



REVIEW OF ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS

Submission by South Somerset District Council on Council Size

1. Introduction

Local Authority Profile

South Somerset is the largest district council in the southwest and one of the biggest district councils in the country, both in terms of geographical size and total population.

The District covers an area of 370 square miles, has a population of 164,600 and is one of five Councils in the County of Somerset. Its characteristic is mainly rural, with Yeovil as its main centre and 8 other small market towns.

The District is parished with 102 parish and town councils and 19 parish meetings and over 820 parish and town councillors.

The Council currently has 60 District Councillors, and an electorate of 131,767 as at 1st June 2017. This equates to 2,196 electors per Councillor.

2. Overview of Council Size Submission

This submission sets out the response from South Somerset District Council to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England's (LGBCE) invitation to put forward a recommendation on future Council size.

The review has been triggered because 13 of the Council's current 39 wards (33%) have an electoral variance of more than 10% from the average. One ward (Brympton) has a variance outside 20%. The Council recognises the importance of electoral equality to a fair democratic process by ensuring that each vote carries the same value, whilst at the same time it must ensure that governance of the Council is maintained at a level which can best serve the electorate.

The Council's submission has been developed by a cross party working group consisting of executive and non-executive members in consultation with their respective group members. The Council's recommendation on Council size was unanimously approved by full Council so enjoys the cross party support of all Members.

This submission seeks to address the three areas contained in the LGBCE's technical guidance on:-

- **governance arrangements** of the council and how it takes decisions across the broad range of its responsibilities.
- the council's **scrutiny functions** relating to its own decision making and the council's responsibilities to outside bodies.
- the **representational role of councillors in the local community** and how they engage with people, conduct casework and represent the council on local partner organisations.

The primary objective for the overall review is in three key parts:

- Electorate equality – achieving a reasonably even spread of elector numbers across each ward. This will need to take into account current electorates and forecasts to 2023.
- Community Identity – do the ward boundaries fully encapsulate existing communities?
- Effective and Convenient Government – is the Council size appropriate to ensure the effective discharge of Council business and representation of the community?

3. Previous Review

The last review of electoral arrangements in South Somerset was in 1996-97, when the number of councillors was retained at 60 and the number of wards was reduced from 40 to 39.

Based on the 1 June 2017 electoral register the current elector to councillor ratio is 2,196. The electorate forecasts developed as part of this exercise suggest that by 2023 the ratio for the Council's recommended number of councillors will be an average of 2,293 electors per councillor.

4. Proposed Council Size

The district council area comprises a large and varied geographical area with a mixture of very rural areas and urban communities. This creates a variety of different local needs and priorities. Because of the complex mix of rural and urban, together with the identified growth within the district, it is felt that the current Council membership of 60 councillors should be retained.

The justification for this submission is:-

- a) The need to ensure an appropriate work/life balance for Councillors;
- b) Related to the above, the need to attract Councillors from a variety of backgrounds and ensure the Council is representative of its communities;

- c) The need for enough members to ensure effective scrutiny and properly represent the full diversity of the district;
- d) The role of the district councillor is seen to be a more active and demanding role as a consequence of developments in ICT and social media together with an increased interest in local democracy, planning and general societal changes;
- e) Increased role of councillors resulting from the implementation of transformation and the funding of services;
- f) The need to reflect the future growth in population in South Somerset, both in Yeovil and generally;
- g) The commitment of the Council to take account of the different needs of geographical communities through operation of an area system and associated committees making decisions in four local areas.

Retention of 60 Councillors does not represent a “stand still” proposal. The predicted electorate increase means the councillor:elector ratio will increase from 2,196 electors at present to 2,290 in 2023. Owing to the concentration of development in a number of Wards, there also will need to be a radical overhaul of the existing boundaries. The Council does not believe there will be a reduction in the development pressures on the District but it is confident efficiencies can be achieved in most of its areas of activity. The Council further believes that only by retaining the number of 60 Councillors will it be able to ensure that the governance, decision making and scrutiny functions will not be compromised and will remain effective, whilst still ensuring Councillors are able to fulfil their representational role within their communities.

