

Swale Borough Council

Council Size Submission

About You

The respondent should use this space to provide the Commission with a little detail about who is making the submission, whether it is the full Council, Officers on behalf of the Council, a political party or group, a resident group, or an individual.

Swale Borough Council, developed by members and officers. Going to Full Council 29 January 2025

Reason for Review (Request Reviews Only)

Please explain the authority's reasons for requesting this electoral review; it is useful for the Commission to have context. *NB/ If the Commission has identified the authority for review under one of its published criteria, then you are not required to answer this question.*

Identified by the Commission.

The Context for your proposal

Your submission gives you the opportunity to examine how you wish to organise and run the council for the next 15 - 20 years. **The consideration of future governance arrangements and council size should be set in the wider local and national policy context.** The Commission expects you to challenge your current arrangements and determine the most appropriate arrangements going forward. In providing context for your submission below, please demonstrate that you have considered the following issues.

- When did your Council last change/reorganise its internal governance arrangements and what impact on effectiveness did that activity have?
- To what extent has transference of strategic and/or service functions impacted on the effectiveness of service delivery and the ability of the Council to focus on its remaining functions?
- Have any governance or capacity issues been raised by any Inspectorate or similar?
- What influence will local and national policy trends likely have on the Council as an institution?
- What impact on the Council's effectiveness will your council size proposal have?

The rainbow coalition administration, which was established after the 2019 borough election, agreed that one of its priorities was to renew local democracy and make the council fit for the future. Achieving this objective has involved far-reaching governance changes, culminating in the decision to move to a committee system from May 2022.

The motivation behind this priority was the desire to diffuse decision-making power more broadly among members than had been the case under the cabinet model. There was a wish to make sure all members could play the decision-making role that their constituents had elected them to play.

Implementing this decision involved a full rewrite of the council's constitution, which was undertaken by the constitution review group. This group – which is made up of one or two senior members from each political group - has continued to meet to review the effectiveness of the new constitution in practice and to work through a list of residual issues, as well as to consider further constitutional improvements going forwards.

The new constitution includes five service committees as replacements for the former cabinet, with 15 members on each committee. The full Constitution can be found via this link: [Agenda for Swale Borough Council Constitution on Monday, 7 October 2024](#)

In March 2023 a Local Government Peer Review was carried out and one of their recommendations was to “*Conduct a review of committee meetings including the number of meetings and capacity to support their frequency. Test further opportunities for wider scrutiny and challenge within the committee system.*” Link to the Peer Review feedback report can be found here: [Council - Peer Review \(swale.gov.uk\)](#) The review was carried out and resulted in the number of committees staying the same, but they now meet less often. However, there are a number of working groups that report to service committees, which involve a large time commitment over a period of months to deliver the work tasked to them by their parent committee. These include the Constitution Working Group, Community Development Strategy Members Task Group, UKSPF Member Working Group, Parking Policy Review Working Group, Leisure Services Working Group, Waste & Street Cleansing Member Working Group and Waste & Street Cleansing Scrutiny Review Working Group.

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

The main areas where local and national policy trends are likely to influence the Council as an institution are the fall in funding means in real terms we are not able to do as much as we once did. The biggest issue affecting the Council other than finance is changes to planning legislation and potential devolution.

With regard to the impact of our Council size proposal, where there is more disquiet about the Council's effectiveness, the workload of councillors increases. The recent period of disruption following the implementation of a new waste contract is a good example of this.

Local Authority Profile

Please provide a short description of the authority and its setting, in particular the local geography, demographics and community characteristics. This should set the scene for the Commission and give it a greater understanding of any current issues. The description should cover all of the following:

- Brief outline of area - are there any notable geographic constraints for example that may affect the review?
- Rural or urban - what are the characteristics of the authority?
- Demographic pressures - such as distinctive age profiles, migrant or transient populations, is there any large growth anticipated?
- Community characteristics – is there presence of “hidden” or otherwise complex deprivation?
- Are there any other constraints, challenges, issues or changes ahead?

Further to providing a description, the Commission will be looking for a submission that demonstrates an understanding of place and communities by putting forth arguments on council size based upon local evidence and insight. For example, how does local

geography, demographics and community characteristics impact on councillor casework, workload and community engagement?

Swale is one of 12 districts which make up the county of Kent. Located on the county's northern coast, the borough sits between Medway, Maidstone and Canterbury, around 60km from central London in one direction and 40km from the Channel Tunnel in the other.

The borough covers an area of 360km², roughly one-tenth of Kent, and is home to 151,700 people (*ONS 2023 mid-year estimate 155,900*) living in 67,235 households, which is projected to grow to 180,700 by 2042.

The population in Swale grew by 11.7% between the 2011 and 2021 census - a higher rate than the South-East which grew 7.5% during the same period.

The borough is a remarkably diverse place, including the historic market town of Faversham, the traditional seaside resort of Sheerness, the more industrial market town of Sittingbourne and rural villages.

The urban centres are connected both physically and culturally by the borough's extensive and important rural areas, accounting for around a quarter of the population. Running east-west through Swale is the M2, providing access to destinations between the Channel ports and London. Some southern parts of the borough lie within the Kent Downs, a designated National Landscape. Around the Isle of Sheppey, we have a coastline of approximately 45km (28 miles), and for the mainland we have approximately 27km (17 miles) of coastline from our boundary with Medway Council (Rainham) to Kingsferry Bridge, and approximately 18km (11 miles) from Kingsferry Bridge to our boundary with Canterbury City Council at Seasalter. This gives Swale a total coastline of around 90km or 56 miles. This does not include the creeks and inlets.

There are challenges when travelling around the borough, the route between the Isle of Sheppey and Faversham is lengthy and there are often delays due to ongoing roadworks. This is difficult for both residents going about their day-to-day business and Members carrying out the council work.

