



**Electoral Review of North Hertfordshire District Council**

# **NHDC: Council Size submission**

**January 2022**

## About this document

1. This document is submitted as evidence from North Hertfordshire District Council (NHDC) to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) as part of the electoral review currently taking place. This is the Authority's submission on Council size.
2. This document has been prepared and collated by Officers using a range of information available, for consideration by Elected Members of the Council

## Executive Summary

3. At present, NHDC is served by 49 Councillors, representing 24 wards. Councillors are elected by thirds, each serving a four year term of office.
4. Following a debate at a specially convened meeting of Council in December 2021, NHDC resolved to move to all-out elections. As a result, the total number of Councillors does not need to be divisible by three.
5. It should be noted that the Submission should be considered in its entirety, rather than as a series of smaller sections.

## Introduction

6. The most recent electoral review of North Hertfordshire District Council was held in 2006. Due to residential development and the growth of the local population, there are electoral imbalances between wards.
7. As a result, this current Review is being conducted by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) to resolve the imbalances and provide greater electoral equality.
8. The initial stage of an Electoral Review is to identify and confirm the preferred Council Size. This is the number of elected Councillors who will serve on the Council, and should be the number required to deliver effective and convenient local government (the number of members to enable the council and individual councillors to perform most effectively).
9. The final size of the council will determine the average number of electors per councillor, and this is then used to determine warding patterns. As such, it is important that the figure agreed is correct and reflects the needs of the authority and of the community, although it should be noted that the LGBCE may amend the agreed figure if necessary in order to allow for a better representation of electors and as a result of consultation.
10. Within the review process, the LGBCE do not have an initial view on whether there should be an increase, decrease or no change in the size of the Council. However, all submissions must be evidence-led and justifiable.

## Guidance on calculating Council Size

11. The LGBCE has provided guidance that highlights the areas that should be considered when developing a proposal for Council Size; these are considered in detail in the pages that follow:
  - a. The governance arrangements of the Council and how it takes decisions across the broad range of its responsibilities.
  - b. The Council's scrutiny functions relating to its own decision making and the Council's responsibilities to outside bodies.
  - c. The representational role of councillors in the local community and how they engage with people, conduct casework and represent the Council on local partner organisations

## Local electorate

12. The number of registered local government electors, as of 1 August 2021, was 98,824. It is projected to increase to around 112,728 by the year 2028. That growth will not be evenly spread, but would lead to greater electoral inequality without this review. The table below provides the current (2021) and projected (2028) electorates by ward, assuming no changes in electoral boundaries or arrangements. The expectation, through this review led by the LGBC, is that all wards will have a variance of less than 10%.

Name of ward	Number of Councillors	Electorate 2021	Variance 2021	Electorate 2028	Variance 2028
Arbury	1	2,191	9%	3,702	61%
Baldock East	1	2,304	14%	2,400	4%
Baldock Town	3	5,654	-7%	5,758	-17%
Cadwell	1	1,845	-9%	2,390	4%
Chesfield	2	5,164	28%	6,803	48%
Codicote	1	2,074	3%	2,612	14%
Ermine	1	2,120	5%	2,441	6%
Hitchin Bearton	3	6,300	4%	6,378	-8%
Hitchin Highbury	3	6,190	2%	6,320	-8%
Hitchin Oughton	2	3,636	-10%	3,637	-21%
Hitchin Priory	2	3,753	-7%	3,982	-13%
Hitchin Walsworth	3	6,171	2%	7,027	2%
Hitchwood, Offa & Hoo	3	5,866	-3%	8,100	17%
Kimpton	1	1,795	-11%	1,810	-21%
Knebworth	2	4,132	2%	4,835	5%
Letchworth East	2	4,360	8%	4,906	7%
Letchworth Grange	3	5,532	-9%	6,147	-11%
Letchworth South East	3	5,284	-13%	5,520	-20%
Letchworth South West	3	5,957	-2%	6,139	-11%
Letchworth Wilbury	2	3,949	-2%	3,949	-14%
Royston Heath	2	4,413	9%	4,901	7%
Royston Meridian	2	4,187	4%	5,328	16%
Royston Palace	2	4,281	6%	4,535	-1%
Weston and Sandon	1	1,666	-17%	3,108	35%
<b>Overall</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>98,824</b>		<b>112,728</b>	

