

Mole Valley District Council

Council Size Submission

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How to Make a Submission

1. It is recommended that submissions on council size follow the format provided below. Submissions should 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.
2. 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.

About You

3. 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, or an individual.

This response has been submitted on behalf of Mole Valley District Council. The submission was prepared with the assistance of a cross-party Working Group of members, supported by Officers and approved by Council at its meeting on 13th July 2021.

Reason for Review (Request Reviews Only)

4. 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.*

Not applicable

Local Authority Profile

5. Please provide a short description of the authority and its setting. This should set the scene for the Commission and give it a greater understanding of any current issues. The description may cover all, or some 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?
 - Are there any other constraints, challenges, issues or changes ahead?

About Mole Valley District

Mole Valley covers 25,832 hectares, 16% of Surrey as a whole and is the third largest of the 11 districts in the county. It has a population of 87,245 in 2019, 7% of Surrey's as a whole and is the ninth most populous district in the county. It comprises of 38,772 dwellings (as of 2020) 8% of Surrey's as a whole and is seventh in terms of districts with the most dwellings. The rural areas of Mole Valley account for over 90% of the District. 76% of the District being designated as Green Belt. 37% of the land is designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and hosts 76 sites of Nature Conservation Importance.

There is a greater concentration of electors per hectare in the hub-towns of Dorking and Leatherhead, as well as in larger villages (which may be characterised as well connected to nearby rural areas) of Ashted, Bookham and Fetcham. The full detail of this may be seen in the data provided in Annex A. In the more rural areas of the district, the electors who Councillors are tasked with representing are distributed amongst a greater area. For example, the ward of Leith Hill encompasses 4,366 hectares, with an elector density of 0.31 electors per hectare. In contrast, for the district ward of Ashted Village (198 hectares), the elector: hectare ratio equates to 24.13.

There is a clear distinction between the wards in the north of the District, such as Leatherhead, which may be categorised as being more urban in nature and do not include other villages or community settlements whilst still having green areas, and the south of the district which is more rural with smaller villages. Furthermore, there is good transport connectivity between the towns and larger villages, but there are significant rural areas where the road network is poor and travel times are longer and there are very few roads climbing the Southern escarpment of the North Downs.

Within Mole Valley there are 13 Parishes, mainly in the southern rural areas of the District. In addition, there are a number of very active Resident Associations. Unparished areas tend to be represented by Residents' Associations, such as Ashted, Bookham, Fetcham and Leatherhead. The exception is Dorking which has an active unelected town centre forum and businesses are represented by a Business Improvement District.

Housing

The average house price was £505,000 in June 2020, making Mole Valley the second most expensive district in the county. The ratio of house prices to residents' salaries was 14:1 in March 2020, making Mole Valley the fifth most unaffordable district in the county. Between 2014/15 and 2018/19, 230 new affordable homes were completed, 6% of Surrey's total and ranking the Mole Valley ninth in terms of affordable housing completions.

At the last census in 2011 there were 4,270 housing units in Mole Valley owned or managed by Registered Social Landlords, including the primary Housing Associations which operate in Mole Valley. According to the most recent figures from the Regulator of Social Housing this total figure had risen to 4701 social housing units in Mole Valley as a whole. Clarion Housing, as of March 2021, manages 4200 units in Mole Valley). This data may not include the private lettings, facilitated by the Council's housing team which amounted to around 70 in the 2019/20 year, as well as the 31 households assisted through Rent Deposit Bond Schemes in that year in order to prevent homelessness.

The high cost of housing within the District and lack of affordable properties, is a significant issue within the area, especially in the rural areas where housing, including that for rent is expensive and limited, creating difficulties for those on lower incomes and young people.

Four wards within the District contain residential park homes: Beare Green, Box Hill & Headley, Capel, Leigh & Newdigate and Okewood. The polling district of Box Hill has a significant proportion of such properties with park homes comprising approximately 75% of residential dwellings (see Annex B). Residents within these properties tend to be over 55 years old and have limited connectivity to the internet.

Demographic

According to the most recent (2019/20) population estimates from ONS, around 23.7% of the population of Mole Valley is aged 65 and over, compared with the national average of 18.4 % in England and 19.1% of Surrey. In 2019 the average age of residents was 47.5 years, making Mole Valley the district with the oldest residents in the county.

The 2011 Census recorded that 90.1% of the population of Mole Valley was White British, with 0.15% Gypsy or Irish from the Traveller community and 4.85% from other White ethnic groups. 1.5% of residents were Mixed-Race and 0.5% of Mole Valley's population is from a Black, African, Caribbean or Black British ethnic group; both of these figures are 0.6% lower than Surrey as a whole. 2.5% of residents from Mole Valley were from an Asian or British Asian ethnic group, whereas this group constituted 5.7% of Surrey as a whole.

