

Sheffield Labour Group

Council size submission

Sheffield City Council

About you:

Sheffield Labour Group are the largest political Group on Sheffield City Council, with 36 of the 84 elected members. While the Council is under no overall control, and governed by a 3 party administration with the Liberal Democrats and the Greens, Labour councillors lead the Council (Leader: Tom Hunt, Deputy Leader: Fran Belbin) and chair 4 of the 9 policy committees.

The Context for your proposal

Our last boundary review published recommendations in 2015 confirming our existing arrangements of 84 councillors across 28 wards, which have served the city well over the last two decades.

In the intervening period a number of strategic functions and governance arrangements have changed, most notably:

- In-sourcing of Council housing repairs following the end of a contract with Kier in 2017.
- The establishment and devolution of powers to a Mayoral Combined Authority (Sheffield City Region Mayoral Combined Authority established in 2018, becoming South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority [SYMCA] in 2021).
- The establishment of 7 Local Area Committees, each comprising 4 wards, in 2021.
- The implementation of a committee system of governance in 2022, following a citywide referendum.

Sheffield's ambitions as a city have been articulated in the [Sheffield City Goals](#), which were created in collaboration with anchor organisations, the voluntary sector and citizens.

[Sheffield City Council Plan: 2024 to 2028 | Sheffield City Council](#) sets out the Council's strategy to contribute to the City Goals over the four year period up to 2028, supported by high level strategies including Housing Strategy, the evolving Local Plan, the Sheffield Growth Plan, Climate Change Plan, Communities Strategy, Living the Life You Want to Live (health and care strategy).

The City Goals, Council Plan and supporting strategies demonstrate our ambition to be a growing, well connected, creative and healthy city, where the Council works collaboratively with citizens, other public services, the voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise (VCFSE) sector, businesses, SYMCA and Government to get things done. We aim to listen, involve, collaborate with others and empower – leading and taking action where we need to and getting out of the way where others are better placed.

Our Council size needs to enable this ambition: ensuring our strategic leadership can function effectively; applying appropriate levels of scrutiny to decision-making within the Council and amongst our partnerships; empowering our citizens and communities to be place-makers and to drive change.

It is our strongly held view that increasing the number of councillors and wards will not help us to achieve our ambition. Below we set out evidence for **retaining Council size at 84 councillors in 28 wards**; if the Commission decides that the Council size should be increased, then we believe there must be a cap of no more than 90 councillors in 30 wards, but our strong preference is for retaining 84 councillors. We strongly contend that more councillors does not equal more democracy; that more councillors would not address workload issues and would more likely increase workloads for those who already feel the strongest pressures; and that the resource and financial costs of increasing the number of councillors outweigh any potential benefits.

Local Authority profile

Sheffield is the fourth largest city in England. According to the [CQC report published in January 2026](#), the population has grown to 573,252 and is projected to rise to 648,419 by 2043.

We are a densely populated city, albeit including some more rural areas, especially in the north. As the UK's first City of Sanctuary and the home of two universities, we have a diverse population with approximately 20% of citizens coming from non-White British ethnic groups who tend to be concentrated in the east and north east of the city; students in particular contribute to higher levels of transience and fluctuations in the size of the electorate.

There are high levels of inequality between different parts of the city – a health and wealth divide symbolised through a 10 year gap in life expectancy along the 83 bus route travelling from the affluent western area through to deprived north east communities – that impacts the volume and complexity of casework. Sheffield has one of the highest amounts of council housing stock amongst local authorities, a significant source of

casework, with council housing concentrated in the north east, east and south east parts of the city.

Political engagement is also very variable across different areas, as illustrated by turnout in the 2024 local elections (for example 52.8% turnout in Ecclesall and 51% in Crookes and Crosspool, in the most affluent Sheffield Hallam constituency; 19.7% in Southey and 20.9% in Shiregreen & Brightside, in the least affluent Sheffield Brightside and Hillsborough).

