

South Staffordshire District Council

Council Size Submission

South Staffordshire District Council

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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.
2. The template allows respondents to enter comments directly under each heading. It is not recommended that responses are should 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 prepared by officers on behalf of the Council and was approved at Full Council held on 27 April 2021. 45 of the 49 elected members were present at the meeting with 43 voting in favour of the proposal and no member voting against the proposal. There was cross-party support for the proposal.

Methodology

At South Staffordshire Council a series of 'task and finish' groups, called Challenge Panels, was established to enable Members to look in detail at key areas. These Challenge Panels then feed into the Overview and Scrutiny Committee as part of the formal scrutiny arrangements for the Council. The Your Council Challenge Panel was tasked with inputting into the Boundary Review and has proved to be an effective forum. The Panel agreed that a Member survey should be completed by all Members for full representation on the time spent undertaking District Councillor activities. In total, 37 members responded. The Your Council Challenge Panel requested that 13 Members complete a journal for further detailed analysis. The information has formed part of the evidence base for the Council Size Submission.

Local Authority Profile

4. 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 constraint 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 transitional populations, is there any large growth anticipated?
 - Are there any other constraints, challenges, issues or changes ahead?

Local government in South Staffordshire operates under a three-tier system involving County, District and Parish Councils. The Councils work closely in partnership together, along with other partners. Staffordshire County Council is responsible for social services, education and highways. There are eight County Councillors covering the area of South Staffordshire. There are 27 Parish Councils in South Staffordshire and they can help with many local issues. They are responsible for smaller local services such as community centres, play areas and play equipment, allotments, and war memorials.

Our people

South Staffordshire is resident to around 113,109 people. When compared to England, South Staffordshire has a lower proportion of children aged under five, under 16 and people aged 16-64. There is, however, a higher proportion of residents who are aged 65 and over. 5.4% of the population is from an ethnic minority group. This presents many challenges, such as having a higher proportion of residents that are not digitally connected and a higher proportion of lone pensioners.

The overall population of South Staffordshire is projected to increase in the next 10 years by 3%, with a significant growth in people aged 65 and over (19%) and aged 85 and over (47%). The rate of increase in the number of older people in South Staffordshire is faster than the England average and equates to 6,600 additional residents aged 65 and over by 2027.

Population changes between 2017 and 2027		
Age category	South Staffordshire	England
Under five	0.2% (0)	-2.2% (-74,900)
Under 16s	2.8% (500)	3.5% (375,600)
Ages 16-64	-4.1% (-2,700)	2.1% (741,800)
65 and over	18.6% (5,000)	20.3% (2,032,700)
85 and over	47.3% (1,600)	25.6% (345,800)

South Staffordshire does have a reducing working age population and there is a need to focus on retaining and attracting younger people, along with ensuring that local employers have future access to a wide and skilled labour pool for the district's ongoing prosperity. Local businesses of all shapes and sizes have said that ensuring younger residents have the skills to meet their future needs is their number one priority. Both the Stoke and Staffordshire LEP, through their Strategic Economic Plan, and Staffordshire County Council as the local skills authority, have prioritised the skills agenda in their plan, which is an example of the robust partnership working arrangements in place within the district.

Only 1% of South Staffordshire residents (amounting to 1,490 people) live within the most deprived national quintile. These residents all live within the Wombourne south west, which makes up 31.3% of this ward's population. Six wards however fall in to the second most deprived national quintile. These wards are presented below:

Ward	% in second most deprived IMD 2015 national quintile, 2016
Bilbrook	27.6% (1,180)
Essington	30.5% (1,550)
Featherstone and Shareshill	24.1% (1,740)
Great Wyrley Town	24.1% (1,520)
Huntington & Hatherton	56.5% (3,150)
Perton Lakeside	24.9% (1,610)
South Staffordshire	9.7%
Staffordshire	18.4%
West Midlands	18.6%
England	20.5%

Overall life expectancy at birth in South Staffordshire is 81 years for men and 84 years for women, both higher than the national averages. Both men and women, however, living in the most deprived areas of South Staffordshire live five and six years less than those living in less deprived areas. Healthy life expectancy in South Staffordshire is 66 years for both men and women.

Around six out of ten adults have excess weight (either obese or overweight) which is similar to the national average. The proportion of people who are obese in South Staffordshire is also similar to the England average. Around 25% of children aged four to five in South Staffordshire have excess weight (overweight or obese) with rates being higher than average. Around 35% of children aged 10-11 have excess weight.

The number of people on dementia, diabetes and hypertension registers in South Staffordshire is higher than the national averages - although this could

reflect good case finding, diagnosis and recording. However, there is a higher proportion of residents in South Staffordshire with a limiting long-term illness compared to the national average. Disability claimants are also high which would suggest levels of long-term conditions are high.

Our Staff

The workforce has reduced from 332 in 2015 to 309 in 2021. Prior to 2015 there had been further staff reductions following the last major economic downturn in 2008. The reduced workforce has adapted and embraced new ways of working, including digital technology, to enable the same high quality services to be delivered to our residents.

Our Place

South Staffordshire is a predominantly rural district bordering the western edge of the West Midlands Conurbation, Shropshire, Worcestershire and neighbouring Staffordshire authorities. To support the overall communication, intelligence and spread of resources the Council divided the district into 5 localities which include a total of 27 parishes and 25 wards.

In the last decade we have seen strong economic growth, the flagship i54 South Staffordshire development has come forward with Jaguar Land Rover's advanced engine facility as well as Moog, ISP, Eurofins and other multi-national companies. i54 is recognised as a nationally significant employment site that has created around 2,700 jobs so far. Work has started on a western extension to the site that will see further expansion of 24 hectares, bringing further inward investment to the district. This is a result of positive partnership working with the County Council, the District Council and with Wolverhampton City Council to enable this development of this scale and quality to happen.

