

Southend on Sea City Council

Council Size Submission: Template

[Southend on Sea City Council

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How to Make a Submission

It is recommended that submissions on future governance arrangements and council size follow the guidance provided and use the format below as a template.

Submissions should be treated as an opportunity to focus on the future needs of the council and not simply describe the current arrangements. **Submissions should also demonstrate that alternative council sizes have been considered in drawing up the proposal and why you have discounted them.**

The template allows respondents to enter comments directly under each heading. It is not recommended that responses be unduly long; as a guide, it is anticipated that a 15 to 20-page document using this template should suffice. Individual section length may vary depending on the issues to be explained. Where internal documents are referred to URLs should be provided, rather than the document itself. It is also recommended that a table is included that highlights the key paragraphs for the Commission's attention.

'Good' submissions, i.e. those that are considered to be most robust and persuasive, combine the following *key success components* (as set out in the guidance that accompanies this template):

- Clarity on objectives
- A straightforward and evidence-led style
- An understanding of local place and communities
- An understanding of councillors' roles and responsibilities

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.

Officers have prepared the submission and presented the findings to Full Council. ##% of councillors supported the submission (number support, number did not support, number abstained).

Due to the timing of local elections in Southend and the nature of no overall control, councillors have lacked available capacity to fully engage in this work. However, several opportunities have been provided to seek councillors' contributions and build consensus, these have included:

- A dedicated intranet page for councillors to access additional information.
- A live on-line survey for councillors to contribute to the capacity and leadership elements of the submission.
- Regular communication via email.
- Group leader briefings.
- A virtual all member briefing session held on 24th June 2024 to explain how the submission was developed.

- A Full Council report on 27th June 2024.

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.*

The Commission has identified that a review is required because:

- It has been a long time since the last review
- The number of electors each councillor represents varies a lot across the council/each ward

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?

Due to its geographical positioning and densely developed urban landscape the city has not experienced exponential growth in population since it was formed as a Unitary Council in 1998. However, the addition of approximately 19,000 people during that time has seen a need for our councillors to interact with greater numbers of residents. The increased use of technologies has enabled our residents to interact and communicate with the council in different ways, allowing for councillor capacity to focus on more complex cases.

The council has not made any substantial changes to its internal governance arrangements since it formed as a Unitary Council. However, we have constantly sought opportunities to assess and enhance our approach to governance structures

over this period, with smaller improvements having enhanced the effectiveness of councillors, both in their time spent in public meetings and when liaising with officers. This approach has allowed us to adapt to new responsibilities, the stable population growth and changes in the local government policy context.

Smaller enhancements to the constitution have included amended scrutiny rules and delegations. At times the council has been supported by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny to explore and identify more efficient ways of working. In October 2022, the Local Government Association conducted a Corporate Peer Challenge in which they recommended action which would support improvements to governance arrangements, including the completion of the intended enhanced scrutiny arrangements, practices to increase collaboration and effective working relationships between councillors and councillors and officers, and consulting residents to inform the consideration of a change to the election cycle from thirds to a whole council cycle. The council accepted these findings and work is ongoing to implement opportunities for more effective government and working arrangements.

As is experienced throughout the sector, continued additions to the council's range of responsibilities over time has seen an expansion of required knowledge for councillors. However, this has been supported by regular portfolio and shadow portfolio briefings with relevant officers, and enhanced training opportunities.

The national policy trend towards greater devolution will likely see the council continue to build relationships across a larger footprint. The Council recognised the opportunity of cross-border strategic partnerships and in 2016 co-founded a South Essex Councils partnership. This experience enables the council to be on the front foot in understanding the skills and capacity required for potential expansion of opportunities through the national devolution agenda.

This review allows us to consider our current and future needs against expected population growth, changing responsibilities and methods of operation. The impact of which will ensure that the council provides good value for money and sound accountability.

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?

The city of Southend-on-Sea

Located 40 miles east of London, Southend is the 36th most densely populated district in England and Wales. With 182,773 residents, it is the most populous area in the county of Essex. A major seaside tourist resort with a world-famous pier and a sub-regional centre for employment and retail provision, it is home to many London commuters, with 20% of adults commuting out of the city for work.

The city is situated on the eastern-most extremity of South Essex lying on the northern side of the Thames Estuary at the point where it meets the North Sea. It has a linear form lying along the coast and is bordered to the north by Rochford and to the west by Castle Point. The predominant land use in Southend is residential, interspersed with mature parks and seven miles of foreshore fronting the Thames estuary to the south and east. The city has four areas of metropolitan Green Belt within its administrative boundary, all of which form a small part of the extensive Green Belt separating settlements within South Essex.

Southend's position within the Thames Estuary is central to both its cultural identity and for driving growth and investment in its communities. With 7,500 seasonal, tourism-related jobs, trips and overnight stays generating nearly £471 million, 7.3-million day trips and nearly 254,000 overnight stays per year, tourism has a core place at the heart of Southend. Southend's beaches, arcades, amusements, and Pier holding a special place in the memories of many people.

The city has 17 wards, and the Council consists of 51 elected members (three per ward). Southend-on-Sea City Council is a multifunctional and complex organisation, its policies are directed by the Political Leadership and implemented by officers of the Council. The Council is responsible for the delivery of major city-wide services such as education, adult and children's social care, waste collection, maintenance of the roads and pavements, looking after the parks, providing street lighting, public health, and many other services. There is one Parish Council within the area, Leigh-on-Sea Town Council. This is governed by 16 elected members across eight wards. The purpose is to protect and promote the heritage and identity of Leigh-on-Sea to preserve the Town for current residents and to provide a legacy for future generations. Leigh-on-Sea Town Council delivers services to meet additional specific local needs, such as managing the community centre, running a volunteer programme, organising local events, administering local allotment sites, and acting as statutory consultee on planning, highways and licensing issues. It is represented by Conservative MP Anna Firth in the Southend West constituency (elected in the by-election following Sir David Amess's death) and by Conservative MP James Dudderidge in the Rochford & Southend East Constituency (due to stand down at the next General Election).

