

## **Canterbury City Council**

### **Submission on Council Size to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England**

#### **1. Introduction**

At its meeting on 10 January 2013, Full Council resolved to submit an expression of interest to the LGBCE to join the programme for an Electoral Review in the near future. The basis for the review is that the council has not undergone a review for over ten years, it needs to accommodate new governance arrangements and ensure that the size of council reflects the demands made upon it bearing in mind the challenging budget situation.

The LGBCE wrote to the council in March 2013 confirming that the council could be included in the programme of electoral reviews for 2013.

#### **2. Background**

The starting point of an Electoral Review is to establish a council size. This is the number of councillors required to deliver effective and convenient local government. The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) decides the Council Size and will consider proposals from the city council and other relevant stakeholders that put forward proposals when making its decision. Before the council size is determined, the LGBCE make a 'minded to' recommendation which will be subject to a public consultation.

Once the council size has been established, the second phase of the review will be to develop future warding patterns for the Canterbury district.

This paper sets out Canterbury City Council's proposal for a council size. The proposal has been developed by the council's Political Management Member Panel. The role of this cross-party Panel is to consider constitutional issues of the council in detail and make recommendations on them by a majority vote to Full Council.

In developing the proposal for council size, the council's Political Management Member Panel considered how the council functions now and how it plans to function from 2015 onwards in terms of:

- The Governance arrangements of the council
- The Scrutiny function
- The representational role of councillors in the local community

### **3. Summary of the council's submission**

The council is putting forward a case for a reduction in council size from 50 to 38 councillors. The reasons for this proposal are dealt with in detail throughout this paper but can be broadly summarised as:

- The last Electoral Review of the council took place between 2000-01 when the council was on the cusp of moving from the committee system of political management to Executive arrangements in response to the Local Government Act 2000. The council introduced Executive arrangements in 2002 and as a result, the role of councillors and the council's decision making structure have changed significantly since the last electoral review. The average number of committee meetings per councillor has reduced from 5.2 to 1.5 meetings. Under the committee system the workload was more evenly spread between councillors. The Executive arrangements have meant that the workload between councillors now varies considerably and the council could continue to effectively take decisions if the council size was reduced to 38.
- The Political Management Member Panel has recently reviewed the council's governance arrangements. The Panel has recommended that the council should continue to operate a 'Strong Leader' model of governance from 2015. To deliver this preferred model of governance the Panel has developed a decision making structure which best meets the business needs of the council and representational role of Members. The council's current decision making structure is to an extent influenced by the number of councillors rather than business needs. To most effectively deliver the business needs of the council, the Panel concluded that the optimum council size would be 38.
- The council has changed the way that services are delivered locally since the last electoral review took place. A large proportion of the council's business is now delivered through shared services. Highways Services has been transferred to Kent County Council. The council has and continues to develop relationships with community groups to deliver services on its behalf. For example, Whitstable Castle, the district's leisure centres and the Horsebridge Arts and Community Centre in Whitstable are directly run by partner organisations. Councillors have overseen the development of these changes but once implemented, their role has evolved to become a monitoring and scrutiny one. As a result there has been a reduction in the business dealt with through the council's decision making process which means that it could continue to function effectively with a reduced size of 38 councillors.

## **4. The council's governance model**

### **4.1 Full Council**

The council currently has 50 councillors elected every four years. At the time of writing this submission one seat is vacant following a resignation in January 2013.

### **4.2 Leadership**

Since May 2011 the council has operated a 'strong leader' and Executive governance model. The Leader has not chosen to delegate functions to individual portfolio holders and decisions that have not been delegated to officers are taken collectively by the Executive.

### **4.3 Executive**

The Executive currently consists of nine councillors including the Leader although in the past it has been 10 councillors. Executive meetings are scheduled on a monthly basis and invariably there is a substantial workload to be dealt with at each meeting.

As a result of the Local Government Act 2000, the council has operated Executive arrangements since 2002. Prior to 2002 the city council was governed by a committee system of political management. The decision making structure the council used to support the committee system model is set out at Appendix A. The structure is based on the committees appointed by Full Council in 2001 and shows there were three main service area committees (policy, community services and development and planning) plus sub-committees and working groups appointed by those committees.

An assessment of the number of committee meetings held in 2001/02 (the last year that the council operated the committee system) compared to number of committee meetings held in 2011/12 has been made. The comparison shows a similar number of meetings were held under both models of governance. There were 113 meetings per year under the committee system and 136 under our present Leader and cabinet model. However, the committees had higher memberships and as a result the workload of members in delivering the councils governance function under the committee system was far greater. Councillors shared 261 places on 16 committees or sub-committees - an average of 5.3 committees per councillor. Under our current

Leader Executive arrangements councillors share 76 places on 9 committee or sub-committees - an average of 1.5 committees per councillor.<sup>1</sup>

Average number of committee places per councillor in 2001/02 (Committee System)	Average number of committee places per councillor in 2011/12 (Leader and Cabinet)
5.3	1.5

Whilst this gives an average workload, it is of course for each political party to allocate places on committees. At the present time there are 9 Executive councillors (including the Leader), the Lord Mayor has a civic role and 40 councillors perform the council's non-Executive functions<sup>2</sup>. Of the non-Executive councillors, three sit on four committees, five sit on three committees, 19 sit on two committees, 10 sit on one committee and there are three councillors that do not sit on any committees.<sup>3</sup> This includes a seat which has been vacant since January 2013.

The move away from the committee system to Executive arrangements has had a significant impact on the role of councillors in the decision making process. Previously there were 22 councillors on each of the service committees that took decisions and the workload was more evenly spread between councillors. Multiple committees meant a higher number of councillors were needed for decisions to be taken. Now just 10 Executive councillors are directly involved in decision making outside of the regulatory committees and Full Council.<sup>4</sup> This has led to the workloads of councillors to vary considerably. For example, whilst the workload of Executive councillors is significant, 13 of the non-Executive councillors are members of just one or no committees. Executive arrangements ultimately mean that fewer councillors are needed for decisions to be taken. As a result, the decision making process could continue to function effectively if the membership of the council was reduced to 38 councillors.

The Localism Act 2011 has given councils the option to return to the former committee system of political management if they wish. The council has recently considered this issue and concluded that it wishes to continue with the present 'Strong Leader' and Executive model as it allows clarity of accountability and a strategic overview when taking decisions.

The council has recently undertaken a governance review. The recommendations of the review will be implemented in the 2013/14 council year and the decision making

<sup>1</sup> Figures based on the council's main committees appointed by Full Council in 2001/02 and 2011/12.

<sup>2</sup> The current Executive is nine (including the Leader) but it is usually 10 (including the Leader)

<sup>3</sup> Number of committees per councillor figures at March 2013 include one vacant seat.

<sup>4</sup> Including vacant Executive seat following resignation in 2012.

structure to support these changes is set out at Appendix B. The council has also reviewed how its decision making structure should operate from 2015. This structure is set out at Appendix C. The council’s Political Management Member Panel developed the structure by assessing the committees needed to deliver the statutory business of the council, local requirements and the recommendations of the governance review. It also took account of the workload of councillors both in delivering the business of the council and their representational role. The Panel concluded that the optimum council size based on these factors was 38 councillors. On the basis that political control of the council does not change, the structure will be implemented in 2015.

