

# Canterbury

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**Organisation Name:** Conservative Group - Canterbury City Council (Representative of a local organisation)

## Comment text:

Dear [REDACTED],

Please find attached the Conservative Group on Canterbury City Council's submission on Council size as our evidence to be taken into account by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England as a part of its Electoral Review.

I would be grateful if you would confirm receipt of our submission before the deadline on July 25 2023.

Kind regards,

Rachel Carnac

Leader of the Conservative Group on Canterbury City Council

(On behalf of the Group)

## Attached Documents:

- Boundary Review Conservative Group-Canterbury - July 2023.pdf

**ELECTORAL REVIEW OF CANTERBURY CITY  
COUNCIL**

**COUNCIL SIZE SUBMISSION BY THE  
CONSERVATIVE COUNCILLOR GROUP**

**22 JULY 2023**

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# **ELECTORAL REVIEW OF CANTERBURY CITY COUNCIL: COUNCIL SIZE SUBMISSION BY THE CONSERVATIVE COUNCILLOR GROUP**

## **Section 1: Introduction**

The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) is undertaking a review of Canterbury City Council's electoral arrangements. The outcome of the review will be implemented for the May 2027 Council elections.

The review will cover the entire district. The statutory criteria that the LGBCE will apply when making its proposals are: -

1. Electoral equality (a consistent number of electors per Councillor).
2. Community identity (strong ward boundaries that reflect communities); and
3. Effective and convenient local government (coherent wards with good internal transport links).

The review was initiated in June 2023 and the preliminary stage of the review will determine the future Council size. The provisional decision on Council size by the Boundary Commission will then inform the next stage of the review, which will consider size and numbers of wards, ward boundaries and the number of Councillors to represent each ward.

The Commission will form its view about the right Council size for an authority by considering the three following areas:

- The governance arrangements of the Council and how it takes decisions across the broad range of its responsibilities.
- The Council's scrutiny functions relating to its own decision making and the Council's responsibilities to outside bodies.
- The representational role of Councillors in the local community and how they engage with people, conduct casework, and represent the Council on local partner organisations.

This submission presents evidence in relation to each of those criteria and supports the proposal of the Conservative Group of Councillors that the size of the council should stay unchanged at 39 Councillors as part of this review. The Conservative Group is of the view that 39 elected Councillors is sufficient to ensure effective and convenient local government.

## **Executive Summary**

**The Conservative Group is of the view that 39 elected Councillors is sufficient to ensure effective and convenient local government on Canterbury City Council.**

- **Restructuring and streamlining the Council:** Reduction in staff numbers and a focus on a more customer-facing service means the role of the Councillor has changed. The evidence base demonstrates how the Council has adapted to the changes in its financial and staff capacity to manage the leadership, scrutiny, and regulatory arms of its business within existing resources. The organisational changes that are currently being introduced are designed to reduce the constituency workload of Councillors by managing contact through officers using new CRM (Customer Relationship Management) technology.
- **Digitisation changing the way residents contact the Council:** The move to digital, for many residents a preferred option now, has allowed Councillors the time to provide extra help for those who want more traditional forms of contact, such as meeting face-to-face. The Council over the last four years has transformed itself into a digitally-enabled operation and is empowering the public to resolve issues themselves online directly with, rather than rely on assistance from others. This will require fewer Councillors to act as intermediaries.
- **Reducing costs to the taxpayer:** The Conservative Group believes that costs should be managed within the existing budget envelope, based on a framework recommended by the Independent Remuneration Panel. An increase in Councillor numbers would add an unwelcome increase in costs to be borne by the tax-payer at a time when the council has reduced its own staffing numbers by almost 30% and its payroll by over 15% since 2014. An increase in the number of Councillors by ten would add an extra £70,000 per annum at least to the council's budget.
- **Changing role of Councillors:** There are clear trends away from direct member engagement in the day-to-day running of the Council and there has been greater delegation of decision making to officers. There is therefore a clear moral case for keeping the cost of members as it is provided that can be done without affecting communities' access to councillor assistance and advocacy. We do not believe that level of assistance has been affected in spite of a rise in the population. In fact, digitisation has enabled Councillors to be more efficient with their time. There has also been a 26.6% reduction in the number of Council meetings since 2015.
- **Measuring Councillor workload:** Without members actually recording their work on a time sheet it is notoriously difficult to build an accurate picture of how 'little bits here and there' add up to a total. There will be wide variations by Councillor and for each Councillor by week. We therefore disregard apocryphal 'how much do you think you do' recollection-based surveys which, arguably, will tend to significantly overstate the position.

## **Section 2: Background information relating to the district and its electors**

### **Current Council arrangements**

The current Council size was determined by the previous review in 2014, after the introduction of the Local Government Act 2000 of Executive Arrangements, which streamlined local authorities' political management arrangements and significantly reduced the number of committees and related duties that Councillors are required to perform.

The Council is currently comprised of 39 Councillors, which was reduced from 50 in 2014, across 21 wards. There are four three-member wards (Barton, Blean Forest, Gorrell and Heron), 10 two-member wards, and 7 one-member wards. All Councillors are elected for a four-year term.

