



Council Size Submission: Template

[Tunbridge Wells Borough Council]

Contents

How to Make a Submission	2
About You	2
Reason for Review (Request Reviews Only)	3
Local Authority Profile	4
Council Size	5
Other Issues	13

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.**

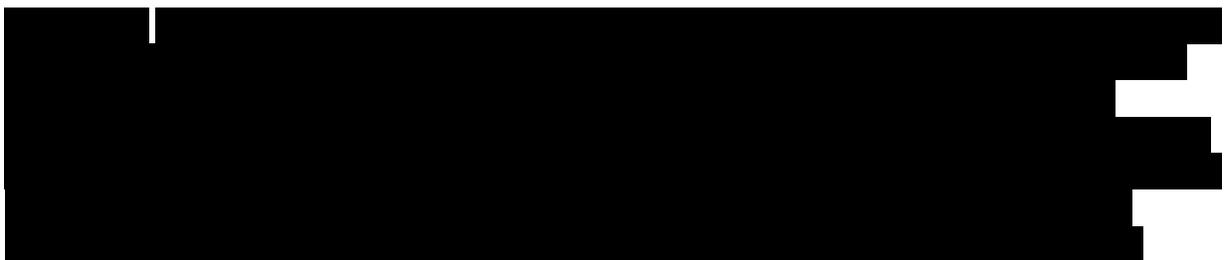
The template allows respondents to enter comments directly under each heading. It is not recommended that responses be unduly long; as a guide, it is anticipated that a 15 to 20-page document using this template should suffice. Individual section length may vary depending on the issues to be explained. 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.



The public consultation recently conducted online produced a majority **against** a reduction in cllr numbers. 261 voted in favour of the status quo or for an increase, while 255 voted for a reduction. The General Purposes Cttee also voted in favour of no change.



Moreover, given the new housing permissions recently approved, the vast number of houses in our AONB and Green Belt will require more cllrs not fewer.

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.*

This review is being conducted because we have been told that the Commission insists on it. Our last review was in 2001. It is only recently that one of our town wards, in Paddock Wood, has slipped below the comparator ideal of other local councils in number represented, from c.2,200 to c.1,700 or thereabouts. All our rural areas were on a par with your comparator wards in other councils, which is an important point.

One important point I wish to make, though none of your questions is likely to help me make it, is as follows. Cllrs are volunteers, who are part-time, and TWBC pays a very small allowance/honorarium, so that [REDACTED] In any organisation of volunteers, [REDACTED] Political parties don't have the same wide range of choice of people as will apply for a well remunerated post. Fewer cllrs would mean a reduced pool of talent to draw on in order to service the council's committees and cabinet. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] That requires a certain number and I think 48 is just right for the moment, though as I shall point out elsewhere, some wards will need more cllrs, because of the excessive housing numbers being imposed in their areas.

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?

There has been no capacity problem highlighted by any inspectorate, [REDACTED]

The future size of the council must be set within the wider national context. Here in the South East we are expected to build a vast amount of housing. [REDACTED]

There will be no improvement in infrastructure, even though our roads are already thoroughly congested and our villages clogged with HGVs. These people will need to be serviced by more cllrs than we currently have. [REDACTED]

To reduce the number of cllrs will cause greater problems than currently exist. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] More residents will mean more complaints, to the rough end of which cllrs are subject.

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?

Tunbridge Wells BC covers both urban areas (in TWells itself, Southborough and Paddock Wood) and a large rural hinterland. The numbers of residents divide equally between the two, about 50K+ in each. Unfortunately for cllrs serving in the rural areas, the geographical spread and scattered nature of dwellings and settlements makes it much harder, more time-consuming and more expensive

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] The rural areas have villages that are historically cohesive communities with a unique sense of identity.