An assessment of the councillor workload to deliver the structure to be introduced from 2015 compared to the council’s current structure is set out in the table below:

Council size	workload
50	<p><b>Current model</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 10 Executive Members (including the Leader) are involved in Executive activity, an area Member Panel (AMP) and up to one Best Value Review per year.</li> <li>- The Lord Mayor has a civic role outside of the decision making process.</li> <li>- 39 non-Executive councillors share 66 places on the council’s eight regulatory and scrutiny committees. On average each non-Executive councillor sits on 1.7 of these committees plus one AMP and 0.7 Best Value or Scrutiny Reviews per year.</li> </ul>
38	<p><b>Proposed future model from 2015</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Eight Executive Members: Executive activity, an AMP and up to one Best Value Review per year.</li> <li>- The Mayor: civic role.</li> <li>- 29 non-Executive councillors: share 62 places on eight regulatory and scrutiny committees. An average of 2.1 of these committees plus one AMP and one Best Value or Scrutiny Reviews per year.</li> </ul>

The Panel has also considered whether the decision making structure for the council could be delivered by a smaller council size of either 30 or 35 councillors as set out at appendices D and E. The Panel concluded that it could not function effectively with fewer than 38 councillors for the following reasons:

- The membership of the Executive, Overview, Scrutiny and Audit Committees would be too small to effectively deal with the council’s business. The posts of Leader and Deputy Leader can be regarded full time and the workload of other Executive councillors can vary depending on the scope of the portfolio,

but is significant. Therefore an Executive of fewer than eight councillors is considered to be too small to effectively deal with portfolio work.

- Similarly, the size of the Overview, Audit and Scrutiny Committees would be too small to cope with the workload if the council size was either 30 or 35 councillors. In particular, the council's scrutiny function has a strong focus towards commissioning small panels to carry out task and finish reviews and there are no plans to change this approach. A larger pool of councillors that can be drawn on to carry out these reviews and deal with other scrutiny and audit work is needed than a council size of either 30 or 35 would allow.
- The smaller council sizes would ultimately mean councillors would be spread too thinly across the number of committees set out in these structures. This could lead to capacity issues for example, finding substitutions when councillors were unable to attend their committees.
- Too small a council size would deter people of working age from becoming councillors due to the time commitment that would be required particularly at Executive level. Currently the council has a good level of representation of younger councillors and it would not wish to see this change as a result of the workload becoming unmanageable
- A higher number was required to fulfil the representational role of councillors across a city, two coastal towns and a large rural area which have distinct characters and their own local priorities. As explained later in this submission, councillors have roles on outside bodies, provide a key link to parish councils and residents associations in their wards and champion community interest groups. The impact of a change in council size on their ability to deal with casework has also been assessed. The results of the 2011 Councillor Survey showed that city councillors spent approximately 18 hours per month responding to constituents. Using the survey results as a guide, the approximate average increase in workload per councillor that a smaller council size could create is set out below:

<b>Council size</b>	<b>Approximate average number of hours responding to constituents</b>	<b>% change</b>
30	30	67%
35	26	44%
<b>38</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>33%</b>
50	18	
<b>National average for shire district councils<sup>5</sup></b>	<b>26</b>	

The results National Census of Local Authority Councillors 2010 show that for shire district councillors, the average number of hours per week spent engaging with constituents, conducting surgeries and answering queries is 6.1 hours per week.<sup>6</sup> This gives an average per month of 26 hours. Whilst the results of the city council's survey are an approximate average, it is indicated that a reduction in council size to 38 would not suggest an increase the workload of councillors beyond the national average. The Panel also considered that the increase in time spent dealing with casework would be manageable with a council size of 38 particularly as electronic communication methods had made it easier for councillors to respond to constituents. However, given the distinct geography of the district and the level of work involved in council business and on outside bodies, a council size of fewer than 38 would increase the workload of councillors to an extent that could undermine the community leadership and representational role.

The Panel also considered that a council size of more than 38 was not necessary to effectively deliver the council's business and the representational role of councillors going forward.

## **5. Regulatory**

### **5.1 Development Management Committee**

The Development Management Committee meets monthly to determine planning applications and consider other planning matters. The council has gradually increased delegation of planning matters to officers and in 2012 reduced its membership from 16 to 11 councillors.

<sup>5</sup> National Census of Local Authority Councillors, analysis of results by type of authority.

<sup>6</sup> Local Government Group, National Census of Local Authority Councillors 2010, p7 and analysis of results by type of authority.

The Development Management Committee also appoints a Sub-Committee to undertake site visits and make recommendations back to the Committee. The Sub-Committee met 5 times in 2011/12.

Councillors new to the Development Management Committee undertake mandatory training and there is also refresher training available once a year.

### **Changes to the Development Management Committee**

The council have proposed a further reduction in the membership of the Development Management Committee from 11 to 10 Members to be implemented from 2015. The council does not anticipate any further changes to the arrangements of the Development Management Committee or the delegation of planning matters.

### **5.2 Licensing Committee**

The Licensing Committee comprises 11 councillors and meets annually to elect a Chair and Vice-Chair and to appoint a Sub-Committee. The Licensing Sub-Committee consists of 3 Members drawn from the Licensing Committee on a rotational basis.

In order to accommodate the transfer of the licensing function to the city council as a result of the Licensing Act 2003, the Licensing Committee initially comprised 15 councillors. Whilst the licensing workload remains high, systems are now in place for it to be effectively managed and consequently the Committee membership reduced to its present 11 councillors in 2010.

The city of Canterbury has a large number of licensed premises which results in the need for the Sub-Committee to meet frequently. 49 cases were heard at 24 meetings of the Sub-Committee in 2011/14. The cases included private hire and hackney carriage and premises licensing.

The Sub-Committee may also undertake site visits to premises in advance of a licensing hearing. Site visits usually takes place immediately before the hearing.

Councillors new to the Licensing Committee have to undertake mandatory training and there is also refresher training available once a year.

### **Changes to the Licensing Committee arrangements**

- The council's governance review has recommended that an officer be given delegated authority for matters relating to private hire and hackney carriage licensing currently considered by the Licensing Committee. Between April and December 2012 there were 27 hearing which dealt with private hire and

hackney carriage licensing. An officer assessment concluded that the number of Licensing Sub-Committee meetings could be reduced by 10-15 meetings per year (35-40%).

- Another change that is being implemented at the start of the 2013/14 Council Year is that the Licensing Committee will be combined with the General Purposes Committee. This will create a single Licensing and General Purposes Committee and reduce the overall number of meetings by two per annum. The Licensing meetings will be incorporated into the General Purposes cycle of meetings.
- The council has proposed a reduction in the membership of the Licensing and General Purposes Committee from 11 to 10 Members.