Mole Valley is a relatively affluent area. The 2019 Indices of Multiple Deprivation indicate that Mole Valley is ranked 294 out of 317 district local authority areas in the UK (1 indicating the highest level of deprivation). The District is the 6th least deprived in Surrey. However, when measured

against the indices there are parts of the District, including and in particular parts of North Holmwood and North Leatherhead, which experience relative levels of deprivation in comparison to other parts of Surrey.

Economy and Tourism

Mole Valley offers convenient access to central London via excellent road and rail links and is situated close to Gatwick (which borders the district) and Heathrow airports. Many major companies, including Unum, KBR, Exxon Mobil and CGI are based in the north of the district.

A study in 2017 ranked Mole Valley seventh out of all English local authorities in terms of productivity but also showed that economic growth had slowed in comparison to other areas. The impact of the pandemic is currently unknown.

Prior to the pandemic MVDC had agreed ambitious plans to regenerate Leatherhead and to continue to ensure that Dorking Town centre thrives.

The beauty of the area attracts a significant number of tourists each year, including a large number of day visitors. The challenging terrain, including part of the 2012 Olympic road cycling route, encourages many cyclists to visit. An evaluation of the impact of visitors in 2016 highlighted both environmental and economic impacts. It estimated the total expenditure by visitors to be £143m, including over £53m on food and drink. This supported 3,280 jobs. Further details are set out in “Wheels Feet & Hooves’ A Destination Management Plan for Cycling, Walking and Equestrian Tourism in Mole Valley”, and can be viewed [here](#)

Gatwick Airport, and those businesses associated with it, provide valued employment for Mole Valley residents. However, the environmental impact gives continuing cause for concern, particularly in the light of ongoing expansion plans. The pandemic has also had a significant impact on the airport with huge losses for operators, airlines and related enterprises.

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 years. 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 impact on the Council’s effectiveness will your council size proposal have?

Council Size

6. The Commission believes that councillors have three broad aspects to their role. These are categorised as: Strategic Leadership, Accountability (Scrutiny, Regulation 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

7. 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.

Topic	
Governance Model	<p>Mole Valley adopted the Leader and Cabinet Model of decision-making in November 2007 and this came into effect from 1st March 2008. In 2011 this was taken one step further with the adoption of a Strong Leader, providing continuity as the Leader is now effectively appointed for a four year term of office.</p> <p>A formal governance review was undertaken between 2012 and 2013 when the decision was taken to retain the cabinet model.</p> <p>In 2019 the Council agreed to undertake a review to consider moving back to a full committee system, or a hybrid model of decision-making. A working group was established to undertake this work and this had been nearing its conclusion at the time the pandemic hit in 2020 and this programme of work was paused. Whilst members are keen that this work is concluded, we do not believe that, should it be adopted, a return to a committee system would change the Council recommendation regarding to size. The early indications from that work was that any changes to the Council’s governance model would not impact the number of members required to effectively manage the work. Workloads would be distributed differently between all members.</p> <p>Whilst the Constitution allows flexibility as to the number of members on the Cabinet (with a maximum of 10), the Cabinet currently consists of nine members.</p>

	<p><u>Current political make up</u></p> <p>Conservative 12 Liberal Democrats 22 Informal Independents 7</p> <p>The Council has 48 seats available for allocation on its formal committees; this excludes Cabinet. These are allocated in accordance with the principles of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989, to ensure that the number of seats held by a particular political group on the Council are reflected in the total number of seats held on the various committees.</p> <p>Additionally the Council appoints to a number of working groups – in May 2021 this equated to an additional 56 seats for members to fill. Again, these are allocated on a proportional basis.</p> <p>At present, this equates to approx. 2.5 seats per member. A move to 39 members would increase this to 2.7 seats per member, which would not have a significant impact on workloads.</p> <p>Mole Valley District Council committee meetings (including working groups and scrutiny panels) are predominantly held in the evening to facilitate participation by Councillors in employment. This also enables Mole Valley District Councillors (three out of six) who are dual hatted county councillors to attend Surrey County Council meetings which are held during the day.</p>
<p>Portfolios</p>	<p>The Leader has currently appointed a Cabinet of nine members, which includes the Leader and Deputy Leader, together with the following Cabinet Portfolios:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leader (Council Strategy and Communication) • Deputy Leader (Leisure and Tourism) • Climate Change • Community Services • Finance • Internal Services • Planning • Projects • Sustainable Economy and Security

The current Leader and Administration of Mole Valley District Council have been in place since the local elections held in May 2019. In May 2021 the Leader undertook a review of the membership of the Cabinet, taking into account the key priorities set out in the Council's Annual Plan and the importance of Climate Change. The Leader concluded that a Cabinet of nine was required to undertake a useful distribution of the workload.