### **Officer management structures**

Over many years the Council has streamlined its officer arrangements in response to financial pressures due to reductions in support from government and a re-alignment of services. Integral to this process was a number of reviews of the Council's senior management and the extent to which a reduced management structure could effectively support the decision-making processes and the delivery of services. The Council is just completing a major transformation and restructuring which has seen its size reduced and the formation of locality teams and more online reporting to streamline customer services.

The evidence base has demonstrated how the council has adapted to the changes in its financial and staff capacity to manage the leadership, scrutiny, and regulatory arms of its business within existing resources. The organisational changes that are currently being introduced are designed to reduce the constituency workload of councillors by managing contact through officers using new CRM (Customer Relationship Management) technology.

Much of this has already been completed and after the May 2023 elections, Councillors are already benefiting from a much more streamlined approach to handling case work. There are two dedicated email addresses that Councillors forward resident cases and questions to and these are referred directly to the case officers and locality teams who follow up and handle directly.

The system should be fully functional by the end of 2023. It is still bedding in but will have a positive impact on reducing the caseload for Councillors.

## **Structure of the Leadership Team**

Head of Paid Service/Director of Corporate Services  
Director of Strategy  
Director of People & Place

In 2021 the council voted to replace the CEO and opt for a leadership team of three executive directors of services (one of whom is Head of Paid Service), and three deputy directors, one of which is the Head of Finance and Section 501 officer. The other two are service directors of People and Place.

Officer delegations have been reviewed and amended to reflect the changes. In addition, Heads of Service have been mandated to play a wider role in the Council's corporate governance and the formulation of strategic policies to deliver the Council's priorities.

## **Section 3: How the Council Works**

This section considers the current Councillor arrangements in Canterbury and each of the key areas identified by the Commission, evidencing how the proposal to keep the current number of Councillors at 39 will result in better management of the Council.

The evidence strongly suggests that the current governance arrangements are less onerous than the committee system that applied when the electoral arrangements for the district were last reviewed in 2014, and that remaining at 39 Councillors will allow the Council's current governance arrangements to be fully and effectively discharged.

As noted later in this report, the demands on Councillors by their representational role are greatly reduced due to the different role of the Council and the widespread use of ICT and other channels of communication.

### **Managing the Business of the Council - Political Governance**

(Source information provided in Appendix B of the evidence submission by Canterbury City Council)

Following the Local Government Act 2000 coming into effect, Canterbury City Council adopted the 'Leader and Cabinet' model in 2002. At the time the council's size was 50 councillors.

In 2014, the Council resolved to move from the Leader and Cabinet model to the 'Committee' model of governance, to take effect at the annual meeting in May 2015.

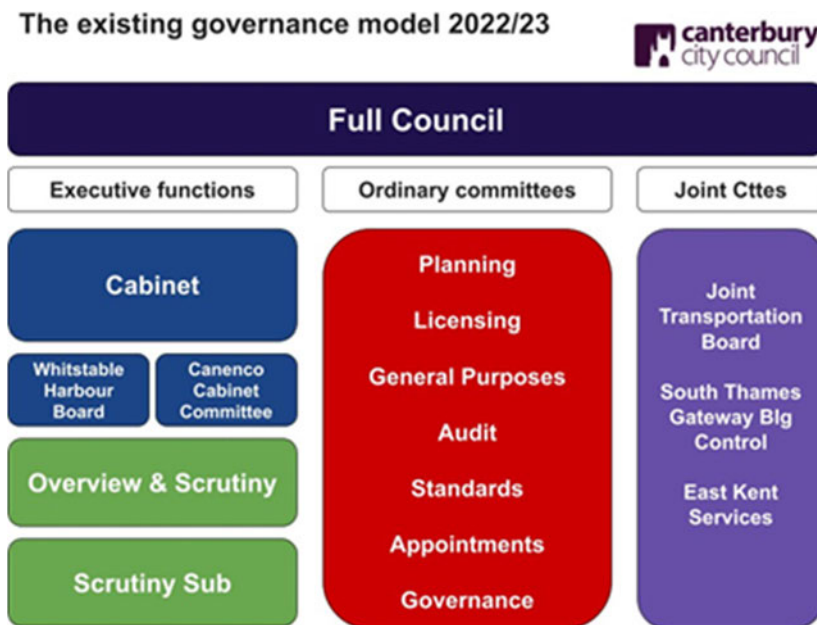
This coincided with the Local Government Boundary Commission review, resulting in the reduction in council size from 50 councillors to 39.

The change took effect at the local elections held in May 2015, meaning the new model of governance and the reduction in council size took effect at the same time. The council operated the 'Committee' model of governance from 2015 - 2022.

In July 2021, the Council resolved to change from the Committee model of governance back to the 'Leader and Cabinet' model, to take effect from the annual meeting in May 2022.

The structure of the new Leader and Cabinet governance model was agreed by Full Council in May 2022 and implemented at the Annual Meeting later that month. The existing model has been carried forward into the new Council. It is expected that it will be reviewed again in due course.

