

Brighton & Hove Conservative Group Council Size Submission

This document is a response to the Local Government Boundary Commission of England.
It outlines the case for maintaining councillor numbers at 54 on Brighton and Hove City Council.

Approved by the Conservative Group (28 June 2021)

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Introduction

The Conservative Group on Brighton and Hove City Council welcomes the LGBCE triggering a statutory review.

The Conservative Group consider that although the role and workload of a Councillor has changed greatly in the 20 years since the last review was conducted, there have not been any extensive organisational changes within Brighton and Hove City Council to warrant an increase in Councillors.

The Group's position is that had there been extensive organisational changes, like in so many local authorities, a case would have been made for a reduction in Councillors.

A great number of our CIPFA comparator authorities who have undergone a relatively recent review by yourselves, have achieved sizeable reductions clearly indicating that a review by yourselves can lead to better public representation and efficiencies without detrimentally affecting local democracy.

With this in mind, the Group's position is for the number of Councillors to remain unchanged at 54.

We submit this report to support our resolution that Brighton and Hove City Council should in future be governed by 54 Councillors

Given the advantages of modern technology and the streamlining of Brighton and Hove City Council's operations we do not believe that any uplift in elector numbers per Councillor to be too onerous.

The case for keeping councillor numbers at 54

We recognise that Brighton and Hove City Council is a much changed Council from the one the LGBCE last profiled in 2003. Whilst Councillors remain committed to their wards and serving residents, we consider that over time Brighton and Hove City Council has evolved and changed, embracing modern technology in the provision of tablets, hybrid devices, and broadband internet access, which has helped Councillors manage casework more efficiently.

In addition, the function of a Councillor in 2021 is different to one in 2003, with former in-house services devolved to third parties and a lower requirement to attend outside bodies. As such, although some colleagues feel, as demonstrated by the Council's survey in that submission, there is a capacity to reduce Councillors, our position is based on maintaining numbers at 54.

Our case focuses on two areas that represent a step change in how both the council and councillors operate, namely:

- the Changed Council and
- the Changing Councillor

The Changed Council

Since the 2003 review, Brighton and Hove City Council has, like all other Local Authorities, had to review its scope and structure in light of changed financial circumstances. This has resulted in a leaner, more focused operation with fewer non-core services, and a slimmer structure across all areas of the Council.


The following areas, while not exhaustive, highlight many of these very significant changes and are submitted as the evidence to our belief that in future Councillor numbers should remain unchanged: Transfer of Council Services to Third Parties, including the Brighton and Hove Clinical Commissioning Group, transfer of Leisure Services to Freedom Leisure Limited, transfer of some highways and other authorities to the South Downs National park Authority.

As a result of the changes in operation, whether through divestment of services, redundancy, recruitment freezing or early retirement, the staffing levels of the Council have decreased.

As at 31 March 2014, the council had a total of 11,274 staff (including school staff).

As at 31 March 2017, the council had a total of 9,124 staff (including school staff).

The Council's own Workforce Equalities Report (2018/19) notes that the headcount of contracted employees at the council is more or less stable*:

| | 2015/16 | 2016/17 | 2017/18 | 2018/19 | Direction |
|----------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Contracted Workforce / Headcount | 4549 | 4291 | 4333 | 4376 |  |

* The numbers in this table do not include school staff

The reduction in staffing has been across all areas and sections of the Council, from Senior Management (there have difficulties recruiting to senior positions) to front of office and operational. The Council's latest organisational chart from Spring 2021 (Appendix 1) shows a reduced number of directorates and a much simpler structure streamlined over time.

The Changing Councillor

As well as attending meetings fixed within the Council diary, a Councillor might also be put forward to a position on an outside body linked to Council.

Within the Parished areas in the city, a sitting Councillor would be advised to attend the Parish Council meetings within their wards, and in others, the local residents' associations.

On occasion, members are also asked due to their procedural knowledge, to sit on ad hoc groups. However the feeling of the Conservative Group is that since the last review in 2003, the demand on Councillors and the way that Councillors now work, present the scope for (arguably) a reduction in Councillor levels but the Group has decided to support keeping the number at 54.

Conclusion

Our submission was agreed by the Conservative Group on the 28 June 2021.

We consider that the culmination of operational and legislative changes over the last two decades has presented a unique opportunity for LGBCE to maintain the City Council size for the better.

We believe that maintaining Councillor numbers at 54 will produce a Councillor base that is fit for future purpose and truly reflective of the landscape, both physical and metaphorically, in which we find ourselves.

Fifty Four Councillors will provide an effective Council chamber which is highly desirable in the eyes of the public, and reflects that Brighton and Hove City Council has shrunk in operation since the last review.

