

# DEMOCRACY AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE MEETING

Date: Tuesday 23 November 2021  
Time: 6.30 pm  
Venue: Town Hall, High Street, Maidstone

Membership:

Councillors Mrs Blackmore (Vice-Chairman), Cooke, Cooper, English, Hastie, Perry, Purle (Chairman), M Rose and R Webb

*The Chairman will assume that all Members will read the reports before attending the meeting. Officers are asked to assume the same when introducing reports.*

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## **AMENDED AGENDA**

Page No.

1. Apologies for Absence
2. Notification of Substitute Members
3. Urgent Items
4. Notification of Visiting Members
5. Disclosures by Members and Officers
6. Disclosures of Lobbying
7. To consider whether any items should be taken in private because of the possible disclosure of exempt information.
8. Minutes of the Meeting Held on 8 September 2021
9. Presentation of Petitions (if any)
10. Question and Answer Session for Members of the Public
11. Questions from Members to the Chairman (if any)
12. Committee Work Programme
13. Reports of Outside Bodies
14. Church Road, Otham Review
15. Governance Working Group - Update

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**Issued on Friday 19 November 2021**

**Continued Over/:**

*Alison Broom*

**Alison Broom, Chief Executive**

16. **Local Government Boundary Review - Council Size Submission (Report to follow after Member event)**

**48 - 87**

17. Whole Council Elections - Further Options

**INFORMATION FOR THE PUBLIC**

In order to ask a question at this meeting in person or by remote means, please call **01622 602899** or email [committee@maidstone.gov.uk](mailto:committee@maidstone.gov.uk) by 5 p.m. one clear working day before the meeting (i.e. by 5 p.m. on Friday 19 November 2021). You will need to provide the full text in writing.

If your question is accepted, you will be provided with instructions as to how you can access the meeting.

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# Agenda Item 16

## Democracy and General Purposes Committee

23 November 2021

### Local Government Boundary Review – Council Size Submission

<b>Final Decision-Maker</b>	Council
<b>Lead Head of Service</b>	Angela Woodhouse, Head of Policy, Communications and Governance
<b>Lead Officer and Report Author</b>	Ryan O’Connell, Democratic and Electoral Services Manager
<b>Classification</b>	Public
<b>Wards affected</b>	All

#### Executive Summary

This report sets out the Council’s Size Submission to be recommended to Council for submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England. The submission recommends, and provides the evidence for, a Council size of 48 Councillors.

#### Purpose of Report

Decision

#### This report makes the following recommendations to this Committee:

That Council be recommended to approve the Council Size Submission document (Appendix A) as the Council’s formal submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England as part of the Council’s Local Government Boundary Review.

#### Timetable

<b>Meeting</b>	<b>Date</b>
Democracy and General Purposes Committee	23 November 2021
Council	8 December 2021

# Local Government Boundary Review – Council Size Submission

## 1. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
<b>Impact on Corporate Priorities</b>	<p>The four Strategic Plan objectives are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Embracing Growth and Enabling Infrastructure</li> <li>• Safe, Clean and Green</li> <li>• Homes and Communities</li> <li>• A Thriving Place</li> </ul> <p>We do not expect the recommendations will by themselves materially affect achievement of corporate priorities. However, they will support the Council’s overall achievement of its aims by ensuring an appropriate size for Council.</p>	Democratic and Electoral Services Manager
<b>Cross Cutting Objectives</b>	<p>The four cross-cutting objectives are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Heritage is Respected</li> <li>• Health Inequalities are Addressed and Reduced</li> <li>• Deprivation and Social Mobility is Improved</li> <li>• Biodiversity and Environmental Sustainability is respected</li> </ul> <p>The Local Government Boundary Review aims to establish a suitable Council Size and equality of democratic representation for the electorate of Maidstone. By doing so it indirectly impacts on all objectives.</p>	Democratic and Electoral Services Manager
<b>Risk Management</b>	<p>The main risks associated with his activity are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. That the Local Government Boundary Commission do not receive/accept a Council Size Submission from the</li> </ol>	Democratic and Electoral Services Manager

	<p>Council and determine Council Size without Council input;</p> <p>2. That the Council puts forward an inappropriate Council size that impacts on the Council's future Governance capabilities.</p> <p>Both of these risks are managed through ensuring a robust evidence led process is followed.</p>	
<b>Financial</b>	<p>Whilst changing council size could have a financial consequence, it is not a driver for the changes and proposed council submission.</p> <p>(Please see note on staffing below)</p>	Director of Finance and Business Improvement
<b>Staffing</b>	<p>The Council size submission will indirectly impact on whether additional staffing is required to support Members in the future. If this is the case the need for additional staffing would be handled separately through the budget process.</p>	Democratic and Electoral Services Manager
<b>Legal</b>	<p>This work is part of the Local Government Boundary Review being conducted by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England and the submission has been put together in accordance with their template, guidance and agreed timetable. The review will be conducted by the LGBCE under its powers in the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009.</p>	Democratic and Electoral Services Manager
<b>Privacy and Data Protection</b>	<p>No impact identified.</p>	Policy and Information Team
<b>Equalities</b>	<p>No direct impacts identified, however, one of the key aims of the boundary review is to ensure that there is equality for electors in their democratic representation.</p>	Democratic and Electoral Services Manager
<b>Public Health</b>	<p>None</p>	Democratic and Electoral Services Manager
<b>Crime and Disorder</b>	<p>None</p>	Democratic and Electoral

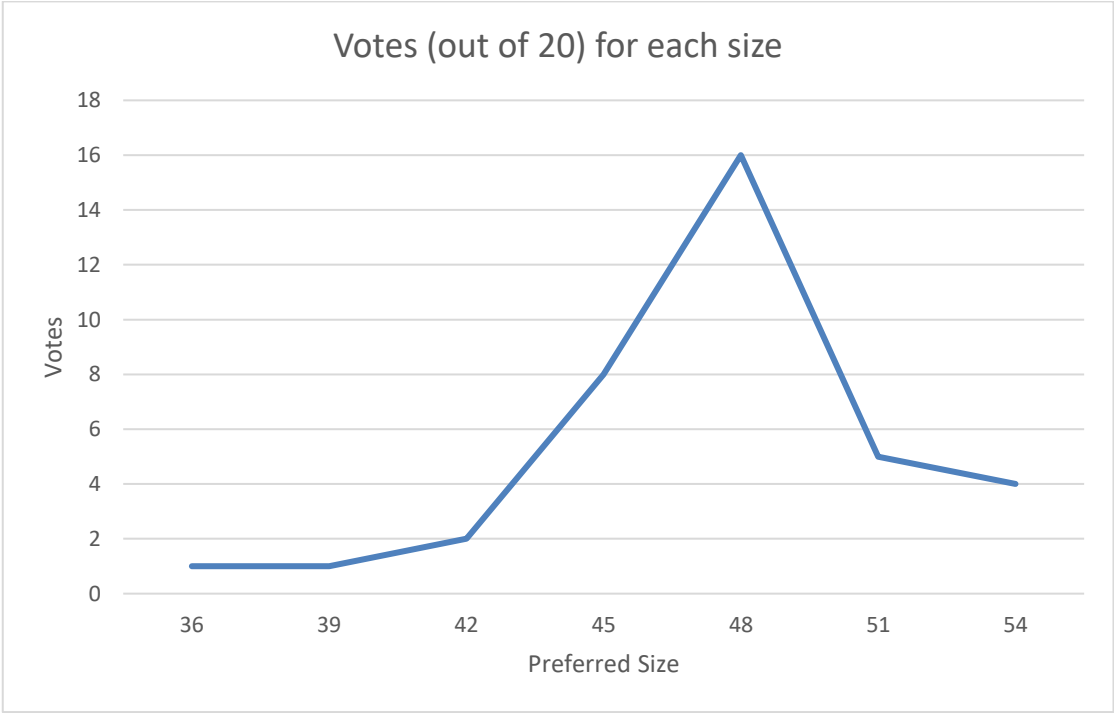
		Services Manager
<b>Procurement</b>	None	Democratic and Electoral Services Manager
<b>Biodiversity and Climate Change</b>	No direct impacts, however, biodiversity and climate change has been identified as a key priority within the workshops carried out on the size submission.	Democratic and Electoral Services Manager

**2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

2.1 This report is the next part of a series of reports on bringing forward the Council’s Size Submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission (LGBCE).

2.2 There have been three workshops held for all Members to attend that looked at future challenges, the role of the councillor and discussed council size. The third workshop held on 17 November 2021 established Members’ preferred size.

2.3 The key outcome from the third workshop was Members indicating their preferred size. All political groups were represented and 21 Members attended the event (20 were present for the voting). Their detailed consideration of the available evidence at the event and the distribution of council size preference based on voting was as follows:



- 2.4 The Committee are asked to consider the draft size submission and recommend it to Council on 8 December 2021 for approval and submission to the LGBCE.
  - 2.5 Anyone may make a submission to the Commission on Council size. This process concentrates on the Council's formal submission, but groups or individuals can make submissions too, separate to this process.
  - 2.6 The review of Council size is an opportunity for the Council to make positive changes to how it supports Members going forwards, to feed positively into the new Executive arrangements being considered, and to help shape the boundary review into something that works for the borough.
  - 2.7 The arguments in favour of the proposed submission are made within the submission itself as it is a document that needs to make its own case independently of this report.
  - 2.8 It is paramount that the Council's submission is an evidence led document, that makes a strong case for whatever size the Council wishes to have. The Commission have made it clear that the Council's own submission will carry no inherent additional weight over another submission and the case must therefore be made as strongly as possible.
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### **3. AVAILABLE OPTIONS**

- 3.1 The Committee are asked to consider the council's size submission for recommendation to full Council. In doing so the committee can amend or change the document.
  - 3.2 The Council could decide not to make a size submission, but this would result in the Commission imposing a size on the Council or at least considering Council size with no input from the Council. This is not recommended.
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### **4. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 4.1 That the recommended Council Size Submission at Appendix A be recommended to Council for approval.
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### **5. RISK**

- 5.1 The two key risks are considered in the issues table above under '1.'
- 5.2 By making a robust submission both those risks are managed.

## **6. CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK**

- 6.1 A series of 3 Member workshops have been held and have fed directly into the Council Size Submission.
  - 6.2 A Councillor Workload Survey was conducted with all Councillors given the opportunity to respond. The summary of that survey forms part of the evidence base to the Council's recommended Size Submission.
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## **7. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION**

- 7.1 If approved the submission will then go to full Council on 8 December 2021.
  - 7.2 If approved the submission will then go to the LGBCE for consideration in January 2022 where they will agree their preferred size for the Council.
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## **8. REPORT APPENDICES**

Appendix A: Local Government Boundary Review – Council Size Submission

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## **9. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

None.



# Maidstone Borough Council

Council Size Submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission  
December 2021

## About this Submission

This response is made by Maidstone Borough Council as its formal council size submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission for its local government boundary review of Maidstone Borough.

Maidstone Borough Council meets the Commission's criteria for electoral inequality, with eight of the 26 wards (31%) having a variance outside 10%, and one with a variance outside 20%. Legislation requires councils to be reviewed "from time to time" and, as Maidstone Borough was last reviewed in 2000, the authority also meets this criterion.

In putting together this submission the Council has considered its future model of governance, how it expects the Borough to change over the next 10-20 years and what challenges it faces. The key objective was therefore to recommend a size that:

*"Enables the Council to be proactive in its response to a changing environment, to provide effective strategic leadership for its residents and to ensure all parts of the community are fairly represented."*

## Local Authority Profile

The borough of Maidstone covers 40,000 hectares and is situated in the heart of Kent. With an estimated population of 171,800 residents (expected to rise to 192,700 by 2033) the borough has a population density of 4.4 persons per hectare. The Borough has an urban rural split with over two-thirds of the borough's population located in Maidstone, the County town. The town is located in the north west of the borough abutting its neighbouring authorities with one of the largest retail centres in the south east. The extents, boundaries and areas of the town are heavily influenced by the Medway running through its centre and the extensive one-way network of traffic. The town also has three main railway stations (running on two lines), Maidstone Barracks, Maidstone East and Maidstone West.

