

Dorset Council

Council Size  
Submission

## Contents

How to Make a Submission .....	2
About You .....	2
Reason for Review (Request Reviews Only) .....	3
Local Authority Profile .....	5
Council Size .....	7
Other Issues .....	20

## 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 on behalf of Dorset Council following its approval by Full Council on 10 February 2026.

Electoral and boundary matters are a non-executive function which falls within the responsibilities of Full Council. On 10 July 2025, Full Council resolved to request that the Local Government Boundary Commission for England undertake an electoral review of Dorset Council with any changes taking effect at the next scheduled elections in 2029. Full Council also resolved that a cross-party task and finish group be established that would make recommendations to Full Council on a submission to the Commission.

This task and finish group met on 15 October 2025 and 3 December 2025 to consider advice from officers based on data and the guidance on boundary reviews and to oversee and shape the development of this council size proposal.

The council is minded to propose an unchanged council size of 82 councillors. Whilst it is recognised that the electorate ratio is likely to increase over time, there is currently a programme of work underway to modernise the council's operating model. This, together with the potential of a devolution arrangement and ongoing discussions with town and parish councils about the potential opportunities for double devolution, are all considered to be

factors that will support councillors in their role making them more effective and efficient and therefore able to manage any increase in casework that may result from a larger electorate.

Dorset Council has a mix of rural and urban areas, and to ensure effective representation across the whole area, the council wishes to retain a mix of 1, 2 and 3-member wards to ensure effective representation for all communities, and the council will make proposals during the consultation on warding patterns.

### 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.*

Whilst Dorset Council wards are borderline for the criteria for an automatic review, because 31% of its wards have an electoral imbalance of +/-10% from the average (16 wards have this level of imbalance), the council believes it is an appropriate time to seek a review of the boundaries that were defined in 2018 as part of local government reorganisation. It is hoped that the review will ensure better electoral equality for electors in local elections.

### 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?

Dorset Council has operated the Leader and Cabinet model of governance since its creation in 2019. The Executive takes the majority of the council's strategic decisions and, in doing so, acts within the parameters of the budget and policy framework set by Full Council. This model ensures openness, transparency and accountability with robust checks and balances through the overview and scrutiny committees.

As well as its assurance role on the adequacy of the council's risk management framework, promoting high standards of conduct of members (both at Dorset Council and the 160 town and parish councils) and supporting the Monitoring Officer in the discharge of their duties, the Audit and Governance Committee reviews the council's constitution ensuring that it reflects the law, good practice and the governance needs of the council and makes recommendations on any changes required to Full Council.

In 2019 the overview and scrutiny function was performed by four themed committees: People, Health, Place and Resources. Members felt that the function could be delivered more effectively by splitting the overview function and the scrutiny function and in September 2020 governance arrangements were changed so that the council's overview and scrutiny functions are undertaken by two overview committees and two scrutiny committees, with the themes of People and Health, and Place and Resources for each. As changes are made around Integrated Care Boards, the council may consider further changes to scrutiny arrangements, particularly around health, but it is not believed that any governance changes will impact on council size.

In preparing this submission, members considered the capacity to attend working groups and advisory groups but didn't believe that an increase in council size was necessary in this case. Group leaders would work with their members to ensure that they were represented on these groups and an increase in council size would not affect capacity levels in this respect.

Dorset Council is working with neighbouring local authorities to develop and strengthen its Wessex devolution proposal that was submitted to the Government in 2025. With a combined population of just under 2 million and including the upper-tier local authorities of BCP, Somerset and Wiltshire alongside Dorset, conversations are ongoing to understand the process for the next round of devolution after the announcement of the priority programme in February 2025, and Dorset Council remains committed to pushing its case strongly alongside its partner authorities.

There are ongoing discussions with town and parish councils about the potential opportunities for double devolution. These councils have been advised that a community governance review will be undertaken in 2027 enabling them to have early discussions considering whether they wish to seek changes to their governance arrangements to ensure they have capacity for possible future opportunities.