We understand that other submissions will be made that will outline an increase in Councillors. We firmly reject any notion of increasing by only a few Councillors as this would be unrepresentative of the true extent of the reduced operation of Brighton and Hove City Council and the impact of Brexit on the city's residents and employment base.

The demographic profile of the City is changing. Families are leaving the City in significant numbers and the [Council was recently advised](#) that within the next 8 years, four of the City's Local Secondary Schools would have too few pupils to remain financially viable. The Council has ordered eight primary schools and one secondary school to reduce its Admissions from next year, after the Council forecast 744 spare school places by 2024 if it did nothing.

We are concerned that demographic changes have not been taken into account in the Council Officers' projections. It is likely that a reduction in families is likely to place downward pressure on the projected number of electors in the City.

We look forward to working alongside the LGBCE in the near future regarding warding boundaries and hope that you find this report a useful and persuasive argument for maintaining unchanged Councillor numbers on Brighton and Hove City Council. Should you require any further information please do not hesitate to contact us.

About Us

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

Brighton and Hove Conservative Group currently consists of the 13 elected Conservative Councillors that sit on Brighton and Hove City Council.

Since the last Review was undertaken by the Boundary Commission and the final recommendations were reported in August 2001, the Brighton and Hove Conservative Group has experienced a varied number of electoral positions at the Council:

Term

| | |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| 2003-2007: Official Opposition | (17 Conservative Group Councillors elected) |
| 2007-2011: Administration | (26 Conservative Group Councillors elected) |
| 2011-2015: Official Opposition | (18 Conservative Group Councillors elected) |
| 2015-2019: Official Opposition | (20 Conservative Group Councillors elected) |
| 2019-2023: Third Party status | (14 Conservative Group Councillors elected) |

Of our current Conservative Group, 6 Councillors experienced all five Terms since the last boundary review was undertaken as elected Councillors and as such have experienced the

We have brought this experience to bear in this submission, including consultation with Geoffrey Theobald, who prepared the Conservative Group's submission the last time the Commission reviewed the city.

In preparing this submission, the Conservative Group has consulted:

- Our 13 current Conservative Group Councillors
- 6 former Conservative Group Councillors from 2003-2019

Our Councillors currently represent 6 wards on the City Council, including Rottingdean Coastal; Woodingdean; Hove Park; Hangleton & Knoll; Wish and Patcham wards.

Since 2003, our Conservative Group has been elected in 13 of Brighton and Hove City Council's 21 Wards.

Reason for Review (Request Reviews Only)

2. 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 was initiated by the Local Authority Boundary Commission as part of its periodic review.

Local Authority Profile

3. Please provide a short description of the authority and its setting. This should set the scene for the Commission and give it a greater understanding of any current issues. The description may cover all, or some of the following:
- Brief outline of area - are there any notable geographic 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?
 - Are there any other constraints, challenges, issues or changes ahead?
- Brighton & Hove City Council is a unitary authority created with the merger of the former Brighton Borough Council and Hove Borough Council on 1st April 1997 under the East Sussex (Boroughs of Brighton & Hove) (Structural Changes) Order 1995. It was granted city status in 2000.
 - The Structural Change Order kept the original wards and councillor numbers for Brighton & Hove resulting in 26 wards with a total number of 78 Councillors. A review was undertaken in 2003 by the Boundary Commission which resulted in the reduction in the number of Councillors to the current 54 Councillors with 21 wards. It has a mixture of two and three member wards.
 - There has been no change to the number of members or wards since the last review, but the names of two wards (Hollingbury & Stanmer Ward to Hollingdean & Stanmer Ward and Stanford Ward to Hove Park Ward) were changed. Proposals to review the external boundaries of the city to incorporate West Saltdean were considered but not progressed.
 - As part of the Council's own submission, officers submitted a breakdown of the population of Brighton & Hove (the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment for 2020: <https://infogram.com/1pkzn2v3xn2095s97znn967jndc3lq1g0w5?live>).
 - Officers noted the following based on this Assessment:
 - Estimated population 290,900 (2019)
 - City populations is increasing (3.6% over the past five years). Similar to the South East and England
 - Similar to previous years, population growth between 2018 and 2019 is estimated to be the result of inward international migration (1,900 people). There were 500 more births than deaths while net internal migration (between the and the rest of the UK) was -1,400. This trend is expected to continue.
 - Children aged 0 -15 years are concentrated towards the west and north of the city with comparatively few children in the centre of the city.
 - Residents aged 16 – 64 years are most concentrated in central wards either side of the Lewes Road with fewer adults of working age in the wards to the east and west.
 - Older people in Brighton & Hove tend to live to the north and east of the city.

