

Submission by the Council of the Isles of Scilly

Council Size Submission

Council of the Isles of Scilly

Contents

How to Make a Submission 2

About You 2

Reason for Review (Request Reviews Only)..... 2

Local Authority Profile..... 4

Council Size 4

Other Issues..... 15

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 will be taken to Full Council for approval at the meeting on Thursday 30 July 2026.](#)

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.*

[The Commission has identified the Council of the Isles of Scilly for review. The review has not been requested by the Council.](#)

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?

The Council is Sui Generis in nature in respect of its governance arrangements. It continues to operate as though it has a committee system of governance. At the present time, there is no reason to think the Council will be materially affected by the Government's programmes of devolution and local government reorganisation. In particular, the Council is not provided for within the provisions of the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Act 2026 requiring local authorities with a committee system to change to a leader and cabinet executive.

Following the last electoral review (when the number of members was reduced from 21 to 16), a more streamlined committee system was adopted in May 2017. The number of committees was reduced and Lead Members were introduced 'to be the lead spokespersons for the areas within their portfolios'. The new system (which places less demand on limited officer resource) has now been operating effectively for nine years.

Since the last electoral review, responsibility for water provision and sewage management on St Mary's and Bryher has been transferred to South West Water. Nevertheless, in spite of its small size, the Council continues to have one of the broadest remits of any local authority in the country. As well as having the powers and responsibilities normally associated with unitary authorities (e.g. planning, housing, children's services, adult services, benefits and taxation, waste management, highways, regulatory services, emergency planning and business continuity, economic development, health and wellbeing), it also runs an airport, a residential care home and the Fire and Rescue Service with stations on all of the inhabited islands.

Following Ofsted's rating of inadequate for the Council's Children's Services in July 2023, an Improvement Board has been established which includes member representation. Updates in respect of the Improvement Plan are also reported to the Council's Scrutiny Committee and Full Council. The Council continues to work with Ofsted and its partners in this respect.

All members of Council are independents.

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?

The Isles of Scilly is a small group of islands situated 28 miles off the Cornish coast. There are five inhabited islands: the principal island of St Mary's plus the four 'off islands' of St Agnes, Bryher, St Martin's and Tresco.

The electorate of each island at 1 April 2026 was:

St Mary's: 1,218

St Agnes: 61

Bryher: 72

St Martin's: 111

Tresco: 102

There are modest urban centres on St Mary's at Hugh Town and Old Town.

The census figures from 2021 show the Isles of Scilly has a distinctive age profile compared with England as a whole, with a higher median age, more older people and fewer younger people and children.

As per the electorate forecast, no large growth is anticipated in the population of the islands.

Although the Isles of Scilly is not an area of high overall deprivation by national standards, there are particular challenges affecting the local population: housing affordability and availability; remoteness from mainland services (e.g. health and education); seasonal employment patterns. The Council formally declared a housing crisis in January 2022.

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	
	<i>Key lines of explanation</i> ➤ <i>What governance model will your authority operate? e.g. Committee System, Executive or other?</i> ➤ <i>The Cabinet model, for example, usually requires 6 to 10 members. How many members will you require?</i> ➤ <i>If the authority runs a Committee system, we want to understand why the number and size of the committees you propose represents the most appropriate for the authority.</i> ➤ <i>By what process does the council aim to formulate strategic and operational policies? How will members in executive, executive support and/or scrutiny positions be involved? What particular demands will this make of them?</i> ➤ <i>Whichever governance model you currently operate, a simple assertion that you want to keep the current structure does not in itself, provide an explanation of why that structure best meets the needs of the council and your communities.</i>
Governance Model	The Council is planning to continue with its streamlined committee system of governance. The Council operates in a relatively simple manner with a large majority of member decisions being made at Full Council – which meets on a monthly basis. Consequently all Scilly councillors have to maintain a detailed overview of the full breadth of Council business. The Council appoints to seven committees: • Governance Committee • Scrutiny Committee • Licensing Committee • Health and Wellbeing Board • Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority • Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Integrated Care Partnership (which sits as a Committee in Common with Cornwall Health and Wellbeing Board) • Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Economic Prosperity Board It will need to take steps to set up a separate Planning Committee due to legislative change (currently Planning matters are dealt with by Full Council). The first three of these are made up of Scilly councillors only.