A substantial rural hinterland surrounds the urban area, which encompasses a small section of metropolitan green belt (1.3%) and 27% of the borough forms part of the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The urban area features a more widely dispersed rural population to the north, on the north downs across several small villages, whilst to the South and East the rural areas are anchored around some larger rural service centres. The M2 and M20 run through the northern part of the borough providing good West to East connections, but less accessible North to South.

The borough's population is split 49% male, 51% female with an average age of just under 41. 61% of the borough are of working age (16-64). 94% of the population is white with 6% BAME. The majority religion is Christianity at 62% with 27% having no religion. 4.5% of the population claim disability benefits.

House prices are an issue in the borough with the average house price being eleven times the average salary and there are significant housebuilding and growth targets for the borough. A significant amount of housing growth has already taken place and this can particularly be seen in the south of the town as the urban area expands, which is evidenced in the electorate disparities underpinning the review.

With the Council itself based in the county town this geography and setting has both practical impacts for Councillors and the conduct of Council business with some Councillors within walking distance of the council chamber and others having significant journeys, and service impacts with the split between rural and urban and the effect of one large urban centre. The rural areas are parished

whereas the town is not, some areas are expansive, whilst others have higher population densities and whilst this impacts on how services are delivered to some extent it also impacts on the role of councillors from different areas.

The Borough has some affluent areas, and is not generally deprived, however there are a couple of areas of significant deprivation at a Lower Super Output Area level that present their own unique characteristics. The Borough cannot be considered to be either distinctly urban, nor distinctly rural but representative of each.

### Review Context and Future Challenges

The Council's last boundary review was conducted by the Boundary Commission for England in 2000/2001. That review did not look at council size as an issue meaning that the Council's size of 55 Members has been in place since the Council was formed in 1974. There have already been significant changes to society, technology and practice over that period. Due to the significant period of time since the last review, conducted under an old regime, there is no direct comparison possible with previous outcomes.

What is known is that historically Maidstone has held elections by thirds and had both Cabinet and Committee systems. It has alternated over the last 20 years between no overall control and slim Conservative majorities. In reviewing the Council's size and its boundaries it is also crucial to consider the dichotomy of the Borough with its rural and urban split and the dual sets of challenges this raises for the Council and Councillors alike.

This submission will therefore focus on developing a Council fit for the future, facing the challenges ahead with a number of councillors and system of Governance that enables effective representation whilst being sufficiently streamlined, accountable and transparent to deliver effectively for the whole Borough.

In looking forwards it is acknowledged that the Council reorganised from an Executive (Cabinet) system in 2015 adopting the committee system, however the Council has now determined that it will be switching back to an Executive model. This model will include some elements of the committee system to involve 'backbench' Members in pre-decision scrutiny. This will be discussed in more detail later in this submission but the Council will be locked in to an executive model for a minimum of five years, though the number of committees and exact operation could be flexed within that overall model.

The Council has also retained elections-by thirds, although a majority voted for whole council elections at a recent Council meeting, and the issue will continue to be a live one as we progress through the boundary review. Council size will therefore need to be considered as a multiple of three as a planning assumption.

We have held several events with councillors to understand their views of the challenges facing them and the Council. The four main areas of challenge identified can be summarised as follows:

- Finances
- Infrastructure
- Environment – biodiversity and climate change
- Technology and the agility to embrace change

- Finances – it is anticipated that financial constraints on councils will continue, with the drive for self-sufficiency for councils continuing apace. Whilst, as a district, Maidstone does not have the challenges and linkages to central funding of social care or education to contend with, pressures will continue in all areas. Whilst broadly this will mean the Council will need to continue to look for a return on its investments where it can, it will also need to be responsive enough to grant funding and bidding to other sources as and when they become available. Covid project bidding and other recent examples from Government highlight the need for ‘shovel ready’ projects to be pulled off the shelf when funding pots are available.

The Council also feels that another key change, whilst perhaps not directly a challenge as the other elements are, is that of increased responsibilities being handed to Local Government, but coupled with more restrictions and prescription on their use. Recent changes in planning, for example with the imposition of central housing targets, are considered a key example of this. Additional responsibilities passed to the Council without the requisite funding would be considered challenges and something the Council would need to be nimble enough to respond to.

With the continued budget pressures all discretionary activity is constantly kept under review. Though some discretionary activities (such as planning enforcement) will remain priorities other services may not and the Council will need to either transform low priority services, reduce them, or look at alternative ways of funding them.

- Infrastructure – Maidstone has a strategic objective to embrace growth and this needs to be carried out in a sustainable way across all areas; but the delivery of infrastructure to support growth has been raised as a key challenge. Whilst not a consideration for Council size directly Maidstone is keen to explore the possibilities of Unitary status and devolved competencies. This is due in major part to the acute infrastructure issues faced by the town and the borough as a whole. Whilst mechanisms exist through planning, such as s106 and CIL, to fund infrastructure, timing and delivery (or lack thereof) remains a frustration. Unless key infrastructure is delivered these issues will only grow over time especially as housing continues to be a key requirement locally (see house prices versus wages) as well as via central targeting. The Council has looked at alternative means of infrastructure provision to support growth, such as through garden communities, but regardless the ability to either deliver directly or influence the delivery of infrastructure will remain a fundamental issue over the next ten to twenty years.
- Environment – Biodiversity and Climate Change – alongside the other elements here and underpinning the delivery of all services and infrastructure as well as linking to technology is the globally significant priority of addressing biodiversity and climate change. The Council declared twin biodiversity and climate change emergencies and has adopted a Biodiversity and Climate Change action plan. A key facet of that plan is embedding it into the culture across the council and factoring it in to all decisions. To do this it will be important that as decision makers all councillors are well briefed and trained in biodiversity and climate change issues, and fully engaged in the topic.
- Technology and the agility to embrace change – as the Council moves forward to address the challenges to service delivery the ability of technology to enable the Council to do more with less and to improve its interface with residents will be crucial. The use of technology will also underpin the Council’s response to climate change, for example through electrifying its own fleet.

Embracing technology is more than just flicking a switch, and this is true for other changes too. So whether its cutting edge technologies such as AI or redesigning how services are structured and delivered so that they are more effective, the Council's culture will need to be responsive to change and to use tools such as data analytics to drive its decisions. In this way it is important going forwards that a resilient and responsive council has officers and councillors who embrace that culture, are brave in decision making; understanding the risks and rewards of delivering change.

## Council Size Considerations

### Context, Assumptions and Evidence

Maidstone is in the process of switching back to a Cabinet and Scrutiny model of governance ('executive model') from its committee system. The new system is currently being worked up and will run until May 2022 to finalise in its entirety. However, the approach, whether through scrutiny or policy advisory committees, is to have the best elements of the committee system, with engaged 'backbench' councillors combined with a responsive executive able to provide leadership, direction and take decisions with direct member accountability.

This changing environment at the time of this council size submission provides a significant challenge in using more established methods for determining council size, particularly when the last review was twenty years ago, carried out under the previous methodology. However, it also provides a significant opportunity for the Council to shape both its structure and its size at the same time in order to achieve the objectives of this submission.

What we do know about the new model is that it is likely to require extra resourcing and support from officers to reinstate an Executive and Overview and Scrutiny functions, whilst maintaining policy advisory committees. We can also safely assume, based on experience of operating executive models in the past that the overall expectation would be that by adopting an executive a smaller number of councillors would take on more of the work – leading to a slight reduction in the overall numbers required to attend meetings and potentially increasing the numbers of councillors with relatively few attendances.

With these assumptions in mind the following evidence will be used to support the analysis for the preferred (and the rejected) Council Size.

**APPENDIX 1 – CIPFA Nearest Neighbour Comparisons** – this sets out the comparisons between Maidstone Borough Council and other authorities of similar size and type. It shows Maidstone's current numbers are within a number at the top end of the comparison group and that recent reviews have tended towards lower numbers and higher electorates per member than our current figure. Also included in this appendix is a comparison of electorates across Wards highlighting the range of existing electorates that Councillors currently represent and current disparities.

**APPENDIX 2 – Attendance Workload including projections on the Executive Model** – this sets out the attendance workload over the last eleven years. From this data (excluding 19/20 as it was impacted by meetings ceasing in March and April 2020) we can see that the average attendance workload has reduced ever so slightly from 2015/16 (committee system) onwards whilst average attendance as risen slightly from 90.3% to 91.1%.

**APPENDIX 3 – Committee Workload Breakdown** – this appendix sets out the split between different committees on the types and manner of work they carry out. Some of this data will be used to model the new arrangements, but its purpose here is to demonstrate and show that not all

committees have the same workloads, or types of work. There is a stark contrast with attendance at Planning Committee or Council and the Maidstone Joint Transportation Board for example. This also highlights that with the introduction of an executive the bulk of decision making aside from regulatory functions will be taken by fewer Members who form the executive.

APPENDIX 4 – Spread of Workload Across the Councillor Cohort – this sets out the average spread of attendances over anonymised ranked councillors. Please note the membership of the council has changed over that period and the purpose of the document is to show the spread of workload likely to be impacted by a switch back to executive arrangements. This is the key piece of evidence underpinning the proposed reduction in the number of Councillors.

APPENDIX 5 – Councillor Workload Survey Summary – this sets out the detailed summary of the Councillor Workload Survey conducted in September/October 2021. The survey was aimed specifically at providing evidence for this submission rather than remuneration (remuneration will be reviewed separately as part of the new executive arrangements). Key messages/themes from the survey are:

- The greatest proportion of Councillor time is spent on Council business;
- There is a spread of workloads that varies significantly across councillors;
- Planning Committee carries a significant time requirement for councillors (in both attendance and training);
- Members dealing with case work are most likely to be following closely as it is resolved, rather than handing it over to officers to see through to conclusion;
- Whilst Members find that officers across the council support them, there is Member interest in dedicated officer support to Members for managing/routing casework and queries; and
- 56% of responses regarding technology and its impacts on council work were positive (vs 28% negative).

### Strategic Leadership

The final number of portfolios has yet to be determined, and in any event can be altered under executive arrangements year on year. However, the key principle established by portfolios vs committees is that more of the decision-making workload will be borne by fewer members.

Portfolio-holders will be paid special responsibility allowances and delegated decisions will be possible. However, a key principle of the new arrangements is for collective decision making at regular Executive meetings to be the preference. This may cause a reduction in individual decision making, however there is a desire to see portfolio holders fully engaged with the scrutiny process of decisions in their areas, whether through policy advisory committees or scrutiny committees.

The scheme of delegation for the new executive arrangements has yet to be confirmed with work being carried out over 2021/22. However, it is a safe assumption that the split between Members and Officers will remain broadly the same, with some tidying up of key areas the likely changes.

Major decisions, or Key Decisions, will be taken by the executive – the number of councillors in the executive will depend on the final number of portfolios that are settled upon, but it will be between 4 and 9.

A projection of the range of workload impact of the new executive model has been included in Appendix 2.

## Accountability

**Internal Scrutiny** - The aim of the new executive arrangements is to capture the good elements of the committee system through wider member involvement. Historically Maidstone has had a highly regarded Overview and Scrutiny function with examples of best practice and is keen to ensure the new model captures that legacy. Key to that is officer support for members fully engaged in scrutiny functions. The model therefore proposes both overview and scrutiny and policy advisory committees (PACs) though the precise implementation of this is being confirmed.

The current approach is for four PACs and one Overview and Scrutiny Committee though this could change dependent on final portfolios and decisions of council. The aim is to have sufficient committees to effectively cover decision making portfolios and an overview and scrutiny committee that can carry out reviews, statutory scrutiny functions, and policy development. This could lead to the creation of task and finish panels to carry out scrutiny reviews, something that has been well utilised at Maidstone.

In considering Council size it is important that Members can be engaged in each PAC, and particularly on the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to give sufficient time to both hold the Executive to account and conduct meaningful reviews and policy development.

**Statutory Function – Planning Committee** - The Council has a single planning committee which has a high workload. Frequency of planning committee meetings is currently set at one every 28 days, though in reality it is 2 every 28 days due to adjournments. This is currently under review with the possibility of 1 every 21 days instead. This would reduce the overall workload on Members.

