



# COUNCIL SIZE SUBMISSION

South Gloucestershire

South Gloucestershire Council Conservative Group. February 2017

## **Overview of South Gloucestershire**

1. South Gloucestershire is an affluent unitary authority on the North and East fringe of Bristol. South Gloucestershire Council (SGC) was formed in 1996 following the dissolution of Avon County Council and the merger of Northavon District and Kingswood Borough Councils.

2. South Gloucestershire has around 274,700 residents, 62% of which live in the immediate urban fringes of Bristol in areas including Kingswood, Filton, Staple Hill, Downend, Warmley and Bradley Stoke. 18% live in the market towns of Thornbury, Yate, and Chipping Sodbury. The remaining 20% live in rural Gloucestershire villages such as Marshfield, Pucklechurch, Hawkesbury Upton, Oldbury-on-Severn, Alveston, and Charfield.

3. South Gloucestershire has lower than average unemployment (3.3% against an England average of 4.8% as of 2016), earns above average wages (average weekly full time wage of £574.20 against England average of £544.70), and has above average house prices (£235,000 against England average of £218,000)<sup>1</sup>.

## **Deprivation**

4. Despite high employment and economic outputs, there are pockets of deprivation in South Gloucestershire. Some communities suffer from low income, unemployment, social isolation, poor housing, low educational achievement, degraded environment, access to health services, or higher levels of crime than other neighbourhoods. These forms of deprivation are often linked and the relationship between them is so strong that we have identified 5 Priority Neighbourhoods which are categorised by the national Indices of Deprivation as amongst the 20% most deprived neighbourhoods in England and Wales. These are Cadbury Heath, Kingswood, Patchway, Staple Hill, and west and south Yate/Dodgton. In each of these areas a local Partnership Network is co-ordinating work to ensure local input, and in many areas they are delivering excellent work on the ground, supported by the work of strategic agencies including the Council.

5. The Council takes a role in bringing partners together including the police, health authority, housing associations and services, the fire service, and community groups and voluntary agencies. The Council particularly contributes with modest sums of money, supporting projects in the priority neighbourhoods, coordinating departments and agencies to help work better together, and gathering information on services, initiatives and research locally and nationally to better inform work<sup>2</sup>. The policy of priority neighbourhoods has already been successful for Filton, which was designated particularly due to high crime figures, but has improved substantially and graduated out of the priority neighbourhood category.

## **Population projections**

6. South Gloucestershire is currently experiencing significant housing growth, with a number of large strategic housing developments building out at locations including Charlton Hayes, East of Harry Stoke, North Yate, and Cribbs-Patchway. Between 2017 and 2023, it is projected that there will be an increase of 19,108 voters across the authority (see Appendix 1)

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<sup>1</sup> For further reading on the demographics of South Gloucestershire please visit:

<http://www.southglos.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/census/key-facts-and-figures/>

<sup>2</sup> For further reading on priority neighbourhoods please visit: <http://www.southglos.gov.uk/community-and-living/stronger-communities/priority-neighbourhoods/>

## **Role of Council**

7. Local Government generally, and South Gloucestershire specifically, is in a period of flux, undergoing many changes at once, which will affect SGC's role in a number of arenas.

8. Firstly, as laid out in the Council Plan, the change in Central Government finance for local authorities and general government policy indicates a need for the state to step back and to allow the private and voluntary sectors a greater role in delivering services and shaping communities.

9. Secondly, having signed a Devolution Deal, South Gloucestershire will be delegating certain strategic functions around transport, housing, planning, and skills to the newly created West of England Combined Authority (WECA), and sharing other functions in the same policy areas. The Combined Authority will be chaired by the West of England Mayor once elected in May, who will take some decision-making away from SGC.

10. Thirdly, executive arrangements are likely to transition from a committee structure to a strong leader and cabinet model from March 2017, this will replace the committees taking decisions with individual cabinet portfolio holders.