5. Anticipated Growth in Population

The Polling District Forecasting Spreadsheet has been affected by Individual Electoral Registration. Many people were removed from the electoral register in December 2015 if they had not matched with the Department for Work and Pensions data, but, they came back onto the register in 2016 when the Referendum was announced and there an increased interest in registering to vote.

The electorate at December 2014 was 128,723. This dropped to 120,177 in December 2015 but has risen to 131,767 in June 2017. The Polling District Forecasting Spreadsheet is forecasting an electorate of 131,919 in 2023, however, in view of predicted development within the district this figure will be much higher. It is expected that a further 3,782 dwellings will be built by 2023 and taking an estimate of 1.5 people per dwelling, we expect the electorate of the district to rise to around 137,592 in 2023. This would mean an average of 2,293 electors per Councillor.

6. Near Neighbour comparison data

The comparison information below highlights the high councillor:elector ratio which already exists in South Somerset compared to the other Somerset District Councils and neighbouring authorities. It also compares equally with our CIPFA nearest neighbours of a comparable size across the country.

Somerset Authorities	Electors	Wards	Council Size	Electors per Councillor
South Somerset	131,767	39	60	2,196
Mendip	85,346	34	47	1,816
Taunton Deane	84,478	26	56	1,509
Sedgemoor	91,699	23	48	1,910
Neighbouring Authorities				
East Devon	113,169	32	59	1,918
North Dorset	53,023	19	33	1,607
West Dorset	80,703	24	42	1,922
CIPFA Nearest Neighbours				
Huntingdonshire	130,799	29	52	2,515
South Cambridgeshire	116,770	34	57	2,049
Aylesbury Vale	138,135	33	59	2,341
Wealden	121,783	35	55	2,214
New Forest	141,338	34	60	2,356

Submission by South Somerset District Council on Council Size Supporting Evidence

1. Governance and decision making – how does the Council manage its business and take decisions across its full range of responsibilities?	
<p>Leadership</p> <p>1.1 What kind of governance arrangements are in place for the authority?</p>	<p>Under the Local Government Act 2000, South Somerset District Council adopted a Cabinet style system with a Leader and Executive. The Council operates a “strong Leader” model whereby the Executive is appointed by the elected Leader. The Executive consists of 10 members; the Leader, Deputy Leader and 8 Executive Members. The Executive’s 10 members are also the Council’s 10 Portfolio Holders and are each the Council’s main representative and spokesperson on their nominated areas of responsibility.</p> <p>The Executive 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 approval by Council e.g. Local Plan, Corporate Plan, Medium Term Financial Plan and Budget.</p> <p>There are approximately 12 formal meetings of the Executive per year and 12 informal briefings.</p>
<p>1.2 How many portfolios are there?</p>	<p>There are 10 portfolios; one held by each member of the Executive, as follows:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Strategy and Policy (Leader of Council) 2. Environment, Economic Development and Transformation (Deputy Leader) 3. Finance and Legal Services 4. Leisure and Culture 5. Property, Climate Change and Income Generation 6. Strategic Planning (Place Making) 7. Area Chairman with responsibility for Yeovil Town Centre Regeneration, Community Safety and the Crematorium 8. Area Chairman with responsibility for Civil Contingencies, Heritage, Building

	<p>Control and Listed Buildings</p> <p>9. Area Chairman with responsibility for Waste and Recycling and Tourism</p> <p>10. Area Chairman with responsibility for Environmental Health, health & safety, Democratic Services, Member Development and Equalities & Diversity.</p>
<p>1.3 Describe how a portfolio holder carries out his/her work on a day to day basis.</p>	<p>Portfolio Holders exercise regular budget monitoring of the resources allocated by the Council and seek to achieve best value in the services for which they have responsibility. They monitor performance, hold regular meetings with the respective Directors and Managers and work with them to deliver the corporate objectives. There are monthly planned progress meetings with supplementary daily or weekly contact with individual officers, depending on the workload.</p>
<p>1.4 To what extent are decisions delegated to portfolio holders or are most decisions taken by the full Executive?</p> <p>What is the volume of decisions taken? How many decisions are taken by officers?</p>	<p>The majority of executive decisions are taken by the Executive or officers under delegated powers. A Portfolio Holder can take any decision within his/her remit other than a key decision and two or more Portfolio Holders may jointly agree to take a decision which is within their collective remits.</p> <p>Decisions taken by the Executive or a Portfolio Holder are subject to the Council's scrutiny "call-in" procedure.</p> <p>The Council takes around 180 – 200 Executive decisions, mostly taken by the District Executive. There are around 20 to 30 Portfolio Holder decisions taken each year. We do not currently record the decisions delegated to officers.</p>
<p>1.5 Do Executive (or other) Councillors serve on other decision making partnerships, sub-regional or national bodies?</p>	<p>Portfolio Holders and Councillors serve on a number of regional and national bodies:</p> <p>Local Strategic Partnership (Portfolio Holder)</p> <p>South West Internal Audit Partnership Ltd</p> <p>Housing and Exceptions Appeals Panel (Portfolio Holder)</p> <p>Police and Crime Panel</p> <p>Somerset Waste Board(Portfolio Holder)</p> <p>PATROL Joint Committee (Parking and Traffic Regulation Outside London)</p>

