

[Insert name of submission organisation/group/individual here]

Council Size Submission: Cotswold District Council

Contents

How to Make a Submission	2
About Cotswold District.....	2
Reason for Review (Request Reviews Only).....	3
The Context for your proposal	3
Local Authority Profile	11
Council Size.....	14
Other Issues	34

How to Make a Submission

It is recommended that submissions on future governance arrangements and council size follow the guidance provided and use the format below as a template. Submissions should be treated as an opportunity to focus on the future needs of the council and not simply describe the current arrangements. **Submissions should also demonstrate that alternative council sizes have been considered in drawing up the proposal and why you have discounted them.**

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

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

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

About Cotswold District

The respondent should use this space to provide the Commission with a little detail about who is making the submission, whether it is the Full Council, Officers on behalf of the Council, a political party or group, a resident group, or an individual.

This submission is made on behalf of Cotswold District Council, following its **approval** by full Council on 25 September 2024.

Electoral and boundary matters are a non-executive function which fall within the responsibilities of full Council. On 20 September 2023 Council approved the creation of a cross-party working group to oversee the Local Government Boundary Review and agreed terms of reference for the working group.

The Boundary Reviews Working Group held a series of meetings from December 2023 to September 2024 to consider advice from officers based on data and the local application of guidance on boundary reviews and to oversee and shape the development of this Council Size Proposal.

The proposal has also been informed by an analysis of Member workloads associated with meeting attendance and a survey which was circulated to all members and had a 76% response rate (26 / 34 Members). The survey was open from 22 July 2024 to 23 August 2024 and a summary of responses is appended to this proposal document.

Summary of the proposal

The Council is proposing a modest increase in the size of the Council from 34 Councillors to 37 Councillors. This increase would keep the ratio of councillors to numbers of electors broadly flat into the future while providing additional capacity to mitigate the increased workload of councillors linked to improvements to the Council's governance arrangements following a recent Corporate Peer Challenge Review. Given that population growth will be centred in and around the main settlements, an unchanged electorate ratio will mean that the rural wards within the district, which are already large and cover numerous parish areas, shouldn't need to increase in size on average.

The Council is also seeking a uniform pattern of single member wards across the whole of the district area if this can be practicably achieved.

Reason for Review (Request Reviews Only)

Please explain the authority's reasons for requesting this electoral review; it is useful for the Commission to have context. *NB/ If the Commission has identified the authority for review under one of its published criteria, then you are not required to answer this question.*

Cotswold District Council meets the Commission's criteria for electoral inequality with 31% of wards having variances more than 10% from the average for the authority.

Cotswold District Council was due to have a boundary review commencing in 2025, following the previous boundary review in 2015. Due to changes in population across the district and slow progress of key major development sites (such as the Steadings in Four Acres ward) impacting the electoral inequality across the district, the Council approached the Local Government Boundary Commission and asked if the review could be brought forward. The Commission agreed and indicated that it would conduct a review of District Ward boundaries beginning in Spring 2024. The review will consider council size and warding arrangements with any changes implemented at the next ordinary elections in May 2027.

The Context for your proposal

Your submission gives you the opportunity to examine how you wish to organise and run the council for the next 15 - 20 years. **The consideration of future governance arrangements and council size should be set in the wider local and national policy context.** The Commission expects you to challenge your current arrangements and determine the most appropriate arrangements going forward. In providing context for your submission below, please demonstrate that you have considered the following issues.

- When did your Council last change/reorganise its internal governance arrangements and what impact on effectiveness did that activity have?
- To what extent has transference of strategic and/or service functions impacted on the effectiveness of service delivery and the ability of the Council to focus on its remaining functions?
- Have any governance or capacity issues been raised by any Inspectorate or similar?

- What influence will local and national policy trends likely have on the Council as an institution?
- What impact on the Council's effectiveness will your council size proposal have?

When did your Council last change/reorganise its internal governance arrangements and what impact on effectiveness did that activity have?

The Council has operated the Leader and Cabinet model of governance since executive arrangements were first brought in following the Local Government Act 2000. The Cabinet takes most of the Council's strategic decisions and in doing so must act within the budget and policy framework set by full Council. This governance model was reviewed by the Council in 2021 and is reflected in the Council's Constitution, which is regularly reviewed by the Council's Constitution Working Group with any changes agreed by full Council. The Leader and Cabinet model provides for strong accountability and certainty around the decision-making process, with appropriate democratic checks and balances, including the role of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, with a strong pre-decision scrutiny function now being demonstrated. Members recognise that open, transparent and inclusive decision making with clear accountability benefits the Council and the communities it serves.

The Council's Constitution has since 25 May 2022 required that an opposition member is chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. While this is not a legal requirement it is widely considered to be good governance practice as it provides for independent checks and balances on executive power. For example, the Chair of Overview and Scrutiny must agree to special urgency in relation to a key executive decision being taken with less than 5 clear days' notice on the Council's Forward Plan, or where the Cabinet wishes to exclude the public from a meeting without having given the required 28 clear days' notice.

All 34 Members serve on Full Council, which meets seven times per year, for up to four hours per meeting. Full Council collectively takes decisions that are reserved to it in the Constitution, appoints the Leader of the Council for a four-year term and appoints the Chief Executive and designates who will be the Chief Finance Officer and Monitoring Officer when there are vacancies. Council also debates any motions brought by councillors, hears public participation, deals with any petitions and provides a forum for members to question Cabinet Members and Committee Chairs.

Members also serve on committees, sub-committees and working groups. All Members spend time reading reports, attending briefings and dealing with correspondence and case work on behalf of the communities they represent. Members with special responsibilities will spend additional time on those responsibilities, for example by engaging with officers and attending informal meetings such as pre-meetings.

The Council has relatively recently undertaken a thorough options appraisal of the available governance models through a cross-party Models of Governance Group, which reported in May 2022. This followed a manifesto commitment of the current controlling group to review the Council's governance structure. The Models of Governance Group's recommended option was to retain the Leader and Cabinet model but with enhanced transparency around Individual Cabinet Member decision making. This is the governance system the Council currently operates. The enhanced transparency around individual Cabinet Member decision making has included enabling the public to attend and view live webcasts of Cabinet Member decision making. In addition, a call-in system was implemented for executive decisions taken by individual Cabinet Members (in addition to Cabinet decisions and key decisions taken by officers). These measures have successfully enhanced the

accountability and effectiveness of executive decision-making and opened it up to the local community.

The Council has systematically reviewed and improved its governance arrangements in response to a Corporate Peer Challenge Feedback Report in October 2022, which recommended that the Council assures itself that its governance arrangements are robust.

The Peer Challenge Feedback Report noted that there were different views about the effectiveness of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny function. The report welcomed the requirement for the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to be an opposition member as a mature constitutional change that provided a good foundation. The report also noted that the Leader and Cabinet were clear that they wished to be held to account more effectively by Overview and Scrutiny.

The Council has made significant progress in strengthening its Overview and Scrutiny function in response to the report. The Council has refocused the role of Overview and Scrutiny on to holding Cabinet to account and contributing to policy development on behalf of the local community. This has involved properly embedding pre-decision scrutiny as part of the Council's executive decision-making process and moving away from using Overview and Scrutiny as a means of keeping elected members informed of key developments across the district. Instead, the Council now holds monthly member briefing sessions on topics affecting the Council or the wider District.

The improvements to the Overview and Scrutiny function and individual Cabinet Member decision making, and other changes implemented through the Peer Review Action Plan and a Democratic Services Improvement Plan (e.g. improvements to the report process) have all had a positive impact on the governance of the Council. There has been a consequent increase in the number of meetings held (particularly Overview and Scrutiny and working groups) and the workload of Members.

The Boundary Commission's last review of the size and warding of Cotswold District Council reported in 2015. That followed a request from the Council that the Commission undertake a single-member ward review. The size of the Council was reduced from 44 councillors to 34 councillors representing 32 wards. 30 wards are represented by a single councillor and two wards are represented by two councillors (Campden & Vale; and Lechlade, Kempsford & Fairford South).

The Boundary Commission Review in 2015 recommended a two-member ward for Campden & Vale to provide the best balance of the statutory criteria for this part of the district. This was a departure from the Council's request for a uniform pattern of single-member wards across the whole district.