In terms of geography, the North Sheppey Coastline from Minster Leas round to Warden Bay does not have any coastal defences and the London Clay cliffs form part of SSSI sites (Site of Special Scientific Interest) designated by Natural England. The sea defences are owned and maintained by the Environment Agency (when the purpose of the defence is to prevent flooding) and Swale Borough Council (when the defence is to protect against coastal erosion).

As a coastal borough, the Port of Sheerness gives access, via its deep water berths, to the largest ships in the world; its imports distributed to all corners of the UK.

Swale's demographic make-up is no less diverse than its geography, including a mix of affluent and less affluent communities. In general, the area is less well-off than is typical for the region, and there are some concentrated pockets of severe socioeconomic disadvantage to be found in locations across the borough.

While the causes of this are deep-rooted and complex, the outcome is that a proportion of our residents suffer from entrenched inequality and a lack of opportunities which the council needs to do what it can to address.

The indices of multiple deprivation in 2019 showed Swale's overall position had deteriorated relative to other places, with the borough now the 69th most disadvantaged of 317 shire districts in England, and the second most disadvantaged in Kent.

In 2024 Swale Borough Council (SBC) adopted its reviewed [Corporate Equality Scheme 2024-2028](#) and agreed 4 equality priorities:

- Supporting integration and cohesion in our local communities
- Supporting our vulnerable residents
- Ensuring easy, clear and convenient access to our services
- Promoting equality as a local employer

Swale has a growing population with more and more people coming to live here from other areas of the UK. The Census 2021 data also shows that people of other ethnic backgrounds are part of this population growth. At the time of the 2021 Census, Swale was among the highest district in Kent where people live with a long-term health problem or disability. Swale is above the average for all Kent districts in this respect, and higher than the average for the South East and England and Wales.

Over recent decades, Swale has seen a successful diversification of its economy, which now has key strengths in manufacturing and distribution, as well as high-skilled activities including cutting-edge technology and life sciences.

However, it remains the case that much of the borough's employment is at the lower end of the skills spectrum and the average weekly earnings are significantly below regional and national averages.

Below is a list of key areas of importance within the community:

- Oare Country Park
- Milton Creek Country Park
- Barton's Point Country Park
- Elmley Nature Reserve
- Perry Wood
- Rose Hill Woods and Grove Park
- The Meads Community Woodland
- Kingsborough Manor Community Woodland
- Leysdown Coastal Park
- Thistle Hill Community Woodland

Link to the Corporate Plan can be found via this link: [Corporate-Plan-2023-2027-final-adopted-version.pdf](#) . The purpose of the Corporate Plan is to ensure that the Council's resources are allocated in a coherent, accountable and effective way, by setting out the five priorities which we will be working on over the next four years, together with the broad objectives we will pursue in support of these priorities.

Community - To enable our residents to live, work and enjoy their leisure time safely in our borough and to support community resilience.

Economy - Working with our businesses and community organisations to work towards a sustainable economy which delivers for local people.

Environment - To provide a cleaner, healthier, more sustainable and enjoyable environment, and to prepare our borough for the challenges ahead.

Health & Housing - To aspire to be a borough where everyone has access to a decent home and improved health and wellbeing.

Running the Council - Working within our resources to proactively engage with communities and outside bodies to deliver in a transparent and efficient way”.

With reference to any other constraints, challenges, issues or changes ahead, finances are one of the main issues we face. Additionally, the Government policy position set out in the English Devolution White Paper on 16 December 2024 on devolution and local government reorganisation will impact Swale. The decision by the Secretary of State to call in the Highsted Park Planning Applications on 7 November 2024 and subsequent inquiry will significantly impact the Council’s finances.

We have 3 very clear geographies with different demographics. Faversham is very different to both Sittingbourne and Sheppey and the issues faced are different. Having said that some of most deprived wards are in Faversham. We have different levels of engagement in different areas, although we have had issues in every area which have brought together communities and have increased engagement.

Council Size

The Commission believes that councillors have three broad aspects to their role. These are categorised as: **Strategic Leadership, Accountability (Scrutiny, Regulatory and Partnerships), and Community Leadership**. Submissions should address each of these in turn and provide supporting evidence. Prompts in the boxes below should help shape responses.

Strategic Leadership

Respondents should provide the Commission with details as to how elected members will provide strategic leadership for the authority. Responses should also indicate how many members will be required for this role and why this is justified. **Responses should demonstrate that alternative council sizes have been explored.**

Topic		
Governance Model	<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>What governance model will your authority operate? e.g. Committee System, Executive or other?</i> ➤ <i>Swale Borough Council changed from a Cabinet governance model to a Committee System in May 2022.</i> ➤ <i>The Cabinet model, for example, usually requires 6 to 10 members. How many members will you require?</i> ➤ <i>N/A</i>

		<p>➤ <i>If the authority runs a Committee system, we want to understand why the number and size of the committees you propose represents the most appropriate for the authority.</i></p> <p>Service committees are generally thematically based, with each committee being responsible for a range of issues and/or a range of council services.</p> <p>Each councillor sits on at least one service committee. The service committees each have 15 members and the five thematic service committees are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community & Leisure • Economy & Property • Environment & Climate Change • Housing & Health • Policy & Resources <p>The full functions of each service committee can be found under section 2.2 of the SBC Constitution via this link Part 2 Responsibility for functions</p> <p>➤ <i>By what process does the council aim to formulate strategic and operational policies? How will members in executive, executive support and/or scrutiny positions be involved? What particular demands will this make of them?</i></p> <p>➤ We chose the committee system to increase the numbers of councillors involved in decision making. We have increased the number of working groups (cross party) to ensure that policies are developed by a wide sector of our member core. Scrutiny is undertaken at committee level, however we have also had scrutiny reviews on specific areas of work (eg waste)</p> <p>➤ <i>Whichever governance model you currently operate, a simple assertion that you want to keep the current structure does not in itself, provide an explanation of why that structure best meets the needs of the council and your communities.</i></p> <p>➤ Members voted unanimously to move a committee system and the recent review demonstrated that there was still an appetite to maintain it. This is largely due to the numbers of groups we have in the council and the political make-up of the council.</p>
<p>Portfolios</p>	<p><i>Key lines of explanation</i></p>	<p>➤ <i>How many portfolios will there be?</i></p> <p>➤ <i>What will the role of a portfolio holder be?</i></p> <p>➤ <i>Will this be a full-time position?</i></p> <p>➤ <i>Will decisions be delegated to portfolio holders? Or will the executive/mayor take decisions?</i></p>

