

Council Size Submission: Bristol City 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, 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.

This submission is made by Bristol City Council and was approved at the Full Council meeting on 9 September 2025.

The submission has been prepared following a series of briefings with all elected councillors, discussion with the political leadership of the Council and advice and guidance from Council officers. A survey of councillors was carried out to inform the submission.

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.*

N/A

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?

Bristol City Council is a Core City and has a significant strategic role at the national and regional level. The profile of elected councillors in Bristol City Council is significant in their local communities, regionally and nationally.

At that time of the last review of the size of the Council in 2014/15, the Council felt that maintaining the number of councillors at 70 was the right level to ensure the appropriate discharge of the Council's responsibilities and representation of local communities. The number of councillors was previously set at 70 following the review of the size of the Council in 1999/2000 with an electorate of 292,256, when it was increased from 68 to 70 councillors. The electorate in 2031 will be 351,700, 20.34% larger with an addition of 59,444 people. In the 25 years since the last increase in the size of the Council, there have been significant demographic changes in the City of Bristol, the local government landscape has evolved, in particular the way in which councils make decisions and how elected councillors engage with their residents. Whilst a number of these factors were present at the time of the last review in 2014/15, Bristol has continued to change as a City and the role of elected councillors has continued to change to reflect the needs of the City that they represent.

The Council faces similar challenges as most other large councils. For example, the cost of social care, delivery of affordable housing, the cost of placements for looked-after children and in a diverse City like Bristol, the range of issues that are raised with elected councillors is wide-ranging, often very complex and touching on multiple areas of the Council's business. Councillors have a pivotal role in their local communities as a means of resolving the issues that are raised with them by their residents. The environment in which councillors work had also changed significantly during this time and the ways in which local residents communicate with councillors has changed with an increase in the use of social media.

The duties and responsibilities of all councillors are set out in the Council's Constitution as follows:

1. To fulfil the statutory and locally determined requirements of an elected Member of a Local Authority.
2. To participate effectively as a member of any meeting to which the Councillor is

appointed, for example by regular attendance at meetings, ensuring that they are adequately briefed and prepared for the meeting, and examine and challenge issues as appropriate.

3. To participate in the activities of an outside body to which the Councillor is appointed and to provide update reports on the work of the relevant body to Bristol City Council as required.

4. To act as community champion for their ward and promote community cohesion. This will include being consulted about ward matters and participating in local decision-making arrangements. In addition, all Councillors should provide a voice and advice for local individuals and interest groups in their dealings with the Council and, where appropriate, to advise them on the pursuit of complaints.

5. To develop and maintain a working knowledge of the Authority's services, management arrangements, powers/duties and constraints and to develop good working relationships with relevant Officers of the Authority.

6. To contribute constructively to open government and democratic participation by encouraging community engagement in the governance of the area.

7. To keep up to date with all developments affecting the Local authority area and the Council including Government policies and prospective legislation.

8. To promote and uphold high standards of ethical conduct by the Council's Members and officers.

9. To uphold the public sector equalities duties set out in the Equalities Act 2010.

The duties and responsibilities of councillors with special responsibilities are also set out in the Council's Constitution.

Projected Population aged 17+ - CIPFA Nearest Neighbours and Core Cities (England)

Source: Analysis by Strategic Intelligence & Performance, Bristol City Council

Using ONS 2022-based Sub-National Population Projections

Local Authority	CIPFA Nearest Neighbour	Core City	Mid-2025	Mid-2031	Mid-2035	Change 2025-35	% change 2025- 35
Birmingham		☑	922,158	947,704	961,843	39,685	4%
Leeds	☑	☑	693,144	726,479	743,887	50,743	7%
Bristol	☑	☑	417,363	441,891	454,615	37,252	9%
Sheffield	☑	☑	484,143	506,816	519,683	35,540	7%
Coventry	☑		307,270	322,268	331,011	23,741	8%
Wakefield	☑		297,633	316,947	328,982	31,348	11%
Manchester		☑	483,542	509,764	524,454	40,912	8%
Liverpool	☑	☑	430,204	450,528	462,319	32,115	7%
Nottingham	☑	☑	278,680	285,532	287,938	9,258	3%
Brighton and Hove	☑		246,093	252,722	256,439	10,346	4%
Derby	☑		214,908	222,100	226,150	11,242	5%
Portsmouth	☑		176,637	180,312	181,609	4,972	3%