The Lechlade, Kempsford & Fairford South ward was originally proposed by the Boundary Commission to be two single-member wards; one for Lechlade and one for Kempsford and Fairford South (which had included some communities that were within Lechlade). This was changed following the consultation based on strong community evidence of links between the communities in Lechlade to ensure that the whole of Lechlade town could be included within the same district ward while keeping electoral variances to a minimum.

The previous Boundary Commission review envisaged an average number of electors per councillor of 2,021 in 2013 rising to 2,183 by 2019. As of June 2024, 34 councillors

represent 70,036 electors, a ratio of 2060:1. The population of Cotswold District increased by 9.6% between 2011 and 2021 from 82,881 to 90,800.

Based on planned housing development within the district, the number of electors is likely to increase by 6,538 to 76,574 by 2031, giving a ratio of 2252:1 based on the current number of councillors, an increase of over 9% on average. This growth is not expected to be uniform across the whole district and will be concentrated in a small number of wards where new housing development is concentrated, most notably those containing larger development sites. Cirencester - Chesterton faces the largest growth, at around a 1,125 increase in electors, followed by the adjacent Four Acres ward at an estimated 711. Moreton West will grow by around 530. Other wards in the principal settlements look set to grow by between 100 and 250 electors. A modest increase in the number of councillors to 37 would provide a ratio of 2070:1 in 2031, which represents a very small increase on the existing number of electors per councillor from the current ratio of 2060:1.

To what extent has transference of strategic and/or service functions impacted on the effectiveness of service delivery and the ability of the Council to focus on its remaining functions?

There have been some changes to the demands on local authorities since 2015, against a backdrop of funding constraints. For example, the Council played an active role in supporting communities in new and different ways during the Covid-19 pandemic. This included the redeployment of a large number of staff into community facing roles, with significant resources allocated to ensure vulnerable people had access to food and medicines. Once this network of support was established and being sustained through an active network of Voluntary agencies and Charities, the focus switched to business support. Members played an active role in identifying local resources and needs throughout this period.

Local Councils have had to increase efficiency and become increasingly financially self-sufficient as the Revenue Support Grant from Government has reduced. For example, the Council is seeking to make the best use of its assets through the adoption of a new Asset Management Strategy based on the following three principles:

- Fit for purpose, cost effective and well utilised;
- Sustainable and efficient;
- Commercially managed.

Members of the public increasingly expect councils to utilise modern forms of technology and to be more responsive than ever before, for example on social media. The Council has been introducing new digital channels and improving those that already existed. This activity coincided with the Covid pandemic, where people accepted the use of alternative service access channels as a result of national restrictions. This resulted in a significant percentage of service requests coming through digital channels, which presented an opportunity for the Council to trial a reduction in the hours of opening for its customer contact centre. Making this change permanent can be expected to save the Council £125,000 per annum.

The Councils Waste, Recycling and Street Cleansing services are delivered efficiently through its Teckal company Ubico Limited. However, it remains an ongoing financial burden, particularly with the need to maximise recycling and recovery of food waste which requires a significant fleet to operate across a large rural district. The Council is constantly reviewing opportunities to increase efficiency and reduce cost through its Cabinet Transform

Working Group. The latest change to be implemented was the Round Optimisations in June 2024.

The new Biodiversity Net Gain requirements placed on authorities are having a notable impact on limited ecology resources and on the demands for large numbers of S.106 agreements which need to be administered through the legal team.

Funding is regularly made available to district councils by central government but the bid process and administration of fundings can be extremely resource intensive and timelines are frequently tight. The provision of UKSPF and REPF funding is welcomed but it is extremely resource intensive to devise schemes, call for interest, evaluate and award, put grant agreements in place and then monitor and report progress. This also requires agile and responsive executive decision making, which the Leader and Cabinet model can provide.

The Council, together with its partner councils Forest of Dean District Council and West Oxfordshire District Council, is undertaking a major transfer of services from its wholly owned Teckal company Publica Group back to the Council. This repatriation of services is taking place in a phased approach with phase 1 being implemented on 1 November 2024, affecting the employment of 270 staff across the partnership; most of whom work exclusively for a single council. A second phase of the transition comprising services and staffing posts that are currently shared is due to be implemented in Spring 2025. This represents a major change programme for the Council which will require significant Member-oversight.

Have any governance or capacity issues been raised by any Inspectorate or similar?

The Corporate Peer Challenge Feedback Report recommended that the Council reassures itself that its governance arrangements are robust. Various improvements have been addressed through the production and implementation of a Peer Review Action Plan and a Democratic Services Improvement Plan.

The Corporate Peer Challenge Feedback Report discussed the Council's "capacity for improvement", noting that the vast majority of Council staff are employed by the Teckal company Publica and noted that it was clear from their discussions with staff at various levels of both organisations that capacity pressures were increasingly being felt and were impacting on both the delivery of council priorities and the wellbeing of staff. The Council has subsequently started the process of insourcing the majority of services from Publica back to the Council in a phased transition.

Over the ten years from the Census 2011 to the Census 2021, the population of Cotswold District increased by 9.6% from 82,881 to 90,800, with the latest estimate in mid-2022 of 91,311. This was a greater increase than the average for the county (8.1%), and England (6.6%). Housing growth projections up until 2031 are estimated to add a further 7,967 in population. Using the current age profile of the district as a reference, this adds some 6,538 electors. The Council has started work on the Local Plan 2031-41. While this work is at a relatively early stage, the strategy is to continue to focus growth over this period around the district's main settlements, to minimise impacts on the Cotswold Natural Landscape.

Cotswold District has three tiers of local government; with a county council, district council and town/parish councillors covering the whole of the district areas. Some District

Councillors also serve as county councillors and / or town/parish councillors. Compared to unitary authorities, this structure adds complexity and places additional burdens on District Councillors, who need to engage at all three levels of local government as local representatives.

Some Members representing rural wards have raised concerns about their capacity to engage effectively with parish councils. There are 88 Town and Parish Councils with 616 town and parish councillors across the district. Town and Parish Councils provide a number of local functions such as the maintenance of cemeteries, bus shelters, and recreation facilities. They also act as important consultees for planning applications and distribute grants to organisations. Councillors representing rural wards cover a number of parish council areas (up to 11 in two of the single-member wards - Ermin ward and Fossebridge ward). In rural areas, ward councillors regularly engage with parish councils and attend parish council meetings or parish meetings, providing an important link between the District Council and its local communities. It is considered that some wards cover too many parish council areas due to the demands of engaging effectively with so many separate organisations and communities. A slight increase in the number of District Councillors which keeps the electorate ratio broadly unchanged would ensure that the rural wards are not any larger than they are at present, given that population growth will be centred around the main settlements. An unchanged Council size would result in rural wards being larger than at present on average.

Members representing two-Member wards have raised concerns about the particular challenges they face as elected representatives over and above the demands on Members who represent single-member wards. Representing a two-member ward creates an additional layer of administration for the members themselves as they need to be in regular communication with each other. Members find that it is very difficult for them to split their responsibilities and represent their ward effectively. The experience is that both Members find themselves representing the whole ward, with double the electorate of a single-Member ward, and there is inevitably duplication (e.g. engagement in planning) and consequently a higher workload for both members compared to members representing a single-Member ward. These issues are likely to be exacerbated where the two members are from different political groups. Two-Member wards also create additional confusion about ownership and responsibility within communities (which can already be confusing in three-tier areas) and dilutes the accountability of elected representatives to the communities they serve.

Attendance at Cotswold District Council meetings is generally good and there have been no issues with meetings being quorate, given that substitutions are allowed at most meetings. In 2023/24 Members attended an average of 18.5 meetings (range: 8 to 31, median 18). This is an increase on the figure of 15.2 for 2022/23 (range 6 to 29, median 16), which was unchanged from 2021/22 (range 2 to 32, median 15).

The table below shows that the workload and time commitment associated with attending Council, Cabinet, Cabinet decision making, committees, sub-committees and working groups increased significantly in 2023/24. The primary drivers of this increase are the more active Overview and Scrutiny function and the enhanced role that Member working groups are playing in the Council's governance arrangements. The increase in the number and total duration of meetings seen in 2023/24 is expected to represent the new normal following the recent improvements that have been implemented to the Council's governance arrangements following the Corporate Peer Challenge Feedback Report.