		➤ N/A
	Analysis	This section does not apply to Swale Borough Council as the authority operates a Committee System governance model.
Delegated Responsibilities	Key lines of explanation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>What responsibilities will be delegated to officers or committees?</i> ➤ See section 2.8 of the SBC Constitution for the Scheme of Officer Delegations via this link: Part 2.8 Scheme of officer delegation ➤ <i>How many councillors will be involved in taking major decisions?</i> ➤ Since the adoption of the committee system in May 2022, all councillors are now involved in taking major decisions through service committees and full council (the exception is single independent councillors who are not able to sit on service committees, unless they are gifted a seat by a group).
	Analysis	<p>In a committee system, there is no executive. There is still a leader, elected by council in the same way as in the leader-and-cabinet model, but s/he does not have executive powers. There are no cabinet and no cabinet members, and thus little or no decision-making by individual councillors.</p> <p>Council is responsible for agreeing the overarching policy and budget frameworks which the service committee (policy & resources) proposes to it. For all decision making the framework is for service committees to propose their recommendations, and once adopted by council, all service committees would take their decisions in accordance with it.</p> <p>Service committees may set up subcommittees and/or working groups. The subcommittees will have decision making powers where these are delegated to them by the Committee. The subcommittees may make recommendations to the whole committee on particular elements of the area of responsibility of the committee.</p> <p>The Housing and Health Committee has a Subcommittee called the Swale Rainbow Homes Shareholder Representation Subcommittee which is made up of members who have received appropriate training. This makes decisions in respect of the Council's role as shareholder of Swale Rainbow Homes.</p>

		Any subcommittee or working group must report to the service committee and its membership is set by the service committee. The membership of a subcommittee must be drawn from the parent committee but the membership of a working group need not do. The political balance rules and access to information rules do not apply to any working groups but they do operate in an open and transparent way and membership is drawn from members who are from different political groups on the Council. Where a working group is supported by officers, the Chief Executive is consulted before it is established.
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Accountability

Give the Commission details as to how the authority and its decision makers and partners will be held to account. The Commission is interested in both the internal and external dimensions of this role. **Responses should demonstrate that alternative council sizes have been explored.**

Topic	
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> ➤ <i>As Swale Borough Council operate a committee system model, there is no scrutiny committee. The scrutiny mechanism is carried out by the service committees and Full Council. This is generally carried out by working groups with cross party membership taken from the responsible service committee. There is no scrutiny officer but support is provided by the relevant service area and the policy team.</i>
Analysis	Scrutiny is usually embedded into the work of individual committees, with each committee responsible for monitoring

		budgets and performance relating to its functions. In addition, members of the committee could highlight areas of concern and request reports on issues relating to their functions.
Statutory Function		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?
Planning	Key lines of explanation	<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>
	Analysis	<p>The Planning Committee currently meets once a month to determine planning applications and consider other planning issues.</p> <p>17 members sit on Planning Committee, which is politically balanced.</p> <p>Planning Committee meetings currently start at 7pm and meeting length can vary significantly according to the agenda.</p> <p>Members are required to undertake training before they can sit on Planning Committee. A substitute system is available however only for those members who have also undertaken the relevant training. Full training is supplemented by 'bitesize' training sessions prior to each alternate Planning Committee meeting.</p> <p>There is a Planning Working Group that visits site(s) of planning applications, that have been deferred by the Planning Committee.</p> <p>There is also a Planning and Transportation Policy Working Group with 11 Members which supports the development of policy in these fields, and in particular the Local Plan.</p>
Licensing	Key lines of explanation	<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> ➤

	Analysis	<p>Licensing Committee (14 Members)</p> <p>All members of the committee are required to undertake Licensing Training before they can sit on the Committee.</p> <p>A sub-committee of 3 members sits to hear appeals, cases of non-compliance etc. Membership of these are selected from the Licensing Committee dependent on the availability of members and to ensure that ward members are not selected, or those where members may have an interest. Sub-committees are usually held during the day to reflect that all interested parties may wish to attend. These sub-committees do not need to be politically balanced but we do try and ensure they are cross party where possible.</p> <p>The Licensing Committee is scheduled to meet three times a year. The sub committees meet as and when needed.</p>
Other Regulatory Bodies	Key lines of explanation	<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>
	Analysis	<p>Standards Committee is made up of 11 members of the council plus three non-voting co-opted parish representatives. The responsibilities of the Standards Committee can be found under para 2.4.5.2 of the Constitution. There is also a sub-committee called the Standards Hearing Panel which is comprised of 3 members of the Standards Committee who have received appropriate training on the conducting of hearings.</p> <p>Audit Committee comprises 9 members of the Council and there are four scheduled meetings per year. The purpose of the Audit Committee is to provide independent assurance of the adequacy of the risk management framework and the associated control environment, independent scrutiny of the authority's financial and non-financial performance to the extent that it affects the authority's exposure to risk and weakens the control environment, and to oversee the reporting process. Specific briefings and training sessions are provided to audit committee members to ensure that they are trained to fulfil their role on the committee.</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.
	Key lines of explanation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>Will council members serve on decision-making partnerships, sub-regional, regional or national bodies? In</i>

