

**SEFTON LABOUR GROUP**

# Council Size Submission: Template

**Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council**

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## How to Make a Submission

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

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

'Good' submissions, g 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.

### **Submission on behalf of Sefton Labour Group**

## Reason for Review (Request Reviews Only)

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

Click or tap here to enter text.

## The Context for your proposal

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

The Commission expects you to challenge your current arrangements and determine the most appropriate arrangements going forward. In providing context for your submission below, please demonstrate that you have considered the following issues.

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

*Latest internal reorganisation was 2021/2022, albeit regular review is part of ensuring all departments are fit for purpose, providing value for money, and ensuring activity is meeting the needs of our communities. Lines of responsibility and accountability were transferred with a sharper focus on quality and outcomes.*

*The impact of transference of service functions has enabled other departments in the council to embrace the 'One Council' ethos on a wider scale. Service delivery has become more fluid, accountable, customer focused and ambitious in delivery of services.*

*Governance and capacity issues are at the forefront of every recommendation and decision that is made. Progress is being made in areas where recommendations from Inspectorate, Peer Reviews and self-assessment reviews are given as part of our ambition to deliver good governance and best practice.*

*Policy trends impact on Sefton at many levels. Policies including introduction of high numbers of new homes to be built had a huge impact on capacity, resilience and in many other service areas other than the Planning department. Increased demand for services including lighting, bins, schools, health and transport were identified early on and mitigation was put in place to manage the expectations of communities, residents, businesses and other key stakeholders. Sefton, as an institution, whilst following Government policy were open and transparent with the community, leading the way to engage and develop the Local Plan. This, we believe, was an example of our ethos in doing with, not to, our communities.*

*Continuity of effectiveness is essential hence our proposal to remain as is.*

### 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?

*Sefton is a coastal borough that serves a number of townships and parish communities. These provide strong identity to our communities and our ward profiles reflect those community needs. Sefton Council also covers agricultural, rural and greenspace in addition to industrialised, strategic communities i.e., Bootle docks. These natural spaces and divisions taken into account in the Local Plan provide clarity within our townships where we plan to expand and grow.*

*Sefton has a higher than average over 65yrs population which creates additional demand on older peoples' services. In contrast to this, Sefton has a younger population concentrated in the South of the borough which correlates with poverty indexes and contributes to the acute pressures on children's social services.*

*The 2021 census profile continues to demonstrate Sefton has a traditional white British community but we are seeing increasing settlements of new communities. Sefton council takes its responsibilities for asylum seekers very seriously, and has active resettlement schemes such as Iraqi, Afghanistan, Ukrainians, Syrian and traditional schemes.*

*Sefton Council is an unusual borough in that it has pockets of high affluence and areas of significant poverty. Linacre and Derby ward are in the top 5% of IMD for poverty. This creates diverse and complex demands from residents to meet community aspiration and needs.*

*Challenges are outlined above.*

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?

*See paragraph referencing governance model.*

### 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	
<p><b>Governance Model</b></p>	<p><i>Sefton Labour Group believes that the current size of the Local Authority justifies the continuation of 66 councillors. However, we do accept there may be minor requirements to adjust the boundaries to harmonise and balance the commissions aspirations. There has been no significant change in population size since the last review, negating the option to increase or decrease councillor numbers.</i></p> <p><b>Voting Cycle</b></p> <p><i>We believe that the three-year voting cycle with one fallow year offers stability in governance, as well as enabling the electorate to reflect on changing political preferences on a three-year cycle; this offers greater democratic engagement with local issues.</i></p> <p><i>Councillors are able to scrutinise and they have an opportunity for both pre-scrutiny decisions and effective call-in arrangements. There are further opportunities within the Forward Plan as well as the establishment of work review groups. Member training is key as all members are mandated or encouraged to participate in a wide-ranging council training programme.</i></p> <p><i>Sefton has undertaken a Peer Review with the Local Government Association and is reviewing all systems.</i></p> <p><i>The Cabinet system provides the catalyst for the development of strategic and operational policies as defined within the Council's current constitution. Specific strategic items are referred to Council for full debate and agreement.</i></p> <p><i>Sefton Labour Group believes the best model for Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council is a Cabinet system which makes the decisions within local government more responsive and effective and ensures that local decisions can be made quickly whilst preserving the high standards of governance so that the public can have confidence in the decision making of local councils.</i></p> <p><i>Sefton Labour Group believes the Cabinet system has fulfilled local government aspirations and made local governance more agile, whilst still enabling political representatives to be the final arbiters of the policy direction local government can take.</i></p> <p><i>Key lines of explanation</i></p>