The council has an ambitious [Council Plan](#) for the period 2024 to 2029 that sets out four key priorities to be delivered during the plan period. This plan was developed having considered the views of local residents and other stakeholders during a number of "Big Conversation" events held across the area and its aim is to work together to create a fairer, more prosperous and more sustainable Dorset. The plan's strategic priorities are:

- ✓ Provide affordable and high-quality housing
- ✓ Grow our economy
- ✓ Communities for all
- ✓ Respond to the climate and nature crisis

Following an investigation by the Council's internal auditors there has been significant criticism of our internal controls and an identified need to strengthen the contract procedure rules, scheme of delegation and procurement arrangements and the need to move to a better culture of compliance. However, all of these serious concerns relate to council officers and no criticisms have been made of member governance or capacity.

The Government has consulted on changes to strengthen the councillor conduct regime. As part of this there is a proposal from Government to introduce a requirement for all principal councils to have a separate Standards Committee. At present within Dorset Council the Audit and Governance Committee is responsible for overseeing the conduct of the 82 Dorset Council councillors and the 1,400 town and parish councillors and a Hearing Sub-

Committee of Audit and Governance considers complaints that are referred for a hearing. A standalone Standards Committee would bring greater focus to standards of behaviour and at the same time would enable the Audit and Governance Committee to concentrate on the internal control environment. However, it is not considered that the introduction of a Standards Committee would impact on the council size proposal, and would be manageable with a cohort of 82 members.

Digital communication has made it easier for the electorate to engage with councillors directly and their role has inevitably changed from a '9 to 5' type role to more of a 24/7 type role. Whilst the workload of members continues to increase, by modernising our services, devolution of functions and taking full advantage of digital efficiencies, the ability of members to self-serve with regard to much of their casework will enable them to work more effectively without the need to increase the number of councillors, and a council size of 82 is considered appropriate.

Government has also stated a future intention to enable councils to have the flexibility to hold hybrid meetings with councillors enabled to attend formal committee meetings virtually. If legislation is passed, Dorset Council will consider whether to take advantage of this flexibility with the potential to further support members to work more efficiently and effectively.

Reviewing warding arrangements will enable further improvement for effective governance with members having sufficient capacity to deal with complex casework, represent the council on outside bodies as well as meeting their responsibilities in attending the formal committee arrangements of the council. A council size of 82 will also enable members to continue to attend town and parish council meetings and for all residents to be effectively represented by their local ward member.

### 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?

## **Dorset Council Profile:**

### **Demography and place**

Dorset is predominantly a rural unitary authority located along the central southern coast of England. 47% of the population live in rural areas: small towns, villages, and hamlets. 53% live in urban areas. The most significant of these include the built-up area of Weymouth, Portland, and Chickerell with a combined population of approximately 74,400.

Dorset Council has a number of Market Towns the biggest being the County Town of Dorchester with just over 20,000 residents. The market towns in the council area range in size from just over 2,000 to just over 20,000.

Dorset Council includes a semi-rural area made up of towns and villages that form a contiguous area in the south-east of Dorset bordering the conurbation of the unitary authority of Bournemouth, Christchurch, and Poole. This suburban or semi-rural area contains approximately 90,000 residents.

Dorset Council's population is currently estimated at 389,950<sup>1</sup> which is approximately 20,000 (6%) higher than ten years ago. This growth is below the national average rate of 8% over the last decade and has been influenced by a drop in net migration into the area due to slowing housing growth. Nonetheless in-migration has continued to be the driver of population growth (just at a slower rate) with the greatest gains among the pre-retirement and retirement age groups of 60-64 years and the greatest losses in those 15-29.

The total 18+ population for 2024 was approximately 327,200 with a total electorate of 300,047.

Dorset has the highest proportion of residents aged 65 and over (31%) of any unitary authority in England, this compares to 19% for England and Wales. This trend is expected to continue to grow with the proportion of 65 and over projected to increase by 23% in the next decade and by 2035 the proportion of those aged 65 and over is expected to be 36%.<sup>2</sup>

Whilst Dorset Council's older population is expected to increase the number of children is projected to fall in the next ten years. Residents aged between 0 to 15 are expected to fall by approximately 6,600 (12%) by 2034. 14% of Dorset's population are school age 5 to 18 compared to 16% for the South West and 17% for England and Wales. (Source: ONS Mid Year Estimates 2024).

Dorset has two rail services one running from Weymouth on the south coast of the county along through to Bournemouth and on to London. The other rail service runs from Weymouth north to Yeovil in Somerset and on to Bristol in the west.

There are no motorways in the council area and just three major trunk roads – the A31 and A35 that run east to west across from Hampshire into Devon and the A30 that skirts across the top of the Council area.