Building work has also commenced on the Council's plans to invest in its headquarters, centrally located in Codsall which one of the largest settlements in the district. Expanding the site into a new Community Hub with a full refurbishment and new build will see specialist teams from across the public, health, private and voluntary sectors co-located together. This in turn will lead to improved service integration for those supporting the district's most vulnerable residents, helping improve outcomes and improving efficiencies. The Codsall Community Hub will see the introduction of a GP surgery, NHS community outreach teams, and increased police presence, all helping reduce taxpayer spend on the wider estate by condensing multiple buildings into one. Space will be available for local businesses, including retail and offices, through the South Staffordshire Business Hub, creating an environment for local business to grow. Residents will benefit with access to public services on one site, in a modern environment with good transport links into both the local settlements and wider conurbation. Fundamentally, investment in the Council's building will secure its long-term future and staff will work in a modern agile collaborative environment. This epitomises the approach adopted by the Council – inclusivity, partnership working and serving the community.

The Council is preparing its Local Plan to 2036. The Council believes the best way to involve communities, assess infrastructure needs and plan well for the future is through a robust Local Plan which plans positively for the District's needs. Our plan going forward, which is still being prepared, but is expected to be

consulted on in the late Summer 2021, allows for our own growth needs and contributes to the wider Housing Market Area needs, but seeks to ensure this growth is strategically planned and set out in a way that supports our communities and delivers needed infrastructure.

Our Local Plan 2036 is seeking to deliver around 9,000 dwellings between 2018-2038 but as the location of sites have not been agreed at this stage we are unable to include these in our forecasts.

Our current Local Plan is set to deliver 2,088 over the next 6 years and there have been 1,481 houses completed in South Staffordshire over the last 6 years.

The north and north-east of the district are well served by the major strategic highway network having the M6, M54 and M6 Toll running through it as well as the A5, A449 and A460 as trunk roads. This part of the district has become a real focus for growth in the wider sub-region, which has brought significant benefits to the area with over 7000 new jobs being created at four key strategic employment sites in the area. However, this in turn has placed a major strain on the local infrastructure. Both residents and Councillors alike have highlighted this as a major concern for the Council and its partners to focus on in the future and the Council will look to work with partners to alleviate the strains on infrastructure and deliver projects to support infrastructure creation that supports the District, its communities and businesses and creates prosperity.

In May 2020 the Development Consent Order for the West Midlands Interchange was granted by the Secretary of State in the North of the District which creates up to 743,200 square metres (gross internal area) of rail served warehousing and ancillary service buildings. The WMI is said to create in excess of 8,550 jobs.

Conversely, the south and north-west of the district have a more rural feel with a more limited and local road network and poorer public transport networks. The district has four train stations - Penkridge in the North on the West Coast Mainline, Landywood in the North on the recently electrified Chaseline, and Codsall and Bilbrook in the centre of the District on the Wolverhampton - Shrewsbury line. However, the majority of the district does not have access to rail services or other forms of regular public transport. The Southern part of the District utilises rail services outside the District, e.g. Stourbridge in the South.

Our Council Plan can be found here -

<https://sstaffsgovuk.sharepoint.com/sites/TheCore/Key%20Documents/Key%20Corporate%20Documents/Council%20Plan%202020%202024.pdf>

Council Size

5. 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

6. 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	Key lines of explanation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>What governance model will your authority operate? e.g. Committee System, Executive or other?</i> ➤ <i>The Cabinet model, for example, usually requires 6 to 10 members. How many members will you require?</i> ➤ <i>If the authority runs a Committee system, we want to understand why the number and size of the committees you have represents is most appropriate for the authority.</i>
	Analysis	<p>South Staffordshire’s 25 wards are represented by 49 District Councillors.</p> <p>The Council is currently a Conservative controlled administration and is a politically stable environment. The current political representation on the Council is: 37 Conservative, 7 South Staffordshire Independents, 3 Green Party, 1 Labour Party and 1 UKIP. The South Staffordshire Independents form the main opposition party. Whilst providing a genuine challenge to proposals and policies via positive debate during the effective scrutiny process, the opposition are generally supportive of final proposals and consensus is usually reached.</p> <p>The full Council is a formal meeting of all Councillors. The full Council is required by law to take certain important decisions including setting the Council’s Budget and Council Tax and approving a number of key plans and strategies, which together form the Policy Framework (listed below). The full Council must also by law take decisions on a number of specific matters.</p> <p>The full Council provides a central forum for debate and gives the opportunity for Councillors to ask questions about the Council or matters affecting the Council. The Council is responsible for the Budget and Policy Framework of the Council and for all of the functions not the responsibility of the Cabinet; it has a role in holding the Cabinet to account. It will carry out some functions itself but others will be delegated to Committees or named officers.</p> <p>The Council has adopted a Strong Leader and Cabinet model of governance. The Leader of the Council was appointed at the Annual Council meeting in May 2019 for a 4-year term of office. The current Leader of the Council has successfully been in office for three terms and served at all three levels of Local Government.</p> <p>The Council appoints the Leader of the Council who then appoints a Cabinet. The leader of South Staffordshire District Council has appointed 5 cabinet members, including a Deputy Leader.</p>

There are approximately 10 formal meetings of Cabinet per year and the Leader meets weekly with the Chief Executive and for part of the meeting members of the Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) join them. CLT also meets with Cabinet weekly on an informal basis if there are issues to be discussed.

The Council appoints the Committees, some of which are responsible for overseeing and reviewing the decisions of the Cabinet, (Scrutiny Committees) while others discharge regulatory responsibilities or other functions which by law may not be discharged by the Cabinet, for example planning and licensing.

In addition to our Committee/Panel system, we also have a series of ‘task and finish’ groups, called Challenge Panels, which were established to enable Members to look in detail at key areas. These Challenge Panels then feed into the Overview and Scrutiny Committee as part of the formal scrutiny arrangements for the Council. The Your Council Challenge Panel was tasked with inputting into the Boundary Review and has proved to be an effective forum.