The city experiences a large range in civic participation with Victoria ward turnout at elections closer to 22%, compared to 45% in West Leigh (average overall turnout 34.01%).

STRENGTHS AND OPPORTUNITIES

▼ Figure 6: Strengths and Opportunities



CHALLENGES

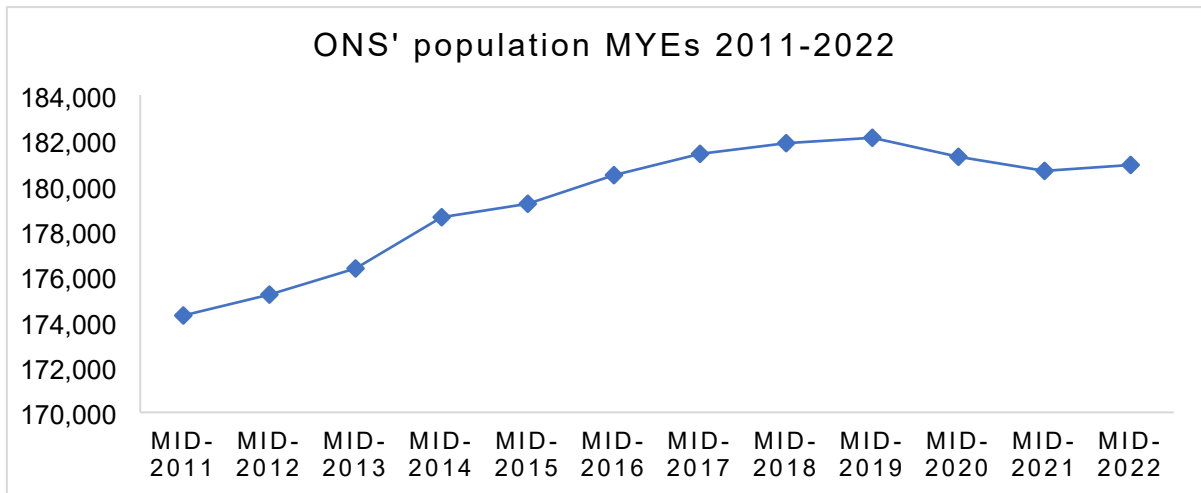
▼ Figure 7: Challenges



*Cities defined by Centre for Cities as 'Primary Urban Areas' www.centreforcities.org/city-by-city/mus

Population and diversity

According to population estimates for mid-year 2022, there were 180,915 people residing in Southend. The population is projected to increase by 13% by 2041 to 204,481 residents.



The city's population increase since 2011 has not been equally distributed across the city's wards; Victoria ward, one of our most deprived wards, saw an 18.2% increase in its population since 2011 whilst the majority of the city's other wards stayed reasonably static, and two of our most affluent wards saw their populations decrease by around 2%. This leaves populations unbalanced amongst wards, with a difference of ~4,000 residents between the most and least populated wards in the city.

19% of the population is aged 15 or under, and 19.1% aged 65 and over.

The Old Age Dependency Ratio is the number of people of State Pension age per 1,000 people of working age. Southend's ratio is predicted to increase by 24% over the next twenty years.

On Census Day, 21 March 2021, Southend-on-Sea was the third most densely populated of East of England's 45 local authority areas, with 4,336 people per square kilometre.

Southend's population is less diverse than the national average; 92% of residents are white compared to 86% nationally. However, the city is diverse across its wards – for example, 16% of residents are non-white in Victoria Ward compared to 3% in West Leigh ward. 130 different languages are spoken in our schools. 20% of Southend's residents have a declared disability, higher than the national figure of 17.5%.

The communities

The city is very varied, encompassing (at least) five different small towns – Leigh-on-Sea, Westcliff, Southend Central, Thorpe Bay and Shoeburyness – each with a minor centre organised around a high street or similar, and each with its own identity and strong community feel.

As such, there are tangible differences between its four localities, with a wide-ranging spectrum of residential perception and aspirations on issues from safety at night to climate change. For instance, residents living in Kursaal, St Luke's and Victoria wards are significantly less satisfied with their local area (58%) (compared to 72% for the city as a whole) and are less likely than other residents to feel safe during the day and at night (Residents' Perception Survey 2021).

To support the co-ordination of integrated health and social care interventions within the community, Southend has been split into 4 localities: West, West Central, East Central and East.

Ward boundaries are often created by main roads such as the A13 (the London road), the A127 and our two national railway lines.

Deprivation

Southend-on-Sea is one of Essex's most deprived areas with 25.8% of residents living in 20% of the most deprived areas in England. It has a higher index of deprivation (IMD) than both Essex and England as a whole.

Despite this, the city also has areas ranked amongst some of the least deprived in the country, leading to a tangible sense of spatial disparity on a local scale¹.

The wards with the highest levels of deprivation are located within the East locality, with Kursaal, Victoria and Milton being ranked the highest on the IMD 2019.

39% of Southend-on-Sea's residents live in areas considered to be in the most deprived 30% in the country, with nine neighbourhoods (out of 107) in Southend-on-Sea falling into the 10% most deprived in the country.

14% of Southend-on-Sea's children live in low-income households (determined by an income below 60% of the median income in the UK), with 14 neighbourhoods (out of 107) in Southend-on-Sea in the most deprived 10% of the country for income deprivation affecting children.