Maidstone has 96% of its decisions delegated to officers and its planning terms of reference are regularly kept under review. As more neighbourhood plans are adopted it will be important to keep the impacts of that under review on workloads. There are no significant changes planned to the scheme of delegation as it is considered to function well.

There is work underway to review the efficiency of the Planning Committee, but at this stage there are no further changes planned to how the planning committee operates.

Planning also comes with a significant training requirement.

The Council currently has a planning referrals committee (covered by its Policy and Resources Committee) that will need consideration given to it under the new arrangements. This is used in exceptional cases only and meets less than once a year.

The implications of council size and the planning committee size are included in considerations of size below.

**Statutory Function - Licensing Committee** – the Licensing Committee carries out its policing setting in conjunction with a service committee, and this will need to be factored into the new executive portfolios when the new model comes into place. The regulatory functions of the committee are carried out through Licensing Sub-Committee meetings called when required. There are 9-12 such hearings held a year. The sub-committee membership of three is drawn from the overall Licensing Committee membership of 13 which has a relatively light workload with a need for training at the start of the year. No changes to this are planned and the system works well providing a suitably sized pool of Members to draw from.

## Statutory Function – Audit Governance and Standards Committee

The Audit Governance and Standards Committee (AGS) has a split of work types as shown in Appendix 3 which relies heavily on ‘noting’. However, it should be noted that in the context of AGS ‘noting’ is ensuring that the key documents are assured, scrutinised and presented transparently for Members and the public. There are no changes planned to the AGS function under the new model proposed and the workload is not considered onerous.

## External partnerships

**Mid Kent Services** – Mid Kent Services has a significant role at Maidstone. Of Maidstone’s 477.3FTE, 148FTE are employed in shared services. This makes direct comparisons on impacts on Maidstone’s staffing sizes difficult as Maidstone’s staffing has increased over the last 10 years even whilst budgets have reduced. This increased reliance on shared services with its primary partners Swale Borough Council and Tunbridge Wells Borough Council is in response to the increased financial pressures the Council faces. Shared Services also exist with Ashford Borough Council and Sevenoaks District Council. The management of this significant proportion of staff (as well as those shared service staff who do work for Maidstone but are employed by other partners) is carried out through a single Mid Kent Services Directorate overseen by the Mid Kent Services Board – where input and direction is provided by the Leaders of the respective councils. This is not considered to be an onerous governance arrangement and has been running well for over 15 years. However, it is something to be mindful of in terms of the awareness and understanding of Members as to how services are run and will be particularly important for portfolio-holders where it crosses into their area of responsibility.

## Outside Bodies

<b>Year</b>	<b>Number of Outside Bodies</b>	<b>Number of Positions</b>
2016/17	42	62
2017/18	41	66
2018/19	35	56
2019/20	33	58
2020/21	33	57
2021/22	34	59

The numbers of Outside body places have varied little over the last 6 years. However, the Council introduced a review mechanism for vacant positions in 2020, which will help to manage this workload. Although there are occasionally requests for additional places on boards or groups, the over trend is expected to continue slightly down.

## Community Leadership

It is strongly felt that whilst the role of the councillor has not fundamentally changed, the way in which it is carried out certainly has.

The Council is split between rural and urban areas, which is mapped fairly well onto the parished and unparished areas of the borough. There is therefore a mix of councillors who work closely with and attend their local parish meetings, in the case of some councillors this involves multiple parishes for one ward, and urban councillors without parishes but the variety of residents bodies that operate in



the urban area. These networks were brought to the fore during the covid pandemic and those strong relationships are a priority to be built on.

Some areas have residents' associations, with one such association, the North Loose Residents' Association also being a recognised neighbourhood forum with an adopted neighbourhood plan. However, the Council itself does not run area forums. A new series of eight 'Ward Cluster' meetings focussing on community safety are currently being established, there is no evidence provided from these yet as to their effectiveness.

Councillors are not given a prescribed means of working with constituents and each councillor takes their own approach. With a mixture of single, two and three Member wards some councillors split responsibilities in their areas between them, whilst in others, such as where councillors might be from different groups, matters are handled more individually.

The Council does have a key link to parishes through the Kent Association of Local Councils (which all parishes are currently members of) with regular meetings held between KALC and the Council's senior leadership to identify key issues.

The key changes for how councillors carry their role has come from technology and communication in the modern world. This is explored more below.

**Casework** - Maidstone is the county town of Kent and is a borough council in a three tier area. There is therefore a key function for councillors to perform in signposting residents to the right body for help, particularly in routing queries through to the county council (see Appendix 5 – Councillor Workload Survey Summary). Casework relating to the borough is handled in one of two main ways, either with the particular case passed over to officers to deal with and routed through the usual contact channels, or by councillors continuing to see a case through to completion alongside officers. Different queries require different approaches – for example implementing a policy change in response to residents' issues may see oversight and campaigning from beginning to end. The majority of queries relating to council issues can be routed through existing channels with officers providing updates. However, Appendix 5 shows that the largest response for how councillors handle issues is to keep a close involvement from beginning to end. This is something to be considered alongside how support is provided to Councillors in the future to enable a more effective means of working.

Currently, Members are supported directly through services and also via democratic services. The Mayor and the Leader have a personal assistant resource dedicated to helping them in their roles, this is something that will need to be reviewed with regard to the executive once arrangements have changed. Democratic services also holds the member training budget which is primarily spent on planning and licensing training but can be targeted at particular areas. For example, specific scrutiny training for Members will be provided to support the switch back to the executive model. This is key for ensuring trained and effective Members in the new model.

## Consideration of Size Options and Recommended Size

### Scope for Change

Maidstone's council size has never been properly reviewed. At the last boundary review in 2000/01 the process followed was significantly different from the current one and as no-one expressed an interest in reviewing it the size was left alone. This leaves significant scope for change on size considering the myriad changes to local government and technology since 1974.

## Direction of Travel

Evidence from the CIPFA comparisons shows Maidstone Borough Council to be on the upper end of council sizes, it also shows that recent directions of travel from reviews have been to reduce council sizes. The average electorate of those councils is also higher than Maidstone's. This points to a reduction in councillors being appropriate. Increasing the size of the Council would be inappropriate based on this initial analysis.

## Quantum of Change

The significant changes going on at Maidstone, with new executive arrangements coming into place provide both a challenge and an opportunity to shape the size and arrangements of the Council in tandem. This will ensure sufficient councillors to effectively carry out the requirements of Strategic Leadership, Scrutiny and Regulatory functions whilst meeting the needs of the community.

**Analysis of the distribution of meetings from year to year**, including projections of ranges for the new model combined with the distribution of variable workloads across councillors and different committees shows the following:

- The distribution of work on committees under current models is uneven, and year on year comparisons show this is not a one-off, with some councillors attending a significant number of meetings, whilst up to a fifth (20%) of councillors attend one meeting or less a month.
- There is a significant burden of work arising for planning committee members – the analysis of agenda item types distinctly shows the decision-making burden on that regulatory committee. Combined with the training requirements highlighted in the Councillor Workload Survey it can be seen that whatever size is put forward that need will have to be met and well resourced. Planning Committee currently has 13 Members. There is a balance to be struck between ensuring a breadth of views on the committee with the burden it puts on councillors, including training, and for substitutes. It is also important to consider the efficiency and effectiveness of the committee in getting through its business. The planning committee adjourns on a regular basis and its cycle of meetings is being kept under review. There are arguments both for and against having a smaller committee with a well-trained engaged group of members with less of a training burden overall, supported by an effective scheme of delegation, and opportunities for member and public engagement at the committee itself.
- The shift to an executive model will have multiple impacts:
  - Workloads will shift further to fewer Members who take on portfolios increasing the skewed workload distribution;
  - The Overview and Scrutiny Committee, whilst not as involved in pre-decision making due to the policy advisory committees, will have a critical role in holding the executive to account as well as carrying out reviews and policy development, and the importance of properly resourcing that committee must not be underestimated;
  - Fewer Members overall will be involved in taking decisions, though the policy advisory committees will create a requirement for members to be involved in pre-decision scrutiny;

**Councillor Workload Survey (including casework analysis)** - The analysis of the Councillor workload survey demonstrates that the greatest proportion of Members time is spent on Council work and that of their casework 60% relates directly to Maidstone Borough Council matters.

The overall view of the impact of technology is positive.

The view of officer support is positive with further scope in both appetite and area (how casework is handled) to increase officer support for casework.

### **Recommended Size – 48 Councillors**

Maidstone Borough Council does not have a direct comparator from a previous Local Government Boundary Commission for England review of council size as one has not previously been carried out. The Council has also had both executive and committee systems in place in the past, and regularly changes administrations, leading to changes in how matters are conducted. This makes quantified analysis on direct meeting volume comparisons difficult and in any event subject to change. Therefore the recommended size is put forward using the workload distribution across the Council cohort as its primary evidence for a reduction in size.

The modelling of the executive arrangements as currently proposed shows the overall number of meetings is likely to increase slightly, with a minimal impact of meetings per month per councillor overall. However, the switch to an executive model means that the type of work will skew decision making workload towards fewer councillors (those on the Executive and on Planning Committee).

The councillor workload analysis of existing workloads shows that across the Councillor cohort it is already significantly skewed with 20% of councillors attending 1 meeting or less per month on average over the last 3 years (though worth noting that one of those Members will be the Mayor who plays an active ceremonial role and reduced committee role). This demonstrates that a reduction of up to 10 members could be considered, but there are concerns about this impact on case work, community representation and burden on Councillors at the other end of the spread with significant workloads already.

Consideration of the Councillor workload survey shows the split between council work and case work with the greater emphasis being on council work. The survey demonstrates an appetite for increased case work support and identifies that 60% of casework relates to MBC business. It is therefore under our control to minimise the impact on that work to councillors through increasing member support (to direct case work queries to the correct place effectively) and considering technological improvements – such as member portals where cases can be routed effectively to the correct officers first time. This could also help with KCC queries (around 30%) too. These changes will help manage the impact of the reduction in numbers for case work per councillor, but not in its entirety. By keeping case work manageable this would help to free councillors to engage strategically too.

48 councillors is the preferred size (a reduction of 7 councillors) and the opportunity will be taken to review committee workloads through both frequency of meetings and the membership size of committees. In particular the size of Planning Committee, the most work intensive of all the committees for meetings and training, will be reviewed.

A sense check of a size of 48 against our evidence and benchmarking shows the following:

- An electorate per councillor of 2,656 – at the upper end of the benchmark group
- A size of 48 puts Maidstone just into the lower quartile of size
- Creates an extra 0.6 meetings per month per councillor, using high end projections of workload for our new mode!

This meets the Council's overarching objective as it will provide the strategic leadership for the borough and be better able to respond to the identified challenges of the future, whilst having effective scrutiny and regulatory functions, and meeting the needs of its communities.

### **Why Not Decrease Further?**

Consideration was given to a spread of sizes and their impacts on workloads and community leadership. A decrease to lower than 48 would risk overburdening councillors from certain areas whilst also risking our ability to meet the needs of the new model. The benchmarking of this figure against our CIPFA nearest neighbours would support the proposed size and not a further reduction.