[REDACTED]

Nor should wards be expanded to include another village because it would be impossible to service, given the sheer size of the area covered. If a ward has two cllrs who are not in the same political party, [REDACTED] that means there is no working together, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Rural poverty is a serious problem (and much more debilitating than urban poverty because of lack of frequent transport)

[REDACTED]

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.**

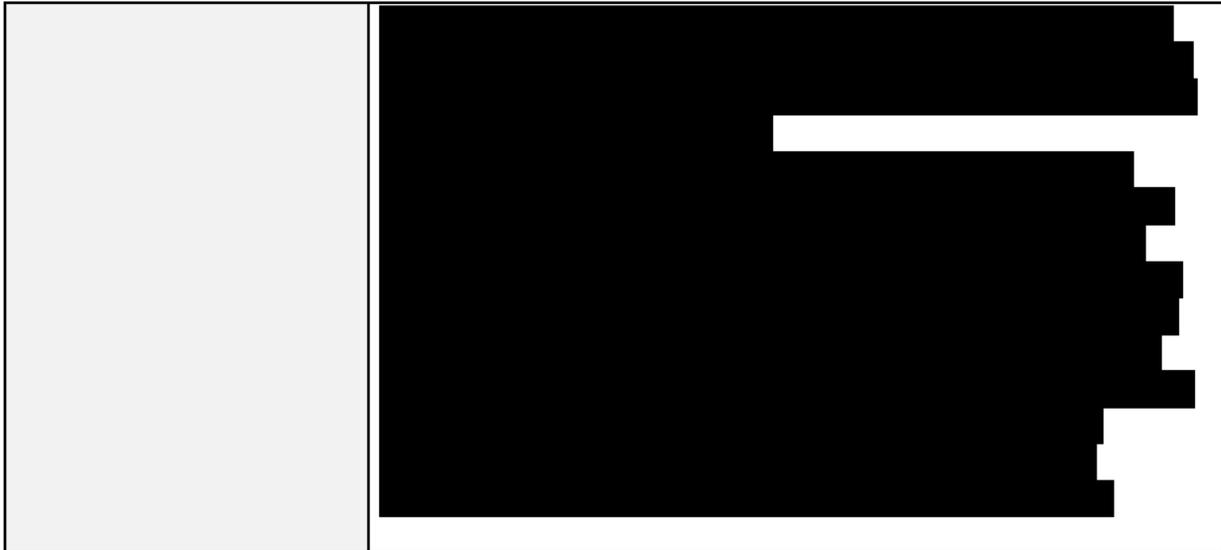
Topic	
Governance Model	<p><i>Key lines of explanation</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>What governance model will your authority operate? e.g. Committee System, Executive or other?</i> ➤ <i>The Cabinet model, for example, usually requires 6 to 10 members. How many members will you require?</i> ➤ <i>If the authority runs a Committee system, we want to understand why the number and size of the committees you propose represents the most appropriate for the authority.</i> ➤ <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> ➤ <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>
	<p><i>Analysis</i></p> <p>The cabinet consists of six members, while the scrutiny cttees (CABs) have progressively experienced a reduction in the number of their cllrs over the last ten years. [REDACTED]</p> <p>[REDACTED] Planning cttee is the only one that has expanded to 14, but has been reduced to one Planning cttee, [REDACTED]</p> <p>[REDACTED] I do not think the reduction of cllrs on cttees is a good idea, as often cttee meetings can be attended by more officers than cllrs, [REDACTED]</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p>

		<p>cannot support a reduction in cllr numbers as the scrutiny function will inevitably be less effective even than before.</p>
Portfolios	Key lines of explanation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ How many portfolios will there be? ➤ What will the role of a portfolio holder be? ➤ Will this be a full-time position? ➤ Will decisions be delegated to portfolio holders? Or will the executive/mayor take decisions?
	Analysis	<p>There are currently six portfolio holders. All of them are part-timers, but I imagine the job is what one makes of it.</p> <p>They can suffer from burn out so that there should be other experienced cllrs to shadow them to ensure a smooth transition, if and when the time comes. To reduce cllr numbers overall will lead to a diminution in portfolio holder choice which will hamper effective governance with greater reliance on officers.</p> <p>With 48 to choose from there could be a larger number of portfolio holders in order to spread the load,</p>
Delegated Responsibilities	Key lines of explanation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ What responsibilities will be delegated to officers or committees? ➤ How many councillors will be involved in taking major decisions?
	Analysis	<p>I cannot answer these questions, except to reiterate that cllrs do not take major decisions, unless they are in the cabinet.</p>

