

Runnymede Borough Council

Electoral Review Council Size Submission

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Introduction

This report is the submission of Runnymede Borough Council (the Council) to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) on its proposals for Council Size. This report constitutes the first stage of the review process and does not include a detailed Council scheme of warding patterns.

The LGBCE advised in the early part of 2017 that a review of the Council's warding pattern would be undertaken, with a view to addressing the electoral variance across the Borough within the existing warding pattern. The Council is being reviewed on the basis that one of its wards, Englefield Green East, had an electoral imbalance of more than 30%, based on the 2015 electorate figures. Officers from the LGBCE visited the Council on the 20th April 2017 to meet with officers, Group Leaders and deliver a presentation to all Councillors to explain the process.

A review consists of a number of stages. The first stage of any such review is the consideration of the existing Council Size, with a view to ensuring an efficient and effective structure is in place.

Summary of Proposals

This submission sets out the Council's proposal to retain the Council Size as it currently is of 42 Borough Councillors. In reaching this conclusion, the Council has taken into account a number of factors:

- Since the last LGBCE review took place 1998 the Council has retained the Committee based decision making system. It considered changing to what is termed Executive arrangements following the enactment of Local Government Act 2000 but after a twelve month trial decided against adopting that system. It was concluded that the Committee based system is more inclusive and affords a greater number of councillors an opportunity to represent their communities;
- The extensive Scheme of Delegation which is reviewed annually has been seen as operating in an effective manner but this is balanced with certain decisions and policy development being undertaken by the various Committees which have been established;
- Future growth of population resulting from the creation of new settlements in the Borough will lead to more demands being placed on Councillors;
- Major revitalisation projects changing the face of a number of urban areas in the Borough will require greater involvement from Councillors to ensure development is reflective of the needs of local communities and the Borough as a whole;
- The technological advancements in communications and the changing way in which residents access information and services places greater demands on Councillors to respond quickly;
- The frequency of meetings including the way in which the Council fulfils its scrutiny responsibilities; and
- The financial position of the Council and the Country as a whole has meant that the Council is pursuing a number of initiatives such as the creation of new services and property acquisitions which require Councillor involvement in decision making.

The Borough of Runnymede

The Borough of Runnymede was formed in 1974 following changes to the local government structure in England and Wales introduced by the Local Government Act 1972 from the former Chertsey and Egham Urban District Councils. It has borders with four other Surrey local authorities and Windsor & Maidenhead Unitary Council.

The total population of Runnymede, according to 2011 census, is 80,510, which is a 3.1% increase since the last Census in 2001. There are 32,714 households in the Borough. The land size of the Borough is 7,804 hectares. This is an increase in households of 3.3% since 2001. The average household size is 2.36 people and this produces a population density of 10.3 people per hectare.

The split between Males (48.63%) and Females (51.37%) is stable. The population of the Borough continues to age with 16.7% of residents being over 65 years of age, an increase of 7.1% since the last Census. The number of residents aged over 85 in the Borough has also increased significantly by 25% to 2,000 residents. The majority of the population (63.9%) is aged between 18-64 years.

The 2011 Census response to questions on ethnic background disclose the following information. The largest ethnic group in the Borough is "White British" at 80.0%, followed by 9.0% being "All Other White Ethnicities". Other notable ethnicity groups are 2.5% "Asian/Asian British: Indian" residents and 2.1% "All mixed/multiple ethnicities". "All black/African/Caribbean/black British" residents represent 1.1% of the population. 0.5% of residents are "Asian/Asian British: Pakistani".

In the 2011 Census 63.4% of the population classified themselves as Christian, 24.0% claimed no religion, 1.9% stated they were Muslim and 1.5% Hindu. A further 2.0% stated in response to the Census questions that they practised other religions.

2.9% of the population indicated in the 2011 Census that they had "bad or very bad health".

The Borough consists of a number of urban settlements whilst at the same time retaining a rural appearance in large parts.

Of the total land area covered by the Borough approximately 6,708 hectares falls with the Green Belt. This presents challenges with regard to future development. Approximately 30% of the Borough is located in the floodplain (flood zones 2 and 3) which leaves approximately 1300 commercial and 11,600 residential addresses at risk from fluvial flooding. This creates a further constraint on development opportunities.

The Council is currently engaged in the preparation of its new Local Plan with a view to it being adopted in late 2018. This will include Longcross Garden Village, a new community to be integrated in to the Council's area.

Runnymede is also the main host authority for the River Thames Scheme, a nationally significant flood alleviation project with a public cost over £500 million. The Council has formed a partnership with the Environment Agency to support the funding of this scheme, ensure the efficient use of public money and local transparency and leadership.

The Council has embarked on an ambitious programme of revitalisation of two major settlements. Construction is currently underway in Addlestone and will shortly commence in Egham. It is the Council's intention to carry out projects in the other settlements in due course as resources become available.

The Borough has a thriving economy with high earnings and low unemployment. Its close proximity to London, Heathrow Airport and the M25, M3 and M4 motorways means that it is an attractive location for both businesses and residential development.

The Borough boasts several high profile local attractions such as Thorpe Park, Savill Garden, Wentworth Golf Club, the Magna Carta Memorial, the Air Forces Memorial, Virginia Water Lake, Runnymede Meadows, Runnymede Pleasure Ground and the River Thames for leisure and commercial use.