Plymouth	☑		224,693	232,740	236,284	11,590	5%
Salford	☑		238,570	258,846	270,121	31,551	13%
Wigan	☑		277,052	291,766	301,124	24,073	9%
Southampton	☑		218,259	226,213	230,352	12,093	6%
Swindon	☑		193,301	202,698	208,402	15,102	8%
Newcastle	☑	☑	266,559	278,334	284,067	17,509	7%
Nearest Neighbour Average			310,282	324,762	332,687	22,405	7%
Core City Average			496,974	518,381	529,851	32,877	7%

It is within this context that the time is right to increase the number of elected members from 70 to 76.

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?

Population

Bristol is the largest city in the South West and the 8th largest of the 12 UK ‘Core Cities’ with an average age of 33.4 years.

In mid-2025 Bristol local authority is projected to exceed half a million people for the first time. The population is projected to increase to 526,600 people by 2032 – a 10% increase between 2022-32 (England 6.4%) and the 2nd highest percentage increase of the Core Cities in England. The biggest factor in this projected population change is net international migration, which is projected to increase the population by an estimated 49,800 people. This is different to the majority of areas in England, where net internal migration (ie to/from other parts of the UK) is projected to be the biggest factor in population change.

Looking back over the last decade (2014-2024) Bristol had the 3rd largest percentage population increase of the Core Cities in England and Wales, after Manchester and

Newcastle-upon-Tyne. Bristol's population grew by an estimated 50,600 people over the decade, a 11.4% increase (England and Wales grew by 6.8%).

Bristol in the 1990s had a stable population which was then followed by a period of unprecedented population growth until the EU Referendum in 2016. Between 2016 and 2020, the population of Bristol increased annually but at a slower rate than the previous decade. Following the Covid-19 pandemic, Bristol has seen a large increase in the population, at levels similar to the years before the EU Referendum.

The main factor behind this growth was net international migration which has increased for the third consecutive year and is now more than 6 times higher than natural change (births minus deaths). This is the highest levels of net international migration seen in more than two decades. The majority of immigration is now non-EU nationals including both international students and people coming to work. The most recent estimates indicate a slowing down of these trends due to recent changes to government policies.

Bristol has seen a significant rise in the number of in-migrants particularly from India but also China, Nigeria, Pakistan and Ukraine. The most recent National Insurance Statistics for 2024/25 however, show that the number of National Insurance Registrations by people from India and Nigeria fell sharply in the 12-month period up to March 2025. Of particular interest from an electorate point of view is that people from India, Nigeria and Pakistan can vote in all elections, with those from China and Ukraine being unable to be on the electoral register.

The population of Bristol has become increasingly diverse, and some local communities have changed significantly. The proportion of the population who are not 'White British' has increased over the last two decades from 12% in 2001 to 28% in 2021. There are now more than 287 different ethnic groups in the city, more than 185 countries of birth represented, at least 45 religions and more than 90 languages spoken by people living in Bristol.

Since 2011, both the number of people moving out of Bristol to surrounding areas and other parts of the UK and the number of people moving into Bristol from surrounding areas and other parts of the UK have gradually increased resulting in an increasingly transient population.

Population impacts on public service finances, strategic planning and the provision of local facilities and services such as schools, open space and housing. Councillors play a central role in ensuring appropriate provision of public services.

Housing

Building homes

Bristol has 208,000 dwellings (end March 2024). Policy H1 of the new Bristol Local Plan sets a minimum of 1,925 new homes annually, with a minimum of 12,000 new affordable homes within the period 2022 -2040.

During 2023/24, 1,433 new homes were built in Bristol (compared to the 5 year average of 1,707). Between 2020-2024, 1,029 student units were built, providing 1,899 bedspaces.

16,016 dwellings have planning permission (April 2024), including 3,021 under construction.

Homelessness

Homeless people are entitled to be included on the electoral register, registering to vote by local connection to a particular area /polling district.

Around 6,000 households approached the Council for help with homelessness issues in 2024/25. The cost-of-living crisis, increasing private rents and reduced supply of affordable housing is driving homelessness and an increase in temporary accommodation.

As a snapshot, 82 people were found sleeping rough in a single night in Bristol (March 2025) (72 in March 24). At end March 2025 there were 1,685 households living in Temporary Accommodation in Bristol, over 90 more than the year before.