### **5.3 General Purposes Committee**

The General Purposes Committee comprises 11 Members and meets five times per annum.

The Committee is responsible for licensing and registration including caravan sites, market and street trading and food premises. Its remit also covers health and safety at work, elections, pensions and appeals and other miscellaneous items not covered by officer delegated powers.

### **Changes to the General Purposes Committee arrangements**

The General Purposes Committee will be combined with the Licensing Committee from the beginning of the 2013/14 Council Year. Refer to section 5.2 above.

### **5.4 Standards Committee**

The council's Standards Committee comprises 4 Members. In 2011/12 there were five scheduled meetings of which three were cancelled and no complaints were considered.

There are no proposed changes to the Standards Committee.

## **6 Scrutiny function**

The council's scrutiny function has evolved since its introduction in 2002. Originally the council had an Overview and Scrutiny Committee (membership 16) and a Scrutiny Sub-Committee (membership 9). In 2011 two separate committees were

created – an Overview Committee and a Scrutiny Committee to clearly define the two aspects of the function. There are 11 places on each committee. The total reduction in membership to deliver the function has therefore reduced from 25 places to 21 places.

The roles of the two committees can be summarised as follows:

### **Overview Committee**

- Formulates, scrutinises or reviews the policies of the Council and the Executive.
- Receives briefing on matters of major local interest.
- Pre-budget scrutiny
- Petitions

### **Scrutiny Committee**

- Considers call-ins
- Develops and manages the annual scrutiny review programme
- Monitors the progress of the recommendations from scrutiny reviews and Best Value Reviews
- Scrutinises council and East Kent shared services performance monitoring reports
- Conducts crime and disorder scrutiny

### **Scrutiny Panels**

The council has a comprehensive rolling programme of scrutiny reviews which is developed in consultation with councillors, members of the public and officers and managed by the Scrutiny Committee. Small panels of five Members carry out short topic or in-depth reviews of specific topics relating to council or partner services. Recent review topics include allotments, highways, High Speed 1, cycle safety and the development of the council's Engaging Communities Policy. There are approximately three scrutiny reviews per year although this is dependent on the length and nature of individual reviews.

### **Health Scrutiny Panel**

The council also has a Health Scrutiny Panel. As the council does not have a statutory role in health scrutiny this panel meets on an ad hoc basis to respond to health consultations that affect the district's residents. The Panel has not met this

year and met once in 2011/12. The council will have a future role in health via a councillor appointment to the Local Health and Wellbeing Board which is a sub-committee of the Kent Health and Wellbeing Board.

### **Changes to the scrutiny function**

- An outcome of the recent governance review is that the council's Audit Committee will be combined with the Scrutiny Committee to create a Scrutiny and Audit Committee from the beginning of the 2013/14 Council Year. The new committee will provide a link between scrutiny and the register of risk management and corporate governance. The membership will be 11 councillors reducing the overall number of places on council committees by five and eliminating four meetings per year.
- The council have proposed a reduction in the memberships of the Overview Committees from 11 to 10 councillors to be implemented from 2015.

The council does not anticipate any further changes to the scrutiny function.

## **7 Other council working groups/panels/boards**

In addition to the regulatory and scrutiny functions, the council also has established other councillor groups that take account of local priorities. These are summarised below:

### **7.1 Joint Transportation Board**

The Joint Transportation Board comprises nine City and nine County Councillors and meets quarterly. The Board acts as a forum for consultation on highways issues, performance and prioritisation of bids for future work. It specifically considers:

- Capital and Revenue funded works programmes
- Traffic regulation orders
- Street management proposals

There are proposals to streamline the number of consultations considered by the Joint Board. There are no further planned changes to the arrangements of the Joint Board.

## **7.2 Whitstable Harbour Board**

The Whitstable Harbour Board comprises six city councillors and three co-opted independent members. The Board has the status of a council committee and discharges the functions relating to the Whitstable Harbour.

There are no planned changes to the arrangements of the Board.

## **7.3 Area Member Panels**

There are five area Member Panels – Canterbury, Herne Bay, Whitstable, Rural North and Rural South. In practice Rural North and Rural South meetings take place at the same time. All councillors are automatically a member of the panel covering their Ward.

The Panels are mainly consultative bodies and consider matters of interest to the local community. Each Panel has an ‘opportunities fund’ of £10,000 per year which can be used to support local improvements, priorities and community projects. The Panels have delegated powers to take decisions over how this fund is spent.

### **Changes to the Area Member Panels**

The Rural North and Rural South Panels receive less business than the other panels. As a result they have decided to reduce the number of their joint meetings from six to four for the 2013/14 Council Year.

There no further planned changes to the arrangements of the Area Member Panels.

## **7.4 Executive Working Groups and Best Value Reviews**

- Executive Working Groups are established to oversee key council projects, policies or local issues for example the Local Plan, Environmental Policy and Student Community. They are politically proportionate and include the relevant portfolio holder and where appropriate external representatives. The regularity of working group meetings is variable depending on business need. Some meet on an ad hoc basis for example when a policy is being reviewed. Others meet with greater regularity as serve as a point of liaison between the council and external bodies.
- Best Value Reviews are conducted by small politically proportionate panels of councillors including the relevant portfolio holder. They are task and finish in

their approach and are commissioned to carry out policy development or to look at specific issues. Example review topics include Houses in Multiple Occupation, public conveniences and housing allocations. Up to three Best Value Reviews may be carried out each year. The programme of Best Value Reviews is designed to complement the scrutiny review programme. The key difference is that they are commissioned by the Executive and the portfolio holder is represented on the Review Team. Best Value Review topics tend to be service and policy based whilst scrutiny review topics are generated by councillors and members of the public and can also have an external focus.

## 8 Demands on time

There is an adopted role profile for councillors describing the key tasks for each role within the council. The role profile is set out at Appendix F. The council has a comprehensive training programme for councillors. The programme includes mandatory training for councillors on the audit, planning, licensing and standards committees. There is also discretionary training provided which at the last induction included topics such as casework and constituency business, scrutiny skills, budget, social media and IT. The training programme is set out at appendix G.

The council holds an event for prospective councillors to explain the role of councillors and how time commitment is divided between council meetings, reading reports and constituency work.

Members were asked at part of the 2011 Members' Survey to give an approximate indication of the amount of time spent responding to constituents each month. 34 councillors responded to the survey. The average time spent responding to constituents based on the survey results was approximately 18 hours per month. The responses ranged from three and 50 hours per month indicating local need and individual Member engagement in constituent work is variable.

Members were also asked if the level of constituency work was more or less than expected before joining the council. The response is set out below:

More than expected	4	28.57%
Less than expected	9	64.29%
No reply	1	7.14%

Finally, Members were asked if the number of council meetings attended was more or less than expected before joining the council. However, no conclusion from the responses could be drawn as the results were evenly split.

The majority of councillors share 62 places on 45 outside bodies across the district and nationally. Each year the council reviews all outside bodies to establish the number of meetings held and obtain feedback on the appointment. A scrutiny review in 2009 assessed the role of councillors on outside bodies and an outcome of the review was a small reduction in the number of bodies the council appoints to. A list of the outside bodies, number of councillor representations on each and approximate number of meetings held per annum (where known) is provided at appendix H.