	No. of Members	No. of meetings per year	Duration of meeting	Time of meeting	Attendance
APPOINTMENTS PANEL	6	4	2 hours	No fixed time	87%
ASSET SCRUTINY	6	Varies but around 5	1 hour	No fixed time	64%
AUDIT & RISK	8	5	1.5 hours	4pm-5.30pm	81%
CABINET	6	10	30 mins	2pm-2.30pm	75%
CHALLENGE PANEL YOUR COUNCIL	17	4	1-2 hours	No fixed time	
CHALLENGE PANEL YOUR PLACE	15	4	1-2 hours	No fixed time	
CHALLENGE PANEL YOUR COMMUNITY	17	4	1-2 hours	No fixed time	

FULL COUNCIL	49	7	1 hour	7pm-8pm	84%
LICENSING & REGULATORY	15	7	1.5 hours	2.30pm-4pm	73%
LOTTERY ADVISORY PANEL	10	1	1 hour	No fixed time	63%
Member Engagement & Training Group	11	Quarterly	1 hour	No fixed time	
OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY	All Members except Cabinet Members	7	1.5 hours	6.30pm-8.00pm	82%
PLANNING	21	12	1.5 hours	6.30pm-8pm	83%
STANDARDS & RESOURCES	14	7	1 hour	2.30pm-3.30pm	70%
WELLBEING SELECT	16	6	1 hour	5pm-6pm	73%

Member Survey on workload

Councillors spend most their time attending internal Councillor meetings such as Overview and Scrutiny, with an even split between the number of councillors that spend 1-5 hours a week attending (50%) and 5-10 hours (47%) attending.

Less time is spent meeting with officers as 76% of Councillors state that can take up 1-5 hours a week, whilst 15% spend attending on average, 5-10 hours a week.

In relation to Councillor and other meetings, 53% of members spend 1-5 hours preparing for them, whilst 35% take 5-10 hours, 6% spend 11-15 hours and a further 6% spend over 15 hours.

Portfolios	<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>How many portfolios will there be?</i> ➤ <i>What will the role of a portfolio holder be?</i> ➤ <i>Will this be a full-time position?</i> ➤ <i>Will decisions be delegated to portfolio holders? Or will the executive/mayor take decisions?</i>
	<i>Analysis</i>	The Leader and Cabinet are responsible for “executive” functions which are primarily those functions which are not by law, or a decision of the Council, to be exercised by specific Committees (e.g. Planning Committee). The Leader also allocates areas of responsibility to members of the Cabinet.

Cabinet Members have individual executive decision-making powers within their portfolios and act as the Council’s main representative and spokesperson for their nominated areas of responsibility.

Before a Member of the Cabinet formally makes a decision, an opportunity is given to non-cabinet members to “call in” the decision for scrutiny – a request for a “call in” must be supported by two members – details of this procedure can be found at part 4 of the constitution – rules of procedure.

The Cabinet carries out all of the local authority’s functions which are not the responsibility of any other part of the authority. Some of these decisions / plans / policies / strategies require the approval of Full Council e.g. Council Plan, Medium Term Financial Strategy, Local Plan.

The portfolio and breakdown of each Cabinet Member is detailed below:

Role	Key Corporate Priority responsibility	Service Responsibilities
Leader	Overall strategic direction of the Council, External partnerships / agencies, Liaison with County Council and Government, the Council Plan, the Constitution, Asset Strategy, MTFS	Oversees work of the Chief Executive, Human Resources, Policy and Performance, Finance and Accountancy, Procurement and Legal Services. Estates and Assets (including commercial property, industrial units, Hinksford Park Mobile Home Park)
Deputy Leader	Planning and Regulatory: Strategic health and Health & Safety Local Plan	Oversees the work strategic housing, development management (executive functions only), local plans, building control and Land Charges, enterprise and growth, transport, highways and rural accessibility, conservation and design and landscape planning, health and safety (executive functions only), planning enforcement (executive functions only), and functions allocated to the Assistant Cabinet Member
Cabinet Member	Business Transformation: Efficiency and Income Plan, Digital Strategy and Agile Working	Oversees the work of ICT, Business Improvement Team, programme and project management/transformation programme and internal audit
Cabinet Member	Welfare Services: Building Better Opportunities, Work Clubs	Oversees the work of housing operations and homelessness, Council Tax, revenues and benefits including debt recovery, customer services, welfare support, safeguarding and Disabled Facilities Grants Customer Services

		<table border="1"> <tr> <td>Cabinet Member</td> <td>Community Services: Emergency Planning and Business Continuity, Voluntary Sector, Climate Change</td> <td>Oversees the work of waste and street scene, drainage systems, flood protection, leisure, street lighting, grounds maintenance, bereavement services, street cleansing, energy saving and the local environment, Council Office management to include catering services, countryside management; public open spaces</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Assistant Cabinet Member</td> <td>Regulatory Services</td> <td>Assists the Cabinet Member in overseeing the work of licensing, food safety, environmental health, pest control, environmental crime and community safety (including anti-social behaviour and CCTV)</td> </tr> </table>	Cabinet Member	Community Services: Emergency Planning and Business Continuity, Voluntary Sector, Climate Change	Oversees the work of waste and street scene, drainage systems, flood protection, leisure, street lighting, grounds maintenance, bereavement services, street cleansing, energy saving and the local environment, Council Office management to include catering services, countryside management; public open spaces	Assistant Cabinet Member	Regulatory Services	Assists the Cabinet Member in overseeing the work of licensing, food safety, environmental health, pest control, environmental crime and community safety (including anti-social behaviour and CCTV)
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Assistant Cabinet Member	Regulatory Services	Assists the Cabinet Member in overseeing the work of licensing, food safety, environmental health, pest control, environmental crime and community safety (including anti-social behaviour and CCTV)						
Delegated Responsibilities	<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>What responsibilities will be delegated to officers or committees?</i> ➤ <i>How many councillors will be involved in taking major decisions?</i> 						
	Analysis	The responsibilities are set out in <u>Part 3 of the Constitution</u>						

Accountability

7. 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	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"> ➤ <i>How will decision makers be held to account?</i> ➤ <i>How many committees will be required? And what will their functions be?</i> ➤ <i>How many task and finish groups will there be? And what will their functions be? What time commitment will be involved for members? And how often will meetings take place?</i> ➤ <i>How many members will be required to fulfil these positions?</i> ➤ <i>Explain why you have increased, decreased, or not changed the number of scrutiny committees in the authority.</i> ➤ <i>Explain the reasoning behind the number of members per committee in terms of adding value.</i>
Analysis	<p>Overview and Scrutiny Committee</p> <p>All Members other than Cabinet are represented on an Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) Committee. O&S acts as a ‘critical friend’ to the Council and receives quarterly performance updates to check and challenge. It has a set work programme that includes items such as budget review and setting and oversight of Challenge Panels. The Council has adopted a scrutiny model that allows for full engagement across all members but with targeted scrutiny where appropriate. For example, the use of the Asset Scrutiny Panel to consider asset proposals, drawing on specialist knowledge of the members of the Panel.</p> <p>The Council fulfils its statutory requirement of creating an Overview and Scrutiny Committee but also goes beyond this, by creating supplementary panels that are important to key business areas – Asset Scrutiny Panel and Wellbeing Select. The Wellbeing Select Committee will act as the Council’s Crime and Disorder Committee for the purposes of the Crime and Disorder (Overview and Scrutiny) Regulations. The scrutiny of all matters relating to health and wellbeing sits with this Committee. Any member of the Council, whether a member of this Committee or not, may refer a local crime or disorder matter to the Committee. The Asset Scrutiny Panel undertakes scrutiny functions in respect of all aspects of the Council’s Asset Strategy.</p>