Nearly 1,690 households were prevented from becoming homeless during 2024/25 and during 2024/25, over 460 empty private sector dwellings were returned into occupation.

Housing Market

The average house price in Bristol is: £340,000 compared with England & Wales: £282,500 (Sept 2024). Over the last decade, average house prices in Bristol increased by almost 79% (+£150,000) which was the highest increase of England & Wales Core Cities and higher than England and Wales 49% increase (+£92,500).

In 2024 Bristol had a 'housing affordability ratio' of 8.72, lower than the high of 9.67 in 2021, but means the average house price is almost 9 times higher than average earnings. This is above England average (7.71) and highest of Core Cities in England and Wales (who are all below England).

Housing stock

Current household tenure is 55% Owner Occupied, 26% Private Rented, 19% Social Rented, with 65% of households living in houses and 32% living in flats (nationally 20% live in flats).

Overcrowding

5.1% (9,684) of Bristol households are overcrowded (fewer bedrooms than required) compared to 4.3% in England and Wales. In some central areas, more than a fifth of housing is overcrowded.

Household composition

Of the 191,638 households in Bristol, 30% are one person households, 57% are single family households and 12% are multiple family or other household types. 27% of all households include dependent children compared to 28% in England and Wales. There are 19,819 lone parent households, 10% of all households in Bristol compared to 11% in England and Wales.

Economy and Employment

Economy

Bristol has one of the most vibrant and successful economies in the UK, with the highest productivity levels per capita, employment and qualification rates of the major cities.

In 2024 gross average earnings (median) in Bristol were £38,990 a year (up by £6,700 since 2021) compared to £37,521 in Great Britain.

In 2024 there were 22,330 business units registered in Bristol, slightly down on 22,370 in 2023. 18,000 (81%) were micro businesses (0-9 employees); 3,500 (16%) small sized (10-49 employees), 735 (3.3%) medium sized (50-249 employees) and 140 (0.6%) large sized (250+ employees)

Bristol had 20,190 active enterprises in 2023, with 2,260 new enterprise start-ups in 2023 and 2,160 enterprises cease trading (removed from the business register). Of new companies incorporated in 2018, 43.9% survived for 5 years (39.3% national average for Great Britain).

Employment

In March 2025 the employment rate in Bristol was 77.6% with 249,200 working age residents in employment. This is the second highest of the GB core cities and well above the national rate (75.4%).

In 2021 71,000 (29.8%) employees in Bristol worked part-time. Of these, almost 25,000 (10.4%) worked 15 hours or less.

59,900 (18.6%) working age residents were economically inactive in the year ending March 2025, the second lowest of the GB core cities and lower than nationally (21.5%). Of these, 26% want a job and 74% do not want a job. Most of the economically inactive are long-term sick (35%), a quarter are looking after family/home (25%) and a further quarter are full-time students (24%).

12,100 (4.6%) working age residents were unemployed in the year ending March 2025, which was higher than national at 4.0%. This compares with 19,100 (8.0%) a decade ago in March 2015. In May 2025 12,700 working age residents were claiming out of work benefits, 3.7% of Bristol's working age population. This is lower than national (4.1%) and has been broadly stable since May 2022, having fallen from 6.2% in May 2020.

Communities and Living Deprivation

In Bristol 15% of residents (73,000 people) live in the 10% most deprived areas in England, including 17,700 children and 7,600 older people. Bristol has 41 areas in the most deprived 10% in England, with the greatest levels of deprivation in Hartcliffe & Withywood, Filwood and Lawrence Hill.

27,561 households in Bristol are estimated to experience fuel poverty (2022); this constitutes 13.8% of all households "fuel poor" (England 13.1%) and 8% of households have experienced moderate to severe "food insecurity" in the last 12 months, doubling to 16% in the most deprived areas (QoL 2024/25).

Significantly fewer young people in Bristol go on to Higher Education (31.6% compared to 42.2% in England). In South Bristol participation is only 22.3%, including 3 of the 5 lowest performing areas in England: Hartcliffe (8.7%, lowest in England), Highridge and Withywood. Highest in Bristol is Westbury Park at 77.6%.

Community Cohesion

Councillors play a key role in supporting community cohesion with all councillors reporting they spend time in community activities, with the most common time being between 6 to 10 hours per month.

