

Council Size Submission: Template

Thanet District Council

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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 You

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 being made on behalf of the Council. A draft of this submission was created by the Boundary and Electoral Arrangements Working Party over a series of meetings and was recommended to Full Council at the working party's meeting of 16 November 2023. The Full Council then considered the draft submission at its meeting on 7 December 2023, where it was agreed.

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?*

[Click or tap here to enter text.](#)

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?

Thanet is located in East Kent, in close proximity to continental Europe. It has three main coastal towns of Margate, Ramsgate and Broadstairs. The built up area is densely populated and forms an almost continuous urban belt around the north east coast. This is separated by areas of countryside between the towns and providing relief in the built area. There are also attractive coastal and rural villages and outside of the urban area, much of the land is high quality and intensively farmed agricultural land.

The district has an area of about 40 square miles (10,300ha) and a resident population of about 140,000. About 30% of the district is urban with 95% of the population living in the main urban area around the coast. Thanet is the fourth most populated district in Kent, and has the second highest population density. Thanet is a popular area for retired people to live, and has the highest number of over 65 year olds in the county whilst having a lower proportion of 16-64 year olds than the county average.

The district has some significant difficulties. Average skills levels in the district are lower than the rest of Kent and England, with unemployment levels higher than the Kent average (KCC Business Intelligence publications). Wage levels are also lower than the national and regional average. However, the Council and a range of other organisations have a clear strategy to encourage both local business growth and inward investment and are working with industry partners to achieve this. The overall quality of life of Thanet's residents is varied. Some residents enjoy a very high quality of life, including living in high quality

residential environments. However, Thanet also has a number of highly deprived wards with many people with support needs. These areas are also characterised by pockets of urban decline and poor housing stock. A key challenge is to ensure that everyone has the same opportunities by reducing inequalities in the area and improving quality of life for all. The Council and relevant other organisations are working to deal with these issues through different initiatives.

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		
Governance Model	<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> <i>What governance model will your authority operate? e.g. Committee System, Executive or other?</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>The Cabinet model, for example, usually requires 6 to 10 members. How many members will you require?</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <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> <input type="checkbox"/> <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> <input type="checkbox"/> <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>
	Analysis	See Annex 1,2
Portfolios	<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> <i>How many portfolios will there be?</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>What will the role of a portfolio holder be?</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Will this be a full-time position?</i>

		<input type="checkbox"/> Will decisions be delegated to portfolio holders? Or will the executive/mayor take decisions?
	Analysis	See Annex 1
Delegated Responsibilities	Key lines of explanation	<input type="checkbox"/> What responsibilities will be delegated to officers or committees? <input type="checkbox"/> How many councillors will be involved in taking major decisions?
	Analysis	See Annex 1 & 6

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.
	Key lines of explanation	<input type="checkbox"/> How will decision makers be held to account? <input type="checkbox"/> How many committees will be required? And what will their functions be? <input type="checkbox"/> 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? <input type="checkbox"/> How many members will be required to fulfil these positions? <input type="checkbox"/> Explain why you have increased, decreased, or not changed the number of scrutiny committees in the authority. <input type="checkbox"/> Explain the reasoning behind the number of members per committee in terms of adding value.
Analysis		Annex 1, 2 & 7
Statutory Function		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?
Planning	Key lines of explanation	<input type="checkbox"/> What proportion of planning applications will be determined by members? <input type="checkbox"/> Has this changed in the last few years? And are further changes anticipated?

		<input type="checkbox"/> Will there be area planning committees? Or a single council-wide committee? <input type="checkbox"/> Will executive members serve on the planning committees? <input type="checkbox"/> What will be the time commitment to the planning committee for members?
	Analysis	Please see Annex 1,2 & 4
Licensing	Key lines of explanation	<input type="checkbox"/> How many licencing panels will the council have in the average year? <input type="checkbox"/> And what will be the time commitment for members? <input type="checkbox"/> Will there be standing licencing panels, or will they be ad-hoc? <input type="checkbox"/> Will there be core members and regular attendees, or will different members serve on them?
	Analysis	Please see Annex 1, 2 & 5
Other Regulatory Bodies	Key lines of explanation	<input type="checkbox"/> What will they be, and how many members will they require? <input type="checkbox"/> Explain the number and membership of your Regulatory Committees with respect to greater delegation to officers.
	Analysis	Please see Annex 1 & 2
External Partnerships		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.
	Key lines of explanation	<input type="checkbox"/> 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? <input type="checkbox"/> 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? <input type="checkbox"/> What other external bodies will members be involved in? And what is the anticipated workload?
	Analysis	Please see Annex 3a,3b

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	Key lines of explanation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> In general terms how do councillors carry out their representational role with electors? <input type="checkbox"/> Does the council have area committees and what are their powers? No <input type="checkbox"/> How do councillors seek to engage with their constituents? Do they hold surgeries, send newsletters, hold public meetings or maintain blogs? <input type="checkbox"/> 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? Youth Council <input type="checkbox"/> Are councillors expected to attend community meetings, such as parish or resident's association meetings? If so, what is their level of involvement and what roles do they play? <input type="checkbox"/> 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? Parish Forum
	Analysis	
Casework	Key lines of explanation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> 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? <input type="checkbox"/> What support do members receive? New casework officer <input type="checkbox"/> How has technology influenced the way in which councillors work? And interact with their electorate? new equipment provided by Council, <input type="checkbox"/> In what ways does the council promote service users' engagement/dispute resolution with service providers and managers rather than through councillors? Council operates lots of self-serve portals on its website, also is open about how to complain.
	Analysis	

Other Issues

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

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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.

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