

Joint submission of the Labour and Conservative Groups on Stevenage Borough Council

# Council Size Submission

Stevenage Borough Council

## Contents

How to Make a Submission.....	2
About You .....	2
Reason for Review (Request Reviews Only) .....	3
Local Authority Profile .....	5
Council Size .....	21
Other Issues.....	35

## 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 is a joint submission made by the Majority Labour Group and Opposition Conservative Group agreed on 16 September 2021 at the meeting of the Stevenage Borough Council Cross Party Electoral Review Working Group.](#)

## 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?

### Following the most recent Electoral Review of Stevenage Borough Council in 1998:

- Council agreed on 13 April 1999 to amend the Council's political management structure with effect from the beginning of the municipal year 1999/2000 to a Leader/Cabinet model.
- The East Hertfordshire and Stevenage (Boundary Change) Order 2013 came into force.

No capacity or governance issues have been raised by any inspectorate or equivalent.

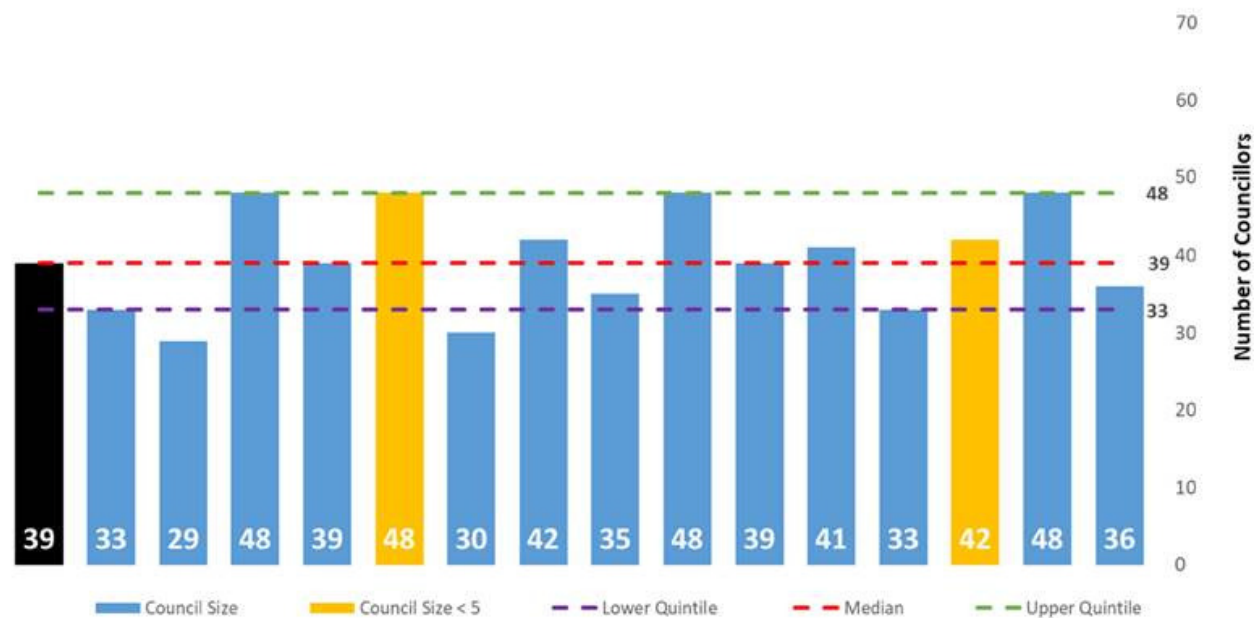
In considering the most suitable Council size it was felt particularly important to ensure that the size continues to be sustainable. Our proposal is to retain the same Council size of 39 Members. Retaining this number of Members would maintain a suitable number of electors per Member in comparison with comparable authorities based on the data available at this time (see table below).

A proposal of 39 Members retains a mid-way estimated average number of electors per Member of 1,779 in 2027 (range 1,703-1,856).

## Appendix 4: Council Size Expected Range

(The black bars represent Stevenage Borough Council)

2019 CIPFA Group and Councillor Counts



The Council feels that given the forecast growth in the total electorate it would still be possible to maintain the principles of effective strategic leadership, accountability, delivery of statutory functions and community leadership without the number of Members being increased.

Given the levels of commitment laid out in this report the Council felt that it would not be appropriate to propose any reduction in the Council size otherwise this would have a significant impact on our ability to continue to support the existing governance process in an effective fashion. As there are currently no proposals to reduce the size of the governance model it has been assumed that the commitment to supporting the governance model will continue at its existing level.

In light of the changing nature of internal accountability and the Council's aspirations to enhance the value provided by the overview and scrutiny and audit process it is felt necessary for all non-Executive Members to be involved in the process. At least 30 non-Executive Members will continue to need to be involved to facilitate these ambitions alongside the other commitments that they have in the Council's governance process.

The Government will publish a Levelling Up White Paper later this year, articulating how bold new policy interventions will improve opportunity and boost livelihoods across the country as the nation recovers from the pandemic. The White Paper is likely to reset the relationship between central and local government and it has been stated that councils will be at the heart of delivering the Government's programme to improve opportunities in all parts of the country. Through county deals there may be a requirement for some kind of local government reform which could impact the role of Stevenage Borough Council and the way in which certain services may be governed/delivered in future.

### 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?

## Stevenage the Place

Surrounded by the leafy countryside of Hertfordshire, Stevenage is a town (urban area) steeped in rich heritage and culture, with a long history spanning back to Saxon times.

Arguably the most significant point in the story of the town came in 1946, when it was designated as the first of the UK's post-war New Towns.

Throughout the urban development period, the New Town created neighbourhoods and communities. It attracted thousands out of London's East End with the offer of modern and affordable homes, better living conditions, and desirable jobs in a rural setting. This was just the start of our town's growth.

From 1946 until 1980, the planning and growth of Stevenage was overseen by a Development Corporation. The first masterplan was for a town of 60,000 people. The first new homes were built in 1951. Major residential development followed throughout the 1950s and 1960s. The first new factory opened in 1953. The new town centre, to the south of the original High Street, was opened by Queen Elizabeth II in 1959.

The Lister Hospital opened in the north-west of the town in 1972. The new town centre railway station opened a year later. Residential development during this decade was focused to the north of the town.

Fast forward to the modern day and the town remains a place of opportunity with affordable house prices, a great shopping and leisure offering and major road, rail and air transport links. Stevenage has a thriving business scene that's home to major business operations for some of the world's largest and most progressive multinationals including GSK, Airbus and MBDA, who are playing a leading role within life, bioscience, space and defence industries and are critical to the UK economy. Seven decades on from the birth of the New Town, Stevenage is also home to some of the UK's leading retailers and high street favourites. The Council's major regeneration programme will introduce a range of new and exciting shopping, leisure and residential opportunities for residents and consumers.

Stevenage is surrounded by the districts of North Hertfordshire and East Hertfordshire. Beyond the edge of the town is open countryside and villages such as Aston, Codicote, Datchworth, Graveley, Knebworth, Walkern, Weston and Wymondley. In more recent times, the town has continued to grow, mainly to the east and north-east. This has seen the town expand into the neighbouring district of North Hertfordshire. Stevenage is divided into distinct land use areas. The town centre, Old Town and railway station are the core of the town. They are surrounded by individual residential neighbourhoods containing around 38,000 homes. 4,500 of these have been built in, or on the edge of, the town since the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. These figures include homes in North Hertfordshire District at Great Ashby. These form part of the urban area but are outside of the Borough Council's administrative control.