	<p><i>doing so, are they able to take decisions/make commitments on behalf of the council?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <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 Thames Gateway Building Control Joint Committee Swale Joint Transportation Board Swale Community Safety Partnership Mid Kent Services Kent and Medway Economic Partnership (KMEP)</p>

Community Leadership

The Commission understands that there is no single approach to community leadership and that members represent, and provide leadership to, their communities in different ways. The Commission wants to know how members are required to provide effective community leadership and what support the council offers them in this role. For example, does the authority have a defined role and performance system for its elected members? And what support networks are available within the council to help members in their duties? The Commission also wants to see a consideration of **how the use of technology and social media by the council as a whole, and by councillors individually, will affect casework, community engagement and local democratic representation. Responses should demonstrate that alternative council sizes have been explored.**

Topic		Description
Community Leadership	Key lines of explanation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>In general terms how do councillors carry out their representational role with electors?</i> ➤ <i>A Councillor's role and responsibilities can include:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Representing the ward for which they are elected</i> • <i>Community leadership and engagement – speaking up for and behalf of residents and groups; encouraging residents to engage and participate</i> • <i>Taking decisions at Council meetings</i> • <i>Regulatory, quasi-judicial and statutory duties (eg. deciding on Planning and Licensing issues)</i> • <i>Developing and reviewing Council policy</i> • <i>Scrutinising decisions at committee meetings</i> • <i>Representing the Council on external organisations (outside bodies)</i> • <i>Seeking to influence decision-making for the benefit of the Borough</i> ➤ <i>Does the council have area committees and what are their powers?</i> ➤ <i>In September 2020 SBC established and launched 4 area committees the purpose of which is to enhance the quality of life and of council services in the relevant area and to bring greater local insight to bear in council decision-making. The membership of each area</i>

committee includes all ward members in the area. Area committee boundaries align with ward boundaries. Substitute members are not permitted on area committees. There are 4 rounds of area committees each year and the chair and vice-chair are selected each year.

There are Area Committees in the following areas;

Eastern (Abbey; Boughton and Courtenay; East Downs; Priory; St Ann's; Teynham and Lynsted; Watling). 12 Members;

Sheppey (Minster Cliffs; Queenborough and Halfway; Sheerness; Sheppey Central; Sheppey East). 14 Members

Sittingbourne (Chalkwell; Homewood; Kemsley; Milton Regis; Murston; Roman). 11 Members;

Western (Bobbing, Iwade and Lower Halstow; Borden and Grove Park; Hartlip, Newington and Upchurch; The Meads; Woodstock; West Downs). 10 Members.

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- *How do councillors seek to engage with their constituents? Do they hold surgeries, send newsletters, hold public meetings or maintain blogs*
- *A Member Workload Survey was carried out (see Appendix I) and the majority of members who responded used social media, newsletters and ward walkabouts to engage with their constituents. Other methods of engagement include holding surgeries, maintaining blogs, direct emails with residents, door knocking, attending community meetings, events and activities and incidental contact when out and about.*
- *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?*
- *For the UK Parliament Week 2024 in November 2024, officers produced a resources pack for secondary schools with the offer of local councillors to come into schools to engage with young people. Unfortunately, no schools took the offer up. The SBC Communications Team also created a post to see if any other schools, youth groups would like to be involved but again there was no interest. Councillors were asked this question in the member workload survey and most stated they interacted with young people, those not on the electoral register, and/or other minority groups and their representative bodies through local community groups in their wards or volunteering.*
- *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?*

		<p>➤ <i>There is an expectation that councillors attend community meetings such as parish/town councils and residents' associations. At a minimum this is to remain engaged and informed about the community that is within their wards. 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></p>
	<p>Analysis</p>	<p>➤ <i>The Member Workload Survey and of the members who responded, 73% represented a parished area. 42% of the councillors who responded spend between 2 to 5 hours per week on parish work. A lot of councillors are members of their local community groups. This can be difficult for some if their ward covers quite a few parishes. The Member Workload Survey showed that 50% of councillors who responded spend 1 to 2 hours working with community groups and 30% spend 2 to 5 hours on this work.</i></p>
<p>Casework</p>	<p><i>Key lines of explanation</i></p>	<p>➤ <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></p> <p>➤ <i>What support do members receive?</i></p> <p>➤ <i>How has technology influenced the way in which councillors work? And interact with their electorate?</i></p> <p>➤ <i>In what ways does the council promote service users' engagement/dispute resolution with service providers and managers rather than through councillors?</i></p>
	<p>Analysis</p>	<p>The Member Workload Survey addressed the questions on casework. The response to the survey can be found under Appendix I. Councillors deal with all casework themselves, often using their own knowledge, experience or consulting with other Members. They also get in touch with SBC officers to resolve queries or if the problems is the responsibility of a partner organisation they get in touch with the relevant external department to seek a resolution. They then feed the information back to the resident themselves, seeing the issue through to its conclusion. As part of their induction, Members are provided with a handbook which includes a contact list of officer roles and responsibilities. They also all have a dedicated officer contact.</p> <p>Questions 7 and 8 of the Member Workload Survey consider how technology has impacted both council and case work. Members commented that although technology has made some tasks easier, it has raised expectations from residents. In 2012, the main methods of communicating with ward councillors was by telephone, letter, email and in person.</p>

		<p>Now social media has greatly increased the amount of time councillors spend, monitoring and responding to questions, they can often come in via multiple sources and one post from a resident on social media can trigger many other related queries which all need to be answered. Councillors acknowledged that this is of benefit to residents, but greatly increases the amount of time spent answering queries.</p>
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Summary

In following this template respondents should have been able to provide the Commission with a robust and well-evidenced case for their proposed council size; one which gives a clear explanation as to the governance arrangements and number of councillors required to represent the authority in the future.