The north, west, rural east and the southern coast strip contain mostly rural green space interspersed with small towns and villages. The area also has significant valleys following small rivers running through the mid, north, and western area of the council. The most significant 'vales' that both have distinctive characteristics in these areas are the Marshwood Vale and Blackmore Vale. In the coastal southeastern stretch is the Isle of

---

<sup>1</sup> ONS Mid-Year Estimates 2024

<sup>2</sup> ONS 2022 Based Population Projections

Purbeck – not a real island but a peninsula bordered on three sides by the sea and containing attractive chalk hills running from east to west. The Isle of Portland is an island linked by a causeway to the mainland and is bordered on 4 sides by the sea with both a distinct character and boundary.

### **Environment**

Dorset includes part of England’s only natural World Heritage Site, the Jurassic Coast, and two National Landscapes that cover 56% of the county. and the council area has many national and international environmental designations.

### **Deprivation**

The high quality of Dorset’s natural and built environment does however hide pockets of significant deprivation with nine areas within the council falling into the top 20% most deprived nationally and over half (58%) of those living in Dorset Council living in areas that have been designated as significantly ‘access to services’ deprived (top 20% most deprived nationally) with some falling into the top 1% for access deprivation.

### **Housing**

Dorset had a housing stock of 188,556 in 2024. New housing completions have averaged around 1,600 a year in recent years, but revised national planning policy now sets the challenging target of 3,246 a year for Dorset. A Dorset Council Local Plan is in preparation, but this is still at an early stage. Consultation on a range of development options has recently taken place, but no decisions have been made yet about the distribution of additional housing and whether the target can be met. The plan is due to be adopted in 2027. [Annual Position Statement - 5 year housing land supply - Dorset Council](#)

House prices in Dorset are significantly above the national average whilst wages are relatively low, creating a high level of local affordable housing need and contributing to the ageing population with many younger people moving out of the area. Dorset is a desirable place for people to retire to, and this pressure contributes to the high cost of housing and the increasing age demographic. In addition, a proportion of the housing stock services second home owners and holiday lets, especially in the coastal towns and villages.

### **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		
<b>Governance Model</b>	<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	➤ <i>What governance model will your authority operate? e.g. Committee System, Executive or other?</i>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>The Cabinet model, for example, usually requires 6 to 10 members. How many members will you require?</i></li> <li>➤ <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></li> <li>➤ <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></li> <li>➤ <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></li> </ul>
	<p>Analysis</p>	<p>Dorset Council currently has 82 councillors representing 52 wards and are currently in a 5-year term that will end in 2029. The next schedule election will return the council to a 4-year electoral cycle after 2 cycles of 5 year terms following local government reorganisation. The council currently has 28 single member wards, 18 two member wards and 6 three member wards.</p> <p>As at December 2025, the political make-up of the council is as follows:</p> <p>42 Liberal Democrat Group  30 Conservative Group  4 Green Group  4 Independent Group  2 Labour Group</p> <p>The council has operated the Leader and Cabinet model of governance since its creation in 2019 with 10 members of the Executive appointed by the Leader of the Council, and has identified four priority areas set out in the Council Plan referenced above. The depth and breadth of council services in this large complex authority means that an Executive of 10 members is necessary to ensure sufficient capacity to work across all council services effectively.</p> <p>Full Council meets six times per year and approves the most significant decisions which impact upon the council’s policy framework, and also sets the budget. As well as a public participation item on the agenda, Full Council enables all members to ask questions of Cabinet and also enables “On Notice Motions” where they are able to bring forward a range of topics for</p>