The existing governance structure is illustrated in the table below –



(Source Canterbury City Council)

As Canterbury City Council states in its submission of evidence:

There has been a:

- 26.6% reduction in the number of meetings since 2015
- 43.75% reduction in Cabinet meetings since 2015
- 24% reduction in Scrutiny meetings (including Audit) since 2015
- 22% reduction in councillors since 2014/15
- 14% reduction in councillors' allowances since 2015
- 41.2% reduction in annual appointments to outside bodies since 2015
- 16.2% reduction in overall expenditure since 2015
- 26.6% reduction in staffing levels (FTE) since 2015
- 4.1% increase in population since 2011, with further increase of 3% expected by 2029 (although this is currently being reassessed by the council.)



## The Council's operating model

### Current Electoral Numbers (source Canterbury City Council)

#### Electoral register - total number registered

Register	Electorate	Electorate ratio
Dec 2019	116,508	2987
Dec 2020	107,947	2767
May 2021	108,949	2793
May 2022	108,167	2773
May 2023	108,398	2779

#### Electorate ratio (source Canterbury City Council)

Year	Councillors	Electorate	Electorate ratio
May 2023	39	108,398	2,779
May 2029	39	114,000 (est)	2,923

The electoral register shows a change in number depending on the type of election. The 2019 General Election saw a larger number of students in Canterbury than normally register to vote. By the May 2023 Local Elections this had fallen back by 8,000. The student population is transitory in nature. Most students study for three years and are only in the district during term time. The Covid pandemic also had an impact as students studied from home in 2020 and 2021. Having said that it is important to note that numbers on the electoral register have not recovered to anywhere near those seen in December 2019.

The council is predicting an increase in population and has recently readjusted the figures upwards again based on new housing to be built within the district and predicted to have new residents by 2029, but this has not occurred yet and is therefore somewhat speculative. However, the latest numbers indicating a rise of 20,000 people need challenging and we understand will be re-evaluated again, given that it is difficult to predict population trends. These were over-estimated in 2014 too. The census numbers give a more accurate picture of a largely unchanging population.

On one level it might be possible to argue that an increase in population must inevitably lead to higher casework workloads for councillors. However, the impact of technology must mitigate this to a large extent. It also needs to be considered that people moving into new developments where infrastructure, such as play areas, are run by management companies means there is less call on councillors to help with district council-run services beyond bin collections, the reporting and monitoring of which are now online services. Students who are frequently residents in University Halls of Residence also tend to have seasonal demands on Council resources, but also have their own internal pastoral and support systems in the Universities.

In 2014, while the prevalence of email was increasing, and smartphones were more widely used, the landscape in 2023 is vastly different after the Covid pandemic resulted in the rise of virtual meetings, the use of social media messaging to make contact, and the much swifter automation of reporting systems within councils. For instance, Canterbury City Council has moved very quickly to online and digital reporting systems. In fact, it has reduced its own face-to-face meetings with residents and in doing so this has not noticeably resulted in more casework being picked up by councillors. Instead, more case management is moving online.

And, of course, we are ever mindful of those residents who are unable to access services online or digitally and who still like to write letters and ask for face-to-face meetings. But the amount of contact via landline and by letter has fallen substantially and makes up a small percentage of the total time spent weekly on councillor work.

The move to digital, for many residents a preferred option now, has allowed Councillors the time to provide extra help for those who want more traditional forms of contact, such as meeting face-to-face.

The higher proportion of contact via email requires a minimum of re-transcription before forwarding to the relevant council email address which is then dealt with by a case officer. Responding by emails is similarly straightforward.

The council is committed to continuing to pursue a digital strategy, which has achieved and will continue to achieve a number of reductions in councillor casework:

- Residents can easily report direct to the council without needing the interface of a councillor in as many cases.
- More residents will be able to sign up for online accounts to monitor their Council Tax payments, benefits, and parking – refer to the website - <https://www.canterbury.gov.uk/parking-and-roads/automatic-car-park-payments/register-car-parking-account>
- Increased streamlining within the council will enable members to report and monitor casework online, greatly improving efficiency.
- The introduction of video at council meetings will mean those councillors who do not have to attend will be able to watch online or speak via video rather than having to attend in person.

It is therefore reasonable to assume that the volume of casework generated by an expanding population will continue to be compensated for by the increases in productivity we have seen through use of communication technology.

## Executive Decision Making

In 2023/24, the Cabinet consists of nine Councillors, including the Leader of the Council. In 2022/23, when the Leader and Cabinet model was re-established, the Cabinet consisted of six Councillors, including the Leader of the Council. That functioned very efficiently as the Portfolio Roles corresponded to the departments in the newly restructured council (see page 5).

In Canterbury, executive decisions are taken by Cabinet collectively.

Increasingly, in line with other Councils, Councillors agree strategies with appropriate delegation to officers to progress implementation.

The table below (produced by Canterbury City Council) gives an overview of how business has been managed through the committee programme since the last review in 2014, taking into account the previous Leader and Cabinet Model, the change to the Committee model from 2015 - 2022, and the return to the Leader and Cabinet model in May 2022.