## **Council Plan**

11. In 2016 the Council refreshed its Council Plan, a short strategic document which outlines the Council's vision and strategy for the next four years<sup>3</sup>.

12. The essence of the plan is captured in the following quote: "Whilst publicly funded services will play a key role, the contributions from those in the community will become more vital. Over recent years the district has delivered a savings programme of £45m, but we need to go even further and by 2020 we are likely to need to deliver further savings in excess of the currently assumed £34m... the council is now smaller and therefore no longer able to do all that we have previously done."

13. This signifies a fundamental policy shift. The Council is proactively transforming from a body which is primarily a provider of services through tax-and-spend policies, to one which offers those vital services, but which has a much greater focus on acting as a service commissioner, an advocate for the public interest, and a coordinator of other actors.

14. As the Council's functions reduce it has taken the decision to reduce its officer workforce, it should therefore follow that the number of political 'workforce' – councillors – reduces concurrently.

## **Devolution deal**

15. SGC will be working closer with neighbouring authorities and the new West of England Combined Authority (WECA) to deliver the West of England Devolution Deal, finally confirmed with Government in February 2017<sup>4</sup>. The West of England area is generally used to describe the area comprising of Bristol, South Gloucestershire, Bath and North East Somerset (BaNES), and North Somerset Council areas. However, after North Somerset voted not to proceed at this stage, the WECA area will comprise only of Bristol City, South Gloucestershire, and BaNES Councils.

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<sup>3</sup> For the complete text of the Council Plan please visit: <http://edocs.southglos.gov.uk/councilplan/>

<sup>4</sup> For the complete text of the Devolution Deal please visit: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/508112/160315\\_West\\_of\\_England\\_Devolution\\_Agreement\\_Draft\\_-\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/508112/160315_West_of_England_Devolution_Agreement_Draft_-_FINAL.pdf)

16. This Deal involves the transfer of significant funds, powers, responsibilities and competencies from the Treasury, Department for Transport (DfT), the Skills Funding Agency (SFA), Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), and other government agencies to WECA. This will also involve certain strategic responsibilities either moving from the Local Authority to the Combined Authority level, or else being jointly held.

17. Such responsibilities include:

- Strategic planning and housing delivery, including preparation of a Spatial Development Strategy for the WECA area with associated call-in powers;
- Strategic transport policy, including preparation of a Local Transport Plan and Bus Strategy for the WECA area
- Highways, with responsibility for an agreed Key Route Network (network of identified roads of strategic importance) transferring to WECA;
- Skills, including feeding priorities into government policy, and commissioning of outcomes from the 19+ Adult Education Budget (fully devolved budget by 2018/19).

18. The West of England has a strong and distinct economic footprint, with 90% of people who live in the West of England working there too. There are almost no public transport routes which begin and end in one authority area without passing through another, and children go to schools across authority boundaries from where they live. As such it is logical for strategic decisions to be taken cooperatively at the West of England level and the first Devolution Deal is the first step on a process which will see more decisions taken in this way.

19. The new West of England Combined Authority (WECA) comprised of the leaders of BaNES and South Gloucestershire Council and the Mayor of Bristol as well as the West of England Mayor who will chair the Board. This will ratify all major strategic policy decisions and steer the devolution process as it goes through further stages.

Wider West of England strategy and legacy matters will be considered by the WoE Joint Committee which will replace the existing Strategic Leaders Board. This will include all WoE Leaders, including North Somerset's and the new WoE Mayor.

20. There will be three components of the political governance reporting to the WECA:

21. Firstly will be the Infrastructure Board, on which will sit the Cabinet/Lead members for Transport, Planning, and Housing. This will consider cross-boundary strategic matters and develop policy pertaining to public transport, the Key Route Network (KRN), housing, and planning.

22. Secondly will be the Skills Board, which will be made up of the portfolio holders for economic development and skills. It will consider cross-boundary strategic matters and develop policy pertaining to ensuring a balanced supply of skills to meet the needs of local businesses and exercising WECA's skills powers.