### **Why Not Increase or Stay the Same?**

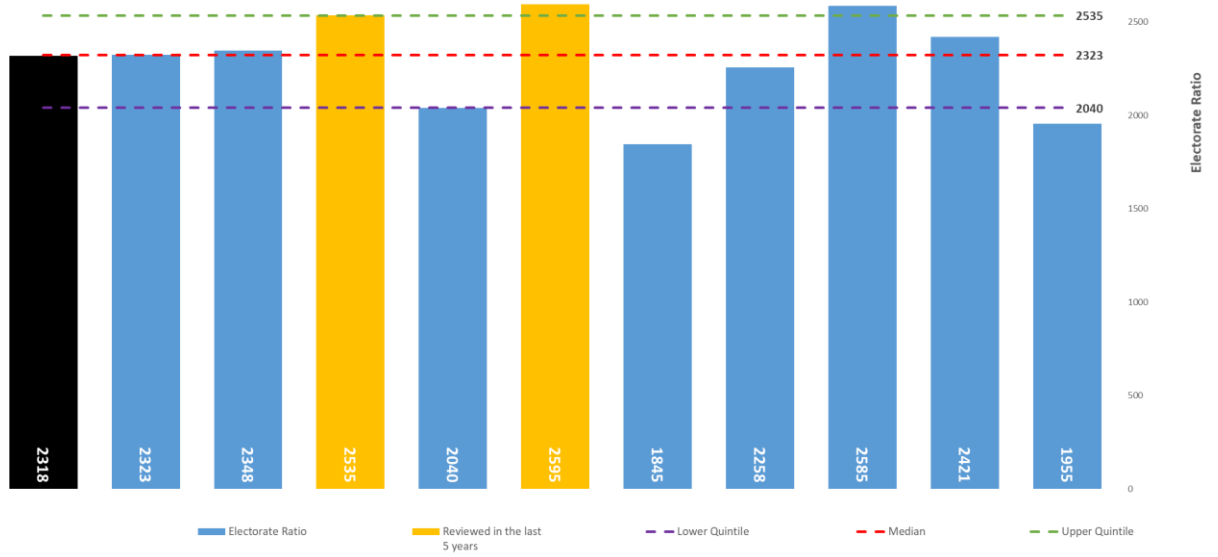
The Council has not had its size reviewed previously, and analysis shows that there is a significant proportion of councillors not fully engaged in council work. With the impending move to an executive model that will accentuate this further, retaining the current number, or increasing further is considered to only exacerbate this situation.

### **Conclusion**

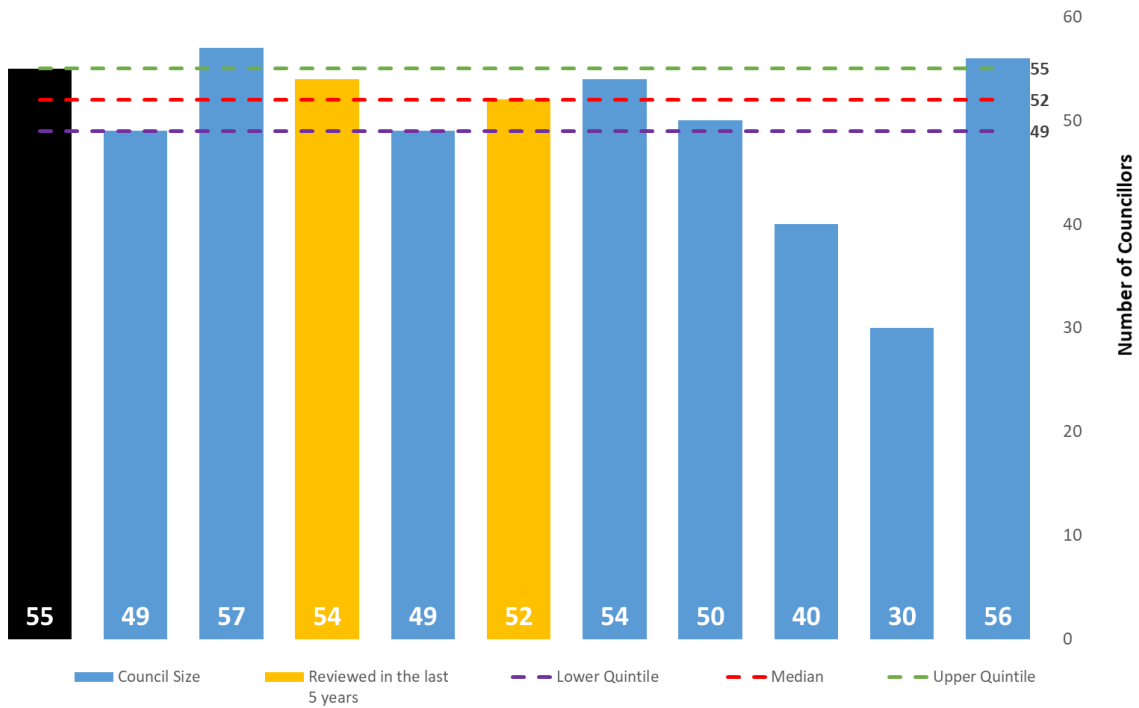
The Council is recommending a size of 48 to streamline in response to the evidence that not all Councillors are fully engaged under a committee system and this is likely to be skewed further with a switch to executive arrangements. This change will be taken as opportunity to review how councillors are supported on their casework by officers and technology, and to review the operation of the Council's committees in order to ensure both the Council's needs and that of its communities can be met.

## Appendix 1 - CIPFA Nearest Neighbour Comparisons

2021 CIPFA Group and Electorate Ratio



2021 CIPFA Group and Councillor Counts



**Appendix 1 - CIPFA Nearest Neighbour Comparisons**

Ward Name	Electors Per Councillor
Allington	2032
Barming & Teston	1987
Bearsted	2236
Boughton Monchelsea & Chart Sutton	2105
Boxley	2237
Bridge	2502
Coxheath & Hunton	2078
Detling & Thurnham	2485
Downswood & Otham	2281
East	2189
Fant	2417
Harrietsham & Lenham	2686
Headcorn	2200
Heath	2502
High Street	2641
Leeds	1942
Loose	2112
Marden & Yalding	2272
North	2128
North Downs	2064
Park Wood	2921
Shepway North	2199
Shepway South	2194
South	2489
Staplehurst	2453
Sutton Valence and Langley	2371

67

Key	
	Less than 2400 Uplift
	2400-2600 Neutral
	Greater than 2600 Reduction

Based on 2019 electoral register (as used by LGBCE)

## Meetings Per Year and Attendance Rates (2012/13 – 2020/21)

<b>Year</b>	<b>Number of Meetings</b>	<b>Attendance rate</b>	<b>Meetings Per Cllr (Average)</b>
22/23 (projected – PACs to review key decisions only <sup>1</sup> )	101 +16% average increase <sup>3</sup> : 117	N/A	19.5 +16%: 22.6
22/23 (projected – PACs to review all decisions <sup>2</sup> )	121 +16% average increase <sup>3</sup> : 140	N/A	22.8 +16%: 26.4
20/21	100	91.6%	24.0
19/20	80	90.2%	19.0
18/19	106	91.3%	25.1
17/18	104	88.3%	24.3
16/17	102	94.3%	24.1
15/16	106	90.1%	25.4
14/15	138	90.2%	27.3
13/14	129	93.0%	26.5
12/13	121	89.6%	25.3
11/12	116	89.7%	23.6
10/11	114	89.2%	25.3

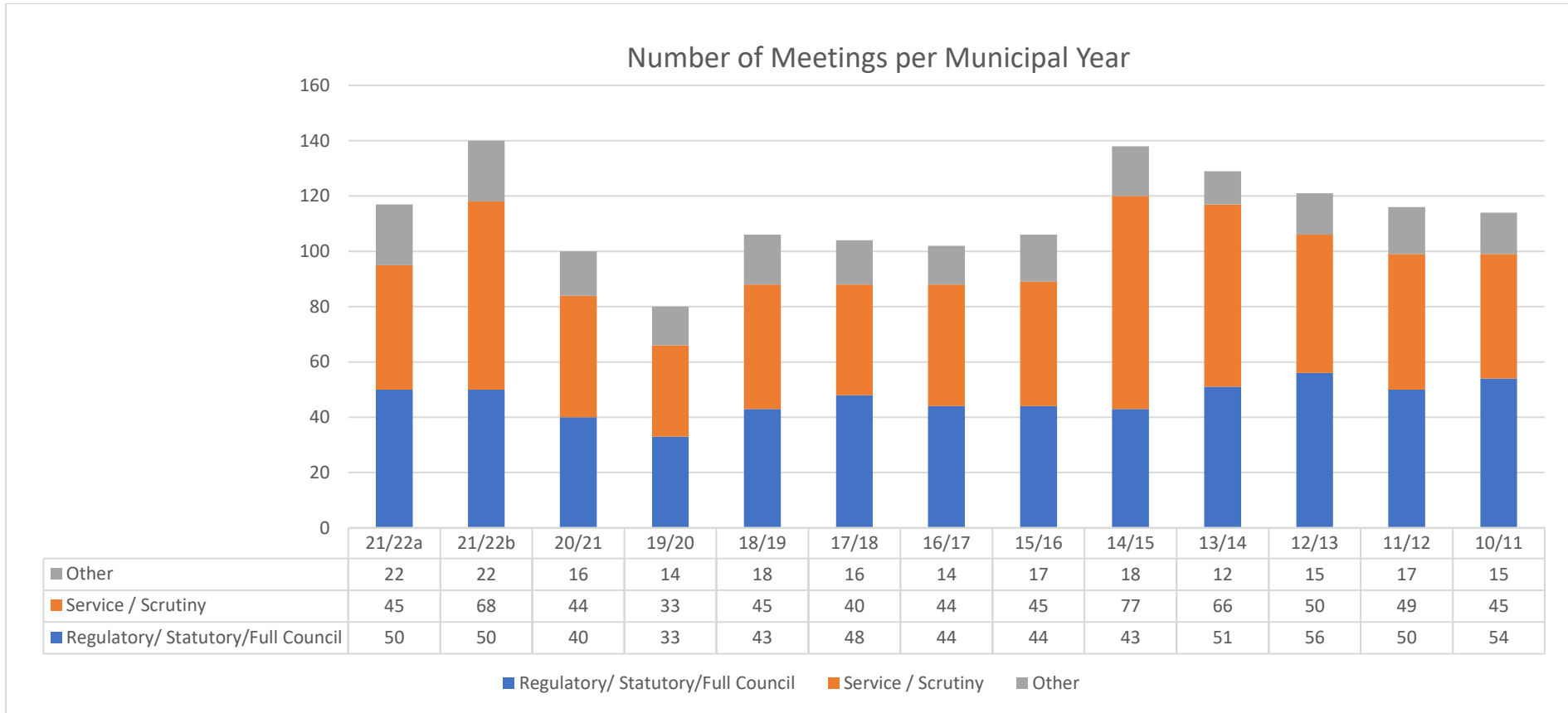
<sup>1</sup> Projections have been made using the Executive Arrangements diagram proposed by the working group. This includes 4 PACs, each with 9 Members. It has been projected that reviewing key decisions only would equate to each PAC meeting 5 times per annum.

<sup>2</sup> Projections have been made using the Executive Arrangements diagram proposed by the working group. This includes 4 PACs, each with 9 Members. It has been projected that reviewing all decisions would equate to each PAC meeting 10 times per annum.

<sup>3</sup> 16% is the average difference between the meetings scheduled within the agreed calendar of meetings, and the actual number of meetings that occur, for example adjourned meetings and extraordinary meetings. The average is calculated from the last 6 full years, excluding 2019/20 figures.