Local neighbourhood centres provide shops and community facilities for residents. There are a range of leisure facilities, retail parks and supermarkets. Open spaces and play areas are well spread throughout the town. Wide roads and a cycle and pedestrian network link all parts of the town. There is an extensive commercial bus network. Most homes are within 400 metres of a bus stop. It is a short walk from the bus station to the train station.

Stevenage benefits from distinct shopping areas: the Town Centre, Roaring Meg and the Old Town. Each area offers unique experiences and a range of different brands. The Council's £1bn regeneration programme is bringing new opportunities to the heart of Stevenage by introducing new open green spaces and children's play areas along with restaurants, bars, café spaces and shops.

Improvements to existing retail units – and the development of modern, new ones – with a focus on exciting, innovative brands, together with a new public realm offer, will make Stevenage the optimal environment for investment. Our town is already bucking the trend when it comes to investment. Despite the challenges of the pandemic, we've attracted newcomers to our portfolio, rather than losing them. Along with a focus on developing an evening economy, Stevenage will be a prime destination for both daytime and evening shopping and leisure activities. Our regeneration programme is aligned with leading studies which suggest that combining commercial, leisure, residential, retail and other facilities in the town, as well as increasing the number of people living and working there, will thereby increase the demand for local services.

Stevenage was awarded £37.5m by the Government through its Towns Fund programme in March 2021. The funding was the result of our Town Investment Plan submission and will be utilised to deliver a package of projects designed to supercharge the local economy and businesses based here, continue the next phase of our transformation of the town centre as a place to live and work and enjoy, and most importantly ensure that we continue to maximise the opportunities for local people. This additional funding highlights the Government's trust in Stevenage Borough Council and our ability to deliver robust regeneration programmes. You can read the Executive Summary of the Town Investment Plan here: [www.Stevenage-Even-Better.com/my-town](http://www.Stevenage-Even-Better.com/my-town).

## **Connectivity**

Stevenage's location just 25 miles from London offers a perfect balance of urban and rural living. The town's position near both London and key transport hubs makes getting to and from the town quick and easy. Commuters can take advantage of trains into London every eight minutes during rush hour with the fastest journeys taking just 19 minutes. Stevenage's railway station is on the East Coast Main Line. There are long distance rail links between London, the south and the north of England. Commuter services connect the town to Kings Cross, Brighton, Leeds, Cambridge and Peterborough as well as nearby towns including Hitchin, Letchworth and Welwyn Garden City. There are also trains to London Moorgate and Hertford via a branch line.



Excellent north-south road connectivity is also afforded via the town's proximity to the A1 (M) which skirts around the town. East-west road connectivity is less efficient, particularly to nearby London Luton and London Stansted airports, although some A road and minor roads ensure east-west travel is possible.

## Population and demography

Stevenage Borough had a total resident population of around 87,800 in 2018, with the current estimate in 2021 being 88,427. Population growth at +5% since 2010 (+4,750 residents) has been slightly slower than the county-wide growth of +7% over the period. This can however be partly explained by a reasonably tight local area boundary with limited capacity for major housing growth.

Looking forward, ONS forecasts suggest that Stevenage will see slow population growth over the coming years, at just +2% by 2030 (+1,740 residents). This growth is broadly in line with wider county averages over the period (+3%).

At 56,200, the borough's working age resident population (16-64) is slightly higher than wider county averages (64% vs 62%) and Stevenage has a slightly smaller proportion of its population aged over 65 (15% vs 17% across the county).

## Economic Contribution

In 2018/19 Stevenage contributed a total £2.7bn in GVA towards the national economy, a 3% increase from the borough's contribution in 2015.

At current levels Stevenage is contributing around 7% towards Hertfordshire annual GVA contribution and despite the presence of some higher value economic clusters locally, GVA per workforce job is slightly lower than wider averages.

GVA Contributions			
	Stevenage	Hertfordshire	England
Total GVA (2018)	£2.7bn	£40.7bn	£1.64tn
GVA Growth (2015-2018)	+3%	+19%	+12%
GVA per workforce job (2018)	£55,540 per job	£57,910 per job	£57,290 per job

Based on the 2017 version of the East of England Forecasting Model (EEFM, 2017), jobs growth by 2030 in Stevenage is estimated at around 2,200 jobs. At +5%, this is slightly below forecast growth across Hertfordshire (+6%), although slightly higher forecast GVA per job prospects locally means that the overall pace of GVA growth in Stevenage is forecast to be in line with county averages, albeit from a lower base.

EEFM Econometric Forecasts, 2017 (2013 Prices)						
	Stevenage			Hertfordshire		
	2018	2030	Growth	2018	2030	Growth
<b>Total Jobs</b>	<b>46,600</b>	<b>48,800</b>	<b>+5%</b>	<b>692,000</b>	<b>733,000</b>	<b>+6%</b>
<b>Total GVA</b>	<b>£2.28bn</b>	<b>£2.71bn</b>	<b>+19%</b>	<b>£35.3bn</b>	<b>£42bn</b>	<b>+19%</b>
<b>GVA per job</b>	<b>£48,800</b>	<b>55,600</b>	<b>+14%</b>	<b>51,100</b>	<b>57,300</b>	<b>+12%</b>
<b>GVA per capita</b>	<b>£25,800</b>	<b>28,400</b>	<b>+10%</b>	<b>29,500</b>	<b>32,000</b>	<b>+8%</b>

Underlying sector analysis shows that the majority of jobs growth is forecast among some of Stevenage's already large sectors, including jobs growth in Health and Care (+1,100 jobs), Retail, Education, Professional Services and Public Administration (all +200 jobs).

Workforce Jobs Change by 2030 in Key Sectors (>1,500 jobs)				
	2018 EEFM Job Estimates	Forecast Jobs Change by 2030	Jobs Change by 2030 (%)	Jobs change by 2030 across Herts. (%)
Health & care	8,800	+1,100	13%	11%
Retail	5,000	+200	4%	3%
Manufacturing	4,900	-400	-8%	-10%
Education	4,000	+200	5%	6%
Business services	2,700	+100	4%	2%
Professional services	2,500	+200	8%	9%
Construction	2,500	+100	4%	3%
Wholesale	2,300	-100	-4%	-9%
Accommodation & food service	2,200	+100	5%	5%
Computer related activity	1,900	+100	5%	8%
Public administration	1,800	+200	11%	10%

Although actual jobs growth in manufacturing has increased by +20% (2015-2018) locally, the EEFM forecasts a decline in manufacturing jobs locally. This may largely be the product of the econometric forecasts drawing on nationally derived sector prospects, rather than more locally observed trends.

The remaining sectors in Stevenage are forecast to remain reasonably static over the years and across all sectors, forecast growth is broadly in line with expected change across Hertfordshire.

## Business Environment

Stevenage is currently home to around 3,710 businesses, the majority of which are micro, small and medium sized enterprises. There are two main employment areas, one to the west of the town centre at Gunnels Wood (largest employment area in Hertfordshire and one of the largest in the East of England) and one to the north-east at Pin Green. One of Stevenage's key benefits is its outstanding business offer.