		<p>debate and decision by Full Council. Meetings usually last for three to four hours and these are webcast.</p> <p>The council operates several other committees ranging from regulatory committees, overview and scrutiny and service specific committees some of which have more detail below. A full overview of our committee structure is attached at Appendix 1 and includes the Pension Fund, Police and Crime Panel, Staffing, Harbours Advisory, Appeals, Corporate Parenting Board, Executive Advisory Panels (currently we have five with themes focusing on the Local Plan, Climate Change, the Planning Design Code, Dorset Farms and Leisure Services), Bournemouth Dorset and Poole Minerals and Waste Policy Joint Advisory, Dorchester Markets Informal Joint Panel, Health and Wellbeing Board and Joint Archives Board – some of these are joint committees/panels with other authorities currently hosted by Dorset Council.</p> <p>Work is currently under way to develop an Area Committee approach fitting in with the administration’s desire to work to deliver the Communities for All priority. The final detail of this approach is not currently known but will draw on the councillors in a particular locality. This will drive workloads but aligns with the design work with the council’s priorities. However, it is not considered that this approach would increase the need for additional councillors.</p> <p><u>Conclusion</u></p> <p>The workloads of councillors varies dependent on the roles of the councillors and the number of parishes that they support, many with high workloads and responsibilities but these are deemed manageable with a council size of 82. A reduction in council size may mean that councillors have to spend more time sitting on committees resulting in less time being available to work within the communities they represent. Conversely, an increase in council size is not considered necessary to meet the currently high level of responsibilities and casework demands, and the anticipated increase, as the transformation programme will enable more efficient and effective working.</p>
<p><b>Portfolios</b></p>	<p><i>Key lines of explanation</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>How many portfolios will there be?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>What will the role of a portfolio holder be?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Will this be a full-time position?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Will decisions be delegated to portfolio holders? Or will the executive/mayor take decisions?</i></li> </ul>
	<p><b>Analysis</b></p>	<p>Dorset Council currently has a Cabinet of 10 members (including the Leader), each with their own <a href="#">portfolio of</a></p>

		<p><u>responsibilities</u> that carry a significant workload. The portfolios are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Climate, Performance and Safeguarding</li> <li>• Property and Assets and Economic Growth</li> <li>• Adult Social Care</li> <li>• Children’s Services, Education and Skills</li> <li>• Corporate Development and Transformation</li> <li>• Customer, Culture and Community Engagement</li> <li>• Finance and Capital Strategy</li> <li>• Health and Housing</li> <li>• Place Services</li> <li>• Planning and Emergency Planning</li> </ul> <p>Cabinet takes a lead on recommending to Full Council matters identified in the Policy Framework and the Budgetary Framework of the <u>constitution</u>. The discharge of executive functions is subject to various notification and call in provisions set out in the overview and scrutiny procedures rules of the constitution.</p> <p>Cabinet meets in public on a monthly basis, and all meetings are live-streamed with recordings available on the council’s website. Cabinet also meets informally on a monthly basis to discuss any emerging issues, policies and strategies and to plan where their focus will be in the short-term and to discuss the forward plan to deliver the Council Plan.</p> <p>Cabinet members agree the strategic direction and provide political oversight of services and council activities within their portfolio remits and act as the accountable member for reports that come forward for decision within their areas of responsibility and provide public accountability for performance and decisions.</p> <p>Some decision making is delegated to individual cabinet members as set out in the constitution (see following section on delegated responsibilities).</p> <p><u>Conclusion</u></p> <p>Whilst the Leader may wish to review and adjust the remit of each of the portfolios, there are currently no plans to reduce the number that would affect the size of the Executive or the size of the council in the short to medium term.</p>
<p><b>Delegated Responsibilities</b></p>	<p><i>Key lines of explanation</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>What responsibilities will be delegated to officers or committees?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>How many councillors will be involved in taking major decisions?</i></li> </ul>

	<p style="text-align: center;">Analysis</p>	<p>Decisions of the council are made in accordance with the delegations set out in the <a href="#">constitution</a> as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Page 39 – Schedule of delegation of executive functions by the leader</li> <li>• Page 215 – Scheme of delegation – Functions of the council</li> <li>• Page 233- Officer scheme of delegation</li> </ul> <p>Responsibility for setting the council’s budget and policy framework sits with Full Council. The policy framework is set out in the constitution as follows:</p> <p>(a) those policies and strategies required by the Local Authorities (Functions and Responsibilities) (England) Regulations 2000 (as amended) not to be the sole responsibility of the Executive:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) Children and Young People’s Plan;</li> <li>(ii) Crime and Disorder Reduction Strategy;</li> <li>(iii) Development plan documents;</li> <li>(iv) Licensing Authority Policy Statement (Gambling Act 2005);</li> <li>(v) The Housing Strategy and the Housing Allocation Policy;</li> <li>(vi) Local Transport Plan; and</li> <li>(vii) Youth Justice Plan,</li> </ul> <p>(b) those required by any other relevant legislation to be determined by Full Council, and/or that the Council identifies (from time to time) should be adopted by Full Council (whether expressly required by legislation or otherwise), including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) Pay Policy Statement;</li> <li>(ii) Statement of Licensing Policy (Licensing Act 2003); and</li> <li>(iii) Corporate Plan.</li> </ul> <p>Decisions falling within the Policy Framework will be made by the 82 councillors of Full Council. Full Council also takes other decisions in relation to certain non-executive functions that are not delegated to committees such as community governance reviews, electoral matters and the Members’ Allowance Scheme.</p> <p>The Executive of 10 councillors take other major decisions either using their delegated responsibilities or as a collective at a Cabinet meeting.</p> <p>The Area Planning Committees and Licensing Committees will take the majority of regulatory decisions as required by legislation, with the detail of delegations being set out in the constitution.</p>
--	---	---

