Council Size Submission

Slough Borough Council

Contents

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.

Full Council with the endorsement of its Best Value Commissioners.

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 if its published criteria, then you are not required to answer this question.*

The request for review is a consequence of the Council voting to amend its elections scheme, to move to whole Council elections with effect from May 2023. This change gives effect to Directions made on 1st December 2021 by the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, under sections 15(5) and (6) of the Local Government Act 1999. The move to whole Council elections is viewed by the Secretary of State and his Best Value Commissioners as an important step in the Council's recovery from the well-documented failure to meet its best value duty.

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 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?

Slough Borough Council is under government intervention and the Council asks the Commission to consider its submission to the Commission in this context. The Council's current governance arrangements therefore demand less weight than would ordinarily be the case, since the Council, working in conjunction with its Best Value Commissioners, has begun the process of identifying the changes necessary to make the Council fit for purpose. This will involve a reassessment of what form the Council will take when Directions come to an end and will also require decisions on what services the Council will continue to deliver, and how they will be delivered. For the reasons set out in this paragraph, the Council has not completed the tables at pages 6 to 9 of this template.

The Commission last reviewed the Council's electoral arrangements between July 2011 and November 2012 and this resulted in the current 42 Member Council divided between 15 wards (comprised of 13 three Member wards; one two Member ward; and one single Member ward). The Lead Best Value Commissioner has given his view that Slough's ward pattern warrants review prior to the first whole Council election in May 2023, but that there is a strong argument in favour of retaining the existing number of Members owing to the scale of the work needed to implement the Council's improvement plan and to support the Borough as it recovers from the effects of the Covid pandemic, and the role Members will have to play in that task. The volume of recorded casework undertaken by Slough's Members during 2020/21 and 2021/ to date is shown below. The formal casework system is not exhaustive since Members may also email Senior Officers to deal with issues direct on occasion but the casework data is useful nonetheless.

All Members make themselves readily contactable by residents, with their contact details and scheduled surgery times available to view on each Member's webpage. The volume of casework and the level of community engagement are both expected to increase as a product of the recovery process described above.

Logged casework figures – 2020 - 21

There were 3,078 items of casework logged for members by the casework team.

37 of the 42 Councillors utilised the Casework monitoring service.

- 3 of these submitted fewer than 10
- 17 submitted between 10 to 50
- 12 submitted between 50 to 150
- 3 submitted between 150 to 500
- 2 submitted more than 500

Logged casework figures - 2021 – 12.01.22

There are 2,479 items of casework currently logged for members by the casework team.

41 of the 42 Councillors utilised the Casework monitoring service.

- 4 of these submitted fewer than 10
- 24 submitted between 10 to 50
- 10 submitted between 50 to 150
- 3 submitted between 150 to 500

Most of Slough's Members have full-time employment in addition to their roles as elected members of the Council. Under current arrangements there is a well-established practice of Members providing cover for one another when their work schedules come into conflict with their Council commitments. The Council wishes the new ward pattern to allow this practice to continue.

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?

Slough is a predominantly urban area situated in east Berkshire, 25 miles to the west of central London. At just 7 miles long by 3 miles wide, Slough covers an area of 12.5 square miles and is, geographically, the third smallest English unitary authority.

It is exceptionally well served by various transport routes, sitting at the junction of the M4, M40 and M25 motorways, situated on the Great Western Main Line and Slough to Windsor & Eton Line railways and close to Heathrow airport. The Elizabeth Line (Crossrail) will also soon allow faster journeys to central London.

The town has attracted people from across the country and the world for labour since the 1920s, which has helped shape it into an economic powerhouse. Slough has an £8 billion economy.[1] The town has also been awarded as the best location to find a job in the UK and has a high rate of business start-ups [2]. It is also the second highest average workplace earnings after London. In 2021, Slough had over 7,600 active businesses.[3]

The town is home to one of the largest trading estates in Europe, and while in recent years the manufacturing sector has shrunk, the high-tech, service and distribution sectors have increased, and the town lives to its number one position as the small city of the future.[4] Slough's top three specialised employment areas are warehousing and logistics (4.1 times greater than the national average), utilities and waste (2.6 times greater than the national average), and ICT media and creative services (1.8 times greater than the national average).