		<p><i>We propose to keep our existing Cabinet system with a maximum of 10 members. This has proven to be effective, both under the current Labour controlled authority and the previous hung council arrangements.</i></p>
	Analysis	<p><b>Size of Council</b></p> <p><i>Population at the last council review was:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Electorate 215,218 (283.110) (2001 census)</i> <i>Ward recommended population and representation of 9,630 with representation of 3 1:3261 (as at last review)</i></li> </ul> <p><i>Ward recommended population and representation of:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>9,630 with representation of 3 1:3261 (as at last review)</i></li> </ul> <p><i>The current population of Sefton MBC is:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Current Electorate 215,581 (current population 275,899)</i></li> </ul> <p><i>The recommended size of wards:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>9,800 electors</i></li> </ul>
<b>Portfolios</b>	<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<p><i>Sefton Labour Group believes there should be a continuation of a maximum of 10 portfolios. This enables a continuing strategic leadership and decision-making process.</i></p>
	Analysis	<p><a href="#">Click or tap here to enter text.</a></p>
<b>Delegated Responsibilities</b>	<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<p><i>Sefton regularly reviews its Constitution including responsibilities and delegated powers.</i></p> <p><i>The most strategic decisions of the council are taken by all members at Full Council meetings. This includes: -</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Adoption of Corporate Plans</i></li> <li>• <i>Vision/Mission for Council</i></li> <li>• <i>Setting Annual Budget</i></li> <li>• <i>Review of constitutional matters</i></li> </ul>
	Analysis	<p><a href="#">Click or tap here to enter text.</a></p>

### Accountability

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

Topic	
<b>Internal Scrutiny</b>	Sefton has an efficient committee system under which task and finish groups can and are agreed by the relevant committee, as and when needed for themed topics.
<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<p><i>There are 4 Overview and Scrutiny Committees.</i>  <i>Audit and Governance</i>  <i>Full Council</i></p> <p><i>Sefton Labour Group believes the current committee structure should be maintained which is focussed on business needs.</i></p> <p><b>Committees and Sub-Committees:</b></p> <p><i>Cabinet</i>  <i>Overview and Scrutiny Committees:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Adult Social Care and Health</i></li> <li>• <i>Children’s Services and Safeguarding</i></li> <li>• <i>Regeneration and Skills</i></li> <li>• <i>Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services</i></li> </ul> <p><i>Task and Finish Sub-Committees as mentioned are established on an ad hoc basis as needed.</i></p> <p><b>Regulatory and other committees:</b></p> <p><i>Appeals Committee</i>  <i>Audit and Governance Committee</i>  <i>Hearings Sub-Committee of Audit and Governance Committee</i>  <i>Initial Assessment Sub-Committee of Audit and Governance Committee</i>  <i>Review Sub-Committee of Audit and Governance Committee</i>  <i>Independent Persons (Standards Issues)</i>  <i>Employment Procedure Committee</i>  <i>Health and Wellbeing Board</i>  <i>Licensing and Regulatory Committee</i>  <i>Licensing and Regulatory (Urgent Referrals) Committee</i>  <i>Licensing (Sexual Entertainment Venues) Sub-Committee</i>  <i>Pay and Grading Committee</i>  <i>Planning Committee</i>  <i>Planning (Urgent Referrals) Committee</i></p> <p><b>Consultative Bodies:</b></p> <p><i>Independent Remuneration Panel</i>  <i>Joint Consultative Committee for Teaching Staffs</i>  <i>Local Joint Consultative Committee</i>  <i>Public Engagement and Consultation Panel</i>  <i>Member Development Steering Group</i></p>

