

Holt, Nicole

From: Paul Harper (Cllr) <PaulHarper@maidstone.gov.uk>
Sent: 07 December 2021 14:20
To: reviews
Cc: Labour (MBC)
Subject: Maidstone Borough Council Review - Size Submission
Attachments: Maidstone Labour Group Submission on Council Size 7-12-2021.docx

Importance: High

Categories: Simon, Submissions

Dear Sir,

As part of the LG BCE review of Maidstone Borough Council, I submit the following report on behalf of the Maidstone Labour Group. Please can you confirm receipt and that it has been passed onto the appropriate team.

Yours sincerely

Paul Harper
Labour Councillor for Fant
Spokes-Person Economic Regeneration, Culture and Leisure
Leader Maidstone Labour Group

REMEMBER TO SOCIAL DISTANCE, REGULARLY WASHING YOUR HANDS

STAY HOME, PROTECT THE NHS, SAVE LIVES

To access our digital services please visit <https://maidstone.gov.uk/contactus>
Sign up to receive your Council Tax bill by email <https://maidstone.gov.uk/emailbilling>

We understand the importance of ensuring that personal data, including sensitive personal data is always treated lawfully and appropriately and that the rights of individuals are upheld.

We are required to collect, use and hold personal data about individuals. Data is required for the purposes of carrying out our statutory obligations, delivering services and meeting the needs of individuals that we deal with. This includes current, past and prospective employees, service users, members of the public, Members of the Council, our business partners and other local authorities or public bodies.

To view our full statement to see how your data will be stored and processed please visit <https://maidstone.gov.uk/dataprotection>

This email is confidential. If you receive it by mistake, please advise the sender by email immediately.

Any unauthorised use of the message or attachments is prohibited. Unless stated otherwise, any opinions are personal and cannot be attributed to Maidstone Borough Council.

Unless a purchase order is attached this email is not a contract or an order.

It is your responsibility to carry out Virus checks before opening any attachments.

Submission

Maidstone Borough Labour Group Council Size Submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission
December 2021

Background

Maidstone Borough Council was formed in 1974 by the amalgamation of the former Maidstone Municipal Borough Council, Maidstone Rural District Council and Hollingbourn Rural District Council. At that time the number of Councillors was set at 55. In 2021 it remains at 55.

It is interesting to note that in 1974 when the Council was established, its population in the 1971 census was 121,220 which meant that each Councillor represented an average 2,204 residents. However since that time the population has grown rapidly as the table below shows:

		% Inc
1971	121220	
1991	136209	0.123651
2001	138948	0.020109
2011	155143	0.116554
2021	171800	0.107365
2033 est	192700	0.121653

Since 2001, it has grown on average by over 1% every year and in 2021 it is calculated to be 171,800 and increase of 50,580 or 42% since the borough was formed. Indeed it is estimated to be at least 192,700 in 2033.

This means that the ratio of Councillors to population has increased over time as follows:

Year	Population	No Cllr	Pop. per Cllr
1971	121,220	55	2,204
1991	136,209	55	2,477
2001	138,948	55	2,526
2011	155,143	55	2,821
2021	171,800	55	3,124
2033 est	192,700	55	3,504

Therefore it can be seen that in 1974 there was an average of 2,204 residents per Councillor, in 2021 it is 3,124 an increase of 42%, with a projected rise to 3,504 in 2033, an increase of 59%.

Councillor Workload

The workload of a Councillor is multifaceted and includes attending committee meetings, working parties, council meetings, councillors briefings, discussions with officers, representing residents, attending outside bodies, talking with residents and Residents casework.

It cannot be underestimated the amount of time this requires. As Councillors ourselves we have estimated for the purpose of a Welfare benefits claim, which was accepted by the relevant assessors that in a typical year a Councillor will spend a total of 2,825 hours a year on work associated with being a Councillor an average of 51 hours a week, or excluding 4 weeks for holidays and bank holidays an average of 55 a week or 8 hours a day. Clearly this workload is not spread evenly throughout the year. This figure reflects our experience as urban Councillors representing areas which are not parished. Even if this figure is reduced by 40% it is still an average of 33 hours a week, or just short of a standard 35 hour a week, which is a typical week for employed people.

Only a minority of this time is spent on 'formal' time in attending Council meetings etc.

