for completion of the review.

A member of the Board is required to be appointed as Chairman of a Task Group and is expected to provide verbal updates to the Board on the progress of a review on an ongoing basis. The remainder of the membership of a Task Group are derived from the "Overview and Scrutiny pool"; non-executive members who may or may not also be members of the Overview and Scrutiny Board. The Task Group Members determine the number and frequency of the meetings, which are scheduled on an ad hoc basis in accordance with Members' availability (most meetings are held in the evenings as many Members have work commitments). Members participating in Task Group investigations are expected to prepare in advance by reading

through agenda packs, to suggest questions for interview with expert witnesses, to suggest evidence for consideration and to attend meetings. Members of Task Group sometimes undertake and present their own research, although this varies. At the end of a review, the Chairman of the Task Group is expected to present the group's findings to the Overview and Scrutiny Board, Cabinet as well as Council and / or partner organisations where appropriate.

There are no specific rules at the Council in respect of the numbers of Councillors appointed to Task Groups. However, generally, Members are encouraged to limit the membership to a maximum of 5 Councillors, as this makes it easier to convene meetings that all Members of the Task Group can attend. This number of Councillors also enables all political groups at the Council (currently 4) to be represented, although there is no requirement for the political balance to be applied to the membership of Task Groups.

In terms of the number of Overview and Scrutiny Committees at the Council, the authority has had a single Overview and Scrutiny Board commissioning Task Groups for a number of years. This model has worked well at Bromsgrove. There are a relatively small number of Councillors available to participate in scrutiny activities (24, as Cabinet Members are not permitted to take part in scrutiny). These Members are also all involved in other Committees, including Planning, Licensing and so forth and additional scrutiny Committees could create conflicts in terms of Member availability to participate in meetings if the number of Committees was to increase without a commensurate increase in the number of Members available to serve on those Committees.

There are currently 11 Members on the Overview and Scrutiny Board. This is a similar number to the membership of other important Committees, such as the Planning Committee. Membership of this Committee tends to be quite popular and therefore a membership of 11 provides a significant number of Councillors, compared to the overall number of Members at the Council, with an opportunity to participate in meetings.

As Bromsgrove District Council is in a two-tier authority area, health scrutiny powers are vested in Worcestershire County Council. However, Bromsgrove is represented on the Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC) by a Member of the Bromsgrove Overview and Scrutiny Board who is appointed at the start of the municipal year. This Councillor is expected to attend HOSC meetings throughout the year, to raise issues on behalf of the Bromsgrove Overview and Scrutiny Board at HOSC meetings and to report back to the Board on the work of HOSC.