The presence of some large employers in the town, alongside a function of in and out commuting however means that business density is relatively low when compared to wider county and national averages. Business start-up rates in Stevenage have also been reasonably low in recent years, although longer-term survival rates among start-ups alongside overall business growth have largely been on par with wider averages.

Stevenage is a leading Life Sciences Centre, not just in the UK but across the globe. The town is home to hundreds of Life and Bioscience organisations including three international, sector-leading organisations in Airbus, MBDA and GSK, all of which are based on Gunnels Wood Road,.

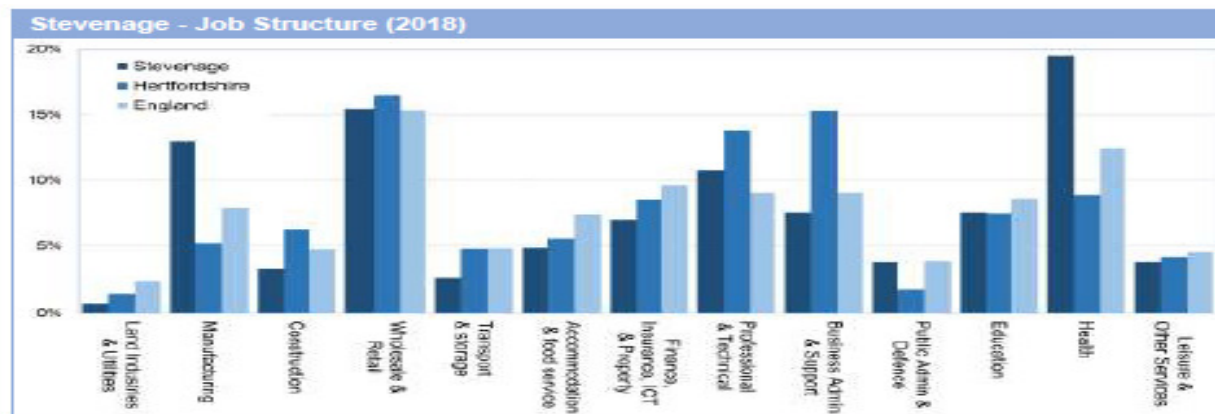
The presence of GSK and Airbus is a key driver for wider clusters of Life and Bioscience organisations forming in Stevenage. These two businesses alone provide around 2,500 jobs in the town and the presence of GSK in particular has recently led to the creation of the Stevenage Bioscience Catalyst, which is focusing on intensive gene therapy research and development (R&D) and is a Catapult Manufacturing Centre. The Cell and Gene Therapy Catapult (R&D) is responsible for 7% global market share/27% of European market. This formation of the R&D cluster has helped attract inward investment and high value science-related businesses to the town. Other notable employers present include Fujitsu, BAE Systems, DuPont and Norwich Union, all of which provide important high value jobs and unique selling point value to Stevenage.

Key Businesses	
Fujitsu (IT)	EADS- Airbus (aerospace)
GSK (pharma)	MBDA (missile production)
BAE Systems (aerospace)	Aeroflex (electronics)
Norwich Union (Services)	Astrium (aerospace)
Tesco (retail)	Dupont (chemicals)

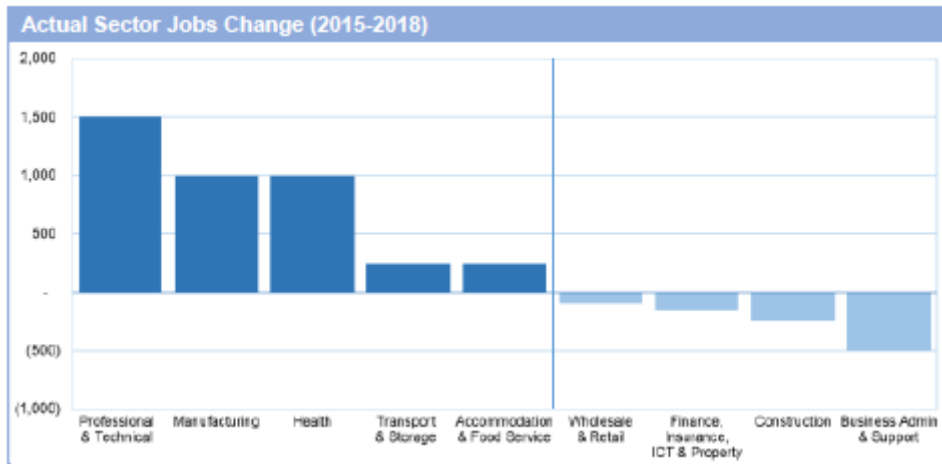
There are currently around 46,000 jobs located in Stevenage and jobs growth in recent years has been reasonably steady (+5%), albeit at around half the pace of jobs growth observed at the county level. This has meant that jobs density in Stevenage is currently slightly lower than elsewhere in Hertfordshire, although both jobs growth and employment densities in Stevenage are notably both higher than at national levels.

Jobs comparisons			
	Stevenage	Hertfordshire	England
Workforce Jobs	46,000	665,000	26.84m
Jobs density per 100 working age residents	83	90	77
Jobs growth 2015-2018	4.6%	10.5%	3.5%

Underlying analysis of employment by sector shows a prevalence of jobs in the Health and Manufacturing sectors in Stevenage and slightly smaller proportions of jobs in Professional and Business Service and Construction sectors when compared to wider County averages.



Further trend analysis shows significant growth locally in Professional, Scientific and Technical Services, Wholesale, Manufacturing and Health jobs in Stevenage in recent years, with some losses in employment observed in Business Administration since 2015.



Whilst recent observed changes in jobs in various sectors mirrors county and national trends such as declining retail and the shift towards ecommerce and online retailing, significant growth in manufacturing is notable given that for many years a decline in manufacturing employment has been an observed trend nationally. This data is supported by other evidence that highlights an increase in take-up of light industrial workspaces in Stevenage (and in wider Hertfordshire). Significant growth in Professional, Scientific and Technical jobs is also notable, and is evidence of the growth of the town's bio-science cluster in recent years.

### Economic Activity and Workforce Engagement

Resident-based economic activity and employment rates in Stevenage are high when compared to county and national levels, inferring a good supply of labour locally. Similarly, unemployment is currently slightly lower locally when compared to wider county and national averages.

Stevenage Resident Population and Economic Activity			
	Stevenage	Hertfordshire	England
Total Population (2018)	87,750	1.18m	55.98m
aged under 16	20.7%	20.5%	19.2%
Working-age (16-64)	64.0%	62.4%	62.6%
aged over 65	15.2%	17.0%	18.2%
Economically Active	84.4% (47,200)	80.8%	79.1%
Employment Rate	82.8% (46,300)	78.1%	75.9%
Unemployment Rate	2.7% (1,275)	3.4%	3.9%

## Skills Infrastructure, Workforce Skills and Occupations

Stevenage is currently served by six secondary schools, a Studio School, three Special Schools, two further education colleges and a training centre. Hertfordshire County Council, as the Local Education Authority, is responsible for the planning of secondary school places in Stevenage.

The town's main college, North Hertfordshire College offers a range of courses including ESOL and A–Levels, Access to University through to Honours Degrees, HNCs and HNDs. Rated as a 'Good' provider by OFSTED, the college is a great local alternative to mainstream higher education that is provided by mainstream universities and colleges.

Resident-based skills and occupations evidence highlights (a) lower levels of higher order skills and occupations among Stevenage's resident working-age population and (b) significantly higher proportions of lower level skills and lower order occupations locally.