		<p><u>Conclusion</u></p> <p>The constitution and scheme of delegations are kept under review and are considered to be working effectively and there are currently no major changes proposed that would impact on the size of the Council.</p>
--	--	---

### Accountability

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

Topic	
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>How will decision makers be held to account?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>How many committees will be required? And what will their functions be?</i></li> <li>➤ <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></li> <li>➤ <i>How many members will be required to fulfil these positions?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Explain why you have increased, decreased, or not changed the number of scrutiny committees in the authority.</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Explain the reasoning behind the number of members per committee in terms of adding value.</i></li> </ul>
Analysis	<p>Decision-makers are held to account through a structured scrutiny framework comprising two overview committees and two scrutiny committees, each with 10 members.</p> <p>The overview committees focus on forward-looking policy development, whilst the scrutiny committees review performance and exercise formal scrutiny powers, including the ability to call in decisions. Their thematic focus is split between Place and Resources, and People and Health.</p> <p>There are seven scheduled scrutiny meetings and six overview meetings annually, with additional joint sessions convened when subject areas overlap. Committees occasionally use informal working to deal with issues in more detail or, in very limited circumstances, outside the public domain.</p> <p>As stated above, in 2019 the overview and scrutiny function was performed by four themed committees: People, Health,</p>

	<p>Place and Resources. Members felt that the function could be delivered more effectively by splitting the overview function and the scrutiny function and in September 2020 governance arrangements were changed so that the council's overview and scrutiny functions are undertaken by two overview committees and two scrutiny committees, with the themes of People and Health, and Place and Resources for each.</p> <p><u>Conclusion</u></p> <p>The council is considering making a change to the People and Health Scrutiny function to separate the health scrutiny work. However, this work is being delayed until the impact of changes to the Integrated Care Board in the area is fully understood. However, it is not anticipated that any change to health scrutiny arrangements would necessitate an increase in council size but this along with the potential addition of area forums/committees and a Standards Committee, would be significantly problematic if council size was reduced.</p>				
<p><b>Statutory Function</b></p>	<p>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?</p>				
<p><b>Planning</b></p>	<table border="1"> <tr> <td data-bbox="355 1019 542 1384"> <p>Key lines of explanation</p> </td> <td data-bbox="542 1019 1460 1384"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>What proportion of planning applications will be determined by members?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Has this changed in the last few years? And are further changes anticipated?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Will there be area planning committees? Or a single council-wide committee?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Will executive members serve on the planning committees?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>What will be the time commitment to the planning committee for members?</i></li> </ul> </td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="355 1384 542 2049"> <p>Analysis</p> </td> <td data-bbox="542 1384 1460 2049"> <p>The Council has four Committees that deal with planning matters, each with a politically proportionate membership of 12 councillors (some councillors sit on more than one planning committee): The Strategic and Technical Planning Committee is responsible for dealing with matters including any application and/or enforcement issues in relation to any planning application where the red line crosses the boundaries of more than one Area Planning Committee, various minerals and waste applications and the registration for commons and town and village greens. The Council also has three Area Planning Committees that deal with any application and/or any enforcement issue relating to town and country planning, rights of way and highway matters. The Area Committees also consider all planning applications which fall outside of the remit of the Strategic and Technical Planning Committee and are not delegated to officers for determination and each of the areas are broadly similar in size.</p> </td> </tr> </table>	<p>Key lines of explanation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>What proportion of planning applications will be determined by members?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Has this changed in the last few years? And are further changes anticipated?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Will there be area planning committees? Or a single council-wide committee?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Will executive members serve on the planning committees?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>What will be the time commitment to the planning committee for members?</i></li> </ul>	<p>Analysis</p>	<p>The Council has four Committees that deal with planning matters, each with a politically proportionate membership of 12 councillors (some councillors sit on more than one planning committee): The Strategic and Technical Planning Committee is responsible for dealing with matters including any application and/or enforcement issues in relation to any planning application where the red line crosses the boundaries of more than one Area Planning Committee, various minerals and waste applications and the registration for commons and town and village greens. The Council also has three Area Planning Committees that deal with any application and/or any enforcement issue relating to town and country planning, rights of way and highway matters. The Area Committees also consider all planning applications which fall outside of the remit of the Strategic and Technical Planning Committee and are not delegated to officers for determination and each of the areas are broadly similar in size.</p>
<p>Key lines of explanation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>What proportion of planning applications will be determined by members?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Has this changed in the last few years? And are further changes anticipated?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Will there be area planning committees? Or a single council-wide committee?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Will executive members serve on the planning committees?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>What will be the time commitment to the planning committee for members?</i></li> </ul>				
<p>Analysis</p>	<p>The Council has four Committees that deal with planning matters, each with a politically proportionate membership of 12 councillors (some councillors sit on more than one planning committee): The Strategic and Technical Planning Committee is responsible for dealing with matters including any application and/or enforcement issues in relation to any planning application where the red line crosses the boundaries of more than one Area Planning Committee, various minerals and waste applications and the registration for commons and town and village greens. The Council also has three Area Planning Committees that deal with any application and/or any enforcement issue relating to town and country planning, rights of way and highway matters. The Area Committees also consider all planning applications which fall outside of the remit of the Strategic and Technical Planning Committee and are not delegated to officers for determination and each of the areas are broadly similar in size.</p>				