Cabinet Members work closely with the Council's Strategic Leadership team (SLT) as well as key partners throughout both the District and the County, representing the Council on a number of joint committees and shared service governance boards.

The Cabinet meets formally 6 times a year; it also meets informally on a monthly basis with SLT to consider upcoming programmes of work and prior to each Cabinet cycle to sign off the draft report recommendations. The Cabinet will also meet informally to address specific urgent issues.

Additionally Extraordinary meetings can be called when urgent business arises, or for significant pieces of work, such as the agreement of the Local Plan consultation documentation. The number of these is variable, with three taking place in 2019-20, one virtually in 2020-21 and in 2021-22 one extraordinary meeting was held in late May, with a further two scheduled to consider Mole Valley's Local Plan submission.

The Constitution allows for the Cabinet to establish a number of working groups. These are politically balanced cross party groups; some are constituted groups such as the

- Aviation Working Group
- Hackney Carriage Consultative Group
- Pippbrook Working Group
- Planning Policy Working Group
- Thomas Flack Working Group

The Cabinet also establish a small number of task and finish groups to consider time sensitive issues, or specific pieces of work. At present the Cabinet has two such groups

- Boundary Review Working Group
- Car Parking Working Group

	<p>These groups are chaired by the relevant Cabinet member. The Cabinet member works closely with Officers to set the direction for the Working Group and agree agendas. The amount of work for the Cabinet Lead and members of each Working Group can vary significantly dependant on frequency and topic. For example, the monthly Planning Policy Working Group (with an open invitation to all members), whilst undertaking its focused work on the development of the Local Plan for Mole Valley, can often have lengthy agendas, with meetings often lasting in excess of three hours. Others, such as the Thomas Flack Working Group, which oversees the allocation of grants from the estate of the late Thomas Frederick Flack for the general benefit of the people of Leatherhead, Ashtead, Bookham and Fetcham only meets once or twice a year to discuss grant applications prior to recommending those for formal approval by the Cabinet.</p> <p>Cabinet Members with reports on the agenda of the Scrutiny Committee are expected to attend the Committee to present reports within their Portfolio and respond to questions. Usually, most Cabinet Members attend Scrutiny Committee meetings.</p> <p>Decision-making is taken collectively by the Cabinet, there is no delegation to individual cabinet members.</p> <p>Individually Cabinet Members meet at least monthly with senior officers to discuss the service areas within their portfolios, including budget, key performance indicators and the delivery of the council strategy.</p> <p>The Council does not promote any cabinet role as a full time post and this is reflected in the Special Responsibility Allowance for Cabinet Members (the allowance scheme for members is assessed by an Independent Remuneration Panel, with recommendations made to Full Council for adoption; the last full review was undertaken in 2017).</p>
<p>Delegated Responsibilities</p>	<p>As noted above within the Cabinet decision making model operating at Mole Valley District Council, the Cabinet takes collective decisions. There is no delegation to individual Cabinet Members.</p> <p>Delegations to committees are set out within the Council’s Constitution and the Council has delegated a number of Local Choice functions to the Cabinet and other committees. For example the approval of the Council’s final accounts and financial statement has been delegated to the Audit Committee.</p> <p>Further details of the delegations to the Council Committees can be found within Part Three, Responsibility for Functions, of the Council’s Constitution.</p>

	<p>Delegations to Officers</p> <p>The Council has agreed an extensive scheme of delegation to officers detailed in the Constitution and the majority of decisions, particularly operational matters, are made by officers under delegated powers.</p> <p>The effective operation of the delegation scheme relies upon close co-operation and liaison between officers and members.</p>
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Accountability

8. 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.

Topic	
Internal Scrutiny	<p>The scrutiny function of authorities has changed considerably. Some use theme or task-and-finish groups, for example, and others have a committee system. Scrutiny arrangements may also be affected by the officer support available.</p>
	<p><u>Scrutiny Committee</u></p> <p>The Council has always maintained one Scrutiny Committee, which is exclusively responsible for scrutinising both external partners, and internal decision-makers.</p> <p>The Committee comprises 11 members (and six substitutes) and meets six times a year in advance of Cabinet meetings to scrutinise upcoming decisions, offering councillors the ability to make comments and provide feedback on Cabinet reports. It is common for ward councillors to attend the Committee to speak where items particularly affect their residents, thus allowing for councillors from all political groups to add value to decision-making. Members of Cabinet cannot sit on Scrutiny Committee.</p> <p>The Committee is not a formal decision-making body and contributes to the Council's decision-making process by scrutinising the actions of decision-making committees and officers. This allows for the Committee to draw attention to important issues, as well as formulating recommendations to improve practice.</p> <p>In accordance with MVDC's Constitutional requirements, the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee are selected from a political group which is not represented in the Cabinet. There is a standing item on the agenda of all</p>

ordinary Cabinet Meetings which provides for the Chairman of Scrutiny to feedback the Committee's comments and suggestions directly to the Cabinet.