Table 1: Meeting statistics 2021/22 to 2023/24

	2023/24	2022/23	2021/22
Number of meetings	93	70	76
Total duration (hours)	119.8	91.6	*
Number of reports	553	273	285
Total pages	11569	7508	7327

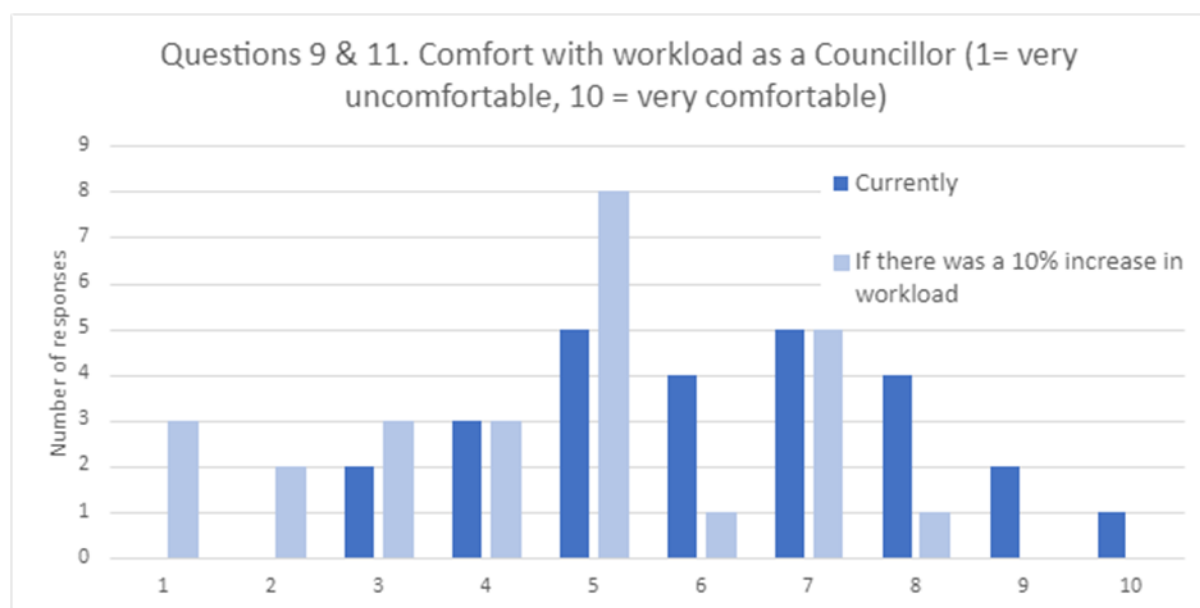
*meeting durations were not accurately recorded for 2021/22.

The increase in the number of meetings has primarily been driven by the increasingly important role that Overview and Scrutiny and Member Working Groups are now playing in the work and governance of the Council following the Corporate Peer Challenge Feedback Report. In 2023/24 Members spent more time reading significantly more pages preparing for meetings and spent more time in meetings compared to previous years.

Half of Members who responded to the survey (13) estimated that they spend 11-15 hours per week on average on their role as a district councillor. Only two Members estimated that they spend less than 11 hours per week on their duties as a councillor (both 6-10 hours per week). 11 Members responded with more than 15 hours per week, with six of those selecting more than 20 hours per week.

The survey results also showed that the majority of Members (21 out of 26 survey respondents) believed that the workload had increased since they first became a councillor (whenever that was). The primary drivers for this increase in workload were identified as being "reading reports" and "ward member work including casework" (both selected by 15 of the 21 Members). Only one member out of 26 felt that the workload had decreased (due to a change in their responsibilities).

The survey asked Members to rank how comfortable they are with their workload from 1 (very uncomfortable) to 10 (very comfortable). The table below shows how Members responded to this question and a follow up question about how comfortable they would be if the workload was to increase by 10%.



If the number of councillors was to reduce (or stay the same) the workload of individual councillors would continue to increase significantly on average and there is a risk that certain councillor roles could not be performed effectively in future, which would be detrimental to the work of the Council and the communities it serves (including town and parish councils and the outside bodies the Council appoints to). This would place particular pressure on councillors who work full time or have caring responsibilities in addition to their duties as a councillor. Members who represent large rural wards covering numerous of parish council areas would continue to face particular demands, including spending significant amounts of time travelling to and attending parish council meetings. These demands would only increase without an overall increase in the number of councillors because population growth will be centred around existing settlement meaning rural wards would likely need to increase in size on average.

What influence will local and national policy trends likely have on the Council as an institution?

The national policy landscape has change significantly following the general election on 4 July 2024.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has been clear that achieving sustained economic growth is going to be the major economic focus of the government, describing this as "Our national mission". This approach will rest on three pillars: stability, investment and reform. The Chancellor has stated that "Nowhere is decisive reform needed more urgently than in the case of our planning system". The first step the government is taking is to consider reform of the National Planning Policy Framework, which is currently under consultation.

The Deputy Prime Minister wrote to local authorities on 30 July 2024 setting out the government's plans to reform the planning system and accelerate the delivery of housing, with an emphasis on social and affordable housing. The letter talks about achieving universal coverage of local plans and introducing new mechanisms for cross-boundary strategic planning, potentially including the introduction of Spatial Development Strategies outside of mayoral areas. The letter also confirms that the government plans to reinstate the standard method as the required approach for assessing housing needs, which will significantly increase the number of homes needed in Cotswold District (from 504 to 979 homes per year).

The new Labour government has indicated that further powers will be devolved to local government although the likely impact on district councils in the form of new powers is not yet clear. The government has stated that "New devolution settlements should be tailored to sensible economic geographies so that local leaders can act at the scale needed to effectively deploy their powers. In the majority of cases that will require local authorities to come together in new combined or combined county authorities".

In March 2024 the Council, along with the other principal authorities in Gloucestershire, agreed to the establishment of the Gloucestershire City Region Board. This new partnership body will support the delivery of developing a vision for the future growth of the economic success for the whole of the Gloucestershire economic area. This is a new outside body which the Cabinet Member for Economy and Council Transformation has been appointed to.

Cotswold District is situated on the edge of the "Western Gateway" which stretches from Swansea to Swindon; a pan-regional net-zero innovation zone. This is a new regional body comprising Council Leaders, Mayors, Government Departments and Local Enterprise Partnerships. While the Council isn't directly represented on the Western Gateway, there is a 'Gloucestershire seat' at the table, currently the leader of Gloucestershire County Council. The Western Gateway it is of strategic economic importance to the district and the wider area.

What impact on the Council's effectiveness will your council size proposal have?

The effects of the proposal to increase the size of the Council to 37 councillors on the Council's effectiveness will be positive compared to maintaining the status quo of 34 councillors:

- All Members will be more likely to have sufficient capacity to deal with increasingly complex casework on behalf of local residents and businesses, including the most vulnerable members of the community, notwithstanding the growth in the size of the population and the electorate.
- All Members will be more likely to have sufficient capacity to attend meetings of outside bodies (where applicable), in addition to their duties as members of Full Council, Cabinet, committees, sub-committees and working groups.
- Non-executive members will be more likely to have sufficient capacity to participate in an active scrutiny function (including task and finish groups).
- It would be more likely that there will be sufficient member capacity for working groups to function effectively.
- Councillor workloads are less likely to be off-putting to prospective councillors, particularly those in employment or with caring responsibilities (15 of 26 survey respondents described their employment status as being employed, either full time or part time; 9 of 26 had caring responsibilities).
- Members representing rural wards will be more likely to serve a manageable number of communities within a reasonable travelling distance.
- Members will be more likely to have sufficient capacity to attend meetings of town and parish councils within their wards.
- Members representing rural wards will be less likely to cover an increased number of parish areas and will be more likely to be able to engage effectively with and support the parish councils within their wards.
- All communities within the district will be more likely to be able to be effectively represented by their local ward member.
- All members will be more likely to have reasonable and manageable volumes of planning applications that they need to engage with.

Local Authority Profile

Please provide a short description of the authority and its setting, in particular the local geography, demographics and community characteristics. This should set the scene for the Commission and give it a greater understanding of any current issues. The description should cover all of the following:

- Brief outline of area - are there any notable geographic constraints for example that may affect the review?
- Rural or urban - what are the characteristics of the authority?
- Demographic pressures - such as distinctive age profiles, migrant or transient populations, is there any large growth anticipated?

- Community characteristics – is there presence of “hidden” or otherwise complex deprivation?
- Are there any other constraints, challenges, issues or changes ahead?

Further to providing a description, the Commission will be looking for a submission that demonstrates an understanding of place and communities by putting forth arguments on council size based upon local evidence and insight. For example, how does local geography, demographics and community characteristics impact on councillor casework, workload and community engagement?