There are health inequalities between our wards, with a life expectancy gap of 9.2 years for males and nine years for females between our most deprived and least deprived wards.

Infrastructure

Strategically located near London, Southend boasts strong connectivity through strategic roads linking communities within and outside South Essex. It serves as a vital national and international gateway, connecting to ports and London Southend Airport. The airport, developed on a former military airfield, offers significant connectivity opportunities. Additionally, the A127, a key east-west transport route, faces capacity issues but has the potential to drive business, employment, and residential growth.

Housing development in Southend has primarily occurred on previously developed land within the existing built-up area. However, new housing needs, as calculated by government standards and the Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA), indicate a significant increase in required homes for Castle Point, Rochford, and Southend by 2037, equating to approximately a tripling of Southend's annual delivery rates for housing. Southend's Core Strategy emphasizes development on existing land, with an average of 340 dwellings built annually between 2001 and 2018.

¹ Nine areas have been identified as being in the top 10% most deprived areas in England, whilst 13 areas are ranked in the least 10% deprived.

London Southend Airport's growth and access to European markets has benefited local businesses, but the town centre faces decline and requires renewal. Growth has been focussed within the town centre, including conversion of vacant office blocks, as well as large scale redevelopment and conversion of the old Shoebury Garrison and incremental infill development throughout the city.

Nature and green and blue space

There are extensive environmental designations covering the foreshore, which is recognised as having international importance for species and habitats.

The city occupies an area of 4175.60 ha (up to high watermark (the level reached by sea at high tide)) with green space, made up of approximately 600 hectares of parks, woods and green public open space, only accounting for 14.36% of the area. For comparison, London's percentage of green space is 38.9%.

The distribution of the city's green spaces is not even, with some wards having minimal or no publicly accessible green space, and although the city has a mix of green space, the availability and quantity are well below the national average.

Local economy and employment

Growth in GVA to the economy has occurred in Southend over the last decade, albeit at a slower rate than the rest of England. Labour moves freely in, out and around the city without regard to administrative boundaries. Further, the South Essex and London labour markets are closely linked to Southend's, with a high proportion of workers regularly crossing boundaries to travel to and from workplaces.

There is a recognised strong entrepreneurial culture and passion in the city, with most businesses being small – 85.5% of Southend's businesses employ 10 people or fewer.

Southend's gross value added per hour worked, which measures the value of goods and services produced, is approximately £10 an hour lower than the regional and national average. This is contrasted by Southend's employment rate and median weekly pay both being higher than the national figures.

Although a lower number of Southend residents have no qualifications compared to the national figure, 37.9% of Southend's population is qualified at or above level NVQ4, compared to 39.5% regionally and 43.5% nationally.

Southend has more out-of-work benefit claimants (5.2% of the population) than the East region (3.5%) and Great Britain (4.2%), and this difference is especially significant in the 18-24 age group.

Culture and Place

Becoming a city in March 2022 provided an opportunity to build on Southend's strengths – its coastline, culture, businesses, transport links, services and the rich diversity of its people and communities – and create a more inclusive city for current and future generations, where everyone who lives here has an equal chance to flourish.

Southend is a creative, diverse place, that has a history of defying conventions and could be considered the alternative seaside experience. Proud of their working-class roots, Southenders are authentic and straightforward with a remarkable community spirit, powerfully displayed during the COVID-19 pandemic, in the aftermath of the tragic and senseless murder of Sir David Amess in October 2021, and during the economic shocks experienced since 2022. There is a common desire across the council and its members to harness that community spirit as we continue to support each other through the events of the last four years.