	<p>Somerset Growth Board (Portfolio Holder) Board of Governors for Yeovil District Hospital NHS Foundation Trust Board of Governors for Musgrove Park Hospital NHS Foundation Trust LGA General Assembly (Portfolio Holder) South West Provincial Employers South West Councils (Portfolio Holder) Somerset Rivers Authority (Portfolio Holder) Parrett Drainage Board Somerset Water Management Partnership Health & Well-Being Board (Portfolio Holder) Somerset Building Preservation Trust (Portfolio Holder) Access for All Armed Forces Community Covenant (Portfolio Holder) Heart of Wessex Local Action Group Yeovil Crematorium and Cemetery Joint Committee South Somerset MIND Blackdown Hills AONB Stop Line Way Steering Group Somerset Levels & Moors Local Action Group Executive Board</p> <p>The Council also makes 18 other appointments to local organisations and action groups.</p>
<p>1.6 Is the role of the Executive Councillor considered to be full time?</p>	<p>None of the Executive Councillors are considered to have a full-time role but considerable demands are placed on them. In a recent survey (May 2017) the Executive Councillors all assessed their weekly hours spent on Council related business to be between 22 to 30 hours per week. This would equate to 3 to 4 working days per week.</p>
<p>Regulatory</p>	<p>In order to give local citizens a greater say in Council affairs, 4 Area Committees have been created. These are responsible for planning, local regeneration schemes and community development in their area. They involve all the district councillors for the</p>

<p>1.7 How does the Council discharge its regulation functions?</p> <p>How many Councillors are involved in committees?</p>	<p>geographical area and their meetings are held monthly in public.</p> <p>A significant number of planning decisions (averaging around 95%) are made under delegated powers to officers without reference to the relevant Area Committee. Officers deal with most applications where there are no conflicting views to the recommendation and where there is no other reason to refer the matter to the Area Committee. A Member can request that an application be referred to the Area Committee for determination rather than determined by officers with the agreement of the Area Chairman.</p> <p>There are 15 Members appointed to the Licensing Committee which meets bi-monthly. The majority of licensing applications / matters (taxi matters, alcohol licensing etc.) are determined by officers under delegated powers, unless there are grounds to refer to a Licensing Sub Committee; on average 8 to 10 Licensing Sub Committee meetings are convened each year. They comprise three Members appointed from the main Committee.</p> <p>Not including Full Council or the 4 Area Committees, there are 7 Standing Committees with a total of 77 seats:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • District Executive (10 members – not in political balance) (LD, 2 Cons) Meets 12 times annually plus 12 briefings and special meetings as required) • Scrutiny Committee (14 members in political balance) (7 LD, 6 Cons, 1 Ind) (Meets 12 times annually plus meetings of task and finish groups and special meetings for call-in of decisions) • Audit Committee (10 members in political balance) (5 LD, 5 Cons) (Meets 12 times annually) • Regulation Committee (14 members in political balance) (7 LD, 6 Cons, 1 Ind) • Licensing Committee (15 members – not required to be in political balance) • Appointments Committee (8 members in political balance) (4LD, 3 Cons, 1 Ind) • Standards Committee (6 District Council members in political balance plus 5 co-optees) (3 LD, 3 Cons)
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	<p>17 of the 60 District Councillors are not appointed to any standing committee but all are appointed to their respective Area Committee as well as Council.</p> <p>In addition to the formal decision making structure there are also a series of subgroups as follows:</p> <p>Income Generation Board Transformation Board Regeneration Board Strategic Alliance with Sedgemoor Appeals Panel Housing and Appeals Exceptions Panel</p> <p>These Boards and Panels are generally appointed in political balance.</p> <p>Further, the Council undertakes a significant number of briefings (approximately 15 to 20 per year) for all Members on important policy or developmental matters, such as Transformation, Peer Review, Housing Strategy etc.</p>
<p>1.8 Describe the arrangements for the delegation of decisions in respect of regulatory functions.</p> <p>To what extent are decisions delegated to officers?</p>	<p>The vast majority of planning applications are determined by officers, unless a local Ward Member has concerns or disagrees with the case officer's recommendations, or thinks that an application may be particularly contentious.</p> <p>The Council's Scheme of Delegation for Licensing authorises the Assistant Director (Environment) to decide specific categories of licence applications. These are typically non-contentious and/or uncontested applications, which the Council has no legal option but to grant.</p> <p>As a guide, approximately 95% of planning applications and 96% of licensing applications</p>