- More than a fifth of Brighton & Hove's total population (22%, 63,200 people) is aged 19 to 28 compared to only 12% in the South East and 13% in England.
- The city is a destination for migrants from outside the UK. It's estimated that between 42,000 and 64,000 people (14%-22%) were born outside the UK. A half of migrants in the city were born in the EU.
- For the academic year 2018/19 there was 39,625 students at the University of Sussex and University of Brighton.

Officers also attached an electorate projection based on proposed new housing in the city.

With respect to these observations from officers, the Conservative Group would make the following ones:

The Conservative Group, as other groups, had been advised by officers on which electoral roll data to use.

The 2020 roll based on 2019 data showed a higher figure because of the national elections.

The Conservative Group notes that, by comparison, the 2021 register based on Dec 2020 data was significantly lower. Officers suggested this was because Brighton and Hove did not have national or all out local elections. The Group believes officers had neglected to take into account the Brexit impact and the loss of European residents from the city. The Council does not have reliable and accurate data on this.

The Conservative Group is also mindful that the pandemic had the effect of removing some of the student population with either no registrations or people moving. The outcomes and data from the two by-elections in studentified areas in May 2021 appear to negate this position.

The Conservative Group notes the figures around housing development in the city resulting in a change in the number of electors. Officers have indicated that this number of electors would increase as a result of the housing targets based on the planning system's projections on 5 year cycles.

The Conservative Group notes that the Boundary Commission's view, and that of Officers, was that the 2025 figures are more realistic than the 2030 figures. Offices had also qualified this by noting that more developments may come on board.

The Conservative Group would point out though that Brighton and Hove is not meeting its housing targets at the moment. In fact, it hardly ever does! The target of 13,200 homes, over 20 years (2020-2030), set the bar at 660 a year. Since 2010, only one year had achieved this - 2015/2016. In fact, on average we've only achieved 481 homes a year. This data was provided by the city's Head of Planning in the spring of 2021.

The Context for our proposal

Your submission gives you the opportunity to examine how you wish to organise and run the council for the next 15 years. 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 impact on the Council's effectiveness will your council size proposal have?

Since the recommendations of the last Boundary Review came into effect, Brighton and Hove City Council has operated the following models of Governance:

- 2003-2008 (5x municipal years): COMMITTEE SYSTEM
- 2008-2012 (4x municipal years): CABINET SYSTEM
- 2012-2021 (9x municipal years): COMMITTEE SYSTEM

The Conservative Group, governed in administration between 2007-2011, found both systems to be manageable, effective systems for decision-making in the City.

With there being little appetite from the Leaders at the Council to change the current Committee system, we have based our analysis of the future size of the Council on the premise that the Committee System continues to operate for the foreseeable future.

In coming to our recommendation on the future size of the Council, the Conservative Group has undertaken a full review of the operation of the Committee system at Brighton and Hove City Council between 2003 and 2021.

Our approach has been data-driven, comparing how committee size, membership and meetings have changed over time in a bid to assess how Councillor workload has changed.

This data has been collated and presented in Appendix 2 and forms the basis of the analysis that follows.

Our approach has been an inductive one, allowing the data to 'speak' and drive our analysis and subsequent conclusions. We had no pre-determined view on Council size before starting this process.

The Committee system of Government at Brighton and Hove City Council can be considered in four main parts:

1. Committees & Subcommittees

These form the core decision-making elements of the Committee System of Government. The composition and membership of Committees & Subcommittees are published every year at Annual Council.

2. Other Bodies

A secondary layer of institutions, the other bodies are allowing the Council to discharge specific legal requirements required by central government. The composition and membership of the other bodies is published every year at Annual Council.

3. Boards/Working Groups/Task and Finish Groups

This tertiary layer of groups have traditionally been formed on an ad-hoc basis, to discuss specific issue or manage major projects. They tend to be at the initiative of the administration of the day and have typically been created by individual committees at the initiative of the Chair of that Committee, although a number of Working Groups have been made 'permanent' over the course of the past two years.

4. Outside Bodies

A final layer of the Committee System is the Outside Bodies, to which the Council is asked to appoint Councillors.

Appendix 2 shows how these four different parts of the Committee System have changed over the years. An additional comparison is included in Appendix 3 comparing two full terms.

The data in Appendix 2 shows the following:

- The Council has steadily streamlined the number, membership and number of meetings of Committees and Subcommittees between 2003 and 2021 (Refer to Table 1 and Table 6 in Appendix 2), including:
 - A steady reduction in the number of Committees/Sub-committees from 17 to 10
 - A steady reduction in the number of councillor seats per Committee/Subcommittee from 167 to 96
 - No overall change in the number of Seats per Committee/Sub-Committee
 - A steady reduction in the number of Seats per councillor from 3.09 to 1.78.
 - A significant reduction in the total number of meetings of Committees and Subcommittees, from 547 to 330 (see Table 6).
- The number and membership other bodies has remained constant.
- The number of Boards/Working Groups and Task and Finish Groups remained constant between 2003-2019 but then significantly increased in the past two years.
- The number, membership and number of meetings of Outside bodies has significantly declined.