Cotswold District has a population of about 91,311 spread over an area of 450 sq. miles (1,165 sq. km). Although very rural, the District lies in close proximity to large urban areas – notably Swindon, Gloucester and Cheltenham and, further afield, Oxford, Bristol, Bath, Birmingham and Coventry.

The Cotswolds is internationally renowned for its natural beauty. The distinctive local building stone, used in the construction of the many magnificent historic buildings, is a hugely important part of the character that makes the Cotswolds a famous tourist destination. The interplay between the built and natural environment is a defining characteristic throughout the District, especially within the Cotswolds Natural Landscape.

The distinctive heritage includes its numerous market towns and villages and their settings, as well as individual heritage assets. The quality of the District's built and natural environment is reflected in the high number of environmental and heritage assets (both designated and non-designated). These include: 80% of the District is within the Cotswolds National Landscape (a greater coverage by a national landscape designation than any other District in England); 144 Conservation Areas (more than any other District in England); 4,991 entries on the statutory list of buildings of special architectural and historic interest (second after City of Westminster); 239 Scheduled ancient monuments; 32 registered historic parks and gardens; 37 Sites of Special Scientific Interest; Over 260 locally designated Key Wildlife Sites; 1 registered battlefield.

In the south of the District, beyond the Cotswold Natural Landscape, the Cotswold Water Park (CWP) is the largest area of man-made lakes in the UK, covering an area of 40 sq. miles (33 sq. miles in Cotswold District). The CWP has evolved from major sand and gravel extraction of the upper Thames valley, which is on-going and likely to continue for the foreseeable future. The area is important for nature conservation, while also providing a major resource for tourism, notably water recreation. Circa 1000 holiday homes have been granted planning permission in the Cotswold part of the CWP.

The District has a high proportion of elderly people and a low proportion of children and young people. It also has the lowest population density, by far, of any of the districts in Gloucestershire. While most residents in the District enjoy a good quality of life, many live in places that lack good access to services, facilities, training and education. This presents problems for those who rely on public transport, particularly young and elderly people.

The population is predominantly UK born (91.2%), but has become more diverse in recent years, as a consequence of both internal migration within the UK and also inward migration, from the EU (3.6%) and from outside the EU. There is little evidence of any concentration of BAME residents in any particular area, nor local concern over integration.

The attractiveness of the area has inevitably brought pressures for housing growth. In the north of the District these have been driven, since the 1960s, by commuting to the West Midlands. However, movement out of London and the south-east has made the Cotswolds particularly attractive for retirement and holiday or second homes. Anecdotally, this has been exacerbated in recent years by the post-Covid boom in 'staycations' but there is paucity of data on short term lets.

The median earned income of full-time employees resident in the Cotswold District is £36,234, higher than both Gloucestershire and UK figures. However, looking at workplace earning in the district paints a very different picture, the median earned income of full-time employees working in the district is £29,579, lower than the county average, and significantly lower than the UK figure of £34,963. Consequently, those people working in local businesses and services face financial barriers, particularly access to housing. The area has high property values, exacerbated by private sector rents rising faster than house prices and earnings. The affordability of homes is a significant challenge – the Ratio of median house price to median gross annual workplace-based earnings has long been one of the highest nationally, and in 2023 sat at 14.88 – 18th out of 319, and the sixth highest outside London.

Each of the larger Cotswold towns has a strong and distinctive role. However, Cirencester is by far the most dominant centre with about a quarter of the District's population and over 30% of jobs (around 13,500) based in the town. This is the key location for business services, finance, retail and public services. Moreton-in-Marsh is regarded by many as the main centre for the north Cotswolds, while Bourton-on-the-Water, Chipping Campden, Fairford, Lechlade, Northleach, Stow-on-the-Wold and Tetbury perform the role of service centres for surrounding rural areas. Smaller local service centres exist at Andoversford, Blockley, Down Ampney, Kemble, Mickleton, South Cerney and Willersey. Elsewhere, rural services are relatively sparse and declining. A striking point about the District's main service centres is their even geographical distribution, with each of them serving a significant catchment of smaller settlements. Many of these historic market towns and larger villages have developed at points along the Fosse Way - a major route running between the south-west and the north of the District. There is a range of employment land and premises in most of the larger market towns and villages, although provision at Lechlade, Northleach and Stow-on-the-Wold is limited. Despite poor broadband coverage throughout much of the District, the economy has a strong representation of small businesses and a diverse economic base. These businesses make a significant contribution to the economic well-being of the District, offer local employment opportunities, and have made the area resilient to fluctuations in the national and global economies. Unemployment rates remain relatively low. In 2011, well before the Covid pandemic, almost 8,000 people (13.3%) already worked from home in Cotswold, double the national average. This is partly due to the rural nature of the District and a highly skilled and entrepreneurial workforce.

As of 2022, the wholesale and retail trades represent the largest employment group in the District (15.6%). The next largest groups are Accommodation and Food (13.3%) and administrative and support services (10.0%). The service sector accounts for a large proportion of local jobs, with tourism being a major and growing part of the local economy. There are several large businesses including Campden BRI, St. James's Place, the Fire Service College, and educational institutions, notably the Royal Agricultural University, which offer opportunities for higher value growth. The economically active population is,

however, declining across the District, and the labour market is considered tight by local businesses with labour supply issues, particularly in the professional, skilled trades and engineering sectors, potentially impacting on economic growth. Demand enquiries for employment land/premises particularly from small, knowledge-based businesses, who want to secure a quality environment or a site for an existing local business, tend to be focussed upon Cirencester and established business parks. The loss of employment land to housing development has reduced opportunities for employment growth in some areas; for example, at Tetbury 9.11 hectares of employment land has been lost to residential / care home development since 2011.

A large number of residents commute out of the District; many using the area as a rural base from which to commute to larger employment centres, notably Swindon, Cheltenham and Gloucester, where there are higher value jobs. This is largely balanced by numbers commuting in, and by those residents who work in the District. Given the rural nature of the area, average travel-to-work times are longer than in most other parts of the County. Much of the District has good road links, with easy access to the motorway network via A-class routes, although this does not apply to the northernmost parishes. The 'missing link' section of the A417(T) between the Brimpsfield roundabout and Brockworth bypass has been a major bottleneck, badly delaying access to and from the M5 motorway at peak times – current work to dual the entire length through the district will create some short-term disruption, but longer term will lead to improved connectivity.

The District is served by just two railway stations, at Kemble (on the Swindon-Gloucester line) and Moreton-in-Marsh (on the Oxford-Worcester line). Kingham and Honeybourne stations lie just outside the District boundary to the east and north respectively.

Parts of the District are vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, including flooding. The area at greatest flood risk is the upper Thames valley, which includes the Cotswold Water Park (CWP), although many other settlements such as Bourton-on-the-Water, Cirencester and Moreton-in-Marsh have also been affected. Recent and regular flooding experienced in the District highlights the additional risk to both existing and new properties of sewer flooding.

Since the July 2024 parliamentary general election, the district area has been represented by two Members of Parliament (representing North Cotswolds and South Cotswolds), whereas previously there was a single MP for the Cotswold district area.

Council Size

The Commission believes that councillors have three broad aspects to their role. These are categorised as: **Strategic Leadership, Accountability (Scrutiny, Regulatory and Partnerships), and Community Leadership**. Submissions should address each of these in turn and provide supporting evidence. Prompts in the boxes below should help shape responses.