	<p>are determined by officers.</p> <p>The Council has a Scheme of Delegation. This was last updated in May 2015.</p>
<p>1.9 Is Committee Councillorship standing or rotating?</p>	<p>Following all-out elections, councillors are appointed to Committees at the first full Council meeting in May and are then reaffirmed annually. There is generally some movement of councillors between committees each year.</p>
<p>1.10 Are meetings ad hoc, frequent and/or area based?</p> <p>How are the Chairs allocated?</p>	<p>Most of the Committees meet monthly unless there is insufficient business to discuss or determine, with the exception of the Standards and the Regulation Committees which tend to meet on an ad-hoc basis.</p> <p>The Chairmen of the Committees are appointed at the first full Council meeting in May and are then reaffirmed annually.</p>
<p>1.11 What level of attendance is achieved?</p> <p>Are meetings always quorate?</p>	<p>Generally a good level of attendance is achieved and meetings are quorate.</p> <p>There have not been any occasions in last 10 years where meetings were not quorate.</p>
<p>1.12 What future issues may impact on the role of non-executive councillors in respect of regulatory functions?</p> <p>How might the role develop?</p>	<p>No change is anticipated.</p>

<p>1.13 Has the Council defined the role of Councillors?</p> <p>Has the Council adopted arrangements for training and developing Councillors and supporting them in their role?</p>	<p>The role of Councillor is defined as follows:-</p> <p>All members could be expected to carry out the following duties and responsibilities:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To participate constructively in the good governance of the district, ensuring the effective running of the Council. The over-riding responsibility of a councillor is to the whole district. 2. To comply with the Code of Conduct for members, the Councils' Constitution and the law relating to councillors, and to ensure that no conflict of interest occurs which might undermine the integrity of the Council. 3. To develop and maintain close working relationships with officers and other members of the Council to promote the Council's objectives. 4. To represent all members of the public within the ward, providing information or a contact where appropriate; to deal with correspondence, emails and telephone calls from constituents and meet them, if necessary, to view or discuss problems. 5. To help parish councils and parish meetings within the ward to keep informed about District Council activities, to attend their meetings and, when invited, to discuss ward matters with them as appropriate. 6. To attend and effectively participate in all meetings of the full Council and the relevant area committee, and to participate in other member level bodies where appointed or appropriate. 7. To represent the Council on outside bodies as agreed and report back to the relevant member level body as appropriate. 8. To keep up to date with the corporate priorities of the Council, its policies and procedures and to read the relevant paperwork prior to participating in any meeting of the Council. 9. To play an active part in the development of the community and area plans, particularly through engaging and consulting local people. 10. To participate in training and development for elected members according to personal need and the needs of the Council, and to attend the annual forward planning workshops for all members and relevant area workshops.
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There are also Ward Councillor and Executive Councillor role descriptions.

A comprehensive training programme follows the election of Councillors every 4 years and we have a Member Development Manager who arranges a continuous programme of training throughout the period.

The programme is informed based on member 1 to 1 meetings, members survey results, discussions with specialists across the council, Political Leads, Committee Chairs and Portfolio Holders to identify potential training needs.

