



# Council Size Submission

***This report is the submission of Epsom & Ewell Borough Council (the Council) to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) on its proposals for Council Size.***

MARCH 2021

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## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (Commission) advised in the early part of 2020 that a review of the Council's warding pattern would be undertaken, to address the electoral variance across parts of the Borough. The outcome of the review will be implemented for the May 2023 Local Council elections. The review covers the entire Borough of Epsom & Ewell.
- 1.2 The review consists of a number of stages. The first stage is the consideration of the existing Council Size, with a view to ensuring an efficient and effective structure is in place. In making its proposals, the Commission will apply the following statutory criteria:
  - The need to secure electoral equality (a consistent number of electors per Councillor)
  - Community identity (strong ward boundaries that reflect communities); and
  - Securing effective and convenient local government (coherent wards)
- 1.3 In determining the "Council Size", the Commission will have regard to the following:
  - The Council's governance arrangements and how it makes decisions
  - The Council's scrutiny functions relating to its own decision making and the Council's responsibilities to outside bodies
  - The role of Councillors in the local community and how they engage with electors, conduct casework and represent the Council on local partner organisations.
- 1.4 The Commission's decision on Council Size will be used to inform the second stage of the review, which will consider the size and number of Wards, Ward names, Ward boundaries and the number of Councillors to represent each Ward.
- 1.5 The Strategy & Resources Committee set up a cross party Member Task & Finish Group to consider the question of council size. The submission of the Member Task & Finish Group was considered by the Strategy & Resources Committee on the 16 March 2021. At its meeting on the 25 March 2021, Council approved the Council's submission.

### Submission Summary

- 1.6 A Council structure needs to achieve a balance between the different lives many Councillors now lead. It needs to be able to encourage those who wish to take on the role of community leader and decision maker and for such people to be able to continue with their normal lives. The recommendation for Council Size has been very carefully considered within the Commission's guidelines and also within the wider context of the efficient use of public resources, in what is and will remain, a challenging and uncertain economic climate.
- 1.7 The support which Councillors provide in terms of casework and community leadership has always been high at Epsom and Ewell. However, the challenges the Borough, in common with the public sector, continues to face and will do so for the foreseeable future, means residents will continue to seek the advice and support of their Councillors, often as their first port of call. The Council feels very strongly that this expectation needs to be met.

- 1.8 The Council recommends that Epsom and Ewell Borough Council should reduce the number of Councillors by three, from the current 38 to 35. This submission evidences the need for 35 Councillors to ensure the Council is able to fulfill its governance, scrutiny and representation roles.

## 2. Local Authority Profile

### Description of Borough

- 2.1 The Council in its present form was established in 1974 as part of the re-organisation of Local Government in England and Wales. It succeeded the previous Borough Council and inherited the same external boundaries. In 1994/95 there were minor changes to the Borough's external boundaries resulting from the Greater London and Surrey (County and London Borough Boundaries) Orders 1993 and 1994.
- 2.2 The Borough has around 80,000 residents and 3,700 businesses and is the smallest of 11 district/ borough councils which make up Surrey. It is situated on Surrey's northern border, with its nearest neighbours, the London Boroughs of Kingston and Sutton to the north and the two Surrey districts of Mole Valley and Reigate & Banstead to the south. The Borough has excellent road and rail links, with central London less than 30 minutes away and access to the rest of county facilitated by the adjacent M25. There is also easy access to Heathrow and Gatwick Airports.
- 2.3 About half of the Borough is made up of open space. The designated Green Belt covers just over 40% of the area of the Borough. Nearly 40% of the Green Belt is made up of public open space, including Epsom Downs, Horton Country Park and Epsom Common. The largest strategic open space is Nonsuch Park. A key part of Epsom and Ewell's history, is horse racing which has taken place in Epsom for over 350 years. The Green Belt is home to the nationally important Epsom racecourse and facilities for the local racehorse training industry. Also within the Green Belt lies the 'hospital cluster'; which was formerly the site of pre-war psychiatric hospitals, now demolished or redeveloped since the last review to provide 1950 new homes.
- 2.4 The Borough has 21 conservation areas, each different in form and character, but all designated for their special architectural or historic interest. There are over 400 'listed buildings' and some 100 'locally listed' buildings. The Borough contains one tributary of the River Thames, the River Hogsmill, along with a number of underground springs.
- 2.5 The Borough is a University Town, being home campus for the University of Creative Arts with whom the Council works with closely. In partnership with UCA, a promotional video was produced to showcase what the Borough offers<sup>1</sup>.
- 2.6 There are no parish councils within the Borough, however, the Council has approved an application for a Neighborhood Forum and the Neighborhood Area.<sup>2</sup>
- 2.7 In 2019 the Council developed its Future40 project. It was the largest consultation and engagement exercise undertaken in the Borough. It heard from residents, groups and organisations about their aspirations for the future of the Borough over the next 40 years. From

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.epsom-ewell.gov.uk/visitors/epsom-and-ewell-promotional-video>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.epsom-ewell.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/residents/planning/planning-policy/other-planning-documents/StoneleighAndAuriol2.pdf>

this exercise two key documents developed the future path for the Council. The first was the “Vision”, which brought forward five themes as drivers for ambition, and also the “Four Year Plan 2020-2024”, which sets out the six corporate priorities for the lifetime of the Plan. The objective is to help keep Epsom & Ewell a great place to live and work, both now and in the future. The Council is currently developing its ‘Build Back Better’ initiative, which aims to adapt current strategies to deliver the Four Year Plan and Vision.

## Composition of Councillors

2.8 The Council has been led by the Residents’ Association Group since the 1930’s, which is both unique in terms of local government and also in terms of representation. The Residents Association Group comprises Councillors from five different registered political parties. The Resident Association groups are based on the Ward structure and any changes will impact that structure and arrangements.