Strategic Leadership

Respondents should provide the Commission with details as to how elected members will provide strategic leadership for the authority. Responses should also indicate how many members will be required for this role and why this is justified. **Responses should demonstrate that alternative council sizes have been explored.**

Topic		
<p>Governance Model</p>	<p><i>Key lines of explanation</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>What governance model will your authority operate? e.g. Committee System, Executive or other?</i> ➤ <i>The Cabinet model, for example, usually requires 6 to 10 members. How many members will you require?</i> ➤ <i>If the authority runs a Committee system, we want to understand why the number and size of the committees you propose represents the most appropriate for the authority.</i> ➤ <i>By what process does the council aim to formulate strategic and operational policies? How will members in executive, executive support and/or scrutiny positions be involved? What particular demands will this make of them?</i> ➤ <i>Whichever governance model you currently operate, a simple assertion that you want to keep the current structure does not in itself, provide an explanation of why that structure best meets the needs of the council and your communities.</i>

	<p style="text-align: center;">Analysis</p>	<p><u>Leader and Cabinet model</u> The Council operates the Leader and Cabinet model. The Leader of the Council is elected for a 4-year term following all out elections (most recently in May 2023). The Leader appoints Cabinet Members and allocates portfolio responsibilities.</p> <p>Cabinet takes strategic decisions collectively and provides political leadership and oversight of the Council as a whole, including at monthly informal Cabinet meetings. Individual Cabinet Members also have certain decision-making responsibilities and provide political leadership and public accountability for the specific services and activities within the remit of their portfolio. Cabinet Members, both individually and collectively, play a key role in overseeing the development of strategic policies and strategy documents. Cabinet Members also act as the Accountable Member for reports within their portfolio responsibilities, which includes presenting reports at meetings of Cabinet, Council and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, with the lead officers playing a supporting role and answering technical questions the Cabinet Member is unable to. Cabinet Members hold senior officers to account for the implementation of decisions and the delivery of the Council’s agreed policies and strategies.</p> <p>The Council has recently reviewed its governance arrangements through the Models of Governance Review in 2022 and agreed to continue with and enhance the Leader and Cabinet Member. The options appraisal measured different governance options against 4 criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maximises individual member talents, and provides the opportunity for greater engagement in Council activity • Facilitates decision making at an appropriate pace • Demonstrates propriety, regularity and accountability • Solution is costed and fully resourced <p>The Models of Governance Review concluded that the Leader and Cabinet model was suitable when measured against the criteria for a successful governance model. However, there were changes made to enhance the transparency of Cabinet Member Decisions which are now webcast live, are open for the public to attend to ask questions and are subject to call-in.</p>
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In 2023/24 Cabinet held 11 meetings lasting a combined duration of 13.7 hours and the agenda packs totalled 2672 pages.

Committee structure

The Council has a streamlined committee structure which is appropriate for a Council with a relatively small number of councillors. For example, the Council operates a combined Planning and Licensing Committee and a single Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

In total there are 35 seats on non-executive committees, plus 11 seats on sub-committees and 34 seats on working groups, so 80 seats are appointed in total annually.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The Council has a 10 Member Overview and Scrutiny Committee which meets c. 10 times per year. The Committee has a key role in scrutinising executive decisions and holding Cabinet to account. It is also empowered to examine any issues that affect the district or its people and to make recommendations to Cabinet or Council. The role of the Committee and recent improvements to the function are discussed elsewhere in this proposal.

Regulatory and administrative committees

The Council operates the following regulatory and administrative committees which are detailed elsewhere in this proposal and have delegated responsibility for certain non-executive functions:

Planning and Licensing Committee: 11 Members,

- Licensing Sub-Committee (Licensing Act 2003 Matters): 3 Members
- Licensing Sub-Committee (Taxis, Private Hire and Street Trading Consent Matters): 5 Members

Audit and Governance Committee: 7 Members

- Standards Hearings Sub-Committee: 3 Members

Performance and Appointments Committee: 7 Members

Working Groups

The Council has appointed a number of cross-party Member working groups which oversee or steer specific areas of Council activity and are separate from

(and in addition to) any task and finish groups established by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Working Groups enable Members to make a contribution and add value to the work of the Council outside of the Council's formal decision-making structures. The majority of working groups were established in the last two years and two of them (Moreton-in Marsh and Publica Review) hadn't started to hold meetings in the 2023/24 civic year but will have important roles to play over the coming period:

- Boundary Reviews
- Constitution
- Cost of Living
- Member Development
- Moreton-in-Marsh (strategic growth)
- Publica Review (overseeing the in-sourcing of services from a Teckal company)
- Public Conveniences Working Group (a task and finish group of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee)

Conclusion

The Council has recently undertaken a comprehensive review of its governance arrangements (the Models of Governance Review) in 2022 and agreed to continue with and enhance the Leader and Cabinet Member. As such, it is expected that the Council will continue to operate these arrangements for the foreseeable future. Recent improvements to Cabinet Member decisions and Overview and Scrutiny have improved the effectiveness of the Council's governance model and provide a strong platform for the future.

The Council is aware of a petition, promoted by an individual councillor, seeking a referendum on a change to the Council's governance arrangements, from the Leader and Cabinet model to a committee system, under The Local Authorities (Referendums)(Petitions)(England) Regulations 2011 ("the Regulations"). However, to date this petition has not met the requirements that would oblige the Council to hold a referendum.

At present the size of Cabinet is 8 Members, as it has been for the last four years, and it is not expected that this will increase or decrease in size in the short term. An executive of 8 Members is considered appropriate for a Council with 34 Members. However, the size of the Cabinet is entirely a matter for the Leader of the Council and could range from 3-10 Members.

		<p>The Council's committee structure is well-established and operating effectively. Committees enable non-executive members to play active and important roles in non-executive functions and decision making, in addition to holding Cabinet Members to account through Overview and Scrutiny and at full Council.</p> <p>Working groups are an increasingly important feature of the Council's governance arrangements, which is placing additional demands on member capacity.</p> <p>As has been demonstrated, the total workload and time commitment associated with meetings increased significantly in 2023/24 compared to the previous two years and is not expected to decrease from that higher level in the short to medium term.</p> <p>Decreasing or keeping the number of councillors unchanged would add to the average workload of Members which is undesirable and may constrain the ability of the Council to operate effectively. Significantly increasing the number of councillors would dilute the influence of individual Members and is not recommended. A modest increase in the number of councillors to 37 would help to mitigate the additional demands and pressures on Member capacity, ensure that Member roles can be distributed effectively, and help to optimise the functioning of the Council's governance arrangements.</p>
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Portfolios	<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ How many portfolios will there be? ➤ What will the role of a portfolio holder be? ➤ Will this be a full-time position? ➤ Will decisions be delegated to portfolio holders? Or will the executive/mayor take decisions?
	Analysis	<p>The are currently eight Cabinet portfolios which are allocated by the Leader and cover the Corporate Priorities agreed by Council, strategic responsibilities and statutory services. Recent changes to portfolios include the addition of a Cost of Living portfolio, and the movement of car parking between portfolios. The Cabinet portfolios have remained broadly stable over the recent years.</p> <p>The current portfolios are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leader (includes housing) • Finance (includes assets, waste and recycling) • Climate Change and Sustainability • Economy and Council Transformation • Planning and Regulatory Services • Health, Leisure and Parking • Communities and Public Safety • Cost of Living and Inclusion <p>The services that fall within each portfolio are listed on the Council’s website and will change from time to time, with changes normally announced at an Annual Council meeting.</p> <p>Cabinet Members agree the strategic direction and provide political oversight of the services and Council activities within their portfolio remits. They act as the Accountable Member for reports that come forward for decision within their areas of responsibilities and provide public accountability for performance and decisions. Cabinet Members take delegated decisions as required under the Constitution. 16 individual Cabinet Member decision making meetings were held during 2023/24.</p> <p>The current portfolios are quite intensive and involve high levels of engagement with officers. 4 of the 6 Cabinet Members who responded to the survey estimated that they spend 20+ hours on Council business per week, with the other two Cabinet Members estimating that they spend 11-15 hours and 16-20 hours per week on Council business.</p> <p><u>Conclusion</u></p>

		<p>The role of a Cabinet Member is not considered to be a full-time position but it does demand considerable time given that the role is carried out in addition to the normal duties of a councillor and that many Cabinet Members also serve on non-executive committees (apart from Overview and Scrutiny, which they will attend in their capacity as Cabinet Members) and outside bodies.</p> <p>The number of Cabinet portfolios has remained unchanged for several years under the current leadership. The Leader has and will make annual adjustments to the portfolios as they see fit but no significant changes are expected that would affect the size of the Cabinet or the size of the Council in the short term to medium term. This could change if significant new powers were devolved to district councils by the new Government elected in July 2024.</p>
<p>Delegated Responsibilities</p>	<p><i>Key lines of explanation</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>What responsibilities will be delegated to officers or committees?</i> ➤ <i>How many councillors will be involved in taking major decisions?</i>
	<p>Analysis</p>	<p>The Council's non-executive and executive schemes of delegation are set out in the Constitution (Parts C4 and C5).</p> <p>Responsibility for setting the Council's budget and policy framework rests with all 34 Members of full Council. The budget and policy framework comprises the guiding strategic policies of the Council:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corporate Plan • Local Plan • Budget (including setting the Council Tax and the Capital and Treasury Management strategies) • Housing Strategy • Licensing Policy Statements • Pay Policy <p>The budget and policy framework set by Council is binding on the whole organisation, including the Cabinet, committees and officers, who must operate within it. Council also takes decisions in relation to certain non-executive functions that are not delegated to committees, such as electoral matters, the Members' Allowances Scheme, the Members' Code of Conduct, and the Council's Constitution.</p>