## Council Vision & Priorities

13. The Council has a clear vision for the area, which is making North Hertfordshire a district in which everyone who lives, works or visits is able to flourish. It is clear that the Council must work with its partners, businesses, and urban and rural communities to achieve this vision.
14. There are three priorities for the Council for 2022-2027, which are:
  - a. **People First.** People make North Herts work. We value all our residents, businesses, staff, contractors, councillors, and other partners, and place them at the heart of everything we do.
  - b. **Sustainability.** We recognise the challenges our towns and district as a whole face and are committed to delivering services which are relevant and sustainable. In doing so we will place our environmental responsibilities, as well as sound financial planning, at the centre of our policy making.
  - c. **A Brighter Future Together.** We are far-sighted and plan for the long term to secure the best outcomes for our people, towns and villages, and the local economy, ensuring North Herts continues to thrive.
15. Within those three priorities are a series of themes
  - a. Our Environment.
  - b. Our Local Economy.
  - c. Our Places.
  - d. Our Services.

## Managing the business of the Council

16. NHDC has adopted the 'Leader and Cabinet' model of local governance. At present, a joint administration of two political parties lead the Council and form the cabinet. The model comprises:
  - a. Full Council of 49 Members, who approve and adopt the budget and key policies within which Cabinet decisions are taken. Council appoints members of committees and holds them and the Cabinet to account for the decisions they take.
  - b. Cabinet comprises 8 Members and 7 Deputy Executive Members. They are responsible for most day-to-day decisions. Members have particular responsibility for specific service areas.
  - c. Councillors' overriding duty is to the whole community, but they are democratically accountable to all the residents of their ward. Their role is to represent the residents of their ward, share in the policy and budgetary decisions of the Full Council, suggest policy improvements, and scrutinise the Cabinet's policy proposals and their implementation.

## Member allowances

17. During the financial year 2020/21, the total sum of allowances paid to District Councillors was £324,041 (including subsistence and expenses). Every member is paid a basic allowance of £5100 and those with a Special Responsibility get an additional sum to reflect their additional responsibility; members can have more than 1 such Special Responsibility. Members may also claim for mileage and expenses.

## Roles and responsibilities of Councillors

### Separation of Roles

18. The Constitution of NHDC formalises the separation of roles for Councillors. These include specifications as to which Committees members of the Cabinet may be members of, and how many Cabinet members may be part of those other bodies.
19. Whilst this separation of roles is crucial in the fair, effective and transparent running of the Council, it does impact on the number of available Councillors for certain bodies and in doing so, increase the requirement of those members in terms of the number of bodies they must join and attend.
20. The Committee Structure tables, below, lists current committees and their remit.

## NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL - COMMITTEE STRUCTURE

**FULL COUNCIL:** The Council comprises all 49 elected Members. It is the decision-making body for the Authority and determines the overall strategy and policy of the Council.