	<p>Currently, Council and Committee meetings, including scrutiny Task Groups, are supported by the Council’s Democratic Services team. This is a relatively small team comprising 6 full time equivalent members of staff, including a Trainee, and one part-time Officer (10 hours per week). In recent years, there has been a significant volume of meetings at Bromsgrove District Council as well as Redditch Borough Council, with which Bromsgrove shares many services including Democratic Services. As such, there is currently only capacity to support one Task Group review at the Council at any one time. However, the Governance Systems Task Group proposed that an additional Democratic Services Officer should be employed to help support increasing workloads and, once in post, this additional officer would help to increase capacity within the team which could be used to support more Task Groups.</p>				
<p><b>Statutory Function</b></p>	<p>This includes planning, licencing and any other regulatory responsibilities. Consider under each of the headings the extent to which decisions will be delegated to officers. How many members will be required to fulfil the statutory requirements of the council?</p>				
<p><b>Planning</b></p>	<table border="1"> <tr> <td data-bbox="355 1023 539 1384"> <p>Key lines of explanation</p> </td> <td data-bbox="539 1023 1460 1384"> <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> </td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="355 1384 539 2004"> <p>Analysis</p> </td> <td data-bbox="539 1384 1460 2004"> <p>From the 01 October 2022 to the end of September 2023, there have been a total of 605 planning applications and related decisions. Of these, 579 were determined under delegated powers, meaning that 4.3% were determined by members. There are no planned changes to the Scheme of Delegation that would alter the current position as to which applications are automatically required to be determined by members.</p> <p>The independent Planning Advisory Service (PAS) undertook a review of the Council’s Planning Committee in 2022. The recommendations arising from this review have been reported to the Constitution Review Working Group and a number of changes were proposed to the Council’s Planning Committee which were agreed at the Council meeting that took place on 25<sup>th</sup> October 2023. A copy of the PAS review of the Council’s Planning Committee has been attached for consideration</p> </td> </tr> </table>	<p>Key lines of explanation</p>	<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>	<p>Analysis</p>	<p>From the 01 October 2022 to the end of September 2023, there have been a total of 605 planning applications and related decisions. Of these, 579 were determined under delegated powers, meaning that 4.3% were determined by members. There are no planned changes to the Scheme of Delegation that would alter the current position as to which applications are automatically required to be determined by members.</p> <p>The independent Planning Advisory Service (PAS) undertook a review of the Council’s Planning Committee in 2022. The recommendations arising from this review have been reported to the Constitution Review Working Group and a number of changes were proposed to the Council’s Planning Committee which were agreed at the Council meeting that took place on 25<sup>th</sup> October 2023. A copy of the PAS review of the Council’s Planning Committee has been attached for consideration</p>
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	<p>together with a copy of the report to Council in respect of proposed changes to the Council's constitution.</p> <p>The Changes proposed in the PAS review include; live streaming Planning Committee meetings on a regular basis, reviewing the length of reports for Planning Committee meetings depending on the significance of the application, introducing officers present at the meetings, the Committee considering information in respect of the outcomes of appeals and, given the quasi-judicial nature of the meetings, using white nameplates for Members rather than coloured nameplates that denote political party affiliations.</p> <p>Whilst changes are proposed to the operation of the authority's Planning Committee, there are no proposals to introduce an Area Planning Committee at the Council. Instead, the Council intends to continue to have a single Planning Committee considering and determining planning applications.</p> <p>Cabinet Members, with the exception of the Leader of the Council, can be appointed as members of the Planning Committee. However, the Chairman of the Planning Committee cannot be a member of Cabinet.</p> <p>In recent years, two meetings of the Planning Committee have been scheduled to take place each month; a lead meeting and a reserve meeting. This arrangement was introduced to provide additional capacity to consider a greater volume of applications that had been delayed during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic. However, over the last 12 months only one meeting of the Committee has tended to take place per month. It is therefore proposed that from 2024/25 onwards, a single meeting of the Planning Committee should be scheduled to take place. Where additional meetings may be needed in future, this will be assessed on a case-by-case basis and extra meetings booked in where needed.</p> <p>Members of the Planning Committee are required to attend meetings of the Committee to participate in the debate and vote on items. Prior to serving on the Committee, Councillors are required to attend planning training. Comprehensive planning training is provided to Members at the start of their terms of office, with for example training having been provided by expert external trainers in May 2023. Planning refresher training is offered to Councillors on an annual basis thereafter which Members of the Planning Committee are strongly encouraged to attend alongside additional, ad hoc training arranged throughout the year, e.g. there was an additional training session in respect of planning enforcement in October 2023. Training is provided jointly to Bromsgrove District</p>
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		<p>Councillors and Redditch Borough Councillors to help share costs. In future, it is intended that a mock Planning Committee meeting will form part of this training process.</p> <p>Further commitments may be required from Members of the Planning Committee during the year in terms of attending site visits. Currently, Bromsgrove Members arrange to attend site visits individually. However, prior to the pandemic, site visits were arranged collectively and transportation was provided to Members and this practice may return in due course.</p> <p>The Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Planning Committee are required to commit additional time to the Committee. In advance of Committee meetings, they are invited to attend briefings with relevant officers to discuss the agenda. They may also be consulted with respect to public speaking arrangements, for example where requests to speak have been received from residents after the registration deadline.</p>
<b>Licensing</b>	<p><i>Key lines of explanation</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>How many licencing panels will the council have in the average year?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>And what will be the time commitment for members?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Will there be standing licencing panels, or will they be ad-hoc?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Will there be core members and regular attendees, or will different members serve on them?</i></li> </ul>
	<p>Analysis</p>	<p>The Council has a “parent” Licensing Committee and three different types of Licensing Sub-Committees that focus variously on Taxi licencing, gambling, premises hearings, sex establishments and street trading licences.</p> <p>The main Licensing Committee meets three times per year to consider Licensing policies, although can hold additional meetings during the year where necessary.</p> <p>In terms of Licensing Sub-Committee (Taxi hearings), Bromsgrove District Council schedules in 6 meetings per municipal year and they can take between 2 to 3 hours per meeting, with a 30-minute Member pre-briefing prior to the meeting commencing. Additional meetings can be convened on an ad hoc basis where required.</p> <p>Hearings in respect of Street Trading Consent Applications are held on an ad hoc basis as and when Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS) receive Street Trading Consent Applications which have received representations. The Council has cancelled one such hearing this municipal year (the applicant withdrew their application) and one went ahead recently. These hearings can take between 2 to 4 hours depending on the number of representations received and the number of public speakers attending, and if the meeting is</p>