2.9 The political balance of the Council following the 2019 Local Elections<sup>3</sup> is

32	Residents Association
3	Labour Party
2	Liberal Democrat
1	Conservative

There are twelve women and twenty-six male Councillors. Councillors are also referred to as ‘Members’ in local authorities and this submission will use both terms. The Member Workload Survey<sup>4</sup> demonstrates just under 50% of those completing the survey would best describe their position as being in full time or part time employment and or have caring responsibilities. Councillors are also active within their communities in roles as trustees for voluntary groups or provide support to such groups in their personal time.

2.10 This demonstrates how important it is for Councils to be able attract those who may be interested in the role of a councillor from its diverse communities. The current number of Councillors enables the Council to maintain this diversity, as people with additional caring or parental responsibilities may be discouraged from standing if the perception of workloads were seen as challenging. The Council has therefore considered a range of options on Council size so as to remain attractive to encouraging diversity amongst the make-up of future councillors.

## Electoral Cycle

2.11 Borough Council elections are held every four years. Elections to elect County Councillors to Surrey County Council are also held every four years, but they do not coincide with the local elections. The last Borough election was held in 2019, and the next two are due to be held in 2023 then 2027. The outcome of the Review is expected to be implemented in 2023 and the electorate forecasting is looking at 2027.

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<sup>3</sup> [https://www.epsom-ewell.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/council/elections-and-voting/Declaration%20of%20results%20-%20all%20wards\\_0.pdf](https://www.epsom-ewell.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/council/elections-and-voting/Declaration%20of%20results%20-%20all%20wards_0.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Appendix 1 Member Workload Survey

## Member Development, IT Infrastructure & Resources

- 2.12 The Council provides a Member Induction for all elected Councillors after an election. The programme involves a description of the legal structure and decision making processes of the Council, explanations of the various parts of the Council's Constitution and guidance on the Codes and Protocols which apply to Councillors. Newly elected Councillors are encouraged to seek the support of an existing Councillor to act as a mentor. On-going training is provided throughout the Councilor's term of office, which includes compulsory training on decision making generally and also on Planning and Licensing. Councillors also have access to training provided by external sources if appropriate to their role. Members also receive updates on key topics as part of their overall role which happen on average one evening a month throughout the year.
- 2.13 Following a move to a new Committee Management Software system in 2016, Councilors' IT provision was reviewed. It resulted in Members all being allocated an iPad to enable access to Committee and Council Agendas along with access to their Council email accounts and the depository of key information. The Council does not appoint political assistants to provide support to any of the Political Groups, nor does it have a Member Services Team providing support to its Councillors.

## Member Allowances

- 2.14 Members all receive a fixed allowance of £3,781.35 per year (for 2020/2021)<sup>5</sup>. There are special responsibility allowances for those who have roles as Chairs/ Chairmen, Vice Chairs/ Vice Chairmen and for those who sit on Planning Committee. The last review of Members Allowances was in February 2020, at which time the Independent Remuneration Panel reviewed various anomalies within the Members Allowance Scheme. Through the questionnaires, meetings and diaries, it has concluded that the Scheme should be amended.
- 2.15 The recommendations recognized the extra work of those who sat on a number of committees, and recommended the previous rule that only one special responsibility allowance could be allowed, be removed. They also recommended all Vice Chairmen and Vice Chairs should receive 50% of what their respective Chairs/ Chairmen received, by way of recognition of the work undertaken by the Vice Chairs. The recommendations were adopted by Council on the 13 February 2020.<sup>6</sup>

## Demographics

- 2.16 The population of Surrey was estimated to be 1,189,900 in mid-2018, an increase of 4,600 since 2017. The increase is made up of 2,600 natural change (births minus deaths), 4,700 net migration from overseas, -2,500 net migration within the UK and -200 other changes.<sup>7</sup>
- 2.17 The population of Epsom & Ewell has steadily increased from 67,000 in 1997 to 75,102 at the time of Census in 2011. In 2018 the estimate was 80,000. The projections for future growth are:

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<sup>5</sup> Appendix 4 Councillors Allowance Scheme

<sup>6</sup> <https://democracy.epsom-ewell.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=146&MId=740&Ver=4>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.surreyi.gov.uk>



<b>Population Projections <sup>8</sup></b>							
<b>Year</b>	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027
	82,400	83,100	83,800	84,400	85,000	85,600	86,200

2.17 The trajectory has been steadily increasing at a greater rate than the rest of Surrey. In terms of density, in 2018 it stood at 23.46 numbers of persons per hectare, which was the highest in Surrey.

2.18 The census figures also show the Borough has an aging population:

<b>Data</b>	<b>Age Groups</b>	<b>Percentage Change</b>
Projected Population  Growth 2018-2043	0-14 yrs	-5%
	15-24 yrs	+3%
	25-74 yrs	+0.4%
	75-84 yrs	+36%
	85+	+42%

2.19 Since the last Review, the changing trends in demographics has required the Council to reconfigure some of its services. Key changes have been around transport, meals or day centre provision so as to contribute to a better quality of life for the Borough's older residents. The Council now runs a vibrant and much sought-after Community and Wellbeing Centre which is a draw for residents in the Borough and those moving to Epsom. The Council continues to provide Daycare support, assisted door-to-door transport service, a community alarm, meals at home service, a shopping service and home improvement scheme. It provides a social prescribing service, which now also operates outside the Borough. These services have played a critical role throughout the pandemic by providing crucial support to those with the highest levels of vulnerability and need.

## **Constraints and Challenges**

### **Financial Challenges**

2.20 The Council's staffing structure has stayed stable for the last decade with around 300 employed staff. Almost all Council services remain run in house, which includes both waste collection and transactional services.