		<p>In addition to the time taken to prepare for the committee meetings which, on average last between three to four hours, councillors also undertake site visits from time to time in support of the committee’s work. Members are also required to undertake mandatory training to be able to sit on the committee.</p> <p>Executive members do not currently sit on Planning Committees.</p> <p>Our latest statistics (which are reported to Government) show that 96% of planning decisions were made by officers under delegated powers in the period from April to June 2025, and 4% of decisions were determined by the Planning Committees. There has been some variance in this quarterly statistic over the past 3 years ranging between 2% and 5% of decisions being determined by the Planning Committees. The Council introduced an updated Scheme of Delegation in July 2024. Whilst it is still relatively early to identify any impact, the reporting for the last 3 quarters indicates that this may have led to an increase in the proportion of applications determined by committees (4-5% for the last 3 quarters).</p> <p><u>Conclusion</u></p> <p>It is broadly accepted that the scheme of delegation with regard to planning decisions works well and there are currently no plans to change this. The current arrangement of 3 Area Planning Committees and 1 Strategic and Technical Committee works well with appropriate substitution mechanisms in place to ensure that all applications can be determined by Committee in a timely manner.</p> <p>The workload of these committees is currently manageable with a council size of 82 members, with no need to increase this. However, a reduction in council size could be detrimental to meeting the statutory obligations in respect of determination of applications within the current scheme of delegation.</p>
<b>Licensing</b>	<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>How many licencing panels will the council have in the average year?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>And what will be the time commitment for members?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Will there be standing licencing panels, or will they be ad-hoc?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Will there be core members and regular attendees, or will different members serve on them?</i></li> </ul>
	Analysis	<p>Dorset Council has a General Licensing Committee and a Licensing and Gambling Acts Committee, both of which have Sub-Committees that sit to consider applications.</p> <p>The General Licensing Committee deals with the discharge of the council’s licensing, certification and registration functions</p>