Since the Scrutiny Committee generally has the opportunity to review and comment on all reports before they are considered by the Cabinet, the call-in mechanism is used infrequently. However, should members take the decision to call in a Cabinet decision, this will be heard by the Scrutiny Committee. In the 2020/21 Municipal year the Call-In function has been used twice to facilitate further discussion of items by the Committee, with further information having been provided by the responsible Cabinet Members.

The Committee can develop its own work plan to determine any specific areas of Council Policy it wishes to scrutinise. In the past Scrutiny Panels, composed of between five and seven members, have undertaken task and finish work on topics such as: a review of car parking services and electrical vehicle charging points, as well as a thorough review of the Council's planning service and its performance data. Scrutiny Panels meet according to the needs of their work, for example, a Panel may meet regularly throughout the year, or it may meet frequently in a condensed period of time in order to complete a specific piece of work.

There is also a Standing Budget Panel, which annually examines the Administration's budget proposals and meets with Cabinet Members to discuss their respective budgets; for the first time, interviews with Cabinet Members were held via public meetings in January 2021 (virtually via Zoom). The final recommendations of the Panel were then presented to the Scrutiny Committee as part of the committee's consideration of the 2021/22 Budget and Council Tax Resolution.

The procedures rules and guidelines for the Scrutiny Committee as set out in the Council's Constitution enable the consideration of requests from members for "a review of matters affecting the District or its inhabitants including the reference of any local government matter relevant to the functions of the Committee." In the early part of 2021, the Committee received its first request for such a review and the Planning Scrutiny Panel undertook a specific piece of work relating to the Development Management Committee's approach to the granting of personal permissions and master plans for larger sites.

The Committee holds three external meetings a year to receive presentations from and scrutinise external organisations. The Committee's external meetings are typically well attended by non-committee members, encouraging a strong degree of Member engagement with these organisations. In the 2020/21 Municipal year this has included scrutinising the contractors responsible for the delivery of the Council's waste contract. The Committee met with Clarion Housing who manage the majority of social housing in Mole Valley, allowing Councillors to question officers on service-delivery

	<p>during the Covid-19 pandemic and examine key issues experienced by residents living in social housing. The Committee also heard from organisations to which the Council provides grant funding, receiving information in relation to service provision during the pandemic Covid-19, including the Mole Valley branch of the Citizens Advice Bureau and a local Domestic Abuse Charity in the area.</p>
<p>Statutory Function</p>	<p>This includes planning, licencing and any other regulatory responsibilities. Consider under each of the headings the extent to which decisions will be delegated to officers. How many members will be required to fulfil the statutory requirements of the council?</p>
<p>Planning</p>	<p><u>Development Management Committee</u> This comprises 19 members (and 12 substitutes) to consider all planning applications not otherwise delegated to officers. Members of the committee are expected to attend regular in-house training sessions and carry out site visits as needed.</p> <p>The Development Management Committee garners the most public interest, and members of the committee receive regular communications from applicants, residents and developers which they need to manage accordingly.</p> <p>The Committee covers the whole of the district and meets 12 times a year (monthly) with proposed adjournment dates for each month should the committee not conclude its business at its scheduled meeting.</p> <p>All 19 members (and 12 substitute members) are required to attend regular training which is delivered by officers within the Planning Service. Training is mandatory for new members to the Committee and ongoing training throughout the year ensures members are kept abreast of relevant legislative changes and local policy amendments.</p> <p>Ward members who are not formally appointed to the Development Management Committee may request to speak to the Committee on those applications that fall within their respective wards.</p> <p>Members appointed to the committee acknowledge that there is a significant time commitment required. The agendas can be lengthy, often ranging from 200 - 300 pages, furthermore members are required to be familiar with the location of the sites and regularly undertake site visits in their own time. It is worth noting that the sites concerned at any one meeting may cover a wide geographical area. For example, for the Development Management Committee held in June 2021, two sites were separated by 17 miles with a minimal travel time of over 30 minutes. The more complex sites that come to the Committee for determination tend to be those in rural areas where there are issues concerning Green Belt/Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty protection.</p>