They allow a wider involvement in Council business by involving non-councillors from the wider public sector, voluntary and community groups to help them in their work. They make reports and recommendations to the Cabinet and the Council on its policies, budget and service delivery. Full details can be found in Part 2 Article 6 of the Constitution.

	No. of Members	No. of meetings per year	Preparation time	Duration of meeting	Time of meeting	Attendance
Overview & Scrutiny	the 43 Councillors – who are not members of the Cabinet	6	30 mins	1 hour	6.30pm-7.30pm	82%
Asset Scrutiny	6	Varies but around 5	30 mins	30 minutes	No fixed time	64%
Wellbeing Select	16	6	30 mins	1 hour	5pm-6pm	73%

On average the Overview and Scrutiny committee takes up approximately 9 hours of a councillor's time every year (3 hours of preparation; 6 hours attending the meetings).

Challenge Panels

To support the O&S infrastructure, Challenge Panels were established in 2013 against a backdrop of a rapidly changing policy and financial landscape. The Challenge Panels were introduced as an informal platform where all Members could check and challenge specific services. They are informal working groups and have no decision-making powers or any formal role in the Council's governance arrangements; although their work may inform the actions of the Cabinet or the consideration of matters by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Wellbeing Select Committee. Each Challenge Panel comprises no fewer than 15 members of the Council and all members of the Council were offered a seat on at least one Challenge Panel.

No more than two members of the Cabinet shall sit on any one Challenge Panel. A member of the Cabinet or the Chairman of a standing committee or a scrutiny committee may not also chair a Challenge Panel. Each Panel will agree an informal action plan at the start of each Municipal Year and may make recommendations to inform the work of the

Cabinet or the consideration of matters by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Wellbeing Select Committee.

They have proved very popular amongst Members and have provided a clear role for Members and officers to work together on topics that add value to the Council. They are focused against three headings:

	No. of Members	No. of meetings per year	Preparation time	Duration of meeting	Time of meeting
Challenge Panel: Your Council	17	4	30 mins	1 -2 hours	No fixed time
Challenge Panel: Your Place	15	4	30 mins	1 -2 hours	No fixed time
Challenge Panel: Your Community	17	4	30 mins	1 -2 hours	No fixed time

In 2017, the Panels were reviewed with Members having a greater say in the design of services. For example, the Your Community Challenge Panel focused on the re-design of the grounds maintenance service that has been brought back in-house.

The Council has carried out an Annual Service Challenge programme that helps set the budget for the following year. In 2017, this process was reviewed, and Member Forward Planning Forums were introduced over the summer period ensuring all Members were actively involved in shaping and designing future services and able to give officers a clear steer on developments at an earlier point.

This process has continued throughout the year where targeted Member Forums have taken place to specifically review and design services in areas such as a new Local Plan for the District, the option to charge for green waste in the future, and future acquisitions and developments. Over the 2020/21-year 28 Member Briefing Sessions/Forums have taken place with high attendance at all meetings.

	<p>The scrutiny arrangements work well and ensure whole member engagement in key issues and topics. The current system allows specific scrutiny where needed e.g. Asset Scrutiny Panel but engages the whole membership via the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. A pro-active approach to scrutiny of executive decisions is adopted with Cabinet Members electing to take matters to O&S for scrutiny and engagement rather than issuing Decisions which would then be subject to call-in. This epitomises the whole Council approach at South Staffordshire.</p>
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<p>Statutory Function</p>		<p>This includes planning, licencing and any other regulatory responsibilities. Consider under each of the headings the extent to which decisions will be delegated to officers. How many members will be required to fulfil the statutory requirements of the council?</p>
<p>Planning</p>	<p><i>Key lines of explanation</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>What proportion of planning applications will be determined by members?</i> ➤ <i>Has this changed in the last few years? And are further changes anticipated?</i> ➤ <i>Will there be area planning committees? Or a single council-wide committee?</i> ➤ <i>Will executive members serve on the planning committees?</i> ➤ <i>What will be the time commitment to the planning committee for members?</i>
	<p><i>Analysis</i></p>	<p>Regulatory The Council has appointed a Planning Committee and a Licensing and Regulatory Committee to deal with matters mainly relating to applications from individuals for consents, approvals and permissions from the Council and a number of other similar functions.</p> <p>Councillors determine roughly 5% of all planning applications, with there being about 1000-1200 applications submitted every year. Approximately sixty of these go to Planning Committee. The criteria for whether a planning application is considered by Planning Committee is where it is called to Committee by a Councillor; where the proposal is contrary to policy, but is recommended for approval; where the Council is the applicant or landowner; or where the applicant is a Councillor, a member of the Development Management or Building Control Team or a Senior Manager.</p> <p>On average the planning committee takes up approximately 4 hours of a councillor's time every month (2 hours of preparation; 2 hours attending site visits and the meeting) or 48 hours a year.</p> <p>In June 2018, the LGA Peer Review recommended that the Council should review its current arrangements to ensure that the structure remains fit for the future. At this time, 48 out of 49 Councillors were members of the Planning</p>