		<p>adjourned in order for Members to conduct a Site Visit, with a 30-minute Member pre-briefing prior to the meeting.</p> <p>Premises Applications / Review hearings are also held on an ad hoc basis as and when WRS receive Premises Applications or Reviews. The Council have had 2 such hearings this municipal year. They can take between 2 to 6 hours depending on the complexity, the volume of information received, the number of representations and if the police are involved. These hearings also entail a 30 to 45-minute Member pre-briefing prior to the meeting commencing.</p> <p>Currently, only members of the Licensing Committee are permitted to serve on Licensing hearings conducted by Licensing Sub-Committees. There are 11 Councillors on the Committee and three Councillors are required to serve on each Licensing Sub-Committee hearing plus a reserve Member where available. The membership of the Licensing Sub-Committee hearings is supposed to vary, although it is reliant on Members' availability. As the hearings are held during the day, to accommodate the needs of Licensing applicants, some Members struggle to participate due to work commitments. This means that in practice the number of Councillors from the Committee available to participate in hearings is fewer than 11 and those Members who do regularly participate in hearings are required then to allocate a disproportionate amount of their time, compared to other Councillors on the Committee, to participate in those hearings.</p> <p>Councillors are not permitted to serve on a Licensing hearing (sub-committee) until they have received Licensing training. Training is provided to Members at the start of their terms of office as part of the Member induction process and refresher training is provided on an annual basis thereafter.</p> <p>Any member of the Licensing committee can chair sub-committee hearings. Chairing skills training is provided to Members as part of the Member induction process and Licensing Committee members are strongly encouraged to attend Chairing skills training before they can chair a meeting.</p>
<p><b>Other Regulatory Bodies</b></p>	<p><i>Key lines of explanation</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>What will they be, and how many members will they require?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Explain the number and membership of your Regulatory Committees with respect to greater delegation to officers.</i></li> </ul>
	<p>Analysis</p>	<p>The Council has a combined Audit, Standards and Governance Committee. The Committee previously held 4 meetings a year. However, the Council was issued with a Section 24 Notice in 2022 and in response to this notice, the number of meetings of the Committee increased to provide Members with greater oversight of the Council's progress in</p>

		<p>terms of addressing the recommendations made by the external auditors in that notice. Once these points have been addressed, it is anticipated that the number of meetings will reduce back to 4 meetings per year, although there is uncertainty at the time of writing about when this will take place.</p> <p>There are currently 11 members serving on the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee. In previous years, 9 Members were appointed to the Committee. However, during the 2022/23 municipal year, difficulties were experienced in terms of holding meetings of the Committee that were quorate and the decision was taken to increase the number of Councillors appointed to the Committee from May 2023 onwards in an attempt to address this problem. To date, meetings of the Committee held since the membership increased have all been quorate.</p> <p>The Audit, Standards and Governance Committee has an important role to provide assurance to Members and the public that there are sound financial management measures in place at the authority. Reports are received from both the Council's financial services team, as well as both the external and interview audit teams. In addition, the Committee has a role in monitoring the Council's standards process and again it is important to make sure that these updates are provided in the public domain to ensure that there is openness and transparency in relation to how the Council handles issues with non-compliance with the authority's Code of Conduct. In this context, it would not be appropriate to delegate the functions of the Committee further to officers in case this should undermine that transparency.</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 council members serve on decision-making partnerships, sub-regional, regional or national bodies? In doing so, are they able to take decisions/make commitments on behalf of the council?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>How many councillors will be involved in this activity? And what is their expected workload? What proportion of this work is undertaken by portfolio holders?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>What other external bodies will members be involved in? And what is the anticipated workload?</i></li> </ul>	
Analysis	<p>Members of the Council are appointed to external organisations as outside bodies every year. Depending on the requirements of that organisation, some appointments are made for a year whilst other appointments can be for a longer period of time. The Cabinet agrees Portfolio Holder appointments made in an ex officio capacity whilst Members</p>	