Ward	Belfairs	Blenheim Park	Chalkwell	Eastwood Park	Kursaal	Leigh	Milton	Prittlewell	Shoeburyness	Southchurch	St Laurence	St Luke's	Thorpe	Victoria	West Leigh	West Shoebury	Westborough
Political representation	CON	LAB	CON	LIB	LAB	GREEN	LAB	CON	CON	CON	LAB	LAB	IND	LAB	CON	CON	LAB
	CON	LAB	CON	LIB	LAB	GREEN	LAB	CON	IND	CON	LAB	LAB	IND	LAB	CON	CON	LAB
	IND	LAB	CON	LIB	LAB	LIB	LAB	CON	IND	CON	LAB	IND	IND	LAB	CON	CON	LAB
Population size	9451	10993	9930	9446	12113	9888	11698	10678	11667	10146	10574	11202	9120	13008	9364	10129	11283
Population % of city total	5.2	6.1	5.5	5.2	6.7	5.5	6.5	5.9	6.5	5.6	5.9	6.2	5	7.2	5.2	5.6	6.2
Density (persons per sq km)	3581	4853	6139	4222	9627	6656	7152	4301	3082	2182	3598	3190	3301	8089	3119	3527	12304
Median age	48	40	43	47	34	40	38	41	40	43	41	38	50	33	44	41	35
Change in pop vs 2011	2.5	4.9	-1.14	0.9	8.8	-1.93	5.7	7.1	4.6	4.5	8.7	-0.1	-1.03	18.2	2.3	-1.47	4
Ethnicity - white	89.4	85.8	81.4	91.7	73.1	88.5	69.1	76.3	88.4	83.4	85.7	81.7	87.4	66.3	91.3	86.5	71.5
Rate of crime / ASB per 1k pop	4.2	5.8	10.2	3.1	18.3	4.2	22.8	11.7	5.3	7.5	5.9	7.2	4.6	18.6	4.5	2.9	4.3
Good / very good health % of ward pop	79.4	80	81.8	81.8	77.8	85.9	79.2	81.5	78.7	79.4	80.3	80.3	82.6	79.5	87.9	81.5	83.3
Life expectancy - female	84.3	82.2	80.4	84.5	79.6	85.6	79	83.1	82.8	82.3	83.3	83.8	86.9	77.1	86.2	82.4	82.2
Life expectancy - male	80.1	78.37	75.94	80.92	73.87	82.66	76.24	77.75	79.14	78.6	80.14	79.17	82.43	72.49	82.85	79.4	78.76
Deprived in four dimensions (Census 2021)	0.5	0.4	0.6	0.2	1	0.1	0.8	0.5	0.3	0.5	0.2	0.4	0.1	0.4	0.1	0.3	0.4
Median house price	£397,500	£ 415,000	£325,000	£ 355,000	£ 220,000	£ 390,000	£230,000	£380,000	£ 302,500	£340,000	£343,750	£316,000	£466,500	£219,000	£615,000	£ 390,000	£ 295,000
Renting %	11.4%	12.9%	33.9%	10.5%	39.7%	28.5%	52.1%	20.0%	18.0%	14.0%	12.9%	23.6%	13.8%	36.5%	14.8%	12.9%	37.1%
No qualifications % of ward pop	23.6	20.9	18.2	22.1	22.7	18.7	18.5	18.6	22.7	22.6	22.7	21.5	17.7	21.6	11.6	20.3	18.7
Level 4 or above % of ward pop	23.9	26.3	34.3	20.1	23.7	38.3	31.1	28.9	21.6	24.8	21.7	22.4	29.5	27.2	35.8	24.8	29.7
Satisfaction %	83.03	70.06	70.06	83.03	58.03	83.03	70.06	70.06	78.41	78.41	70.06	58.03	78.41	58.03	83.03	78.41	70.06
Retired residents % of ward pop	32.9	22.4	23.7	32	13.4	20.5	16.8	24.7	22.1	28	25.5	17.3	34	12.9	27	25.1	12.1
Turnout by ward	36.3	31.9	34	35.9	20.5	36.2	27.6	34.3	26.7	29.8	30.9	25.1	41.1	19.8	39.2	29.8	24

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		
<p>Governance Model</p>	<p><i>Key lines of explanation</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Southend-on-Sea City Council is made up of 51 councillors who represent 17 wards. ➤ The ceremonial Mayor is elected annually by Full Council and is the “first citizen”. In addition to chairing Full Council the Mayor is responsible for representing the Council at any civic functions and undertakes fundraising activities for his/her designated charity. ➤ The Council operates an Executive and Cabinet member system. ➤ The full functions of the governance model are set out in the <u>Council's constitution</u>. ➤ Political priorities are developed following manifesto commitments, further development by the portfolio holder, scrutiny and Cabinet, with support from officers as required. ➤ The constitution outlines the policies and plans which are to be agreed by Full Council. ➤ Often the format touches several of the following steps but not exclusively: starting with a legal requirement, officers develop and build an evidence-base to help shape a proposal. This is further developed by Executive Briefing (which sees Cabinet and the Corporate Leadership Team coming together), cross-party working parties, scrutiny, cabinet, and full council. ➤ These opportunities ensure that all councillors can shape and inform relevant strategic and operational policies. ➤ Key Decisions are subject to scrutiny and will be published on the Forward Plan. This approach allows councillors to understand how and where to focus their capacity. ➤ The Council's priorities are detailed in its Corporate Plan, these priorities are then articulated in onward plans such as the Departmental Service Plans. This approach ensures that officer's capacity can be aligned to deliver against those priorities.

		<p>➤ There is no known appetite or indication that the model of governance currently in operation will change.</p>
	<p>Analysis</p>	<p>The governance model is well established and there is no known appetite or indication that the current model will change. A review of the council's constitution continues to explore and improve ways of working, creating efficiency through more effective processes.</p> <p>An increase in the number of councillors would enable more capacity within the non-Executive functions. This means that more councillors could participate in working parties, scrutiny and other committees. In addition to capacity, an increase in numbers allows for more diversity of thought. However, in order to facilitate this approach more engagement in developing and training effective Chairs will be needed to effectively manage larger meetings. There are also cost implications to be aware of. This is expanded upon in the final section below as this is an overarching considering.</p> <p>A decrease in the number of councillors would see those remaining sitting on more committees and more actively involved in the governance model. This would not necessarily see a change to the governance model however, the pool of councillors available to service this and other functions would be reduced. It is considered that ongoing opportunities for continued improvements to ways of working, as well as enhanced training and use of technology, would create additional capacity and absorb a small decrease in overall numbers.</p> <p>No change in the number of councillors itself would not necessarily warrant a change to the governance model. As referenced above, opportunities for creating additional capacity can be explored, so that councillors can spend more time on other activity, such as casework.</p>
<p>Portfolios</p>	<p><i>Key lines of explanation</i></p>	<p>➤ SCC has not had a one-party majority administration since 2019. This is the council's longest spell of no party majority.</p> <p>➤ This is a growing trend at a national level. The Council's current election in third's system increases the propensity for change in the make-up of the Cabinet roles.</p> <p>➤ In 23/24 the Council operated with a Leader plus 9 Cabinet members. In previous and the current year (24/25), the Cabinet is comprised of a Leader plus 8 Cabinet members. The Council's constitution does not allow for the Cabinet, including the Leader to be greater than 10 members.</p>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The numbers within Cabinet are subject to change at each election, which currently operates in thirds and so has a higher opportunity for regular change. ➤ Text from Southend Council's constitution: <i>Any decisions to be taken by individual cabinet members must comply with the Access to Information Procedure Rules as set out at Part 4b in the Council's Constitution. This will require a written report (with the financial and legal implications fully addressed) which will be published alongside the record of decision following sign-off by the S151 Officer and the Director of Legal Services. All decisions taken must be within the budget and policy framework. Any urgent decisions taken by a Cabinet Member will follow Rules 15 or 16 of the Access to Information Procedure Rules.</i> ➤ The role of a portfolio holder is generally considered to be a part-time role, and responsibilities outside of ward and community leadership include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Informing and shaping reports as well as presentation of reports to Cabinet, Council and other meetings, ○ Decision maker both as a Cabinet collective and at time on an individual basis ○ Communication opportunities both in press statement and community blogs ➤ Each cabinet member is the spokesperson for their policy area or 'portfolio'. They will receive regular briefings and advice from officers. ➤ Cabinet members are responsible for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ leading on developing council policy and making recommendations to the cabinet. ○ giving guidance to the cabinet on budget priorities. ○ monitor performance and make sure policy is delivered. ○ lead on improving council services. ○ make sure that activities meet the council's overall vision, core values and guiding principles. ➤ Additional cabinet member responsibilities include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ contributing to debate and decision-making. ○ working with councillors who are not members of the cabinet, members of the opposition and officers to make sure that the overview and scrutiny process works correctly. ○ Presenting to scrutiny committee and responding to overview and scrutiny committee reports. ○ representing the council at a national and local level.
	Analysis	<p>Whilst the Cabinet make-up is subject to small change three years out of four, the Constitution to support decision making and councillors scrutiny in strategic and operational policy is well understood.</p>