		<p>Committee (one member chose not to be a member of the Committee). The Councils review of its current arrangements at that time resulted in a member decision of a reduction of 27 members to a total of 21 Planning Committee members.</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="633 248 1834 568"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>No. of Members</th> <th>No. of meetings per year</th> <th>Duration of meeting</th> <th>Time of meeting</th> <th>Attendance</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Planning Committee</td> <td>21 (including 4 Cabinet Members)</td> <td>12</td> <td>1.5 HOURS (2.5 hours with training session beforehand)</td> <td>6.30PM-8PM</td> <td>83%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>Whilst Planning Committee Members are required to take training before they can sit on the Committee, for further support Members are also invited to attend a training session 1 hour before each Planning Committee starts.</p> <p>The reduction of members from 48 to 21 has had a positive impact on the running of the Planning Committee with no negative impacts in terms of representation noted. Ward members have the opportunity to attend and speak on applications in their area.</p>		No. of Members	No. of meetings per year	Duration of meeting	Time of meeting	Attendance	Planning Committee	21 (including 4 Cabinet Members)	12	1.5 HOURS (2.5 hours with training session beforehand)	6.30PM-8PM	83%
	No. of Members	No. of meetings per year	Duration of meeting	Time of meeting	Attendance									
Planning Committee	21 (including 4 Cabinet Members)	12	1.5 HOURS (2.5 hours with training session beforehand)	6.30PM-8PM	83%									
	<p><i>Key lines of explanation</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>How many licencing panels will the council have in the average year?</i> ➤ <i>And what will be the time commitment for members?</i> ➤ <i>Will there be standing licencing panels, or will they be ad-hoc?</i> ➤ <i>Will there be core members and regular attendees, or will different members serve on them?</i> 												
<p>Licensing</p>	<p>Analysis</p>	<p>Licensing</p> <p>The role of the Licensing and Regulatory Committee is to be responsible for determining applications and enforcement decisions of the Council in relation to all licensing matters (other than those which are by law matters for the Cabinet) and other related matters, (including the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act) as set out in Part 3 of the Constitution.</p> <p>The Licensing and Regulatory Committee shall comprise 15 Councillors appointed by the Council at its Annual Meeting. The Committee can exercise certain of its functions (under the Licensing Act 2003, the Gambling Act 2005 and taxi licensing legislation) through Licensing Sub-Committees; which shall comprise of any 3 (in the case of Licensing Act or Gambling Act matters) or any 5 (in the case of taxi licensing matters) of the 15 Councillors of the Committee. The</p>												

		<p>Director of Legal and Governance is responsible for choosing the members of any such sub-committee.</p> <p>The quorum for a meeting of the Licensing and Regulatory Committee shall be one quarter of the number of voting members of the Committee, quorum is therefore generally 4.</p> <p>The quorum for a meeting of a Licensing Sub-Committee shall be 3 voting members of the Licensing and Regulatory Committee. The political balance requirements under the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 shall not apply to meetings of the Licensing Sub- Committee.</p> <p>On average the Licensing and Regulatory committee takes up approximately 14 hours of a Councillor's time every year (3.5 hours of preparation; 10.5 hours attending the meetings).</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="595 555 1736 756"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>No. of Members</th> <th>No. of meetings per year</th> <th>Duration of meeting</th> <th>Time of meeting</th> <th>Attendance</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Licensing & Regulatory</td> <td>15</td> <td>7</td> <td>1.5 hours</td> <td>2.30PM-4PM</td> <td>73%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>The Committee works well at current membership and there are no proposals to reduce membership. Attendance is good and quoracy is not an issue.</p>		No. of Members	No. of meetings per year	Duration of meeting	Time of meeting	Attendance	Licensing & Regulatory	15	7	1.5 hours	2.30PM-4PM	73%
	No. of Members	No. of meetings per year	Duration of meeting	Time of meeting	Attendance									
Licensing & Regulatory	15	7	1.5 hours	2.30PM-4PM	73%									
<p>Other Regulatory Bodies</p>	<p><i>Key lines of explanation</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>What will they be, and how many members will they require?</i> ➤ <i>Explain the number and membership of your Regulatory Committees with respect to greater delegation to officers.</i> 												
	<p>Analysis</p>	<p>N/A</p>												

External Partnerships	Service delivery has changed for councils over time, and many authorities now have a range of delivery partners to work with and hold to account.
<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>Will executive members serve on decision-making partnerships, sub-regional, regional or national bodies?</i> ➤ <i>How many councillors will be involved in this activity? And what is their expected workload? What proportion of this work is undertaken by portfolio holders?</i> ➤ <i>What other external bodies will members be involved in? And what is the anticipated workload?</i>
Analysis	<p>South Staffordshire is the southernmost of the nine Staffordshire authorities in the County. The district adjoins the Major Urban Area of the West Midlands Conurbation and is very close to the Black Country towns of Dudley and Walsall and the City of Wolverhampton. The district also shares its boundaries with Shropshire and Telford to the west and Stafford to the north, with the County of Worcestershire to the south.</p> <p>Playing an important role in the economy of the wider County and West Midlands due to our strategic location to the West of the conurbation, the Leader of the Council sits on the Stoke-On-Trent and Staffordshire Local Enterprise Partnership Executive Board, and due to the close economic links with the Black Country has also been invited and attends the Black Country LEP Board meetings.</p> <p>This has come about through the strong partnership working where three councils including ourselves, Staffordshire County Council and City of Wolverhampton Council worked together to deliver the award-winning and successful i54 South Staffordshire. The Councils continue to work together and have recently collectively delivered the i54 Western Extension building on the success of the i54 delivery of recent years.</p> <p>The majority of the Council’s regional representative role is undertaken by Cabinet Members with the Leader and Deputy Leader carrying the highest workload. Whilst this does invariably impact on these Members, the workload is manageable and there is capacity within the wider membership to reallocate representative roles if required.</p> <p>Member Survey</p> <p>The Member Survey and Member Journal indicated that attendance at external partnership meetings was not a significant call on Member’s time with only a small minority indicating participation at this level.</p> <p>In request for Councillors to identify any regional bodies or meetings they attend as part of their role as a Councillor, 11 respondents skipped the question and 14 stated that they do not. 10 out of the 37 Councillors identified a regional body that they attend. In terms of the time spent on such meetings, 29% of Councillors spend 1-5 hours attending regional</p>

meetings on average each week, whilst a higher proportion of 68%, do not spend any time attending.

In request for Councillors to identify any national bodies or meetings they attend as part of their role as a Councillor, 11 respondents skipped, 16 stated that they do not, 4 attend LGA meetings.

A final question concerning external workload refers to meetings within the District, where Councillors attend as a representative of the Council. Whilst 38% of Councillors spend 1-5 hours attending, a higher proportion of Councillors (53%) do not spend any time attending these types of meetings.