The Council's Safer Runnymede service, which includes a state of the art CCTV system is in operation across all of North Surrey, has made a major contribution to a low crime rate and the general public's perception of safety.

There are 'pockets' of need in the Borough which have health and obesity issues, lack of educational attainment, higher unemployment, and unsuitable housing.

Whilst the Borough's proximity to the motorway network is a strength in many respects, it can have a negative impact on residents' quality of life e.g. congestion and air quality.

Welfare reform changes are gradually being phased in which will result in reduced disposable incomes for some people who receive benefits. The subsequent effect of this is that more people may require support from Council services which will mean a greater demand on resources and interaction with Councillors.

The Housing and Planning Act 2016 presents significant challenges for the Council, especially the redefinition of affordable housing and the requirement to provide starter homes.

The profile of the population will change over the next 15 to 20 years which will result in a larger number of older people and fewer workers to support them.

Climate change effects are inevitable with more extreme weather events of droughts and floods. The Borough suffered greatly during the floods which took place in the winter of 2013/14.

There is increased car dependence causing increased congestion and air pollution.

Reductions to Surrey County Council's funding will have an impact upon the Council e.g. they may reduce their community services grant or reduce their grants to local voluntary services who will then suffer if alternative funding is not found.

PART ONE

Governance and Decision Making

The Borough Councillors

The Council currently has 42 Councillors representing 14 Wards, with each Ward electing 3 Councillors. One Councillor is elected in each ward every year, apart from one year in four when elections are held to elect County Councillors to Surrey County Council.

It is commonly accepted that the overriding duty of Councillors is to the whole community, but they have a special duty to their constituents, including those who did not vote for them.

The political balance of the Council for 2016/17 is 36 Conservative Councillors, who form the majority political group of the Council, and 6 Runnymede Independent Residents' Group Councillors.

Since its creation in 1974, there has never been an instance when the Council has been unable to discharge its functions due to a lack of Councillors.

It is the view of the Council that the existing ratio of Councillors to electors enables effective local representation to be discharged. It provides Councillors with the ability to interact effectively with their constituents whilst also not having a severe impact on the personal lives of Councillors.

Member Development and Training

The Council provides a Member Induction session for newly elected Councillors. Those sessions involve briefings from officers from the Democratic Services and Legal Teams. Each session involves a description of the legal structure and decision making process of the Council. There is then an explanation of the various parts of the Council's Constitution. Guidance is provided on the various Codes and Protocols which apply to Councillors. Each Councillor is also provided with material issued by the Local Government Association which provides further information on the work of a Councillor. Newly elected Councillors are also advised to seek out an existing Councillor to act a mentor.

In 2016, a series of training sessions were provided on the Role of the Councillor, Governance, Local Government in 2016 and Beyond, the Housing and Planning Challenges, Community and Environmental Services and Key Objectives for Runnymede. Whilst aimed at newly elected Councillors or those with aspirations to act as committee chairs the sessions were open to all Councillors. It is intended to run similar programmes in future years.

On-going training is provided throughout the Councillor's term of office, which includes Planning and Licensing training. Councillors also have access to training provided by external sources if appropriate to their role.

Leadership

The Council continues to operate the Committee system of governance under Section 9B of the Local Government Act 2000. During the course of 2000/2001, the Council did experiment with an Executive style system but at the conclusion of that, experiment it was decided to take advantage of the provisions in the Local Government Act 2000 and retain a Committee based system.

Whenever the issue has been discussed there has been overwhelming support for the continuation of the Committee system. It is seen by Councillors as providing an opportunity for the largest number of Councillors to participate in the governance process. It enables residents to feel that their views are being represented by individuals they know who are active in their local communities. The three member ward system also ensures that someone is always available for residents to approach and raise their concerns with.

Leader of the Council

The Leader of the Council is the Leader of the majority group (currently the Conservative group), however they have no executive function as the Council operates a Committee based system.

Policy Committees

Responsibility for policy lies with the four policy committees of the Council – the Corporate Management Committee, Community Services Committee, Environment and Sustainability Committee and the Housing Committee.

Corporate Management Committee

The Corporate Management Committee (CMC) meets 11 times per year to discuss corporate policy, finance, staff, elections, administration, IT, property management, non-housing regeneration schemes and economic development.

The CMC has 10 members, with a proportional allocation of seats (8 Conservative and 2 Runnymede Independent Residents Councillors). The Council approves the membership of the committee at its Annual meeting in May each year. The meetings of the CMC are normally held at the Civic Centre at 7.30 p.m. on Thursdays. Attendance at the CMC is high and there have been no occasions when it has not been quorate.

Six members of the CMC form the External Appointments Sub-Committee, which meets once per year to agree the appointment of representatives to external bodies. This Sub-Committee has 6 members, with a proportional allocation of seats (5 Conservative and 1 Runnymede Independent Residents Councillors).

CMC has been actively engaged in the initiatives the Council has pursued to revitalise various settlements in the Borough. These projects are acknowledged as challenging. The adoption of a Property Investment Strategy by the Council has been overseen by this committee. The aim of this exercise is to address the financial challenges the

Council faces with the reduction in central government funding.