Understanding the trends - A Key report: 'A new Constitution for Brighton and Hove City Council' (2012)

The reason behind this streamlining of the council can be found in a report presented to a Special Council in 2012 titled '[A New Constitution for Brighton and Hove City Council](#)'.

The report was produced to enact the Council's decision to return to a Committee System of Governance after the Localism Act 2011 came into effect.

It was the culmination of work from a New Constitution Member Working Group consisting of three councillors working with senior officers Abraham Ghebre-Ghiorghis and Elizabeth Culvert. These senior officers remain at the Council today. We recommend that the Boundary Commission reviews this report and the Attachments, which can be found [here](#).

The report starts with an observation about the unique position Brighton and Hove has been in when it comes to Governance arrangements:

3.1 For most local authorities, governance is a dry subject and not of much interest. Not so in Brighton and Hove! Over the last ten years, the Council has been at the cutting edge of innovation when it comes to governance.

It then goes on to outline's the Council's approach which has led to a streamlined committee system in section 4.

The Design Principles:

4.1 In order to ensure that the Council's new constitution is as effective as possible, the Member Working Group and the Leaders Group agreed a set of design principles:

- (1) Openness and Transparency
- (2) Accountability
- (3) Efficiency
- (4) Soundness
- (5) Affordability
- (6) The third way, and
- (7) Forward Looking

4.2 It is important to emphasise the need for the constitution and ways of working to reflect modern best practice. It is therefore proposed to maximise the use of information technology and to have streamlined, efficient and quick decision making practices and procedures. It is also proposed to keep the best bits of the executive system including overview and scrutiny, the petitions scheme, a revised forward plan, public questions at all meetings and public speaking at planning committees.

4.3 The proposed committee structure is designed to be streamlined and cost effective.

4.4 With possible further reduction in the number of committees (for example the JCB) this will be the most streamlined Member structure the Council has had since it came into existence in 1997.

The report outlines the Council's determination to streamline and be cost effective and at the cutting edge of Governance in the UK.

As Appendix 2 has outlined, the data shows that this approach has succeeded. The Boundary Commission may want to highlight Brighton and Hove City Council as a model for the Committee system in its report.

Conclusions

The data suggests a clear trend of streamlining of the core functions of council (Committees, Subcommittees and Other Bodies).

This has paid dividends, reducing Councillor workload required to run the key committees, subcommittees and other bodies of the Council.

However, disrupting this trend, is the explosion in the number of the Ad hoc Boards, Working Groups, Task and Finish Groups that has occurred over the course of the past two years. While the number of these entities was only detected in single figures in the years analysed in the first 4 terms, they then exploded to 24 and then to 40 in the last two years. This has disrupted the overall trend for all entities as shown in Table 5.

In coming to its decision on future council size, the Commission will need to carefully consider what weight to give to the dramatic increase in Ad hoc Boards, Working Groups, Task and Finish Groups over the past 18 months.

The rapid increase in the past two years has been picked up by the Council Officers in Democratic Services. It is understood that it is causing problems for staffing, with the running of these groups now delegated to junior officers who write the minutes etc. These meetings are not publicised online as core Committee Meetings are. It is understood that to get on top of this in future years the Policy & Resources Committee will be encouraged to review and rationalise the list of permanent working groups prior to each Annual Council meeting. There is certainly room for rationalisation with many coming to the end of their work programme and efficiencies could very easily be made.

The view of the Conservative Group is that that these Working Groups tend to be a reflection of the Administration and not part of the core structure of the council.

Therefore, we would submit that less weight be given to these entities in the considerations of the Boundary Commission on future Council Size.

We propose that the overall picture of Brighton and Hove City Council 2003-2021 is one of efficiencies being made, councillor workload being reduced and indeed, a council system at the cutting edge of the Committee System in the UK.

We submit that this has put downward pressure on the number of councillors required to run the core functions of the council and recommend that the Boundary Committee reflect this by not increasing the size of the Council.