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.surreyi.gov.uk/dataset/2jj46/population-projections-20162041>

- 2.21 The Council has responded to unprecedented challenge of the Covid-19 pandemic by supporting residents and businesses throughout the crisis, while maintaining key service levels. The Council's emergency response has included helping vulnerable residents with food, prescriptions and other needs through a Community Hub, putting in place measures to make town centres and public spaces Covid-secure, and helping to sustain the local economy with over £11m grants paid to local businesses.
- 2.22 The current Medium Term Financial Strategy 2020-24, when originally produced in February 2020, had projected that new savings of £443,000 would need to be identified by 2023/24, to deliver a sustainable revenue budget with no reliance on reserves. Since then, the financial impact of Covid-19 has been unprecedented. During 2020/21 income streams have reduced and net cost pressures increased, the Council is projecting an overspend at year-end of £0.78m on the 2020/21 revenue budget, after receiving projected government support of c.£3.8m.
- 2.23 In February 2021, the Council agreed a balanced budget for 2021/22, with updated projections showing the budget forecast deficit is now expected to increase to £920,000 by 2023/24 as set out in the following table:

General Fund Budget Summary	2021/22 Budget	2022/23 Forecast	2023/24 Forecast
	£'000	£'000	£'000
Net Cost of Services	9,034	8,791	9,213
Forecast Budget Deficit	0	757	920

## Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation

- 2.24 In July 2020, Surrey County Council's (SCC) Leader, wrote to MHCLG, requesting a mandate to reform local government in Surrey. The letter set-out SCC's desire to move away from the current two tier structure in the county to become a single-tier Unitary Authority. In Autumn 2020, MHCLG responded to the request to make clear that it sees no pressure for reform of local government in two tier areas (like Surrey), nor a need for structural change. Instead, MHCLG confirmed that any work should be based on locally-led improvements and driven by locally-led proposals.
- 2.25 The Leaders of all Surrey's district and borough councils commissioned a review, to examine alternative proposals for local government provision in Surrey and to explore ways of joint working and closer collaboration with partners. As the country emerges from the pandemic, the 11 districts and boroughs plan to revisit the report and explore the collaboration opportunities it provides.

## Local Plan & Housing

- 2.26 The Council is in the process of preparing a new Local Plan. However, for a number of reasons the Plan programme has been subject to delays beyond the control of the Council. At present the timetable is expecting a submission to the Secretary of State in October 2022, with a public hearing in January 2023 and adoption by December 2023.

- 2.27 The Council has in place a Housing Delivery Action Plan,<sup>9</sup> because it has not delivered the required levels of housing. There are areas within the Borough made up of large single owner occupier homes. Over time, this may lead to an increase in population as family homes come to the market or possible windfall planning development sites. The changes in demographics and population growth, will continue to add to the pressure for suitable and affordable housing within the Borough.
- 2.28 The Council has experienced unprecedented demand in the last year for housing and homelessness services. As Government support schemes such as furloughing and tenant eviction protection end, demand for these services is likely to increase further. The net budget requirement for temporary accommodation is currently at an all-time high of c£1.5m.
- 2.29 The 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.

## Climate Change

- 2.31 In 2020 the Council set an ambitious target for being carbon neutral by 2035. The Climate Change Action Plan was developed by the Councillors and sets measure to help reduce the Council's own emissions as well as promoting good practice throughout the Borough.<sup>10</sup> The work of the Action Plan is broken down into themes with the Council focusing on driving forward the ambitious change programme not just within the local authority but within the Borough through influence and improvement.

## Economic Development

- 2.32 The Council's Economic Development Strategy provides a framework for delivering sustained prosperity setting out the Council's ambitions, key priorities and related actions for the economic development across the Borough. The Borough is home to a number of major international and national headquarters, to small independent enterprises and everything in between. As well as being a significant local employer, the horse racing industry adds around £13million annually to the local economy. Although the impact of Brexit on the Borough is still to be assessed, Covid has presented the Council with new challenges.
- 2.33 In September 2020, four parts of the Borough, felt the greatest economic impact of Covid both from unemployment and people being furloughed. In three areas, the figures show over 25% of the working population to have been furloughed. Epsom and Ewell comes 6th for unemployment rate in Surrey and the 5th highest for youth unemployment.
- 2.34 The Council is in the process of developing new plans through its Build Back Better initiative to ensure the Borough remains affluent, by anticipating and responding to the inevitable changes in employment and business patterns and stimulating both.

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.epsom-ewell.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/residents/planning/planning-policy/Draft%20Housing%20Action%20Plan%202020%20Final.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.epsom-ewell.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents//Climate%20Change%20Action%20Plan%20Final.pdf>

## 3 Governance & Decision Making

### The Councillors

- 3.1 The job description of a Councillor (also referred to as Members) is set out in the Constitution<sup>11</sup>. The Councillors are collectively responsible as policy makers and for the strategic and corporate management functions. They are advocates for their constituents and representatives for their communities.
- 3.2 The complexity of their role has grown as societal pressures and expectations have changed. For example, the Council has to set a balanced budget each year. The work of the Council is impacted by national campaigns for change, be it climate change, recognition of diversity and a creation of a fairer society. It is also impacted by national policy, be it the delivery of higher levels of housing, changes to the welfare systems and increased regulatory action. The work of all Councillors requires them to contribute to these processes and develop plans in response. It also requires direct support of their communities and for their constituents.

### Governance Model

- 3.3 The Council operates the Committee system of governance based on the Local Government Act 2000. Whenever the model of governance has been discussed there has been overwhelming support for the continuation of the Committee system. It is seen as providing an opportunity for the largest number of Councillors to actively participate in shaping policy and direction of the Council. It enables residents to feel that their views are being represented by individuals they know who are active in their local communities. There are no plans to change this operating model.
- 3.4 The Council does not have a designated 'Leader of the Council', because it operates a committee governance structure. Instead the Chairman of Strategy & Resources Committee fulfils the function of a Leader and responds to all formal Government correspondence. The Group Leader of the majority group (the Residents Association), fulfills the representation role within the Surrey Group of authorities.
- 3.5 With the exception of one Ward, the Council is made up of a three Member Ward system. This helps to ensure that a Councillor is always available for residents to approach and raise their concerns with. It also provides resilience for decision making by managing the role of members on decision making committees such as Planning. For example, the make-up of Planning Committee has been designed to encourage a representative from each Ward.