72% of Bristol residents are satisfied with their local area as a place to live, but only 43% of people in the most deprived areas (QoL 2024/25). 65% of residents “feel they belong to their neighbourhood” with 45% of people in the most deprived areas (QoL 2024/25)

73% of Bristol residents citywide feel that “people from different backgrounds get on well together” in their local area, similar to last year’s 72% (QoL 2024/25) and around half (46%) of residents volunteer or help out in their community at least 3 times a year (43% in the most deprived areas) (QoL 2024/25).

Children

There are 92,700 children under 18 living in Bristol (Mid-2024). 23.0% (18,844) of children under 16 live in relative low-income families in Bristol (2023/24), above the national average (21.8%) and significantly more than 16.2% in 2014/15.

As at Jan 2025, 30.2% of Bristol’s school pupils (around 19,000 children) are eligible for free school meals and 6.3% of 16–17 year olds (2024/25) were “Not in education, employment or training” (NEET) or destination unknown.

Social Care

At the end of March 2025, 5,544 adults were receiving BCC funded Social Care, with 1,430 in Care Homes and 4,157 receiving a community-based support service. A snapshot of Bristol Social Services taken in March 2025 shows that 758 children were in care and 368 children had a child protection plan. Almost 34,000 people provide unpaid care in Bristol (7.6% of all people aged 5+; England and Wales average is 8.9%).

Crime & safety

In 2024 there were 168,000 crimes in Avon & Somerset, around 21,000 more than 2023 - a 14% increase and the second highest of 43 police forces. Total recorded crime in Bristol in 2024/25 was 63,100, an increase of 8% on the previous year and the highest recorded in the last eight years.

The biggest categories are 23,200 violence offences, 13,500 theft and 7,200 public order offences. The crime rate is 131.8 per 1,000 population (2024/25) compared to the National Crime rate of 87.9 per 1,000 population (2024).

Rates of people whose day-to-day life is affected by fear of crime has increased to 24% (from 21% last year) and is 41% in the most deprived areas of the city (QoL 2024/25).

Recorded hate crime in 2024/25 was 2,900 crimes, an increase of 15% on the previous year (2,520). Racial prejudice accounts for 69% of all hate crimes, followed by sexual orientation

(10.8%) and disability (7.8%). 7.6% of people overall said they were a victim of racial discrimination or harassment in the last year, and 40% of people from Black, Asian & Minority Ethnic groups (QoL 2024/25).

Health and Well-being

Bristol is an active city but for many health outcomes the city performs poorly compared to the England average, but better than most of the English core cities. There are significant health and wellbeing inequalities within the city, often with worse health outcomes for people in the most deprived areas.

Life expectancy for women is 82.7 years and for men 78.9 years (2023) both are lower than the national average. The inequalities gap in life expectancy between the most and least deprived areas in Bristol is 10.7 years for men and 7.2 years for women (2021-23).

Bristol's healthy life expectancy (years living in good health) is 60.3 years for women and 60.4 years for men (2021-23; both lower than the national average of 61.9 and 61.5 years respectively).

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 ➤ <i>What governance model will your authority operate? e.g. Committee System, Executive or other?</i> ➤ <i>The Cabinet model, for example, usually requires 6 to 10 members. How many members will you require?</i> ➤ <i>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.</i> ➤ <i>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?</i> ➤ <i>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.</i>
	Analysis The Council currently operates a Committee Model of governance which was implemented in May 2024, having previously operated a Directly elected Mayor and Cabinet Model of governance. Government policy has indicated that all Councils that are not currently operating a Leader and Cabinet Model of governance (with a few exceptions that are not relevant to the Bristol context) will be required to adopt a Leader and Cabinet Model of governance as set out in the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill currently before Parliament. It is anticipated that this change of governance will take place by the time of the next local elections in Bristol in May 2028, possibly sooner. Therefore, this submission is based on the Leader and Cabinet Model