23. Thirdly will be the Business Board, which will consist of the portfolio holders for economic development. This will consider cross-boundary strategic matters and develop policy pertaining to economic development and inward investment.

24. The membership of each of these bodies will be drawn from lead members/cabinet portfolio holders.

25. There will be separate scrutiny and audit committees for WECA, which will be sat on by non-executive councillors. At present it is proposed that South Gloucestershire will have 3 seats on each committee (2 Conservative, 1 Liberal Democrat).

### **Governance and decision making – Committee and Cabinet**

26. At present South Gloucestershire Council operates using the Committee system, where portfolios sit with committees comprised of councillors from all three parties who are each decision makers in their own right.

27. Policy is made by the following committees, which meet between 6 and 8 times a year:

- Policy and Resources Committee (13 seats: 8 Conservative, 3 Liberal Democrat, 2 Labour)
- Resources Sub Committee (7 seats: 4 Conservative, 2 Liberal Democrat, 1 Labour) (must be Policy and Resource Committee members)
- Environment and Community Services Committee (13 seats: 7 Conservative, 3 Liberal Democrat, 3 Labour)
- Children, Adults, and Health Committee (13 seats: 7 Conservative, 3 Liberal Democrat, 3 Labour)

28. Setting aside the Resources Sub Committee seats, which must be taken by Policy and Resources committee members, there are 39 seats on decision making committees. Scrutiny is a function carried out by these committees, and therefore there are no separate seats for members carrying out scrutiny.

29. Following the 2015 election the Conservative Group returned 40 out of 70 seats, taking control of the Council. In November 2016 Full Council voted to instruct officers to prepare a new Constitution following the Strong Leader and Cabinet executive model to be presented at March 2017's Full Council. It is anticipated that it is likely in March 2017 that Council will vote to move to the Cabinet system along the lines articulated in the November 2016 resolution<sup>5</sup>.

30. The proposed model will vest executive power in an 8 member Cabinet holding the following portfolios:

- Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for the Local Economy and Devolution
- Corporate Resources
- Community Services
- Planning, Transport, and Strategic Environment
- Housing Delivery and Public Health
- Adult Social Care
- Children and Young People
- Schools, Skills and Employment

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<sup>5</sup> For more details see item 10 'Review of Governance Arrangements' on:  
<https://council.southglos.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=143&MIId=9026&Ver=4>

31. Scrutiny will be coordinated by a 15 member Scrutiny Commission, which will prepare reports on policy and will also have the power to establish task and finish groups for more intensive scrutiny and research. This will be appointed on a proportional basis, meaning that the Conservatives will hold 8 seats, the Liberal Democrats 4 seats, and Labour 3 seats. The Chair will be a non-Conservative member.

32. The expected change in executive arrangements from committee to cabinet will see a reduction in policy making and scrutiny roles from 39 committee seats to 23 seats (8 cabinet seats and 15 scrutiny commission seats), although it should be noted task and finish group membership is open to any non-Cabinet member, membership need not be exclusive drawn from those sitting on the commission.

### **Quasi-judicial functions**

33. As well as policy making and scrutiny, the Council is expected to fulfil a number of non-political and quasi-judicial functions, including considering complaints, holding the NHS to account, determining planning applications, auditing finances, and making decisions pertaining to licensing and public rights of way (PROW).