### The Mayor

- 3.6 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

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<sup>11</sup> <https://democracy.epsom-ewell.gov.uk/documents/s16704/Part%202%20-%20Articles%20of%20the%20Constitution%2030112016%20Constitution%20of%20Epsom%20and%20Ewell%20Borough%20Council.pdf>

citizen".

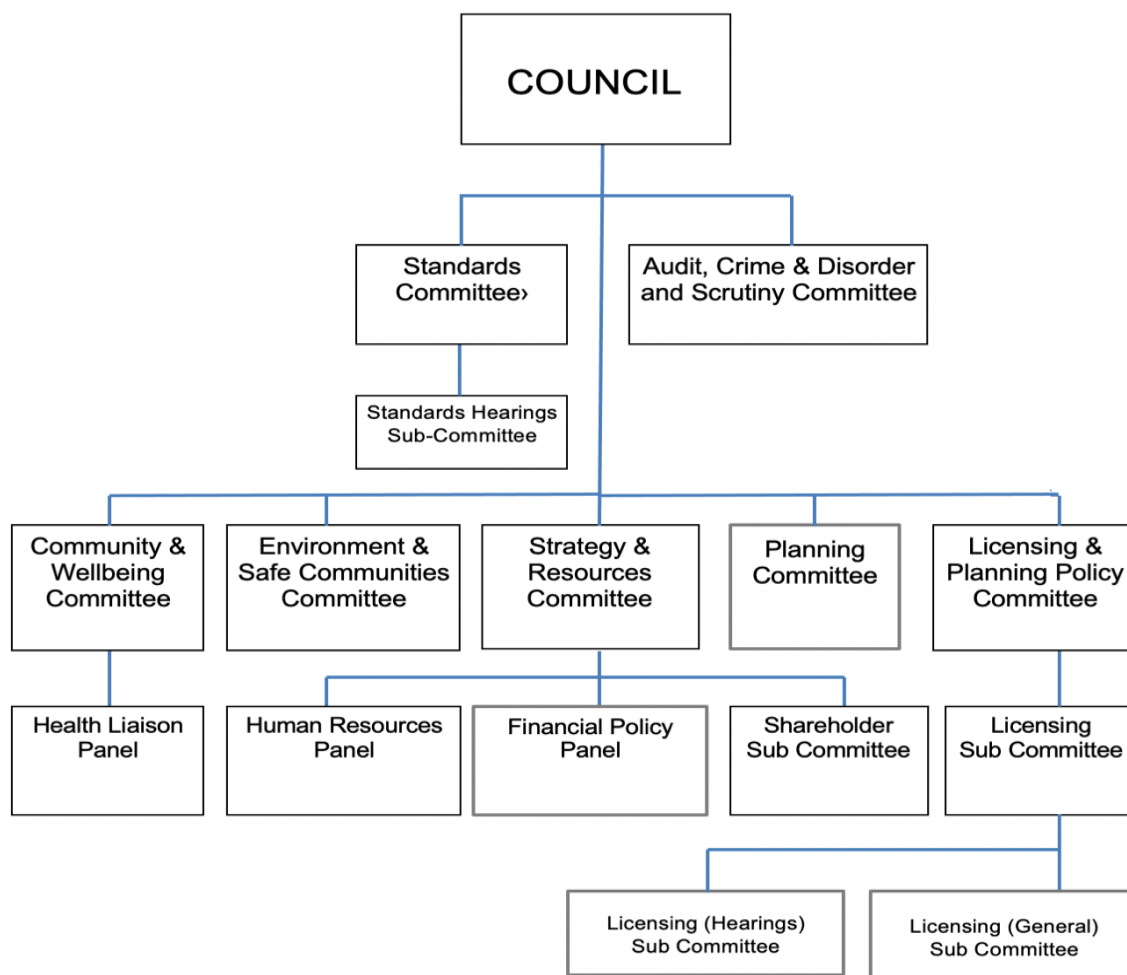
- 3.7 The Mayor adopts a non-political role, with key responsibilities and duties including:
- Chairing of Full Council.
  - Opening functions, events and new businesses as the Borough's representative.
  - Attending award ceremonies and receptions at the request of local schools, businesses, voluntary 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.
- 3.8 During their period of office, the Mayor will receive invitations to events/functions in the Borough and across Surrey. The Mayor's role may 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. For this reason the Mayor, as first citizen does not sit on any committees, although Mayors have been known to sit on outside bodies where their position as the first citizen does not conflict.
- 3.9 The Deputy Mayor can stand in if the Mayor is not available. When formally deputising for the Mayor, they have the same non-political responsibilities and prerogatives as the Mayor. When not formally deputizing they, however, continue to function as a Councillor, but will be mindful of the responsibilities of their role as future 'first citizen'.

### **Governance Changes since last Review**

- 3.10 As a result of the Local Government Act 2000 and following public consultation, the Council took the decision to adopt "alternative arrangements" comprising a "stream-lined committee system". The Constitution was duly approved by the Secretary of State and adopted in September 2001.
- 3.11 Since 2001, several pieces of further legislation have come into force, which have required the creation of additional committees or amended the necessity for them. For example, all local authorities were required under the Police and Justice Act 2006 to establish a Crime and Disorder Committee. The role of this Committee is to scrutinise the work of the local Community Safety Partnership and to consider councillor calls for action concerning local crime and disorder matters. In 2014, the Council made changes to some of its Committees and their terms of reference, which included the merger of two committees to create an Audit, Crime & Disorder & Scrutiny Committee. In 2016 further changes were made with the Social and Leisure Committees being replaced with a single Community & Wellbeing Committee.
- 3.12 In 2019, the Council carried out a Polling Stations Review, which resulted in a number of changes, including in polling places and the creation of new polling district.