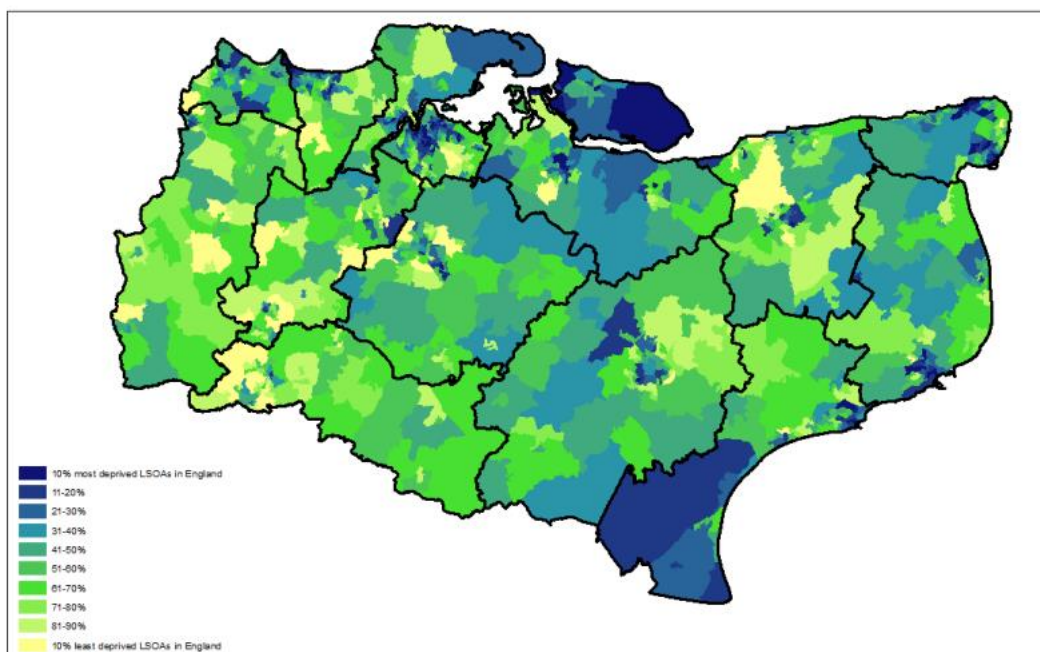
Use this space to summarise the proposals and indicate other options considered. Explain why these alternatives were not appropriate in terms of their ability to deliver effective Strategic Leadership, Accountability (Scrutiny, Regulation and Partnerships), and Community Leadership.

Swale Borough Council are proposing a council size of 55 which is an increase of 8 councillors. The case for this is as follows:

- 1) At the last Local Government Boundary Review in 2012, there was a Cabinet system of Governance. This was changed to a Committee system model in 2022 which increased the number of councillors involved in decision making. The Member Workload Survey asked councillors if their workload had increased since moving from a Cabinet to a Committee system, 69% said it had increased, 31% said it had stayed about the same and none said it had decreased.
- 2) The Independent Remuneration Panel report ([Independent Remuneration Panel Report May 2022](#)), paragraph 4.1.7 states that “*we find that the average time commitment required to execute the role of a councillor with no special responsibilities is 14 hours per week within a Committee Model of governance. This is an increase of two hours per week since the March 2020 review recommendation.*” This provides evidence that the change from a Cabinet to Committee system does result in an additional time commitment for councillors.
- 3) If you multiply the current council size of 47 by the additional 2 hours work, 94 hours extra councillor time is required per week. If you divide this by the March 2020 time commitment of 12 hours per councillor per week, that amounts to a requirement of 8 extra councillors, therefore council size of 55 is proposed.
- 4) Question 5 of the Member Workload Survey asked about the average number of hours councillors spent per week on different types of council business. Removing the figures for tasks relating to special responsibilities, of the councillors who responded, the average amount of time councillors currently spend on council business is 25 hours per week.
- 5) Question 10 of the survey asked about councillors work/life balance. The majority of responses described how undertaking council business encroached on family life, work commitments, caring responsibilities and other voluntary work.

- 6) The projected elector figures submitted as part of the LG Boundary Review Commission's information request demonstrate that the majority of the Commission's projections have been challenged as the proposed housing development figures are higher.
- 7) Questions 7 and 8 of the Member Workload Survey consider how technology has impacted both council and case work. Members commented that although technology has made some tasks easier, it has raised expectations from residents. In 2012, the main methods of communicating with ward councillors was by telephone, letter, email and in person. Now social media has greatly increased the amount of time councillors spend, monitoring and responding to questions, they can often come in via multiple sources and one post from a resident on social media can trigger many other related queries which all need to be answered. Councillors acknowledged that this is of benefit to residents, but greatly increases the amount of time spent answering queries.
- 8) One of the Corporate Plan 2023-2027 objectives is to ensure effective partnership working, in particular to renew contract and partnership arrangements to ensure the most appropriate and efficient means of delivering services to our diverse communities and customers. Appendix II sets out the Outside Bodies nominations for 2024/25. By having more councillors, outreach will be more effective as working relations with outside bodies will be improved and easier.
- 9) Swale is a diverse borough, there are areas of affluence next to areas of high deprivation. The indices of multiple deprivation in 2019 showed Swale's overall position had deteriorated relative to other places, with the borough now the 69th most disadvantaged of 317 shire districts in England, and the second most disadvantaged in Kent. These areas of need result in an increased workload for councillors as they work with residents who are in difficulties, either by approaching partner organisations on their behalf or signposting them to seek assistance.