Number of Meetings Per Municipal Year (2010/11 – 2020-21 and projected 2021/22)

69

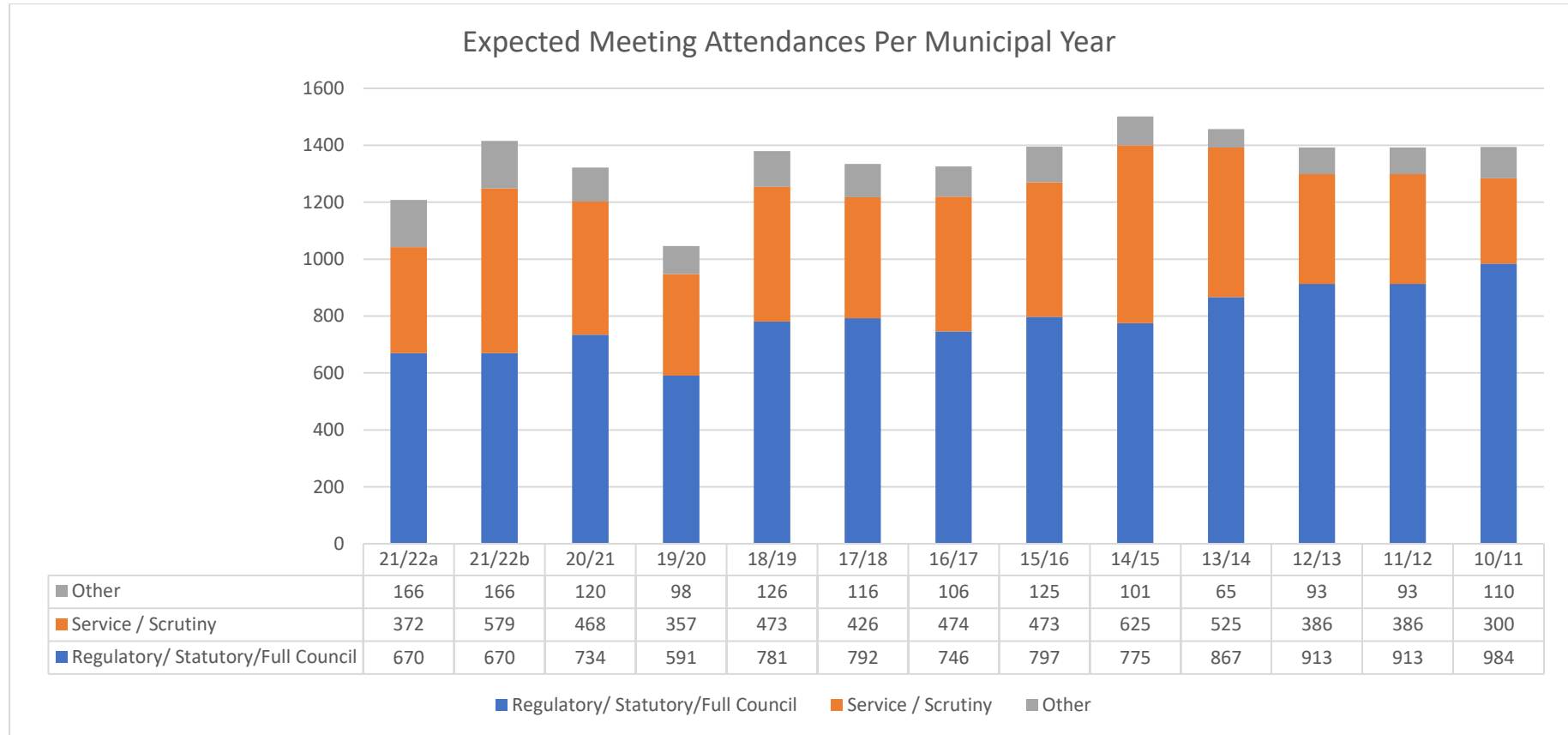


21/22a - Projections have been made using the Executive Arrangements diagram proposed by the working group. This includes 4 PACs, each with 9 Members. It has been projected that reviewing key decisions only would equate to each PAC meeting 5 times per annum. This also includes the 16% average increase in meetings throughout the year.

21/22b - Projections have been made using the Executive Arrangements diagram proposed by the working group. This includes 4 PACs, each with 9 Members. It has been projected that reviewing all decisions would equate to each PAC meeting 10 times per annum. This also includes the 16% average increase in meetings throughout the year.



Expected Meeting Attendances Per Municipal Year, (2010/11 – 2020-21 and projected 2021/22)



70

21/22a - Projections have been made using the Executive Arrangements diagram proposed by the working group. This includes 4 PACs, each with 9 Members. It has been projected that reviewing key decisions only would equate to each PAC meeting 5 times per annum. This also includes the 16% average increase in meetings throughout the year.

21/22b - Projections have been made using the Executive Arrangements diagram proposed by the working group. This includes 4 PACs, each with 9 Members. It has been projected that reviewing all decisions would equate to each PAC meeting 10 times per annum. This also includes the 16% average increase in meetings throughout the year.

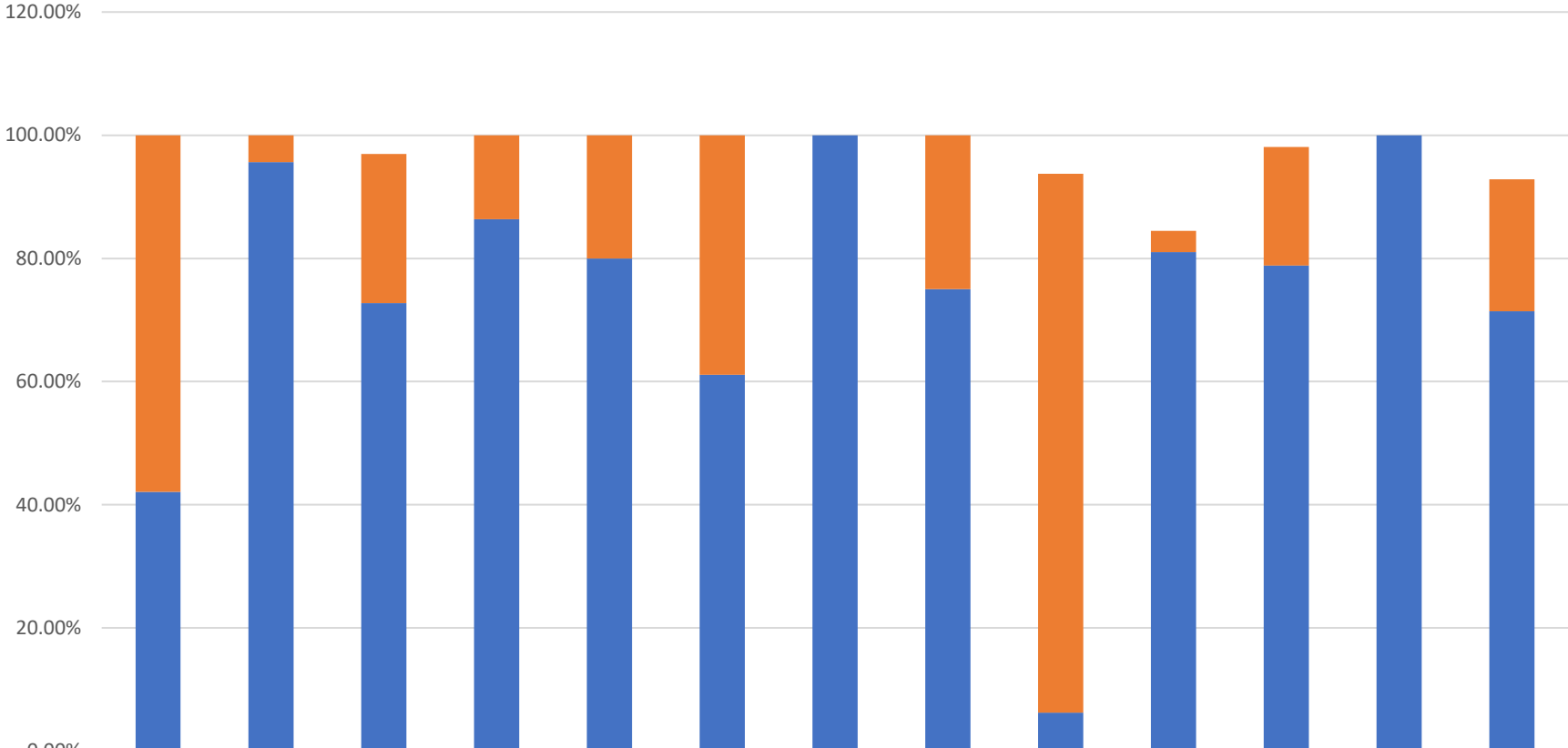
Council Size Impact on Meetings Per Councillor (Average)

Council Size	Number of meetings per Member (based on average of last 5 years)		Number of meetings per Member (based on lower projection, adjusted*)		Number of meetings per Member (based on higher projection, adjusted*)	
	Per Annum	Per Month	Per Annum <i>(change from current average)</i>	Per Month <i>(change from current average)</i>	Per Annum <i>(change from current average)</i>	Per Month <i>(change from current average)</i>
55 (current)	22.6	2.1	22.6 <i>(0)</i>	2.1 <i>(0)</i>	26.4 <i>(+3.8)</i>	2.4 <i>(+0.3)</i>
54			23.0 <i>(+0.4)</i>	2.1 <i>(0)</i>	26.9 <i>(+4.3)</i>	2.4 <i>(+0.3)</i>
51			24.4 <i>(+1.8)</i>	2.2 <i>(+0.1)</i>	28.5 <i>(+5.9)</i>	2.6 <i>(+0.5)</i>
48			25.9 <i>(+3.3)</i>	2.4 <i>(+0.3)</i>	30.2 <i>(+7.6)</i>	2.7 <i>(+0.6)</i>
45			27.6 <i>(+5.3)</i>	2.5 <i>(+0.4)</i>	32.2 <i>(+9.6)</i>	2.9 <i>(+0.8)</i>
42			29.6 <i>(+7.0)</i>	2.7 <i>(+0.6)</i>	34.1 <i>(+11.5)</i>	3.1 <i>(+1.0)</i>
39			31.9 <i>(+9.3)</i>	2.9 <i>(+0.8)</i>	37.2 <i>(+14.6)</i>	3.4 <i>(+1.3)</i>
36			34.6 <i>(+12.0)</i>	3.1 <i>(+1.0)</i>	40.3 <i>(+17.7)</i>	3.7 <i>(+1.6)</i>

\*Adjusted to include average increase in meetings (+16%)

Committee Workload Breakdown 2019/20

2019-2020

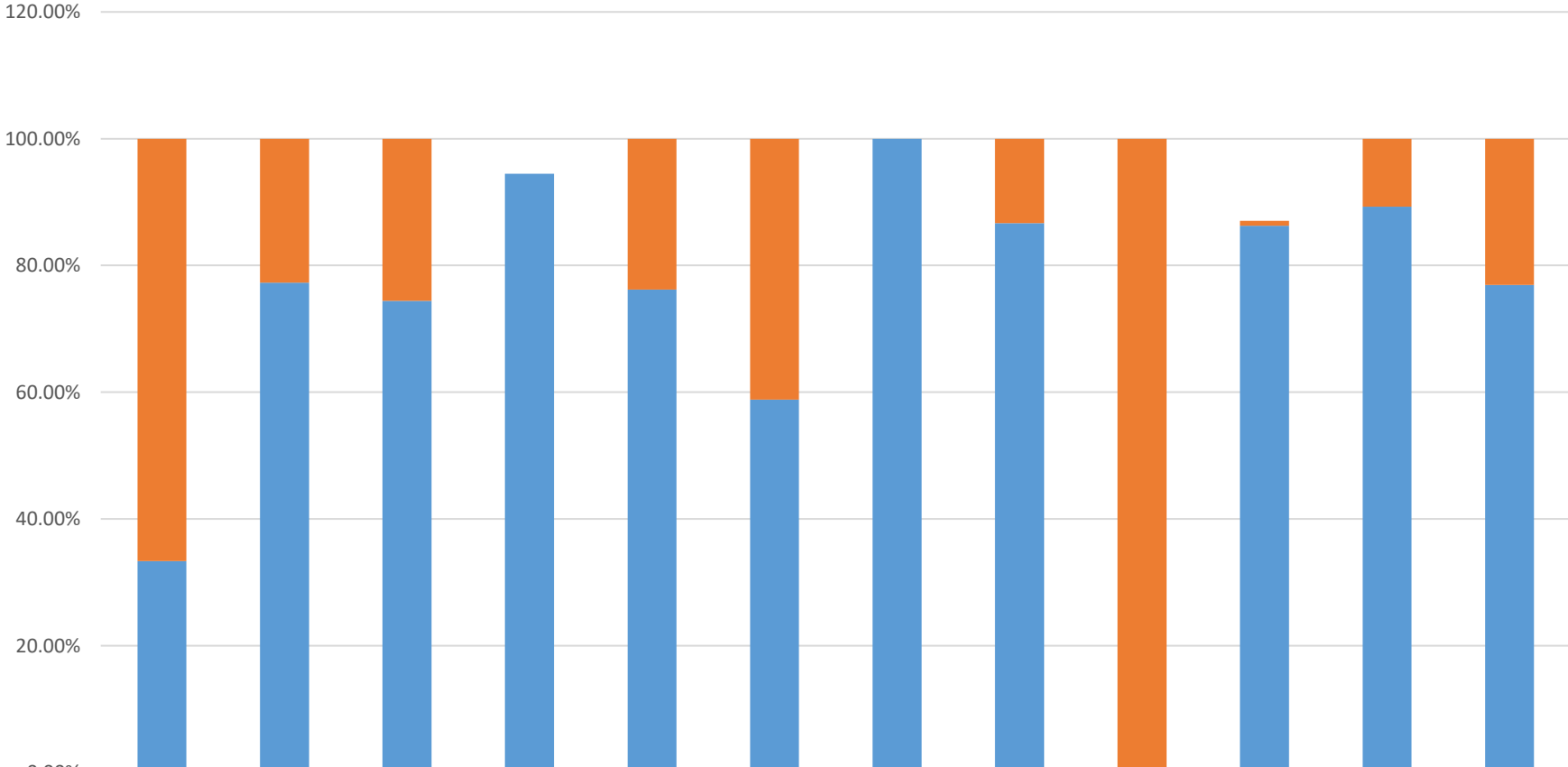


	AGS	Cobtree	CHE	Council	D&GP	ERL	LSC	Licensing	MJTB	Planning	P&R	QORWKRT C	SPI
Category 5 N	57.89%	4.35%	24.24%	13.64%	20.00%	38.89%	0.00%	25.00%	87.50%	3.45%	19.23%	0.00%	21.43%
(All Decisions)	42.11%	95.65%	72.73%	86.36%	80.00%	61.11%	100.00%	75.00%	6.25%	81.03%	78.85%	100.00%	71.43%