		<p>An increase in the overall numbers of councillors would not increase the number of Cabinet members as the council is already at or near the limit. However, an increase in councillors overall would increase the pool in which a Leader can choose from and provide additional ward councillors to support with non-Cabinet duties. It is likely that the Cabinet function would be involved in any potential future regional partnerships including devolution. Therefore, creating additional capacity for this group would be beneficial.</p> <p>A decrease in the overall numbers of councillors could potentially reduce the pool of available councillors from which the Leader could make up a Cabinet. This could lead to a smaller Cabinet size. However, given the unitary responsibilities of this council there is a risk that a dramatically smaller Cabinet may not operate as effectively, although some efficiencies could be gained from more focused briefings between officer groups and portfolio leads, as well the opportunities in enhanced training and technology use could support with creating additional capacity. A decrease would likely be managed until such time that additional involvement with more regional partnerships is established.</p> <p>No change in the number of councillors itself would not necessarily warrant a change to the Cabinet model. As referenced above, opportunities for creating additional capacity and more efficient working styles are being explored.</p>
Delegated Responsibilities	<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The Council’s delegation framework is set out in the Constitution at Part 3 Schedule 3 - Delegations to Officers.pdf (southend.gov.uk) ➤ In July 2023, a report to Council Report of Executive Director Finance and Resources.pdf (southend.gov.uk) permitted Cabinet Members to take urgent individual decisions concerning their portfolio. To this end, individual Cabinet members can be more accountable for their portfolio. However, this has increased activity towards those members.
	Analysis	<p>The change in executive decisions has seen an increased number of papers and decisions being presented to councillors, with related increased workload for both councillors and officers alike. This change will be evaluated and there will be opportunities to understand if improvements can be implemented to provide the assurance required at expected levels of capacity.</p> <p>An increase in the overall number of councillors would not necessarily lead to an increase in Cabinet members by which this area of work primarily impacts. However, an increase would provide more general capacity for wider council to be aware of activity and engage where needed.</p>

		<p>A decrease in the overall number of councillors would not necessarily lead of a decrease in Cabinet members by which this area of work primary impacts. However, a decrease would provide less general capacity for wider council to be aware of activity and engage where needed.</p> <p>No change. The review into ways of working and the constitution will evaluate where opportunities to improve practice exist. This will happen irrespective of an increase or decrease.</p>
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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"> ➤ The scrutiny of decisions and holding the Council's Executive to account is a role that is carried out by the Council's Scrutiny Committees. Its purpose is to act as critical friend to the Executive. ➤ The Council has three multi-party Overview and Scrutiny Committees which support the work of the Executive (Cabinet) and the Council as a whole and which holds the Cabinet to account – People Scrutiny Committee, Place Scrutiny Committee and Policy & Resources Committee. ➤ The Scrutiny Committees are made up of 17 non-Executive Councillors. The Mayor may also not sit on any Committee. Each Committee must reflect the political balance of the full Council, which is made up of 51 Members. ➤ The Scrutiny Committees meet on average six times a year and the meetings are held in public and are webcast live.
Analysis	The design of Scrutiny Committees at the Council provides an opportunity for all non-Cabinet members to fulfil their democratic duty by scrutinising and enhancing Executive decision making. The benefits over and above an equal opportunity to engage and participate, is the

	<p>diversity of thought which is generated through representation of political parties. However, as a result the meetings are large and require good management to be functional.</p> <p>There are opportunities to enhance capacity through increased capability training prior to considering a change in the numbers of members sitting on each Committee.</p> <p>An increase in the number of councillors could see these meetings grow, if the current principles are applied. These meetings are already large and require good management to be effective and functional. Making these meeting much larger would require greater discipline and less opportunity for debate.</p> <p>A decrease in the numbers of councillors could enable for more efficient meetings however, this would require the members to be consistently engaged. It is noted that currently not all members engage in these committees at the same level, thereby suggesting some capacity within the meeting for additional participation. Those councillors who are members will need to ensure that they are consistently briefed and prepared to fully participate to ensure meaningful scrutiny takes place.</p> <p>No change in numbers of councillors will continue with the same arrangements. Opportunities to increase councillor capacity can be gained through additional training.</p>
<p>Statutory Function</p>	<p>This includes planning, licencing and any other regulatory responsibilities. Consider under each of the headings the extent to which decisions will be delegated to officers. How many members will be required to fulfil the statutory requirements of the council?</p>
<p>Planning</p>	<p><i>Key lines of explanation</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Approximately 4% of all planning applications received by the Council are determined by councillors, this equates to around seven per month. This level has not changed in recent years and there is no indication which leads us to anticipate a significant change. ➤ There is currently one single wide planning committee and there are no plans to change this. The committee has 12 members including the Chair. ➤ Overall, the time commitment for members of the planning committee is 12 meetings (of around 3-4hr each) and two training session per year.