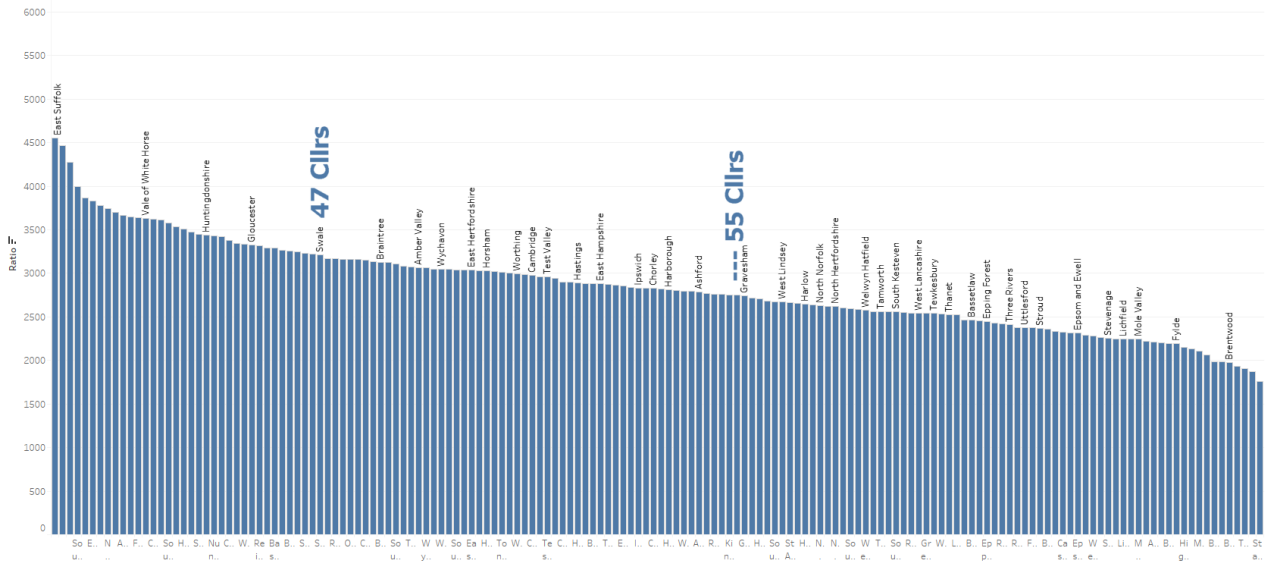
Indices of Deprivation 2019 (IoD2019): Overall IMD2019
National rank of Lower Super Output Areas in Kent & Medway



Source: The English Indices of Deprivation 2019 (IoD2019): The Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG)
Map produced by Strategic Commissioning - Analytics, Kent County Council © Crown Copyright and database right 2019, Ordnance Survey 100019238



- 10) When comparing the council size to population ratio of other local authorities, Swale has a lower ratio of councillors to population as can be seen in this chart:

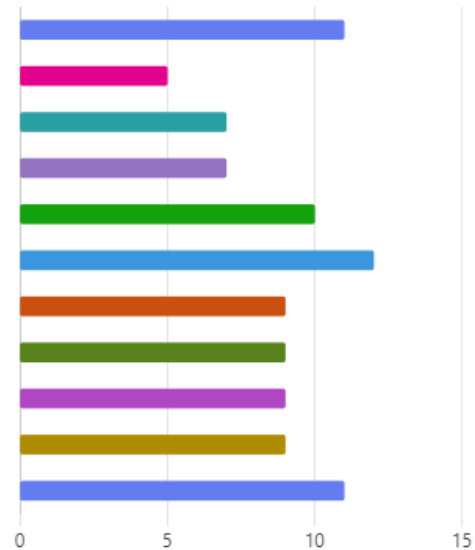


11) Swale Borough Council have considered the option of a lower council size proposal but as the evidence above demonstrates, a figure lower than 55 will not provide the support for residents, or help to achieve the Council’s ambitions and priorities as set out in the Corporate Plan. The proposal of 55 will more evenly spread the workload of councillors thus addressing many of the issues raised in the member workload survey on work/life balance.

Local Government Boundary Review – Member Workload Survey responses

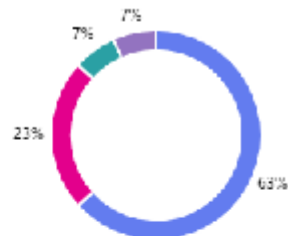
1. Which of these roles do you hold? (select all that apply):

● Committee Chair	11
● Committee Vice-Chair	5
● Member of Audit Committee	7
● Member of Standards Committee	7
● Member of Licensing Committee	10
● Member of Planning Committee	12
● Member of Community & Leisure Committee	9
● Member of Economy & Property Committee	9
● Member of Environment & Climate Change Committee	9
● Member of Health & Housing Committee	9
● Member of Policy & Resources Committee	11



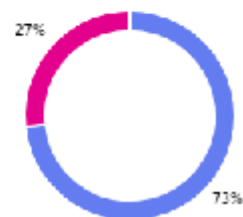
2. How long have you been a Swale Borough Councillor (if elected at a by-election, please select the closest date)?

● Since 2023	19
● Since 2019	7
● Since 2015	2
● Longer	2



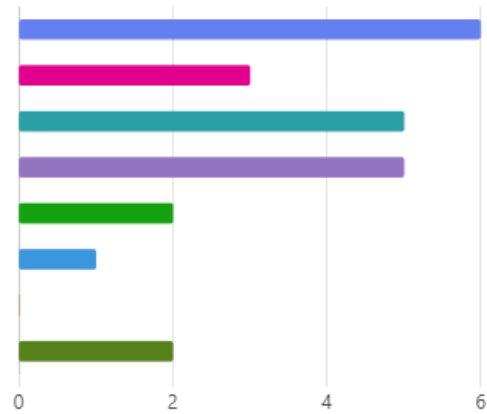
3. Do you represent a parished area?:

● Yes	22
● No	8



4. If 'Yes' on 3, how many parish/town council meetings do you attend a month?

None	6
One	3
Two	5
Three	5
Four	2
Five	1
Six	0
More than six	2



5. Before the implementation of the Waste Contract in March 2024, on average, how many **hours a week** did you spend ...