Stevenage Residents - Skills and Occupations			
	Stevenage	Hertfordshire	England
Qualified to NVQ4	32.7%	42.4%	39.0%
Qualified to NVQ 3	20.7%	16.6%	18.7%
Qualified to NVQ 2	16.9%	19.5%	17.3%
Qualified to NVQ L1	21.5%	9.8%	10.6%
Other / No qualifications	8.2%	11.7%	14.4%
Higher Order Occupations (SOC 1-3)	44.2%	52.4%	48.0%
Lower Order Occupations (SOC 6-9)	37.4%	27.9%	32.3%

The mismatch between jobs available locally is likely the product of low resident workforce skills and attainment. In Stevenage, only 3 in every 10 residents are educated to degree level compared to 4 in 10 across Hertfordshire and England. The Hertfordshire Skills Strategy seeks to proactively support young adults into further education and collaboration with businesses and local educational institutions will help to improve skills performance further.

The Hertfordshire Skills Strategy to 2020, highlights the plans to provide support for young people aged 16 – 24 into transition to work, working towards fuller employment in the wider Hertfordshire area, harnessing skills to sustain and support the SME base and collaborations between

businesses and education providers to improve the skills of the workforce. The emerging countywide Skills Strategy is likely to build further on these ambitions and will be reflected in local plans specifically for Stevenage.

## Commuting Flows

Commuting evidence suggests low levels of self-containment in Stevenage with over half of residents (51%) commuting elsewhere daily. The borough also attracts a significant number of inflow commuters (54%), which is again high. This infers a highly mobile resident workforce that is well integrated with surrounding economic centres, but that there is a poor mismatch between the jobs available in the borough and resident demands. Note, of the 19% of residents commuting elsewhere, this is largely to London authorities, highlighting the effects of Stevenage's proximity and ease of access to the capital. The overall position is that Stevenage is a net importer of commuters.

Stevenage Commuter Inflows / Outflows					
Stevenage Workforce Origins			Resident Workforce Destinations		
	Total	%		Total	%
Stevenage	17,490	46%	Stevenage	17,490	49%
North Herts.	6,360	17%	North Herts.	3,710	10%
Central Beds.	3,090	8%	Welwyn Hatfield	3,670	10%
East Herts.	1,570	4%	East Herts.	1,560	4%
Welwyn Hatfield	1,470	4%	Westminster	1,010	3%
Luton	1,110	3%	St Albans	760	2%
St Albans	770	2%	Central Beds.	550	2%
South Cambs.	380	1%	Luton	510	1%
Elsewhere	6,030	16%	Elsewhere	6,780	19%
Total	38,260	-	Total	36,040	-

## Annual Earnings

The disparity between jobs available in Stevenage and jobs filled by local residents is also reflected in earnings evidence. In 2019, median annual gross resident earnings were some £6,400 short of workplace-based salaries (£29,100 per resident vs £35,500 per workplace job respectively), reflecting the influence of high value activities locally which are filled by in-commuters. This is a different picture to the county average, where workplace-based salaries are lower than resident-based earnings.

Resident and Workplace-based Annual Earnings			
	Stevenage	Hertfordshire	England
Resident-based Median Average Annual Earnings	£29,100	£35,450	£30,660
Workplace-based Median Average Earnings	£35,500	£32,730	£30,660
Difference	+/-£6,400	+/-£2,710	-

## Deprivation

Whilst the presence of high value jobs has improved the towns overall economic contribution, as mentioned previously GVA per job remains slightly lower than wider averages and the presence of high value activities locally has arguably had a limited ‘trickle down’ effect that has benefitted local communities.

Stevenage has some of the most deprived wards in Hertfordshire and the East of England. There are some areas of serious deprivation, particularly in the Bedwell neighbourhood.

Life expectancy is lower than the Hertfordshire average, in some cases by 10 years. Stevenage also has higher than average levels of smoking, obesity, physical inactivity and premature deaths from heart disease and cancer.

Earnings is itself a core driver for levels of deprivation in any economy, and evidence from the 2019 Indices of Deprivation ranked Stevenage as being the 117th most deprived local area nationally (out of 317 localities). This places the borough among the 2nd most deprived quintile nationally.

Underlying sub-domains highlight specific challenges locally, particularly in education deprivation and crime, where Stevenage performs reasonably poorly on these measures of deprivation. Conversely, Stevenage performs reasonably well in terms of health deprivation and disability and very well on living environment measures, comprising housing and air quality indicators.

At a more local level, there are acute pockets of deprivation present within the town, with 9% of people living in some of the most deprived LSOA’s in England.



Stevenage – Indices of Multiple Deprivation (ID) 2019 results		
	Rank Out of 317 Local Areas (1 = Most Deprived Nationally)	Local Area Quintile Nationally
Stevenage's overall score	117 <sup>th</sup> Most Deprived	2 <sup>nd</sup> Most Deprived
<b>Domains</b>		
Income Deprivation	100 <sup>th</sup> Most Deprived	2 <sup>nd</sup> Most Deprived
Employment Deprivation	108 <sup>th</sup> Most Deprived	2 <sup>nd</sup> Most Deprived
Education Deprivation	60 <sup>th</sup> Most Deprived	1 <sup>st</sup> Most Deprived
Health Deprivation & Disability	152 <sup>nd</sup> Most Deprived	3 <sup>rd</sup> Most Deprived
Crime	91 <sup>st</sup> Most Deprived	2 <sup>nd</sup> Most Deprived
Barriers to Housing & Services	68 <sup>th</sup> Most Deprived	2 <sup>nd</sup> Most Deprived
Living Environment Deprivation	268 <sup>th</sup> Most Deprived	5 <sup>th</sup> Most Deprived

Stevenage has reasonably high levels of deprivation, but with a growing prized Life Science and aerospace cluster present, alongside ‘spill-over’ opportunities to capitalise on the future success of the capital and the Oxford-Cambridge Arc and recent success in upskilling effort locally, there is a clear opportunity for ensuring that future high value activities attracted to Stevenage can benefit local communities, thus reducing levels of economic deprivation locally.

### **Housing and Affordability**

Over the recent years, increasing house prices in London have resulted in a ‘ripple effect’ that has increased demand for housing in towns surrounding the capital, particularly those such as Stevenage where ease of connectivity to London’s core is possible.