### Committee meetings in 2014/15, 2021/22 and 2022/23 (Source Canterbury City Council)

<b>Committees Model</b>	<b>2014/15 Leader and Cabinet</b>	<b>2021/22 Committee</b>	<b>2022/23 Leader and Cabinet</b>
Councillors	50	39	39
Council	8	13	6
Cabinet/Executive	16	-	10
Overview and Scrutiny Committee	11	-	9
Scrutiny and Audit/ Accounts Ctte	14	-	-
Scrutiny Sub Committee	-	-	5
Audit Committee	-	5	5
Policy Committee	-	8	-
Regeneration Committee	-	6	-
Community Committee	-	8	-
Planning Committee	15	11	13
Planning Sub-Committee	4	-	-
Licensing (& GP in 2014)	8	2	2
Licensing Sub-Committee	20	18	14
Whitstable Harbour Board	6	4	3
Standards Committee	2	1	1
Joint Transportation Board	3	2	4
Appointments Committee	3	9	3
East Kent Committee	1	2	1
Governance (inc 2014 Commission)	5	3	2
Area Forums x 4: Canterbury, Herne Bay, Whitstable and Rural (6 meetings each)	24	-	-
Decision Review Committee	-	1	-
General Purposes	-	-	-
South Thames Gateway	-	-	4
<b>Meetings per year</b>	<b>140</b>	<b>94</b> <b>-32.9%</b>	<b>82</b> <b>-41.4%</b>

- Cabinet requires far fewer members to participate in meetings overall. Although other councillors may attend, they are not required to do so. Plus, once video is installed in the Council chamber (2023/34), it will mean other councillors wishing to speak or attend can do so virtually.
- The council historically appointed members to many more third-party bodies in the district and in Kent than today, including many more community asset boards and charities. This changed in 2019. Councillors now take up outside roles in a private voluntary capacity. Whilst we cannot evidence the workload required previously, it seems reasonable to assume that appointing to more bodies called for a proportionately higher degree of member commitment. Before 2019, there were appointments to 34 third-party bodies in the district. In 2023/24 this has reduced to 14.
- The Area Forums have been disbanded and this has reduced the number of meetings again that councillors are expected to attend.
- Councillor Briefings and Training are now mostly held via virtual meetings or in a hybrid format. This has reduced Councillor travelling time and enabled more flexibility on how Councillors choose to attend, fitting around work and caring responsibilities. In 2022/23, ten Councillor Briefings were held, compared to 17 in 2021/22.
- Councillors receive induction training, covering key elements and essentials in undertaking the role of Councillor. Training is provided on regulatory matters such as planning and licensing. Political Groups also provide ongoing development support to newer Councillors. Time required to be spent on training is generally limited to the first three months after the Local Elections, and there is no evidence to suggest that the training commitment required is rising.
- Parish Council meetings – these can add extra workload for those Councillors in wards with Parish Councils. However, out of the 39 Councillors, only 15 Councillors currently have Parish Councils within their wards.

## **Regulatory Committees**

### **Licensing Committee**

The Licensing Act 2003 requires each licensing authority to establish a licensing committee consisting of at least ten, but not more than fifteen, members of the authority. The Act prescribes that the role of this committee is the discharge of the authority's licensing functions. The Act sets out that a licensing committee may establish one or more subcommittees consisting of three members of the committee.

Members of the Licensing Committee meet once each municipal year to re-establish its Sub Committee. Further meetings of the Licensing Committee are convened, as required, in order to agree or amend any overarching policies, processes and procedures; and set the fees, in respect of the various licences that fall within its remit. The Licensing Committee also meets to agree the strategic direction of the licensing authority as and when necessary. The number of times that the Licensing Committee has met since the last Boundary Commission review has halved in number per year to two meetings.

The Licensing Sub Committee comprises any three members of the main Licensing Committee. The role of the Licensing Sub Committee is to hear and determine specific licence applications that are subject to representations or objections, together with applications which seek the review of an existing licence. The Sub Committee also sits to serve counter notices in respect of opposed Temporary Event Notices.

Licensing Sub met 20 times in 2014/15 and that had reduced to 14 times in 2022/23.

## **Planning Committee**

Planning Committee is a regulatory committee, which met 13 times per year in 2022/23 and this may increase again once water contamination problems at Stodmarsh, which have put a halt on some housing development, are resolved. A significant number of decisions are delegated to the Head of Planning.

Over 90% of applications are dealt with by officers under delegation and this trend has not changed significantly since the last review.

New ward councillor 'call-in' arrangements were introduced in 2020 and at the same time the ability for Parish Councils and selected amenity groups to refer an application to committee were removed. The intention was to put the Ward Councillor at the heart of the process and ensure dialogue from residents and Parish Councils flowed through them.

## **Delegation to officers**

The City Council has a comprehensive Scheme of Delegation to Officers (as set out in Part 8.1 and 8.2 of the Constitution), which clearly sets out where the responsibility and extent of delegation lies. Delegations are provided to the directors and service directors. They have the power to sub-delegate to other officers and this is fully documented.

The delegations to Officers have helped to reduce the burden on Councillors and ensure efficient and effective discharge of functions at the appropriate level.

The approach taken by the Council over a number of years has been to rely and expect the Chief Executive and now the Leadership Team, as well as senior officers of the Council to effectively implement the strategic decisions of the Council and to run operational services effectively, making use of their professional expertise and experience.