Council Size

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

Strategic Leadership-

5. Respondents should provide the Commission with details as to how elected members will provide strategic leadership for the authority. Responses should also indicate how many members will be required for this role and why this is justified.

| Topic | | |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Governance Model | Key lines of explanation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ What governance model will your authority operate? e.g. Committee System, Executive or other? ➤ The Cabinet model, for example, usually requires 6 to 10 members. How many members will you require? ➤ 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. ➤ 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? ➤ 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. |
| | Analysis | |
| 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 | The Conservative Group notes that the Council has only very recently formalised a model of Joint Chairs for Committees. |

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| | | <p>This way of working was brought forward by the current Administration and has also been adopted by the Opposition Group on Council as well with their recent announcement of Co-Leaders of the Opposition.</p> <p>This financial arrangements for this model were agreed to at the recent Full Council Meeting in July, meaning that Special Allowances are now shared.</p> <p>The rationale for the measures, as described by the administration, is to split the workload between members to allow more women and young people to be involved in local government.</p> <p>Announcing the change of working practices, the Administration issued the following statement:</p> <p>The Green spokeswoman added: “In line with our commitment to make the role of a councillor fit alongside other responsibilities, a number of Green councillors decided to share roles, on taking control of the council last week.</p> <p>“These are just some of the many things we need to do to make sure that becoming a local councillor is something that anyone can consider.</p> <p>“Greens remain committed to ensuring that our council is accessible to people from all communities.”</p> <p>Source: The Argus, 11/08/20.</p> <p>The implication of the above is that sharing roles will make the job of being a Councillor less onerous, less time consuming and hence attract more people to become councillors.</p> <p>With the sharing of committee roles now enshrined in practice at Brighton and Hove City Council, it is anticipated this will lead to a further streamlining of the workload of the council, sharing workload more evenly across members.</p> <p>This innovation represents a further streamlining of the Committee system of governance, making better use of spare capacity of members of the administration who may be under-worked.</p> <p>Conclusion</p> <p>We would suggest that this potential efficiency gain for the council as a whole puts downward pressure on the size of the council.</p> |
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| | | <p>Its rationale is to attract more people to become councillors, by reducing the workload.</p> <p>Spreading the workload more evenly will reduce the disparity between the highest working councillor and lowest working councillor in an administration and tap into any unused spare capacity.</p> |
| Delegated Responsibilities | <i>Key lines of explanation</i> | <p>➤ <i>What responsibilities will be delegated to officers or committees?</i></p> <p>➤ <i>How many councillors will be involved in taking major decisions?</i></p> |
| | Analysis | <p>These are set out in the constitution.</p> <p>All 54 Councillors will continue to be involved in making major decisions, such as the budget anything that is in the budget and policy framework. The Policy & Resources Committee which takes decisions that have major policy or budgetary implications has 10 Councillors and a Standing Invitee.</p> |

Accountability

6. Give the Commission details as to how the authority and its decision makers and partners will be held to account. The Commission is interested in both the internal and external dimensions of this role.

| Topic | |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Internal Scrutiny | <p>The only official scrutiny committee the Council has relates to Health scrutiny. The cross-party nature of all the committees makes sure that proposals are scrutinised and challenged before a decision is made.</p> <p>Every member can ask to present a letter to any committee for consideration whether it is to propose a new policy or scrutinise a decision taken or any faults in implementation. The Policy committees can set up ad-hoc policy panels which serve a similar purpose to a scrutiny committee.</p> |
| <i>Key lines of explanation</i> | <p>➤ <i>How will decision makers be held to account?</i></p> <p>➤ <i>How many committees will be required? And what will their functions be?</i></p> <p>➤ <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></p> <p>➤ <i>How many members will be required to fulfil these positions?</i></p> |

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| | | <p>➤ <i>Explain why you have increased, decreased, or not changed the number of scrutiny committees in the authority.</i></p> <p>➤ <i>Explain the reasoning behind the number of members per committee in terms of adding value.</i></p> |
| Analysis | | <p>The scrutiny role of each Committee is set out in its Terms of reference. Equalities for example, is a function of the Policy & Resources Committee, but is scrutinised by the Tourism, Equalities, Communities & Culture Committee. These arrangements replaced a former 'generic' Overview & Scrutiny Committee which was set up in 2015.</p> <p>The role of the Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee is set out by statute and complemented by the role of the Health & Wellbeing Board.</p> <p>Member Working Groups are kept under regular review by the Constitutional Working Group, and fulfil an important scrutiny function, from oversight of the council's Modernisation agenda, budget, procurement, or Health and Social Care Integration.</p> <p>As an example, throughout 2020 and 2021, it has not proven possible to convene the Member Development Working Group more than once.</p> |
| Statutory Functions | | <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> |
| Planning | Key lines of explanation | <p>➤ <i>What proportion of planning applications will be determined by members?</i></p> <p>➤ <i>Has this changed in the last few years? And are further changes anticipated?</i></p> <p>➤ <i>Will there be area planning committees? Or a single council-wide committee?</i></p> <p>➤ <i>Will executive members serve on the planning committees?</i></p> <p>➤ <i>What will be the time commitment to the planning committee for members?</i></p> |
| | Analysis | <p>Four percent of approximately 3,400 planning application per year are determined by members at Planning Committee.</p> <p>Arrangements have been recently introduced to allow more major applications to be delegated to officers and this may help to reduce this proportion over future years.</p> <p>There is no specific period that councillors serve on Planning Committee (some stay on committee for many years). There are 12 meetings a year with additional meetings called for strategic planning applications.</p> <p>Brighton & Hove became a Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) charging authority in October 2020. It is intended to take forward CIL governance proposals to the planning policy committee in June 2021. The proposals include a significant role for ward councillors in supporting or sponsoring 6-monthly bids into the neighbourhood pot for their</p> |