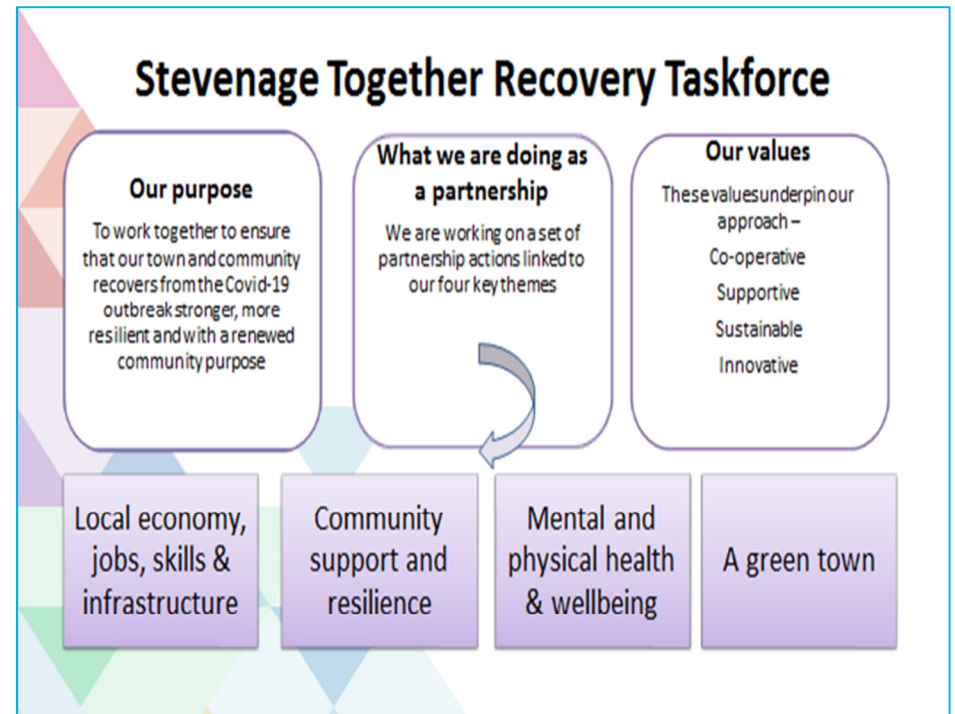
As with many towns surrounding the capital house prices in Stevenage have grown substantially, with a 21% increase in prices witnessed since December 2015. As of December 2018, median average house prices in Stevenage were £274,950, compared to £240,000 across England.

An observed trend across Hertfordshire in recent years has been the loss of around 771,000 sq m of commercial floor space, and around half of this has been lost to residential uses.

There is a serious lack of affordable homes. Entry-level housing costs 8.9 times more than median residential salaries. Affordable housing completions barely keep pace with sales through Right to Buy.

### **Other Challenges and Constraints**

**Covid Recovery** - The effects of the pandemic have required the Council to quickly adapt services to provide support for residents and businesses and to manage the impacts of the pandemic. We can't do this alone - partnership working and working with communities is key to our recovery and all the work we do to support our community. The pandemic has had significant impacts on our residents and businesses in the town, which is reflected in areas of increasing demand or pressures in different service areas such as homelessness support and advice, Council Tax and Housing Benefits, income and rents, and the capacity of Environmental Health team who have played a leading role in Local Outbreak Management. We anticipate that these pressures will be long-felt and will require the ongoing focus of the Council and its partners. The Council is taking a co-operative approach to recovery through the Stevenage Together local strategic partnership. The partnership, acting as a Covid Recovery Taskforce, is focussing on a number of key areas, many of which will be supported by the delivery of the Council's external facing strands of its FTFC programme (specifically Regeneration, Housing Development, Co-operative Neighbourhoods and Clean, Green, Safe and Thriving Town).



**Ongoing Austerity** - With the scale of recent funding restrictions there is undoubtedly a need to build our financial resilience. Through budgetary pressures and a need to support the economic recovery, councils face tough challenges in how they spend taxpayers' money. With this in mind, there is no room for financial error in achieving savings and income targets. Every £ saved now means the protection of frontline services. Along with changing demographics which lead to increased service demand, financial decisions are coming under even closer scrutiny.

We are continuously finding new ways of delivering improved services at lower cost. Moving forward there will be an ongoing need to further develop our strategic, joined-up approach to finding the efficiency savings that Stevenage Borough Council needs.

**Capacity and Change** - The lack of capacity in an organisation to make change is usually identified as the main cause of the failure to deliver results. We recognise that it is essential that the Council has a workforce that is sufficient, skilled and supported to deliver high quality services and to support change. In order to achieve this, new ways of working are being designed and implemented across the organisation. The

Council’s emerging Transformation programme will be implemented over the next 2 to 3 years and will improve the customer service experience whilst allowing capacity to be released to support the Council’s corporate priorities and to deliver required savings.

Through the programme we will need to assess and develop staff to ensure we have a workforce fit for the future. As well as commercial behaviours, there are a whole set of other behaviours needed in the new local government landscape, such as creativity, innovation, challenge, and the appetite for risk.

### Corporate Priorities

In response to the challenges highlighted above we have set a number of long term priorities for the town and Council through our Future Town, Future Council programme.

The Council’s long term priorities include:

Priority	Programme Aim	Programme outcomes
Transforming our town	Create a vibrant town centre where people want to live, work and play	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A new healthy, sustainable and vibrant town centre fit for the 21st Century and delivered through a phased regeneration programme</li> <li>• Reflecting on and maximising the benefits of our new Town’s heritage</li> <li>• Enhancing sustainable transport</li> <li>• Transforming the town centre for businesses, residents and visitors</li> <li>• Upskilling and providing opportunities for our residents</li> <li>• Supercharging businesses to grow and develop, utilising our existing national and international status as a strong foundation</li> </ul>
More Social and Affordable Homes Programme	Increase the number of social and affordable homes in Stevenage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased number of social and affordable houses in Stevenage</li> <li>• Improved access to the housing market in Stevenage for greater number of residents</li> </ul>

<p>Co-operative Neighbourhoods</p>	<p>Work with our communities to improve our neighbourhoods</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clean and green neighbourhoods.</li> <li>• Residents feel that they can work with the Council and other organisations to help meet the needs of the local area.</li> <li>• Staff better understand the town’s communities and through doing so are more able to deliver and support the change that is required, including through community plans.</li> <li>• Public spaces to be seen as community assets – officers to work with the local communities to rejuvenate public spaces in a co-operative and co-productive way. This will encourage their use, make them more attractive, engender ownership and responsibility, and result in them being better cared for by the Council and residents.</li> <li>• The community centres are efficiently run, well-managed and, most importantly, meet local needs.</li> <li>• Improved quality and safety of the Council’s built assets in neighbourhoods including council housing, garages and community buildings.</li> </ul>
<p>Clean, Green, Safe and Thriving Town</p>	<p>Improve the quality of life of Stevenage residents and enhanced experience for visitors</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working to reduce health inequalities and improve the health and wellbeing of Stevenage residents</li> <li>• Building resilient communities, reducing crime and disorder and helping people feel safe</li> <li>• Making Stevenage a ‘destination creative’ town</li> <li>• Unlocking opportunities for the local economy and our residents, ensuring that future regeneration and growth in Stevenage works for everyone</li> <li>• Achieving net zero Council emissions by 2030 and leading work to achieve this aim for the town, its businesses and residents</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establishing Stevenage as a leader in sustainable transport</li> <li>• Enhancing Stevenage's biodiversity by conserving, restoring, recreating and reconnecting wildlife habitats, whilst increasing awareness and appreciation of Stevenage's wildlife</li> </ul>
Making Your Money Count	Ensure sufficient resources are available to deliver on the Council's priorities while remaining financially resilient to withstand the impact of COVID and/or recovery phase	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To improve the customer journey and experience by enabling customers to engage and communicate with the Council when and how it best suits them including the provision of enhanced digital interventions</li> <li>• To improve the productivity of the workforce through the introduction of streamlined processes and ways of working</li> <li>• To retain wealth locally and support local employment through the insourcing of contracts wherever it is deemed viable to do so</li> <li>• To ensure the Council remains financially resilient in order to continue to deliver its key priorities and operate its services for residents &amp; businesses</li> </ul>