The trend in Cabinet reports is for major projects to go to Cabinet only once, with substantial delegated powers being granted to officers, most often in consultation with a named cabinet member. Where previously many projects would be reported to Cabinet at key milestones, now the practice is for the milestone decisions to be covered by the original delegations.

This approach has been reflected in the delegation of authority to officers to implement significant programmes such as the Levelling-Up Fund Bid for Canterbury, which is a multi-year programme where disposals and management over many years will not need to come back to cabinet. This approach has led to fewer decisions being required from Members both of the executive and other committees.

## **The representational role of Councillors in the local community & casework**

Individual Councillors manage and progress their casework with advice and guidance from officers as appropriate. Councillors have, however, observed that the use of email and other media has allowed for faster, less-time consuming communication with both residents and officers in relation to case work. Similarly, the availability of online information, services, and ways of reporting issues for residents and Councillors alike has also reduced the time required to undertake casework.

The introduction of appropriate software for tracking and monitoring the handling of complaints, for instance, missed bin collections, fly-tipping, parking fines, and noise complaints has and will reduce the amount of time Councillors need to spend assisting residents with such issues.

There is no evidence that the expanding population is leading to more complaints: indeed as outlined above the reverse seems to be true in places, as new developments have their own management companies who deal with managing open spaces, emptying litter bins, street lighting and removing flytipping and graffiti.

### **Community/neighbourhood representation**

A few Councillors still conduct surgeries. In some cases these are regular monthly meetings in such places as, for example, local community centres, and libraries, whilst others prefer to make themselves available either through email, telephone conversations or by meetings with residents.

Many Councillors also choose to meet and speak to residents when it is convenient for the resident, rather than making them wait for the Councillor to hold a monthly surgery. They find individual meetings a more personal and suitable way of engaging with people in their ward than surgeries. While others meet residents during Parish Council meetings or by attending other groups and activities within their wards.

We are not aware that the Council holds any data about the time spent by Councillors on representation of individual electors apart from the small survey data that they recently gathered and is in the report submitted by the Council.

### **Section 4: Planning for the Future**

The trend to continuously seek efficiencies and to streamline the council and the way it provides services will continue. In addition to the changes identified above and the restructuring of the Council to make it more customer-focused through digital self-service, there have been other significant organisational changes with the Marlowe Theatre staff transferring to a Trust organisation in 2018, and East Kent Housing staff being transferred in-house from a four-council arms-length organisation in 2021/22. Waste Management and Grounds Maintenance are managed by a Latco. The numbers outlined by the Council reflect the net position following those and any other changes (source: Canterbury City Council).

The table and graph below show the trend in funding over recent years. Since 2014/15, total expenditure has decreased by 16.6% and staffing numbers by 26.6%.

#### **Changes to council expenditure and staffing 2014/15 to 2021/22** (source: Canterbury City Council)

<b>Financial Year</b>	<b>Total Expenditure</b>	<b>Staffing (FTE)</b>
2014/15	£20,438m	759
2021/22	£17,120m	557
Decrease 2014/15 to 2021/22	-16.2%	-26.6%

The one area of council activity that would see costs rise substantially, if Councillor numbers were to rise above 39 would be Members' allowances. Even without an increase, it is anticipated that this current Council will call for another review of Councillor Allowances and seek increases. The last review of Councillor Allowances was agreed by the Policy Committee in April 2022, as

part of the change in governance model, and at that time, there was some concern that Cabinet Member allowances were too low and that these would be reviewed again. Between reviews, allowances increase in line with the staff pay award.

The largest single cost is the basic allowance for councillors. In 2022/23, the basic allowance payable to all councillors was £6,075 pa, the second highest of the 12 Kent districts. Special Responsibility Allowances are more difficult to compare as structures vary but for key roles such as Leader and Cabinet Member, Canterbury is comparatively lower - in some cases below the Kent average.

The estimated cost of Members Allowances for a council size of 50, based on current rates, would be approximately £400,000. This assumes basic allowances at the existing rate and a 20% increase in mileage, travel, and NI costs.

It seems quite unjustifiable that members would then cost more than they did in 2014/15 when all other council spends have diminished – and that of employed staff dramatically so.

Coupled with the clear trends away from direct member engagement in the day-to-day running of the council, there is a clear moral case for keeping the cost of members as it is provided that can be done without affecting communities’ access to councillor assistance and advocacy.

As Canterbury City Council notes in its own report: “One of the underlying considerations in the construction of effective and convenient governance arrangements has been the management of costs relating to the cost of democracy. One of the political steers during both governance reviews was to manage costs within the existing budget envelope, based on a framework recommended by the Independent Remuneration Panel.” And we stick to this principle.

The impact on the Member Allowances budgets of the reduction on council size and subsequent change in governance model can be seen below.