The Council's has been recognised by other authorities as innovative and a leader in this field. The success of this programme has led to the Council being approached by a number of other local authorities for advice.

Given the financial challenges faced by the Council over the next decade the workload of this committee will only increase as more imaginative ways of dealing with the economic environment which will exist will be required.

In addition to the work of the committee on local based projects there are further demands on its time in relation to the Council's participation in regional schemes such as the Local Enterprise Partnership. A particular outcome of this regional scheme has been to designate the Longcross development in the Borough as one element of a multi part Enterprise Zone. The purpose of this designation is to stimulate economic growth by providing financial incentives for businesses to establish themselves in this location.

Community Services Committee

The Community Services Committee (CSC) meets 5 times per year to discuss the arts, cemeteries, community development and safety, grant aid to voluntary organisations, leisure and sports development, recreational activities and facilities, services to older people, tourism and the Safer Runnymede partnership.

The CSC has 10 members, with a proportional allocation of seats (9 Conservative and 1 Runnymede Independent Residents Councillors). Council approves the membership of the committee at its Annual meeting in May each year. The meetings of the CSC are normally held at the Civic Centre at 7.30 p.m. on Thursdays. Attendance at the CSC is high and there have been no occasions when it has not been quorate.

This committee's work streams have meant that its workload has increased in recent years and will continue to do so. The aging population of the Borough has required the Council to review the various services it delivers to this sector of the community. The Community Transport Services provided by the Council have been expanded substantially. A major factor which can adversely affect older people is the sense of isolation they can experience. Improved Community Transport enables them to engage in a wide range of activities and contributes to their continued well-being.

The meals service provided by the Council has also been overhauled to make it more attractive and move away from the old image of a service that provides only one offering. There is now greater choice, quality compares favourably to that offered by private sector providers and new services, such as a weekend tea service, have been introduced.

The committee is also involved in enhancing the leisure offering in the Borough. The Council outsourced its leisure function in 2012 via a Leisure Trust to which it appoints two Councillors. The Council has recently agreed to construct a new major leisure facility which will for the first time in the history of the Borough offer a public swimming pool to residents.

The committee has also been active in the adoption of a project to carry out a multi-million pound enhancement of the Runnymede Pleasure Ground site. This will involve improvements to the site including a new café and recreational facilities.

Environment and Sustainability Committee

The Environment and Sustainability Committee (E&SC) meets 5 times per year to discuss pollution control and environmental protection, food legislation, public health, refuse collection, recycling, energy management, parking, street trading, land drainage and the yellow bus school bus scheme.

The E&SC has 10 members, with a proportional allocation of seats (8 Conservative and 2 Runnymede Independent Residents Councillors). Council approves the membership of the committee at its Annual meeting in May each year. The meetings of the E&SC are normally held at the Civic Centre at 7.30 p.m. on Thursdays. Attendance at the E&SC is high and there have been no occasions when it has not been quorate.

This committee has been involved in considering a number of major projects as part of its workload which will be continuing over the next decade. Examples of this work include looking at the way in which refuse and recycling services are delivered at a local and Surrey wide level. The need to reduce waste being sent to land fill sites and increase recycling are major national initiatives.

The Council has for a number of years operated a discretionary school transport service. This service is designed to reduce pollution issues associated with home to school vehicle journeys. It forms one strand of the Council's work in respect of Air Quality. The Borough has two major motorways running through it, M25 and M3. There are also major commuter railway links into central London which pass through the Borough. When these transport links are combined with the proximity of Heathrow airport the Council will face a number of major challenges over the next decade in how to deal with Air Quality. The committee is overseeing the Council's work with a number of partners to develop strategies to address this issue.

Work related to Environmental Enforcement also forms a major part of the work of this committee. Devising ways to deal with the environmental, social and economic impact of fly tipping are matters that the committee will be involved in over the next five years. The Council has recently commenced a pilot project to address littering in its town centres. The initial results are positive and it is intended to roll this out across the Borough in future years.

Housing Committee

The Housing Committee (HC) meets 5 times per year to discuss public and private housing provision and standards, homelessness, disabled facilities grants and Housing and Council Tax Benefits.

The HC has 10 members, with a proportional allocation of seats (9 Conservative and 1

Runnymede Independent Residents Councillors). Council approves the membership of the committee at its Annual meeting in May each year. The meetings of the HC are normally held at the Civic Centre at 7.30 p.m. on Wednesdays. Attendance at the HC is high and there have been no occasions when it has not been quorate.

The focus of the work of this committee is the management of the Council's retained stock of 2890 properties. The maintenance and enhancement of this stock has greatly occupied the time of the committee recently and will continue to do so over the coming years. The Council has embarked this year on a new house building programme. These are the first new builds in the Borough for a number of decades. It is planned to deliver 12 new units as part of this project. It is intended to carry on this new build initiative over the coming years.

Reforms to the welfare system have resulted in an increase in demand for accommodation. The committee has overseen the creation of a new service which works with private landlords to increase the availability of properties for rent.