		<p>and determines any application relating to the manufacture and/or storage of explosives. Each Sub-Committee consists of three members taken from the membership of the General Licensing Committee.</p> <p>The Licensing and Gambling Acts Committee is responsible for exercising any of the council’s functions under the Licensing Act 2003 and Gambling Act 2005; and any other associated matters that naturally fall within the jurisdiction of the committee where legislation permits.</p> <p>Each Sub-Committee consists of three members taken from the membership of the Licensing and Gambling Acts Committee. On average there are 24 sub-committees per annum. Monthly dates are provisionally added to the calendar of meetings.</p> <p>In addition to the time taken to prepare for the committee meetings which, on average last approximately one hour, councillors also undertake site visits from time to time in support of the committee’s work. Members are also required to undertake mandatory training to be able to sit on the committee.</p> <p><u>Conclusion</u></p> <p>The Licensing Committees are very busy, meeting on a very regular basis. However, the arrangements currently in place work well and enable the workload to be managed effectively without a need for an increase in council size. There is a pool of members who can be called upon to consider licensing applications but this could be adversely impacted if there was a reduction in council size.</p>
<p><b>Other Regulatory Bodies</b></p>	<p>Key lines of explanation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>What will they be, and how many members will they require?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Explain the number and membership of your Regulatory Committees with respect to greater delegation to officers.</i></li> </ul>
	<p>Analysis</p>	<p>Whilst not classed as a regulatory committee, the council also appoints members to the Audit and Governance Committee that has ad hoc sub-committees to consider code of conduct investigation reports.</p> <p>This committee has 12 members (including two independent members) and meets between four and six times per year. It is tasked with an assurance role on the adequacy of the council’s risk management framework, promoting high standards of conduct of members (both at Dorset Council and the 160 town and parish councils) and supporting the Monitoring Officer in the discharge of their duties. The Audit and Governance Committee also reviews the council’s constitution ensuring that it reflects the law, good practice and the governance needs of the council and makes recommendations on any changes required to Full Council.</p>

		<p>In addition to the time taken to prepare, the committee meetings, on average, last approximately 90 minutes.</p> <p><u>Conclusion</u></p> <p>The government's recent consultation on strengthening the standards regime may result in a requirement to establish a Standards Committee but it is not considered necessary to increase council size to deliver this addition requirement in the future. The workload is considered deliverable with a council size of 82 members but a reduction in council size would lead to concerns about the ability to deliver additional pressures if changes to the standards regime are enacted.</p>
<b>External Partnerships</b>	<p>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.</p>	
<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <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></li> <li>➤ <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></li> <li>➤ <i>What other external bodies will members be involved in? And what is the anticipated workload?</i></li> </ul>	
<b>Analysis</b>	<p>There are a number of <u>outside bodies</u> to which the Council appoints a representative. Many of these are not decision-making bodies but enable Dorset Council to facilitate, negotiate, and engage in local matters and provide community leadership where this is beneficial. There are currently 86 outside bodies to which Dorset Council makes appointments. Members are appointed for the council term. The representatives are frequently the local ward member but there are 13 outside bodies where the representative has to be either the Leader or a Cabinet member. In other instances, a Cabinet member may be appointed but this isn't a requirement.</p> <p>In 2022 Dorset Council reviewed all the outside bodies to which it makes appointments to ensure that it was still appropriate and added value for Dorset Council to be represented.</p> <p><u>Conclusion</u></p> <p>The large number of outside bodies on which Dorset Council is represented reflects the council's Communities for All priority in the Council Plan. It is embedded in everything that the council does. Dorset Council has 160 parish councils and the level of Dorset Council member engagement varies but the majority have regular briefings from their Dorset Council</p>	

	<p>Councillor. Whilst the double devolution ambition may ease the workload on some ward councillors, the engagement with local councils will still be a very important factor in ensuring that this priority continues to be delivered and maintaining the current council size supports this ambition.</p>
--	---

### 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>In general terms how do councillors carry out their representational role with electors?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Does the council have area committees and what are their powers?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>How do councillors seek to engage with their constituents? Do they hold surgeries, send newsletters, hold public meetings or maintain blogs?</i></li> <li>➤ <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></li> <li>➤ <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></li> <li>➤ <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></li> </ul>
	Analysis	<p>Dorset Council does not currently have any area committees other than the Area Planning Committees. The Eastern and Northern Area Planning Committees are held at venues within the planning area covered, and these are traditional committees under the Local Government Act 1972 and make decisions in line with the scheme of delegation.</p> <p>As mentioned above, work is currently under way to develop an Area Committee approach fitting in with the administration's desire to work to deliver the Communities</p>