	<p>The Chairman and Vice Chairman have a pre-briefing with the Planning Officers prior to the meeting and a representative from each political group is also entitled to attend.</p> <p>The Constitution does not prohibit Cabinet members from sitting as members of the committee.</p> <p>A Planning Peer Review was undertaken in 2019, and as result of this an informal Planning Improvement Board was established to consider the suggested recommendations arising from the review. A Scrutiny Planning Panel was also convened to formally consider the Peer Review suggestions and make recommendations to Council via Scrutiny. As a result of the peer review, the planning delegations to officers were reviewed and updated. The review also recommended that the size of the committee be revised (with a suggested reduction in the number of seats). Members have informally indicated their preference for 19 seats to remain available on the Committee.</p> <p>The level of delegation is comparable with other similar authorities with the Council seeking to comply with the National Planning Practice Guidance, which confirms that it is in the public interest for the local planning authority to have effective delegation arrangements in place to ensure that decisions on planning applications that raise no significant planning issues are made quickly and that resources are appropriately concentrated on the applications of greatest significance to the local area.</p> <p>This is not to downplay the role of members in the planning system and the determination of planning applications. Members are extensively involved in planning related cases, whether those are reported to a Committee or not. Planning is a large part of members' inboxes. The amount of planning case work they are involved in, irrespective of the delegation arrangements, is likely to rise as the emerging Local Plan has the potential to be a step-change in housing delivery.</p>
Licensing	<p><u>Licensing Committee</u></p> <p>This comprises 11 members, meeting twice a year (and more often if required) to discharge all functions required under the Licensing Act 2003. Through its twice-yearly meetings the Committee will set discretionary policies and, where appropriate, make recommendations to Full Council to adopt policies reserved to it by statute. For example, the Committee is in the process of reviewing the Statement of Licensing Policy, for the next five years and will then make recommendations on adoption of the policy to Council. In the past it has undertaken work in relation to taxi licensing and enforcement, principles under the Gambling Act 2005 and any of its obligations under the Animal Welfare Act 2006.</p>

	<p>As required, members of the Licensing Committee also sit on Licensing Sub-Committees to hear appeals relating to entertainment, premises licences and Taxi licences. This has recently included determining appeals on pavement licences, as part of the Business and Planning Act 2020 which delegated this temporary power to district and borough councils as part of the government's response to Covid-19.</p> <p>In 2020/21, four Licensing Sub-Committees were convened to hear four appeals. Over the past five years, on average 4.2 appeals have been determined by the Sub-Committee.</p> <p>Sub-Committees are held in the daytime to enable attendance by all interested parties and this can make it more difficult for those members in full time employment to participate.</p> <p>All members of the Licensing Committee are required to undertake training in relation to the licensing functions of the council, and this must be refreshed on a regular basis. Mole Valley District Council operates a shared Environment Health and Licensing Service with Tandridge District Council, and since early 2021, training is delivered to elected members of both district councils virtually, enabling members to share knowledge on a wider scale. Training of Licensing Committee members is of particular importance given the quasi-judicial nature of the Sub-Committee and is mandatory before a members can take part. Additional training is provided to those members acting as the Chairman of the Sub-Committee.</p> <p>The Constitutional requirement is for three members of the Licensing Committee to sit on a Licensing Sub-Committee. Given the ad-hoc nature of the timings of sub-committee hearings, the ability to draw from the existing membership of the parent Committee is critical to the effective operation of the Sub-Committees; the Sub-Committees can be convened at short notice to ensure compliance with statutory deadlines, and members who are not the relevant ward members for the application/hearing may be called upon.</p> <p>The procedure for Licensing appeals is set by the Council's Statement of Licensing Policy.</p>
<p><i>Other Regulatory Bodies</i></p>	<p><u>Audit Committee</u> This comprises seven councillors. It meets on average five times a year to consider the Council's governance and audit functions, including the signing off of the Statement of Accounts.</p> <p>Members of the Cabinet cannot sit on the Audit Committee and in accordance with the Constitution, the committee must be chaired by a member of an opposition party.</p>

	<p>The Committee has the core Audit Committee responsibilities, as described by CIPFA, and has delegated responsibility from Full Council to approve the Annual Audited Accounts and the Annual Governance Statement.</p> <p><u>Standards Committee</u> The Standards Committee comprises six District Councillors (and six substitutes) and two Parish Council Representatives (who are non-voting members of the Committee). Each year, Council formally waives the political balance requirements, thereby enabling two members from each of the main political groups to make up the six committee members.</p> <p>The function of the committee is primarily to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by members and to hear and determine misconduct allegations referred to it.</p> <p>Upcoming work for the Standards Committee includes a review of the Council’s Member Code of Conduct.</p>
<p>External Partnerships</p>	<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>
	<p><u>Shared Services</u> In recent years, Mole Valley District Council has established a number of shared services with a range of Local Authorities within Surrey.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmental Health and Licensing Shared Service – with Tandridge District Council (MVDC acts as the host authority) • Joint Waste Solutions – with Surrey Heath, Elmbridge and Woking Borough Councils (Surrey Heath acts as the host authority) • Southern Building Control Partnership – with Tandridge District Council (Tandridge acts as the host authority) <p>As part of the Governance arrangements for these shared services the relevant Cabinet Member is appointed to sit on the relevant Partnership board for the shared service, to ensure that the Partnership is delivering its objectives effectively and efficiently.</p> <p>In the summer of 2020, Surrey County Councillors launched a bid for a single county-unitary council, which was not progressed by the Government. As part of responding to this bid, the eleven Surrey District and Borough councils</p>