Significant changes to Housing Revenue Account financing, legislation affecting Homelessness duties, public sector tenancies and Welfare Reform have resulted in a period of constant policy changes affecting residents, applicants and the Council. The number of significant reports to Housing Committee has increased due to the range of complex financial and legal issues now within the purview of the Committee:

- Provision of Homelessness and Housing Advice services, including provision of Temporary Accommodation
- Maintenance of the Borough's Housing Register
- Allocation of Social Housing within Runnymede
- Private Sector Partnerships including Runnymede's in house service Magna Carta Lettings
- Maintenance of the Council housing stock including procurement of large reactive and planned maintenance contracts and Health and Safety responsibilities
- Approval of the Housing Revenue Account annual budget
- Approval of the Development Plan using HRA balances.
- Approval of major strategies for Housing and Homelessness and Policy and Procedure which is constantly reviewed in response to legislative change.
- Performance monitoring

To enable the Housing Department to progress new initiatives and schemes in a timely manner members of the Committee also attend Member Working Group meetings to consider development proposals, impending legislative changes and monitor HRA expenditure.

The limited supply of social housing necessitating the removal of choice for homeless households who receive one direct offer of accommodation, and the increased use of Private Sector Tenancies and Affordable Rent homes, has resulted in additional constituency work for Members as a greater proportion of residents are dissatisfied with the outcome of their housing application, they may be living in unsuitable accommodation which the Council is not able to resolve at the current time due to demand.

The Mayor

The Mayor is elected each year at the Annual meeting of the Council, which is held in May. The role of the Mayor is to represent the Council in the local community as the Borough's "first citizen".

The Mayor adopts a non-political role, with key responsibilities and duties including:

- Chairmanship of Full Council.
- Opening functions, events and new businesses as the Borough's representative.
- Attending award ceremonies and receptions at the request of local schools, businesses, voluntary and community groups.
- Hosting civic receptions for overseas visitors, civic dignitaries and other guests.
- Visiting individuals and groups throughout the Borough to mark celebrations and key events.

During their period of office, the Mayor will receive numerous invitations to events/functions in the Borough and across Surrey. The role played at these events varies, depending on their nature and the expectations of the organiser. The Mayor's role may sometimes be purely passive where all that is required is the Mayor's presence. There may be other occasions when the Mayor's role is more active in terms of opening events, making a speech, awarding prizes and meeting guests.

At the beginning of each Mayoral year, it is traditional for the Mayor to identify charities that they will seek to raise funds for during their year of office. During the course of the year, the Mayor will organise events to raise money for those charities.

There is also a Deputy Mayor who can stand in if the Mayor is not available. The Deputy Mayor has two distinct roles. When formally deputising for the Mayor, they have the same non-political responsibilities and prerogatives as the Mayor. When not formally deputising they, however, continue to function as a Councillor.

The Regulatory Committees

The Council has 3 Regulatory Committees: the Planning Committee, the Licensing Committee and the Regulatory Committee.

The Planning Committee

The Planning Committee (PC) meets approximately every three weeks to, amongst other duties, determine planning applications that have been reported to it complete with a recommendation from the Corporate Director of Planning and Environmental Services.

Other duties of the PC include consideration of other development control matters, e.g. planning enforcement cases.

Members of the public and applicants are entitled to address the PC on certain

planning applications. Ward Councillors, who are not members of the PC, are allowed to speak at its meetings.

The PC has 15 members, with a proportional allocation of seats (13 Conservative and 2 Runnymede Independent Residents Councillors). It is a standing Committee, the membership of which is determined annually at the Annual meeting of Council in May. The meetings of the PC are normally held at the Civic Centre at 7.30 p.m. on Wednesdays. Attendance at the PC is high and there have been no occasions when it has not been quorate.

The Council is still in the process of preparing its new Local Plan. The Council designated the Thorpe Neighbourhood Forum and Thorpe Neighbourhood Area on the 24th August 2016.

The Council is supporting the principles of neighbour planning and a number of new neighbourhood fora are being considered in the community.

Given the large amount of land in the Council's area that falls within the Green Belt there are a number of planning enforcement matters, which are related to development in sensitive sites.

With improvements to transparency and reporting the number of investigation requests for breaches of planning control has increased, and continues to increase dramatically. The average number of investigation reports per year has risen from around 150 10 years ago to closer to 250 per annum.

Scheme of Officer Delegated Authority - Planning

The full scheme of Officer Delegations to the Corporate Director of Planning and Environmental Services is maintained in the Council's Constitution. The scheme is extensive and covers a wide range of categories of planning applications and other matters. However, there is provision for a Councillor to request the Corporate Director of Planning and Environmental Services to refer an application to an appropriate meeting of the PC.

The Corporate Director of Planning and Environmental Services (or in his absence an authorised Deputy) determines applications under delegated authority. The officers will, at their discretion, refer particular applications to the PC for determination.

The Licensing Committee

The Licensing Committee (LC) is scheduled to meet five times a year and is responsible for any matter which falls under the remit of the Licensing Act 2003 in accordance with the Council's approved statement of Licensing Policy.

Specifically the LC is responsible for the policies of the Council relating to licensing.

The LC is responsible for establishing the Licensing Sub-Committees. The Licensing Sub-Committees consider premises licences, club premises certificates, temporary events notices and personal licences in the Borough in respect of the sale and/or supply of alcohol and the provision of regulated entertainment and late night

refreshment where representations have been made.