Council size

Governance

Topic		
Governance Model	<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<p>➤ See About the Council Sheffield City Council for detailed information about the Council’s structure and governance systems. Sheffield operates a committee system of governance. Our committee system was designed around the current number of 84 members and implemented in 2022. There are in total 180 committee places (policy committees, regulatory committees and others including governance and admissions); each elected member must take up two committee places (in addition to a place on their Local Area Committee), including on a policy or regulatory committee, which allows meaningful participation for all councillors, and some flexibility. The petition that led to the introduction of the committee system called for all councillors to be part of the decision-making process and this remains a key design principle.</p> <p>➤ The overarching Strategy and Resources Committee has 13 members including the Leader, Deputy Leader and Policy Committee Chairs. The 8 Policy Committees have 9 members. All committees are politically proportionate. This system is flexible enough to give some places on policy committees to smaller Groups not in the administration and other committee places, for example on regulatory committees, to ungrouped councillors. In this way the full diversity of our city, geographically and demographically, is reflected in decision-making.</p>

		<p>➤ Increasing the number of councillors, even to 90, would remove the flexibility within the current system as all 180 committee places would be allocated to the 90 councillors and none would be able to take up more than 2 committee places, without a redesign of the whole system. Committee chairs, for example, routinely hold 3 committee places on their own committee, Strategy and Resources Committee and the Senior Officer Employment Committee that appoints senior staff. Our cross-party Governance Committee regularly reviews the effectiveness of the current system and there is no appetite to fundamentally redesign a system that is working well, nor to undermine the core design principles. This is another strong reason why we wish to retain 84 councillors.</p> <p>➤ Strategic and operational policies are formulated by each committee, informed by knowledge briefings available to all committee members that allow pre-scrutiny of all decisions. In the current situation of no overall control, the 3 Groups in the administration each have a lead member on every policy committee, as Chair, Deputy Chair or Group Spokesperson, who attend pre-agenda meetings, and lead on policy engagement with officers, fellow Group members, partners and the public on behalf of their Group. Working groups/task and finish groups are also regularly established to work through specific or cross-committee policies.</p> <p>The committee system has undoubtedly increased the workload of all elected members, as evidenced in the workload survey conducted in late 2025. The additional work around preparing for committees was recognised through increases in the basic member allowance introduced alongside the new system in 2022, and with subsequent uplift in line with staff pay increases.</p> <p>Those in leadership positions – as Chairs, Deputy Chairs and Spokespersons – also have a heavy workload, needing to be across all issues pertinent to their committee. This is all the more so as lead members are likely to additionally hold Group leadership positions (e.g. Group Leader/Deputy Leaders) and have additional responsibilities in that capacity, such as attending weekly</p>
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		<p>Administration Leaders Briefings and Group leadership meetings, and leading election campaigning.</p> <p>These workload issues would not be addressed through an increase in the number of elected members; on the contrary, more members creates additional Group management responsibilities, which will fall on those who already have the heaviest workload. Additionally, to retain the design principles described above, extra committee places would need to be created, for example by increasing the size of committees, adding to the time burden of coordinating these around the commitments of more councillors.</p> <p>➤ Agenda papers for all meetings are published a week in advance, allowing the public full access to appropriate information before decisions are taken and the opportunity to ask questions / make statements; these are in addition to wider consultation, engagement and involvement methods that may take place around specific agenda items.</p> <p>➤ The current 9 person committees create a good balance - each person feels individually accountable and takes time and effort to assure themselves they are making a good decision, while ensuring policy development and scrutiny benefits from a diversity of political perspectives. There is no evidence that additional members would improve scrutiny or accountability, or create any additional time for community engagement with policy making.</p>
<p>Portfolios</p>	<p><i>Key lines of explanation</i></p>	<p>➤ In addition to the overarching Strategy and Resources Committee, the 8 policy committees with 9 members are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adult Health and Social Care • Communities Parks and Leisure • Economic Development Skills and Culture • Education Children and Families • Environmental Services and Regulation • Finance and Performance • Housing • Transport Regeneration and Climate <p>Regulatory committees are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning and Highways (13 members) • Licensing (15 members)