commissioned KPMG to consider potential alternative unitary models, and opportunities for greater collaboration between Councils. At its meeting on 26th May 2021, the Cabinet approved a range of principles for any further collaboration amongst Councils in addition to its existing partnerships with a number of authorities within, and beyond, Surrey.

Mole Valley Youth Council

The Council has operated a Youth Council (Mole Valley Youth Voice) for a number of years. The number of schools participating in the Council has fallen in recent years, and it was agreed that a review of Youth Voice and how the Council engages with young people should be undertaken. The review is planned for 2021/22 and officers will be working closely with the relevant Cabinet Member to develop proposals for consideration.

Members across the chamber are very keen to further develop these partnerships as they recognise the importance of seeking and hearing the views of future electors, given the decisions they are taking will have significant impact on this generation, particularly in relation to the response to the Climate Change Emergency and the adoption of the Local Plan.

Mole Valley Local Committee

The Local Committee consists of Mole Valley's six County Councillors alongside six, politically balanced, nominations of District Councillors who enjoy equal voting rights. The Local Committee meets approximately 4-5 times per annum and works to make decisions on local services and functions, as well as managing a budget delegated to it by the County Council's Cabinet. This includes a vital role in engaging with residents about local issues, and influence the County Council's work in light of local needs and perspectives; the Committee also works to monitor the performance and, where appropriate, making recommendations about local improvements to services for young people, libraries, highways and transportation. Members of the committee are also expected to attend approximately four to five informal meetings each year. Meetings of the Local Committee take place in the daytime.

Outside Organisations

The Council annually appoints councillors from all political groups to a wide range of outside organisations, which allows members to represent the Council and wider community through close engagement with these organisations. In some cases the Lead Cabinet Member will be the appointment representative, or a local ward embers, others are open to all embers.

The workload associated with an appointment varies, depending on the number of meetings and the expected workload from associated activities and preparation.

The full list of these bodies is below:

- Age Concern Mole Valley
- Member Armed Forces Champion
- Ashtead Common Consultative Committee
- Ashtead Peace Hall Memorial Committee
- Bookham Residents Association – Board of Directors
- Brockham Big Field Community Sports Ltd
- Central Surrey Council for Voluntary Service
- Mole Valley Citizens Advice
- Clarion Regional Scrutiny Committee
- Coast to Capital Strategic Joint Committee
- District Councils Network Assembly
- Dorking BID Board
- Dorking and District Town Twinning Association
- Dorking Residential Care Homes
- Dorking Town Forum
- East Surrey Community Safety Partnership
- Epsom and St Helier University Hospitals – Local Representatives' Panel
- Friends of Triel
- Gatwick Airport Consultative Committee
- Gatwick Diamond
- Gatwick Green Space Partnership
- Gatwick Joint Local Authorities Group
- Gatwick Noise Management Board Community Forum
- Local Government Association – General Assembly
- Lower Mole Partnership Liaison Group
- Health Liaison Panel
- Mole Valley Access Group
- Mole Valley Business Forum
- Plastic Free Bookham Steering Group

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Police and Crime Panel • Redhill Aerodrome Consultative Committee • South East England Councils (SEEC) • Surrey Environment Partnership • Surrey Countryside Partnership Board • Surrey Playing Fields (otherwise known as Surrey County Playing Fields Association) • Surrey Leaders' Group • Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Board <p>Historically the Council has appointed members to act as trustees (for a three year term) to local charitable trusts, such as</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dorking Charities • Fetcham United Charities • Leatherhead United Charities • Mickleham Almshouses <p>The Council can also make nominations to Surrey Wide Outside Bodies when invited to do so by the Surrey Leaders Group. At present Mole Valley Councillors sit on the following Surrey wide organisations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Surrey and Borders Partnership NHS Foundation Trust • Surrey Civilian-Military Partnership Board
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Community Involvement

9. 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?