The LC has 10 members, there is no statutory requirement for political balance but it has been the practice of the Council to ensure that the LC membership includes the different political groupings. The current allocation of seats is 8 Conservative and 2 Runnymede Independent Residents Councillors. It is a standing Committee, the membership of which is determined annually at the Annual meeting of Council in May. The meetings of the LC are normally held at the Civic Centre at 4.00 p.m. on Wednesdays. Attendance at the LC is high and there have been no occasions when it has not been quorate.

The Licensing Sub-Committee

The Licensing Sub-Committee meets during the daytime and consists of three Members. A named reserve Councillor is appointed to ensure that the quorum can be achieved even if the meetings are called at short notice. The dates of the meetings are ad hoc, determined by the necessity to consider any matters within their remit.

The Regulatory Committee

The Regulatory Committee (RC) meets five times a year and is responsible for the licensing of hackney carriages, private hire vehicles, drivers and operators; the licensing of charity collections; matters under the Gambling Act 2005; sexual entertainment venues and any other licensing matter not covered by the Licensing Act 2003.

The RC has 5 members, with a proportional allocation of seats (4 Conservative and 1 Runnymede Independent Residents Councillors). It is a standing Committee, the membership of which is determined annually at the Annual meeting of Council in May. The meetings of the RC are normally held at the Civic Centre at 7.30 p.m. on Tuesdays.

The Standards and Audit Committee

The Standards and Audit Committee (S&AC) has 10 members (9 Conservative and 1 Runnymede Independent Residents Councillors). The meetings are held three times a year at 7.00 p.m. on Tuesday evenings at the Civic Centre. The S&AC is appointed annually at the Annual meeting of the Council in May. Attendance at the S&AC is high and there have been no occasions when it has not been quorate.

The responsibilities of the S&AC include:

- to promote standards within the Council and to monitor the operation of the Code of Conduct
- to establish a Hearing Sub-Committee to hear and determine complaints of alleged breaches of the Member Code of Conduct referred to it by the Monitoring Officer
- to grant dispensations pursuant to Sections 33(2) (b) and(c) of the Localism Act 2011
- to hear and determine appeals against refusal to grant dispensations by the

Monitoring Officer pursuant to Sections 33(2) (a) and (d) of the Localism Act 2011

- to receive an annual report from the Monitoring Officer on Standards issues
- to act as the Council's Audit Committee
- to receive reports from the Council's internal auditor
- to consider appeals by staff in relation to employment matters

The Hearings Sub-Committee

The Hearings Sub-Committee terms of reference are to hear and determine complaints of alleged breaches of the Member Code of Conduct by Councillors referred to it by the Monitoring Officer in accordance with the Procedure for Hearings and Consideration of Complaints (Annex to Administrative and Procedural Standing Order 51) and consider appeals by staff in respect of employment issues.

The meetings are only called when an allegation of a breach of the Code of Conduct has been alleged. The Sub-Committee has not met since its establishment in June 2012.

In order to assist in the consideration of Councillor conduct matters the Council has appointed two Independent Persons under the provisions of Section 28(7) Localism Act 2011.

Outside Bodies

Each year, the Council appoints Councillors and other community representatives to a wide range of outside bodies. These include various local charities, consultative bodies and Surrey-wide organisations, including a number of voluntary organisations serving the community.

The workload associated with the appointments varies, though would normally involve the attendance of the Councillor at between 4 and 6 meetings a year at different venues in the Borough or County. The number of appointments to each body is normally determined by the needs of the body concerned and varies between one and three Councillors.

The appointments are made by the External Appointments Sub-Committee of the CMC that meets once a year in May at the start of the municipal year. Currently there are 67 Councillor appointments to 39 external bodies.

The appointments are viewed as important not only by Councillors but also by the organisations. They provide Councillors with an opportunity to gain an insight into the work of a diverse range of groups and provide those groups with a contact point who understands the issues they are dealing with.

Englefield Green Committee

The Englefield Green Committee (EGC) discusses the Council's powers and duties relating to Englefield Green under the terms of a 1954 lease from the Crown.

The EGC is composed of all Councillors representing the two Englefield Green wards (six in total), along with two resident representatives. The meetings of the EGC take place three times a year and are normally held at the Jurgen Centre at 7.30 p.m. on Tuesdays.

PART TWO

Scrutiny Functions

The Council has one Overview and Scrutiny Committee (called the Overview and Scrutiny Select Committee) (O&SC) comprising 9 members (7 Conservative and 2 Runnymede Independent Residents Councillors).

The O&SC ensure that its level of activity is manageable through its annual work programme. Any proposals for new reviews are scrutinised carefully by the O&SC, to ensure that adequate resources are available and that the potential outcomes of such reviews justify the resource and time necessary for such pieces of work.

The O&SC supports the work of the Council as a whole and reviews may lead to reports and recommendations that advise the Council in relation to its policies, budget and service delivery.

The O&SC may also be consulted on forthcoming decisions and the development of policy.

The Overview and Scrutiny Select Committee

The O&SC meets 5 times a year. The meetings are held on Thursday evenings at the Civic Centre and attendance levels of Councillors are high.

The O&SC's Terms of Reference include:

To monitor and to review the following:

- policy development and review
- performance management
- scrutinise our services, decisions, actions and
- matters affecting residents and the Borough.