**Members allowances 2014/15 to 2022/23** (source: Canterbury City Council)

	<b>2014/15</b>	<b>2021/22</b>	<b>2022/23</b>
Council size	50	39	39
Model	Leader and Cabinet	Committee	Leader and Cabinet
Basic allowance	£241,255	£225,040	£236,433
Special resp allowance	£118,861	£84,440	£84,345
Mileage claims	£10,878	£1,165	£3,049
Travel and subsistence	£732	£109	£1,528
Employers NI	£8,512	£6,110	£5,938
Mobile phone allowance	£972	N/A	N/A
PC allowance	£4819	N/A	N/A
Total pay	£386,029	£316,864	£331,293
		-17.9%	-14.2%

**The Digitisation of Society**

As we have already noted above, the Council over the last four years has transformed itself into a digitally-enabled operation and is empowering the public to resolve issues themselves online directly with, rather than rely on assistance from others. This will require fewer Councillors to act as intermediaries.

The council is increasingly becoming paperless for members and provides a laptop device to all

members for them to connect via a Google-based system and ModGov to council papers and agendas. Calendars are also kept digitally on those devices and Councillors are informed of meetings. Moreover, the Council has developed a Councillor Intranet for the May 2023 Councillor cohort which enables speedier and easier contact with the Council and officers. This has delivered considerable efficiencies in terms of meeting preparation and administrative organization.

## **Devolution**

At the moment there is no indication of any plans for devolution of local government that would change the way the Council works. However, it should be noted that the Government has expressed its desire for greater devolution across the regions. There will be a Governance Review during the life of this Council and it is already known that the towns of Whitstable and Herne Bay are calling for the establishment of Town Councils. This would no doubt have implications for those District Councillors representing both towns. Similarly, the review may seek to justify full parishing of the district and similarly this would have implications for all District Councillors.

## **Section 5 The proposal for Council size**

The previous sections of this report have described how the Council has streamlined its arrangements so that fewer Councillors have a formal role in the decision-making of the Council, there are fewer committees scrutinising executive decisions, and fewer outside bodies on which the Council has representation. Officer arrangements too have changed with fewer senior managers and a focus of resources on delivering front-line services. The Council has sought to ensure that it is managed effectively with lean and efficient structures. The Conservative Group believes it is appropriate that this approach should also apply to the number of Councillors.

The Council could have chosen, as we are seeing in many other boundary reviews, to request that it remains at 39 Councillors, or even that it reduces in number further.

The Conservative Group on Canterbury Council is disappointed that the administration has not sought to keep down the cost of councillors by requesting that numbers are maintained at 39 as a maximum, and notes that the draft submission by the Council as debated at Council on July 20 is seeking an increase to 49 Councillors after a tabled amendment, even though the Council's own recommendation to Council was to increase to 43. We believe this is contrary to the great weight of evidence that remaining at 39 Councillors would be both proportionate and sustainable.

It is clear that some Councillors attend far more meetings than others, and there is more information on this below. This is not a surprise, as those attending the highest number of meetings are likely to be cabinet members or committee chairs, who are remunerated more than a back-bencher for an expected higher workload. There are also other Council members who in the 2019/2023 Council attended very few meetings and that is the case now in the 2023 Council with some Councillors serving on very few committees. This tends to suggest that workloads are therefore shared amongst Councillors: some more involved in Council decision-making while others are more involved in handling casework, particularly where there are two members sharing a ward.

## **Quantifying Councillor workload**

While the draft submission by the Council refers to a survey that was completed by some Councillors to indicate workload, there is no accurate data available on the average workload of Councillors in Canterbury or elsewhere. Looking at the survey results, it appears that,



anecdotally, those that responded were those with the biggest workloads either serving as Group Leaders or Deputy Leaders, Cabinet Members or Committee Chairs. It also does not differentiate between the workload for those in single member, two-member or three-member wards. It also does not correlate the issues of managing workload against those that have full-time jobs and caring responsibilities. We would therefore contend that the survey results are anecdotal at best, and do not provide an accurate picture on which to base a decision.

Without members actually recording their work on a time sheet it is notoriously difficult to build an accurate picture of how 'little bits here and there' add up to a total. There will be wide variations by councillor and for each councillor by week. We therefore disregard apocryphal 'how much do you think you do' recollection-based surveys which, arguably, will tend to significantly over-state the position.

### **Reviewing the electorate across wards with current boundaries**

The largest increase in the electorate is found in the ward of Herne & Broomfield, which has 6,666 electors in 2021 marking an electoral imbalance greater than 20%.

One of the Herne & Broomfield councillors, who was first elected in 2011 and was then a Councillor for Heron ward, before moving to Herne & Broomfield in 2019, which is showing an 18% variation, says that he has never spent more than 10 hours per week on casework and that he is able to manage this.

Within our group, many of us representing wards that are shown as well in excess of the electorate ratio, are not struggling to manage with casework or the workload. Please see reports below from serving and recently serving Councillors. Many of us are in full-time work and/or have caring responsibilities. None of us are of retirement age.

### **Arriving at an appropriate number**

The changing role of members, the need to have sufficient members to scrutinise the executive, the importance of community initiatives and being able to interact with residents as well as have a meaningful role in attending meetings and contributing to strategic decisions makes it clear that a reduction in numbers would be inappropriate.

However, given the restructuring of the Council, the digitisation of services, the changes in how Councillors interact, communicate and handle casework as a result of changing technology, it is impossible to see a case for increasing the number of Councillors.