		Further details regarding these committees (including the number of appointments of Scilly councillors and meeting numbers) are provided in Appendix 1. The Governance Committee and Scrutiny Committee are non-statutory committees (the Council is not required to have a separate Scrutiny Committee). They provide forums where matters can be given detailed consideration before being brought to Full Council. The Licensing Committee, Health and Wellbeing Board, Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority and the Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Integrated Care Partnership (ICP) are statutory committees. All comply with the required statutory membership (the last three also include those other than Scilly Councillors). The Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Economic Prosperity Board (EPB) is a joint committee administered by Cornwall Council. Membership of the ICP and EPB can involve Scilly members in trips to the mainland (including potential overnight stays) to attend meetings. (In 2025-26 there was a combined total of 5 in-person attendances by Scilly members at the EPB – but none at the ICP.) The EPB will shortly be discontinued with the winding down of the Shared Prosperity Fund. Following the publication of the Health Bill 2026, it seems likely the ICP will also soon be abolished. The total number of Council and committee meetings for 2025-26 was 34 (of which 8 were administered by Cornwall Council). Full Council accounted for 35% of meetings (12/34) and 64% of requested attendances (192/299) emphasising its central position in the Council's decision-making processes. The terms of reference for the Council and committees may be found in appendix B of the Council's standing orders [https://committees.scilly.gov.uk/mgCommitteeDetails.aspx?ID=323]. In addition to formal committees, members are also appointed to a number of internal working groups and boards: • Climate Emergency Working Group (5 members) • Communications Working Group (11 members) • Local Plan Steering Group (8 members) • Capital and Properties Board (4 members) • Corporate Parenting Board (3 members) • Climate Adaptation Oversight Group (7 members)
--	--	---

		Details of individual councillor appointments to committees and other internal working groups and boards and external appointments are provided in Appendix 2. An independent review of members' allowances in February 2025 estimated the amount of time required to be an effective 'backbench' member of Council was 12 hours per week or 78 days per year. The basic allowance for members in 2025-26 was £7,831.
Portfolios	<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	➤ <i>How many portfolios will there be?</i> ➤ <i>What will the role of a portfolio holder be?</i> ➤ <i>Will this be a full-time position?</i> ➤ <i>Will decisions be delegated to portfolio holders? Or will the executive/mayor take decisions?</i>
	Analysis	The Council operates as though it has a committee system of governance so individual members do not have executive decision-making powers. There are, however, 13 special responsibility allowances (SRAs) paid to members for taking on particular roles: • Chairman of Council (£16,445) • Vice Chairman of Council (£8,614) • Chairman of Governance Committee (£3,916) • Chairman of Scrutiny Committee (£3,916) • Chairman of the Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority (£3,916) • Chairman of Licensing Committee (£2,349) • Lead Member for Children (£3,916) • Lead Member for Adults (£2,741) • Lead Member for Economy, Tourism and Transport (£2,741) • Lead Member for Environment, Environmental Services and Climate Change (£2,741) • Lead Member for Finance, Governance, Risk, Performance and Corporate Services (£2,741) • Lead Member for Housing and Corporate Estate (£2,741) • Lead Member for Planning and Regulatory Services (£2,741) The figures shown in brackets are the allowances for 2025-26. The Chairman of Council is the overall strategic policy lead and the communications lead for the Council. They represent the Council on major initiatives, especially with Government. The Vice Chairman of Council deputises for the Chairman in respect of all aspects of their role.

		The Chairman of individual committees drive the work of their respective committees. Lead Members provide political leadership and a spokesperson for their respective areas. They work with officers to oversee and monitor the development and implementation of policies and strategies. Lead Member Role Profiles (including the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of Council) may be found in appendix D of the Council's standing orders [https://committees.scilly.gov.uk/mgCommitteeDetails.aspx?ID=293]. Apart from the Lead Member for Children (which is a statutory position instituted by the Children Act 2004), the system of appointing Lead Members with specific portfolios was adopted by the Council in May 2017 as part of the streamlined committee system adopted at that time. Details of individual councillor appointments to roles with an SRA attached are provided in Appendix 2. As will be seen, the 13 SRAs are currently held by 10 councillors. Members are permitted to receive up to 2 SRAs at the same time. The Members Scheme of Allowances may be found in appendix O of the Council's standing orders [https://committees.scilly.gov.uk/mgCommitteeDetails.aspx?ID=278].
Delegated Responsibilities	<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	➤ What responsibilities will be delegated to officers or committees? ➤ How many councillors will be involved in taking major decisions?
	Analysis	As stated above, the large majority of member decisions are made at Full Council. It follows therefore that all councillors have the opportunity to be involved in making these decisions. Certain matters, however, are delegated to committees, which are set out in the Committees Terms of Reference, e.g.: • the Licensing Committee fulfils the responsibilities of the Council's statutory licensing committee under the Licensing Act 2003 and the Gambling Act 2005 – and it also deals with other licensing regimes, e.g. street trading, boating. • the Scrutiny Committee is delegated the Council's statutory health scrutiny functions (save for issues of substantial variation or development of services where Full Council is the formal consultee).