This committee takes an active interest in matters and has used its call-in powers to enable it to discharge its critical friend role in relation to sensitive decisions the Council has had to make in recent years.

Crime and Disorder Committee

The O&SC sits additionally as the Crime and Disorder Committee (C&DC) under Section 19 of the Police and Justice Act 2006. As the C&DC, meetings take place 3 times a year on Thursday evenings at the Civic Centre.

The Committee's Terms of Reference are:

- To review or scrutinise decisions or action taken by the Police, the Council, Police Authority, Fire and Rescue Authority, Health Authority and Probation Services

- To review community safety strategy
- To review the Safer Runnymede initiative

PART THREE

Representational Roles of Councillors

It is clear that one of the key reasons individuals seek to become a Councillor is the role they can play in the community by seeking improvements for local residents. It is therefore understandable that a significant proportion of their time is spent on engaging with residents. It has always been the view of Council that the ratio of electors to Councillors should be such that there is easy access to elected representatives and they, Councillors, should have adequate time to devote to their duties without adversely impacting on their private lives.

The actual time commitment will vary between Councillors, dependent on their other responsibilities and the nature of the area they represent. Regardless, community engagement continues to form a substantial element of the overall role of a Councillor.

The Council is currently involved in a number of projects and initiatives which has generated an increase in the workload of Councillors. The work associated with the adoption of a new Local Plan has led to residents seeking information from their Councillors on the impact that various proposals will have on their neighbourhoods.

The revitalisation projects the Council is undertaking have led to an increase of work for Councillors. Such schemes will give rise to positive and negative reactions. Councillors are seen as the first point of contact by individuals and groups who wish to comment on such projects.

As the Council has retained its housing stock this generates a large number of contacts from tenants and applicants for housing. Individuals in such situations can be experiencing a great deal of stress and this requires a sensitive approach from their elected representatives.

The area of planning produces a great deal of work for Councillors at a constituency level. Any proposals for development or unauthorised development will generate strong reactions from various parties. Councillors are faced with difficult situations in having to balance competing needs.

The way in which Councillors undertake this engagement again varies but will involve local surgeries, blogs and, if necessary, attending public meetings such as those of local residents' groups. Significant changes have occurred in the way in which members of the public access information, and comments by Councillors would indicate that these have had an effect on the number of enquiries they receive.

The public, for example, is more able now to find out information than was the case when the Council Size was last reviewed in 1998. The use of the internet has replaced a high proportion of direct contact and the amount of information available electronically has grown enormously, with websites such as that hosted by the Council providing extensive information which previously residents may have turned to their Councillor for. Telephone calls from members of public have fallen, with more and more enquiries being received by e-mail. Whilst the demand of residents on Councillors' time to obtain information has reduced as other sources of information have grown due to more complex legislation being introduced in a number of fields the need for representational work by Councillors has grown.

Whilst Councillors no longer act as the main conduits for information the use of email means that they are expected to respond to enquiries far more quickly than use to be the case. Social media has also become a popular tool for residents to use as a mechanism for communicating with Councillors. Given the speed at which comments are posted there is a great deal of pressure on Councillors to react quickly to matters which are raised through this medium.

Councillors do attend local community meetings organised by residents associations or local community groups. The nature of the ward, and current issues, has an impact on the level of commitment required of a Councillor for such events. The main purpose is to listen to the views of the residents and, where appropriate, represent those views within the Council. It is clear that Councillors deal with their caseloads in a variety of ways.

Overall, Councillors seek to assist their constituents directly but will seek the assistance of Officers if necessary. In the majority of cases, the Councillors will remain engaged until a matter has been resolved.

PART FOUR

The Future

Localism and Policy Development

The Council has a wide programme of having devolved assets to local community organisations ranging from the delivery of leisure activities, allotments to sports clubs. The Council does not currently have plans to devolve political responsibility to local areas.

The Council has worked closely with voluntary and community organisations over many years and has extensive experience of working with the community to identify services that can be provided or supported by such organisations. Councillors often play a key role in such arrangements, with suitable Officer support to ensure that the Councillors have sufficient resources to function effectively. The Council also has a programme of enhancing community-owned assets to support local organisations.

Recent political developments have meant that the appetite for devolving local government functions at a regional level is not as high on the political agenda as it was in the last few years. The option was explored in Surrey with a view to combining with neighbouring county councils. That initiative has stalled but may be revived when the political climate has settled following Brexit. The impact of any such arrangements is hard to judge until details emerge.

At a local level, the Council is discussing with Surrey County Council revised arrangements for the operation of local area committees. This may result in a need to identify members to sit on any expanded version of the local area committee. The Council does not itself operate any local area/neighbourhood committees and has no concrete plans for any at present.

Service Delivery

The Council is responsible for the direct provision of housing in the Borough and currently has a stock of approximately 2890 properties. The Council maintains housing responsibilities such as maintaining the Housing Register, homelessness and affordable housing activities.

Changes to the funding regime for Local Housing Authorities introduced by the Localism Act 2011, welfare reform and the pressure to increase housing supply has led to greater demands on the Council against a backcloth of reduced resources. Councillors are making decisions which have a major impact on the lives of their residents.