The time commitment for councillors on these outside bodies is variable but in some cases significant. Some bodies hold meetings once or twice per year whilst others meet on a quarterly or six monthly basis. Two of the bodies involve a far greater time commitment with two councillors on the Whitstable Castle Trust attending meeting approximately 24 times per year and the two councillors on the Herne Bay Pier Trust attending meeting approximately 40 times per year. However, it is for the individual councillor to decide the level of their involvement on each outside body and the workload they take on as a result.

## **9. Representational role of councillors**

Councillors carry out their representational role in a variety of ways and it very much down to the individual. In dealing with casework, councillors tend to take an in-depth approach to resolving specific issues raised by residents following the case through from start to finish.

The political groups are supported by two group secretaries whose role is to support councillors with casework, for example directing a councillor to the correct service or body when an issue is raised. The group secretaries also co-ordinate group meetings and communicate matters between councillors. Councillors are also able to access services directly to resolve issues.

Councillors use a range of communication methods to engage with constituents which include visiting individuals, phone, email, social networking sites and newsletters. Some councillors hold surgeries which are advertised in the local paper. Councillors can also receive casework from residents' associations where they are members of them. Electronic communication methods and in particular email have made councillors more accessible to constituents. As a result councillors potentially receive more correspondence from constituents but it has also become easier for them to respond more efficiently.

The council holds events for young people to engage with councillors as part of Local Democracy Week. These include a competition for young people to become 'Lord

Mayor for the Day' and an event for school children to develop campaigns which they present to councillors.

There are 26 parish councils and several active residents associations concentrated in the urban areas of the district. The frequency of parish council or resident association meetings is unique to each group and it is for the individual councillor to decide how frequently they will attend but generally councillors are active members of these groups. There is also a parish forum held twice per year attended by councillors representing rural wards in the district.

The community issues for Canterbury city, the coastal towns and rural areas are distinct and councillors also have a role in championing community groups of interest for their areas. Some examples include Friends of Duncan Downs, the Seasalter Project, Friends of Prospect Fields, the Canterbury Society and Whitstable Society. This role includes attendance and meetings and providing a direct link into the council.

## **10. The future**

### **10.1 Localism and policy development**

One of the aspirations behind the Big Society is that local people and community groups will become more empowered to run and improve local services themselves. Similarly, the Localism Act gives community based organisations new rights to bid to run council services where they can demonstrate they have the capacity to do so.

The council has already developed strong relationships with many community based organisations that provide services on its behalf or run services which benefit the communities they serve. Whitstable Castle, Rural Street Runner, Leisure Centres, the Horsebridge Arts and Community Centre and Herne Bay Festival are directly run by a partner with grant, concessions or in kind support from the council. The way these services are delivered has changed since the last electoral review. Decisions about service delivery have reduced for the council. Instead, councillors have a monitoring role or are appointed to these bodies as representatives of the council to assist with their work.

How the council manages these relationships and develops new ones is a critical issue and is set out in the council's Engaging Communities Policy which was developed by a scrutiny panel. The role of councillors in services or facilities transferred to the direct management of third parties is more of a monitoring role than where services are provided directly by the council. Councillors may be

represented on the management board or equivalent depending on the scale of the operation and the risks involved.

## **10.2 Service delivery and finance**

Since the last electoral review of the council there have been significant changes to the way some services are delivered locally which have also changed the role of councillors.

As mentioned above, some council services are now delivered by community based organisations. Another key change since is that until 2005 Kent County Council operated a partnership arrangement for highways services with the district authorities. This meant each district council had joint responsibility for the highways in their areas and hosted a Highways Partnership team. The County Council ended these arrangements on the basis of greater efficiency and took back sole control of Kent Highways Services in April 2005. This has reduced the workload of councillors and their role has changed. Councillors are consulted on highways matters through a Joint Transportation Board, raise and signpost matters to County Council and also have a role in scrutinising the highways service.

The council has taken two approaches in response to recent financial constraints:

### **1) Shared Services**

The council together with neighbouring authorities in East Kent has created shared services for a range of support and frontline services. The council has entered into joint arrangements for personnel and payroll and waste collection.

EK Services has been created to deliver the council's ICT, revenues and benefits, and customer contact centre functions on behalf of Canterbury city, Dover and Thanet district councils. Landlord housing services are now delivered by an Arms Length Management Organisation on behalf of Canterbury city, Dover, Shepway and Thanet district councils.

The role of the councillors in handling the business of these services has shifted to a client and monitoring role. For example, there is councillor representation on the East Kent Housing Board and areas boards. Initially an East Kent Joint Arrangement Committee and an East Kent Joint Scrutiny Committee between the four district councils and Kent County Council that would be sharing services were created. In practice only three of the district councils share services and so these committees will be abolished and a new committee created between these

three councils. Decisions relating to shared services have been delegated to officers and the East Kent Joint Arrangements Committee has not had a role in taking decisions around the delivery of services. There will no longer be a joint scrutiny committee as this monitoring role is handled by the individual district council scrutiny committees. The council's Scrutiny Committee considers the quarterly performance reports from all shared service partners.