## 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>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>What governance model will your authority operate? e.g. Committee System, Executive or other?</i></li> <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>
	<b>Analysis</b>	<p>Stevenage Borough Council will continue to operate under the ‘Strong Leader and Cabinet’ model in line with the provisions of the Local Government Act 2000 and the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. The Leader, Deputy Leader and Executive Portfolio Holders, a total of 8 positions, are the busiest roles within the Council’s governance structures.</p> <p>The Leader will continue to be elected for up to a four-year term of office at the Annual Council meeting in May. Under the strong leader arrangements, the Leader determines the makeup of the Executive and also holds a Portfolio.</p> <p>Retaining this structure will provide the strong leadership and governance that is required to deliver the priorities of the town and our residents as outlined earlier within this submission.</p>

<b>Portfolios</b>	<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<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>
	<b>Analysis</b>	<p>It is anticipated that the current governance arrangements will continue.</p> <p>For 2021/22, each of the seven Members of the Executive (excluding the Leader) has responsibility for one of the following Portfolio areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Resources</li> <li>• Environment and Regeneration</li> <li>• Children, Young People, Leisure and Culture</li> <li>• Housing, Health and Older People</li> <li>• Economy, Enterprise and Transport</li> <li>• Communities, Community Safety and Equalities</li> <li>• Neighbourhoods and Co-operative Working</li> </ul> <p>The key areas of work for the Leader are to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide political leadership to the Council</li> <li>• Appoint other Councillors to the Executive</li> <li>• Represent Stevenage Borough Council and act as an ambassador for the Authority</li> <li>• Manage and lead the work of the Executive</li> <li>• Participate in the collective decision making of the Executive</li> <li>• Demonstrate a commitment to high ethical standards of behaviour and governance</li> <li>• Work with Scrutiny</li> <li>• Work with Officers to lead the organisation</li> <li>• Act for Stevenage Borough Council on Hertfordshire County wide bodies</li> <li>• Lead partnership and community work</li> </ul> <p>The key areas of work for all seven Executive Members are to:</p>

- Lead on their Portfolio
- Contribute to the setting of a strategic agenda and work programme for the Portfolio
- Provide representation for the Portfolio
- Report and communicate on progress and key issues within the Portfolio
- Lead on significant property transactions
- Take an active part in Executive meetings and decision making
- Work with Scrutiny
- Lead partnership and community work in their Portfolio areas

The Executive is scheduled to meet on at least 10 occasions each year and is the main decision-making body of the Council. While the Constitution does provide for decisions to be made by individual Executive Members, in practice this happens infrequently. However, they are consulted prior to the making of any Officer Key Decisions. Portfolio Holders do actively lead their Portfolios and ensure they are always well briefed in preparation for meetings. They are regularly consulted by Strategic and Assistant Directors and are kept fully aware of service activity within their portfolios.

The role of the Portfolio Holders is not considered to be full time. However, it is necessary for the Portfolio Holders to make a substantial time commitment to properly carry out their roles. Executive Members have established informal panels and working groups to assist in the progression of key issues. Examples include the Housing Development & Regeneration Working Group (which meets 12 times a year) and the Commercial & Investment Working group (which meets quarterly).

In addition to formal Executive meetings, the Portfolio Holders are expected to represent the Authority on bodies outside of the Council. As senior representatives of the Council, Executive Members are called upon to participate in partnership and regional bodies, as well as certain voluntary organisations. The demands made by these bodies vary, but are a significant call upon the time of Executive Members.

Executive Members are, on occasion, requested to attend Scrutiny meetings to report on activity in their Portfolio area.

Three Executive Members also serve on each of two Joint Committees, namely the Joint Revenues & Benefits Committee (with East Herts District Council Councillors), which meets once a year to monitor the activities of the Shared SBC/EHDC Revenues & Benefits Service; and the Joint CCTV Partnership



		Committee, which meets twice a year to monitor the activities of the Council's CCTV partnership with East Herts, North Herts and Hertsmere District/Borough Councils.
<b>Delegated Responsibilities</b>	<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<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>
	Analysis	<p>The functions of the Executive are set out in Part 3 of the Council's Constitution and include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Making recommendations to Council on overall objectives, policy, priorities and budget (revenue and capital)</li> <li>• Monitoring the overall budget, including consideration of supplementary estimates within set financial limits</li> <li>• Providing advice to Portfolio Holders and officers on budget preparation</li> <li>• Making recommendations to Council on the level of Council Tax, Council Tax discount, housing rent levels, borrowing limits and treasury management policy and policy on discretionary rate relief</li> <li>• Setting policy and strategy on any matter not specifically reserved or delegated elsewhere under the Council's policy and budget framework</li> <li>• Making decisions on behalf of the council within the policy framework set by the council, for instance in relation to the purchase and sale of land</li> </ul> <p>Decision making of the Executive is by all eight Portfolio Holders, including the Leader.</p> <p>The need for rapid decision making and the efficient delivery of services to the public in a wide range of matters means that it is not possible for elected Council Members to be directly involved in the detail of all decisions. Therefore, the Council has delegated a number of actions to officers, and these are detailed in the Scheme of Delegation (in Part 3 of the Council's constitution) which is regularly monitored and amended as required.</p>

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	
<b>Internal Scrutiny</b>	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.
<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<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>Stevenage Borough Council will continue to operate three Scrutiny Committees Overview and Scrutiny with 14 Members currently serving, and two Select Committees: 'Community' with 10 Members serving and 'Environment and Economy' with 11 Members.</p> <p>The Council reviews the operation of these committees periodically and, in the past, the size of these committees has varied. The Council has settled on this model since 2013 as it works well with all three committees delivering a wide range of review work and challenge for the Executive. There were previously 7 and then 4 scrutiny committees which were unsustainable and offered poor challenge and value for money compared to the current model.</p> <p>Each of the three Scrutiny Committees agrees its own work programmes and this is reviewed by the Council on an annual basis. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee carries out their own reviews and have recently reviewed the Council staff sickness</p>

rates and a large review of the whole scrutiny function at the Council. It meets on average 10 times a year and sits within the call-in period of the Executive Committee and scrutinises each of the items that the Executive have resolved.

The two Select Committees meet on average 6 to 8 times a year and carry out a mixture of longer in depth reviews and short term one off items. With their in-depth reviews which are supported by the officer Strategic Leadership Team and the Scrutiny Officer, individual Scrutiny Members are invited to take on a lead role in connection to the review. In addition, Members undertake site visits and have joined informal working groups which undertake their own work and then report back to the formal Select Committee meetings. The Select Committees also carry out more short term reviews interviewing Executive Portfolio Holders, monitoring their own Action Tracker of past scrutiny reviews and meeting with the Executive Portfolio Holder to carry out pre-scrutiny at Portfolio Holder Advisory Groups (on average 3 to 4 meetings a year)

Main reviews that the Environment and Economy and the Community Select Committees have undertaken in the last few years include:

- The Neighbourhood Centres – Looking at the public realm, retail offer, resident groups, coming up with solutions to improve the area
- Local Post Offices – following local difficulties with the service engaging with users, sub post office providers in retail settings, National Association of Sub-postmasters
- Stevenage Train Station passenger experience following timetabling difficulties and looking at the 5<sup>th</sup> Platform delivery – engaging with rail users, HCC, Network Rail, and rail provider GTR
- The Indoor Market, engaged with market traders, users and industry experts to maximise the opportunities for traders and shoppers
- The economic impact of Covid-19 on the local economy and the Council's response – a far reaching review to be concluded in 2021
- Scrutiny of the Council's response to the Climate change emergency – begun in 2021