	<p>agree other outside body appointments at a meeting of Council held early in the municipal year.</p> <p>The extent to which Councillors appointed to outside bodies make decisions at these meetings varies in accordance with the terms of reference for the body to which the Councillor is appointed and the capacity in which the Councillor is appointed. For example, Members appointed to the Joint Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS) Board on behalf of the Council can take part in collective decision making with representatives of other Councils in that shared service, however, the Council's representative on the Worcestershire HOSC, whilst representing the Council, does not make any decisions as the HOSC is not a decision making body.</p> <p>The Portfolio Holders have a greater workload than other Members arising from working on Outside Bodies as they are appointed to more bodies in an ex officio capacity. However, the amount of time that Councillors appointed to outside bodies have to spend working on duties for external organisations varies according to their terms of reference.</p> <p>Outside body appointments are shared out, cross-party, amongst approximately 20 Councillors. Approximately 50% of the appointments are made in an ex officio capacity.</p> <p>The Chairman of the Council may have additional involvement with other external bodies, in respect of their fund-raising activities for their nominated charities and in terms of the civic engagements they attend.</p> <p>The Leader of the Council and other political group leaders may meet more frequently with representatives of other organisations to discuss matters impacting on the District. In addition, the Leader of the Council, group leaders and Cabinet Members may come into contact with representatives of bodies such as the Local Government Association (LGA), both through attendance at the LGA's annual conference and through attendance at training provided by the LGA. As part of the Member induction process, opportunities to attend all of the LGA training sessions designed for new Councillors is promoted to new Members by Democratic Services.</p>
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**Community Leadership**

The Commission understands that there is no single approach to community leadership and that members represent, and provide leadership to, their communities in different ways. The Commission wants to know how members are required to provide effective community leadership and what support the council offers them in this role. For example, does the



authority have a defined role and performance system for its elected members? And what support networks are available within the council to help members in their duties? The Commission also wants to see a consideration of **how the use of technology and social media by the council as a whole, and by councillors individually, will affect casework, community engagement and local democratic representation. Responses should demonstrate that alternative council sizes have been explored.**

Topic		Description
Community Leadership	Key lines of explanation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>In general terms how do councillors carry out their representational role with electors?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Does the council have area committees and what are their powers?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>How do councillors seek to engage with their constituents? Do they hold surgeries, send newsletters, hold public meetings or maintain blogs?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Are there any mechanisms in place that help councillors interact with young people, those not on the electoral register, and/or other minority groups and their representative bodies?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Are councillors expected to attend community meetings, such as parish or resident's association meetings? If so, what is their level of involvement and what roles do they play?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Explain your approach to the Area Governance structure. Is your Area Governance a decision-making forum or an advisory board? What is their relationship with locally elected members and Community bodies such as Town and Parish Councils? Looking forward how could they be improved to enhance decision-making?</i></li> </ul>
	Analysis	<p>Members manage their ward work individually. Some Councillors choose to hold surgeries whilst other Councillors communicate with their residents in different ways. All Councillors are provided with a Council email address which they are required to use for Council business and they can also opt to provide a telephone number to the public. Members' contact details are publicised on the Council's website.</p> <p>Many Councillors attend meetings of Parish Councils held in their wards, even in cases where they are not Parish Councillors. The decision as to whether to attend these meetings is made by the Members themselves. Some Councillors represent wards in which there are a number of Parish Councils, so this can involve attendance at a number of meetings.</p> <p>Some Members use social media to interact with residents. This is organised by Members themselves and is not directly facilitated by the Council. However, Councillors are required to abide by the Council's Member Code of Conduct when</p>

		<p>using social media and this is covered in Code of Conduct training as part of the Member Induction process.</p> <p>The Council's public speaking rules for the Planning Committee enable Councillors to register as ward Members to speak on particular Planning applications. Members are consulted in respect of planning applications for their wards and have the power to call in applications for the consideration of the Planning Committee where they feel that a debate at a meeting of the Committee would be helpful.</p> <p>The Council has a standard report template. Within that template, there is a requirement for report authors to consult with ward Councillors, where appropriate, in respect of proposals that may have specific implications for their wards. The frequency with which this occurs varies according to the focus of the reports.</p> <p>Bromsgrove District Council does not have Area Committees. Currently, there are no plans to introduce Area Committees.</p> <p>There are no particular mechanisms in place to enable the Councillors to interact specifically with minority groups or young people. However, the Council does have an Electoral Matters Committee, which reviews and determines many (although not all) issues relating to elections and issues relating to engagement with people in relation to the local electoral process can be discussed at these meetings, depending on items on the agenda.</p>
<b>Casework</b>	<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>How do councillors deal with their casework? Do they pass it on to council officers? Or do they take a more in-depth approach to resolving issues?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>What support do members receive?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>How has technology influenced the way in which councillors work? And interact with their electorate?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>In what ways does the council promote service users' engagement/dispute resolution with service providers and managers rather than through councillors?</i></li> </ul>
	Analysis	<p>Councillors deal with their case work individually and each Member has their preferred approach to resolving case issues. Sometimes, Councillors choose to refer issues on to Officers, either for a resolution or in order to gather information or clarify factual details. Currently, there is a corporate requirement for Council staff to respond to Member queries within 10 working days, however officers are currently reviewing the guidance and protocols.</p>