Slough has 54,880 dwellings and the second highest average household size in the country (2.8 people per household). Over the last year, properties in Slough have an average overall price of £388,819 this is much higher than the national average of £267,000[5] and furthermore, number of sold prices in Slough have gone up by 9% from the previous year.[6]

Of Slough's working age population (aged 16-64) as of June 2021, 72.9% (72,400 people) are economically active. Of these, 67.9% (67,600 people) are in employment; 6.4% (4,600 people) are unemployed and 27.1% (26,100 people) are economically inactive. In April 2021, 23.0% of the working aged population in Slough were claiming government-based benefits due to the pandemic (10.9% Job Retention Scheme (JRS), 6.2% Self-Employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS) and 5.9% unemployment claimant count increase since March 2021). 80,000 both residents and commuters work in Slough.

Slough's population continues to grow, reaching 149,577 in mid-2020, and is one of the most ethnically and religiously diverse in the UK. Approximately 120 different languages are spoken in our schools. 40% of residents were born outside the UK and half the babies born here in 2016 had both parents born outside the UK.

The population structure is younger than the national average and includes many families, a high proportion of children, and working age adults. In 2020, there were an estimated 12,415 infants (aged 0 to 4), 34,362 children and young people (aged 5 to 19) and 87,243 adults (aged 20 to 64). While proportionally lower than other areas, the older population (15,577 adults), is growing.

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[1] Centre for Cities 2018, Glassdoor 2017-2020
[2] Glassdoor data and Slough Inclusive Growth Strategy
[3] https://slough.berkshireobservatory.co.uk/economy-and-employment/ ONS IDBR
[4] https://www.thamesvalley.co.uk/thames-valley-region-performs-outstandingly-in-fdis-european-cities-and-regions-of-the-future-2020-21-report/
[5] ONS HM Land Registry
[6] HM Land Registry

Slough has a range of excellent primary and secondary schools In 2019 57% of pupils achieved GCSE grade 5 or above in English and Maths, better than the national average of 43%, putting Slough in the top 10 best performers in the country. At A-level, 12.3% achieved grades AAB or higher, below the national average of 14.1%.

Despite these strengths, Slough's current fifteen electoral wards still contain markedly different neighbourhoods and communities, with variations in wealth and deprivation. In 2011, 14.6% of households with dependent children had no adults in work. 29.79% of children (7,716) are defined as living in poverty. This is in line with the national average but higher than our neighbours.

Since 2019 there has also been a slight shift towards greater deprivation in Slough relative to the rest of England, particularly in relation to barriers to housing and services, income deprivation affecting older people and crime. Slough remains the most relatively deprived area within the Thames Valley, followed by Reading and Milton Keynes, coincidentally the three areas with the highest levels of serious violence in 2020/21.[7] The recent pandemic has affected Slough particularly badly with increases in claims for unemployment-related benefits, with the average rate of claimants across LSOAs increasing fourfold and with an average rate of 89 in 1,000 persons aged 16-64 claiming unemployment support.[8]

Life expectancy varies between wards with men expected to live on average, up to 78.4 years of age and women up to 82.5 (both approximately 1 year less than the England average). Healthy life expectancy for both men and women are lower than the England average: women on average can expect to live the last 24 years of their life in poor health (compared to 20 years in England), while men can expect to live the last 18 years of life in poor health (compared to 16 years in England). Key health and wellbeing challenges for the borough include ensuring a healthy start to life, improving childhood obesity, oral health, smoking, physical inactivity, diabetes, TB, alcohol and substance misuse, mental health issues and early deaths from cardiovascular disease[9].

There has been great investment in a range of leisure facilities including Slough Ice Arena, Salt Hill activity Centre, Langley Leisure Centre, the Centre to support people to be more active and healthier. During the pandemic, the network of green gyms in parks and open spaces have helped many with keeping active when leisure facilities have had to close due to lockdown. Slough has many awarding winning parks and open spaces, covering a total of 2.5km sq.

