

Sheffield Liberal Democrat council group

Council Size

Submission: Template

Sheffield 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 20page 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.

Sheffield Liberal Democrats hold 27 of 84 seats on the council and take part in the administration alongside the Labour and Green groups. We chair 3 of 9 policy committees, have deputy chairs of 3 policy committees, hold one of 2 chairs of planning, chair of audit and standards and various other positions.

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?

Elections were first held on the current boundaries in 2016.

In 2022 there was a change of governance to a committee system, following a referendum triggered by a public petition according to section 9MC of part 1A of the Local Government Act 2000 (as amended by the Localism Act 2011). While this change had been previously resisted by the Labour administration, following the referendum it has been broadly accepted.

Since 2021 the council has been no overall control, with a Labour/Green administration in 2021/22 and since May 2022 a Labour/Liberal Democrat/Green administration under the committee system.

Both the committee system and the change to no overall control has increased the workload on members with the great majority of members sitting on policy committees and therefore being responsible for executive decisions, and with all three parties having to provide lead members in each of 9 portfolio areas (including leader).

The council is undertaking an internal transformation programme "Future Sheffield" intended to save money, and improve efficiency and public engagement. The success or failure of this will impact on council effectiveness and member workloads.

We find the current arrangements to be effective and are proposing to continue with 84 members.

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?

Sheffield sits on seven hills; it includes large rural areas to the north and west, suburbs of greatly varying affluence and an increasingly inhabited central area. There is ongoing regeneration in many post industrial areas, excellence in some sectors of the economy but also much poverty and some neighbourhoods with multiple complex challenges.

Ethnic diversity is similar overall to the national average with 79.1% of the population being white and 74.5% being white British. There is also a large student population including many international students. Some areas therefore have significantly more transience in population than others.

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	
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Governance Model	<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	
	Analysis	<p>Sheffield currently operates 9 Policy committees, 8 with 9 members and Strategy and Resources with 13 members (so as to include all policy committee chairs and remain proportional). These involve the great majority of members in strategic and operational policy formation.</p> <p>Summary of positions to be filled:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 85 on Policy Committees • 95 on other committees • 75 on 'other council bodies' (some of which are intrinsic to the role of lead members or are formalised briefing sessions) • 28 on South Yorkshire bodies (SYMCA, Fire Authority, etc, many of which are separately remunerated) • 70 on other outside bodies <p>This is a total of 437 appointments averaging a little over 5 per member.</p> <p>Additional to this there will be at any time a handful of temporary and ad hoc working groups, some cross committee, giving deeper consideration to one policy area.</p> <p>The distribution of workload and appointments is inevitably highly unbalanced with great variation in members' work and family commitments, and with members of parties in administration generally having substantially more work; and leading members in particular having much more work.</p> <p>Some changes to the number and size of some committees would be possible. Governance committee is currently undertaking a review of policy committee portfolios with the aim of improving the logic of the portfolio boundaries and better balancing committee</p>

		<p>workload. This has not been steered to consider a reduction in the number of policy committees because the overall workload seems appropriate.</p> <p>Other sizes for policy committees were considered in 2022 with member workload being an argument for going lower than 9, but other considerations prevailed, not least that the referendum was understood to demand that member involvement in decision making should be the norm. It also happened to be the case that with 9 members per policy committee in 2022 the balance of group control on each committee could straightforwardly reflect the balance of group control of full council and this has largely but not entirely been the case ever since. This has been useful to the administration which is not based on a policy platform agreed up front, but rather a willingness to work constructively together. A higher or lower number may have this property in future.</p> <p>Committees of 9 have worked well; an increase or decrease in size in response to a change in the number of members or committees would be relatively straightforward, at some risk to effectiveness.</p> <p>So we are not proposing any great changes to numbers and sizes of committees.</p> <p>There have been difficulties finding members to serve on licensing committee due to the commitments involved, with one group failing to fill its quota of places, placing more pressure on other members. Any reduction in the number of councillors would amplify this problem.</p> <p>The council is not at liberty to move away from a committee system due to the provisions of the Localism Act 2011. A further referendum could be proposed in 2031 at the earliest, but there is no sign of support either in the council or the city for a change.</p>
Portfolios	<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <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	<p>The portfolios are held 9 policy committees, the chair of each being the authority's lead member for that portfolio.</p> <p>Role profiles are available here: https://democracy.sheffield.gov.uk/ecCatDisplayClassic.aspx?sch=doc&cat=13764&path=0</p> <p>Working age members will generally need to supplement their income or earn their primary income with outside work, this would generally include portfolio holders, if to a lesser extent. Many also have caring responsibilities.</p>

		<p>Decisions cannot legally be delegated to individual members. There is an urgency provision for officers to make a decision in consultation with the chair and deputy chair of a committee.</p> <p>Typically policy (and other) committees will hold a pre-agenda meeting and a pre-meeting before each committee meeting, either with the 3 lead members, or with the whole committee, to steer and iron out upcoming decisions.</p>
Delegated Responsibilities	<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>What responsibilities will be delegated to officers or committees?</i> ○ <i>How many councillors will be involved in taking major decisions?</i>
	Analysis	<p>Broadly speaking policy committees make policy decisions. Operational decisions are delegated to officers with some specific exceptions where committees of members consider matters such as planning, licensing, audit and standards, admissions and some HR functions.</p> <p>The great majority of members sit on policy committees and make 'major' decisions, with the lead members of each administration group in each portfolio (so currently 27 members) having a leadership responsibility in their groups.</p> <p>Policy committee members will have regular briefings – generally one or more per week – on the service in their portfolio areas. (Strategy and Resources is less often)</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.