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| | | wards. Citywide this will amount to approximately £300k pa (15% of the £2m likely to be generated). This will be piloted in 2021-22. |
| Licensing | <i>Key lines of explanation</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>How many licencing panels will the council have in the average year?</i> ➤ <i>And what will be the time commitment for members?</i> ➤ <i>Will there be standing licencing panels, or will they be ad-hoc?</i> ➤ <i>Will there be core members and regular attendees, or will different members serve on them?</i> |
| | <i>Analysis</i> | <p>The Licensing and Regulatory Committees are Quasi-Judiciary functions of the Council.</p> <p>These Committees also consider the Council policy in terms of Licensing and Regulatory functions such as gambling. Since 1999, the functions of both committees have changed. The main area of change has come from the 2003 Licensing Act.</p> <p>Many committee responsibilities were either removed or delegated to Council officers. For example, prior to 2003 the Committee would consider and enforce behavioural complaints in door staff at local night clubs and would have to consider up to three or four such breaches per meeting.</p> <p>Following the 2003 changes and the creation of the SIA, that function disappeared as the SIA work directly with Council officers to ensure their policies are abided by.</p> <p>Although the number of meetings remains stable, agenda items are reduced and therefore licensing meetings are much shorted than they used to be.</p> <p>For the 2019/20 municipal year there were 31 Licensing Panels which is a good example of an average year. The average length of a meeting is 4 hours and councillors will spend a couple of hours ahead of the meeting to go through the papers etc.</p> <p>The membership of the Licensing Panel – 16 councillors - is appointed at Annual Council, but they are called on an ad-hoc basis as and when required, with the 3 Members being taken from the parent Licensing Committee based on availability.</p> |
| Other Regulatory Bodies | <i>Key lines of explanation</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>What will they be, and how many members will they require?</i> ➤ <i>Explain the number and membership of your Regulatory Committees with respect to greater delegation to officers.</i> |
| | <i>Analysis</i> | <p>The 3 regulatory committees are currently as follows:</p> <p>Audit & Standards – 8 Cllrs with 2 independent co-optees – 4 meetings per year</p> <p>Licensing Committee – 16 Cllrs – 3 meetings per year</p> <p>Planning Committee – 10 Cllrs – 12 meetings per year</p> |

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| External Partnerships | | <p>The main partnerships for member involvement are BH Connected – 3 Group Leaders and one extra Member from the Administration, Community Safety Partnership, Economic Partnership, Transport partnership (Member chairing, all parties represented) , Strategic Housing Partnership (Member chairing) Equalities and Inclusion partnership (Member co-chairing) .</p> <p>Other partnerships have been affected by pandemic and will be reviewed in terms of operation and membership going forward.</p> |
| <i>Key lines of explanation</i> | | <p>➤ <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></p> <p>➤ <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></p> <p>➤ <i>What other external bodies will members be involved in? And what is the anticipated workload?</i></p> |
| | Analysis | Members sit on a range of bodies, but in general do not have ability to make decisions on behalf of council |

Community Involvement

7. The Commission understands that there is no single approach to community leadership and that members represent, and provide leadership to, their communities in different ways. The Commission wants to know how members are required to provide effective community leadership and what support the council offers them in this role. For example, does the authority have a defined role and performance system for its elected members? And what support networks are available within the council to help members in their duties?

| Topic | | Description |
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| Community Leadership | <i>Key lines of explanation</i> | <p>➤ <i>In general terms how do councillors carry out their representational role with electors?</i></p> <p>➤ <i>Does the council have area committees and what are their powers?</i></p> <p>➤ <i>How do councillors seek to engage with their constituents? Do they hold surgeries, send newsletters, hold public meetings or maintain blogs?</i></p> <p>➤ <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></p> <p>➤ <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></p> |