The training programme is developed around member's needs:

- As a collective group in terms of general skills and knowledge – legislation changes etc.
- To reflect groups/committees specialisms and required skill sets.
- To develop Individual's specialisms and skills for particular roles for example Portfolio Holders and Area Chairs.
- Developing individuals, reflecting their own personal needs and their plans for their future at SSDC including aspirations to take on more responsibility.

We also consider future need, succession planning and looking to prevent or reduce risks around single points of failure.

In addition to this formal/skills based training the Overview and Scrutiny Committee conduct specific Task and Finish reviews, this is an excellent opportunity for all members to develop a detailed knowledge of Council Services, partners, organisations operating in the SSDC area and policy development. Members regularly comment that this is an excellent training ground.

<p>1.14 Has the Council assessed how much time Councillors spend on Council business?</p>	<p>Evidence gathered in 2008 showed that on average, Councillors spent 19 hours per week on general councillor duties.</p> <p>In a recent survey (May 2017) we asked if this was still an accurate reflection for Members. Of the 42 responses, 14 agreed this was about right, 5 said it was less than 19 hours and 23 felt they spent a range of 22 to 40 hours per week on Council duties. In practice, this means that our Councillors already invest a significant time commitment in delivering their roles and that time commitment is increasing.</p>
<p>1.15 Do Councillors generally find that the time they spend on council business is what they expected?</p>	<p>The majority of Members said that prior to election, they had anticipated 10 to 15 hours per week, however, because of research required to provide a reasonable assessment of the questions on any particular agenda, attending Town and Parish Council meetings and because they were involved in more than one committee, the time spent exceeded what they had originally anticipated.</p>
<p>1.16 What is the extent of Councillors representational role on, and appointment to, outside bodies?</p> <p>How many are involved in this activity and what is their expected workload?</p>	<p>Service on outside bodies has always been an established part of a Councillor's role. An appointed Member on an outside body will be able to use their knowledge and skills as a Councillor to assist the organisation to which they are appointed.</p> <p>We appoint 50 members to 39 outside organisations. Following a Scrutiny Task and Finish review of Councillor representation on outside bodies in 2013/14, a guidance leaflet to Councillors appointed to Outside Bodies was produced to outline their responsibilities and obligations in that role.</p> <p>Members take their representational role very seriously and often involve themselves beyond the level expected by SSDC.</p>
<p>1.17 Does the Council have difficulty in retaining Councillors or attracting new candidates?</p>	<p>The Council does not play an overly active role in attracting and retaining members, although historically it has offered information sessions and other support for prospective new members.</p> <p>As the majority of members are affiliated to a political party SSDC cannot become involved in who will be put forward as candidates. In the 2015 elections all wards were</p>

	contested and there have been no instances where the Council has been unable to discharge its duties due to lack of councillors.
1.18 Have there been any instances where the Council has been unable to discharge its duties due to a lack of Councillors?	There have been no instances where the Council has been unable to discharge its duties due to a lack of Councillors.
1.19 Do Councillors have an individual or ward budget for allocation in their area? If so, how is the system administered?	Individual Ward Budgets were trialled approximately 10 years ago, but were discontinued and the funding re-allocated to the Area Committee grants budgets.
2. Scrutiny of the Council, outside bodies and others.	
2.1 What's the structure? How does it operate?	<p>There is one main Scrutiny Committee with 14 members, appointed in political balance. The Scrutiny Committee has 1 Chair and 2 Vice Chairs, one from each political group.</p> <p>The Scrutiny Committee undertakes the statutory Scrutiny functions such as Policy Development and Review, monitoring the performance of the authority and holding the Executive to account. All non-executive members support the committee and are invited to participate in reviews on a 'Task and Finish Project' basis as directed by the main Scrutiny Committee. The main Scrutiny Committee also has responsibility for managing the Call-in function. The Scrutiny Committee can 'Call-in' a decision that has been made by the Executive but not yet implemented. This enables members to consider whether the decision is appropriate. The Scrutiny Committee may recommend that the Executive reconsider the decision or can, if it wishes, ask Council to debate the issue.</p>