		<i>Sefton Labour Group believes the size of committees are adequate to serve the electorate and members have the opportunity to participate in these committees as well as task and finish groups.</i>
	Analysis	<a href="#">Click or tap here to enter text.</a>
<b>Statutory Function</b>		This includes planning, licencing and any other regulatory responsibilities. Consider under each of the headings the extent to which decisions will be delegated to officers. How many members will be required to fulfil the statutory requirements of the council?
<b>Planning</b>	Key lines of explanation	<i>The Planning framework is under constant review to respond to national legislation to ensure the community receives planning determination which is timely and proportionate to the request and application, therefore models of delegation are constantly reviewed.</i>  <i>Planning Committee is the most active committee of the council relating to community engagement; actual meetings; planning site visits and ongoing training through changes in legislation. We have a single council-wide committee which reflects community needs, as determined by a single borough Local Plan. This ensures consistency of decision-making and transparency across the Borough. Planning is a substantial time commitment for members and, as such, requires a large committee structure of 15 members and substitutes.</i>
	Analysis	<a href="#">Click or tap here to enter text.</a>
<b>Licensing</b>	Key lines of explanation	<i>The council has a strategic licensing function which is well met and managed through the current arrangements. This is a mixture of routine and urgent licensing issues. This ensures licensing can react in a proportionate and timely manner to sometimes time sensitive matters. We operate a borough-wide committee with core members, supported by an extensive training programme - there are no substitutes. There is a Licensing and Regulatory (Urgent Referrals) Committee consisting of members of the Licensing and Regulatory Committee which operates as needed.</i>
	Analysis	<a href="#">Click or tap here to enter text.</a>
<b>Other Regulatory Bodies</b>	Key lines of explanation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Audit and Governance Committee</i></li> <li>• <i>Audit and Governance Hearings Sub-Committee</i></li> <li>• <i>Audit and Governance Member Briefing Session</i></li> <li>• <i>Employment Procedure Committee</i></li> <li>• <i>Health and Wellbeing Board</i></li> <li>• <i>Licensing (Sexual Entertainment Venues) Sub-Committee</i></li> <li>• <i>Licensing and Regulatory (Urgent Referrals) Committee</i></li> <li>• <i>Licensing and Regulatory Committee</i></li> <li>• <i>Licensing and Regulatory Committee Member Training</i></li> <li>• <i>Licensing and Regulatory Committee Spokespersons with Representatives of the Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Trade</i></li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Licensing Sub-Committee</i></li> <li>• <i>Pay and Grading Committee</i></li> <li>• <i>Planning (Urgent Referrals) Committee</i></li> <li>• <i>Planning (Visiting Panel)</i></li> <li>• <i>Planning Committee Member Training Session</i></li> <li>• <i>Public Engagement and Consultation Panel</i></li> </ul>
	Analysis	<a href="#">Click or tap here to enter text.</a>
<b>External Partnerships</b>		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.
<i>Key lines of explanation</i>		<p><i>Sefton operates in a Merseyside-wide footprint and our members serve on a wide-ranging set of committees with decision-making powers within their framework. These include:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Liverpool City Region Combined Authority</i></li> <li>• <i>Liverpool City Region Combined Authority Transport Committee</i></li> <li>• <i>Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority</i></li> <li>• <i>Merseyside Waste Disposal Authority</i></li> </ul> <p><i>Since the last review there has been a significant increase in workload to cover the Combined Authority scrutiny functions. The Council Leader holds a significant portfolio within the Combined Authority.</i></p> <p><i>We have members involvement with Health, Adult Social Care and governors of hospitals and schools. In addition, the council nominates a wide-range of members to represent Sefton on a very broad-based set of Boards including: -</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Police Panel</i></li> <li>• <i>Canal and Rivers Trust</i></li> <li>• <i>Port Health Authority</i></li> <li>• <i>Flooding (covers both local and national context)</i></li> </ul>
	Analysis	

## 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.**

<b>Topic</b>		<b>Description</b>
<b>Community Leadership</b>	<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<p><i>Sefton Labour Group believes the current structure of 3 councillors per ward is essential for continuity and enables the electorate to access a consistent service from their elected representatives. We have set out below the role of a councillor which we think justifies this suggestion.</i></p> <p><i>Sefton Labour Group believes that the role of a councillor is one of the most fundamental political offices in our democracy. It enables the community to govern themselves. Councillors can cooperate and work alongside partners from a wide range of agencies for the betterment and protection of their communities. Councillors work towards shaping and influencing both national and local stakeholders. It is the proximity to local life that distinguishes local councillors from other types of local officials.</i></p> <p><i>A councillor's role traverse: local and national policy, delivery, the mechanisms for delivery and ensuring the highest standards of governance. Locality is key covering geographical space, communities of interest and identity.</i></p> <p><i>Councillors are trustees of the electorate's interests and delegates enacting the electorate's wishes.</i></p> <p><i>This work encompassing: working with a wide range of public and private partners, voluntary and community interests and groups, campaigning for local and national issues, practical and visible campaigning such as litter picking, consulting with local and national government and a wide range of public and private agencies. This can include existing, potential plans as well as enacting central government policy. Reacting to national emergencies e.g., the pandemic and cost of living crisis. Workloads vary depending on geography plus social and economic context.</i></p> <p><i>What is certain is there is a constant and continual demand for councillors' assistance, advice, support and intervention in this ever-changing world.</i></p> <p><i>Sefton empowers all 66 councillors through training, officer support, internal meetings with local agencies, becoming the voice of their local communities to having delegated responsibility for ward funds. A support system is available to all councillors through neighbourhood action teams who offer support to facilitate member engagement within their ward boundaries, and participation in community events. Members require a wide range of skills, a deep-seated commitment to local people and the democratic process which enables community governance.</i></p>

		<p><i>All necessary IT equipment is provided to members along with a personal Sefton Council email address and training in the use of this equipment is provided for members.</i></p> <p><i>This gives members the tools to engage with residents and others with regard to casework, community engagement and local democratic representation.</i></p> <p><i>Area committees - others may suggest they are re-instated - why we disagree.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Past the sell by date, poor attendance from public and used as a political football.</i></li> </ul>
	Analysis	<a href="#">Click or tap here to enter text.</a>
<b>Casework</b>	<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<i>Each councillor is issued with an ICT package and support to meet their individual needs. Councillors hold surgeries, physical and virtual, have embraced Teams and Zoom to enable virtual meetings with residents. Councillors undertake ward walkabouts and proactively report issues. Councillors work on a multi-media environment responding to individual resident's needs. Councillors directly tackle casework and where officer scrutiny is required, refer to officers and then follow up.</i>
	Analysis	<a href="#">Click or tap here to enter text.</a>

### Other Issues

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

### Summary

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

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

*In summary, Sefton Labour Group believes the above is a strong case for retaining council size and governance arrangements.*