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| | | <p>➤ <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></p> |
| | Analysis | <p>Councillors have an online presence and are generally contacted by their constituents via email or social media.</p> <p>There are no area committees in Brighton & Hove, but the Council does support 4 Area Panels, Central, East, North and West which involve tenants and residents' associations in those four areas, and recommendations are reported to the Housing Committee.</p> <p>Councillors are able to hold ward surgeries although a number choose to use an online forum rather than hold physical sessions. There are also some councillors who use local newsletters/publications to put information into about their work and contact details; whilst others use their own social media accounts or join groups on Facebook that relate to their communities.</p> <p>Resident expectation is that their ward member may attend community meetings, but it is not obligatory for them to do so.</p> |
| Casework | Key lines of explanation | <p>➤ <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></p> <p>➤ <i>What support do members receive?</i></p> <p>➤ <i>How has technology influenced the way in which councillors work? And interact with their electorate?</i></p> <p>➤ <i>In what ways does the council promote service users' engagement/dispute resolution with service providers and managers rather than through councillors?</i></p> |
| | Analysis | <p>Trends in Councillors' Casework</p> <p>The Conservative Group has discussed as group with our 13 group members how the ward work of a councillor has changed between 2003 and 2021.</p> <p>The main trend has been digitisation of work, with council processes having shifted online.</p> <p>In 2003 many matters were raised by Councillors via letter writing to the relevant department or presenting issues at committees, often having to attend a meeting in person to raise matters. A lot of time was also spent chasing responses. This took up a lot of time.</p> |

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| | | <p>A lot of the correspondence received from residents and officers came in by letters, fax machine and phone calls. Councillors used to respond by letter. Councillors also used to hold regular in-person ward surgeries, where they would sit at a public building for several hours</p> <p>Today this has completely changed. Most matters are dealt with via emails directly to officers who should respond within 5 working days. This is a much more efficient process and reduces the need for members to raise such matters in person at the relevant committees. This has a knock-on effect of reducing the time committee meetings take to complete.</p> <p>A number of councillors also no longer hold in-person surgeries anymore. Councillors stopped them because people were not coming any more, preferring to just email when they had an issue.</p> <p>Casework Management System</p> <p>Councillors' casework is set to be streamlined in the coming months, with the introduction of the Brighton and Hove City Council's new Casework management system.</p> <p>This innovation will mean that a significant proportion of the issues currently raised with councillors via email, will in future be dealt with a case management system available to residents to access via the council's website.</p> <p>It is envisaged this will remove a lot of 'service' issues from Councillors' inboxes (bins not being emptied, etc), saving Councillors considerable time.</p> <p>This system is currently being piloted by a working group involving all three parties. The pilot has involved councillors testing the technology by uploading their current constituent enquiries to the Casework Management System. Our Conservative Councillors in this working group have highlighted features of the system that have already reduced the amount of time spent on case work as a ward councillor. These features include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Once an enquiry is uploaded, an instant response is provided by an Officer • Officers will then respond directly to residents, with no need for Councillors to be the 'middle-women and men', chasing responses and then forwarding them on. • Any future contact on the same issue can then be raised directly between the constituent and the officer, and not involve the councillor. <p>Following the success of the pilot, the Casework Management System is to be fully rolled out later in the year to all councillors, with training to be provided.</p> |
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| | | <p>The full roll-out envisages that residents will be able to – and encouraged to - raise service issues themselves directly through the Council's Website, which will link automatically to the case management system and to an officer for action. The Councillor might be cc'd for noting but would otherwise not be involved.</p> <p>Councillors will then act as a back-up or safety net for residents when they don't get the action they want. This will dramatically cut down councillor workload and provide a more efficient service. Over time this should remove a significant amount of service related casework from councillors' inboxes.</p> <p>Following feedback from our Conservative Councillors participating in the pilot, all Conservative Councillors have said that they will join the full rollout to achieve these efficiency gains.</p> <p>Pandemic</p> <p>The Pandemic has accelerated many trends in digitisation, some irreversibly.</p> <p>Since the pandemic, many residents' meetings that Councillors had been expected to attend in person have moved online. This has reduced travel time requirements for councillors and reduced their workload. As we have emerged from the pandemic we have seen some meetings remain online, despite restrictions being eased. There is a strong possibility the trend of online meetings established during the pandemic will continue in one shape or form consistent what is expected across the country.</p> <p>Conclusion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The trends outlined above show a reduction in the time taken to resolve any given residents' issue. This has and will reduce the workload for councillors. • With the full rollout of the new Casework management system, further efficiencies will be made, making casework more efficient and reducing the amount of time councillors spend on it. • All this will put downward pressure on the number of councillors required at Brighton and Hove City Council in the coming years. |
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Other Issues

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

1. The alternative submission

We wish to bring to Commission's that the 'Council submission', which was initiated by the Labour and Green Groups, is not endorsed by the Conservative Group.

When put to a vote at the Full Council meeting on 15 July 2021, the Conservative Group voted against it, which will be reflected in the minutes of the meeting.

As a Group, we decided early in the process that we wished to pursue our own submission to the Commission.

We made this decision after we learned that Labour representatives would be pushing the Council to propose increasing the number of councillors from the outset, before any data had been provided. We felt that the Council submission had therefore become a political exercise to justify a pre-existing view rather than a data-driven exercise.