	<p>Executive functions are the responsibility of the Leader of the Council and in summary are delegated as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cabinet (8 Members): matters of corporate policy and high-level strategic matters, key decisions, recommending the budget and policy framework to Council. • Individual Cabinet Members: strategic matters relating to Cabinet member portfolios; delegated decisions. • Chief Executive or Deputy Chief Executive: operational service matters, in consultation with the Leader and / or relevant Cabinet Member, where appropriate. <p>Cabinet may agree to delegate certain decisions to individual Cabinet Members or senior officers at Cabinet meetings.</p> <p>Non-executive decisions, such as the determination of planning and licensing applications are delegated to committees, sub-committees and officers. Generally, the larger and/or more contentious decisions (e.g. where there are objections or proposals are contrary to adopted policies) are taken by Members at committee and sub-committee meetings and smaller, routine decisions are taken by officers.</p> <p><u>Conclusion</u> The Council's decision-making arrangements are well established and functioning effectively. The Council's Constitution sets out how the Council operates, how decisions are taken and the procedures which are followed to ensure that decision-making is efficient, transparent and accountable to local people. The Council has a cross-party Constitution Working Group, which has an annual work plan, meets regularly and makes recommendations to Council regarding amendments to the Constitution, keeping it up to date with changes to legislation, governance practice and the needs of the Council. The Council's delegated arrangements are kept under regularly review but no changes to delegation thresholds are expected that would impact the size of the Council.</p>
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Accountability

Give the Commission details as to how the authority and its decision makers and partners will be held to account. The Commission is interested in both the internal and external

dimensions of this role. **Responses should demonstrate that alternative council sizes have been explored.**

Topic	
Internal Scrutiny	The scrutiny function of authorities has changed considerably. Some use theme or task-and-finish groups, for example, and others have a committee system. Scrutiny arrangements may also be affected by the officer support available.
<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>How will decision makers be held to account?</i> ➤ <i>How many committees will be required? And what will their functions be?</i> ➤ <i>How many task and finish groups will there be? And what will their functions be? What time commitment will be involved for members? And how often will meetings take place?</i> ➤ <i>How many members will be required to fulfil these positions?</i> ➤ <i>Explain why you have increased, decreased, or not changed the number of scrutiny committees in the authority.</i> ➤ <i>Explain the reasoning behind the number of members per committee in terms of adding value.</i>
Analysis	<p>The Council has a 10-Member Overview and Scrutiny Committee which meets c. 10 times per year and is chaired by an opposition Member. The Overview and Scrutiny function has been transformed in the last couple of years, with the work of the Committee refocused on holding the Cabinet to account and contributing to policy development on behalf of local communities.</p> <p>In November 2022 the Council adopted an Executive Scrutiny Protocol which sets out the basis for a positive relationship between the Cabinet and Overview & Scrutiny Committee.</p> <p>Meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee are scheduled to take place in the week prior to each meeting of the Council’s Cabinet. This enables effective pre-decision scrutiny of selected executive decisions and provides the Committee with the opportunity to hold Cabinet Members to account in public and make any recommendations to the Cabinet in a timely and transparent fashion. This system helps to ensure that non-executive members can influence decisions on behalf of the local community and that any issues with proposals can be explained, clarified or reconsidered in advance of decisions being taken. There is also the opportunity for other elected Members or public speakers to make representations in public to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and to raise issues related to forthcoming Cabinet decisions. This can provide the Committee with lines of enquiry when questioning Cabinet</p>

Members and/or inform recommendations the Committee submits to Cabinet.

In addition to focusing on Cabinet reports, the Committee is empowered to examine any issues that affect the district or its people. Recent examples include focuses on the ecological emergency and issues with rail services in the district, where the Committee engaged with a representative of Great Western Railways at a meeting held in public.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee may establish task and finish groups to focus in on key areas of policy development. An example is the Public Conveniences Review Group, which drew on external and internal expertise and analysed usage and financial data in undertaking a detailed piece of work looking at the future provision of public conveniences facilities within the district. The cross-party group's recommendations helped to inform the decisions of Cabinet in relation to the renewal of the maintenance contract, the options for different facilities, and the promotion of services to the public, with the aim of reducing the net cost of the service to the Council while maintaining an acceptable level of public service provision across the whole district. The review spanned 4 meetings over a 10-week period. The meetings took place remotely and lasted a total of 4 hours. There was additional work for Members in between meetings which included liaising with councillors at other local authorities, reading meeting reports, reviewing financial and usage data, and commenting on a draft report over email.

There were 11 meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in 2023/24 (total duration 28.5 hours), up from 6 meetings in 2022/23 (16.1 hours) and 7 meetings in 2021/22. The Committee's agenda packs totalled 2243 pages, up from 866 pages in 2022/23 and 917 pages in 2021/22. This highlights the enhanced role that the Committee is playing in the work and governance of the Council and the resulting increased workload for Members.

In 2023/24 the Overview and Scrutiny Committee submitted 28 recommendations to Cabinet, 22 of which were agreed in whole or in part. The Council has for the first time in recent years produced an Overview and Scrutiny Committee Annual Report for 2023/24. The report submitted to full Council in July 2024 demonstrated the impact of Overview and Scrutiny and the effectiveness of the Executive Scrutiny Protocol.

Conclusion

Following the Peer Challenge Report the Overview and Scrutiny Committee is playing an enhanced and more effective role in the Council's governance arrangements. It is

	<p>also holding more meetings and scrutinising more reports. This is directly impacting the workload and capacity of Member and in particular, Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet Members.</p> <p>Task and finish groups can be expected to play a more prominent role in contributing to policy development. The frequency and length of task and finish group meetings will depend on the nature of the matter being scrutinised and the timeframe for the review. The Council can support one task and finish group at any one time and a review will typically span 3-6 meetings.</p> <p>The increased activity of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and any increase in the number of task and finish groups, which to date have been quite occasional (c. 1 per year), is having an impact on Member workload and capacity, which would support a small increase to the size of the Council.</p>				
Statutory Function	<p>This includes planning, licencing and any other regulatory responsibilities. Consider under each of the headings the extent to which decisions will be delegated to officers. How many members will be required to fulfil the statutory requirements of the council?</p>				
Planning	<table border="1"> <tr> <td data-bbox="355 1131 542 1496"><i>Key lines of explanation</i></td> <td data-bbox="542 1131 1460 1496"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>What proportion of planning applications will be determined by members?</i> ➤ <i>Has this changed in the last few years? And are further changes anticipated?</i> ➤ <i>Will there be area planning committees? Or a single council-wide committee?</i> ➤ <i>Will executive members serve on the planning committees?</i> ➤ <i>What will be the time commitment to the planning committee for members?</i> </td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="355 1496 542 2049">Analysis</td> <td data-bbox="542 1496 1460 2049"> <p>The Council operates a single combined Planning and Licensing Committee comprising 11 Members and covering the whole of the Cotswold District Area. The Committee meets monthly to determine certain planning applications and consider any changes to licensing policies.</p> <p>Members of the Committee are expected to read papers in advance, attend Sites Inspection Visits, which are scheduled monthly, and attend meetings.</p> <p>Members are required to undertake planning training before sitting on the Planning and Licensing Committee to determine planning applications. Going forward there will also be a more regular programme of planning training for Members to build Member knowledge and expertise in this area.</p> </td> </tr> </table>	<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>What proportion of planning applications will be determined by members?</i> ➤ <i>Has this changed in the last few years? And are further changes anticipated?</i> ➤ <i>Will there be area planning committees? Or a single council-wide committee?</i> ➤ <i>Will executive members serve on the planning committees?</i> ➤ <i>What will be the time commitment to the planning committee for members?</i> 	Analysis	<p>The Council operates a single combined Planning and Licensing Committee comprising 11 Members and covering the whole of the Cotswold District Area. The Committee meets monthly to determine certain planning applications and consider any changes to licensing policies.</p> <p>Members of the Committee are expected to read papers in advance, attend Sites Inspection Visits, which are scheduled monthly, and attend meetings.</p> <p>Members are required to undertake planning training before sitting on the Planning and Licensing Committee to determine planning applications. Going forward there will also be a more regular programme of planning training for Members to build Member knowledge and expertise in this area.</p>
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In 2023/24 the Planning and Licensing Committee held 12 Meetings lasting a total duration of 26.8 hours and the agenda packs totalled 1008 pages. This represents an increase in the workload from the previous year 2022/23 (21.4 hours, 748 pages).