## Committees

- 3.13 The Council's decision-making structure is set out on Part 3 of its Constitution, which is shown in the structure chart below:



- 3.14 The Committee Model has a focus on outcomes and delivery, so there is an alignment with the work of council departments across the Council. Council approves the membership of the Committees, sub Committees and Advisory Panels at its Annual meeting in May, each year. Meetings of Council and Committees take place in the evenings either at 7pm or from 7.30pm. This is to accommodate those Councillors who either work or have other caring responsibilities.
- 3.15 The Council's four Policy Committees have responsibility for policy and operational matters. This includes statutory responsibilities; developing strategies; drawing up revenue budgets and developing proposals for capital projects; develop and maintain communication and consultation with the public, local businesses, voluntary and other relevant organisations. They have responsibility for forming and developing partnerships and influencing stakeholders; agreeing the distribution of grant aid or awards and determining the level of delegation to officers. The make-up of each Committee, Sub Committee, Advisory Panels and their terms of reference are set

out in Part 3 of the Constitution. The Advisory Panels play a significant role in key areas of work. For example, the Financial Policy Panel, helps to support the decisions Strategy & Resources Committee is required to make on financial matters and budget setting.

- 3.16 The breakdown of all the separate committees, sub committees, advisory panels and the groups, demonstrates the capacity needed across the Councillor structure to support Council decision making<sup>12</sup>.
- 3.17 The role and responsibilities of Councillors has expanded as the role of local government has significantly changed with the devolution of responsibilities and service provision since the last Review. For example, the Health and Social Care Act 2001 gives statutory functions in relation to the reviewing and scrutinising of local health service matters to O&S committees of local authorities that hold responsibility for social services. The Council's Health Liaison Panel fulfills important function for a number of second tier Councils and has developed a strong relationship with health bodies, even though the Council is not directly responsible for social services.

### Statutory & Regulatory Function

- 3.18 The Council has established a number of committees in order to discharge its statutory functions. The Constitution sets out the terms of reference for its Committees, it also gives details of the procedures to be used in committee meetings. The breakdown of appointments of Councillors to Committees, Sub Committees and Advisory Panels demonstrates the spread of decision making powers across the Council. There are 113 appointments necessary for this to function. A further 31 are necessary for the Officer/ Member Working Groups appointment by Committees are necessary to carry out the support function for effective decision making.

### Planning

- 3.19 The Council's Planning Committee operates as the single council wide committee. It has a membership of thirteen members and determines all strategic and major planning applications and planning applications which have not been delegated to Officers and those which are called in by Councillors.
- 3.20 The Council has a steady flow of planning applications and with the pressure for housing within Borough, Planning Committee meetings can be particularly demanding for Councillors. Applications often require high levels of preparation by Committee decision makers, for a Committee meeting. These meetings also generate significant public interest and involvement. Although there is scheme of delegation in place to Officers, all major and contested applications are required to go to Planning Committee. The Committee meets at least once every 6 weeks, with extra meetings being added as needed. By way of an example in 2019-2020 the Committee met 13 times during the course of the year. <sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Appendix 3: Appointments required to support Governance & external Partnerships

<sup>13</sup> Appendix 2: Committee Meetings Statistical Data



## Licensing

- 3.21 The Council's Licensing and Planning Policy Committee has a membership of ten Councillors. The Committee has responsibility on behalf of the Council for developing the Licensing Policy and keeping under review the administration of alcohol/entertainment licensing under the Licensing Act 2003. It also has responsibility for other areas of licensing such as taxis private hire, street trading, films and animals.
- 3.22 Members of the Committee are the only Councillors allowed to sit on Licensing (Hearings) Sub Committees which deal with alcohol/entertainment licensing under the Licensing Act 2003. These Sub Committees must comprise three members and they have responsibility for considering individual licensing applications where there are objections and reviews of granted licenses as well as the review of such licences.
- 3.23 There is also a separate Licensing Sub Committee (General) which draws its membership from the wider Council membership. The General Sub Committee determines other types of licences such as the grant, renewal of private hire, hackney carriage vehicles and driver licences, for Operator licences as well as the revocation of such. It also requires three members to sit as decision makers.
- 3.24 Both Sub Committees require trained members to sit and the preference is to avoid Members in whose Ward a site is located, to sit as a decision-maker, if possible. All the meetings take place during the day and this can restrict the pool of Members who may be available. The number of meetings can vary from year to year, as they are dependent on applications and any regulatory action, they are also sometimes cancelled at short notice because the parties concerned may have agreed a resolution.

## Standards Functions

- 3.25 The Standards Committee is made up of nine Members and has a Standards Hearing Sub Committee of three Members. The Committee, amongst other matters advises the Council on its duty to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by Members. It has a Sub-Committee which determines any complaints against Councillors which require a Sub-Committee Decision.
- 3.26 The work of the Standards Committee has grown since 2018, which lead to the work of the Chair being recognised for a special allowance award as part of the 2020 IRP review. It currently has a working group set up to work on constitutional changes to encourage greater public participation within the democratic processes.
- 3.27 An example of how the work of Council can be affected by external factors, is the report of the Committee on Standards in Public Life on Codes of Conduct for Members in 2019. The aim of Report was to address the problems within Local Government sector. In doing so, the Report made a number of good practice recommendations for local authorities to consider and report back upon. The Council's Standards Committee followed up on many of the recommendations early. For example it developed and introduced a new Code of Conduct for its Members in 2019.



## Audit, Crime & Disorder and Scrutiny Committee

- 3.28 Being a Committee based model of governance, the Council only has one committee which carries out a number of roles, including scrutiny. The Audit, Crime & Disorder and Scrutiny Committee has ten Councillors and fulfills a number of key statutory functions, and these are set out in Schedule 1 to Part 3 of the Constitution. This includes the Committee being the Crime and Disorder Committee under Section 19 of the Police and Justice Act 2006. The remit of this Committee requires its Members to have with a number of different specialisms. The Committee meets on average four times a year.
- 3.29 The Committee's level of activity is managed through its annual work programme. Any proposals for reviews are scrutinised by the Chair and Vice Chair with the relevant Heads of Service. They will also make sure adequate resources are available and that the potential outcomes of such reviews justify the resource and time necessary for such pieces of work.
- 3.30 The Committee 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 Committee may also be consulted on forthcoming decisions and the development of policy.