		<p>All Members are provided with a key Officer contact list when they are elected, which is included in their induction packs. Members also have access to staff contact details on the Council's Outlook email system.</p> <p>Members do not receive specific support in terms of managing their case work. However, the Democratic Services team are often contacted by Members for information, including contact details for relevant departments or advice in respect of referring queries on to other services or organisations. All of the Democratic Services team's contact details are provided to Councillors in their induction packs early in their terms of office and the team is in regular contact with Members.</p> <p>In addition, the Democratic Services team produce the Members' newsletter, which contains information useful for Members. The newsletter is published on a monthly basis and is circulated by email for all Members' consideration, with paper copies placed on display in the Members' Room at Parkside.</p> <p>The email addresses provided by the Council to elected Members can be used to communicate with the public alongside any telephone numbers they agree to share with local residents. These details are published on the Council's website.</p> <p>The Council currently provides the majority of Members with paper copies of agenda packs and other key documentation, although Members can go paperless on request. In line with key targets set in the Council's Carbon Reduction Strategy, action is currently being taken to try to reduce the amount of paperwork generated for Committee meetings. This has included the Democratic Services team providing training to Members on how to use the modern.gov app to access and annotate agenda packs, including private papers, electronically. (Modern.gov is the Council's Committee management system).</p> <p>At the request of Members, the Council is gradually in the process of starting to live stream more Council and Planning Committee meetings on a regular basis. This should not change the way that Members interact at Committee meetings, as there remains a legal requirement for Councillors to attend formal meetings in person. However, this does help to enhance the transparency of the local democratic process.</p> <p>Members of the public do request the contact details of Members from time to time via the Council's contact centre.</p>
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		Where this is requested by phone, the contact details are provided and Officers do check whether the public would also like to be provided with contact details for the relevant Council department.
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**Other Issues**

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

**Summary**

In following this template respondents should have been able to provide the Commission with a robust and well-evidenced case for their proposed council size; one which gives a clear explanation as to the governance arrangements and number of councillors required to represent the authority in the future.

Use this space to summarise the proposals and indicate other options considered. Explain why these alternatives were not appropriate in terms of their ability to deliver effective Strategic Leadership, Accountability (Scrutiny, Regulation and Partnerships), and Community Leadership.

**Summary**

The Council has provided through this submission a detailed analysis of its regard to:

- Its current governance arrangements and how it makes decisions.
- Its scrutiny functions relating to its own decision making and The Council’s responsibilities to outside bodies; and
- The role of its councillors in the local community and how they engage with their residents and conduct casework, including how this may have changed in recent years and is affected by community characteristics and financial challenges.

Based on this analysis, The Council considered its options in terms of its future size. To do so effectively, the consideration of council size was initially taken to a meeting of group leaders before being discussed at a meeting of the cross-party Electoral Matters Committee, where the following options were considered:

**Option 1 – Reduce the number of Councillors**

The option of reducing the number of councillors was carefully considered. During discussions the following points were noted:

Electoral ratio – Bromsgrove currently has the highest ratio of elector per councillor when comparing both its CIPFA nearest neighbours and all other authorities within the

Worcestershire County. It is felt that increasing this ratio by reducing the number of councillors would not provide Bromsgrove with any improvement in comparatively effective local government representation for electors. It was noted that in the last electoral review in the council had reduced its size from 39 to 31 councillors with an aim to remove multi member wards. The council would like to continue with the most effective patterning of wards where possible and feel that a further consecutive reduction would be excessive.

Community leadership - It was noted that a reduction in the number of Councillors would also increase councillor workload during a time in which Councillors have identified additional complexities of casework. It was identified that such complexities arise due to national factors such as the rise in the cost of living, but also due to community characteristics in Bromsgrove, such as an above average aged population. Most importantly it was felt that the community could be negatively impacted by any such reduction.