<p>2.2 What is the general workload of scrutiny committees?</p> <p>Has the Council ever found that it has had too many active projects for the scrutiny process to function effectively?</p>	<p>The general workload is one committee meeting per month unless special meetings are called due to urgent business.</p> <p>With regard to Task and Finish groups this can range from 1-5 depending on the urgency/need for the work to be undertaken, the amount of officer resource available, and the length of time it may take to collate information/collect evidence. Partnership or joint reviews can take considerably longer and take much more resource.</p> <p>Task and Finish groups are open to all Non-Executive members as general rule, a scrutiny member chairs the review, occasionally Executive Members are also invited depending on the topic.</p> <p>Members always try to manage their work in such a way that they can make provision to deal with any unforeseen issues, at the moment for example as shown in the Scrutiny Committee's agenda's the Task and Finish work will be set up to flexibly adapt around the need to effectively scrutinise Transformation a major investment of Tax payers money, critical to the success of the Council.</p> <p>Scrutiny Committee manage their own workload, they always consider all reports that are to be considered by District Executive to varying degrees, SSDC Scrutiny operates on the basis that pre-decision scrutiny is better. It prevents delays, ensures good quality reports, information and evidence to inform effective decisions. (This in no way prevents Call – In).</p>
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<p>2.3 How is the work programme developed and implemented?</p> <p>How many subjects at any one time?</p> <p>What's the time-span for a particular study?</p>	<p>All members are invited and encouraged to make suggestions to the work programme; these suggestions are considered at Scrutiny Committee unless urgent then other arrangements are made. The subject is then scored against a Selection Criteria (attached in Appendix A) and these subjects can be an item for a committee meeting or a Task and Finish review.</p> <p>We tend to operate on a maximum of 5 Task and Finish reviews, this is due to officer resourcing and being able to attract members to the Task and Finish groups. The maximum at any one time considers the complexity and the project plans/anticipated timescales for each.</p> <p>We have had reviews completed within 2 weeks and others take 10 months.</p>
<p>2.4 Are Councillors involved in scrutinising external issues?</p>	<p>Councillors can be involved in any issue that effects/impacts on the South Somerset Community. For example a Scrutiny review was conducted on Flooding and recommendations were made to several agencies which resulted in the formation of the Somerset Rivers Authority.</p>
<p>2.5 When not in scrutiny meetings what activities are Councillors expected to undertake?</p>	<p>Scrutiny members are expected to do preparatory work for both Scrutiny Committee meetings and contributing to Task and Finish reviews. This involves</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading reports, articles, best practice etc. • Conducting online research • Carrying out Public consultation, reviewing the responses • Meeting and questioning service users, witnesses and experts • Conducting site visits • Contacting other local authorities.

<p>2.6 How will the role of the scrutiny Councillor change?</p> <p>What are the emerging issues and trends?</p>	<p>Due to a combination of financial pressures and a desire to improve services and modernise the Council, SSDC is embarking on an ambitious Transformation Programme. This will involve a new operating model and way of delivering services, new technology and a more commercial approach including new activities to generate income.</p> <p>Scrutiny Committee will have a challenging and demanding role in its capacity as a critical friend throughout the process and monitoring the effectiveness of this transformation by reviewing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The effectiveness of the delivery of the Council’s services • The sustainable savings • Reviewing the policy’s governance and performance • Contributing to the locality element of the programme <p>The Council also has a number of ambitious programmes for the regeneration of the District, focussed on the towns of Yeovil and Chard. These will involve the Council becoming the developer of some sites and working in partnership with commercial developers on other sites.</p> <p>The role of the SSDC Scrutiny member will expand in terms of having to become more commercially minded and working to different governance and responding to different pressures for the service delivery arm of SSDC and the business income generation arm.</p>
<p>2.7 What kind of support do scrutiny members receive?</p>	<p>At present members have 2 days full support from a Scrutiny Manager and a Democratic Services Officer to support the Scrutiny Committee meetings. Additional support is available to assist with Task & Finish Reviews but members are required to do research etc as part of their role on T&F reviews.</p>
<p>3. Representational Role: Representing electors to the Council</p>	