## Other Arrangements for the discharge of duties

- 3.31 The work of Councillors does not rest just with the formal committees. They are also required to support a number of other working groups, which help to drive or support policy development, expenditure, or project delivery. Currently there are six such internal groups, with 31 appointments.<sup>14</sup> The breakdown of Committees and groups with the number of appointments, evidences the number of Councillors needed to run the governance framework.<sup>15</sup>
- 3.32 For example, the Council has a Borough Investment Fund which offers grants to owners and occupiers of commercial buildings within the Borough, to improve and enhance shop fronts. It also operates a CIL Neighbourhood Scheme, which allows the Council to fund smaller infrastructure projects required by the community where development takes place. Successful local CIL applications for funding to date have included projects such as playground equipment, street lighting, footpath restoration and improvements to community facilities.
- 3.33 There is the Capital Member Group which reviews all proposals for Capital expenditure before plans are developed into proposals. There are invariably time limited working groups, set up to deal with specific matters. In the last year for example, the Council has the Electoral Review Task and Finish Group, Polling Stations Working Group, a Standards Working Group looking at public participation within the Constitution. Again Councillors need to be available to sit on such groups.

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<sup>14</sup> Appendix 3: Appointments to support Governance & External Partnerships

<sup>15</sup> Appendix 3: Appointments to support Governance & External Partnerships

## External Partnerships & Outside Bodies

- 3.34 The Council also has a range of joint committees and outside bodies and partnerships which all require an appointed Councillor. There are the unique partnerships such as the Conservators, which have been set up by legislation to preserve the Epsom Downs, where the Council sits with other key stakeholders. There is a joint Committee with the London Borough of Sutton to manage Nonsuch Park. The list of outside bodies, partnerships and appointments to external organisations is set out in Appendix 3. The Council has tried to manage the bodies its Councillors are able to sit on and there are a number of wider Surrey Committees which the Council has not appointed to. There is pressure on Councillors time and a balance has to be struck between the often competing workloads.

## Voluntary Sector

- 3.35 The Borough has a sizeable voluntary and community sector. Councillors frequently engage with these and other civic society organisations in their role as political representatives and community champions. A number of Councillors are appointed to outside bodies which serve the communities across the Borough, and these are set out in the table below:

No.	Body on which Represented	No of Councillor Reps
1	Age Concern (Epsom and Ewell) – General Committee	2
2	Committee of Management of Local Citizens Advice Bureau	2
3	Epsom and Ewell Town Twinning Association – Management Committee	2
4	Epsom Common Association	1
5	Ewell Parochial Trusts	3
6	Friends of Epsom and Ewell Parks	1
7	Central Surrey Community Action (formerly Voluntary Action Mid-Surrey)	1

- 3.36 Sitting on outside bodies is a further call on time and whilst the demands of these organisations varies significantly, they all require Members to attend meetings each year, along with the work programme which this carries. On top of formal appointments, a number of Councillors also support, often informally a range of local community and voluntary groups.
- 3.37 Given the financial challenges faced by the Council over the next decade, the workload of Committees and the need for setting up more time limited working groups, is expected to

increase. More will be required of Councillors in terms of innovation and redesign to address the ongoing challenges of the economic environment. The work of Committees on local area/ region based projects, will place further demands on their time. For example, in relation to the work with the Local Enterprise Partnership.

- 3.38 At a local level, a number of Surrey Councils have revised arrangements for the operation of Local Area Committees, which are currently run by Surrey County Council. This may result in a need to identify Members to sit on any revised version of the Local Area Committee, as adopted by other Surrey Councils. The Council does not itself operate any local area/neighbourhood committees and has no plans for any at present.

### Member Workloads

- 3.39 The Council currently requires 194 separate appointments by its Councillors to various seats or positions. A summary of this breakdown<sup>16</sup> illustrates both the level and balance of the Council's decision making, partnership and collaborative arrangements:

	Appointments required
Committees/Sub Committees/ Advisory Panels	113
Officer/Member Working Groups appointed by Committees	31 including subs
Member Champions	5
Joint Committees/Arrangements	32 including subs
Outside Bodies	13
<b>Total number of appointments required</b>	<b>194</b>

- 3.40 In an average year the Council will hold 64 Committees, Sub Committees and Advisory Panels meetings. The planning and delivery of these meetings requires an average of 45 call over meetings which involve the Chair, Vice Chair of a Committee and relevant officers. On average, appointed committee Members will attend around 5.4 meetings a month per year.<sup>17</sup>
- 3.41 In addition to the Committee workload of Councillors, the Member Workload Survey found that in an average month, 1 to 5 meetings accounted for 50% of meetings. These meetings are with Officers, other Members, Business and Community Groups. All meetings whether they are internal or external, require preparation time. They also inevitably require follow-up work. The number of Councillors available to engage and carry out these duties is critical to the successful delivery of outputs.

<sup>16</sup> Appendix 3 Appointments required to support Governance and External Partnerships & Outside Bodies

<sup>17</sup> Appendix 2 Committee Meetings Statistical Information.

## **Scheme of Delegation to Officers**

- 3.42 The Scheme of Delegation to Officers is in the process of a fundamental review. At present, in order to increase efficiency, decrease bureaucracy and reduce costs, new delegations are added as needed. However, the decision-making profile of the Council is based on the need for elected representatives to make strategic decisions. This is combined with the powers exercised by the various committees of the Council. When appropriate additional meetings are convened to deal with urgent matters. The change to the officer scheme of delegation will not change the work of the Council's Committees.