<b>CABINET</b>	<b>STANDARDS COMMITTEE</b>	<b>OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE</b>	<b>FINANCE, AUDIT AND RISK COMMITTEE</b>	<b>PLANNING CONTROL COMMITTEE</b>
<p>The Cabinet takes decisions on service and management matters, except statutory matters reserved to Council. Many decisions are made by Cabinet on behalf of Full Council. There are also two Cabinet Sub-Committees for 'Council Charities' and for 'Local Authority Trading Companies' Shareholder'.</p>	<p>The Standards Committee deals with matters relating to the conduct and probity of councillors. The Chair and Vice-Chair are District Councillors. The Committee also deals with the conduct of Parish Councillors. An "Independent Person" is appointed to act in an advisory role, supported by two "Reserve Independent Persons".</p>	<p>The Overview and Scrutiny Committee examines and reports to Cabinet on service delivery of both Council services and other agencies. The Committee sets its own Work Programme and deals with matters under the Council's call-in procedure. It holds the Cabinet to account for its decisions and reviews and considers existing and new policies.</p>	<p>The Finance, Audit and Risk Committee monitors and reviews the Council's financial situation, as well as assisting the Council in its development and review of policy in respect of the Audit and Risk functions. It has the statutory role of approving the Council's Accounts and Annual Governance Statement.</p>	<p>The Planning Control Committee determines planning applications submitted to the Council which are not determined by delegated decision.</p>
<b>AREA COMMITTEES</b>	<b>COUNCIL TAX SETTING COMMITTEE</b>	<b>LICENSING &amp; REGULATION COMMITTEE</b>	<b>EMPLOYMENT COMMITTEE</b>	<b>JOINT STAFF CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE</b>
<p>There are five Area Committees:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Baldock &amp; District</li> <li>• Hitchin Committee</li> <li>• Letchworth Committee</li> <li>• Royston &amp; District</li> <li>• Southern Rural Committee</li> </ul> <p>Area Committees are the means by which closer links are established with the community. All elected Members are entitled to sit on their local Area Committee. They have the power to consider and report to Cabinet/Council on any matter affecting their area.</p>	<p>The Council Tax Setting Committee sets the Council Tax Base and the Council Tax for the District, as well as approves the Non-Domestic Rating Income Return.</p>	<p>The Licensing and Regulation Committee deals with a range of licensing matters, including applications under the Licensing Act 2003 and Gambling Act 2005.</p> <p>There are two sub-committees which sit under the Licensing &amp; Regulation Committee to handle licensing applications: The Licensing Sub-Committee and the Licensing and Regulation Sub-Committee.</p>	<p>The Employment Committee is responsible for making appointments to Chief Officer posts and deals with disciplinary matters relating to these officers.</p>	<p>The Joint Staff Consultative Committee, comprising elected councillors and staff representatives (including the Trade Unions), is the regular corporate interface with employees to discuss employee relations and human resource issues.</p>

<b>CABINET PANELS</b>	<b>THE DISTRICT WIDE GRANTS PANEL</b>	<b>HERTFORDSHIRE GROWTH BOARD (HGB)</b>	<b>HERTFORDSHIRE GROWTH BOARD SCRUTINY COMMITTEE</b>
<p>There are three Cabinet Panels:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cabinet Panel on Community</li> <li>• Cabinet Panel on Place</li> <li>• Cabinet Panel on the Environment.</li> </ul> <p>Each has Terms of Reference that guide the discussion.</p> <p>Referrals can be made to Cabinet or to other Committees/officers.</p> <p>Other Committees can refer subjects to these Panels for discussion.</p> <p>The Panels are an advisory body with no decision-making powers and have an informal style to promote community engagement within the respective Panel themes.</p>	<p>Acts as an advisory panel to the Executive Member for Community Engagement, in approving grants in consultation with the Service Director Legal and Community made under the Community Facilities Capital Grant Funding Scheme and district wide community grants.</p>	<p>Established by Hertfordshire County Council and the Hertfordshire District and Borough Councils. It is responsible for exercising the strategic direction, monitoring, delivery and co-ordination of current and future Growth Board strategy, programmes and implementation of any Growth Deal Project. It has oversight, accountability for and prioritisation of the Growth Board Growth fund.</p>	<p>Established to advise the HGB with regard to achieving the objectives in the HGB Terms of Reference. Acts as a forum for discussion with a wider range of members and stakeholders across the Hertfordshire area, so that the HGB benefits from a wider range of expertise in making its decisions</p>



### Full Council

21. The Council currently has 49 Councillors, elected by thirds for a four year term of office. From 2024, NHDC will move to all-out elections, with all Councillors elected in the same scheduled elections every four years, serving for a four-year term of office.
22. All Councillors are members of Full Council, which is responsible for approving and adopting the budget and key policies within which Cabinet decisions are taken. Council appoints members to committees and holds them and the Cabinet to account for the decisions they take.
23. The Council normally has around 6-8 meetings per year, plus additional special meetings that are held as necessary.