If the number of Councillors were reduced significantly below the current 55 then in our view it would become a full-time job; and would exclude residents of working age (18-67) from being a Councillor unless they had sufficient funds to live on. This is a key criteria when considering the need for a Council to represent diversity of age, gender, sexuality, ethnicity and disabilities.

Urban/ Rural

Maidstone Council consists of a very large town (Maidstone), surrounded by a rural hinterland. Whilst the areas outside the town are parished the urban town of Maidstone is not. In parished areas there is a lot of work carried out by Parish Councils, especially in the areas of allotments, parks, planning consultation, public halls, casework etc which reduces the workload of councillors in a ward with Parish Councils. In the non parished areas all this work comes to the Borough Councillor as there is not an additional tier of local government.

Additionally in an urban are likely to be much more work related to planning and other issues for a more densely populated environment.

The table below compares the urban/ rural population split for a number of South East Councils.

	Town	District	% in Town
Chelmsford	111511	178388	0.625104
Guildford	77057	148998	0.517168
St Albans	57795	147095	0.392909
Tunbridge Wells	59947	118724	0.504927
Maidstone	85939	171826	0.500151

Views of Maidstone Council

The Majority Group on Maidstone Council is Conservative with 29 Councillor of whom 18 represent parished areas and only 11 represent non parished areas, and therefore the Council's view point and decision making is dominated by Councillors from the rural parished areas.

Community Representative/ Leaders

A large part of the role of a Borough Councillor is to be a community representative for their population, not just those on the electoral role.

The population demographics in the non parished Maidstone Town area are shown below:

	2,011	No Cllr	Ave Pop/ Cllr	Electorate 2021	Electorate % Population
Allington	6,879	3	2,293	6,096	89%
Bridge	5,855	2	2,928	5,004	85%
East	8,539	3	2,846	6,567	77%
Fant	9,570	3	3,190	7,251	76%
Heath	6,053	2	3,027	5,004	83%
High Street	9,690	3	3,230	7,923	82%
North	9,481	3	3,160	6,384	67%
Park Wood	6,603	2	3,302	5,842	88%
Shepway North	9,043	3	3,014	6,597	73%
Shepway South	5,895	2	2,948	4,388	74%
South	8,331	3	2,777	7,467	90%
TOTAL	85,939	29	2,963	68,523	80%

Whilst overall 80% of the population is on the electoral role this varies from 90% to 67%. In some areas such as Shepway North and South this matches to the two least poorest wards in the borough, and in an area such as Fant, by a large number of European residents who do not register. However elected Councillors

have a duty not just to people 18+ who are in the electoral role but to the whole population. When look at this prism in the town an average Councillor represents 2,963 residents, but only 2,363 electors.

A large part of the role of a Borough Councillor in an urban non parished ward is to be a Community Leader, speaking on behalf and leading their local community, this is a time consuming role and requires Councillors to be representing discrete areas. With the current number of Councillors this is well achieved but with a reduction in Councillors then natural communities would be lost and Councillors would lose this coherence with the people they represent. In the parished areas the parish Council will perform this important role.

Local residents will look to their borough councillor to sort out all local issues including services which come under the County Council largely due to the fact that the County Councillors represent large areas and have no roots in a community unlike borough councillors. This element of work need to be considered and is als a reflection of urban Councillors being seen as community leaders.

Growth in Population

As was pointed out earlier since 1974 when the Council was established there is an increase in 42% of the number of residents and voters who councillors represent now compared to the situation in 2021 and forecast for 2033. In 1974 there was an average of 2,204 residents per Councillor, in 2021 it is 3,124 an increase of 42%, with a projected rise to 3,504 in 2033, an increase of 59%.

This in fact means that if the ratio used in 1974 to determine the size of the Council were used in 2021, then the size of the Council would have increased to 78.

Conclusion

Based on the research conducted by Maidstone Council as well as our evidence presented above we believe that the future size of Maidstone Council should be 54. Whilst this is only a modest reduction, if the size of the Council had kept up with population growth, then in 2021 the Council should have 78 Councillors and therefore our proposal for modest reduction to 54, represents in real terms a significant cut.

For the Council to go below 54 in our view would be wrong, it would over burden the remaining councillors break the link of community representative and leader and mean that there was a disconnect between residents and elected representatives, which is already seen with County Councillors.

Recommendation

That the size of Maidstone Borough Council is set at 54.

Councillor Paul Harper
Councillor Margaret Rose
Councillor Patrick Coates

7th December 2021