		the Governance Committee provides the Council's audit committee functions with regard to internal audit. The Scheme of Delegation to Statutory Officers, Proper Officers and more generally to Chief Officers and Strategic Directors may be found in Appendix F of the Council's standing orders [https://committees.scilly.gov.uk/mgCommitteeDetails.aspx?ID=295].
--	--	--

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	➤ How will decision makers be held to account? ➤ How many committees will be required? And what will their functions be? ➤ 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? ➤ How many members will be required to fulfil these positions? ➤ Explain why you have increased, decreased, or not changed the number of scrutiny committees in the authority. ➤ Explain the reasoning behind the number of members per committee in terms of adding value.
Analysis	Given the Council operates a committee system of governance, there is no statutory obligation to appoint a Scrutiny Committee. Nevertheless, the Council has opted to have a Scrutiny Committee, reflecting the priority assigned to the scrutiny function. Eight councillors are appointed to the Scrutiny Committee. The Committee met four times in 2025-26 and it is scheduled to meet four times in 2026-27. The Scrutiny Committee: - provides member input into the development of key policies - reviews and challenges decisions - monitors and reviews the effectiveness of Council services.

Statutory Function		This includes planning, licencing and any other regulatory responsibilities. Consider under each of the headings the extent to which decisions will be delegated to officers. How many members will be required to fulfil the statutory requirements of the council?
Planning	Key lines of explanation	➤ <i>What proportion of planning applications will be determined by members?</i> ➤ <i>Has this changed in the last few years? And are further changes anticipated?</i> ➤ <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>
	Analysis	Certain planning applications are considered at Full Council. There is no separate Planning Committee (although one will need to be established due to the below referred to legislative change). In 2025-26, 100 out of 114 planning applications (88%) were delegated decisions, made by officers. The Government target is 90%. The proportion of delegated decisions has risen steadily over the last five years (2021-22: 71%). The Town and Country Planning (Discharge of Local Planning Authority Functions) (England) Regulations 2026 are due to come into effect on 31 October 2026. Under these regulations, planning committees will be subject to a 13-member cap. The implications for the Council are still being worked through but it will be necessary to move the consideration of planning applications out of Full Council and into a committee. There are moves to introduce mandatory planning training for those making decisions on planning applications.
Licensing	Key lines of explanation	➤ <i>How many licencing panels will the council have in the average year?</i> ➤ <i>And what will be the time commitment for members?</i> ➤ <i>Will there be standing licencing panels, or will they be ad-hoc?</i> ➤ <i>Will there be core members and regular attendees, or will different members serve on them?</i>
	Analysis	Under the Licensing Act 2003, the Licensing Committee is required to have between 10 and 15 members. The Council's practice is to appoint all members other than the Chairman of Council (i.e. 15 members).

		The Licensing Committee met two times in 2025-26. A third meeting was scheduled but it was declared inquorate. There are three meetings scheduled in 2026-27. When a licensing hearing is required, a licensing panel is set up comprised of up to three members of the Licensing Committee. To sit on a licensing panel, the members in question must have received formal licensing training. There was one licensing hearing during 2025-26.
Other Regulatory Bodies	<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	➤ <i>What will they be, and how many members will they require?</i> ➤ <i>Explain the number and membership of your Regulatory Committees with respect to greater delegation to officers.</i>
	Analysis	The Isles of Scilly Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority is a committee of Council under the Maritime and Coastal Access Act 2009 (a statutory committee). The Scilly IFCA was established by The Isles of Scilly Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Order 2010 and it operates under its own constitution. In accordance with the Order, the Scilly IFCA consists of 8 members and 3 of those members must be Scilly councillors. The Chairman of the Scilly IFCA is currently one of the Scilly councillors – and we believe this has always been the case. The Scilly IFCA works to manage sustainable inshore fisheries within its 6 nautical mile district, striving to balance social, environmental and economic benefits whilst ensuring healthy seas and a viable fishing industry. There are only 10 IFCAs in England.
External Partnerships		Service delivery has changed for councils over time, and many authorities now have a range of delivery partners to work with and hold to account.
<i>Key lines of explanation</i>		➤ <i>Will council members serve on decision-making partnerships, sub-regional, regional or national bodies? In doing so, are they able to take decisions/make commitments on behalf of the council?</i> ➤ <i>How many councillors will be involved in this activity? And what is their expected workload? What proportion of this work is undertaken by portfolio holders?</i> ➤ <i>What other external bodies will members be involved in? And what is the anticipated workload?</i>