### Cabinet

24. NHDC is currently led by a joint administration. As a result, the Cabinet includes Members from both parties, bringing a breadth of experience. The Cabinet comprises 8 Executive Members and 7 Deputy Executive Members. Whilst each member has a responsibility for a particular service area, when major or key decisions are to be discussed or made, they are taken collectively by the whole Cabinet. The Cabinet meets around 6-7 times per year. In addition to attending Cabinet meetings, each Cabinet member has regular meetings with relevant directors and other senior officers.
25. The current Cabinet member's portfolios are set out in Section 14 of the Constitution.

### Delegations to Officers

26. NHDC has a comprehensive Scheme of Delegation to Officers (as set out in the Constitution) which clearly sets out where the responsibility and extent of delegation lies.
27. These delegations to officers have helped to reduce the burden on Members.

## Regulatory Committees

28. Under the terms of the Constitution, a number of regulatory and other Committees have been established. These have delegated authority to carry out and/or oversee specific duties and functions of the Council. The table below gives an overview of these committees.

<b>Committee</b>	<b>Number of Members</b>	<b>Meetings/year</b>
Licensing and Regulation Committee	14	1
Planning Control Committee	12	12
Standards Committee	12	2

## Other committees and panels

29. NHDC uses Cabinet Panels as advisory groups to Cabinet, alongside other committees with specific responsibility.

<b>Committee</b>	<b>Number of Members</b>	<b>Meetings/year</b>
Employment Committee	5	4
Finance, Audit and Risk Committee	7	6
Joint Staff Consultative Committee	5	4
Cabinet Panel on Community	9	4
Cabinet Panel on Place	9	4
Cabinet Panel on the Environment	9	4
Hertfordshire Police and Crime Panel	1 (external appointment)	3-4
CCTV Partnership Joint Executive	3	2
Council tax setting committee	5	2
District Wide Grants Panel	9	As required (4 since inaugural meeting in Sept 2021)

## Area committees

30. NHDC uses Area Committees to ensure local representation on local matters. Area Committees are the means by which closer links are established with the community. All elected Members are entitled to sit on their local Area Committee. They have the power to consider and report to Cabinet/Council on any matter affecting their area.

<b>Committee</b>	<b>Number of Members</b>	<b>Meetings/year</b>
Baldock and District Committee	6	4
Hitchin Committee	13	4
Letchworth Committee	13	4
Royston and District Committee	7	4
Southern Rural Committee	10	4

## Overview and Scrutiny Committee

31. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee examines and reports to Cabinet on service delivery of both Council services and other agencies. The Committee sets its own Work Programme and deals with matters under the Council's call-in procedure.
32. The Committee has 12 members and meets 6 times per year.

## Summary of appointments

33. The table below summarises the information from the above sections.

<b>Committee</b>	<b>Number of Members</b>	<b>Meetings/year</b>	<b>Members x meetings</b>
Council	49	6	294
Cabinet	8	6	48
Licensing and Regulation Committee	14	1	14
Planning Control Committee	12	12	144
Standards Committee	12	2	24
Employment Committee *	5	4	20
Finance, Audit and Risk Committee	7	6	42
Joint Staff Consultative Committee	5	4	20
Cabinet Panel on Community	9	4	36
Cabinet Panel on Place	9	4	36
Cabinet Panel on the Environment	9	4	36
CCTV Partnership Joint Executive	3	2	6
Council tax setting committee	5	2	10
District wide Grants Panel	9	As required	
Baldock and District Committee	6	4	24
Hitchin Committee	13	4	52
Letchworth Committee	13	4	52
Royston and District Committee	7	4	28
Southern Rural Committee	10	4	40
Overview & Scrutiny	12	6	72
<b>Total</b>			<b>998</b>
<b>N Councillors</b>			<b>49</b>
<b>Average meetings per Councillor</b>			<b>20</b>

\* Employment Committee meets as required, and met 4 times in 2020, and once in 2021/22, depending on Chief Officer vacancies.