Accountability

Planning	<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>What proportion of planning applications will be determined by members?</i> ➤ <i>Has this changed in the last few years? And are further changes anticipated?</i> ➤ <i>Will there be area planning committees? Or a single council-wide committee?</i> ➤ <i>Will executive members serve on the planning committees?</i> ➤ <i>What will be the time commitment to the planning committee for members?</i>
	Analysis	<div style="background-color: black; width: 100%; height: 150px; margin-bottom: 10px;"></div> <p style="color: green;">Other councils have retained three planning cttees so that every member has a chance to represent their own area and be held accountable for their decisions.</p> <div style="background-color: black; width: 100%; height: 200px; margin-bottom: 10px;"></div> <p style="color: green;">This cttee meets every three weeks. So the work load is very high and usually demanding.</p> <p style="color: green;">The bulk of applications—over 95% -- has always been delegated to officers.</p>

Licensing	Key lines of explanation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ How many licencing panels will the council have in the average year? ➤ And what will be the time commitment for members? ➤ Will there be standing licencing panels, or will they be ad-hoc? ➤ Will there be core members and regular attendees, or will different members serve on them?
	Analysis	Click or tap here to enter text.
Other Regulatory Bodies	Key lines of explanation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ What will they be, and how many members will they require? ➤ Explain the number and membership of your Regulatory Committees with respect to greater delegation to officers.
	Analysis	There are many regulatory cttees [REDACTED] on which the numbers of cllrs has been steadily reduced [REDACTED]
External Partnerships		Service delivery has changed for councils over time, and many authorities now have a range of delivery partners to work with and hold to account.
Key lines of explanation		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ 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? ➤ 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? ➤ What other external bodies will members be involved in? And what is the anticipated workload?
Analysis		<p>There is a wide range of partnerships with regional and national bodies, including trustees of local charities, like the C Advice Bureau, the Commons' Conservators as well as bodies set up in concert with several Local Authorities. It has been the case that a large number of our cllrs volunteer to serve on these extra bodies.</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>All this means a proliferation of meetings which usually require reading papers as a preparation. [REDACTED]</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p>



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	<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>In general terms how do councillors carry out their representational role with electors?</i> ➤ <i>Does the council have area committees and what are their powers?</i> ➤ <i>How do councillors seek to engage with their constituents? Do they hold surgeries, send newsletters, hold public meetings or maintain blogs?</i> ➤ <i>Are there any mechanisms in place that help councillors interact with young people, those not on the electoral register, and/or other minority groups and their representative bodies?</i> ➤ <i>Are councillors expected to attend community meetings, such as parish or resident's association meetings? If so, what is their level of involvement and what roles do they play?</i> ➤ <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</i>

		<i>and Parish Councils? Looking forward how could they be improved to enhance decision-making?</i>
	Analysis	<p>All cllrs engage in casework and are the first port of call to be approached by their residents.</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p>
	Key lines of explanation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>How do councillors deal with their casework? Do they pass it on to council officers? Or do they take a more in-depth approach to resolving issues?</i> ➤ <i>What support do members receive?</i> ➤ <i>How has technology influenced the way in which councillors work? And interact with their electorate?</i> ➤ <i>In what ways does the council promote service users' engagement/dispute resolution with service providers and managers rather than through councillors?</i>
Casework	Analysis	<p>[REDACTED]</p>

		<p>[Redacted]</p> <p>Dispute resolution is usually cllrs' work to sort out with the responsible agencies like the housing associations in relation to difficult tenants causing trouble for others.</p>
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Other Issues

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

One important point I wish to make is as follows. Cllrs are volunteers, who are part-time, and TWBC pays a very small allowance/honorarium, [Redacted]

Political parties don't have the same wide range of choice of people as will apply for a well remunerated post. Fewer cllrs would mean a reduced pool of talent to draw on in order to service the council's committees and cabinet. [Redacted]

[Redacted] That requires a certain number and I think 48 is just right for the moment, though [Redacted]

Looking Ahead

To reduce the numbers of cllrs will be a retrograde step, as the greater the work load the more insistent will be the demands for younger cllrs to take the retired members' places and with that will come the demand for a real wage, [Redacted]

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.