## 4 Community Involvement

- 4.1 A key reason given by those wishing to become a Councillor, is the role they can play in their communities to bring about improvements and represent the views of their residents. This driver, gives Councillors an insight into the problems, priorities and opportunities necessary for developing local solutions and action. It is therefore understandable that a significant proportion of their time is spent on engaging with residents.
- 4.2 The ratio of electors to Councillors should be such that there is easy access to elected representatives. 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 at Epsom and Ewell.
- 4.3 Council is currently involved in a number of projects and initiatives which has generated an increase in the workload of Councillors. For example the work associated with the development of a new Local Plan. Residents are seeking information from their Councillors on the impact that various proposals will have on their neighbourhood, as well as the Borough more generally.
- 4.4 There are examples of the partnership working which is helping to deliver schemes and projects for the Borough which sit outside the work of the Council. For example, a local community initiative to bring a statue of Emily Davison to Epsom Town Centre has involved active engagement by Councillors.

### Casework

- 4.5 The most significant change since the last Electoral Review has been in technology. The direct effect of this has been the method of communication. Technology has changed the ways in which Councillors are able to interact with their communities and their constituents. The impact of this on the lives of Councillors is not something to be underestimated. The easy access and extensive use of mobile telephones, email and social media has increased expectations by the public from both Councillors and the Council in terms of access and immediacy of response. This has not meant there is no one to one contact. Many Councillors see personal and on-site engagement with residents as a key part of their role and, for some communities, the only contact remains in person. In addition, casework arising from austerity, both nationally and locally, also accounts for some of the more complex casework around housing and homelessness and personal support.
- 4.6 The Member Workload Survey identifies the type of subject matter along with amount of time to deal with these issues. Residents in some of these situations can be experiencing enormous stress, requiring both sensitivity and time from their elected representatives. Their Councillor is often their first port of call to help and to talk to.

- 4.7 Planning enquires produces a great deal of casework for Councillors at a Ward level. Proposals for development or unauthorised works can generate strong reactions. The size of Planning Committee aims to reflect the make-up of the Borough, which means there needs to be capacity at Ward level for residents' views to be heard.
- 4.8 The way in which Councillors engage with their residents vary. There is a range between holding local surgeries, writing blogs and attending public meetings such as those of local residents or single issues. The access to information and support from elected representatives has changed considerably since the last review. The use and easy access of the internet has replaced a high proportion of direct contact. Councillors will invariably respond directly to their residents but will seek the assistance of Officers as and when required. In almost all cases the Councillors will remain engaged until a matter has been resolved.
- 4.9 The amount of information available electronically has also grown exponentially. Even though the Council provides more information, the level of direct contact with Councillors on matters of information remains high. There is an expectation from the public that their Councillor will respond to any matter and will do so by return.
- 4.10 Since the start of pandemic, the method of interaction has had to change, and Councillors have adapted by having virtual meetings instead of in person. The level of case related contacts and how they are handled, evidences the high levels of engagement with and by Councillors. For example 30% said they had 100 + requests of assistance and support over the last year, 18% have between 51-60 requests. The time spent by Members on dealing or supporting case work again highlights that 46% of respondees are spending between 6 to 9 hours each week, with 6% spending between 20-29 hours per week.
- 4.11 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 straightaway. Councillors regularly use social media as a tool for the Council's messages. Recent examples have included messages on diversity, keeping safe during Covid, support of businesses.<sup>18</sup>
- 4.12 The nature of expectations and how contact is made with Councillors for support has changed since the last Review. The use of telephone calls from members of public as the first method of contact has fallen over the years. More enquiries start through the receipt of an e-mail. Any perception of delay in responding by a Councillor is met with complaints to the Council.
- 4.11 An area of high community Councillor contact relates to service requests. Some members of the public feel if they seek the support of their Councillor, they will be able to influence a matter or an outcome. The Member Workload Survey evidences the breadth of enquires, along with their frequency. The reasons for why Members have been contacted again evidence how Members are seen as the problem solvers for many residents. The Member Workload Survey highlights the highest areas of contact were:

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<sup>18</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KSLn3Mj4A0I&list=PLU1GWtl\\_OsxVvtsyPcU4p1LiS\\_q6OhSIIm&index=2](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KSLn3Mj4A0I&list=PLU1GWtl_OsxVvtsyPcU4p1LiS_q6OhSIIm&index=2)

Related to Council Services			
Planning  <b>94%</b>	Parking & Highways  <b>91%</b> <sup>19</sup>	Anti-social behaviour & Council service  <b>88%</b>	Parks  <b>79%</b>
Rubbish collection & Fly tipping/flyposting  <b>76%</b>	Noise nuisance  <b>67%</b>	Housing & Enforcement/other regulatory matters  <b>64%</b>	
Not related to Council Services:			
Non EEBC services  <b>73%</b>	Neighbour disputes  <b>52%</b>	Parking & Highways  <b>91%</b>	

- 4.12 The figures evidence the time Councillors spend advocating and representing individual residents ' concerns by trying to broker a solution both for matters related to Council Services as well as those which fall outside. The percentages also show that Councillors are sometimes the only contact for many who may not have anyone else.
- 4.13 Council Officers are approached to provide information, to explain or address the issues raised by casework. On average Officers are referred five casework related questions a week, throughout the year, where input is needed to enable a Councillor to respond to an enquiry. However, invariably the Councillor will respond directly to their resident, there is no officer support for the management of Councillor caseloads.
- 4.14 To be able to respond in the manner the public expects, adds to the need for a sustainable Council Size number.