## **2) Customer Focus Review**

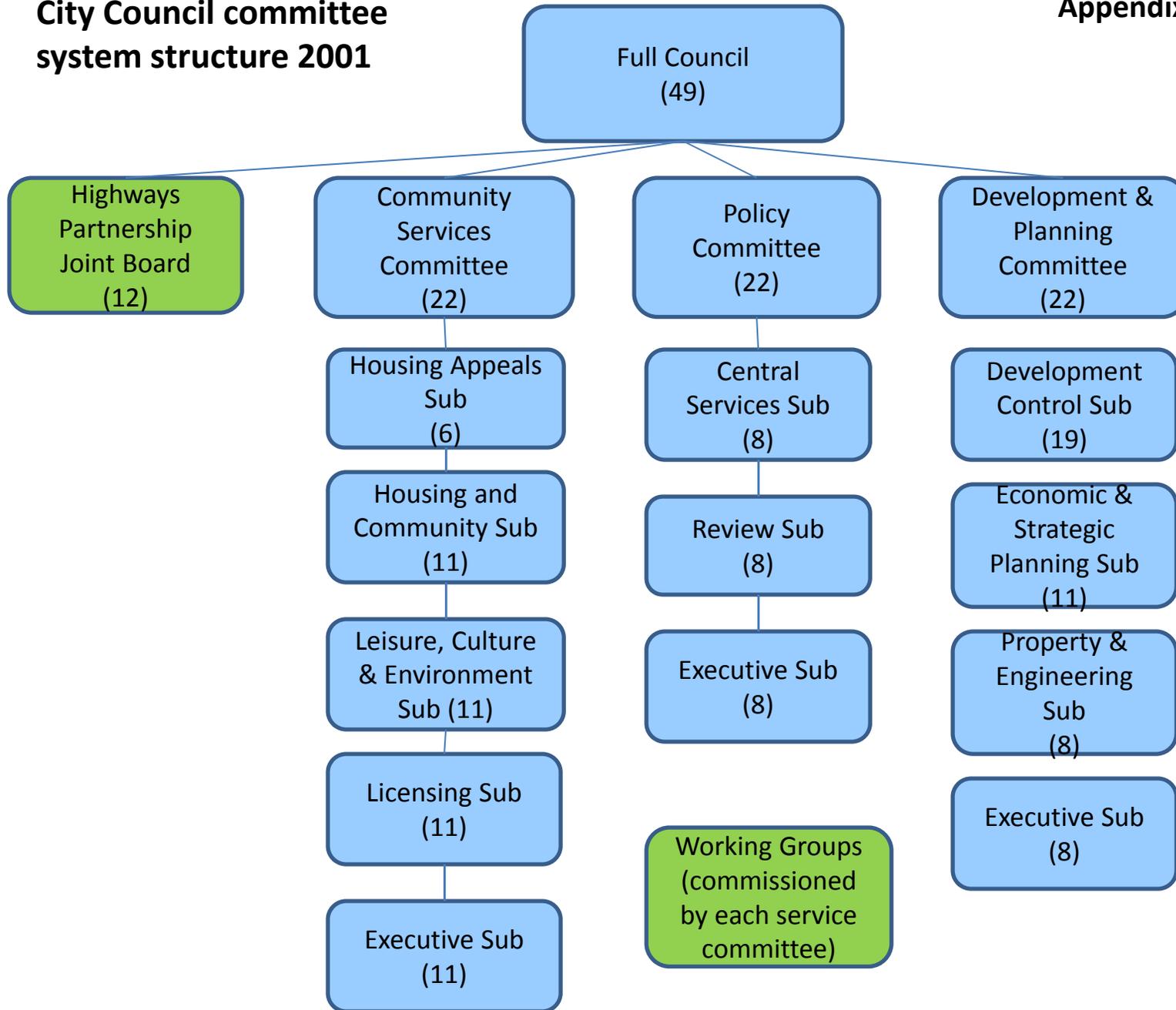
The council is currently undergoing a programme of Customer Focus Reviews of services that have not entered shared service arrangements. The purpose of the reviews is to reduce the costs of services by delivering them in different and more efficient ways. For example, recent reviews that have concluded have created a more streamlined development management service and introduced a single neighbourhood enforcement team. These changes are operational and therefore do not affect the level of service delivery. The reviews are overseen by a councillor working group but beyond this have not changed the role of councillors or their workload.

## **11. Conclusion**

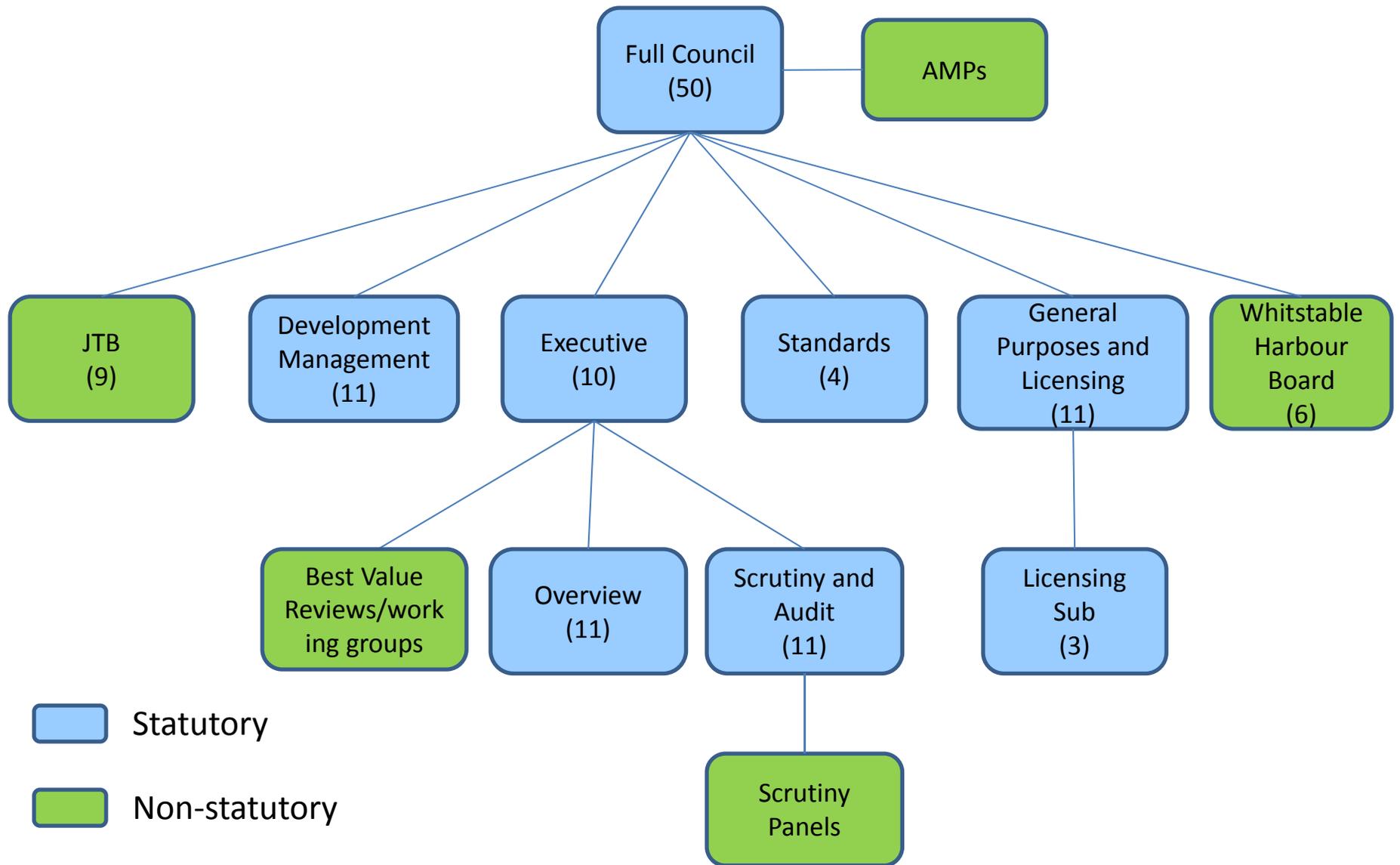
Based on the evidence set out in this submission and accompanying documents the council believes 38 councillors is the right number to manage the council's business in an effective and efficient way whilst ensuring that councillors are able to fulfil their representational role.