	Analysis	<p>Planning system demand is closely linked with the national economy. However, the more affluent areas of Southend mean that cyclical economic downturns result in less harsh decreases on demand during these times. The overall trend is upwards but at a steady and consistent rate. There are opportunities to enhance capacity through increased capability training prior to considering a change in the numbers of members sitting on each Committee.</p> <p>The arrangement outlined above, therefore could accommodate a small increase or decrease in membership without there being a significant impact to the delivery of this function.</p> <p>An increase in the overall number of councillors would allow for more capacity, however there is no pressing need for additional capacity in this area at present.</p> <p>A decrease in the overall number of councillors would reduce the available capacity of all councillors. The Committee is less than a third of the council this is not deemed to be an excessive commitment and could cope with a small decrease in overall capacity. The use of enhanced training could be used to improve the effectiveness of the meeting.</p> <p>No change in the overall number of councillors would see the current arrangements continuing with the use of additional training to support councillors with capability and capacity, if required.</p>
Licensing	Key lines of explanation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ On a normal year Licensing Committee and Sub Committees sit between 10 and 12 times a year. ➤ The demand for this service has increased over time and is predicted to continue with the introduction of a new taxi policy where delegated officer powers on application refusal and revocations and suspensions will instead be taken by the Committee. It is expected that an additional 15-20 a year could be required. ➤ On average a hearing takes place during office hours and lasts around 3-4 hours, including discussing and writing up the decision plus any pre-reading. Sub Committees last around 1.5 to 2 hours. ➤ Because of statutory time limits in which to hold a hearing after an application consultation has closed it is not possible to schedule meetings across set dates and they are all ad hoc except for changes to policy or taxi conditions etc.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The Licensing Act 2003 requires a full committee of minimum 12 maximum 15 members from which we have a permanent chair and vice chair, 1 of whom always sits with 2 other members on application decisions (5 minimum for taxis). ➤ Council’s Licensing Committee currently has 15 councillors, and its membership reflects the proportionality of the Council, and to ensure there are no conflicts of interest (e.g. they are not permitted to sit on applications in their own ward or the ward in which they live and where possible we avoid the adjoining wards too).
	<p>Analysis</p>	<p>The council’s Licensing Committee is already at the legal maximum number of members. This number allows a representation of the political make-up of Council and ensures that no conflicts of interest arise on individual applications. There are opportunities to enhance capacity through increased capability training.</p> <p>An increase in the overall number of councillors would therefore not dramatically change the capacity of the Committee.</p> <p>A decrease in the overall number of councillors would require councillors to sit on high number of committees than they currently do (if the same principles are applied to appointments). This could, therefore, decrease their capacity. This would need to be managed in the event of an increase in workload due to policy change.</p> <p>No change in the number of councillors would see the Licensing Committee maintain the same level of capacity. However, as Licensing is less than a third of the council this is not deemed to be an excessive commitment and could cope with the additional work expected due to a policy change.</p>
<p>Other Regulatory Bodies</p>	<p><i>Key lines of explanation</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ There are five other Regulatory Committees which have between 5 and 9 councillor members, these are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audit Committee (sits 4,5 times a year) • General Purposes Committee (sits 1 – 2 times a year) • Standard Committee (as required but rarely) • Health & Wellbeing Board, (sits 4 times a year) and • Appointments and Disciplinary Committee (sits around 4 times a year)

	Analysis	<p>There are opportunities to enhance capacity through increased capability training prior to considering a change in the numbers of members sitting on each Committee. These Committee's do not sit large numbers of councillors and their lower sitting numbers suggest that they can be well managed.</p> <p>An increase in the overall numbers of councillors would increase general capacity and the pool of available members. However, there is no indication that additional capacity for this work is required.</p> <p>A decrease in the overall numbers of councillors would see more councillors sitting on additional bodies thereby decreasing their available capacity across the board. This could in part be addressed through additional training and technological advancements.</p> <p>No change in the overall numbers of councillors would see the current arrangements continuing. Opportunities to support additional councillor capability and capacity, will continued to be explored.</p>
External Partnerships		Service delivery has changed for councils over time, and many authorities now have a range of delivery partners to work with and hold to account.
<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ In July 2023 a review of all Outside Bodies on which councillors sit was undertaken. One of the objects was to improve the understanding of capacity required to perform the role and disengage from activity which was no longer required or added value. The result has reduced the number of outside bodies that councillors are appointed to, increased capacity considerations and committed to review the arrangements on an ongoing basis. To support opportunities for more efficient ways of working, appointments to such bodies will align to councillor's personal interest or as part of their ward work. ➤ Backbench councillors are aligned to 16 outside bodies and Cabinet Members are appointed to 32 different outside bodies. ➤ The workload and requirement to attend meetings varies significantly. However, the review will now ensure that attendance seeks to be productive and beneficial for the council. ➤ Councillors currently serve on the South Essex Council's (SEC) Joint Committee. In the calendar year of 2023, the Committee met four times. The minutes of the Committee are reported to the council's Scrutiny Committee. 	