Community Involvement

8. 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	Key lines of explanation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>In general terms how do councillors carry out their representational role with electors?</i> ➤ <i>Does the council have area committees and what are their powers?</i> ➤ <i>How do councillors seek to engage with their constituents? Do they hold surgeries, send newsletters, hold public meetings or maintain blogs?</i> ➤ <i>Are there any mechanisms in place that help councillors interact with young people, those not on the electoral register, and/or other minority groups and their representative bodies?</i> ➤ <i>Are councillors expected to attend community meetings, such as parish or resident's association meetings? If so, what is their level of involvement and what roles do they play?</i> ➤ <i>Explain your approach to the Area Governance structure. Is your Area Governance a decision-making forum or an advisory board? What is their relationship with locally elected members and Community bodies such as Town and Parish Councils? Looking forward how could they be improved to enhance decision-making?</i>
	Analysis	<p>The level and methods of community engagement and leadership undertaken is at the discretion of each Councillor.</p> <p>Due to the Councils many channels of communication the need for residents to rely on Councillors for information about council services has reduced – for example, residents no longer need to contact their Councillor to find out about meetings as minutes and agendas are published online. Information about council services is available 24/7 through the Council's website and we have an increased following on Social Media. We also distribute three different versions of our Council News Round Up, every Friday, to staff, members, and parish clerks. Each week, the Council News Round Ups consist of council news, good news stories and helpful resources which we encourage our members and parishes to share with residents. We will shortly be sending the parish version out through our e-alerts system too, which has 8,148 residents signed up so far.</p> <p>In addition to this, Member Briefings take place on an ad hoc basis to ensure Members are kept up to date on new legislation or changes in services.</p> <p>We also have two Member Support Officers who are responsible for managing the democratic process and ensuring that elected Members are fully supported to carry out their duties to support the delivery of the Council's Strategic priorities.</p>

Member Survey - workload

65% of Councillors are dealing with on average, 1-5 cases/issues a week on behalf of local residents, 16% are dealing with an average of 6-10 cases and a further 16% are dealing with 11-15 cases each week. 54% of Councillors spend 1-5 hours engaging with ward residents on direct Council business on average each week, 40% spend 5-10 hours and 5% spend 11-15 hours. This is referring to enquiries, casework, and home visits (before Covid-19).

Where 15% of Councillors do not spend any time on community obligations on indirect Council business on average each week, 64% spend 1-5 hours and 18% spend 5-10 hours. To support this, a response to ‘what aspect of your duties has changed most in recent years’ a Councillor has reported an “increased Councillor representation on Community Organisations.” In summary, little time is spent attending regional, national and external meetings, more time is spent attending meetings with officers and the most time is spent attending councillor meetings like Overview and Scrutiny and preparing for meetings.

Member Survey – support

In terms of sufficiency, the survey tells us that all Councillors feel that they have sufficient time to effectively carry out their role as a Councillor and to effectively communicate with their ward residents. Only 2 out of 37 respondents feel that they need more support.

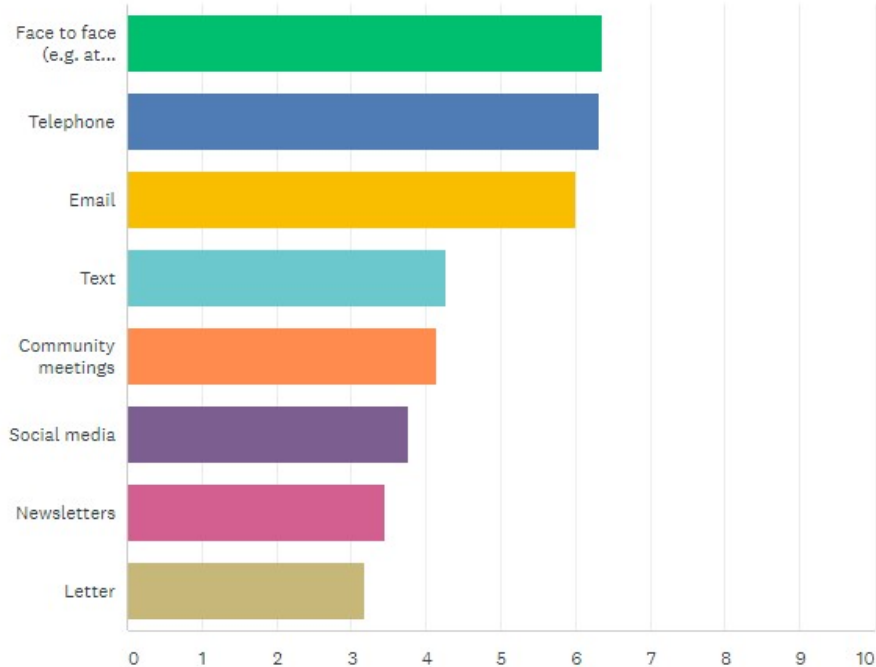
Member Survey - favoured communication

Firstly, to contextualise the makeup of our Council, our Councillors are longstanding, with the vast majority being of retirement age – approximately 11 out of 49 Councillors are in employment.

Our Members prefer to communicate with residents face-to-face or by telephone as evidenced below.

Please rank the following in order of importance as modes of communication with ward residents. (1 being the most important - leave blank if you do not use that type of communication)

Answered: 37 Skipped: 0



Whilst face-to-face communication with residents is still joint top with telephone and emails slightly behind, the new way of working due to the Covid-19 pandemic has acted as a huge catalyst for change. Most of our Members have adapted well to such an intense shift to digital working and now may be more inclined to use digital methods of communication for resident engagement in the future. Whilst some members feel ‘workload is much easier than it used to be due to advanced technology’ others ‘still go out to each electorate to discuss their issue.’ Nevertheless, through intense officer support for those who need it, the continuation of some home working will allow greater flexibility and empower councillors to spend more time out in the community, having face to face conversations where most suited.

Member Training

Newly elected Members receive a practical guide to the Council that sets out the role they can play, how decisions are made and other practical information they need so they can quickly get to grips with their role. Each year there is also a rolling programme of training events some of which, are mandatory. In 2019/20 there were 26 training sessions, the

majority of these have been repeated this year.