Topic	Description
Community Leadership	Councillors could be expected to undertake the following ward-based activities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ward surgeries • Newsletters

- Social media activity
- Participate in local community groups – such as Parish Council or Residents’ Association Meetings

The disparate geographies throughout Mole Valley such as the differences in physical size of wards, and the difficulty of travelling within some scarcely-populated rural wards, can mean councillors representing rural wards spend more time travelling to meetings or events within their wards. Whereas some councillors representing urban or densely-populated wards could carry out their duties on foot, others may be required to travel significant distances to perform their duties and meet residents. This disparity, felt particularly in rural areas of the district, may impact upon councillors’ ability to commit to in-person events; this in turn may impact upon some residents’ ability to access representation. Whereas a surgery could be accessible to many residents in a more urban area, in a more rural ward, this may be fettered by transport links, together with a requirement for a greater number of surgeries across a larger geographical area.

The introduction of greater access to technology has changed the way that members can work with communities. The recent pandemic has demonstrated how new technology, such as virtual meetings can be utilised to mitigate issues where access to members or communities is more challenging. Whilst it is recognised that sometimes meetings, especially of a sensitive nature, are best held face to face, the last 15 months have provided an insight as to how technology can be utilised to maximise engagement.

Of course, managing an ever increasing inbox, phone calls and letters, together with a range of social media accounts, does require a significant time commitment from elected members. With the increase in the use of social media, a response which traditionally might have gone to one or two people, can now very easily be shared with a much wider audience. Members have had to learn to adapt to such changes, especially in the modern world where people expect swift and sometimes immediate responses to social media posts.

Within Mole Valley, Parish Councils are primarily located within the rural wards within the south of the District. Whilst not many District Councillors stand as Parish Councillors, they do have a standing invitation to attend regular (normally monthly) Parish meetings in order to report on any local matters, or to hear local concerns which may impact upon their work as District Councillors. Attendance at these meetings can also impose a significant time commitment on members, particularly where a Ward may encompass multiple parishes. For example, the Brockham, Buckland, and Betchworth Ward includes 3 Parish Councils with councillors attending meetings for each Parish.

	<p>In the more urban parts of the District there are a number of very active Residents' Associations and again local ward members are expected to attend and contribute to these meetings. In some instances, councillors may be required to collaborate with multiple Residents' Associations within their wards.</p> <p>In the majority of cases, Parish Council and Residents' Association meetings are held in the evening and in addition to their MVDC commitments, it would not be uncommon for councillors to attend on average three evening meetings a week.</p> <p>A further requirement for councillors throughout the District is working with, coordinating, and referring residents onto ad-hoc community groups which have been developed since the emergence of Covid-19. This has resulted in an additional pressure for members to provide assistance and support, particularly to more vulnerable residents within their communities. Whilst set up to assist with the pandemic, a number of groups are now considering how they can adapt and continue to provide support to those residents and communities who need it. Members will continue to engage with and work these groups, in addition to their existing case work.</p>
<p>Casework</p>	<p>The local ward member is often seen as the community representative who can best assist with local issues, regardless of whether they are services delivered by the Council. Typically issues raised relate to planning, social housing, bin collections, benefits, bus services, and highways. The local member may act as the catalyst in resolving problems, or helping to refer residents onto the appropriate organisations.</p> <p>Councillors have adapted to utilising Social Media and emails as a medium for communicating with residents, rather than face-to-face surgeries or using the phone. However, this has contributed to an expectation of a more prompt response to enquiries, than used to be expected. Particularly with the proliferation of Social Media, councillors may be under significant pressure to react quickly to matters highlighted through this medium.</p> <p>As with many issues, as the age profile of Mole Valley is older than the rest of Surrey on average, residents may be less likely to utilise self-service options on the Council's website. This may lead to the need for greater intervention from councillors, as they are required to ensure that residents can access these key services.</p> <p>Since the last Boundary Review, the Council has transferred its housing stock to a housing association, whilst this reduced the specific housing questions being asked of members, the level of casework has remained steady and often takes more time as members are having to liaise with a range of housing associations as opposed to just speaking with officers at the Council.</p>

Given the geography and rural / urban split of the district, the issues presented to members representing these wards can differ. Property issues and neighbour disputes are more common place within the urban area, with footpaths, highways and vegetation issues creating more concern in rural wards. Both the rural and urban areas have social housing, in the urban towns these are usually managed by National Housing Associations such as Clarion, or larger ones like Mount Green or Raven. Rural areas can have more local organisations such as the Poland Trust, where covenants are placed on properties regarding local links and members are asked to support the selection of residents in the allocation process.

Community events take place throughout Mole Valley, and members are very engaged in these events, often supporting the planning and safe delivery of these, again this varies by ward but provides members with the opportunity to engage with their communities in a visible way.