The Committee determined 33 planning applications out of a total of 3832 applications submitted to the Council. The total number of applications submitted to the Council has reduced slightly in recent years, down from 4496 in 2021/22 and 4354 in 2022/23. The number of applications determined by Committee will vary from year to year and not necessary in proportion to the number of applications received overall:

2023/24: 33
2022/23: 25
2021/22: 46

Members of the Executive can serve on the Planning and Licensing Committee but tend to only do so as substitute Members.

All Members of Council will engage in the planning system in the planning system in some forms, including by:

- Attending meetings of the Planning and Licensing Committee as a substitute Member.
- Attending meetings of the Planning and Licensing Committee as a Ward Member.
- Reviewing applications within their Ward and referring applications to the Planning and Licensing Committee.

Ward Members tend to attend Committee meetings where there are applications situated within their wards. Based on 2023/24 figures there are on average 120 planning applications per ward or 113 per ward Member. The wards with the highest and lowest numbers of planning applications in 2023/24 are listed below. The wards with the highest numbers of planning applications tend to be the larger rural wards within the Cotswold Natural Landscape whereas the wards with the fewest planning applications tend to be the more urban wards in Cirencester and Tetbury.

Highest

Campden & Vale, 278 (2 Member ward)

Coln Valley, 248

Fosseridge, 244

Bourton Vale, 220

Lechlade, Kempsford & Fairford South, 210 (2-Member ward)

Lowest

		<p>Stratton, 35 Tetbury Town, 24 Chesterton, 23 The Beeches, 12 New Mills, 9</p> <p>The Council's Planning Protocol (Part 5E of the Constitution) was updated by Council in January 2024 to improve the functioning of the process whereby applications can be referred by Members to the Planning and Licensing Committee for determination. This change may result in Members making more use of the referral system going forward although referrals are subject to a view process so applications will only go to committee for determination where there are valid planning reasons.</p> <p><u>Conclusion</u> Planning can be a significant challenge in an area with many parts of the district subject to one constraint or another, (much of the district is located within the Cotswolds National Landscape). The Council has suitable arrangements in place for discharging its planning responsibilities. There is an adequate pool of Members who can determine planning applications and there are plans to increase the frequency and scope of planning training available to all Members.</p> <p>Changes to the process for referring applications to the Planning and Licensing Committee for determination could result in an increase in the number of applications referred to the Committee but that remains to be seen.</p> <p>The government elected on 4 July 2024 has announced plans to accelerate house building to provide more homes and support economic growth, which could have an impact on the number of major applications that come forward for determination in the coming years, which would directly impact the workload of the Committee.</p> <p>While the Council itself has no plans that would warrant a review of the size or responsibilities of the Planning and Licensing Committee, the Government has announced plans to legislate for the introduction of a national scheme of delegation. The Council will keep the workload of the Planning and Licensing Committee under review over the coming period.</p>
<p>Licensing</p>	<p>Key lines of explanation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ How many licencing panels will the council have in the average year? ➤ And what will be the time commitment for members? ➤ Will there be standing licencing panels, or will they be ad-hoc?

		<p>➤ <i>Will there be core members and regular attendees, or will different members serve on them?</i></p>
	<p>Analysis</p>	<p>The Council has a combined Planning and Licensing Committee which appoints two licensing sub-committees:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Licensing Sub-Committee (Licensing Act 2003 Matters): 3 Members, meets ad hoc as required to determine certain licensing applications. • Licensing Sub-Committee (Taxis, Private Hire and Street Trading Consent Matters): 5 Members, meets ad hoc as required to determine certain licensing applications. <p>The Planning and Licensing Committee principally deals with licensing policies, while applications are determined by the relevant sub-committee depending on which legislation the application is governed by. Members are required to undertake licensing training prior to sitting on a sub-committee to determine a licensing application.</p> <p>In 2023/24 five licensing applications were determined by the licensing sub-committees and the total duration of the hearings was 6.6 hours, with agenda packs totalling 403 pages. These figures are similar to the previous year (4 applications, 5.9 hours, 422 pages).</p> <p><u>Conclusion</u> The Council has suitable arrangements in place for discharging licensing functions. The demands of the licensing sub-committee functions on Member workloads and capacity are relatively minor compared to Cabinet, Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Planning and Licensing Committee. The split of responsibilities between the main committee and the sub-committees works well and there is an adequate pool of Members who can be called on to determine licensing applications. There are no plans to change the composition of the licensing sub-committees at present.</p>
<p>Other Regulatory Bodies</p>	<p><i>Key lines of explanation</i></p>	<p>➤ <i>What will they be, and how many members will they require?</i></p> <p>➤ <i>Explain the number and membership of your Regulatory Committees with respect to greater delegation to officers.</i></p>
	<p>Analysis</p>	<p>Council appoints the following other regulatory or administrative committees:</p> <p>Audit and Governance Committee: 7 Members plus 2 Independent Members, meets 5 time per year to monitor the adequacy and effectiveness of the Council's governance arrangements and to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by Members.</p>

- Standards Hearings Sub-Committee: 3 Members plus an Independent Person, meets ad hoc, as required to determine allegations that a Member of the district, town or parish council within the district area, has breached their Council's Code of Conduct.

Performance and Appointments Committee: 7 Members, meets ad hoc as required to consider the appointment and terms and conditions of the Council's Statutory Officers and any grievance or disciplinary matter in relation to the Chief Executive. The Committee did not meet during 2023/24.

Audit and Governance Committee

The Audit and Governance Committee now operates within an annual workplan and has a busy programme of business. The five meetings held in 2023/24 totalled 9.8 hours and the agenda packs totalled 913 pages. This is a slight increase on the previous year when the Committee discharged its business in four meetings (854 pages). The Committee previously held 4 scheduled meetings per year but this was increased to 5 per year from 2023/24.

The Membership of the Audit and Governance Committee has recently been supplemented by the addition of two Independent Members; non-councillors who have made a positive contribution and brought an independent view to the matters before the Committee.

The Standards Hearings Sub-Committee is a recent addition to the Council's committee structure. The Council has not held a standards hearing for over a decade but robust arrangements are being put in place (including updated hearings procedure rules and complaint handling arrangements) as a matter of good governance should the need arise in future. Council has also agreed to recruit up to two town and parish council representatives who will sit on hearings in a non-voting capacity where the subject Member is a town or parish councillor.

Conclusion

The Council's regulatory committees are functioning effectively, and recent improvements have been positive. No changes are proposed to the size of the Audit and Governance Committee or the Performance and Appointments Committee.

The Standards Hearings Sub-Committee currently comprises 3 Members plus an Independent Person but given that the

		<p>quorum is 3 Members there would be merit in considering a small increase in the size of this sub-committee.</p> <p>The new government elected on 4 July 2024 may decide to make changes to the standards regime at a national level (for example the introduction of more meaningful sanctions). This would raise the profile of the complaints process and could be expected to result in more complaints being submitted and/or reaching the hearing stage, which would impact Member capacity and support a slight increase in the size of the Council.</p>
External Partnerships	<p>Service delivery has changed for councils over time, and many authorities now have a range of delivery partners to work with and hold to account.</p>	
<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>Will council members serve on decision-making partnerships, sub-regional, regional or national bodies? In doing so, are they able to take decisions/make commitments on behalf of the council?</i> ➤ <i>How many councillors will be involved in this activity? And what is their expected workload? What proportion of this work is undertaken by portfolio holders?</i> ➤ <i>What other external bodies will members be involved in? And what is the anticipated workload?</i> 	
Analysis	<p><u>External Committees</u> Council appoints one Member plus one named substitute Member to two external non-executive committees:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gloucestershire County Council Economic Growth Scrutiny Committee • Gloucestershire County Council Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee <p>There is a standing item on the agenda for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to enable the appointed Members to provide written or verbal reports on the work of the external committees.</p> <p><u>Outside bodies</u> The Council appoints Members to outside bodies that have a wide variety of connections to the Council’s work and corporate priorities. These include links to climate change, management of the natural landscape, economic growth and representatives on the partner organisations delivering services such as Ubico (waste and recycling) and Publica (currently delivering the majority of services on behalf of the Council). Most representatives on outside bodies are appointed by the Leader of the Council annually. The work of some outside bodies relates to Cabinet portfolios but several non-executive members also serve on outside bodies.</p>	