The Conservative Group on Canterbury City Council therefore arrives at maintaining the number of Councillors at 39. However, we believe that there should only be one-member and two-member wards and that three-member wards function less well. This arrangement would help with any drawing up of new wards and would for instance, allow for a re-allocation of the existing 39 Councillors.

### **Section 6 Financial impact of Council size proposal**

The budget allocated for Members' Allowances for 20/23 is approximately £330,000. An increase to 50 councillors would result in an increase of at least £70,000.

While this may seem quite modest in the context of the council's total spend, we believe that residents expect to see the cost of elected members reflect the contracting role of the council and they should also play their role in achieving the savings that councillors have expected the officer corps to deliver through downsizing.

## **Appendix 1**

### **A commentary on member workloads from Cllr Joe Howes, ward Councillor 2011 onwards, former Community Committee Chair and Cabinet Member for People**

*Having been a councillor for the last 12 years I have worked under both the Cabinet and Committee systems in Canterbury. When I was first elected in 2011 the number of councillors was over 50 until we went to the current 39 in 2015. Having served as a backbencher, cabinet member and committee chair I feel that the current 39 councillors have worked really well and the amount of time needed to carry out my role has not been a burden. I would suggest that on ward work I have never spent more than 10 hours a week completing this. As a councillor in a two-member ward the burden is often eased by sharing the tasks with my colleague.*

*My role in the cabinet took more time but this was something I was able to carry out and ultimately I was happy to do this role. If I was concerned that I couldn't do this role to the best of my abilities I would have not taken on this job.*

*In opposition I have found that I am still spending 10 hours a week doing ward work and attending meetings.*

### **A Commentary on member workloads from former Cllr Ben Fitter-Harding who was Council Leader from 2020-2023**

*I write this as former Leader of Canterbury City Council and the Conservative group, and a father of two young children with a full-time job outside of Council. I have served as a 'back bench' councillor in a Cabinet system of 50 councillors, a Cabinet member without portfolio in a Cabinet system of 50 councillors, a committee chair in a Committee system of 39 councillors and Leader in a Cabinet system of 39 councillors.*

*I believe strongly in the effectiveness and efficiency of local government.*

*Whilst the pressure of the role of Leader, particularly with my other constraints, was significant, I have experienced ward level work over a period of 10 years and within a council that has operated different governance systems and decreased in size.*

*It is based on that experience that I suggest that Canterbury City Council have, at most, 39 councillors. I personally believe that this number could be reduced still further, perhaps to 35 or 36, to keep councillors involved in active and meaningful roles.*

*Over the last decade Canterbury City Council has invested heavily in technology, with many resident queries now being dealt with most effectively via the Council website. It is undertaking to improve the technology available to councillors, which will aid them greatly with their ward work, and it is in the advanced stages of implementing a Customer Relationship Management platform that has the potential to greatly reduce councillor workload in the future.*

*Its award-winning bin collections platform has resulted in vastly more residents self-serving for bin-related issues. The contractor change in 2021 flushed out a huge number of issues, and while councillors initially felt the brunt of this, when I left my role bin-related issues were historically low. I note that at the time of writing the Council and its contractor are embroiled in strike action; whilst I have no doubt that this is creating a burden for all councillors it is a temporary consequence of the new political leadership and will no doubt be resolved, one way or the other, in the near future.*

*Even the Council's new digital planning guidance system, which answers innumerable resident questions about whether they need planning permission before starting the formal process, instantly and for free, reduces the typical planning-related caseload.*

*Provided that the Council continues to invest in its customer services operation and its digital plans, councillors will be freed up to focus on more complicated ward casework. With digital systems coming on stream to help manage that, there can be no justification for increasing councillor numbers. To do so would only result in a less effective and efficient council with poorer levels of councillor engagement and awareness than the current situation.*

*I trust that the Review will conclude that 39 councillors is sufficient for Canterbury City Council and consider the possibility of a further reduction.*

**A Commentary on member workloads from Cllr Dan Watkins who is a twin-hatter as well as being a councillor on CCC, he is a Deputy Cabinet Member on Kent County Council**

*I represent Greenhill, a single member ward in Canterbury district with a significantly over-average population, where that population is steady throughout the year.*

*Having been a councillor for over four years, I would say that the level of casework I receive is manageable for one person. It is a real mix, generated both by residents on lower incomes (with mainly housing-related issues) and those who are more affluent (who ask about planning, the environment, anti-social behaviour, parking, and transport issues). I would say both groups generate equal amounts of casework.*

*I have a day job and a young family, but my experience is that the workload is still sustainable, despite my having more residents than most councillors. Technology has helped, eg I can attend councillor briefings on Teams, and most residents prefer that I resolve their issues by communicating on email/phone rather than in person. So travel time has been minimised.*

*As such, I see no need to increase the number of councillors across the district and would keep them at the same level. Furthermore, to increase councillor numbers, and the cost to the council, at a time when family budgets are being squeezed, does not seem the right choice.*

**A Commentary on member workloads from Neil Baker - Canterbury City Councillor Tankerton Ward from 2011-2023**

**From 2011-2015, this was a two-member ward as part of a 50-member council. From 2015 onwards it has been a smaller one-member ward.**