■ (All Decisions) ■ Category 5 N

Committee Workload Breakdown 2020/21

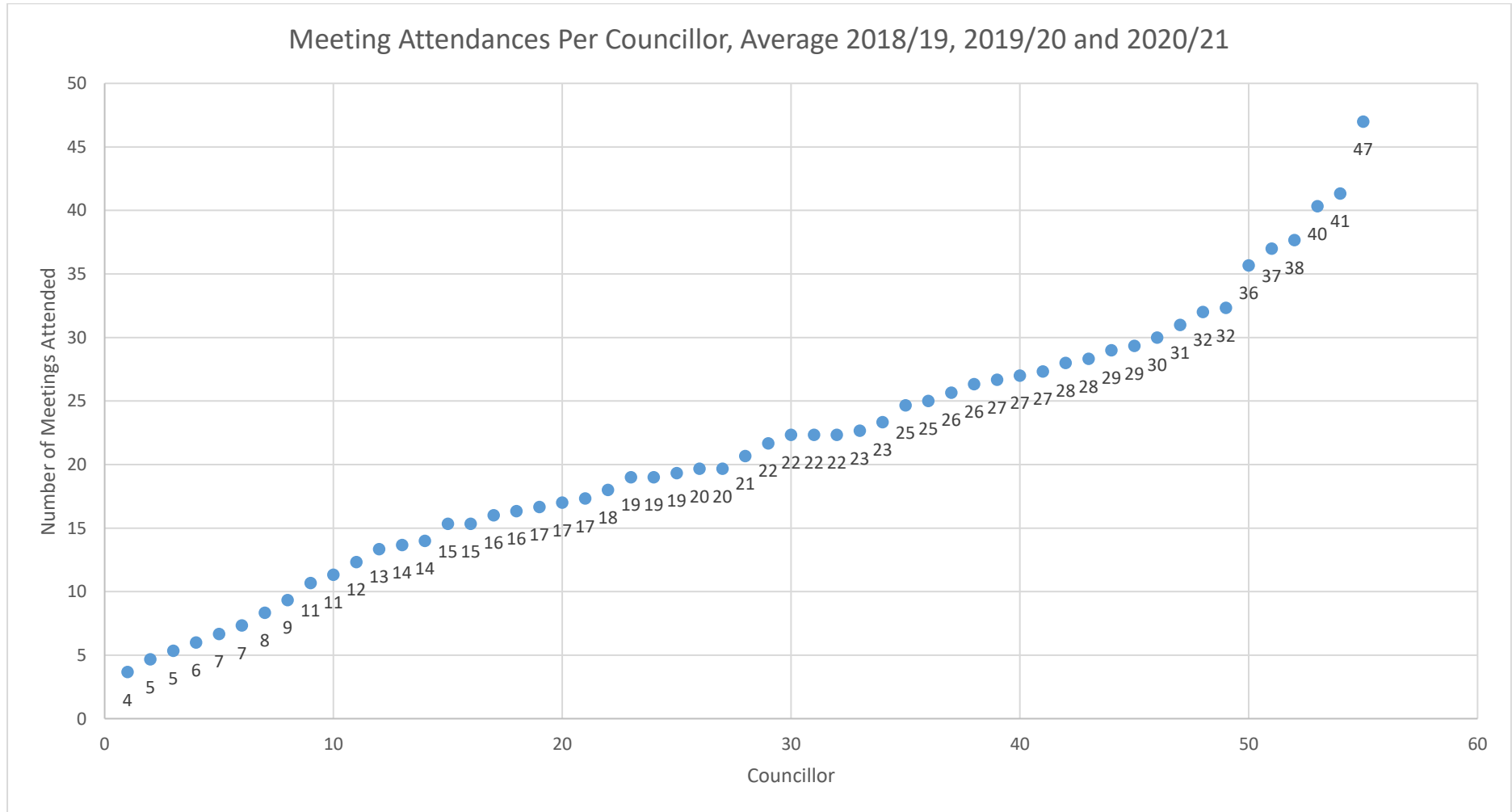
2020-2021



	AGS	Cobtree	CHE	Council	D&GP	ERL	LSC	Licensing	MJTB	Planning	P&R	SPI
Noting	66.67%	22.73%	25.58%	0.00%	23.81%	41.18%	0.00%	13.33%	100.00%	0.76%	10.71%	23.08%
(All Decisions)	33.33%	77.27%	74.42%	94.44%	76.19%	58.82%	100.00%	86.67%	0.00%	86.26%	89.29%	76.92%

(All Decisions) Noting

Average Meeting Attendances Per Councillor

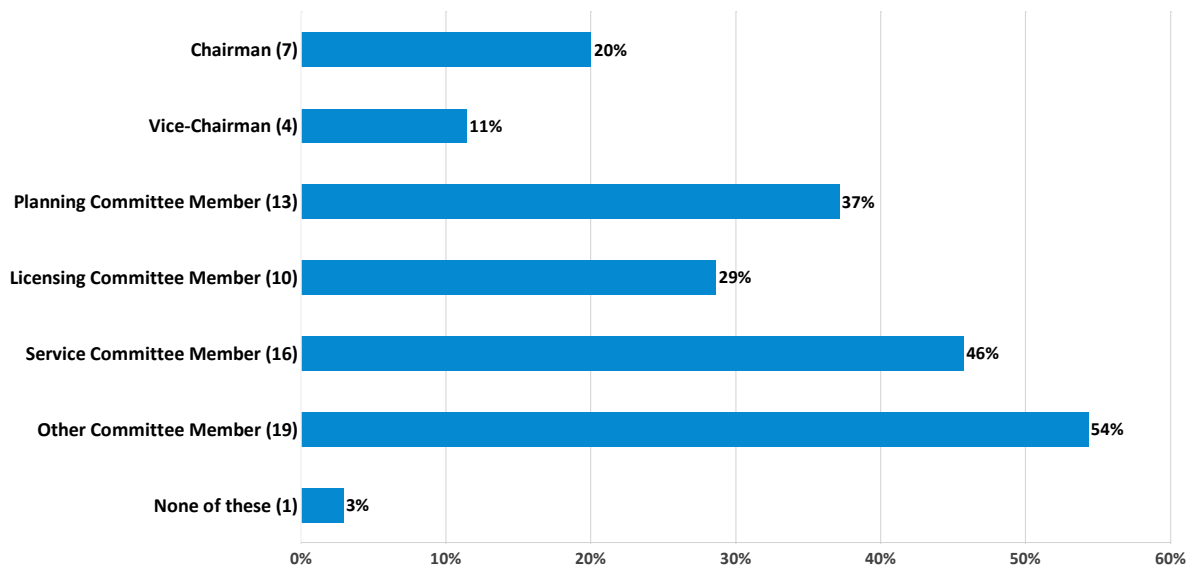


# Member Workload Survey 2021

## Which of these roles do you hold?

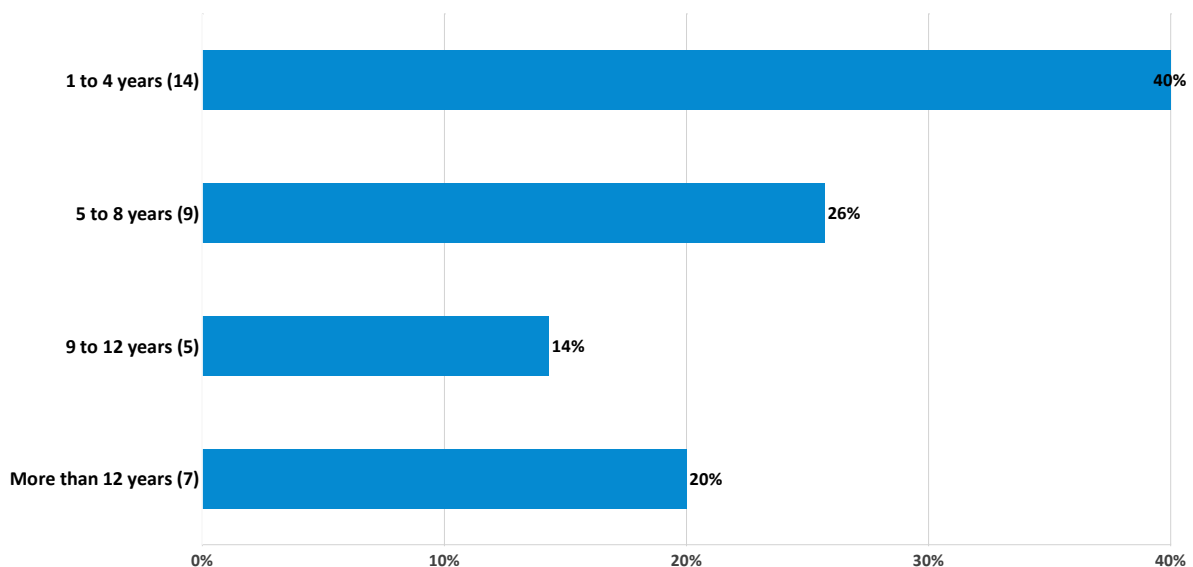
The response given to this question determined which of the other questions in the survey were relevant so that they could be posed to Members in those roles. Respondents could select more than one response.

Total responses: 35



## How long have you been an MBC councillor?

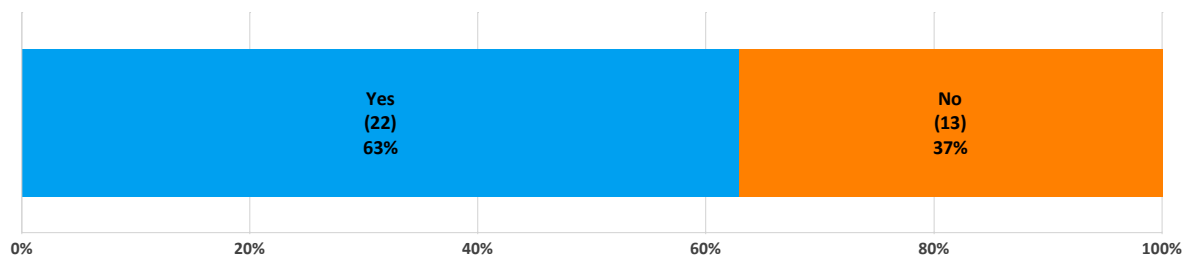
Total responses: 35



# Member Workload Survey 2021

## Do you represent a parished area?

Total responses: 35



## Time Spent – overall work (Monthly)

Total Responses	Minimum	Maximum	Mode	Mean	Median
<b>Time spent per month on Council Work</b>					
32	12	174	30	45	31.5
<b>Time spent per month on case work</b>					
30	4	70	10	22.6	20
<b>Time spent per month on parish work</b>					
17	0	50	20	14.4	15
<b>Time spent per month working with other local community groups in your area</b>					
25	0	120	10	17.4	10

## Time Spent – specific duties (Monthly)

Total Responses	Minimum	Maximum	Mode	Mean	Median
<b>Planning Committee</b>					
12	2	40	6	15.7	10
<b>Licensing Committee</b>					
6	0	10	3	3.8	3
<b>Services Committees</b>					
15	3	25	6	8.9	6
<b>Other Committees/Nominated groups</b>					
15	1	50	2	9.8	4
<b>Chairing</b>					
8	1	30	10	11.3	7

## Briefings

Total Responses	Minimum	Maximum	Mode	Mean	Median
31	1	30	2	11.1	8

# Member Workload Survey 2021

## Training (Annually)

Total Responses	Minimum	Maximum	Mode	Mean	Median
<b>Planning Committee Training</b>					
10	9	60	10	19.9	17
<b>Licensing Committee Training</b>					
6	3	16	5	7.2	5.5
<b>Chairing Training</b>					
7	0	4	0	0.6	0

## Other time spent (monthly)

Total Responses	Minimum	Maximum	Mode	Mean	Median
<b>On outside bodies, including external boards and partnership meetings</b>					
28	0	40	0	7.1	3
<b>Liaising with officers (outside of the role of chair or vice-chair)?</b>					
28	0	40	4	7.6	4
<b>Travelling on council business (meetings, briefings, training etc.)?</b>					
28	0	30	2	7.3	4.5

## Comments about impact of technology on Council Work

Total comments received 25, these are shown in full below.