34. These are carried out by the following committees:

- Development Control (East) Committee (13 seats: 7 Conservative, 3 Liberal Democrat, 3 Labour) – this meets twice a month, once as Development Control (East) Committee to determine applications, and once as Development Control (East) Sites Inspection Sub Committee to visit sites of applications prior to determination.
- Development Control (West) Committee (13 seats: 7 Conservative, 3 Liberal Democrat, 3 Labour) - this meets twice a month, once as Development Control (West) Committee to determine applications, and once as Development Control (West) Sites Inspection Sub Committee to visit sites of applications prior to determination.
- Regulatory Committee (15 seats: 9 Conservative, 3 Liberal Democrat, 3 Labour) beneath this sit the Licensing (Any 3 trained Regulatory members), PROW (4 Conservative, 2 Liberal Democrat, 1 Labour), and Standards sub committees (1 Regulatory member from each party), the membership of which are drawn on a proportional basis from the parent committee. This meets 5 times a year as Regulatory Committee. The Licensing, PROW, and Standards sub committees meet ad hoc as necessary, but for context Licensing sat 22 times in 2016, 11 times in 2015, and 19 times in 2014; PROW sat 3 times in 2016, 4 times in 2015, and 3 times in 2014, and Standards sat 4 times in 2016, 5 times in 2015, and 3 times in 2014.
- Audit and Accounts Committee (7 seats: 4 Conservative, 2 Liberal Democrat, 1 Labour) – This meets 3 times a year.
- Health Scrutiny Committee (13 seats: 7 Conservative, 3 Liberal Democrat, 3 Labour) – This meets around 8 times a year, with additional joint meetings with Bristol City Council’s Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC) as necessary.

35. There are a grand total of 62 seats to carry out these functions. At present this equates to 0.89 seats per member. However should the transition to Cabinet be made, Cabinet Members would not take seats on these committees, which would increase seats available to exactly 1 seat per member with the current number of 70 councillors. Under the Council Size of 61 proposed in the Conclusion, excluding Cabinet members, this would result in an average of 1.2 seats per member.

### **Non-decision making committees, outside bodies, and ancillary duties**

36. As well as the two groups of committees above, councillors are also represented on Council and outside bodies. The vast majority of these meet either infrequently or on an ad hoc basis, with the exception of the West of England Partnership's Strategic Leaders Board, Joint Transport Board, Planning Housing and Communities Board, and Joint Scrutiny Committee, which each meet quarterly except Scrutiny, which convenes 5-6 times per year.

37. These include, but are not necessarily limited to:

- Adoption and Permanence Panel (1 Conservative member)
- Fostering Panel (1 Conservative member)
- Standing Advisory Committee on Religious Education (1 Conservative, 1 Liberal Democrat, 1 Labour)
- Complaints Panel (Any 3 trained members, usually on though not necessarily on basis of 1 Conservative, 1 Liberal Democrat, 1 Labour)
- Employee Appeals Panel (Any 3 trained members, usually on though not necessarily on basis of 1 Conservative, 1 Liberal Democrat, 1 Labour)
- Police and Crime Panel (Community Services lead member/portfolio holder)
- Children's Trust Board (1 Conservative member from Children, Adults, and Health Committee)
- Public Transport Forum (2 Conservative, 2 Liberal Democrat, 2 Labour)
- Environment and Waste Forum (2 Conservative, 2 Liberal Democrat, 2 Labour)
- Equality Forum (Any 3 Councillors)
- Schools Forum (Lead member/portfolio holder for Children and Young People)
- Avon Pension Committee (1 Member)
- South West European Partnership Office (Community Services Lead member/portfolio holder)
- Avon Fire Authority (3 Conservative, 2 Liberal Democrat, 1 Labour)
- Local Strategic Partnership (1 Conservative, 1 Liberal Democrat, 1 Labour)
- Economy and Skills Partnership (1 Conservative, 1 Liberal Democrat, 1 Labour)
- Safer and Stronger Communities Partnership (1 Conservative, 1 Liberal Democrat, 1 Labour)
- Learning Difficulties Partnership Board (Lead member/portfolio holder for Children and Young People)
- Cotswold Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Partnership (1 member)
- West of England Strategic Leaders Board (Leader of the Council)
- West of England Joint Transport Board (Lead member/portfolio holder for Transport)
- West of England Planning, Housing, and Communities Board (Lead members/portfolio holders for Planning and Housing)
- West of England Joint Scrutiny (1 Conservative, 1 Liberal Democrat, 1 Labour)
- Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) (Council Leader)
- South Gloucestershire Traded Services (1 Conservative, 1 Liberal Democrat, 1 Labour)
- Merlin Housing Society Customer Assembly (1 Conservative, 1 Liberal Democrat, 1 Labour)

38. Not considering seats automatically held by lead members as part of their leadership roles, there are currently 53 seats carrying out these ancillary functions, although it should again be noted that many of these meet infrequently or on an ad-hoc basis. This equates to 0.75 seats per member under the current structure.