		<p>for All priority. The final detail of this approach is not currently known but will draw on the councillors in a particular locality. This will drive workloads but aligns with the design work with the Council's priorities.</p> <p>The representational role of councillors is carried out in a variety of ways and includes attendance at town and parish council meetings, surgeries, newsletters, social media activity and working with community groups and associations.</p> <p><u>Conclusion</u></p> <p>Even with an Area Committee approach, the representational role of the individual ward members in their local communities will be essential to ensure delivery of the Communities for All priority. The council is confident that this can be achieved with a council size of 82 and, despite the anticipated increase in the electorate and likely increase in casework, it isn't felt necessary to increase council size to maintain a high level of representation. However, concerns were expressed that reducing council size could have a detrimental impact on delivering high levels of local representation.</p>
<p><b>Casework</b></p>	<p><i>Key lines of explanation</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <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></li> <li>➤ <i>What support do members receive?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>How has technology influenced the way in which councillors work? And interact with their electorate?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>In what ways does the council promote service users' engagement/dispute resolution with service providers and managers rather than through councillors?</i></li> </ul>
	<p><b>Analysis</b></p>	<p>At Dorset Council, 62% of councillors (51) are also representatives on their local town or parish council.</p> <p>There is no set method for councillors to deal with their casework and this is completed by the councillors according to their own preferences and working styles. Anecdotal evidence also suggests that this also depends on the particular case with some being very complex issues relating to a range of organisations. The amount of casework also differs between councillors. Councillors of single councillor wards have reported that casework can be demanding especially as they have no partner ward member to discuss matters with or cover ward work if they are away or unwell.</p> <p>Councillors' work may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dealing with casework either in person, by telephone, email and, less frequently, by letter.</li> <li>• Representing the voice of their communities at formal council meetings.</li> </ul>

- Attending town and parish council meetings
- Working with community organisations in their wards
- Holding surgeries
- Posting on social media

The majority of support to councillors is overseen by the Democratic and Governance Services Team. However, support is offered to councillors throughout the council.

Support includes:

- two councillor PAs and a councillor support and development officer
- councillor allowance scheme
- dedicated support from officers including impartial advice on their area of expertise such as housing, adult social care, planning, tourism, finance and engineering projects
- communications such as bulletins and newsletters from the council
- ICT assistance so councillors can receive digital communications including provision of council device and access to council apps and programs
- mentoring and advice through political groups and through communicating with other councillors
- access to information from other organisations such as the [Local Government Association](#)
- a learning and development programme including an induction and continual development opportunities throughout a councillor's term of office
- a carer's allowance for councillors that need to provide care for a family member while they are at committee meetings and undertaking other councillor duties.

The council is largely a paperless organisation and therefore digital skills are of paramount importance to the councillors. Working digitally has also meant that councillors are available "on the go" and therefore councillors are readily available for their residents. We also have a large amount of requests for councillors to have access to their corporate emails when they are abroad on holiday.

With regard to service users' engagement/dispute, rather than through councillors, for generic service requests such as reporting a missed bin collection, residents are encouraged to report this directly via the council's website. For some services, councillors may have a specific role such as speaking as a ward councillor at a planning committee and highlighting the concerns of residents. In addition, we are seeing a rise of questions, petitions and protests at committee and council meetings which suggest

		<p>residents see the councillors as a way to resolve concerns and issues.</p> <p>The council's transformation plans will improve the front door for residents and also for councillors, with many "tools" already available for example mapping showing current road works. Further technological changes will support councillors to be able to work more effectively.</p> <p><u>Conclusion</u></p> <p>Whilst it is anticipated that councillors' workloads will continue to increase due to demands, it is hoped that with transformation of our "front door" services and other technological improvements, the additional workload will be manageable with the current council size countering the need for additional councillors. However, there was concern that a reduction in council size may be detrimental to local residents with reduced representation and a longer wait to receive support from their elected representative and it was concluded that maintaining a council size of 82 would enable the council to "future proof" capacity.</p>
--	--	--

**Other Issues**

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

**Summary**

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

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

The council has carefully considered council size taking into account current workloads and anticipated future requirements and has concluded that a council size of 82 councillors is appropriate although is content to consider a reduction or increase of one or two councillors if necessary to ensure electoral equality.

It is felt that a reduction in councillor numbers would increase the pressure on remaining councillors with a necessary increase in attendance at formal committees and meetings with partners and outside bodies. The casework load would also be spread across fewer councillors, potentially leading to a reduction in the level of service that councillors are able to offer to their local communities.

The council also considered the option to increase the council size but this was not considered necessary. Whilst there is an anticipated growth in population increasing the elector ratio and potentially workload, this has been balanced against the council's ambitious transformation project which will enable councillors to work more efficiently and effectively, and an anticipation of the impact of possible devolution and double-devolution to the town and parish councils.

The  
Local Government  
Boundary Commission  
for England