**City Council committee system structure 2001**

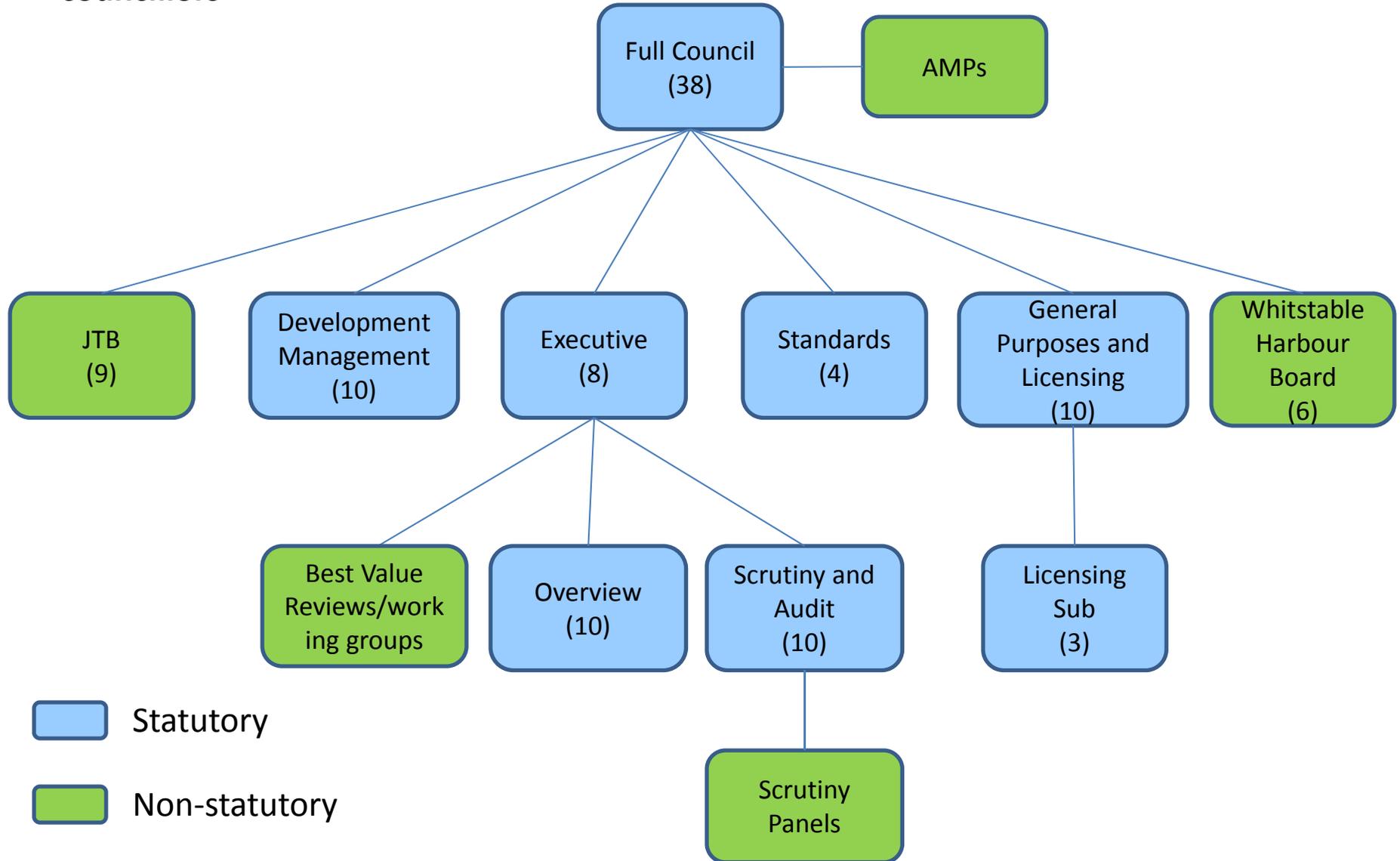
**Appendix A**



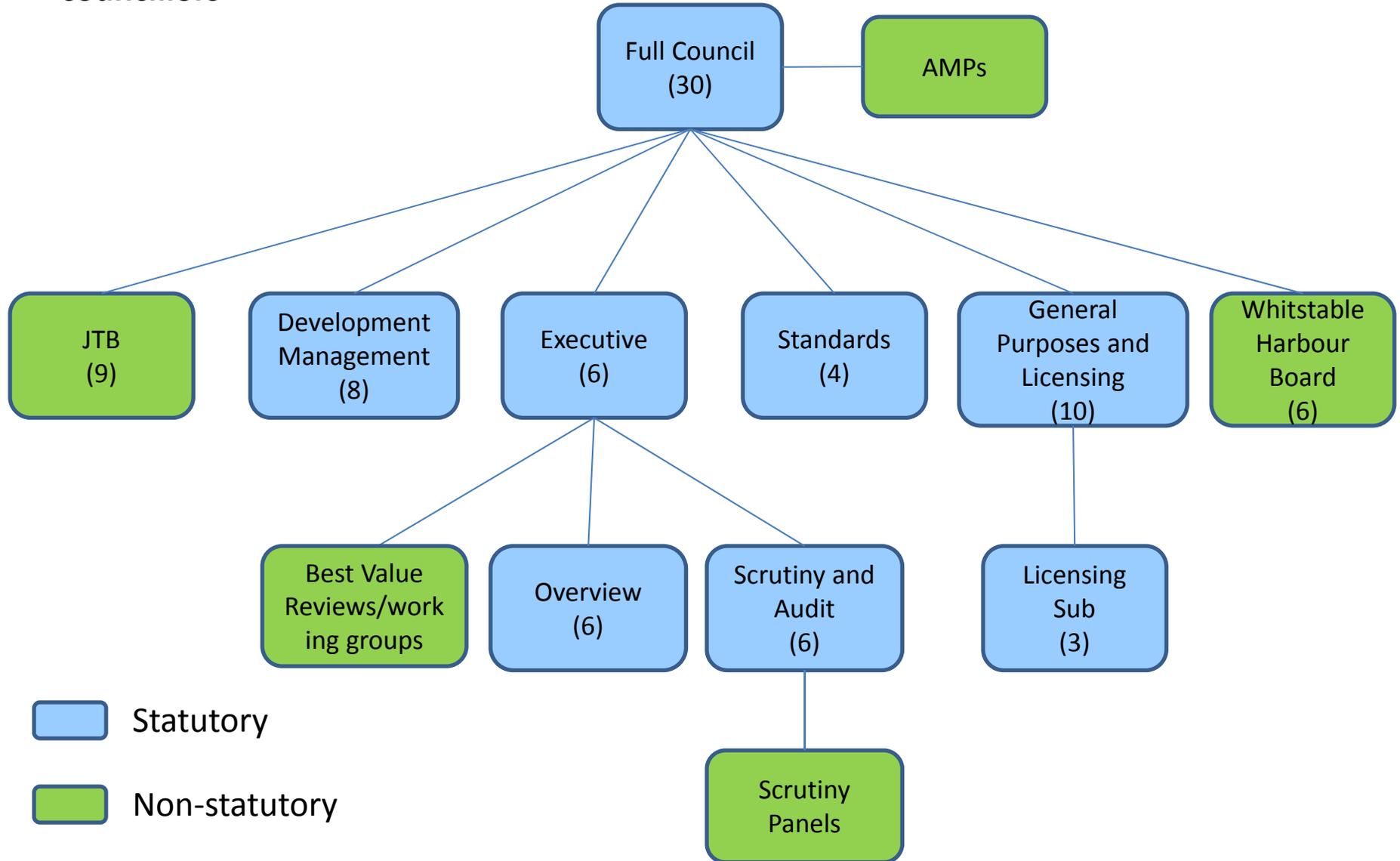
# Decision making structure from 2013/14