	<p>In recent years there has been a modest increase in the number of outside bodies the Council appoints councillors to, from 17 in 2022/23 to 18 in 2024/25. In 2023/24 Members served on 0.56 outside bodies on average (range: 0 to 5). Meeting frequencies and time commitments will vary across the different outside bodies. Currently 13 seats on outside bodies are occupied by Executive Members, and six by non-executive Members.</p> <p>Outside bodies cannot take decisions on behalf of the Council as the Council has not formally ceded any decision-making powers to outside bodies. The Council is producing guidance on the responsibilities of Members appointed to outside bodies.</p> <p><u>Conclusion</u> There has been a recent increase in the number of outside bodies the Council appoints to, linked to the economic development and climate agendas. This would support a small increase in the size of the Council.</p>
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Community Leadership

The Commission understands that there is no single approach to community leadership and that members represent, and provide leadership to, their communities in different ways. The Commission wants to know how members are required to provide effective community leadership and what support the council offers them in this role. For example, does the authority have a defined role and performance system for its elected members? And what support networks are available within the council to help members in their duties? The Commission also wants to see a consideration of **how the use of technology and social media by the council as a whole, and by councillors individually, will affect casework, community engagement and local democratic representation. Responses should demonstrate that alternative council sizes have been explored.**

Topic		Description
Community Leadership	<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>In general terms how do councillors carry out their representational role with electors?</i> ➤ <i>Does the council have area committees and what are their powers?</i> ➤ <i>How do councillors seek to engage with their constituents? Do they hold surgeries, send newsletters, hold public meetings or maintain blogs?</i> ➤ <i>Are there any mechanisms in place that help councillors interact with young people, those not on the electoral register, and/or other minority groups and their representative bodies?</i> ➤ <i>Are councillors expected to attend community meetings, such as parish or resident's association meetings? If so,</i>

		<p><i>what is their level of involvement and what roles do they play?</i></p> <p>➤ <i>Explain your approach to the Area Governance structure. Is your Area Governance a decision-making forum or an advisory board? What is their relationship with locally elected members and Community bodies such as Town and Parish Councils? Looking forward how could they be improved to enhance decision-making?</i></p>
	<p style="text-align: center;">Analysis</p>	<p>District councillors perform a variety of roles both within the Council and in playing an active role in the communities they represent, providing a two-way link between the Council and communities.</p> <p>Some District councillors have multiple representative roles as they may also serve as county councillors and/or town or parish councillors. Currently three District Councillors serve as county councillors and thirteen other District Councillors serve as town or parish councillors (no District Councillors currently serve at all three levels).</p> <p>There are a number of ways in which councillors will engage with communities, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being the voice of the community at District Council meetings. • Attending town or parish council meetings. • Engaging with, supporting and serving on community organisations, residents' associations, charities or business groups. • Holding surgeries. • Dealing with casework by email, telephone or letter. • Engaging in social media platforms. <p>The Council does not have any area committees in the District and there is no budget allocated to Ward Members.</p> <p><u>Conclusion</u> The growth in the population and the size of the electorate will place additional demands on the representative roles of elected members. A modest increase in the size of the Council to 37 will mitigate this additional demand.</p>
<p>Casework</p>	<p><i>Key lines of explanation</i></p>	<p>➤ <i>How do councillors deal with their casework? Do they pass it on to council officers? Or do they take a more in-depth approach to resolving issues?</i></p> <p>➤ <i>What support do members receive?</i></p> <p>➤ <i>How has technology influenced the way in which councillors work? And interact with their electorate?</i></p> <p>➤ <i>In what ways does the council promote service users' engagement/dispute resolution with service providers and managers rather than through councillors?</i></p>

	<p style="text-align: center;">Analysis</p>	<p>Councillors are responsible for dealing with their own casework correspondence. The Council does not have a casework management system. All Councillors are provided with a welcome pack and corporate induction programme upon their election and are provided points of contact for each Council service. Contact points are also listed on the Councillor Portal (intranet), which also includes a link to the planning portal and e-forms for councillors to report issues such as missed bin collections and fly tipping. The Democratic Services Team will act as the first point of contact for newly elected members through a buddying system and will signpost members to other officers where they are unsure who to contact for particular issues.</p> <p>The nature of casework has changed in recent years. More Members are active on social media and will be contacted by residents using social media. Councillors are also contacted regularly by email, telephone or, increasingly rarely, letter. Councillors' preferred methods of contact are reflected on their pages on the Council's website. All councillors are provided with a Council email account for managing their Council correspondence, which they access using their own device.</p> <p>Some queries which would have previously been directed to councillors are now solved through direct contact with the Council, which is done by phone, email or social media. Contact with councillors now often involves more complex matters such as planning or other complex casework which may involve multiple agencies, for example where there are mental health issues. This is particularly the case for members representing the main settlements within the district area. Such complex casework can involve research and co-ordination with multiple partner organisations, rather than simply referring the resident to the relevant officer or department. For members representing rural areas, the planning casework and issues can be particularly complex.</p> <p>15 of the 26 Members who responded to the survey believed that ward member work including casework had driven an increase in the workload of councillors since they were first elected. The survey also showed that all 26 Members who responded deal with casework over email and telephone, with the next popular methods of communication being face to face (24), instant messaging (12), social media/blogs (11), public meetings (7), letter (3) and surgeries (2). Nine members also selected "Other" methods of engagement.</p> <p><u>Conclusion</u></p>
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		<p>The proposed addition of three councillors will enable additional capacity for managing casework compared to the status quo, particularly in more urban areas where significant growth is planned.</p> <p>Without a modest increase in the number of councillors, the workload associated with casework for each councillor can be expected to increase by c. 9% on average because of growth in the size of the population and the electorate. The survey results show that this would result in councillors becoming less comfortable with their workload on average, with some councillors becoming very uncomfortable with their workload.</p>
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Other Issues

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

There are no other issues that the Council wishes to raise with the Commission.

Summary

In following this template respondents should have been able to provide the Commission with a robust and well-evidenced case for their proposed council size; one which gives a clear explanation as to the governance arrangements and number of councillors required to represent the authority in the future.

Use this space to summarise the proposals and indicate other options considered. Explain why these alternatives were not appropriate in terms of their ability to deliver effective Strategic Leadership, Accountability (Scrutiny, Regulation and Partnerships), and Community Leadership.

The Council considers that a size of 37 Members is appropriate for the Cotswold District from 2027. This size provides for an acceptable and broadly stable ratio of councillors to the electorate, accounting for the expected population growth over the coming years. It also helps to mitigate the increased pressures on councillor workloads associated with enhanced Member governance arrangements such as a more active Overview and Scrutiny function and increased numbers of Member working groups following the Corporate Peer Challenge Feedback Report in 2022. This proposal would enable councillors to remain effective in undertaking their roles on the Council and in the communities they represent.

An unchanged Council size of 34 members, or a smaller Council size, is not recommended. This would place increased pressure on councillor workloads into the future and would potentially deter people from standing for election. It would also not provide sufficient capacity for the Council to effectively operate its current, recently improved, governance and decision-making arrangements. Due to population growth being centred around existing settlements, the rural wards would necessarily need to increase in size and cover more parish areas on average. This would exacerbate the existing pressures faced by Members representing rural communities and would not support effective representation.

A Council size significantly larger than 37 councillors could arguably provide for enhanced representation but would dilute the responsibilities and accountability of individual

councillors and add cost to the Council (in the form of additional allowances payments and electoral costs) without providing significant additional benefits to the governance of the Council.

The Council has a strong preference for a uniform pattern of single-Member wards across the whole of the district area and would therefore seek to reconfigure the ward boundaries so that all parts of the district, including the areas covered by the current Campden & Vale and Lechlade, Kempsford & Fairford South wards, will be represented by a single district councillor following the local elections in 2027. The Council recognises that this may not be achievable within the available variance of $\pm 10\%$ without dividing communities in a way that conflicts with effective representation. If this proves to be the case and single Member wards are found to be impractical in certain areas, and there is no flexibility in the variances, then 2-Member wards may prove to be unavoidable in a very small number of exceptional locations.