34. In total, there are at least 998 attendances scheduled each year, which equates to an average of 20 per Councillor. Most meetings are open for Members to attend as observers, and many Councillors do take advantage of this scheme to ensure they keep up-to-date with matters of interest to their communities. In addition, there are ad-hoc or special meetings convened as required.

## Cancellations

35. Over the past 18 months, a number of meetings have been postponed, cancelled or moved to virtual online events due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Whilst we remain hopeful that legislation is brought forward to allow online meetings to resume in the near future, NHDC are returning to face-to-face in person meetings as appropriate. The number of meetings cancelled for reasons other than COVID-19 is small.

## Attendance of Members

36. In addition to looking at the extent to which cancellations have taken place, it is also important to look at the levels of attendance in order to gain an appreciation of how the Council currently functions. During 2020/21, Councillors attended an average of 87% of the meetings they were expected to; this is an increase from 83% the previous year, and 81% the year before. Given the current COVID-19 pandemic, this is a high attendance rate although does highlight an absence rate of over 10%

## Outside Bodies

37. The Council nominates Members to external bodies to represent the authority and local people to a range of different groups. These all meet 'as required', but the commitment of being a member of the external body includes preparing for and attending meetings, representing the views of the authority and its residents to the body, and feeding information back to the authority.

38. In total, 40 Members sit on outside bodies. The number of appointments varies from 1 to 12 (including reserve roles). There are a total of 97 appointments to external bodies.

<b>Body</b>	<b>Number of Cllrs appointed</b>
Baldock Community Forum (Community Interest Company)	1
Baldock Town Twinning Association	2
Baldock United Almshouses Charities	3
Baldock Youth and Community Association	3
Bedfordshire and River Ivel Internal Drainage Board	1
British Schools Museum - Hitchin	1
Charles Collison Trust	1
Chilterns Conservation Board	1
Citizens Advice North Herts	3
E A Lucas Technical School Foundation	1
East of England Leaders Group	1
Grange Fellowship Community Association	3
Groundwork Hertfordshire	1
Hertfordshire Armed Forces Covenant Board	1
Hertfordshire Building Preservation Trust	1
Hertfordshire Health Scrutiny Committee	0
The Hertfordshire Growth Board	1

<b>Body</b>	<b>Number of Cllrs appointed</b>
The Hertfordshire Growth Board Scrutiny Committee	1
Hertfordshire Waste Partnership	1
Herts Leaders Group	1
Hitchin BID	1
Hitchin Charity School Endowment	1
Hitchin Cow Common Trust	1
Hitchin Educational Foundation	5
Hitchin Initiative	1
Hitchin Senior Citizens' Welfare Committee	3
Hitchin Town Band Committee	2
Hitchin Town Twinning	2
Hitchin United Charities	4
Howard Garden Social and Day Care Centre	3
Jackmans Community Association	3
King George V Playing Fields User Group	3
Knebworth House Education and Preservation Trust	1
Knebworth Twinning Association	1
Knebworth Village Trust	2
Letchworth Civic Trust	2
Letchworth Garden City Business Improvement District (BID)	1
Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation	1
Letchworth Garden City Town Twinning Association	1
Letchworth Sustainability Forum	1
London Luton Airport Consultative Committee	1
North Hertfordshire Council for Voluntary Service	2
North Herts Local Strategic Partnership *	3
North Herts Minority Ethnic Forum	1
Police and Crime Panel	1
Rands Educational Foundation	1
Royston and District Community Transport Scheme	1
Royston and District Sports Council	1
Royston Community Association	3
Royston First Advisory Council (BID)	1
Royston Old People's Day Centre Committee	1
Royston Town Twinning Association	2
Sport North Herts	5
St Michaels Mount Community Centre, Hitchin - Management Committee	3
Survivors Against Domestic Abuse (SADA)	1
Walsworth Community Association	3
Westmill Community Centre, Hitchin - Management Committee	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>98</b>

\* Cabinet resolved in December 2021 to dissolve the North Herts Local Strategic Partnership.