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<sup>19</sup> Highways and on street parking matters are a County Council matter

## 5. Recommendation on Council Size

### Summary

- 5.1 The review of the Council's Size has taken into account the information and evidence set out in this Submission. The Commission's technical guidance provides no 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. The key issue 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.
- 5.2 In considering options for Council size, Members of the Task & Finish Group focus remained on ability to deliver the Council's governance, to serve the Borough community, and reflect its financial position. The work did find a clear case for maintaining the current number of Councillors at their present level as one which is sustainable. However, even though there are a group of Councillors who currently undertake six or more appointments on committees/ outside bodies, there is capacity to increase the workload of those Councillors with fewer appointments.
- 5.3 Councils need the ability to attract a wide variety of applicants to the role of Councillor. The issue of capacity and balance, have been considered in terms of the various options for Council size. It remains important that Councillors are able to exercise their roles as decision makers along with their ability to interact effectively with their constituents, and still carry on with their day to day activities or responsibilities.
- 5.4 On balance, the Council considers 35 would allow the Council to continue to operate its governance structure. The number is based on requiring Councillors to take on more responsibility but one which is assessed to be sustainable.

### Committee arrangements maintained since last review

- 5.5 The Council considered 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 the Localism Act, the Committee structure has come back into favour as a leadership and governance model, with an increasing number of local authorities converting back to a Committee system.
- 5.6 The Council conducts reviews of its Constitution and these have not highlighted any concerns with the Committee system. It is considered that with a Council Size of 35 Councillors it is possible to maintain the effective formal decision-making and scrutiny structure whilst continuing to adhere to relevant legislative requirements.

### The changing way in which residents' access information, services and support

- 5.7 Since the last Electoral Review in 1997, 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.

- 5.8 This form of access has dramatically increased in recent years where residents increasingly 'self-serve' from the Council's website, reducing the need for individuals to approach Councillors directly on a range of activities. Councillors continue to engage with residents in a variety of ways, including e-mail, websites and by way of social media. Although this makes it significantly easier for residents to access information and services than was previously the case, the evidence is that residents will still direct service requests to their Councillors irrespective of the information the Council has on its website.
- 5.9 The Council moved to paperless meetings in 2016 and has allocated electronic devices to all Councillors. This further supports Councillors in their work and streamlines processes.

### **Councillors Workloads**

- 5.10 The Member Workload Survey<sup>20</sup> provides a valuable insight into the work and time Councillors spend on Council and community activities. The level of work for Committees has been consistent over the years. It is the view of the Council that ratio of Councillors to electors needs to enable and allow effective local representation. The time spent by Members on dealing or supporting case work again highlights that 46% of respondents are spending between 6 to 9 hours each week, with 6% spending between 20-29 hours per week. This is on top of the average of preparing for and attending just under six committees a month.
- 5.11 The nature of the strong relationship with the voluntary sector is evidenced by the Council appointments to bodies such as Age Concern, Central Surrey Community Action and the Committee for Management of Local Citizens Advice Bureau. The relationship has proved vital during the pandemic. These relationships will be added to further as the Council helps the Borough to recover and Build Back Better.

### **Availability of Members to sit on Committees**

- 5.12 There are natural restrictions on who can be selected to sit on Committees. The application of legislation limits the ability of ungrouped Members to be able to sit on Committees. This can change but it requires all Councillor agreement or changes to the Constitution. A reduction to 35 Councillors would lead to 34 Councillors being available to take on decision making and scrutiny roles, since it would have to exclude the Mayor

### **Ratio of Councillors to Electorate**

- 5.13 Epsom and Ewell is home currently to approximately 80,000 people. The movement changes in electorate over time demonstrates the growth in the electorate figures as well as the increase in the ratio of Councillor to electorate. The Commission started the last review in 1997, it concluded

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<sup>20</sup> Appendix 1 Member Workload Survey

in 1999 with the reduction in 1 Member and 1 Ward.

- 5.14 The Council carried out a periodic review in 2012, which showed an increase in average ratio of Councillor to electorate. This is summarised in the table below:

Year	Wards	No of Councillors	Electorate	Average Ratio Councillor to electorate
1997	14	39	51,284	1:1315
2012	13	38	56,898	1:1497
2021	13	38	59,262	1:1559
2027 Projected on numbers only	13	38	63,183*	1:1662
		35		1:1805

\*to be confirmed

- 5.15 The forecasting methodology<sup>21</sup> sets out the Council's approach to projected electorate figures for 2027.
- 5.16 The electorate of Epsom & Ewell is currently 59262, equating to 1,560 electors per Councillor. The growth forecast by 2023 is an electorate of 63,183. This would increase electors per Councillor to 1,662 for 38 Councillors and 1,805 for 35. 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 reduces to 35.

### Local Circumstances

- 5.16 Of all the second tier Surrey Councils, who have undertaken a review recently, all have had a reduction in their Council Size:

Year of Review	Council	Council Size Change (Council recommendations to LGBCE)
2015	Woking	17 % reduction (36 to 30)
2015	Elmbridge	20% reduction (60 to 48)
2017	Surrey Heath	14% reduction (40 to 34) <sup>22</sup>
2019	Reigate and Banstead	12% reduction (51 to 45)
2019	Runnymede	2.38% reduction (42-41)

<sup>21</sup> Appendix 5 Forecasting Methodology

<sup>22</sup> The Commission recommended 35 Councillors instead of the 34 suggested by the Council.

5.17 It is made clear in the Commission's guidance, that a Council submission on size will be judged on the basis of a case for the circumstances of that Council. The governance structure of a Cabinet/ Executive model is very different to that of a Committee model. The number of Councillors needed to support decision making structures is also very different.

### **The financial position of the Council**

5.18 The Council in line with the local government generally, has faced severe challenges over the last decade. At first it was as a result of the global economic crisis which commenced in 2008. The current uncertainties flowing from the Brexit and now Covid add to the financial pressure on both local authorities and the communities they serve. The approach of the Council has been to reduce its costs through redesigning services to make them more efficient.

### **Conclusion**

- 5.19 In determining a recommendation on Council Size, the Council has had regard to its:
- governance arrangements and how it makes decisions;
  - its scrutiny functions relating to its own decision making and the Council's responsibilities to outside bodies; and
  - the role of Councillors in the local community and how they engage with their residents, conduct casework and represent the Council on local partner organisations.
- 5.20 The Council therefore recommends a proposal for a reduction of Council Size from the current 38 to 35 Members.

# Appendix