39. As part of the proposed change to a Cabinet system, the Economy and Skills Partnership is proposed to be closed and subsumed into the Local Strategic Partnership. This will reduce available seats to 47. Excluding Cabinet members this will still equate to 0.75 seats per member. Using the Council Size of 61 proposed in the Conclusion, and excluding Cabinet members this will equate to 1 seat per member.

### **Representational role of councillors**

40. As well as taking formal seats on various bodies and committees, members will also be representing their residents' interests. This will include, but not necessarily be limited to, taking on casework, attending Community Engagement Forum meetings, and eg sitting on School Governors' boards.

41. As such, it is important that casework loads remain manageable by maintaining a reasonable voter to member ratio. Casework loads will differ from week to week and ward to ward depending on levels of deprivation, government and council policy, voter engagement, and other extraneous factors.

42. It is worth noting at this point that the Council is embarking on a new Digital Strategy, which will involve utilising digital technology to streamline resident interactions with the Council, signpost to services, and manage demand out of the organisation. This will make casework simpler for members to resolve and should also exert a downward pressure on casework loads.

43. At present there are on average 3021.1 electors per member in South Gloucestershire. Using projected elector figures for the year 2023 if the Council maintains 70 members this figure will rise to 3294 electors per member. Neighbouring authorities within the West of England offer a helpful opportunity to benchmark this figure. Using the latest number of registered electors the elector to member ratios are as follows:

- Bath and North East Somerset Council (74 members) – 1836 (likely to undergo a review)
- Bristol City Council (70 members) – 4525
- North Somerset Council (50 members) – 3244

44. For more detailed information please see Appendix A.

45. It is also important to note that because South Gloucestershire is part urban and part rural that there is a need to ensure that numbers are not reduced to the point that rural wards become so large as to become unmanageable. Certain wards such as Severn, Boyd Valley, and Cotswold Edge are already fairly large rural wards with a large number of small but distinct communities that all need representation.

### **Conclusions**

46. Demand on councillors in South Gloucestershire is being reduced in four key ways: an anticipated transition from committee to cabinet executive arrangements; delegating authority to the West of England Combined Authority on strategic matters pertaining to planning, transport, economic development, and skills; more use of digital technology and transformation of the council's wider role as a result of government policy and financial circumstances.

47. Policymaking and scrutiny seats will be reducing from 39 to 23.

48. All elected member activity at the Combined Authority will be conducted by Lead/Cabinet members, with the exception of the Scrutiny and Audit Committees, on each of which South Gloucestershire Council will have 3 seats (2 Conservative, 1 Liberal Democrat).

49. As such it follows that it would be prudent for a reduction in the total number of councillors.

50. Given the magnitude of the reduction in number of seats available for policy making, it would be prudent to reduce the number of Councillors by at least 10% (7 seats).



51. With a growing population and the changes detailed above it is clear that many members will find their time taken up with an increasing casework load from their residents and therefore it is necessary to define a minimum number of councillors. With the reduction in roles for policymaking and scrutiny, it would be appropriate for the average caseload of the average councillor to grow by 10-15%. Whilst this figure cannot be counted, the elector to member ratio is an appropriate proxy measure.

52. Using projected voter figures for 2023, future elector to member ratios would be:

- 63 seats – 3,660 electors per member (increase of 10%)
- 62 seats – 3,719 electors per member (increase of 11.4%)
- 61 seats – 3,780 electors per member (increase of 12.9%)
- 60 seats – 3,843 electors per member (increase of 14.3%)
- 59 seats – 3,908 electors per member (increase of 15.7%)

53. Using these figures, it is clear that 59 seats would increase the ratio by more than 15%.

54. Bearing in mind the Boundary Commission's discretion to allow 1 seat leeway in either direction, the most appropriate number to recommend is 61 seats, sitting the Commission's discretion in the middle of the two extremes.