- Less than an hour
- 1-2 hours
- 2-5 hours
- 5-10 hours
- 10-15 hours
- 15 hours or more

Council work eg attending or preparing for council meetings (not as chair/vice-chair), training or working groups

Ward case work eg responding to residents, liaising with officers etc.

Parish work eg attending parish/town council meetings, addressing issues raised by the parish/town council

Working with local community groups in your ward

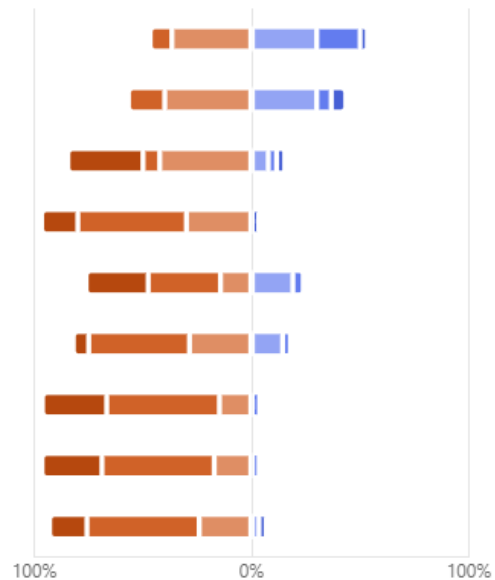
Work relating to being a chair or vice-chair of a committee

Attending or reading briefings

Outside bodies, including external boards and partnership meetings

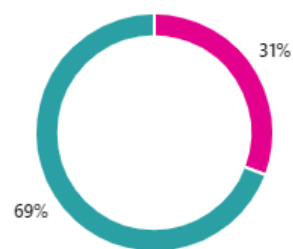
Travelling on council business

Other tasks as councillor, not listed above



6. For those who were councillors before the move to a committee system, would you say the amount of time you spend on...

Decreased	0
About the same	4
Increased	9



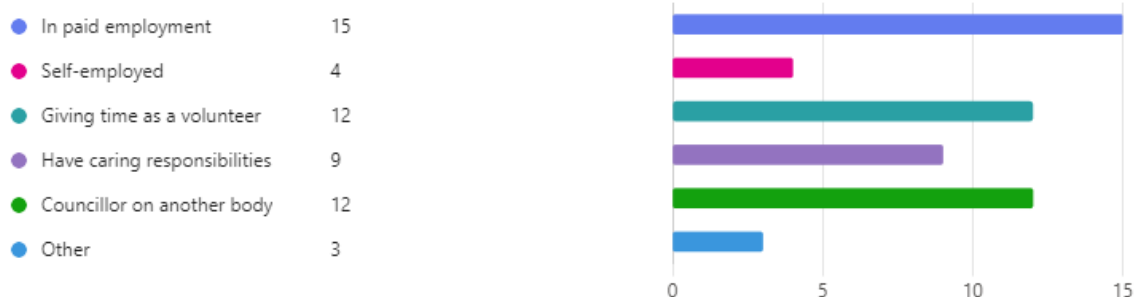
Question 7 - Please comment on how technology impacts your COUNCIL work either positively or negatively (comments summarised below):

- The SBC supplied laptops make council business easier;
- The website needs improvement, the forms don't work on older mobile phones;
- SBC should be on Instagram;
- remote meetings are good, but connectivity can be difficult in rural areas;
- technology makes research easier;
- Teams meetings can be attended from anywhere and it means less travel;
- better use of IT could be made;
- the decision to stop sending paper copies of agendas is a negative one;
- social media and emails have a negative impact;
- Modern.Gov app very helpful;
- email and Teams are very good;
- too many SBC email updates are sent, important updates can be overlooked;
- broadband costs should be covered by SBC;
- not all residents can be reached via technology, face-to-face contact is still needed; and
- although technology is easier, it can increase the workload for councillors.

Question 8 - Please comment on how technology impacts your CASE work either positively or negatively:

- Expectations from residents have changed in recent years. When letters were the main method of contact, residents were happy to wait for a reply. Now replies are expected instantly;
- residents don't realise councillors do not have officer assistance with responding to case work messages;
- research and communicating with officers is easier;
- easy to share information with residents;
- more use could be made of Teams and reporting systems;
- there are many channels of communication that need to be monitored and responded to which is additional work;
- not all councillors are IT literate;
- reduction of paper copies which improves data security;
- reaching people can be difficult;
- not all residents can be reached via technology, face-to-face contact is still needed;
- having a social media presence improves engagement with residents;
- sometimes experience login problems which can't be resolved out of hours; and
- the high volume of emails can mean important emails are missed.

9. In addition to your work as a SBC councillor, are you? (select all that apply):

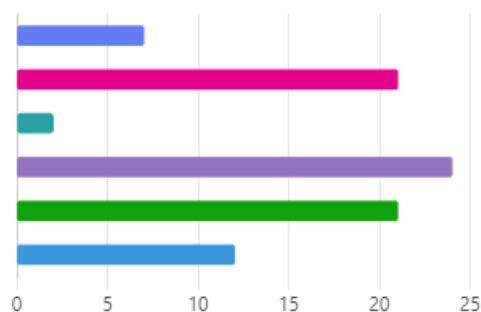


Question 10 - Please comment on your work/life balance, how does your work as an SBC councillor impact any other occupation or family life?:

- regularly have to take unpaid leave to attend meetings;
- some weeks have to attend 3 or 4 evening meetings which impacts family life;
- often have to miss or postpone family/social events;
- not enough time for a personal life;
- daytime meetings often clash with work commitments;
- it can eat into time for personal development which can slow career progression;
- after doing a full day's work, often have to work past midnight on case work;
- work life is flexible which fits around being a councillor;
- family life difficult with young children;
- try to put time aside for family but not always successful;
- difficult to switch off, residents expect councillors to be available 24/7;
- the councillor allowance doesn't pay the bills;
- commuting for work means it is not possible to attend day time meetings or be part of working groups;
- had to give up paid work in order to work effectively as a councillor;
- dealing with the waste contract increased workload by 10-20 hours a week;
- substituting for other councillors on committees adds to time at meetings;
- the committee system has increased time spent on preparing for meetings and evening commitments. Would prefer longer meetings across fewer evenings;
- parish council meetings take time;
- constant juggling of SBC/family life;
- 5 out of 30 councillors responded their family life was not impacted by being a councillor;
- it would help if committee meetings were online;
- difficult to support partner with family commitments such as childcare;
- when travelling from work to an evening meeting there isn't time to eat; and
- difficult to get time off in the day to attend Planning Committee site meetings.