		of governance as the governance structure that will be in place in the future. Under the Leader and Cabinet Model, it is anticipated that the Council will have between 8 and 10 members in its Cabinet. Strategic and operational policies will be developed by the Leader and Cabinet. It is anticipated that members in scrutiny roles will have a role in scrutinising emerging policies. The recent survey shows that 41% of councillors spend over 25 hours per month in meetings, indicating a significant time investment in formal council business. The survey also shows that councillors with special responsibilities tend to be more represented in the higher time commitment categories, reflecting the additional demands of leadership and committee roles. Councillors report that the demands on them have also increased, for instance in licensing and also public health and community safety. Planning is reported to be one of the most time-consuming committees.
Portfolios	<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	➤ <i>How many portfolios will there be?</i> ➤ <i>What will the role of a portfolio holder be?</i> ➤ <i>Will this be a full-time position?</i> ➤ <i>Will decisions be delegated to portfolio holders? Or will the executive/mayor take decisions?</i>
	Analysis	It is anticipated that there will be between 8 and 10 portfolios under the Leader and Cabinet Model. A portfolio holder will have a significant leadership role which will be a full-time position. Decisions will be made by the Leader and Cabinet in formal public meetings, although there may be some decisions delegated to individual portfolio holders.
Delegated Responsibilities	<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	➤ <i>What responsibilities will be delegated to officers or committees?</i> ➤ <i>How many councillors will be involved in taking major decisions?</i>
	Analysis	The Council has defined the threshold for key decisions that are taken by elected councillors as a decision that involves the expenditure or savings of £500,000 or more or which has a significant impact on two or more wards in the City. Decisions below this threshold are taken by officers in consultation with the

		relevant portfolio holder. Operational day-to-day decisions are taken by officers.
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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		➤ <i>How will decision makers be held to account?</i> ➤ <i>How many committees will be required? And what will their functions be?</i> ➤ <i>How many task and finish groups will there be? And what will their functions be? What time commitment will be involved for members? And how often will meetings take place?</i> ➤ <i>How many members will be required to fulfil these positions?</i> ➤ <i>Explain why you have increased, decreased, or not changed the number of scrutiny committees in the authority.</i> ➤ <i>Explain the reasoning behind the number of members per committee in terms of adding value.</i>
Analysis		Under a Leader and Cabinet Model of governance it is anticipated that the Council will have at least 4-5 scrutiny committees which will engage in the full range of scrutiny functions: pre-decision scrutiny of Cabinet decisions, monitoring of performance, scrutiny of decisions taken and the escalation of decisions that have been called in. Each scrutiny committee is likely to have 9 members and will meet at least 6 times per year. The number of members of a scrutiny committee enables a divergence of views to be represented and for an appropriate level of challenge and scrutiny to be provided.
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	➤ <i>What proportion of planning applications will be determined by members?</i> ➤ <i>Has this changed in the last few years? And are further changes anticipated?</i>

		➤ 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	The Council has 2 planning committees, and they deal with major planning applications and applications that have been called in by councillors. Each planning committee has 9 members and meets every 6 weeks. We do not anticipate that executive members will serve on planning committees under the Leader and Cabinet Model of governance. The Council's arrangements in respect of the discharge of its planning functions are well-established and the Council does not currently have any plans to change the structure of its planning committees.
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	The Council discharges its licensing policy functions through a Licensing Committee which has 9 members and meets on average 4 times per year. Licensing sub-committee hearings to determine Licensing Act 2003 applications are held on average every two weeks and would require on average up to half a day's attendance. The Council also has a Public Safety and Protection Committee which deals primarily with licensing of the taxi trade and street trading licences. This committee has 9 members and meets on average 4 times per year. Public Safety and Protection sub-committee hearing to determine taxi licensing applications are held on average once a month and would require up to half a day's attendance. There is a standing membership of the Licensing Committee and Public Safety and Protection Committee. There are 15 members of the Council who are appointed to sit on Licensing sub-committee hearings.
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	The Council will also have the following Regulatory Committees:

		Audit Committee – this is a committee of 9 members and meets on average 6 times per year. Human Resources Committee – this is a committee of 9 members and meets on average 4 times per year. Public Rights of Ways and Green Committee – this is a committee of 7 members and meets on average 4 times per year.
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.
<i>Key lines of explanation</i>		➤ <i>Will council members serve on decision-making partnerships, sub-regional, regional or national bodies? In doing so, are they able to take decisions/make commitments on behalf of the council?</i> ➤ <i>How many councillors will be involved in this activity? And what is their expected workload? What proportion of this work is undertaken by portfolio holders?</i> ➤ <i>What other external bodies will members be involved in? And what is the anticipated workload?</i>
	Analysis	Since the last review of the size of the Council, the West of England Combined Authority has been established. The Council is a member of the Combined Authority Area and the role that the Council has as a constituent member of the Combined Authority will continue to grow and develop as part of the devolution agenda which will see further powers devolved to Combined Authorities which will have a direct impact on the Council and its elected members. Councillors have a range of roles in respect of the work of the Combined Authority as the responsibilities of the Combined Authority impact on different portfolios, for example transport, planning, environment, housing and skills. There is also a role for councillors as members of the Audit and Scrutiny Committees in the Combined Authority. The Combined Authority Committee meets 4 times per year and is attended by the Leader of the Council or their deputy. The Audit Committee meets 4 times per year and has 6 members appointed by the Council. The Scrutiny Committee meets 4 times per year and also has 6 members appointed by the Council.