		<p>Additional committees are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health Scrutiny Sub-Committee (to meet regulatory requirements – 9 members) • Charities Sub-Committee (to govern the Council’s responsibilities as charitable trustee for 41 charities – 5 members) • Audit and Standards (7 members) • Governance (9 members) • Admissions (7 members) • Senior Officers Employment (a pool of members for senior appointment panels – 15 members) • Appeals and Collective Disputes (a pool of members for appeals/collective dispute panels – 15 members) <p>➤ The roles of committee leads (Chair, Deputy and Spokesperson) are described above. As above, increasing the number of councillors to 90 would make it impossible for anyone to sit on more than two committees without redesigning our committee system.</p> <p>The current system allows members who work full-time to take up a place on a committee that meets less frequently, such as Admissions, in addition to a place on a Policy or Regulatory Committee.</p> <p>➤ Some portfolio leads carry out their elected member roles full-time, while some have to work part-time alongside owing to their personal circumstances. This does create significant workload pressures but would not be alleviated by more councillors, which would only create additional timetabling and Group management burdens. It is of course desirable to have a diversity of backgrounds, ages and caring responsibilities amongst elected members and leadership roles, which inevitably leads to such pressures. We believe these are best addressed through the level of Special Responsibility Allowances, which are reviewed regularly by an Independent Remuneration Panel, and through clear guidance on the capacity required for roles within political parties’ recruitment processes.</p> <p>➤ Decisions are taken via the vote of all committee members – in the current circumstances of no overall control, this means the Chair’s Group can be outvoted by other committee members,</p>
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		demonstrating how the existing proportionality approach works in action. Certain decisions, e.g. the Council budget, the HRA, or those related to the constitution, are reserved to full Council.
Delegated Responsibilities	<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<p>➤ A scheme of delegation is in Part 3 of the Council's constitution (Agenda for Sheffield City Council Constitution on Wednesday 1 October 2025 Sheffield City Council) that sets out matters to be delegated to committees, officers and full Council. This scheme is currently under review by the Governance Committee to ensure that committee agendas are manageable and focused on the issues of most importance to our citizens and communities. This is part of our ongoing efforts to reduce councillor workload.</p> <p>➤ As above, key decisions are taken by members in the relevant committee in proportion to political balance (9 in matters delegated to most of the policy committees, 13 in over-arching or cross-cutting matters delegated to Strategy and Resources Committee).</p>

Accountability

Topic	
Internal Scrutiny	<p>➤ In most cases pre-scrutiny of decisions takes place through knowledge briefings open to all committee members and pre-meetings. In some cases working groups or task and finish groups are established to explore key policies/decisions in more detail – these may involve more than one committee if the issue is cross-cutting.</p> <p>A Health Scrutiny Sub Committee is also in place to meet our statutory responsibilities in holding NHS bodies and local health service providers to account.</p>
<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<p>➤ Accountability for decisions is the responsibility of all councillors on the relevant committee who have the opportunity to be fully informed prior to the decision being taken at committee and to take part in/influence wider consultation methods.</p> <p>➤ The number of committees and functions are described above.</p> <p>➤ Task and finish groups are established as required with clear terms of reference. This may vary amongst committees, but on average there may be one task and finish group per committee. These will be timebound,</p>

and may not need to involve lead members, though generally lead members are keen to be involved in all aspects of their committee's work so this does create additional pressures on lead members.

Policy committees generally hold formal meetings 7-9 times per year (12 for Strategy and Resources). Each meeting is scheduled for 2.5 hours and will require pre-reading of papers and attendance at approximately hour long weekly or two hour fortnightly knowledge briefings. Lead members also attend an hour-long pre-agenda meeting and hour-long pre-meeting in each committee cycle to ensure agendas are relevant and that items of business have adequate time for consideration.

- The current number of 84 councillors effectively carry out these responsibilities. Although the level of work can lead to significant workloads for lead members, this would not be alleviated by additional councillors; indeed more members are more likely create additional work for councillors as well as for Democratic Services officers.
- We significantly increased the role of scrutiny through the introduction of the committee system in 2022, and the principle of pre-scrutiny of all decisions. Under the Cabinet model, 80-100 decisions per year were undertaken by each Cabinet member which are now taken by each committee. The review of the officer delegation scheme that we are currently undertaking is considering whether some of these decisions would be more appropriately taken by officers to ensure valuable committee time is used wisely and in the best interests of our citizens; the awarding of contracts for hedge trimming and for flooring in council buildings are examples of decisions currently taken in committee that could be delegated to officers.
- Our Group can see no additional value in adding more members to committees which are already effective in representing Groups' views in a proportionate manner. It is a matter of fact that our committee system is already significantly more expensive to run than the previous Cabinet model, requiring substantially more Democratic Services officers' time to service the committees and requiring relevant officers to ensure all councillors on a committee are fully briefed. This creates timetabling difficulties that would be made even more harder by having to work around the availability of more councillors.