<p><i>Key lines of explanation</i></p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <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>
<p>Analysis</p>		<p>The model is essentially one of pre-scrutiny, with committee members able to participate in briefings and feed in ahead of papers being brought to committee.</p> <p>There is a separate Health Scrutiny subcommittee of 9 members exercising the authority's statutory health scrutiny function. There are also specific scrutiny functions held by the Transport Regeneration and Climate policy committee in relation to flooding and by the Communities, Parks and Leisure policy committee in relation to crime and disorder.</p>
<p>Statutory Function</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>Planning</p>	<p><i>Key lines of explanation</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <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> ○ <i>Will there be area planning committees? Or a single council-wide committee?</i> ○ <i>Will executive members serve on the planning committees?</i> ○ <i>What will be the time commitment to the planning committee for members?</i>
<p>Analysis</p>		<p>It is our impression that the amount of officer delegation has increased of the last 15 years or so. There has been a single council-wide committee since about 2011, prior to that there were two area planning committees.</p> <p>The committee meets every three weeks on a Tuesday afternoon, generally preceded by site visits on Monday morning.</p> <p>It is our view that we should introduce a call-in procedure for</p>

		decisions that would otherwise be delegated to officers, which we understand operates in some other authorities.
Licensing	Key lines of explanation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 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 adhoc? ○ Will there be core members and regular attendees, or will different members serve on them?
	Analysis	<p>Licensing subcommittee is scheduled twice a week all year round, although about a third of meetings are then cancelled if there is no or not enough business to consider.</p> <p>Taxi licensing meetings will generally consider about 4 cases and last 2 to 3 hours, and statutory licensing meetings will consider typically one case and last one to two hours.</p> <p>Membership of the subcommittee comprises one of the two co-chairs of the committee, two other members out of 13 on a rota basis, and a reserve who attends but is released at the start of the meeting if they are not needed.</p> <p>Licensing is typically one of the more difficult committees for groups to fill due to the nature of the commitment.</p>
Other Regulatory Bodies	Key lines of explanation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 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	
External Partnerships		Service delivery has changed for councils over time, and many authorities now have a range of delivery partners to work with and hold to account.
Key lines of explanation		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Will council members serve on decision-making partnerships, sub-regional, regional or national bodies? In doing so, are they able to take decisions/make commitments on behalf of the council? ○ How many councillors will be involved in this activity? And what is their expected workload? What proportion of this work is undertaken by portfolio holders? ○ What other external bodies will members be involved in? And what is the anticipated workload?
	Analysis	<p>As indicated above 98 positions are filled on South Yorkshire and other outside bodies, about 20 of which are filled by policy committee chairs.</p> <p>A great many functions including, waste, highway maintenance, social care, leisure and others are contracted, with these contractual relationships being managed by officers reporting to the appropriate policy committee.</p>

Officers also sit on a great many partnership bodies and report to policy committees.

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"> ○ <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	<p>We expect councillors to be accessible to their communities, take up and champion causes of local interest, hold surgeries, communicate by various means, attend community meetings and so forth. Many are actively involved in local community groups which often includes groups involving otherwise hard to reach people.</p> <p>There are seven Local Area Committees each of four wards and therefore 12 members, supported by a small team of locality focussed officers. Budgets vary according to indices of multiple deprivation but are generally sufficient for small</p>

		<p>grants schemes for community groups and maybe a handful of other small projects. Some spend significant amounts on public engagement. Decision making powers are limited and we believe they should be extended.</p> <p>LACs meet formally quarterly with additional briefing meetings in between and ward level meetings (CAGs) between members, officers and sometimes other partners are scheduled monthly.</p>
Casework	<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <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>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <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	<p>There is a members casework service that members are encouraged to use and that connects members to the appropriate officer and follows up or closes cases as appropriate. It is sometimes overwhelmed or underresourced. Members' engagement with it is mixed.</p> <p>There is generally a pathway for residents to contact the council directly, with many services having a useful web presence, and there is a call centre with a single number for most common services. The council is currently undergoing a transformation which intends to increase web use and reduce call centre use. There is a risk that if this transformation does not deliver as intended and residents can't get satisfaction from a call centre that more will be approaching councillors with their issues.</p>

Other Issues

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

In support of this process, council officers have conducted a survey of member workloads in which our group and others participated. A summary is attached alongside this submission. We believe this is a fair reflection.

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.

We propose continuing with 84 council members.

We recognise the important work that councillors do, advocating and being a champion for their communities, taking up local issues, holding surgeries and taking up casework, and exercising leadership and judgement over council business. We consider that 84 members are sufficient to do this, and, due to the costs associated with additional members, oppose any increase, and firmly oppose any increase over 90 members.

We recognise the analysis of member workload that has been done, but consider that at a time when the public sector as a whole is being asked to do more with less, that councillors should experience the same discipline. We accept this analysis as grounds to reject any reduction in the number of members.