To support communication and engagement, in 2014 a Member Engagement and Training Panel was established that consisted of the Chairmen of Committees and the Challenge Panels, and chaired by the Cabinet Member for Welfare Services. The meeting is co-ordinated by the Director Legal and Governance and each year the panel evaluates member training as well as setting out the new training programme for the following year and looks to ensure that Member engagement is promoted and improved. There are 11 members who sit on this group, who meet quarterly for 1 hour.

Dual hatted roles

The Council operates in a three-tier system of responsibility for the provision of services and support in the local community, which can in some cases increase workload for Councillors. Our tiered system of local government consists of County, District and Parish. It is highlighted in the Survey, by a Member that “I have 3 Parish Councils on my ward which I am expected to attend as their District Councillor.” Some Councillors are also dual hatted. 33 Councillors are also Parish Councillors (4 of which, are Councillors of 2 Parishes) and 6 Councillors are also County Councillors. A Member who has been a Parish Councillor for 25 years noted in the survey that “where Members are dual-hatted, this role has also considerably increased.”

South Staffordshire Community Lottery

The Community Lottery continues to provide good causes with a COVID-secure and sustainable platform to raise essential funds. Support for the community from the community continues to grow. As of 31 March 2021, 77 good causes are registered and benefiting from the lottery. In total, 155,769 tickets have been bought since November 2017. In total £93,461.00 has been raised for good causes, community groups and charities in South Staffordshire. A large proportion of this funding has gone directly to registered good causes, with a small percentage generating funds to support the South Staffordshire Community Innovation Fund.

South Staffordshire Community Innovation Fund

The South Staffordshire Community Innovation Fund is funded through the sale of Community Lottery tickets. Once a year, charities, good causes and community groups are invited to apply for funding up to £1,000 to support specific projects. In the latest call for applications, 10 organisations have been successful and a total of £7,110 has been paid to good causes.

Casework	<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>How do councillors deal with their casework? Do they pass it on to council officers? Or do they take a more in-depth approach to resolving issues?</i> ➤ <i>What support do members receive?</i> ➤ <i>How has technology influenced the way in which councillors work? And interact with their electorate?</i>
	Analysis	South Staffordshire Councils' Councillors do not undertake regularised casework or hold surgeries. They deal with queries on an ad hoc basis.

Other Issues

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

A focus on future needs

It has been highlighted by many of our Councillors, that Member roles should better reflect our demographics, and that means providing flexibility that encourages uptake from working ageing people. It was stated in a Member Journal that “Calls logged during ordinary working hours (9-5) are undertaken whenever time allows in my working day. Currently, home working during the pandemic makes opportunities to make/take calls easier. In normal times this would likely revert to 6pm and after.” This suggests that some continuation of working from home may encourage younger members, which is something we will continue to promote in our future ‘Be a Councillor’ events.

A member stated in the Member Survey - “Keeping the role as accommodating as possible to Councillors of working age such as myself is absolutely essential. Becoming familiar with procedures, officers, ward issues, etc can be a real challenge when your capacity is reduced by 40 hours per week. I am lucky enough to find myself representing a three member ward which I share with two very experienced colleagues. Without their support, guidance and shared caseload, the role would become a difficult juggling act. These roles should be open to all and better reflect our demographics, and that means providing flexibility that encourages uptake from underrepresented backgrounds. It is also important to note that many Councillors are also serving on their Parish Councils. This is an extra load with additional meetings and responsibilities. Councillors are able to split Parish and District duties in many cases (I do and am very grateful for the flexibility it affords), but my experience is that combining the two roles often leads to increased workload overall. Therefore, representing a ward/community this way can skew the data when considering District-only commitments.”

Our Vision

To help build our Council Plan 2020-2024 and shape its vision for the future, the Council attended over 60 community events across the district to find out what is important to residents, what they love about South Staffordshire and what they would like to change.

Of significance for the Review is that for residents it is important that the distinctiveness of villages is retained as, first and foremost, residents identify themselves with their village first and then their district. This will be a key consideration when considering where boundaries are set within the district. Our residents and members will want that local identity to be taken into account and retained. This element is of more importance for our residents that locality or ward identification.

Digital Transformation

In thinking about the optimum number of Councillors it is important to consider our digital transformation journey and how the new way of working due to the Covid-19 pandemic has acted as a huge catalyst for change. Whilst face-to-face communication with residents is still joint top with telephone and emails slightly behind, in terms of Council meetings, briefings and training in particular, the journals show support for home working and some continuation after the pandemic:

- “Working from home saves me considerable time not having to travel thereby giving me greater flexibility and effectiveness within the working day”
- “Microsoft teams meetings should continue once the Covid-19 pandemic has been resolved with the exception of Full Council, Cabinet and Planning Committee”
- “Training and briefing sessions should continue to be delivered via MS Teams. Perhaps some Committee meetings too.”
- “Calls logged during ordinary working hours (9-5) are undertaken whenever time allows in my working day. Currently, home working during the pandemic makes opportunities to make/take calls easier. In normal times this would likely revert to 6pm and after.”

Although some Members have highlighted “The impact on digital working does not compensate face to face contact with officers, residents and councillors. When at a physical meeting, answers to questions bounce more questions, and more efficient outcome is achieved, instead of emails sending and receiving.” To mirror the different views from the Councillor Survey and Journal, the Members of the Challenge Panel for the review have highlighted the following:

- “Workload is much easier than it used to be due to advanced technology”
- “I still go out to each electorate to discuss their issue”
- “I have never worked so hard, even with all this technology and I am worried about the increase of housing delivery and the impact this will have on us”

Regarding Members’ ‘Digital Transformation’ journey, the following in the last 18 to 24 months has been rolled out:

- Provision of laptops running Windows 10 to all Members
- Provision of Office 365 for emails and access to Teams for all Members
- Electronic committee papers removing the need for the printing of papers/reports
- Virtual meetings, both formal and informal meetings

Most of our Members have adapted well to such an intense shift to digital working. They have had to undertake training in the use of the laptops, Windows 10 and Office 365. In addition, a number of Members were involved in the trialling of virtual meetings, providing feedback to improve the flow of the virtual meetings etc.

Going forwards, it is likely a number of meetings will remain virtual. The concept of 'hybrid' meetings is also likely to develop, where some Members will be physically in a meeting room while others will be remote. Hybrid meetings will create a new set of dynamics for Members and Chairmen to trial and feedback on.

