

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

Year	Number of Outside Bodies	Number of Positions
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.