<p>3.1 Has the representational role of Councillors changed since the council last considered how many elected Councillors it should have?</p>	<p>Councillors feel the public are more aware of them and their role along with a greater expectation of assistance and more opportunities for people to contact them. Social media provides the public with much greater access to them and there is a consequent expectation of instant replies.</p> <p>It is also important to reflect that councillors are seen more and more as advocates for their community and can get involved in issues that are not directly related to council services but serve and are of benefit to a wider public interest.</p>
<p>3.2 In general terms, how do Councillors carry out their representational role with electors?</p> <p>Do members mainly respond to casework from constituents or do they have a more active role in the community?</p>	<p>Most Councillors are proactively involved within their wards as opposed to simply responding to case work and consider that they play an active part within their communities. The approach they take varies from member to member, but most Councillors are involved in some or all of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Holding surgeries – dealing with queries, providing advice and engaging with their constituents face-to-face; ➤ Working with, and/or offering support, to community groups and local organisations; ➤ Attending Town and Parish Council meetings - this is more prevalent than previously as there is more an expectation that they will attend. We have a large number of town and parish councils (102) which creates quite an additional workload for our members; ➤ Maintaining blogs and/or websites and social media;
<p>3.3 How Councillors engage with Constituents?</p> <p>Do they hold surgeries, public meetings, use IT etc?</p>	<p>In the recent survey (May 2017) almost every Councillor mentioned attendance at their Town or Parish Council meetings and other community events as a major part of their engagement with their constituents. However, Councillors also mentioned 1 to 1 meetings with residents, monthly surgeries, emails and telephone calls, regular articles for Parish Magazines and Parish websites. Also widespread use of the social media sites such as Facebook and twitter.</p>

<p>3.4 How do Councillors generally deal with casework?</p> <p>Do they pass on issues directly to staff or do they take a more in depth approach to resolving issues?</p>	<p>Councillors are expected to take accountability for their casework, and manage their work appropriately, albeit with officer support. Usually, Councillors will contact officers directly –whether in person or via telephone / e-mail, and then respond to the individual. There is a sense of ownership and need to ensure the residents issue is satisfactorily resolved.</p>
<p>3.5 What support do Councillors receive in discharging their duties in relation to casework and a representational role in their ward?</p>	<p>Councillors receive support and advice from staff at all levels of the Council. However, as the staff numbers at the Council have reduced, the amount of time officers are able to give to support Members is less than it used to be, meaning that they are having to shoulder more of the work themselves.</p>
<p>3.6 Has the Council put in place any mechanisms for Councillors to interact with young people, those not on the electoral register, or minority groups or their representative bodies?</p>	<p>The Council organises occasional events and visits to the Council offices for school groups and we hold an annual Gold Star Awards ceremony which focusses on celebrating inspirational young people and the adult volunteers working with them. School groups are welcomed at our two Country Parks for activity events and we hold annual country fairs in each park. Councillors are invited to participate in all these events.</p> <p>The Council also hosts an Equalities Steering Group to which Councillors are invited as well as representatives from carers groups, religious groups, migrant worker representatives, mental health organisations and gypsy and traveller representatives. There is also a separate Somerset Gypsy and Traveller Forum which brings together representatives and Councillors.</p>

<p>3.7 Are Councillors expected to attend meetings of community bodies such as parish councils or resident associations?</p> <p>What is the level of their involvement and what role do they play?</p>	<p>Attendance by Councillors at the Town and Parish Council meetings within their ward is expected and positively encouraged to keep them informed about District Council activities and to discuss ward matters with them as appropriate. As mentioned above we have a large number of town and parish councils in our administrative area.</p> <p>District Councillors are expected to brief their Parishes on key issues affecting their area and help to identify ways in which the District Council can support the resolution of Parish level issues.</p>
<p>4. The Future</p>	
<p>4.1 What impact do you think the localism agenda might have on the scope and conduct of council business and how do you think this might affect the role of Councillors?</p>	<p>There is no evidence to suggest that the localism agenda has significantly impacted on this council or will do so in the future. Few communities have an appetite for Neighbourhood Plans but the Council is supporting a small number. Other aspects of the Act in particular have had an impact upon our councillors e.g. seeking their support and advocacy in relation to Assets of Community Value.</p>
<p>4.2 Does the Council have any plans to devolve responsibilities and/or assets to community organisations, or does the Council expect to take on more responsibilities in the medium to long term?</p>	<p>The Council has implemented a programme of devolution to Town and Parish Councils for local facilities where those councils have a desire to take over their management. Whilst there are no specific plans to devolve further responsibilities at this stage, it is an area where the councillors remain willing to actively engage with their communities where opportunities arise.</p>