From these comments it was identified that:

- 14 comments were broadly positive about the impact on technology on Council work. Seven mentioned less travelling saving time and money.
- Five said digital was easier with information available at their fingertips and four mentioned improvements in their work/life balance. Several also mentioned increased attendance at meetings within their comments.
- Seven Comments were broadly negative. Here concerns about increased workloads, increased expectations for responding to queries and feeling disconnected were raised.
- Four comments were classified as being neutral, these commenters suggested that technology has had a negligible impact. There were mentions of needing to 'catch up' after the pandemic and one said they prefer a 'hands on approach' based on their experience with their constituents.

### Q9: Use the box below to tell us about how technology has impacted your COUNCIL work

The use of skype/ Teams has made meetings easier especially the Cllrs briefings. it has reduced travel time and made it generally easier

More meetings re online which for me results in being increasingly disconnected and informal discussions are very limited.

Skype/Teams meetings have been very successful and will probably continue for training and briefings sessions thus reducing travelling times.

It has massively increased the workload and reduced the time people are willing to wait for a reply. The idea that technology lightens the workload is to coin a phrase naive.



# Member Workload Survey 2021

<b>Q9: Use the box below to tell us about how technology has impacted your COUNCIL work</b>
Ability to access emails on the go so better communication. During the pandemic attending virtual meetings. All my equipment is my own
email makes it easier to contact officers, fellow councillors, and members of the public but of course there is then pressure to answer them quickly. If I want to speak at a committee as a visiting member it is more convenient to do it virtually than in person. It is essential to maintain a good work life balance and turn the computer off regularly when at home. When I was first elected in 1982 the only way of contacting council officers and residents was by telephone or letter !!
We do a lot more meetings and briefings online in addition to attending committees in person
Made things easier using Zoom for training and briefings.
Has helped as I can do council related work while travelling to and from work and during lunch break.
Hate not having meetings back at Town Hall
Some parts are an improvement, others can be a problem as I prefer to take a "hands on" approach to issues within my Wards meeting with many who prefer a personal contact particularly the elderly and young people who prefer to talk to me about issues they may have rather than make contact via email.
Access to technology was far greater in the past when I had a working laptop and printer I now have neither and only patchy access to email on other devices.
Easy access to information and documents on the Internet. Satnav in carrying out site visits
It has meant that a lot of meetings, training and briefings can be virtual which saves me travelling and means that I am more able to attend them around work.
It has saved me approx. one whole day per week in travel to and from meetings. (typical allowance for journey 40 mins each way - say one meeting per day - allowing for the niceties of incarnate meeting, coffee etc)
email kills me
Remote meetings saves so much time and encourages me to attend more meetings. As the council has no telephone directory the Skype system to contact officers is invaluable (changed the way I am able to work).
It's reduced some meetings, but currently it feels like we're trying to catch up and with so many different aspects to the Council I still can spend 4 hrs in the car to and from Maidstone, and ERL issue in the morning and then a Planning or "corporate interest" later in the evening. It's hard to say and quantify, so much has changed...again! Changes in Council, changes post Covid, changes in roles, extra demands like Local Plan etc have meant more meetings, some online. When it was pretty well all online, it cut down LOTS of travel and site visits!
Use of virtual technology during COVID has saved a lot of travelling time and I suspect has increased attendance at working groups.
Negligible impact
It has saved travelling time; enabled me to attend more meetings / case work; enabled me to do other things at the same time during a meeting
Virtual meetings has been very useful and allows better attendance to briefings and training sessions
My email inbox has increased at a considerable rate since Covid-19. So replying and dealing with emails has increased tenfold.
Has helped to some degree having some digital. But did make starting as a Cllr hard and feel we still need to catch up on some elements.

# Member Workload Survey 2021

**Q9: Use the box below to tell us about how technology has impacted your COUNCIL work**

Virtual meetings, training and briefing sessions enabled greater flexibility and save travelling time.

## Approach – Proportion of approach used

Total Responses	Minimum	Maximum	Mode	Mean	Median
<b>Route case work through to the relevant council department and let them respond</b>					
29	0%	99%	0%	15.3%	10%
<b>Route case work through to the relevant council department and keep a watching brief</b>					
29	0%	98%	10%	19.3%	15%
<b>Personally handle case work with direct liaison with relevant department throughout</b>					
29	1%	100%	90%	65.4%	75%

## Casework – Proportion by organisation

Total Responses	Minimum	Maximum	Mode	Mean	Median
<b>MBC</b>					
30	30%	99%	70%	59.9%	60%
<b>KCC</b>					
30	0%	60%	0%	21.4%	17.5%
<b>Parish</b>					
30	0%	40%	0%	11.7%	7.5%
<b>Other organisations (i.e housing body, health, police)</b>					
30	0%	20%	0%	7.1%	5%

## What support do you get from the council to help with case work? What works well? (i.e. direct contact with officers, website)

Total comments received 27, these are shown in full in the table below.

The following was identified:

- Twelve said that direct contact with officers works well.
- Four comments had positive mentions of support from Officers.
- Four mentioned occasional difficulties in identifying who is the relevant person to contact.
- Five mentioned the website, three of which mentioned using the website as a resource or directing constituents to it, one said the website was too generalised and another mentioned being unable to report issues on a constituent's behalf.

**Q12: What support do you get from the council to help with case work? What works well? (i.e. direct contact with officers, website)**

Very little, I try to identify the relevant team leader,

Helpful when I find who is responsible. I do find that feedback from officers is lacking in a lot of cases.

Excellent help from officers and the direct contact with them is the best approach.

# Member Workload Survey 2021

<b>Q12: What support do you get from the council to help with case work? What works well? (i.e. direct contact with officers, website)</b>
No actual support is provided. direct liaison with officers works best. The website and customer service telephones are not effective solutions in most cases. as it takes more time involves more staff and generally delays an outcome. In may cases it is actually impossible for a Councillor to report via websites as for e.g. with Environmental health you have to give your address. Not terribly helpful if you are complaining on behalf of a third party living nowhere near where you live.
Timely answers to questions and advice
Direct contact with officers as with experience I know which ones to contact and which ones are particularly helpful e.g. planning. the website is useful for queries on waste collection for instance.
Direct contact with officers
Not enough experience yet to comment
All my experience of officers has been good.
Officers always helpful direct contact is best
Technical support on Planning issues with the relevant Officers. Good support from Officers concerning Licensing issues in the Borough. Good working relationship with Officers in the Communities, Housing and Environment Departments who provide good support in the waste collection and waste management services. Good technology exists which is useful in this area and easy to use.
Some teams and individuals are very good others less so.
Excellent and prompt advice and information from officers. Works well as it is.
As soon as I find the right officer / I've found them very helpful
The easy to report websites for fly tipping etc work well. Direct contact with officers works well too.
Officers are usually very helpful, but I am always conscious of their direct workload.
emails are usually responded no later than by the second reminder
Direct contact with officers, the skype system is invaluable for this. Website for research. As a member working doing case work being asked to do online reporting hinders me.
I make enquiries, I get answers, or I tell residents to use the website, to report things.
Direct contact
Generally direct contact works very well. Dealing with KCC is more difficult
Support if needed from MBC, very limited from KCC
Direct contact with officer is better. However sometimes I find it difficult to locate the right person to talk to.
direct contact with officers works better than relying the web site which is too generalized
Direct contact with Officers
I get good support from officers at all levels mostly by email exchanges. I only call if something is urgent or better by phone. Website is good and the majority of things are there, but many residents contact their local councillor before using the web site.
Occasional support from officers when residents have problems with day-to-day concerns i.e. waste collections/planning/enforcement. All officers respond quickly to assist with answers to and/or resolutions which can be relayed back to residents

## **Is there further support the council could provide? (i.e. dedicated webpage, dedicated officer to assist with case management)**

Total comments received 24, these are shown in full in the table below.

# Member Workload Survey 2021

From these comments the following was identified:

- Ten mentioned they would like a dedicated officer or group of officers that they can go to for support and another said that if this role existed the officer would need to be very knowledgeable.
- Four requested improved staffing lists so they can easily identify the most appropriate officer to contact.
- Four said they were happy with the current support provided.
- Two made negative comments about having to use the same channels as residents/are treated the same as residents.
- One suggested having a dedicated webpage for support.

<b>Q13: Is there further support the council could provide? (i.e. dedicated webpage, dedicated officer to assist with case management)</b>
If the Council could send out a list of all team leaders, it would avoid going to the service heads
Who to contact would be very helpful.
None at present
Councillor enquires should never have to go via the general website or call centre. The insistence in some cases that they should impeded representing the public.
Dedicated staff offering support in clusters
dedicated webpage could be useful
Not enough experience yet to comment
Greater clarity of who, and what authority, is responsible for each issue.
May be good
I have been a Member for over 10 years and have a reasonable knowledge of who, what and when to seek assistance from Officers most who have been employed for many years and are very experienced and have extensive knowledge.
The officer / Elected Member relationship has changed over the years (as the powers of Councillors have reduced) and the former parity of esteem is largely lost.
Nothing further needed. Easy and quick access to info
Dedicated online chat or call centre
A dedicated officer would be nice! Sometimes we don't know how to deal with cases but they have probably come up before so maybe a dedicated officer in each area or a main email box to use that can be filtered the right way as sometimes we are asking the wrong department.
Dedicated officer to assist with case management please.
Just support and not to be treated the same as a member of the public when I am pursuing information/action
I have a problem with people who don't use the internet. AND People DONT look at websites! They moan. Some issues are quite detailed and need specific grasp and reply: Planning Applications, specific streets of missed bins, General Flooding matters etc. An Officer would have to be VERY broadly knowledgeable AND specifically knowing to deal with or re-refer.
I am reasonably happy with the current situation.
Officer liaison meetings would be helpful.
As above a clearer intranet to find the correct officer to deal with
dedicated officer / point of contact would be helpful
I sometimes think a dedicated officer would be good for councillors but the work load can be so varied it would be best to pilot this first before creating a particular post.

# Member Workload Survey 2021

<b>Q13: Is there further support the council could provide? (i.e. dedicated webpage, dedicated officer to assist with case management)</b>
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Dedicated officer would be great. Repeat reminders of who is who (directory of officers) actually repeat the email say twice a month and add new people etc.
--

If number of Ward members are reduced access to a dedicated officer to assist with case management would be welcomed
--

## Comments about impact of technology on Case Work

Total comments received 24, these are shown in full in the table below.

From these comments it was identified that:

- Seven mentioned accessibility, either in relation to being more accessible to constituents or being able to access information.
- Five said technology has had little impact on their case work.
- Two said technology had improved the management case work
- Two suggested that casework has increased as a result of technology.
- There were also several comments about members specific approaches/situation.