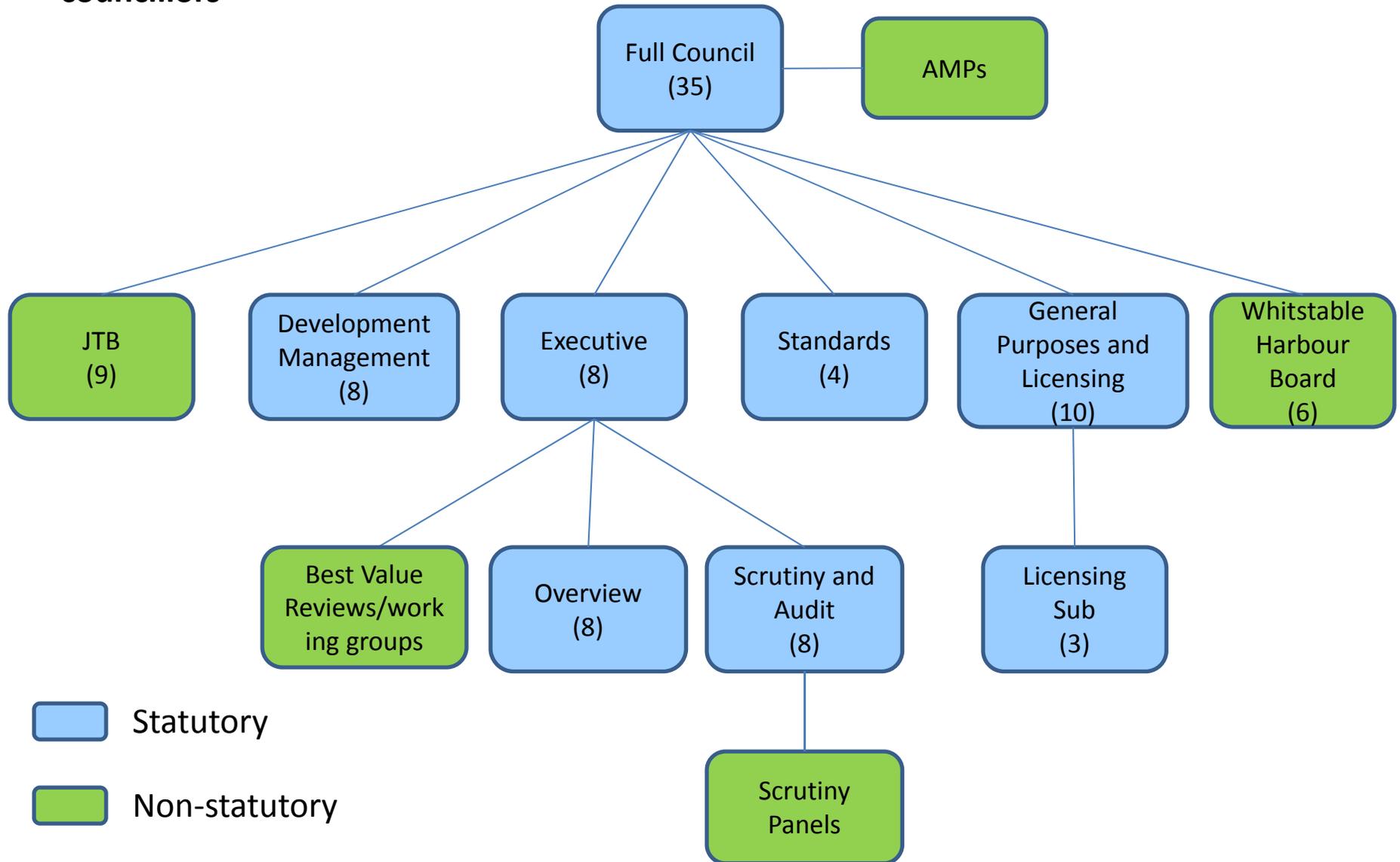
**Proposed future decision making structure from 2015 based on 38 councillors**



**Example future decision making structure from 2015 based on 30 councillors**



**Example future decision making structure from 2015 based on 35 councillors**



**Electoral Review Submission on Council Size to the Local Government  
Boundary Commission for England from Canterbury City Council Liberal  
Democrat Group**

The origin of the approach to the Boundary Commission came from an ongoing internal exercise to seek cost reductions across the council. This was coupled with some suspicion that it might also at the same time reduce the number of back-benchers as well! Although the issue of costs is not within the remit of the Boundary Commission this has actually been the driver of the council's application. Reducing the number of committee places per councillor and re-organising committees reduces both councillor costs and officer costs and naturally means that councillors will spend less time on committee work. If the main function of councillors is to sit on committees then clearly such an approach will guarantee the need for fewer councillors. However, we challenge the original premise for making some of these changes and we do so particularly given the growing population of the district.

We believe there are two prime inter-linking strands in the role of the councillor :-

1. Representing constituents.

2. Sitting on committees.

1. Representation.

Canterbury city councillors represent just over 3,000 residents per councillor. This is the highest figure in east Kent. If the Local Plan is adopted our population will go up from the current 151,000 to about 200,000 by 2031. This would mean if we stayed at our current level of 50 councillors we would be representing a population of 4,000 constituents per councillor in 18 years time. If we moved to the suggested model of 38 councillors this would rise to 5,260 constituents per councillor over the same period.

Obviously a larger number of constituents would lead to a more full time role. This has implications for attracting more younger councillors which we have argued for some time would ensure that councillors better represent the age structure of their constituents. It is significant that the more full time role of county councillors is reflected in their generally being older and less representative in terms of age. It has also been suggested that having responsibility for more constituents would mean that councillors would have to be paid more which rather negates the cost saving argument.

It is a given that all councils are different. The area covered by Canterbury City Council can loosely be characterised in four parts:

(1) the urban area of Canterbury – a historic city. A cultural hub. Dominated by public sector employment. Strong retail and tourist sectors.

(2) the urban area of Herne Bay – a traditional seaside town facing some difficulties in adjusting to the loss of the traditional holiday business. Large elderly population. Some areas of economic deprivation.

(3) the urban area of Whitstable - the importance of the harbour and a range of small individualistic shops. Some urban renaissance from second home owners and the influx of London money. Elements of a bohemian and artistic community.

(4) a number of villages around these urban areas. Villages ranging from the classic chocolate box Kent village to ex-mining villages with continuing levels of significant social deprivation.

We would argue that there are considerable differences between the various communities in the district and indeed these are fiercely safeguarded. Whitstable residents frequently complain about playing second fiddle to Canterbury! Consequently councillors need to have detailed local knowledge and be sympathetically attuned to these different communities.