Air quality and pollution is an issue that negatively impacts on health, like many urban areas in the UK, Slough experiences high levels of air pollution, primarily due to road transport emissions. To tackle this the council is accelerating the take up of cleaner vehicles and greener technologies as part of a transition to a low emission economy. The Council has also introduced an annual Climate Challenge which provides a platform to showcase climate change progress in its pursuit of a net zero footprint.

Community cohesion is strong with most residents agreeing that Slough is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together. As a result of close partnership working with Thames Valley Police and others, Slough is a safe and welcoming place.

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[7] Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government. 2019
[8] NOMIS, 2021.
[9] http://fingertips.phe.org.uk/profile/health-profiles/area-search-results/E06000039?place_name=Slough&search_type=parent-area

Latest figures show from June 2020 to May 2021, 107 total number of crimes per 1,000 persons.[10]

[9]http://fingertips.phe.org.uk/profile/health-profiles/area-search-results/E06000039?place_name=Slough&search_type=parent-area

10 https://slough.berkshireobservatory.co.uk/crime-and-community-safety/

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	*Key lines of explanation*	➢ *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	**Not completed for the reasons stated at page 3 above**
Portfolios	*Key lines of explanation*	➢ *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	**Not completed for the reasons stated at page 3 above**
Delegated Responsibilities	*Key lines of explanation*	➤ *What responsibilities will be delegated to officers or committees?* ➤ *How many councillors will be involved in taking major decisions?*
	Analysis	**Not completed for the reasons stated at page 3 above**

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	
Internal Scrutiny	The scrutiny function of authorities has changed considerably. Some use theme or task-and-finish groups, for example, and others have a committee system. Scrutiny arrangements may also be affected by the officer support available.
Key lines of explanation	➤ *How will decision makers be held to account?* ➤ *How many committees will be required? And what will their functions be?* ➤ *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?* ➤ *How many members will be required to fulfil these positions?* ➤ *Explain why you have increased, decreased, or not changed the number of scrutiny committees in the authority.* ➤ *Explain the reasoning behind the number of members per committee in terms of adding value.*
Analysis	**Not completed for the reasons stated at page 3 above**
Statutory Function	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?
Planning *Key lines of explanation*	➤ *What proportion of planning applications will be determined by members?* ➤ *Has this changed in the last few years? And are further changes anticipated?* ➤ *Will there be area planning committees? Or a single council-wide committee?*

		➢ Will executive members serve on the planning committees?
		➢ What will be the time commitment to the planning committee for members?
	Analysis	**Not completed for the reasons stated at page 3 above**
Licensing	*Key lines of explanation*	➢ 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	**Not completed for the reasons stated at page 3 above**
Other Regulatory Bodies	*Key lines of explanation*	➢ 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	**Not completed for the reasons stated at page 3 above**
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		➢ 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		**Not completed for the reasons stated at page 3 above**

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	*Key lines of explanation*	➢ *In general terms how do councillors carry out their representational role with electors?* ➢ *Does the council have area committees and what are their powers?* ➢ *How do councillors seek to engage with their constituents? Do they hold surgeries, send newsletters, hold public meetings or maintain blogs?* ➢ *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?* ➢ *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?* ➢ *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?*
	Analysis	**Not completed for the reasons stated at page 3 above**
Casework	*Key lines of explanation*	➢ *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?* ➢ *What support do members receive?* ➢ *How has technology influenced the way in which councillors work? And interact with their electorate?* ➢ *In what ways does the council promote service users' engagement/dispute resolution with service providers and managers rather than through councillors?*
	Analysis	**Not completed for the reasons stated at page 3 above**

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.

The Council and its Best Value Commissioners agree that the current Council size remains fit for purpose, but that Slough's ward pattern should be revised to coincide with the introduction of whole Council elections in May 2023, and they request the Commission to undertake a review on this basis.