**Kent County Councillor for Whitstable East and Herne Bay West from 2021-  
This division covers the Canterbury City Council wards of Greenhill, Swalecliffe, Tankerton, West Bay and polling district HH5 of Heron.**

*If everything else in life had stood still, it would be fair to assume increasing the number of electors per councillor would bring a proportional increase in workload. However, even in the period since 2011 the manner of working with residents and council officers has changed markedly.*

*While every item of casework is different, it is now rarer for issues to be generated through face-to-face meetings and solutions found via further face-to-face meetings. These will always exist*

*and it's important to interact with residents in the manner they feel most comfortable - but it is often overlooked that an increasing number are used to doing most things online and expect to be able to interact with their councillor this way.*

*For many years, I was a member of the Planning Committee - including as chair for the final year of my tenure - and the reduction in material I received in the post from interested parties was huge. Although there is always a risk of email overload, I personally find it much easier to read documents sent electronically than posted, hand-written letters with printed photographs. It is also much easier for residents to make their case this way.*

*It is also much easier (although councils could make it more straightforward) for residents to report issues directly with the council and not via their elected members. Examples would be graffiti, fly-tipping and missed bin collections.*

*Graffiti and fly-tipping reporting is something the city council has done well and the ability for anyone with a phone - including councillors - to take a photo and upload it with embedded location data is a good example of increased turnaround times. Historically, this may have taken much longer and required a lot of councillor involvement - to be told of the problem, to go and photograph the issue, to find an officer who would agree it was an issue and then for the officer to arrange for the relevant contractor to fix it.*

*Canterbury City Council, to the best of my knowledge, is developing a "locality officer" approach. This will further reduce the reliance on councillors to deal with the day-to-day issues (which isn't necessarily a good thing, in my opinion) and focus more on strategy. And as the ability for residents to obtain information and answers themselves increases, the reliance on councillors as the first point of contact will diminish even further than it already has. While there are pros and cons to this, it should mean councillors have more capacity to focus on the most complex cases that need more than just a quick response.*

*While social media has its drawbacks, it does allow councillors to rapidly answer queries, monitor general thoughts on issues and build-up a rapport with those residents who wish to use the medium. As well as direct communication, it also allows councillors to pick up casework in the way they would once have done by overhearing the "problem of the day" when sat in a cafe.*

*This cannot replace the need to use more traditional methods, but it can help allay fears connected to councillors having to represent a large area - although concerns about geography will always exist when it is clearly more difficult to spend time on every road on a regular basis in a sprawling rural ward than a compact urban one. Arguably, councillors will have more difficulty with wards increasing in terms of geographical size than population number.*

*Overall, I think equal representation across the district is a more important consideration than councillor numbers alone. If there were a desire to have the same number of councillors for each ward and that number was two, the most obvious solution would be to increase the numbers to 40 or reduce to 38. There may be areas where this causes concerns about coterminosity with communities, but this is already a problem - as one example, many people in Swalecliffe Ward (such as those living in Marine Crescent) identify with Tankerton and the boundaries around the edges of wards across Whitstable are arbitrary, but this is perhaps something for a further round of consultation.*

**A Commentary on member workloads from Rachel Carnac – Canterbury City Councillor 2019- , Reculver Ward, Deputy Leader of the Council, 2020-2023, Conservative Group Leader and Chair of the Scrutiny Committee – 2023-**

*I found that casework naturally rose considerably during the Covid pandemic, through lockdowns and then even into the early stages of returning to normal. It was an abnormal time and many people needed helping. But, even with the cost-of-living crisis, I have noticed the amount of case work coming through has dropped quite dramatically and on average I think I'm doing a maximum of 10 hours per week, depending on whether I have parish council meetings to attend.*

*I have definitely noticed that many residents are using the council's website to report issues such as missed bin collections and flytipping. Likewise, the new planning software means I have fewer residents asking me questions. Even with housing issues, which can make up a bigger proportion of my workload, I'm finding that the new locality teams are responding directly and I'm not being asked to be involved, unless something goes wrong. I would say I've become the person of last resort to be contacted.*

*That means I have more time to be involved in projects within my ward that are more strategic and look at place-making and longer-term issues. I represent a very large rural ward and I have had no issue covering it and getting out and meeting people. I also have managed very well as the only councillor in my ward and prefer to have a single member ward. I hear from others who never seem to get on with sharing a ward, and it seems to me one person ends up doing all the work, while the other does a lot less – it certainly seems far from equitable. I represent quite an elderly population who still like to write letters and have face-to-face meetings and I have never let anyone down. I also have a big strategic housing development in the ward which has taken a considerable amount of time with resident casework as it went through planning and then to appeal.*

*As Deputy Leader, and Cabinet Member for Corporate Services, which included the council budget, there was a lot of work from the summertime through to passing the budget in February each year. I also have a full-time job and sometimes I found the workload very demanding. However, I had also taken on a lot of other commitments outside of the Council, such as being Chair of a School Board of Governors and other initiatives, which I could always have dropped to give me some spare time.*

*Given changing technology, the restructuring of the council, reduction of officers and a more streamlined way of handling resident cases, plus the need to ensure councillors provide good value for money, I believe that 39 councillors on Canterbury City Council is the right number and works very well.*