For some years there has been considerable public debate and disquiet over the governance of the district. Residents' groups such as the Canterbury Society have called variously for a more representative Executive, more power to Area Member Panels, a Town Council structure etc.

Recorded information on the amount of time spent by councillors in their representational role is sketchy and varies considerably from councillor to councillor. We certainly have councillors in our group who regularly spend between 10 and 20 hours a week on community issues related to their role as councillors. These can roughly be described as :-

- (1) Formal casework such as housing issues, refuse problems, noisy neighbours etc.
- (2) Local neighbourhood issues such as contentious planning applications, licensing and late night problems which often involve formal or informal groups of residents.
- (3) Ongoing interaction with residents' associations, parish councils, outside bodies etc.

Many residents and councillors value the fine grain local relationship which ensures local issues can be democratically voiced. This level of interaction cannot easily be achieved by county councillors with their large constituencies.

Representation means different things to different councillors. Straight forward casework has indeed been greatly eased with the availability of email and electronic media, but it has also increased the amount of casework because access by constituents to councillors is now also much easier. However, representation spreads into working with various residents' groups,

community organisations, parish councils etc. Community groups, particularly in Canterbury and Whitstable, have become much more vocal and influential. Cuts to local authority funding have spurred some of these groups into taking action to enhance, protect and improve their communities themselves and this means more involvement by councillors in those actions.

## 2. Committee work.

When the council was forced to abandon the old committee system it was opposed by all three parties at the time. However, the Political Management Working Group now disagrees that a return to the old committee system would be desirable. This is unsurprising because the Political Management Working Group is essentially made up of members of the Executive who would of course lose power if the committee system was re-adopted.

The old structure had fewer formal meetings than the new system. Old system 2001/2 113 formal meetings, new system 2011/12 136 formal meetings. So it could well be perceived to have been more efficient.

Some individual committees have already been reduced in size over the years. Given the diversity of the district we believe it is important that different areas are represented at committee. For example, the Development Management committee, which regularly attracts lengthy public debate with 50 to 100 members of the public attending, comprised 19 councillors in 2001. It has been progressively cut to 15 and then to the current number of 11. It is questionable that members are currently sufficiently familiar with some applications. With a bigger population in the district in 2031 and 25% more houses we would question that decision-making of a current committee size of 11 would be sound, let alone the proposal of a reduction to 10 or even 8. It must not be forgotten that already occasional absences means the committee sits with lower numbers. Only nine councillors decided on an application for 100 houses in April 2013.

This committee also needs to be balanced between our four main areas (see earlier). Currently it comprises four Canterbury councillors, four rural and three from Whitstable with no representation from Herne Bay. A smaller committee is only likely to add to this distortion. Similar concerns apply to other committee reductions which will make them less representative.

Working groups and panels can be very effective in developing new policy detail or recommending changes to the way in which the council operates. Many are topic based and most meet for a relatively short period of time, often with quite an intensive period of meetings – sometimes fortnightly or monthly. Some, like the Local Plan Working Group, can meet over a period of years with considerable volumes of paperwork and quite lengthy meetings. We would stress the importance of such groups and the role of councillors within them in contrast to formal meetings such as Full Council which is increasingly a rubber-stamping exercise with meetings that can be as short as half an hour.

Equally one needs to consider the work of councillors on outside bodies which varies hugely. Some meet once or twice a year and comprise merely formal meetings such as the University Court or the Canterbury Archaeological Trust. Others may have relatively few formal meetings, but demand huge amounts of time such as the Thanington Neighbourhood Resource Centre which only has six formal meetings a year, but the councillor who is chair of Trustees probably visits at least twice a week and spends several hours a week on the business of that organisation.

Work with residents' associations and parish councils is not recorded within the city council's submission, but often the decisions made at committee need to be communicated to those organisations and indeed their desires fed through to committee. Thus we would suggest that the role of councillors at committee should be considered to be subservient to their representational role.

### 3. Conclusions and Recommendations.

- (1) Different councillors put in different degrees of effort and time. Some regard committees and committee work as their prime functions. Others spend most time in their representation role. Some are able to devote a great deal of time. Others, perhaps because they are full time employed, much less. They may find day time meetings impossible unless they have especially understanding employers.
- (2) We recognise that cost issues are not part of the remit of the Boundary Commission, but inevitably it is an issue at a time of financial stringency in local government. In the Canterbury district 30 of our 50 councillors draw less than £6,000 per annum each in terms of remuneration including expenses. About 40% of the cost of elected members is attributable to the nine Executive members. The proposal recommended by Canterbury City Council is to cut Executive members from nine to eight ie. 11% and backbenchers from 40 to 29 ie. 28%. Reducing the size of the council will therefore not significantly reduce costs, especially if back-benchers have to be paid more in order to compensate them for larger constituencies. This would be particularly important if we are to attract younger councillors who will be working and will need to combine their chosen careers with their council work.
- (3) The balance between the representational role and the committee role is a matter of judgment. It is our view that committee work should be subservient to the representational role. Thus cutting committees is not an argument for cutting councillor numbers.
- (4) The uncertainty about the outcome of the Local Plan, which is now out to consultation and then to examination by the Inspector, means that the likely future growth of the district is uncertain. There is currently considerable debate as to whether we should be looking at growth to 200,000 or 180,000 by 2031. However, it is clear that there will be significant population growth.

- (5) There is also uncertainty about the current demands from some quarters for town councils. The issue of a community governance review was considered recently by the Executive, but a decision was made to proceed with an electoral review first. We believe the advice of the Boundary Commission should have been followed where a governance review precedes an electoral review. Without a governance review it is difficult to make firm recommendations about councillor numbers.
- (6) It is suggested that some committees should be abolished/merged/reduced in numbers. This is used to support the case for a reduction in the number of councillors although we question this in point (3) above. We would support the case for some re-organisation of the committee structure and indeed some of the proposals made seem perfectly sensible. However, we would actually prefer to see a return to something akin to the old committee structure which actually had fewer formal meetings although it involved more councillors on a much more consensual basis. Furthermore, with a population in the district that has grown 50% faster than the south east average over the last 12 years and is now set to grow at a 50% higher rate than this over the next 18 years, we question that a reduction in councillor numbers is commensurate with proper democratic representation. As has been noted earlier, we already have the highest population to councillor ratio in Kent.
- (7) However, we do accept that given the reduction in revenue, the local authority has had to re-organise its services and indeed to cut and reduce a number of its activities. This has to be balanced with an increase in the population for which this authority is responsible. Particularly, given that the population is already distorted by a large student population which has grown considerably during the last 15 years and which does not show up in the statistics. When considering councillor numbers there is a balance between the work that the council can undertake on its reduced budget and the increased population.
- (8) Thus we would accept that the current 3,000 electorate per councillor does work and given the reduction in council services we accept that this might even rise to 3,500. Looking forward to 2031 this would suggest that rather than reducing councillor numbers we should be looking to a modest increase to around 57 from the present 50. This might be staged over the next 18 years or introduced about half way through that period.

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on behalf of Canterbury City Council Liberal Democrat Group

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