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	<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ A single Council wide committee takes planning decisions, led by two co-Chairs. ➤ Chairs of Policy Committees generally do not sit on Planning but occasionally attend as substitute members. ➤ The minimum commitment is to attend Planning Committee meetings 12 times a year, meetings last 2-5 hours. Members are drawn from a pool of 13. About half the members attend site visits lasting 2-3 hours the day before the meeting. Preparation time for meetings, i.e. reading the papers and any necessary research, varies from 2 - 8 hours per meeting. There is also a hour long briefing for the co-chairs once a month, mandatory training of 2 hours twice a year, and ad hoc briefings from officers, 3 or 4 a year. Members who attend more regularly can expect to spend 25-30 hours a month when all is taken into account, but there is more flexibility for member with other commitments.
Licensing	<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Licensing meets twice per week, around 90 times per year. ➤ Meetings last approximately 3 hours. One meeting per week deals with licence applications (1 or 2 per meeting) and one with taxi licenses (4 or 5 per meeting). Meeting papers typically run to 100 pages so pre-meeting work is also required. ➤ Licensing is a standing panel with regular meetings held on Mondays and Tuesdays. ➤ Licensing has 2 co-chairs and in total a pool of 15 members to draw each panel from. One of the co-Chairs attends each meeting, plus two others drawn from the pool of members on a rota basis. A reserve also attends who can leave if everyone expected is able to turn up. This allows work to be spread fairly amongst the members, with those who have more availability attending more meetings. This system is sufficiently flexible for our purposes.
External Partnerships	<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ A list of external bodies that include councillor representation is here Outside bodies Sheffield City Council. A small number of these bodies (South Yorkshire Pensions Authority, South Yorkshire Fire and

		<p>Rescue Authority, Police and Crime Panel) have external allowances attached to the role.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Some of these external responsibilities are very clearly linked to lead committee roles – for example the Chair of Adult Health and Social Care also co-chairs the Health and Care Partnership Board and sits on Sheffield Adult Safeguarding Partnership Board. ➤ Other external bodies require representation from councillors from a particular area or with specific interests, for example Manor and Castle Development Trust serves the relevant ward, and Sheffield Carers and Young Carers represents the interests and needs of adult unpaid carers and young people with caring responsibilities. ➤ The time commitment for each board will vary and, in some cases, adds to the workload of lead members. However we currently have no difficulty in filling these roles, with Groups usually agreeing representation amongst themselves and occasionally via an election for a contested role at full Council.
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Community Leadership

Topic		
Community Leadership	<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Three councillors in each of the 28 wards represent their electorate, which currently averages 13808 per ward, which is low-mid range in comparison to other councils. ➤ There are 7 Local Area Committees (LACs), each covering 4 wards with 12 councillors. The LACs each hold a budget of £100,000 to spend on residents' priorities across their areas, informed by community plans drawn up in consultation with local people. Financial limits are in place to delegate spending to officers, the Chair or the whole committee. The councillors in each ward also make decisions on how to spend a ward pot and local Community Infrastructure Levy funds, allocated to wards in proportion to their standing in the Index of Multiple Deprivation. ➤ Councillors engage with their constituents in a number of ways that are chosen by individual councillors. These include regular surgeries, attendance at community meetings and events, engagement with local groups, social media, reports on activity via newsletter, videos and other such methods.