Analysis	Scilly councillors are appointed to various outside bodies which seek or require Council representation: • Isles of Scilly National Landscapes Partnership (2) • Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Local Nature Partnership (1) • South West Regional Flood and Coastline Committee (1) • Devon and Cornwall Police and Crime Panel (1) • Medical Travel Transport Group (1) • Cornwall Partnership NHS Foundation Trust (1) • Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Economic Forum (2) • Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Workforce and Skills Board (1) • Economic Prosperity Board Advisory Panel (1) • Cultural Centre and Museum Project Board (3) • Safer Scilly (2) • Islands Futures Board (3) • Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Leadership Board (2) The number of appointments is given in brackets after the name of each outside body. Membership of some of these outside bodies can involve Scilly members in trips to the mainland (including potential overnight stays) to attend meetings. Of the 21 appointments, 18 are held by the 10 members in receipt of a special responsibility allowance. Members act in an ambassadorial role when appointed to outside bodies. They do not have individual decision-making capability. For example, Members are not able to commit resources of the Council while attending these meetings. If such a decision is required, the Member should work with the responsible officer to prepare a report for Council to that effect.
----------	---

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	<i>Key lines of explanation</i> ➤ <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>
	Due to the small size of the Isles of Scilly, many councillors are known personally by their constituents. This is particularly the case for the off-island councillors. Much of the representational role is therefore carried out as a result of informal conversations arising from day-to-day encounters in the community. An annual public meeting is held on each island for local residents to discuss concerns with councillors. These meetings are promoted via the Council's corporate communication channels and officer support is provided. Councillors are also able to engage with the public by attending other events, meetings and consultations on specific issues which are organised by the Council. Regular meetings have been held since October 2025 on post-16 education and training provision/support with families and young people. Councillor contact details are provided on the Council website. In most cases, councillors have opted to provide a telephone number as well as an email address. A periodic Chairman's Update (also signed off by the Chief Executive) is promoted by the Council's corporate communication channels. Some councillors: • are known to hold periodic surgeries but these are not promoted by the Council's corporate communication channels. • conduct radio interviews with local radio station, Islands FM 107.9.

		• conduct media interviews in response to press requests (although it should be noted there are no news outlets dedicated specifically to the islands). A standing order has been adopted allowing members of the public to submit questions directly to meetings of Full Council. The Council has no area committees and there is no Area Governance structure. There are no Parish Councils, Town Councils or Residents' Associations on Scilly. Councillors are only expected to attend meetings of the bodies to which they have been formally appointed (although some are also involved with other community interest groups).
Casework	Key lines of explanation	➤ <i>How do councillors deal with their casework? Do they pass it on to council officers? Or do they take a more in-depth approach to resolving issues?</i> ➤ <i>What support do members receive?</i> ➤ <i>How has technology influenced the way in which councillors work? And interact with their electorate?</i> ➤ <i>In what ways does the council promote service users' engagement/dispute resolution with service providers and managers rather than through councillors?</i>
		➤
	Analysiss	Different councillors will deal with casework in different ways – but officers, and indeed other councillors, will always make themselves available to provide whatever support is required. The amount of casework on Scilly (where the ratio of elected members to voters is approximately 1 to 100) is less than in other unitary authorities (where the ratio is usually around 1 to 2,000). All meetings of Full Council and its committees are live streamed and archived online. Some councillors engage with conversations on local FaceBook noticeboards regarding Council activities. Officers would encourage councillors to use separate 'Councillor' pages for this sort of activity (rather than their main profiles) in line with LGA guidance. A Customer Services Charter was approved at the meeting of Full Council on 3 October 2024 [https://scilly.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Customer%20Services%20Charter%20All%20staff_1.pdf]. This document underlines the Council's commitment to providing excellent customer service and marks the fulfilment of the following objectives in the Corporate Plan 2022-2026:

		• make it simple for our customers to find out who to contact and when they are available; and • ensure that our workforce is able to provide face-to-face or over-the-phone customer service where appropriate. To support these outcomes, a Service Information Pack has been made available (online and in hard copy from Council reception desks) which details each customer facing department's function, where it is based, how it can be contacted and when staff are available. The Council has a corporate-level policy for dealing with public feedback including complaints [https://www.scilly.gov.uk/sites/default/files/document/council/Feedback%20Policy%20June%202025.pdf]. In addition, there are more specific complaints regimes in place where individuals can complain: • about a specific service they have received from the Council (e.g. Adult Social Care); or • about something for which the Council has a regulatory responsibility (e.g. private housing standards). Through these mechanisms, complaints can be directed to the most appropriate person (i.e. an officer rather than a councillor for operational matters).
--	--	---

Other Issues

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

n/a

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.

With its village-sized population, the Council of the Isles of Scilly is unique in English local government. It is also identified as unique (Sui Generis) in terms of the local government legislation that provides the framework for the operation of local authorities. When considering council size, it is not possible to draw meaningful comparisons with other local authorities for the purpose of benchmarking. The CIPFA Nearest Neighbours Model cannot be used (as it would be elsewhere) to identify 'expected ranges' for the number of councillors and the councillor-to-electors ratio.

Considerations regarding an increase in Council size

The streamlined committee system adopted in May 2017 (after the last electoral review reduced the number of members to 16) has been a success. It is considered to be more efficient than the more expansive committee system that preceded it, reducing duplication and making fewer demands on limited officer resource. Simplified decision-making processes focused on monthly meetings of Full Council, combined with Lead Members providing political leadership for their respective areas, is thought to strike an effective balance which enables the Council to fulfil its responsibilities. There appears to be no reason therefore to consider an increase in the size of the Council.

Furthermore, even if the number of available member positions were increased, it is by no means clear they could be filled. At the election in May 2025:

- a total of 17 candidates stood for 16 positions.
- St Mary's was uncontested for the first time since 1981 with 12 candidates standing for 12 positions.

At the election in May 2021:

- a total of 16 candidates stood for 16 positions.
- St Mary's was contested with 13 candidates for 12 positions.
- no candidate stood for Bryher necessitating an immediate by-election to fill the vacancy.

By the end of the 2013-17 Council (when there were 13 seats for St Mary's and 2 for each of the off islands), there had been three vacancies (two for St Mary's and one for Bryher) for more than two years. As a counterpoint to this, there were 18 candidates for the 12 positions on St Mary's at the election in May 2017 (and 4 candidates for a St Mary's by-election in May 2019). When looked at in the round, however, we would not be confident that additional positions could be filled.

There would also be a budgetary concern with an increase in the number of members. Although the allowances paid to members are modest compared with those on the mainland, they make up a significant proportion of the Council's budget. For 2026-27 member allowances (£0.215m) make up 2.6% of the General Fund Revenue Budget (£8.306m). By contrast, we understand that for other unitary councils the figure hovers around 0.25%-0.7%.

Considerations regarding a decrease in Council size

Given the wide-ranging responsibilities of the Council of the Isles of Scilly in terms of Strategic Leadership, Accountability and Community Leadership, we believe a reduction in the number of councillors could leave the organisation too small to discharge its functions.

The Council of the Isles of Scilly already has the smallest number of members of any principal area local authority in the United Kingdom. In Scotland, the Orkney Islands Council has 21 members and the Shetland Islands Council has 23 members. In England, the smallest district council (Folkestone & Hythe) has 25 members while the next smallest unitary council (Rutland) has 27 members.

Furthermore, the Council of the Isles of Scilly is already much smaller today than it has been in the past. A table showing changes to the Council's constitution over time is provided in Appendix 3. As can be seen:

- there were 25 or 26 members from 1891 to 1985;
- there were 21 members from 1985 to 2017; and
- there have been 16 members since 2017.

Considerations regarding a modest increase or decrease in the number of St Mary's councillors on the basis of electoral equality

As part of our warding arrangements submission, we have considered whether there is a case for a modest increase or decrease in the number of St Mary's councillors on the basis of electoral equality. As will be seen, our conclusion is in favour of the current number of 12.

Final proposal

Our final proposal is for no change to the size of the Council of the Isles of Scilly, i.e. we recommend there should be 16 members.