## Other responsibilities

39. In addition to attending meetings, Councillors play a key role as advocates and representatives of their local communities. Outside of the COVID-19 pandemic era, many hosted meetings and events for their residents. They attend local community events, representing the Council to residents and engaging with residents to identify matters of concern to them. They also receive letter, emails and telephone calls from local residents seeking information, advice and support in their interactions with both the Council and broader democratic and governmental processes, as well as communicating with residents through social media.
40. Councillors were invited to complete a short form to give a clearer understanding of their current workloads and other commitments. Of 49 Councillors, 14 responded (29%). Not all questions were relevant to all Councillors, so figures below are based on the actual responses received. Obviously Councillors who did respond may differ from those that did not, so these may be overestimates.
- a. Due to the varying nature of their roles and responsibilities, time in service, and other commitments, the amount of time spent on District Council duties varies considerably. For example, a Councillor in opposition without additional responsibilities will have fewer meetings and formal engagements than members of the Executive.
  - b. The amount of time spent preparing for meetings varies, depending on the type of meeting and the level of interaction required with colleagues, members of the public, or other stakeholders in advance of the meeting. For individual Councillors, the amount of time preparing for formal meetings also depends on the number of meetings they are expected to attend. In a typical month, respondents told us the amount of preparation time varied but averaged 16 hours (range between 6 and 30 hours). In addition, follow-up actions and activities are required for many.
  - c. The COVID-19 pandemic has affected workloads in different ways. Some Councillors reported the number of formal meetings decreased, and travel time decreased due to the use of digital meeting technologies. Others reported that caseloads have increased owing to more people working from home and noticing issues in the local community more readily.
  - d. District Councillors spend considerable amounts of time in other meetings and engaging in other business of the Council. Whilst project meetings, discussions with Officers, Portfolio briefings and informal meetings don't apply to all Councillors, for those for whom it does it takes around 20 hours per month. For specific projects, this can be considerably longer and may involve site visits and extended engagements.
  - e. The amount of time required for external appointments, where the Councillor represents the Council to another body, also varies with an average of 9 hours per month.
  - f. Some district council wards are served by several parish councils, and district Councillors often attend most parish council meetings in their area where possible.

This leads some to attend 6 meetings per month, each taking an evening for the meeting and preparation time.

- g. The volume of case work (representing and responding to the needs and concerns of local residents) also varies considerably between councillors and over time, averaging around 35 hours per month. Some Councillors, busy with other commitments, delegate some of their casework to ward colleagues, although single-member ward councillors cannot do that. Councillors reported receiving emails, phone calls and in-person conversations from residents asking for support, and spend time liaising with officers and other organisations to seek resolution. Some councillors also hold surgeries or ward walks on a regular basis.
- h. In addition to their formal duties and casework, councillors undertake training to help make them as effective as possible in their roles. This includes general training and support, as well as specialised training (such as housing, planning and licensing).
- i. Half of responding Councillors also work (either part-time or full-time, including both paid roles and voluntary roles). In addition 36% have caring responsibilities.
- j. The timing and location of meetings has an impact on how effective Councillors can be, owing to travel commitments and overlap of other responsibilities.