<b>Q14: Use the box below to tell us about how technology has impacted your CASE work</b>
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No impact
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I find that I am contacted mainly by phone land line or mobile 60% of the time and then the rest by email
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Not really
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It helps produce surveys and responses to local issues, but produces a high demand for time ie dealing with Social Media and thousands of emails. It makes it easier for residents to report problems, which is good but again this increases workload
--

It makes me more accessible to my constituents
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It is good for keeping residents informed of the action I am taking on a particular issue and for getting information from officers.
--

Deal with most issues by email contact with officers
--

Not enough experience yet to comment
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Helped
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Only when I send to officers
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Quick access to information relating to case work and subsequent access to Officers who are able to provide assistance.
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Access to technology has diminished over the last ten years to a very low level.
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Easy and quick access to information.
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It has meant that I can easily search the planning portal for looking at planning permissions and comments.
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Beyond saying that email makes us very easily accessible nothing to add. There is an expectation that emails should receive immediate response.
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preference of email over phone
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Skype system to contact officers additionally skype allows remote contact with officers viewing documents at the same time (share screen facility). Website for research. Online reporting hinders case work
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# Member Workload Survey 2021

<b>Q14: Use the box below to tell us about how technology has impacted your CASE work</b>
I get very good Officer responses, because I know the key officers and their roles and know them personally. So, an email to them gets the detail I need. NEW Members would struggle. Currently the new Members don't know enough, so they call more established Members. Any directory would need to be quite large! They wont use it, so personal relationships are best, NOT MORE ICT based systems. Social Media has increased the "tittle tattle", rumour and innuendo. When a "major issue" happens (Ward or Borough) then that increases work in just email activity. Handling any response or ignoring can be a PR blunder.... advice is often needed.
A case work application / tool would be useful. MPs have something where cases can be logged tracked and all correspondence kept
To be fair not that much. My older residents prefer more traditional methods. If I am dealing with the Parish technology can be very useful.
none
Slow internet at home.
not a huge amount because most issues are better dealt with face to face or over the phone. Not everyone has a computer or likes Zoom.
My emails have increased dramatically over recent years, and this was happening pre covid. I would not be able to do a good job without a smart phone and cloud technology.

## Comments about how the balance work has changed during respondents' time as a Councillor

Total comments received 27, these are shown in full in the table below.

From these comments it was identified that:

- 11 said that their workloads have increased during their time as a Councillor.
- Five said they do not have enough experience to comment, being new to the role.
- Four said that technology has had little or no impact on balancing their caseload.
- Two said that technology has improved the balancing of their case work.
- One mentioned that workloads fluctuate during the year.
- There were also several comments about members specific approaches/situation.

<b>Q15: Use the box below to tell us about how you think the balance work has changed during your time as a Councillor</b>
I have seen a continuing increase in the amount of work and time needed as the Councils role in the community rightfully extends, this has seen a step change since the Covid-19 pandemic
Clearly more online Skype and Team plus a bit of Zoom less meeting officers in person.
Not been a Councillor for long enough to judge
Case work has increased. Briefings and training have increased. The amount of time spent on training has increased. there are more meetings overall. when I started I in 1994 I was doing 50 to 60 hours a month now it can be as high as 280.-
I haven't been here long enough to comment
New technology has assisted greatly but in turn has increased the workload
I am more efficient at dealing with issues as I have gained experience
Not enough experience yet to comment

# Member Workload Survey 2021

Q15: Use the box below to tell us about how you think the balance work has changed during your time as a Councillor
It has increased from a few years ago - it is heavier when you start as a Cllr and it takes time to who is best to contact and learn about the legalities and policy around different areas. However, we are getting increasing amounts of representations as areas are cut and infrastructure is harder to come by. I also find I am reacting to issues, rather than being proactively communicated to by the council about decisions. There are also a lot more briefings than there were when I started as a Cllr.
It's change as has the world
Having been a Councillor who is known for what I do within the Community, my residents feel that they can call on my advice and support at any time if they have issues. I have made it my role to get to know young people in my Ward who feel confident to talk about issues that concern them. The same applies to the elderly who frequently ask for advice or assistance. Getting to know people and listening to them gives them confidence at all ages. I enjoy working within my Community.
When Councillors exerted far more influence and attracted more respect it was a joy to dedicate as many hours as possible to effective advocacy for ward and Borough. The diminution of influence has tempered this enthusiasm. However, direct interventions such as patrolling local green spaces and clearing litter and fly tipping are time consuming.
Little change in balance of work.
Difficult the say as I'm a new councillor
I haven't been a councillor very long but I think that people are getting more aware of how to contact their councillor and to email and ask for help so my case work has increased.
Workload has increased in proportion to the roles I have undertaken
little change, except that most briefings are now held remotely
Badly worded question!!!! I don't do any "balance work" I leave that to tightrope walkers and jugglers etc. Not a clue of what is needed here!
Use of technology has INCREASED work in visibility and level of "attack". Emails PER DAY can be onerous. Then they need dealing with or setting the diary!
It has increased. I think this is partially due to becoming better known
My Borough work has increased a lot. I was initially a cabinet Member, so my workload was already quite high. But under the Committee system I have been Vice- Chair of Policy and Resources as well as charring planning. Case work has stayed at the same level but as Borough Councillors we do more direct work with our residents than our County Members.
My first year. So, I had no prior knowledge
It is a about the same. However, during lockdown, the community support increased.
as my knowledge and networking has increased, so has my ability to deal with residents' issues I am ore able to resolve / attend to issues more myself (on my own) than handing over to officers
I am definitely in front of a computer more than ever or on my mobile and expect this will increase in future. Once we get back to the habit of meeting people directly, I expect the emails will continue along with other online work and the days will get longer.
It has not
Work fluxes during the year. Would like improved spacing (Sept /Oct for instance is intense).

## Comments about how technology has impacted on balancing work? And if this change has been positive or negative.

Total comments received 25, these are shown in full in the table below.

# Member Workload Survey 2021

From these comments it was identified that:

- Nine were broadly positive with mentions of increased efficiency, being able to spread workload out and improved communication.
- Five made comments suggesting there has been no change or no improvement in balancing work due to technology.
- Three specifically mentioned time saved due to less travelling.
- Three highlighted increased expectations on responses/answer to queries or issues raised by their constituents.
- Four were pragmatic, highlighting both advantages and disadvantages balancing work due to increased due of technology.
- One raised concerns about technology 'overload'.

<b>Q16: Use the box below to tell us about how technology has impacted on balancing work? And if this change has been positive or negative.</b>
Overall positive, the use of virtual meetings has enabled briefings and routines with senior officers to continue without the need for any of the parties to have to physically move around to attend.
Less meeting officers in person is to a negative.
Ditto
Technology has helped in some ways i.e., better communication reducing the time it takes to produce ward newsletters or letters to residents. It has increased expectations from the public and massively increased case work and communication requests. answering my emails can take 4 hours a day.
Technology doesn't only bring benefits - it also presents challenges, so overall I would say that technology impact is neutral
there is now more pressure to answer emails quickly, so I have to make sure I set aside breaks from doing my council work at home. Overall, the change has been positive.
I am spending more hours in meetings online
Not enough experience yet to comment
Negative less contact with fellow members and some officers
Technology has helped in balancing my workload as information can be provided within my Community when required very quickly. Not all residents have computers and many elderly residents do not want them. The most important thing for me is to personally keep in touch with residents in order that if assistance is required I can and do provide assistance to them. The negative impact of technology can be residents not wanting to tell you about matters that are troubling them for fear of looking stupid. I use technology all the time in my professional role so it would be difficult to make a judgement on whether technology is positive or negative. I have to use it!
Access to technology has reduced, capability of technology when accessed and absence of basic tools like a printer are debilitating to work as a Councillor.
Faster access to information and documents.
Positive
It has been helpful to be able to fully use the calendar options to make sure that I am planning and scheduling my work effectively.
On-line meetings, as already described, has been massively beneficial.
briefings are now held remotely, cuts on travel time, save of around 1 hour per briefing
Increase in remote meetings both committee and individual contact with officers, positive While pursuing casework being told to use online reporting systems, Negative Poor website layout hinders research. Negative



# Member Workload Survey 2021

<b>Q16: Use the box below to tell us about how technology has impacted on balancing work? And if this change has been positive or negative.</b>
I love technology, but personally it's getting to "overload" in all its aspects. But then I want to cut my travel it's a two-sided coin. But the health concerns now affect me, "white blinded" vision, back ache, tremulous hands etc.
Technology has made a big different to Group/ Workshop/ Briefing type meetings as these can all be done virtually. One can even attend as a Visiting Member virtually to Committee meetings, although personally I prefer face to face.
None
Technology has helped and there is not the need to attend every briefing in person which cuts down on travel/time.
positive impact, I'm able to deal with more issues as the workload has increased over the years
I feel technology has made me more productive and efficient. Technology has created a better balance in terms of spreading the load. So essentially emails can be written at night as opposed to making phone calls or going to see people?
It has not
Positive to some degree. The mix is important of physical and digital. There is a negative of the amazonisation of life. I have a full-time job and council is not a full-time occupation. Therefore, the rising pressure for quicker responses from the public is harder. Technology facilitates this but could perhaps help with it as well.

## Comments about what respondents think are going to be the biggest changes to how council work and case work are conducted over the next 5-10 years

Total comments received 25, these are shown in full in the table below.

From these comments it was identified that:

- Seven said they expected workloads and expectations of them to increase.
- Five mentioned reforms of Local Government (Including the Boundary Review and becoming a unitary authority).
- Five said they were unsure, with one of these stating they are new to the role.
- Three said they expected face2face interaction to reduce.
- One said they would be requiring new skills to deal with the increasing amount of communication platforms.

<b>Q14: Use the box below to tell us what you think will be the biggest changes to how you conduct council work and case work over the next 5-10 years?</b>
The continuing housing crisis, and deteriorating environment caused by increasing congestion and over development
Increasingly we are seeing the Council does not wish to meet residents in person or speak on the phone the preference is to report it online, email or leave a message. The assumption that everyone has access to the internet, online banking, social media is not correct. This results particularly with older residents saying what's the point no one listens no one cares.
Not sure
I will need to continue to up my ability to conduct and the time spent on research and policy development and to devote more time to developing even more Social Media skills on yet more platforms.

# Member Workload Survey 2021

<b>Q14: Use the box below to tell us what you think will be the biggest changes to how you conduct council work and case work over the next 5-10 years?</b>
Meeting expectations and handling an increasing workload
I really don't know. Will Local Government continue to exist in its present form?
Not enough experience yet to comment
The biggest help would be having one authority rather than MBC and KCC. Every borough council could have the responsibility of KCC and therefore divide responsibility.
Council work un-known I feel know change will happen people will still need help
In my Wards the numbers of houses that have already been built, have placed a strain on facilities within the area. I believe that technology will greatly assist how I maintain the personal approach to residents that I started in 2011 when first elected. There are many issues with the expansive developments in all areas in the South East of England, resulting in the requirement for medical facilities, schools, highways a reduction in pollution and the need to protect green areas not keep building on them. There needs to be greater control of development within planning and affordable homes provided for purchase by young residents of The Borough of Maidstone!
Continued loss of influence and powers, continued loss of esteem in role and financial cost of being a Councillor (in terms of impact upon employment prospects and equipment / materials).
Increasing and improving technology.
Not sure
The change to executive arrangements may have some change on the committees and the work that I do. Case work will increase as more residents move into the newly built houses in my ward.
It might not happen, but I would like to see the role becoming more strategic and less social worker. This does not mean a reduction in community liaison and involvement. It would mean less time dealing with, for example, housing cases and not being able to magic up a new house but more time working on policy and strategy to deliver housing
electoral reform and / or boundary review
Increase in remote meetings both committee and individual contact with officers.
I doubt I will WANT to serve that long! The prospect of more emails every day and some of the vitriol with them, despite my desire to work for a better community means I really had to think about any next election. My health, my sanity, Versus an easier life, more free hours and less stress? AS A VOLUNTEER!
Continued use of technology. However, I do not see any likelihood of the workload decreasing, if anything it will increase. Councillors cannot just deal with strategic issues; they must always serve those who elected them.
LGBR
With the increase in household in MBC area the workload will increase.
the impact of the boundary review financial / budgetary pressures devolution / partnership working residents' expectations
Technology will improve but create even more channels of communication. A I will encompass all our lives and change work patterns. Personal contact with residents and the council has been lost over recent years and I would not want this to reduce any further.
None
Further demands for quicker responses from Cllrs who are effectively part time. So, this needs to be supported. Hybrid meetings will probably increase.