The Council has a 'Direct Services Organisation' for services such as refuse collection. In addition, the Council maintains highway verges on behalf of Surrey County Council.

The protection of the environment has an increasing profile and local authorities are seen as public bodies at the forefront of this work. There is an increasing call for individuals to play their part in protecting the planet. The Council not only provides services but also has an educational role to play in such matters. Recent changes in

the way refuse is collected has generated a great deal of public interest and Councillors are called upon to explain and justify these changes.

The Council also operates three social centres for older people located Addlestone, Egham and Woodham. These provide daily lunches and a range of social activities.

As census figures show the Borough has an aging population whose needs have to be met. The provision of services by the Council, whether through transport, meals or day centres contribute to a better quality of life being enjoyed by older residents.

The Council has also recently enhanced its Customer Services team to provide an improved facility for users of its services.

For many years, the Council has operated a CCTV (Safer Runnymede) service for community safety and uses the same operation centre and staff to provide a community alarm service to residents.

Whilst it is recognised that there have been some additional Council responsibilities, such as alcohol, gambling and Taxi licensing, there has been an overall reduction in the Council's workforce since the year 2009, reflecting these changes in the funding regime for the Council's services and central government controls on Council Tax increases.

In 2008/09, the Council employed 419 full time equivalent (FTE) staff. In 2016/17, the number of FTE staff has been reduced to 362 a reduction of 13.6%.

The Council has had to make the difficult decisions between competing priorities and to help mitigate the effects of cuts across the public sector whilst maintaining high quality service delivery for residents.

Finance

Along with other Boroughs and Districts, the Council has seen a year on year reduction in its Government support. The Council received notification of an indicative settlement for 2018/19 of its rate support grant of £10k, representing a reduction of 99% in cash terms compared with 2017/18 followed by its total removal in 2019/20. The funding for the Local Council Tax support scheme is no longer shown separately and the Council is now expected to fund this themselves going forward. A number of other grants have also been removed.

The Council has sought to address the reduction in its income from central government funds by adopting and implementing a Property Investment Strategy designed to generate an income stream with which to deliver existing and enhanced services to the community. One of the additional benefits of this initiative is the delivery of revitalisation schemes to various parts of the Borough. These schemes will improve the economic vitality of the Borough and recreational facilities for inhabitants.

Through streamlining of business processes, the Council has avoided cutting services to the public.

The average cost for an elected Member is some £6325 (based on Councillor

Allowance, IT support budget and training fund (see 17/18 budget book)

Indicative Shape of the Council

The Council's Committee structure has been altered over a number of years and it is considered that a total of 42 Councillors is sufficient to run the business of the Council. The current structure has been in place since 2011 and no issues have been raised during annual reviews of the Constitution, since that date, to suggest that it is not functioning in an effective manner.

As previously mentioned the Council did in 2000/01 experiment with an Executive governance system but the conclusion at the end of that exercise was that it excluded a large number of Councillors from the decision making process. Taking into account the various projects the Council is undertaking in a wide range of fields it is felt that a Council Size of 42 operating a Committee based system is an appropriate Council Size. Whilst a number of the Council's CIPFA nearest neighbours may have smaller Council Sizes the majority of those based in Surrey have numbers close to or matching the proposed Council Size.

Time Commitments of Councillors

The workload of Councillors covers attendance at meetings and representing the electorate. When the Independent Remuneration Panel undertook its review of Member Allowances in 2013 and 2016 it carried out a survey of Councillors and asked them to estimate the amount of time they devoted to Council business on a monthly basis. On each occasion the response was that 43 hours per month were spent on Council business. This evidence demonstrates that the time demands placed on Councillors is remaining constant. The proposed Council Size of 42 would still enable Councillors to meet their workload whilst enabling the majority of Councillors to sit on up to two committees.

The electorate of Runnymede is 61,821 equating to 1,471 electors per Councillor. The growth forecast for Runnymede by 2023 is an electorate of 65,142. This would increase electors per Councillor to 1,551. It is considered that, in the context of modern open and transparent local government, this will not result in an unacceptable workload per Councillor if the Council Size remains at 42.

PART FIVE

Conclusions

The review of the Council's Size has taken into account the information and evidence set out in this Submission. As highlighted by the LGBCE in its technical guidance there are no strict mathematical criteria for Council Size or a national formula for its calculation. Council Size is a local choice matter and will reflect the desire of communities to put in place arrangements which they feel work best for them. Of major importance in reaching any decision is the need to have in place a structure which provides residents with easy access to elected representatives, enables effective decision making to be undertaken and does not place excessive demands on the time of those who stand for political office. The Council has concluded that maintaining the current number of Councillors at their present level is sustainable. The following factors are viewed as supporting this decision:

- **Access to Councillors**

An important aspect of the role of a Councillor is to be accessible to those they represent and to be able to devote time to the decision making process. Individuals who are Councillors give up part of their free time to discharge that role. The Council is of the view that by retaining its existing complement it facilitates easy access for residents whilst at the same time not discouraging people who have careers from becoming Councillors.