		<p>➤ Similarly councillors make locally informed decisions about how to interact with young people, those not on the electoral register, and/or other minority groups and their representative bodies – attending meetings, activities or events as appropriate.</p> <p>➤ Councillors may choose to attend meetings such as Tenants and Residents Associations and in a small number of cases a town or parish council is also in place – some councillors may choose to stand for election to these or may opt to attend as a member of the public.</p> <p>➤ Our Local Area Committees were established in 2021 and have decision-making powers. Each LAC is supported by a staff team who help to co-ordinate 4 public meetings per year (supported by Democratic Services staff) and organise projects, events and activities that are agreed by LAC members, as well more general community engagement and development work, developing partnerships with local organisations and supporting wider Council services to engage with their neighbourhoods. Various services within the Council also have staff with a responsibility to liaise with a particular LAC area.</p> <p>With 4 wards per LAC, it is broadly recognised that the areas they cover are not always cohesive and that such large areas generate a lot of work for the LAC teams. Increasing the number of councillors/wards would lead to pressures to increase the number of LACs – for example 90 councillors across 30 wards could lead to 10 LACs made up of 3 wards each. While this might lead to more cohesive areas that meet the needs of communities more effectively, it would be prohibitively expensive, requiring significantly more staff across the LAC teams and more time for staff within services to carry out their liaison responsibilities, over and above each LAC’s budget. These costs would begin to run into the millions which would need to be justified through additional evidence.</p> <p>Our LACs are due for review, particularly in the light of our Communities Strategy (New approach to improve how the Council works with the city’s communities Sheffield City Council) that was agreed in 2025 and aims to support more participative democracy. This strategy was co-produced with the VCFSE sector and the input of citizens and sets out our ambition to collaborate more effectively with our communities, rather than “do to” them. We have invested £2.2 million into working with community organisations on new commissioning</p>
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		<p>approaches that will more effectively give voice and influence to them, and commits to the Council getting out of the way where others are better placed to lead. The success of this strategy will be measured by more local organisations and citizens taking the lead on initiatives in our neighbourhoods and communities, and not by increasing the number of councillors working on their behalf.</p>
<p>Casework</p>	<p><i>Key lines of explanation</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Councillors choose how to deal with their casework, with some preferring an in-depth approach to resolving issues while others make use of a dedicated Members Casework team within the Council who follow up issues for them, and which is available to all councillors. This varies according to members’ preferences, with some preferring to develop relationships with officers in key services. ➤ Councillors in senior leadership roles also have dedicated PA support who may assist with casework. ➤ Technology has undoubtedly expanded the ways in which constituents contact councillors and how councillors interact with them. Constituents notify issues via email, telephone, social media and in person at surgeries and events. This has increased the amount of casework. ➤ The Council is currently undertaking the Future Sheffield transformation programme which includes a key focus on customer service. For example, the redesign of our taxi licensing portal over the last year, with significant input from taxi drivers, led to a huge drop in queries to the relevant advice line and calls on councillor support. The transformation programme will take some time to complete in all services, but we anticipate will lead to greatly improved customer service and an associated reduction of casework. ➤ We do note that demographic change (see electorate forecasting submitted by Democratic Services) will increase the size of the electorate and the overall population of Sheffield, which in itself is likely to lead to increasing amounts of casework; and further note that in the workload survey many members refer to the amount of casework alongside other responsibilities (Council and work/personal) as “overwhelming”. This does present the strongest evidence for an increase in the number of councillors, but we are unpersuaded that an increase will significantly improve matters. As above, the biggest increase in workload is a result of participating in

		<p>the committee system, which was brought about by the people of Sheffield voting via referendum for all councillors to take part in decision-making and had support across political Groups. Subsequent increases in workloads have been recognised through increases in members' allowances, and councillors in leadership roles, where workloads are the highest, benefit from PA support in addition to the Members Casework team.</p> <p>➤ We further note that there are discrepancies in the amounts and complexity of casework each councillor deals with that reflect the characteristics of each ward, including deprivation, volume of council housing, etc. We believe these are better dealt with through the next stage of the boundary review when we look at ward boundaries.</p>
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Other issues

The cost of creating additional wards/places for elected members must be taken into account. Members allowances alone would cost approximately £58,000 per additional ward per annum and there would be extra resource required in Democratic Services to service members and elections, that is difficult to quantify but would be substantial. As above there could also be impacts on LAC teams and other service areas.

A redesign of our committee system would also be necessary should we increase the number of councillors and would use up valuable resource. We have already undertaken a thorough design process that has been continuously reviewed through the Governance Committee (for example reviewing different aspects of the system such as Policy Committee remits and full Council), where all Groups have agreed that the current system is basically sound and reflects our core design principles, and any fundamental redesign has been rejected.

The electorate forecast for 2032 would take average ward size from 13808 to 14823, which is still well within the range of comparable cities. As described above, Sheffield is taking steps to move towards a more participative democratic process and away from more paternalistic approaches, by “working with” and not “doing to” communities. We want to strengthen democracy but we don't see increasing the number of elected representatives as the best way to do that.

Summary

We recognise the city is growing, and we understand the challenges many councillors face with high workloads. However, we think our city's democracy is best served by improving the way we work, not the number of councillors. The Council is already working to enhance community engagement through our Communities Strategy and

through the review of LACs; reduce the amount casework and complaints by transforming customer services through our Future Sheffield programme; and reduce committee workloads through prudent delegations to officers.

Our committee system is in good health and is underpinned by design principles that reflect the choice of citizens in our governance referendum to include all councillors in meaningful decision-making. Redesigning the system to accommodate additional councillors would use up valuable resource when our Governance Committee is already undertaking regular review of all aspects of our governance. There is no evidence that Sheffield citizens want the number of councillors to be increased.

The financial consequences of more councillors go beyond the cost of additional allowances, taking into account the costs of redesigning the committee system, extra burdens on Democratic Services officers, potential implications for LACs and other knock on effects for Council officers.

We therefore submit that we should retain the current Council size of 84 councillors in 28 wards. If the Commission takes a view that the increase in population necessitates an increase in Council size, then we strongly submit that there must be a cap of no more than 90 councillors in 30 wards.