11. How do you engage with your constituents? (select all that apply):

● Hold surgeries	7
● Send newsletters	21
● Maintain blogs	2
● Social media	24
● Ward walkabouts	21
● Other	12



Question 12 - How do you interact with young people, those not on the electoral register, and/or other minority groups and their representative bodies?

- Through work as a charity and community organisation trustee;
- by attending community events;
- by getting out and about to meet people face-to-face;
- through an invitation to a mosque;
- via social media;
- giving talks at schools and youth clubs;
- door knocking;
- this is something that needs improvement;
- difficult to do in wards with no official community groups;
- canvassing;
- through established contacts with young people and minority groups;
- by email/telephone when necessary;
- as a driver for the Swale Community Volunteer Service;
- youth working group; and
- parish council events at schools.

Question 13 - What support do you get from the Council to help with casework (ie direct contact with officers, use of website)

- officers are responsive but more are needed as they are overstretched;
- sometimes have to wait for response from officers;
- website needs improvement;
- use council laptop;
- proactive engagement from officers to anticipate problems before they arise would be beneficial;
- receive support from the Chief Executive and senior management;
- officers help with contact to partner organisations and outside bodies;
- councillor colleagues are helpful;
- do not receive help with funding for ward business; and
- some officers are only contactable at certain times.

Question 14 - What further support could the Council provide with your casework?:

- Increase the budget for officers and project work to support residents;
- improve the website;
- officers to respond to all email enquiries;
- happy to attend more training/briefings to improve knowledge;
- develop a casework database;
- more training;
- admin support for casework;
- if councillors had access to information, it would mean they wouldn't have to contact officers as much;
- have regular 1-1s with officers to assist with resolving difficult casework;
- contact with officers on Friday afternoons;
- contact list of officer roles and responsibilities;
- fewer meetings;
- realistic expectations of residents;
- each councillor to have a dedicated officer contact;
- councillor emails to be set up with an automatic response so resident knows it has been received;
- a more reflective and transparent councillor allowance scheme so residents can see what time they spend on work;
- improve the safety of councillors when out and about doing ward work;
- councillors should have compulsory Disclosure & Barring Service (DBS) check;
- link officer and member safeguarding policies so that groups that work with councillors know that SBC take safeguarding seriously; and
- officers should be more accessible to residents.

Appendix II – Outside Bodies:

Organisation	Nominations for 2023/24	Nominations for 2024/25
Bensted's Charity	Kieran Golding (to 2027) Ben J Martin (to 2027) Hannah Perkin (to 2025)	Kieran Golding (to 2027) Ben J Martin (to 2027) Hannah Perkin (to 2025)
Charity of Sir William Stede	Charlie Miller (to 2027) Angie Valls (to 2027) Tony Winckless (to 2027)	Charlie Miller (to 2027) Tony Winckless (to 2027) Kieran Mishchuk
Citizens Advice Service, Swale*	Kieran Golding Elliott Jayes Pete Neal (resigned)	Kieran Golding (to 2026) Elliott Jayes (to 2026) Hannah Perkin (to 2027)
Council for Voluntary Services	Simon Clark Paul Stephen Sarah Stephen	Simon Clark Paul Stephen Sarah Stephen
Faversham Swimming Pool Management Committee	Claire Martin	Vacancy due to resignation.
Kent Downs National Landscape Joint Advisory Committee (was Kent Downs AONB Joint Advisory Committee)	Terry Thompson	Terry Thompson
Kent Health and Wellbeing Board	Angela Harrison	Angela Harrison
Local Children's Partnership Group in Swale (was Swale District Partnership Conversation)	Angela Harrison	Angela Harrison
Lower Medway Internal Drainage Board	Derek Carnell Richard Palmer Peter Marchington Terry Thompson Tony Winckless Dolley Wooster	Derek Carnell Richard Palmer Peter Marchington Terry Thompson Tony Winckless Dolley Wooster
Medway Maritime Hospital	Angela Harrison (to 2025)	Angela Harrison (to 2025)
Oare Gunpowder Works Advisory Group	Rich Lehmann Julien Speed Ashley Wise	Charles Gibson Rich Lehmann Julien Speed
PATROL Adjudication Joint Committee (Parking and Traffic Regulations Outside London)	Richard Palmer	Richard Palmer
Kent and Medway Police and Crime Panel	Richard Palmer	Richard Palmer
Sheppey Matters	Elliott Jayes	Elliott Jayes
South East England Councils	Mike Baldock Tim Gibson	Mike Baldock Tim Gibson
Southern Housing Kent Regional Residents Panel (was Optivo Kent General Panel)	Karen Watson	Karen Watson
The Meads Woodland Group	James Hunt (to 17 October 2026)	James Hunt (to 17 October 2026)

United Charities of Milton Regis	Derek Carnell (to 2027) Charlie Miller (to 2027) Angie Valls (to 2027) Tony Winckless (to 2027)	Derek Carnell (to 2027) Charlie Miller (to 2027) Tony Winckless (to 2027) Kieran Mishchuk
West Faversham Community Association	Carole Jackson	Carole Jackson