41. In summary, a 'typical' or average district Councillor that responded:

- a. Spends 16 hours per month preparing for formal District Council meetings.
- b. Attends 2 District Council meetings per month as a delegate.
- c. Spends time on follow-up actions after meetings.
- d. Spends 20 hours per month in other meetings and projects.
- e. Spends 9 hours per month representing the Council in external appointments.
- f. Attends parish council meetings in their ward, up to 6 evenings per month.
- g. Undertakes around 35 hours of case work per month.
- h. Attends ongoing training.
- i. Half of Councillors work full- or part-time.
- j. One-third have caring responsibilities

42. Whilst an increase in the number of electors that each Councillor would represent will not increase the number of meetings, it could increase the caseload work. Any reduction in the number of Councillors would need to be accompanied by changes to the Council's governance arrangements to reduce the meeting requirements (either by reducing the number of meetings, or reducing the number of Councillors attending). However, in the absence of any such planned changes, a reduction in the size of Council would result in an increase in the number of meetings individuals are expected to attend. This may result in some existing Councillors being unable to continue in their current roles and deter new candidates from standing for election in future.

## Changes since the last Review

43. During the 2020/21 financial year, NHDC had an annual spend of £15.12m. This is a reduction from £16.86m in 2006/07, a reduction of over 10%.
44. In April 2014, the number of full time equivalent staff (FTE) was 309.6; in 2020/21 this had increased to 311.8 (an increase of around 1%), with a reduction in headcount of 4% over the past ten years.

## Further Anticipated Changes

45. In addition to the above information, it is worth also highlighting that the day-to-day role of a councillor has changed substantially in recent years, and will no doubt continue to do so into the future. In addition to there now being fewer council meetings to attend, and less duplication within remaining meetings, the technological changes at the Council have also provided councillors with an opportunity to communicate across IT platforms that greatly increase efficiency, and allow more time for face-to-face contact with residents who do not have access to the internet.
46. The impact of the covid-19 pandemic has increased the rate of change considerably, and the use of technology has now become very much a key part of the role of both officers and councillors as an effective means of communicating within the existing restrictions. This is something that is likely to continue even once these restrictions are eased.



## Comparison to other authorities

47. The LGBCE offer a chart showing the council size of the authorities in the CIPFA nearest neighbours model. Using publicly available information, the table below shows comparisons in the number of electors per councillor (using 2019 electorate figures and current number of district councillors).

Authority *	Local government electorate**	Cllrs	Electors per councillor	Last LGBCE review
Braintree	114,587	49	2,339	2014
Dacorum	113,191	51	2,219	2006
Basingstoke and Deane	137,269	54	2,542	2019
Epping Forest	103,154	58	1,779	2000
Chelmsford	135,909	57	2,384	2000
Test Valley	98,538	43	2,292	2018
Tonbridge and Malling	98,280	54	1,820	Ongoing – see below
Ashford	97,341	47	2,071	2017
Maidstone	127,013	55	2,309	2001
Huntingdonshire	134,726	52	2,591	2017
Tunbridge Wells	84,917	48	1,769	2000
Rugby	80,584	42	1,919	2012
Stroud	96,375	51	1,890	2015
Stafford	102,108	40	2,553	2015
East Hertfordshire	110,104	50	2,202	2012
North Hertfordshire	101,791	49	2,077	Ongoing

\* Based on CIPFA nearest neighbours model as reported by LGA Inform (<https://lginform.local.gov.uk/reports/view/lga-research/lga-research-cohesion-and-integration?mod-area=E07000099>)

\*\* Electorate as of 1 December 2019 register publication, as published by the Office for National Statistics.

Cells highlighted RED have an electorate per councillor ratio greater than NHDC.

48. Below are three examples of current reviews in progress by the LGBCE. Whilst not yet complete, they give an idea of current proposals for council size and electorate ratios:

Authority	Pre-review			Post-review	
	Current Cllrs	Electors / Cllr	Electors/Cllr based on 6-year projection	New Cllrs	Electors/Cllr based on 6-year projection
Tonbridge & Malling, Kent ongoing	54	1,821	1,978	43	2,484
Amber Valley, Derbyshire ongoing	45	2,244	2,367	42	2,536
East Staffordshire, ongoing	39	2,225	2,343	37	2,470