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	➤ <i>In general terms how do councillors carry out their representational role with electors?</i> ➤ <i>Does the council have area committees and what are their powers?</i> ➤ <i>How do councillors seek to engage with their constituents? Do they hold surgeries, send newsletters, hold public meetings or maintain blogs?</i> ➤ <i>Are there any mechanisms in place that help councillors interact with young people, those not on the electoral register, and/or other minority groups and their representative bodies?</i> ➤ <i>Are councillors expected to attend community meetings, such as parish or resident's association meetings? If so, what is their level of involvement and what roles do they play?</i> ➤ <i>Explain your approach to the Area Governance structure. Is your Area Governance a decision-making forum or an advisory board? What is their relationship with locally elected members and Community bodies such as Town and Parish Councils? Looking forward how could they be improved to enhance decision-making?</i>
	Analysis	Councillors will carry out their representational role with residents through traditional routes, for example the holding of monthly surgeries and regular communication through newsletters and other traditional media. However, the role that social media now plays in the way that residents communicate with their local councillor is significant and this medium is a key channel for sharing information, but also for local residents to raise issues with their local councillor. Engagement with the public takes many forms and councillors try to adopt a flexible approach depending on local needs: • Surgeries are changing in nature. Static surgeries are still required but in some areas councillors focus more on using

		street surgeries, visiting a cluster of residential streets on a particular day. • Home visits – residents often expect a home visit for more complex cases; • Email – Initial contact and simpler queries are often dealt with by email; • Newsletters - most councillors distribute newsletters on a regular basis; • Meetings - attendance at local public meetings is required, including neighbourhood forum meetings (to set priorities every 3 months), community groups and local planning forums; • Social media - councillors maintain a blog, use X and/or can be contacted on dedicated social media. Councillors also have a range of roles in their local communities which arise from their appointment to outside bodies by the Council as well as roles that they will take on to support their local communities. Whilst the City of Bristol does not have any Parish or Town Councils, Bristol has established arrangements for local decision making through Area Committees, which discharge a range of functions. They have some decision-making powers in respect of the spending of the local element of the Community Infrastructure Levy and s.106 monies. However, they have a much wider consultative role covering a range of local issues, including community assets, allotments, play areas and parks and local traffic schemes. Meetings of Area Committees take place up to 4 times every year. The role of Area Committees continues to develop and the range of activity that they are involved with is likely to increase over time.
Casework	<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	➤ <i>How do councillors deal with their casework? Do they pass it on to council officers? Or do they take a more in-depth approach to resolving issues?</i> ➤ <i>What support do members receive?</i> ➤ <i>How has technology influenced the way in which councillors work? And interact with their electorate?</i> ➤ <i>In what ways does the council promote service users' engagement/dispute resolution with service providers and managers rather than through councillors?</i>
	Analysis	The recent survey indicates that casework is a major component of councillor duties, with over half of respondents spending more than 30 hours monthly on constituent issues. Councillors are also actively involved in community work. Many councillors report a desire to attend more community

		meetings, but paid work and other councillor commitments prevent this. Administration and communications including social media form a significant part of councillor duties, with many spending the equivalent of several working days each month on these tasks. Comments from the time survey include noting that casework has increased dramatically especially due to digital communication (emails, social media). Councillors report there is never enough time for e-mails as they receive up to 100 per day and that almost every councillor struggles to keep up with casework and emails. With channel shift to maximise resource efficiency, contacting the council is becoming less personal, whereas councillors are available to be contacted by constituents by email, phone, text and WhatsApp 24/7. Councillors in deprived or complex wards report higher caseloads and more community demands. They report that community expectations are growing. It is also reported that there is more work in the community, so correspondingly casework goes up. Complex cases often require considerable research and liaison with non-council bodies such as the fire and police authorities and the local MP. Complex cases can last a considerable period (over 18 months), during which time the complexity of the case has often increased. Working in the community can be very unpredictable such as contingency evacuations and smaller crises. Financial constraints have reduced the staff available to provide councillor support. The impact of cuts are being felt differently between wards and also within wards, with a number of wards having high levels of multiple deprivation and increasing levels of complex casework.
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Other Issues