Member Support

The Council does not provide support to political groups and does not provide a case management system to support members' in their ward work. Each member is expected to develop their own systems to manage this element of their role. Officers are available to members during office hours, should they need to discuss a particular issue.

All members are provided with a Microsoft Office 365 Account, this enables them to access their council emails through outlook, access the Members' Extranet as well as providing access to software such as word and excel.

The Leader and Chairman of the Council have access to administrative support within the Democratic and Electoral Services Team.

Other Issues

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

All issues have been covered in the above text.

Summary

11. 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 number of councillors required to represent the authority in the future. Use this space to summarise the proposals and indicate any 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.

The countryside of Mole Valley is extensive and accounts for over 90% of the District's area, making it a very desirable location for people to live, surrounded by beautiful countryside and landscapes. The District is well served with two market towns, 3 large villages. The countryside contains a variety of attractive villages, hamlets and scattered isolated dwellings and farms, containing about a quarter of the District's population. The landscape of the countryside is also highly attractive.

As a whole, Mole Valley is a relatively affluent area. The 2015 Indices of Multiple Deprivation indicate that Mole Valley is the 305th least deprived local authority area out of a total of 326 local authorities. No part of the District is within the least deprived 10% nationally. However, when measured against the indices, there are parts of the District, including parts of North Holmwood and North Leatherhead, which experience relative levels of deprivation in comparison to other parts of the District.

However, this does not mean that Mole Valley is without its challenges, housing being a big issue for both the lack of availability and affordability. There is a very fine line for members to balance regarding the desire to preserve the countryside, whilst looking at potential areas for development to accommodate the housing need.

Mole Valley is forecast to have moderate population growth over the coming six years and beyond, when the new electoral arrangements will be in place. A total of 1113 new dwellings have planning permission and are forecast for construction and occupation in the years leading up to 2027. This does not take into account any smaller planning sites which may increase population density in existing developments, windfall sites, and any other population trends, including the existing uncertainty pertaining to the medium-term impact of Covid on working patterns.

As the Council elects by thirds, we have considered options around numbers divisible by three. It is not considered that there is justification for proposing an increase in elected members to 42, yet it is felt that a reduction to 36 could have a detrimental impact on the workload of members

and the effective operation on the Council. The Council therefore considers that a reduction to 39 elected representatives would ensure that there is no significant impact on the effectiveness of the Council's operations, enabling members to satisfy their decision making and regulatory responsibilities whilst also providing effective ward representation to local residents.

With specific reference to casework, it is important to note that there are some instances where such work can be generated by residents who are not on the Mole Valley Register of Electors. Following the recent elections held in May 2021, we have identified approximately 3,000 properties within the district where there are currently no registered electors; some are vacant (e.g. in the process of being remodelled, new development for sale) but some also include residents who are not on the electoral roll (and may be ineligible for registration purposes).

The provision for 39 members would enable all councillors to be allocated a small number of seats on Committees and Working Groups. Furthermore, members are conscious of the need to ensure that workloads are seen as manageable in addition to other commitments, such as employment and young families to ensure that there remain opportunities for those who wish to, to stand as a Member of the Council at future elections.

The Council therefore concludes that 39 members represents an appropriate Council size to create a ward pattern with a lower elector: councillor ratio in those wards with higher levels of deprivation and to account for greater levels of casework.

Conclusion

As detailed throughout our submission, it is felt that a Council made up of 39 elected representatives would be the optimum number to ensure that it can operate its business effectively.

In particular we would re-emphasise the following points from our submission to support this.

- As the Council elects by thirds, the proposed number of Councillors must be divisible by three.
- A higher figure of 42 was felt to be unjustifiable, given the general preference to reduce numbers rather than increasing these, an increase would also have a financial implication for the Council. Therefore the Council did not look to explore this option in detail.
- Since the last Boundary Review was undertaken in 1998, it was felt that the workload of members had increased, primarily due to the wider use of electronic communications such email and more recently social media. Whilst this has made access to information easier, it has raised expectations of residents as to the speed and detail of response from their elected representatives.

- Additionally, the demographic of Councillors has changed since the last review, with the average age of Councillors having reduced and made the Council more reflective of the communities it represents. However, the role of Councillor is a demanding one, with many Councillors juggling careers and families on top of their Council duties.
- It was considered that a reduction in Council size to 36 (a reduction of 12.8%) would not be sustainable and would have a significant impact on the effective running of the Council as well as the workload of Councillors, particularly for those representing large rural areas within the district.
- It was felt that the increased workloads due to a significant reduction in the number of Councillors would act as a deterrent for new candidates potentially looking to stand for election, or for current members when considering if they wished to seek re-election.