Analysis	<p>Capacity to participate in external partnerships is well managed with a commitment to review councillors involvement on an ongoing basis. Regional partnerships are likely to grow, as is seen to be the trend nationally and with central government devolution agendas. However, the Council already participates in this activity (SEC) and has built up good capability to respond to future demands. Additional capacity will likely be required to consider the impact and scrutinise any potential future devolution activity in the region.</p> <p>An increase in the overall numbers of councillors would enable external partnerships to be fully resourced with good levels of engagement resulting in effective decision making and outcomes.</p> <p>A decrease in the overall numbers of councillor may require additional scrutiny as to the capacity of councillors to engage fully with all current partnerships. However, this would be difficult following the current review, where those partnerships existing are deemed to be of importance.</p> <p>No change in the overall numbers of councillors would result in a continued approach to this aspect of work. In the event of more capacity required for significant regional partnerships, a full Cabinet model of 10 could be explored.</p>
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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	<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	➤ Ward work is a key aspect of the representational role of an elected councillor and includes dealing with resident's concerns and representing the concerns and interests of individual constituents and the ward more generally. Many councillors hold monthly ward surgeries, with some holding additional joint surgeries

		<p>with other councillors on a monthly basis. Councillors inevitably also offer to meet constituents at other convenient times and locations. Increasingly, councillors act as community leaders, bringing people together around issues and helping to formulate strategies to resolve them, as well as influencing and mediating between different interests.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Many councillors attend events, send newsletters and maintain blogs and social media profiles. Councillors report that they interest with residents through existing resident association or tenant activities as well as established forums such as youth centres and other community groups. This enables councillors to interact with harder to reach groups.
	<p>Analysis</p>	<p>The extent to which councillors engage and participate in local leadership activity is dependent on the needs and strength of community generated activity. Councillors are well connected within their communities and understand how best to support groups and individuals.</p> <p>An increase in the overall number of councillors would reduce the number of registered voters (and local population) they each represent. This will increase councillors’ capacity in this area. However, wide scale concerns about capacity in this area has not been raised with officers.</p> <p>A decrease in the overall number of councillors would increase the number of registered voters (and local population) they each represent. This will decrease councillors’ capacity in this area. The impact of which may be that councillors would need to be more selective in the events that they chose to support and engage with.</p> <p>No change would enable councillors to maintain similar levels of community support. Opportunities to support additional councillor capability and capacity through training will continue to be explored.</p>
<p>Casework</p>	<p><i>Key lines of explanation</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ It can be difficult to identify the average number of hours per week that Councillors spend on ward work as this will vary according to the type of ward the Councillor represents in terms of the issues that may be raised by constituents, and the number of hours the councillor can make available due to other commitments. ➤ The LGA’s National census of local authority councillors 2022, found that councillors spent, on average, 22 hours per week on council business, with the largest proportion of time was spent attending council meetings (7.9 hours on average), followed by engaging with constituents, surgeries, enquiries (6.6 hours), working with community groups (4.4 hours), and other items (3.5 hours). ➤ In-depth Scrutiny Project 2021-22 - Enabling Councillors to be Effective, July 2022 reported that “Dealing with enquiries from local residents is a key part of a councillor’s democratic role and a significant large part

		<p>of Members' time is spent responding to enquiries from the public." Examples of the types of casework were given as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Letters, phone calls, email and social media. • Councillor surgeries, advice sessions and doorstep calls. • Campaigning and other political activity <p>➤ The report further notes that "Dealing with casework requires councillors to develop and maintain their own arrangements for managing information and tracking progress. The amount of casework that a councillor receives depends on the nature of the area they represent, although research suggests that the higher the level of deprivation in an area, the more casework there is likely to be."</p> <p>➤ There is limited dedicated officer support for councillor to support them in this work.</p> <p>➤ The Case Management Portal allows councillors to log cases, track their progress and update them as they are processed and managed. The Case Management Portal provides a digital, self-serve mechanism for casework.</p> <p>➤ The <u>MySouthend</u> self-serve digital solution for residents to report and track issues have made strides in improvement over recent years with more planned. This option will allow residents to interact without needing to first liaise with a councillor, freeing up councillors' capacity for more complex issues which have not or cannot be dealt with MySouthend.</p> <p>➤ The Councillor Queries system allows councillors to engage directly with a customer support team to log and allocate queries across the organisation. During the period from January 2022 to January 2023, on average each councillor submitted 6 queries per month. These can range in complexity with some requiring detailed engagement and others being easily resolved.</p> <p>➤ Figures from the Councillor Queries system indicates that there is capacity for some councillors to increase the use of this system as a means of progressing less urgent/complex enquiries.</p> <p>➤ Likewise, the improvements planned for MySouthend should continue to enhance user experience and remove some traffic away from more traditional avenues of communication, such as via councillors. This is consistent with the outcome of the in-depth Scrutiny Project 2021-22 - Enabling Councillors to be Effective.</p> <p>➤ An August 2023, Remuneration Panel reviewed <u>Southend Members' Allowances</u>, in consultation with councillors, found that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ In interviews the most commonly reported time requirement to be an effective backbench Member was in the 16-20 hour per week range ➤ Councillors report that the most communication they receive is by email and this is the method by which they spend most of their time in dealing with specific case issues. However, councillors note that not all residents
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		<p>like or are able to communicate in these ways and often the more complex issues require face to face interaction.</p>
	<p>Analysis</p>	<p>Similar to the above, the extent to which councillors are required to engage in case work and complex case work is dependent on the issues experienced by individuals and groups within their wards. Whilst there is limited officer support on handling casework, there is an established, with plans for improvement, process for raising queries and reporting issues. Technological advancement will enable more lower-level case work queries to be handled by officers.</p> <p>Councillors have reported that most of their communication is via email. The planned improvements to MySouthend could help to relieve some of that traffic, allowing councillors to devote that time to more complex matters.</p> <p>Feedback from councillors does not indicate that there are sustainable capacity issues in dealing with casework issues.</p> <p>An increase in the overall number of councillors would reduce the number of registered voters (and local population) they each represent. This could reduce the casework demand. Wide scale concerns about capacity in this area has not been raised with officers, however councillors have noted an increase in complex matters.</p> <p>A decrease in the overall number of councillors would increase the number of registered voters (and local population) they each represent. This could increase the casework demand. The impact of which may be that councillors would need more support from officers and or require the planned improvements in technology to triage incoming work.</p> <p>No change would enable councillors to maintain similar levels of support, with the advancement of technology providing more capacity of more complex activity.</p>