<p>4.3 Have changes to the arrangements for local delivery of services led to significant changes to Councillors workloads? (For example, control of housing stock or sharing services with neighbouring authorities)</p>	<p>The Council operates four local areas with associated committees. In recent years, whilst the workload and ambitions in the areas remains similar, the amount of staff to support both this work and our Councillors, has diminished. meaning that they have needed to be more actively involved to secure the same outcome for their communities</p> <p>Since the last boundary review there have been some significant changes in service provision. The Council transferred its housing stock and associated staff to a new social landlord, now named Yarlington Housing. Whilst Councillors are therefore not involved in the day-to-day management of significant housing, the Council is still the Housing Authority, so they are still involved in an active housing programme of securing the building of new homes including affordable homes, and the housing of homeless people. Their constituents will still approach them with their housing problems and issues and being more removed in one sense creates additional work rather than less as the Council no longer has control of the “levers”.</p> <p>The Council also now delivers its waste collection and recycling service in partnership with other Somerset councils through the Somerset Waste Partnership. Councillors are required to be members of the Partnership Board and the Council’s scrutiny committee scrutinises the performance and delivery of the partnership.</p>
<p>4.4 Are there any developments in policy ongoing that might significantly affect the role of elected members in the future?</p>	<p>Through the transformation programme, the Council is looking at how it might support Members better including through ensuring they have more ready access to data and information on their area and the performance of the Council and other public services in their wards, as well as electronic mechanisms to support their ward case work.</p> <p>The Council has a number of significant policy developments that will be an additional and significant call on their time for a number of years to come, notably:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Local Plan review and the need to identify significantly more land for housing and employment – this generates a lot of public interest and representations to members.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The regeneration of the towns of Yeovil and Chard and the Council acting as developer of many sites. - The commercial development of the council including the investment in and development of new services that the council does not currently provide such as commercial property; housing development with the council as developer; energy generation and management.
<p>4.5 What has been the impact of recent financial constraints on the Council's activities?</p>	<p>To date, the Council has managed to work within the financial constraints whilst still providing all of its core services and many of its discretionary services. Some elements of discretionary services have been removed or reduced and in some areas service standards and performance have been reduced.</p> <p>In the future, the Council's financial strategy which has Transformation and Commercialisation at its centre, aims to avoid the need to cut or reduce services and seeks to improve service standards as well as develop new income generating services.</p>

**Selection Criteria for Scrutiny Work Programme
(Title of Subject/Issue)**

Subject / Issue	Score out of 10 (Where 10 indicates strong agreement)	Comments
1.This topic has not recently been or is due to be reviewed by another group of members and/or officers		
2.The Scrutiny work can be delivered within existing resources.		
3.This is an issue of local concern.		
4.This issue supports the delivery of the Corporate Plan (Local Strategic Partnership)		
5.The involvement of Scrutiny will lead to improved value for money.		
6.New Government guidance or legislation means a major change to service delivery. Scrutiny involvement will aid this process.		
7.This issue has been raised by External sources, best practice advisors, stakeholders, partners, other authorities etc.		
8.Scrutiny Involvement in this subject will improve member understanding of a complex but important issue and will consequently lead to improved decision making.		

Scoring Guidance

Alternative terms for the subject/issue being scored:

1. This is to avoid duplication of work.
2. Members with the Scrutiny Manager can complete the work needed in a reasonable time to achieve the required outcome(s).
3. This is something the community (not just an individual or a group) want to be looked at or improved.
4. The Council has identified this area as a priority.
5. Scrutiny may be able to reduce costs, improve the service, make a difference.
6. Scrutiny can help the Council respond to change quickly and continue to provide a good service.
7. It has been identified as an area that needs improvement.
8. Members will learn and be able to make better decisions.

When Scrutiny has several proposed issues or topics to be looked at or already has a full work programme and more proposed topics are received, each topic will be scored; the topic with the highest score will be looked at first or as soon as it is practical to do so.

The maximum score that can be awarded is 80