Main reviews that the Community Select Committee have undertaken in the last few

	<p>years include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review of the Council’s Sports and Leisure offer leading to key recommendations informing a new Leisure Contract procurement</li> <li>• Housing Allocations – leading to reform of the then existing bidding system</li> <li>• Resident Engagement – improving the way the Council engages with residents</li> <li>• Damp and Mould in Council Housing Stock – engaging with tenants to bring in a new reporting and intervention programme to remedy properties suffering with this problem</li> <li>• Public Health – annual meetings with the HCC Director of Public Health to review of diabetes, smoking, healthy Stevenage hub, and programmes to promote improved local public health</li> <li>• Crime and Disorder – annual review to hold to account the performance of the Police, Council and partners engaged community safety in the borough</li> </ul> <p>The Council’s three scrutiny committees comprising 23 Members, with some overlap of Members on the three committees, engage in valuable work in holding the Executive to account and undertake their own reviews of local services with partners to bring improvements for residents and to the local area.</p> <p>Through the cross party working group it has been agreed that the above scrutiny arrangements will continue and will not be subject to significant change.</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="694 1098 884 1286"> <p><i>Key lines of explanation</i></p> </td> <td data-bbox="884 1098 2145 1286"> <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="694 1286 884 1394"> <p><b>Analysis</b></p> </td> <td data-bbox="884 1286 2145 1394"> <p>The Borough-wide Planning &amp; Development Committee comprises 14 Members of the Council and meets monthly, primarily to consider major planning applications and those applications “called-in” by Members. Executive Members are permitted to serve on the</p> </td> </tr> </table>	<p><i>Key lines of explanation</i></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><b>Analysis</b></p>	<p>The Borough-wide Planning &amp; Development Committee comprises 14 Members of the Council and meets monthly, primarily to consider major planning applications and those applications “called-in” by Members. Executive Members are permitted to serve on the</p>
<p><i>Key lines of explanation</i></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><b>Analysis</b></p>	<p>The Borough-wide Planning &amp; Development Committee comprises 14 Members of the Council and meets monthly, primarily to consider major planning applications and those applications “called-in” by Members. Executive Members are permitted to serve on the</p>				

		<p>Committee (currently, one Executive Member is serving on the Committee). Occasionally, additional Committee meetings will be arranged to solely consider large scale or contentious planning applications. The Committee is also consulted on major planning policy items (such as Supplementary Planning Documents), although decisions on approving such documents resides with the Executive.</p> <p>Planning &amp; Development Committee Members are provided with regular training, and new Members are trained before they are allowed to serve on the Committee.</p> <p>Around 5% of applications received by the Council will be decided by the Planning &amp; Development Committee meeting. The Council receives around 800 applications per annum. During the financial year of 2020/21, the Council held 11 scheduled meetings and determined 33 applications. This equates to around 3 applications per meeting. A special meeting was held to consider one other high-profile application. This workload is considered appropriate and provides a manageable amount of work for each meeting.</p> <p>No changes are planned in the way planning matters are determined, unless there is change in the national planning framework requirements.</p>
<p><b>Licensing / General Purposes Committees</b></p>	<p><i>Key lines of explanation</i></p>	<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>
	<p>Analysis</p>	<p>The Council's General Purposes Committee comprises 14 Members, and meets to consider and determine licensing policy matters (such as the Licensing Act 2003 Policy, Gambling Policy, Taxi Policy etc.) before they are considered by the Executive, as well as conducting hearings into whether Hackney Carriage/Private Hire Vehicle Drivers are "fit and proper" persons to hold such licenses. It meets whenever a Policy is to be reviewed or when a Taxi Driver Hearing is required. The Committee did not meet at all during 2020/21, but met four times during 2019/20. It is due to meet next in</p>

		<p>January 2022 to consider an updated Gambling Policy.</p> <p>The Licensing Committee (comprising the same 14 Members as the General Purposes Committee) meets on an ad hoc basis solely to conduct hearings in respect of Licensing Act 2003 applications. Due to a substantial degree of Officer delegation in dealing with licensing matters, the Committee has only met once in recent years (in August 2021), with another meeting planned for late October 2021.</p> <p>Training is provided for Members of the Committee, both generally, and specifically for new Members regarding hearings, before they sit on the Committee for the first time.</p> <p>These arrangements are not subject to change.</p>
<b>Other Regulatory Bodies</b>	<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<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>
	Analysis	<p><b>Audit Committee</b></p> <p>This Committee comprises 10 Members (+ 1 Independent Non-voting Member) and meets 5/6 times a year. The main responsibilities of the Committee are to consider the annual accounts; risk management; fraud prevention; the audit plans of the External Auditor and the Internal Auditor; monitor Internal Audit performance; and monitor management response to both Internal and External Audit recommendations. Training is provided for Audit Committee Members to assist them in possessing a degree of financial understanding to properly discharge their responsibility as Members of the Committee. No changes are planned in regards to the Council's Audit Committee as the governance approach is deemed proportionate and fit for purpose.</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</i></li> </ul>

	<p><i>workload? What proportion of this work is undertaken by portfolio holders?</i></p> <p>➤ <i>What other external bodies will members be involved in? And what is the anticipated workload?</i></p>
<p>Analysis</p>	<p>The Council is represented by the Leader and/or Executive Portfolio Holders on a number of national, regional and local partnerships as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stevenage Development Board – Leader and Portfolio Holder for Environment &amp; Regeneration</li> <li>• Hertfordshire Growth Board – Leader is Vice Chair of the board</li> <li>• Covid Outbreak Management Board – Leader</li> <li>• District Councils Network – Leader</li> <li>• North East Central Herts (NECH) Growth Corridor Board – Leader (Chair)</li> <li>• NECH – Life Sciences – Leader</li> <li>• NECH – Community Wealth Building – Leader</li> <li>• Hertfordshire Climate Change and Sustainability Partnership - Portfolio Holder for Environment &amp; Regeneration</li> <li>• Stevenage Together Partnership – Leader (Chair) + other Executive Members</li> <li>• Economy Taskforce - Portfolio Holder for Economy, Enterprise &amp; Transport (Chair)</li> <li>• Stevenage Equalities Commission – Portfolio Holder for Communities, Community Safety &amp; Equalities</li> <li>• East Coast Mainline Consortium - Portfolio Holder for Economy, Enterprise &amp; Transport</li> <li>• UK Innovation Corridor Board - Portfolio Holder for Environment &amp; Regeneration</li> <li>• Co-operative Councils Innovation Network – Leader (Chair)</li> <li>• LGA Resources Board – Leader</li> <li>• LGA Culture, Tourism and Sport Board – Portfolio Holder for Children, Young People, Leisure &amp; Culture</li> <li>• London Marathon Board - Portfolio Holder for Children, Young People, Leisure &amp; Culture</li> <li>• Arts and Heritage Forum - Portfolio Holder for Children, Young People, Leisure &amp; Culture</li> </ul>

- Hertfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) – Leader
- East of England LGA Infrastructure & Growth Board - Portfolio Holder for Environment & Regeneration
- Town & Country Planning Association - Portfolio Holder for Environment & Regeneration
- UK Net 100 Local Government Network - Portfolio Holder for Environment & Regeneration
- ARCH – Portfolio Holder for Housing, Health & Older People
- Healthy Stevenage Partnership - Portfolio Holder for Housing, Health & Older People

Stevenage is playing a pivotal role on the Hertfordshire Growth Board, which is the way partners across the county are now working together to manage future growth and support economic recovery. Through working in partnership we are committed to creating happy, healthy, green communities so that everyone can feel they belong in Hertfordshire and can benefit from its success. It means making places that contribute to people's health, happiness and well-being without compromising the future or our environment. It means ensuring that Hertfordshire continues to contribute to the UK and national economy while developing a sustainable local economy for the benefit of all of its residents.