Appendix 1 - Projected elector figures and ratios

Ward	Members	2017 Electorate	2023 draft electorate	change	2017 member to elector ratio	2023 draft member to elector ratio under current boundaries	change (%)
Almondsbury	1	3288	3288	0	3288	3288	0
Bitton	1	2792	3001	209	2792	3001	7.485673352
Bradley Stoke Central and Stoke Lodge	2	6077	6077	0	3038.5	3038.5	0
Bradley Stoke North	1	3095	3095	0	3095	3095	0
Bradley Stoke South	2	6649	6649	0	3324.5	3324.5	0
Boyd Valley	2	5952	7176	1224	2976	3588	20.56451613
Cotswold Edge	1	4172	4172	0	4172	4172	0
Charfield	1	3236	3528	292	3236	3528	9.023485785
Chipping Sodbury	2	5641	5765	124	2820.5	2882.5	2.19819181
Dodington	2	5994	6086	92	2997	3043	1.534868202
Downend	3	8869	8869	0	2956.333333	2956.333333	0
Emersons Green	3	9943	10613	670	3314.333333	3537.666667	6.738408931
Frampton Cotterell	2	6134	6215	81	3067	3107.5	1.32050864
Filton	3	8042	8109	67	2680.666667	2703	0.833126088
Frenchay and Stoke Park	2	4396	7036	2640	2198	3518	60.05459509
Hanham	3	9090	9190	100	3030	3063.333333	1.100110011
Kings Chase	3	8464	8662	198	2821.333333	2887.333333	2.339319471
Ladden Brook	1	3199	3225	26	3199	3225	0.812753986
Longwell Green	2	5739	5869	130	2869.5	2934.5	2.265202997
Oldland Common	2	5987	5987	0	2993.5	2993.5	0
Parkwall	2	6291	6337	46	3145.5	3168.5	0.731203306
Patchway	3	8472	15659	7187	2824	5219.666667	84.83238905
Pilning and Severn Beach	1	2838	2838	0	2838	2838	0
Rodway	3	8736	8736	0	2912	2912	0
Severn	1	3046	3046	0	3046	3046	0
Stoke Gifford	3	9376	9387	11	3125.333333	3129	0.117320819
Staple Hill	2	5891	6036	145	2945.5	3018	2.461381769
Siston	1	3730	3730	0	3730	3730	0
Thornbury North	2	6464	7945	1481	3232	3972.5	22.9115099
Thornbury South and Alveston	2	6072	6115	43	3036	3057.5	0.708168643
Westerleigh	1	3234	3241	7	3234	3241	0.216450216
Winterbourne	2	6278	7603	1325	3139	3801.5	21.10544759
Woodstock	3	8662	9244	582	2887.333333	3081.333333	6.71900254
Yate Central	2	6588	6588	0	3294	3294	0
Yate North	3	9038	11466	2428	3012.666667	3822	26.86435052
<b>Total</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>211475</b>	<b>230583</b>	<b>19108</b>	<b>3021.071429</b>	<b>3294.042857</b>	<b>9.035583402</b>

1.169811

Neighbours	
Banes Ratio (based on voter figures as of PCC election 2016)	1835.527027
North Somerset Ratio (based on voter figures as of PCC election 2016)	3243.98
Bristol Ratio (based on voter figures as of PCC election 2016)	4525.214286

Future Ratios	Ratio	Percentage change
Ratio with 63 cllrs	3660.047619	10.00000
Ratio with 62 cllrs	3719.080645	11.42857143
Ratio with 61 cllrs	3780.04918	12.85714286
Ratio with 60 cllrs	3843.05	14.28571429
Ratio with 59 cllrs	3908.186441	15.71428571