2. Council's questionnaire

The Conservative Group was not a part of the Council's Questionnaire regarding size submission.

We would like to have it noted that had our views been taken into account, our 13 members would have added to the 11 respondents answering 'About Right' to 'Question 5: Do you think 54 is the correct number of Councillors for Brighton & Hove currently', resulting in a plurality of 24 responses for that option.

3. Financial impact

As a final point, we would also add that we need to be mindful that extra councillors would represent an ongoing cost to the budget, which would be detrimental to the City's finances as we come out of a pandemic.

The Cost to local taxpayer of Basic and Special Responsibility Allowances for 54 Councillors is currently £3,587,068 per four year term (refer to Appendix 4).

This does not include councillor expenses.

We urge the Commission to take the impact on the taxpayer into account when coming to a decision.

We would submit that the data shows the Council can be effectively run with 54 members and further expense to the taxpayer can and should be avoided.

CO-OPTEES

A recent innovation of the Council, that has helped streamline the decision-making process, has been the adoption of Co-optees for committees.

Prior to the introduction of Co-optees, councillors were placed with the burden of conducting their own consultation prior to meetings on policy matters. With many advocacy groups in Brighton & Hove, this was previously a time-consuming endeavour and often decisions had to be deferred due to councillors requesting further consultation be undertaken.

The introduction of Co-optees has changed this. Co-optees represent certain interest groups and provide immediate feedback as decisions are made. They provide a one-stop shop for community advocacy group's engagement on issues. Their addition to the Committee process has had the effect of streamlining the decision-making process and minimising the need for councillors to undertake lengthy consultation prior to making decisions. Now if a council has a question during the meeting about the impact of a policy they can ask the Co-optee and get an immediate answer.

The process of introducing co-optees started several years ago. The success of Co-optees was mentioned in the 2012 Report 'A New Constitution for Brighton and Hove City Council', with section 17.1 of this report describing the positive impact of external expert witnesses and co-optees on the Overview and Scrutiny Committee as 'exceptional'. The New Constitution included [plans](#) for 81 Co-optees across the new streamlined committees, with the role formalised in a '[Protocol on Co-option](#)'.

In recent years initiative has evolved further and many committees now have permanent co-optees, including:

- Policy and Resources Committee (BAME Co-optee)
- Tourism, Equalities, Communities and Culture Committee (BAME Co-optee)

The Council has recently discussed raised the idea of enshrining Co-optees in the City's Constitution.

At the recent Council meeting on 15 July 2021, the Council made a decision to pay Co-optees a formal wage, further formalising the positions.

Conservative Analysis:

The innovation of co-optees has allowed the council to make the decision-making process more efficient and reduce the consultation time pressure on members.

This innovation has allowed committees to be streamlined by the Council and steadily reduced in number and membership, as outlined in Appendix 2.

Summary

9. In following this template respondents should have been able to provide the Commission with a robust and well-evidenced case for their proposed council size; one which gives a clear explanation as to the number of councillors required to represent the authority in the future. Use this space to summarise the proposals and indicate any other options considered. Explain why these alternatives were not appropriate in terms of their ability to deliver effective Strategic Leadership, Accountability (Scrutiny, Regulation and Partnerships), and Community Leadership.

In summary, the Conservative Group's analysis has highlighted the following trends since the time the boundary commission undertook its last boundary review:

- A streamlining of the number of Committees and Sub-Committees resulting in a reduction in the overall number of committee and seats per member.
- An online shift in casework that has reduced the work-load per constituent, with further efficiencies soon to be realised via the i-casework management system.
- Innovative changes to the structure of the administration, with co-chairs designed to make it more attractive for people with less time to join the council.

We have considered the alternative proposal put forward by the Council at the request of Labour and the Greens and disagree with it on the following basis:

- The data does not support a move to increase the number of Councillors.
- The Council's submission and survey did not contain the input from the 13 Conservative Councillors. Had this been included, a majority of respondents would have answered about right.
- We believe that the proposal for 58 was prejudged, given it was proposed by Labour and the Greens early and before a workload survey went out to members.

Given the above evidence, which all points to downward pressure on councillor workload, we accept that the Commission may come to its own conclusion that the number of Councillors needs to be in fact reduced.

However we would suggest that the projected increase in population, although a lower rate than elsewhere in the country, may be enough to convince the Commission to justify holding the number of Councillors at its current level.

Therefore, the 13 members of the Conservative Group of Councillors proposes the number of councillors remains at 54 for the reasons noted in this submission.

The Conservative Group at Brighton and Hove City Council welcomes the opportunity to make representation and acknowledges the strict Rules that the Commission is obliged to follow.

The Group is pleased to deliver its proposal for the size of the council and will be submitting proposals for the warding arrangements in due course.