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

Council Size - CIPFA Nearest Neighbours and Core Cities (England)

Source: Analysis by Strategic Intelligence & Performance, Bristol City Council

Using Electoral Registration and Annual Canvass Data 2024, The Electoral Commission

Local Authority	CIPFA Nearest Neighbour	Core City	Council size	Wards	2025 Local Government electors (01/12/24)	Local Government electors per councillor
Birmingham		☑	101	69	767,635	7,600
Leeds	☑	☑	99	33	577,531	5,834
Bristol	☑	☑	70	34	333,320	4,762
Sheffield	☑	☑	84	28	390,092	4,644
Coventry	☑		54	18	239,235	4,430
Wakefield	☑		63	21	267,130	4,240
Manchester		☑	96	32	390,591	4,069
Liverpool	☑	☑	85	64	335,348	3,945
Nottingham	☑	☑	55	20	204,134	3,712
Brighton and Hove	☑		54	23	199,600	3,696
Derby	☑		51	18	184,005	3,608
Portsmouth	☑		42	14	148,154	3,527
Plymouth	☑		57	20	197,800	3,470
Salford	☑		60	20	202,533	3,376
Wigan	☑		75	25	248,681	3,316
Southampton	☑		51	17	161,512	3,167
Swindon	☑		57	25	169,401	2,972
Newcastle	☑	☑	78	26	193,834	2,485
Nearest Neighbour Average			65		253,269	3,915
Core City Average			84		399,061	4,779

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.

Why Maintaining 70 councillors is not Appropriate

Strategic Leadership

- With anticipated changes in governance and increasing complexity in local and national policy – including devolution arrangements - maintaining the current number risks overstressing councillors, limiting their capacity to engage in strategic planning and policy development.

Accountability

- Scrutiny and regulatory functions require time and expertise. With 70 councillors, the workload per member remains high, potentially compromising the depth and quality of scrutiny.
- Partnership working (e.g. with health, police, and voluntary sectors) is expanding, and councillors need sufficient capacity to engage meaningfully.

Community Leadership

- Councillors are increasingly expected to be visible and responsive in their communities. Maintaining the current number does not allow for councillors to effectively respond to casework and community engagement responsibilities.
- The recent councillor time survey shows that many councillors are already working full-time hours, which may deter people with jobs or caring responsibilities from standing for election.

Why Decreasing the Number Was Not Appropriate

Strategic Leadership

- Fewer councillors would concentrate strategic responsibilities among a smaller group and would reduce diversity of thought and representation in decision-making.
- It would hinder the Council's ability to respond flexibly to emerging governance models and policy shifts.

Accountability

- A reduction would severely impact the Council's ability to maintain robust scrutiny and regulatory oversight, especially as services become more complex and integrated.
- It would also reduce the number of councillors available to sit on committees and partnership boards, weakening democratic accountability.

Community Leadership

- Fewer councillors would mean larger wards or more constituents per councillor, diluting the quality of representation and responsiveness.
- It would exacerbate the accessibility issue, making it even harder for working people or those with caring responsibilities to serve effectively.

Why Increasing the Number Beyond 76 Was Not Appropriate

Strategic Leadership

- While a larger council might offer more capacity, it could potentially create a more complex decision-making environment.
- The Council aims to balance capacity with streamlined governance — 76 is seen as the optimal point.

Accountability

- A larger number of councillors could potentially dilute individual accountability.
- It may also lead to duplication of roles and responsibilities, reducing clarity in who is responsible for what.

- 76 councillors strikes a balance between capacity and credibility.

Community Leadership

While more councillors could enhance community engagement, the Council considered that 76 allows for better distribution of workload without creating unnecessary complexity or cost.

Conclusion

The recommendation of 76 councillors reflects a careful balance between the need for effective governance, robust accountability, and inclusive community representation. It responds to the evolving demands on councillors while ensuring the role remains accessible and sustainable.