The impact of recent governance reviews - As set out in the contextual section of this document, the Council has recently agreed to amend its constitution as a result of a review of its governance arrangements, including the introduction of a Cabinet Advisory Panel. Considering this amongst other proposed changes, a reduction in the number of councillors would further increase workload, with commitments to outside bodies also requiring consideration. It is therefore felt that any reduction in the number of councillors could impede the Council's future operational arrangements.

**For the reasons stated above it is the view of the Council that Reducing the number of councillors is not a viable option for Bromsgrove District Council.**

### **Option 2 – Increase the number of Councillors**

Serious consideration was given to the option of increasing its number of councillors. It was noted that there is a projected population growth of 6552 in the next 10 years within Bromsgrove. It was also noted again that the electoral ratio is higher that of neighbouring authorities.

However, responses to the survey from councillors shows that most feel that the council size and their current workload is about right. It was also noted that an increase of one additional councillor could potentially raise an operational issue from a political balance perspective, as it would create an even number of councillors. Whilst not outweighing any of the main focuses of the Electoral Review, such operational considerations appear reasonable.

As can be seen in option 3 the recent assessment on the Council's governance arrangements there is already a view that there is effective governance based on the current number of councillors.

Whilst financial implications are not a consideration of the Electoral review itself, any additional councillors would have a financial implication, with costs such as member allowance, training and IT equipment worth noting.

**Ultimately, whilst there are some indicators that an increase in council size could be an appropriate course of action, there were not any strong driving factors within either analysis or discussions which warranted the additional increase when balancing this against discussions for maintaining the Council's current council size.**

### **Option 3 – Maintaining the current number of Councillors**

Effective governance - The recent undertakings to assess the Council's governance arrangements and the proposed model have been based on the current council size and therefore it is felt that the Council is in a good position to operate successfully with its current 31 councillors.

Electoral variance - The Council acknowledges that this review provides an opportunity for an assessment of the current ward boundaries to ensure effective local governance. There are currently some significant imbalances in ward electorates, with Perryfields having a -62% and Hilltop a -34% electoral variance. In places these variances are due to housing development, which were accounted for in the previous review, but delayed. Despite this, there is a clear need to look at electoral balance in each of the wards for some redistribution where possible. It is felt that this is where the work is needed to ensure successful governance in Bromsgrove, which will take place in the latter stages of the review.

Councillor views - Most Councillors who responded to the survey implied that they are currently happy with both their current workload and the current council size.

The Council has undertaken a comprehensive analysis with considerations given to each option. Maintaining the current number of councillors is the preferred choice for Bromsgrove District Council. This option aligns with the councillors' views with their existing workload and council size, whilst recognising the Council's vision for its future governance arrangements. Additionally, addressing electoral imbalances within the existing council size at later stages of the review will ensure effective local governance without the potential consequences of reducing or increasing the number of councillors. Preserving the status quo is considered to be the most balanced decision when assessing the options available.

Councillor Workload Survey – Response Summary

12. Which statement best describes the way you feel about your current workload as a councillor?

- I could take on a bigger workload 2
- I feel my workload is about right 7
- I feel my workload is too large 2



13. Do you feel that the number of councillors in Bromsgrove District Council is:

- too few 2
- about right 9
- too many 0




15. What is your employment status (outside of your role as a councillor)?

- working full time 4
- working part time 5
- retired or not working 2
- self employed 0



8. Do you feel that your duties (Council business and/or within the community) have changed in recent years

[More Details](#)

 Insights

- Yes 5
- No 6



9. What do you think is the reason for this?

5 Responses

ID ↑	Name	Responses
1	anonymous	Covid, more residents working from home. A more pronounced feeling of entitlement to fast responses ,different attitudes as people have moved out of more urban areas, lack of understanding (rural areas have less streetlights pavements etc. Loss of trust in the political landscape, politicians infected by Westminster bad behaviour.
2	anonymous	Increase in demands as society's expectations are for immediate responses to enquiries.
3	anonymous	more planning and enforcement issues are coming to light
4	anonymous	Social media and more proactive engagement with the public and voluntarily get involved with community issues.
5	anonymous	People contact me more frequently during traditionally 'out of office' hours since the pandemic.



## 10. How would you say your duties have changed in recent years?

5 Responses

ID ↑	Name	Responses
1	anonymous	More traffic issues, more tree issues. Finances have tightened so less to offer,
2	anonymous	More demands and higher expectations from the residents.
3	anonymous	i have only been in a year
4	anonymous	More of a 'go to person' which I'm happy with.
5	anonymous	More people are in need of help for a variety of issues but particularly relating to the cost of living crisis and complex issues, as well as issues with wider WCC plans.