Our Leader is driving this agenda forward through her roles as the Vice Chair of the Board and Chair of the North, East and Central Herts Growth Corridor. The Council is also sponsoring or leading on a number of workstreams including life sciences, climate change and sustainability, and community wealth building.

In addition to the Herts Growth Board and the national, regional and local partnerships listed above, some Councillors are appointed annually by the Council to outside bodies. These appointments to outside bodies are listed on the Council's website.

In May 2021 there were 41 separate Councillor appointments to 38 outside bodies. These organisations are a mix of local or regional charities, and partnerships. Most of these are local organisations, but appointments are made to wider partnerships such



	as the Luton Airport Consultative Committee (4 meetings per year), and the Herts Police and Crime Commissioner Panel (4 meetings per year). There are also organisations which Portfolio Holders are appointed to, such as the East of England LGA (4 meetings per year) and the Herts Waste Partnership (4 meetings per year).
--	---

## 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	Councillors in Stevenage carry out their representational role through expected communication channels, including: email, letters, face to face and social media. They often serve as the conduit by which complex resident issues are highlighted and resolved, helping to supplement the corporate reporting tools that are available to residents and Members where necessary. This has been further augmented through their

		<p>involvement as part of the Council's Co-operative Neighbourhoods programme, which seeks to better focus Stevenage Borough Council's customer facing services on a geographic basis, in order to break down the traditional barriers between service units and to better support Councillors in their delivery of outcomes for residents.</p> <p>Councillors typically hold ward surgeries on a regular basis, utilise local notice boards, and contact residents over the phone, email or text in order to help them resolve specific issues. All of this designed to remove the barriers to engaging with local Members by providing as many channels of communication as possible. In recent years, social media has been a revelation in this area and has opened the door to many residents who may not have the time or inclination to attend a ward surgery or residents meeting.</p> <p>Our Social Inclusion Partnership, Youth Council and other forums are some of the mechanisms that enable our councillors to engage with minority groups and young people. Many Councillors are also involved with the local VCSE sector, working with and lending their support or expertise as trustees of local voluntary organisations. This further helps to build relationships with the local community both in terms of working with key community stakeholders, but also in working with organisations that support traditionally hard to reach groups.</p> <p>Councillors also participate in public residents meetings when they are held. They leave the organisation of these meetings to local residents, but attend and participate in the discussions, answer questions and pass on information to council officers. They often work closely with the chair of these meetings, although this is in an advisory capacity rather than being involving in the administration of the groups.</p> <p>A Co-operative Engagement Framework proposal – involving new arrangements to ensure SBC tenants and residents have a range of more dynamic opportunities to participate in the management of their homes and neighbourhoods was agreed by the Executive in June 2021. These agreed arrangements aim to better connect with SBC's co-operative neighbourhoods programme whilst also responding to the Social Housing White Paper 'a charter for social housing residents'. We also considered the recommendations made as a result of the Tenants Participation Advisory Service report that explored tenant scrutiny arrangements at SBC and was concluded in 2020.</p> <p>Resident involvement was originally managed by the Council's Housing service and subsequently Stevenage Homes in 2012 whereby a variety of structures were established to enable tenant and resident participation with</p>
--	--	--

		<p>Housing functions.</p> <p>Following a business unit review in 2019, with a focus on enabling co-operative working, tenant and resident participation functions merged into a new community development service. It was then identified that whilst there were a number of structures and mechanisms for resident participation, the number and diversity of individual residents actually engaged was limited. The recommendations approved by the Executive this year set out, amongst others, how improvements will be made to develop a new housing forum to create the opportunity for residents and Councillors to engage in the strategic development of housing services and to look at more effective ways of undertaking scrutiny across housing functions that are more diverse and far reaching across Stevenage communities.</p> <p>The Council's approach to engagement will be further strengthened in line with the future requirements of the Housing White Paper (Tenants voice etc.)</p>
<b>Casework</b>	<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<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>
	<b>Analysis</b>	<p>Whilst not all contact with residents results in case work for Councillors, they often find themselves at the centre of resolving issues for local people, either by signposting residents to reporting tools or engaging officers to support exceptions and issues that may arise.</p> <p>Generally speaking Members work collaboratively with officers in order to solve complex problems, an approach that has been further enabled by the recently adopted Co-operative Neighbourhoods approach. This provides regular direct interaction between members and key officers who support them in resolving their case work, identifying neighbourhood issues and engaging with residents. This allows Councillors and officers to work collaboratively around service user engagement and dispute resolution with senior officers aware of and involved in the resolution of issues. As the Council continues to manage its own housing stock (circa 8,000 homes) this increases the level of casework experienced by Members across the town.</p>

		<p>The degree to which they involve themselves in resolving individual issues is often determined by the priority, complexity or urgency of the case. Where possible Members and officers utilise corporate reporting systems to ensure that issues are passed into the correct channels, where this is possible it means that the member involvement in an issue is minimised, allowing them to better prioritise their case work.</p> <p>However for those issues that are a high priority, complex or urgent, Members will take a more in-depth approach, working with officers to resolve issues for residents. This approach ensures an efficient use of time and resources for both officers and Members, as issues are dealt with by exception with a focus on things that fall outside of automated processes.</p> <p>Members work has been significantly influenced by technology, with social media playing a big part in how they interact with residents. This has made it much easier for members to reach their local residents, especially those with work or childcare commitments that typically have found it challenging to interact with traditional engagement channels such as residents meetings and ward surgeries. Similarly, the evolution of automated Council reporting systems has augmented the way in which issues are resolved throughout the Council. This ensures that Councillor casework is passed directly to the responsible department and streamlines councillor involvement in typical issues.</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.

Through the establishment of a cross party working group the Council's political representatives have considered carefully the question of its future size. The Majority Labour Group and Opposition Conservative Group agree that retaining the current number of Councillors at 39 would be the appropriate way forward for Stevenage Borough Council. It was agreed that the current number of Councillors works well and that whilst the electorate forecasting would see Councillors representing an increased number of electors, it was not considered to be a determining factor to increase the number of Councillors. Even with this increase, retaining the 39 Councillors would still keep Stevenage within the average ratio of Councillors to electors amongst its CIPFA closest neighbours.

The Majority Labour Group and Opposition Conservative Group also agreed that the existing Governance Arrangements (Leader/Cabinet model) for Stevenage Borough Council provides a strong model of governance and should continue. However, the Conservative Group requested that a minor review of Executive Portfolios take place, more aligned to the roles of the Scrutiny select committees, and in order to minimise portfolio cross-overs. The Leader of the Majority Group undertook to look at this request.

The Minority Liberal Democrat Group were split between a Council size of 39 and 42 Members, and the Liberal Democrat Group favoured moving to a Committee System for Governance arrangements. The Liberal Democrat Group will therefore make a separate submission to the Commission.