- **Committee arrangements maintained since last review**

The Council considers that the proposed retention of 42 Councillors is appropriate in the context of the Council's current arrangements and is fit for purpose in the future. This is because the number 42 has been determined by reference to a Committee structure. The Council experimented with an Executive arrangement when changes were introduced in 2000 and concluded that this did not provide an opportunity for a large number of Councillors to participate in the democratic process. Since 2011, it has been seen that the Committee structure has come back into favour, with a number of local authorities taking advantage of the provisions in the Localism Act 2011 to convert to a Committee system.

The Council conducts annual reviews of its Constitution and these have not highlighted any concerns with the Committee system. It is considered that with a Council Size of 42 Councillors it is possible to maintain the effective formal decision-making and scrutiny structure whilst continuing to adhere to relevant legislative requirements.

- **Scheme of Delegation to Committees and Officers annually reviewed;**

The Scheme of Delegation is reviewed annually to ensure that with the increasing speed of change, both external and internal, it is flexible, generic and user-friendly to meet the needs of a modern local authority. The Scheme is accessible via the Council's website. In addition, in order to increase efficiency, decrease bureaucracy and reduce costs, new delegations are added when a need arises. The Council's governance arrangements allow for changes to be made during the course of a

municipal year without the need to wait for the annual review.

The Scheme enables effective and efficient decision making by officers enabling business to be conducted effectively. This is combined with the powers exercised by the various committees of the Council, which meet on a frequent basis. When appropriate additional meetings can be convened to deal with urgent matters.

- **The technological advancements in communications and the changing way in which residents accessed information and services;**

Since the last Electoral Review in 1998, the Council has invested in 'electronic' government to enable residents to access services of the Council through its website and to communicate with the Council effectively by email / on line. This form of access has dramatically increased in recent years where residents increasingly 'self-serve' from the website, reducing the need for individuals to approach Councillors directly. Clearly, Councillors continue to engage with residents in a variety of ways, including e-mail, websites and by way of social media. This makes it significantly easier for residents to access information and services than was previously the case.

The Council has a contact centre located at the Civic Centre which local people can phone or visit. The Council has close integration with the Police and Adult Social Care Services who are co-located with it in its main office, which makes it significantly easier for residents to access information and services than was previously the case.

The Council is moving to conducting paperless meetings and has offered a variety of electronic devices to all Councillors. This further supports Councillors in their work and streamlines processes.

- **The financial position of the Council, and the Country as a whole.**

The Council in line with the whole local government family has faced severe challenges over the last decade as a result of the global economic crisis which commenced in 2008.

The approach of the Council has been two fold. It has sought to reduce its costs through redesigning services to make them more efficient and out sourcing those services which lend themselves to such exercises. The Council has however acknowledged that cost cutting can have an adverse impact on the range and quality of services provided to its community.

In order to address the issues it faces the Council has been forward thinking in undertaking revitalisation projects in Addlestone and Egham which improve the local environments, stimulate the local economies and generate local employment opportunities.

The Council has also adopted a Property Investment Strategy to create an income stream to not only replace lost central government funding but also facilitate future growth. This approach has been seen by other local authorities as the way forward to address the funding issues facing local government.

The current uncertainties flowing from the Brexit vote add to the pressures on local

government to plan for the future.

PART SIX

SUBMISSION

The Council at its meeting on 19 October 2017 resolved that the Chief Executive, be authorised to submit, to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England, the Council's proposal for a retention of Council Size at 42 Members, based on the following factors:

- (i) The proposed size will facilitate access and not discourage individuals from standing for elected office
- (ii) Committee arrangements maintained since last review have been seen as an effective method for decision making by involving all Councillors
- (iii) Scheme of Delegation of Functions to Committees and Officers annually reviewed and when appropriate extended
- (iv) the technological advancements in communications and the changing way in which residents access information and services
- (v) the financial position of the Council, and the Country as a whole

The Council has ruled out the possibility of increasing the Council size.

The Council has concluded that retention of its existing Council Size would achieve the aims of the review without impacting on its ability to deliver its services or adversely affecting the needs of constituents and Councillors in terms of engagement.

The Council considers that the proposed retention of 42 Councillors is correct in the context of the Council's current arrangements, and will be "future proof". This is because the number 42 has been determined by reference to a Committee structure under which decision-making is undertaken by a large number of Councillors sitting on a variety of committees with discrete responsibilities for a range of functions. The conclusion of the Council, when it experimented with an Executive arrangement in 2000/2001 was that this system was viewed as excluding a large number of Councillors from the decision making process.

Links to further information on the Council's Website

Constitution -

<https://www.runnymede.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=16672&p=0>

Councillors -

<https://www.runnymede.gov.uk/article/4744/Councillors>

The Council's Decision-Making Structure –

<https://www.runnymede.gov.uk/article/5799/Decision-making-process>

Current Committee Structure –

<https://www.runnymede.gov.uk/article/5497/Committee-AgendasMinutes>

Scheme of Delegation (Part 3 Constitution of the Council – April 2017 –

<https://www.runnymede.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=16672&p=0>

Membership of Committees and Chairman and Vice Chairman -

<https://www.runnymede.gov.uk/article/5497/Committee-AgendasMinutes>

(See entries for individual committees on website for membership of committees)

Corporate Business Plan 2016-2020 -

<https://www.runnymede.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=15521&p=0>

Council Budget Book –

<https://www.runnymede.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=16417&p=0>