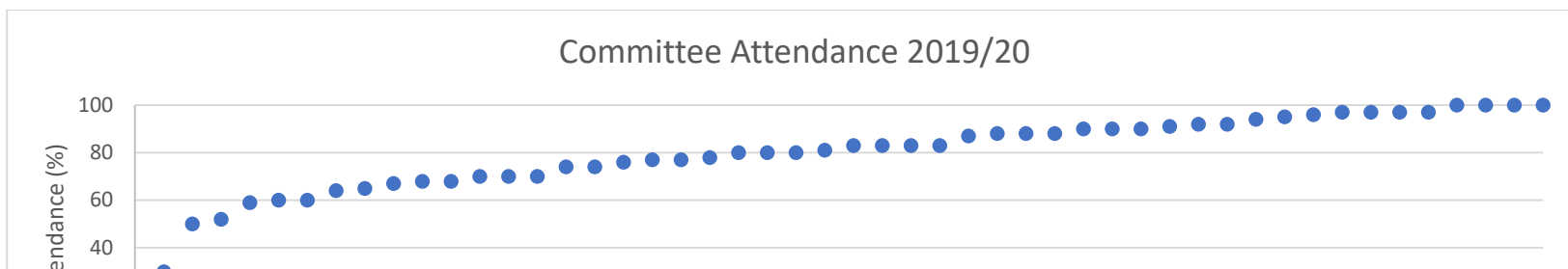
Covid-19 has really accelerated the Member digital transformation journey, but further training of Members is required to consolidate that progress to ensure Members are comfortable with the technology available to them and they are able to make the best use of the technology.

Also, it is likely in the future that Members will be able to access some information, such as their emails, from their personal mobile devices, but there will be some restrictions on what they can do with some content i.e. download an email attachment to their personal device will probably be prohibited. This will result in additional training requirements for Members to understand what they can and can't do and why.

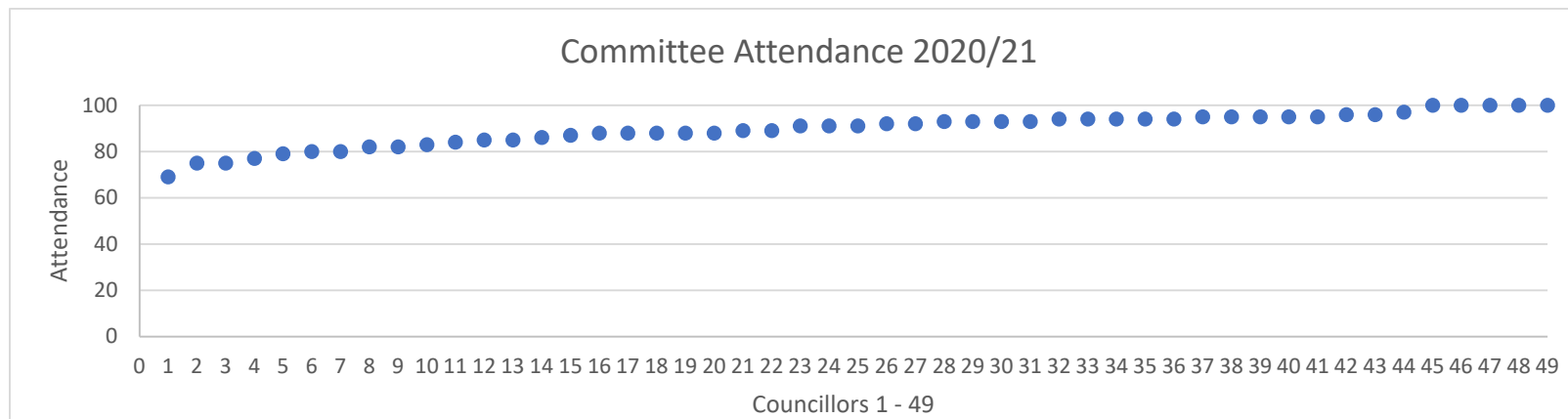
In summary, workload will naturally feel easier to those who are more confident with technology, some will feel it has increased due to the need to widen their skills. But ultimately, through intense officer support for those who need it, it will allow flexibility, and empower councillors to spend more time out in the community, having face to face conversations where most suited.

Committee attendance by Member 2019/20 (Pre Covid)

In 2019/20 the average attendance of all Members across all the committees was 80%.



Committee attendance by Member 2020/21 (During Covid)



In 2020/21 the average attendance of all Members across all the committees was 90%. Digital working appears to have had a positive impact on attendance. Looking ahead, the position of a Councillor will be more appealing to our working age population due to greater flexibility.

Our Awards

From our commercial and entrepreneurial ventures to our welfare services team and our waste and recycling service, we are working together to award-winning standards:

- Winner of the iese Gold Award 2020 for public sector transformation
- Winner of the iese Bronze Award 2020 for public sector transformation

Summary

10. 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.

During this first phase of the Boundary Review process Members, through the Your Council Challenge Panel, have considered a number of options and issues. Effectively serving the South Staffordshire communities Members represent is the overriding consideration and has shaped Members decision making.

Members considered a status quo submission but accepted that the evidence around workload and electorate numbers, especially in light of digital enhancements, pointed towards a reduction in councillor numbers.

The proposal agreed upon of a reduction of 8 councillors, with reductions largely being accommodated within the large villages by combining existing wards and reducing representation, was seen as a realistic proposal that would enable members to continue to effectively represent their residents whilst retaining community identities. Members reviewed all wards and have informally considered boundary changes based on the proposed reduction to 41 elected members.

Members also considered the impact of the Council's Draft Local Plan and the housing projections for the district. It was acknowledged that inevitably there will be housing growth within South Staffordshire and thus an increased population. Reducing councillor numbers below the 41 proposed would be unworkable given the housing projections to 2027 and beyond. At 41 councillors, each councillor would represent 2,130 electors by 2027; this is without the housing projections from the Draft Local Plan taken into account. If these housing projections were taken into account, then the figure would rise to 2,212. The Council is of the view that this is the realistic electorate projection for 2027.

We know from residents' surveys and local intelligence that community identity at a very local level is important to our residents and the Council would want to ensure that this principle is taken through at the next stage of the review process; boundaries should reflect local identity rather than a nominal line on a map.

This decision has cross party support.