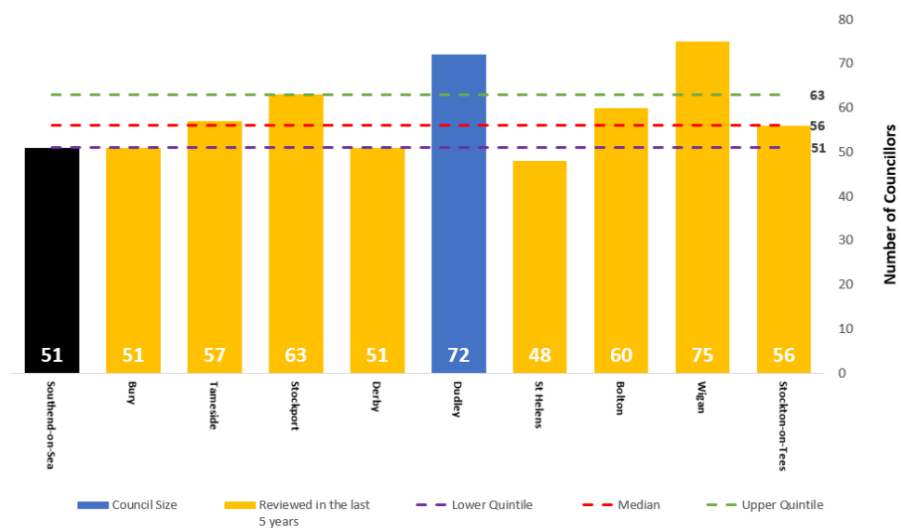
Other Issues

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

Council size ranges and nearest neighbours.

The Commission have shared CIPFA nearest neighbour range, Southend-on-Sea (shown in black below) is on the lower quartile for the range of council size. This means that a submission for less councillors would need to be supported by a detailed bank of evidence.

2024 CIPFA Group and Councillor Counts



Election cycle.

At a Council meeting on Thursday 13th June 2024, councillors decided to maintain elections in thirds following the first whole council election when the new boundaries are in place. Therefore, the council size will need to be divisible by 3.

Cost implications.

There is no escaping the financial difficulty that the local government sector faces and the need to find innovative, and more efficient ways of working to continue delivering the same level of service. This also applies to the way councillors themselves operate. An increase in the number of councillors does have a cost implication for the Council's budget. With basic allowance and the NI contributions this is approximately £11,800 per councillors per annum, for non-executive members. There are other additional expenses including mobile phones, IT equipment, conference expenses and the training budget which is currently profiled as approximately £31,000 per annum for all 51 councillors.

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.

The Council's governance model is well established, and the council is well-versed in seeking and implementing opportunities for continuous improvement to enable more effective and efficient ways of working. The council's Transformation and digitalisation programmes will increase opportunities including how we obtain additional assurance through better evidenced proposals and recommendations, resulting in more efficient ways of working. These advances will enable us to increase our activity and deliver more for our residents.

Ongoing enhanced training and development, with particular focus on Chairing and participation in effective committees, will ensure our members are capable and are equipped to manage their capacity. The council will continue to improve this offer by adopting best and latest practices as well as working with partners, such as the LGA, to support councillors. These are all opportunities within our control, which we endeavour to exhaust to increase councillors' capacity.

However, there are aspects outside of the council's control which may negatively impact on councillors' capacity:

Whilst the city, due to its already densely developed urban landscape, will not exponentially grow in population, there will of course be some growth. The pandemic, and recent cost of living pressures has contributed to systemic deprivation in parts of the city, with additional cohorts of residents who are just about managing requiring the council's support. This and the ongoing budget challenges facing local government means that some of our preventative services may not be available for all, as once was. This could see increases in more complex caseloads for our councillors as we need to support more people through these difficulties.

The council has been increasing its regional partnerships over the past decade with potential for more larger scale devolution opportunities. These partnerships offer substantial benefits for Southend, with significant amounts of money attached. Our councillors will need to be able to participate fully in these discussions and decisions in order to ensure the best outcomes can be achieved for local residents.

Across our committees we strive to represent the political makeup of the council, which not only provides an opportunity for all elected members to engage and enhance decision making but ensures broad accountability and diversity of thought. These principles are well embedded and valued. However, the larger committees at times can be prone to issues of scale, where detailed and nuanced debate is difficult to achieve. It is therefore, considered that increasing the membership of committees further would not result in more efficient outcomes.

We are therefore minded to recommend that the council size remains at 51, where opportunities to increase capability and capacity through training, working practice and technology continue to be explored to cancel out any potential increase in demand on capacity.