49. Four Hertfordshire authorities have had relatively recent reviews:

Authority	Pre-review			Post-review	
	Original Cllrs	Electors / Cllr	Electors/Cllr based on 6-year projection	New Cllrs	Electors/Cllr based on 6-year projection
St Albans, Herts 2021	58	1,890	1,958	57	1,993
Hertsmere, Herts 2018	39	1,949	2,142	39	2,142
Watford, Herts 2016	36	1,981	2,165	36	2,165
Welwyn Hatfield, Herts 2016	48	1,643	1,734	48	1,734

50. NHDC currently has 2,016 electors per councillor; if it retains 49 Councillors the electorate ratio will be 2,301 in six years' time. Whilst this is higher than the other Hertfordshire authorities above, it is less than the three ongoing LGBCE reviews of authorities within the same CIPFA group of most-similar local authority areas.

51. The table below shows the three CIPFA group authorities, with the change between pre-review numbers of Councillors and elector-councillor ratios and post-review numbers.

Authority	Electors / Cllr post-review	Reduction in Councillors (%)	Increase in elector:councillor ratio (%)
Tonbridge & Malling, Kent ongoing	2,484	20%	36%
Amber Valley, Derbyshire ongoing	2,536	7%	13%
East Staffordshire, ongoing	2,470	5%	11%

52. To bring the ratio in line with those three authorities, the number of Councillors on NHDC would need to reduce to 44-46 Members. Although the driving force of the review is to achieve equality, a reduction in the number of Councillors would generate a budget saving of £5100 basic allowance per Member (based on the current Members' Allowances Scheme).

Number of Councillors	Elector:Councillor ratio (in 2028)	Reduction in Councillors (%)	Increase in elector:councillor ratio (%)
44	2562	10%	27%
45	2505	8%	24%
46	2451	6%	22%
47	2398	4%	19%
48	2349	2%	16%
49 (current Council Size)	2301	0%	14%
50	2255	-2%	12%

53. It should be noted that directly copying or mimicking another authority may not be helpful, as each authority has its own ways of working, different communities to serve, and different challenges to face. However, it is important to recognise that the three current LGBCE reviews of NHDC's CIPFA group members all show a reduction in Council Size and higher elector-to-Councillor ratios than this area if no changes are made.

## Council Size Submission

- (1) Taking into account the details of this report, which outline the workload of NHDC councillors in terms of both meetings and casework, the current financial climate, future methods of working, changes in the structure and service delivery of the authority over recent years, and recognising the changing role of Councillors moving forwards, NHDC has discussed the following and there is cross-party agreement to this being the formal NHDC Council Size submission to the LGBCE as part of the current Review.
- (2) NHDC recognise that all current wards will be reviewed and are likely to change in the next stage of the Review, and a separate submission will be made to the LGBCE to support that process.
- (3) NHDC submit that the future council size for this authority should be **50**.
- (4) This was discussed and agreed by Full Council on 20 January 2022, with 34 Members voting in support of this submission (2 against, 0 abstentions). All three Group Leaders have been involved in the development of this submission, and all three support this final document. During the debate at Full Council, Members raised three key points in support of the future council size being 50:

- a. A reduction in the size of Council will not be in the interests of the electorate served by Members, particularly due to the mix of urban and very rural communities within the District. Rural wards by necessity include several different parishes, and wide geographical areas, in order to have broad electoral equality (the same number of electors per councillor) as more densely populated urban areas. Any reduction in the number of Councillors overall would increase the size of the rural wards further, making effective representation impossible for those communities. This would be exacerbated by the fact that most population growth is expected in rural communities.
- b. An increase of 1 councillor to the submitted 50 will still see an increase in the elector:councillor ratio of 12%, and whilst this is a manageable increase in workload, retaining the current council size or reducing the number of councillors would see a much greater increase in that ratio, which would become untenable.
- c. The electorate projections anticipate a very significant growth in the number of electors, particularly in urban communities. The proposed council size of 50 will allow the council to work effectively to support this growth in population.