

## 2018 Boundary Review – Isle of Wight - Council Size

### **Executive Summary**

1. This submission, prepared by the Isle of Wight Council, presents the case for the status quo to be maintained in the number of elected members required to operate the democratic functions of the local authority. That number being a total of 40.
2. In developing this submission, the council took as its starting point, the existing number of members and then considered whether or not there was evidence to support a variation of that number. In arriving at the conclusion that the status quo should prevail, a number of factors have been taken into account. These include changes and future potential changes in governance arrangements; developments in national, regional and local policy affecting local government; factors affecting the representational role of elected members; advances and future developments in technology, together with evidence gathered concerning the time commitments in discharging the functions of the elected member role.
3. Whilst not specifically relevant to the determination of the required number of elected members, consideration has also been given to population trends any potential increase in electoral numbers through housing and other forms of growth and development. The ultimate aim has been to reach a considered view as to what would deliver the most effective and efficient local administration system for the benefit of Island residents.
4. The detailed analysis summarised in this submission will conclude that it would be premature to suggest any changes to the number of members of the Isle of Wight Council at this time.

### **Introduction**

5. In 2017, the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) confirmed that the Isle of Wight Council had been identified as a council requiring an electoral review during 2018/19. The main factor driving this decision was that 36 per cent of the current electoral wards had an electorate variance of greater than +/- 10 per cent of the average for the entire authority (See Addendum A).
6. The review is to be conducted in two phases, the first, to review council size and the second to review electoral boundaries. The purpose of phase one is to determine how many elected members in total, should make up the council in the future. In considering council size, there are three areas that are required by the LGBCE to be taken into account:
  - The governance arrangements of the council and how it takes main decisions across the range of its responsibilities. The aim is to ensure that the council has the right number of members to take decisions and manage the business of the council in an effective and efficient manner both now and in the future.
  - The scrutiny function arrangements of the council relating to its own decision making and the council's responsibilities to outside bodies.

The aim being to assess the number of members needed to hold decision makers to account and that these responsibilities can be administered in a convenient and effective way.

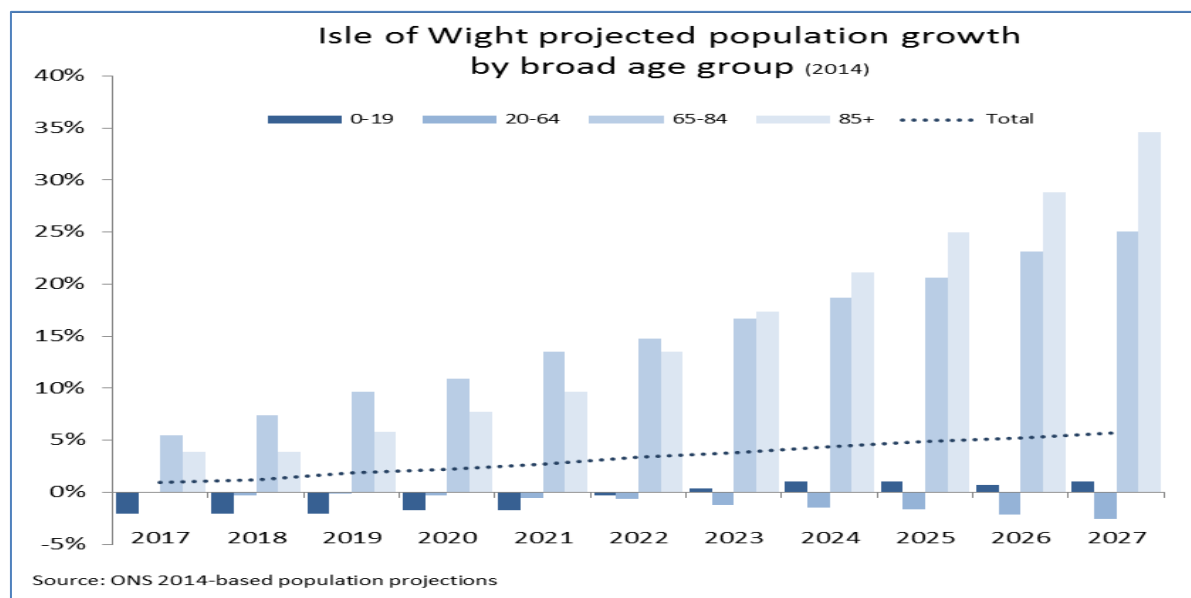
- The representational role of elected members in the local community and how they engage with people; conduct casework and represent the council on local partner organisations. The aim being to ensure that the needs of the local population are adequately represented.

7. Phase two of the review will involve an examination of the current electoral divisions and their boundaries. Current boundaries would need to be redrawn, taking into consideration likely growth or development for a number of years into the future. This work will not commence until the council size has been determined and confirmed by the LGBCE.

### **The Isle of Wight in Context**

8. The Isle of Wight lies off the south coast of mainland England and covers an area of 380.16 <sup>km<sup>2</sup></sup> (38,016 hectares, or 146.8 sq. miles). Slightly more than half, mainly in the west is designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The Island has some 100 sq. miles (258 km<sup>2</sup>) of farmland, 20 sq. miles (52 km<sup>2</sup>) of developed areas and 57 miles (92km) of coastline.
9. The Island is a mostly rural community (approximately 84 per cent), with a number of large towns including Newport (the County Town), Ryde, Cowes and East Cowes, Sandown and Shanklin with further smaller settlements to the west of the Island (commonly known as the West Wight) and the south (Ventnor). It is within these locations that the majority of Island residents live. Outside these settlements, there are around 30 villages and hamlets. The overall electoral boundaries of the authority remain unchanged since the last review in 2007. Being an Island, the external boundaries are naturally determined, with no fixed link to mainland UK.
10. The Isle of Wight Joint Strategic Needs Assessment demographic data (October 2017) illustrates that based on the mid-2016 population estimates the Island is home to some 139,798 people. This represents net growth of c.1400 (1.0 per cent) since the last Census in 2011, and an increase of 403 since 2015. In comparison growth in the south east stood at 4.3 per cent and for England and Wales, 3.9 per cent.
11. Looking forward, the Office for National Statistics projects that the Island's population will increase to 146,559 by 2026 and 153,023 by 2036. Anticipated growth therefore being in the region of 5 per cent over the period, albeit that the actual population is heavily influenced by being recognised as a tourist destination.
12. The increase that has been seen in the Island's population is being driven by the over 65 age group. This mirrors the national and regional trend, but is exaggerated by both this group growing, and the under 65 group shrinking, which is not the case seen in the regional and national data. This is also apparent when

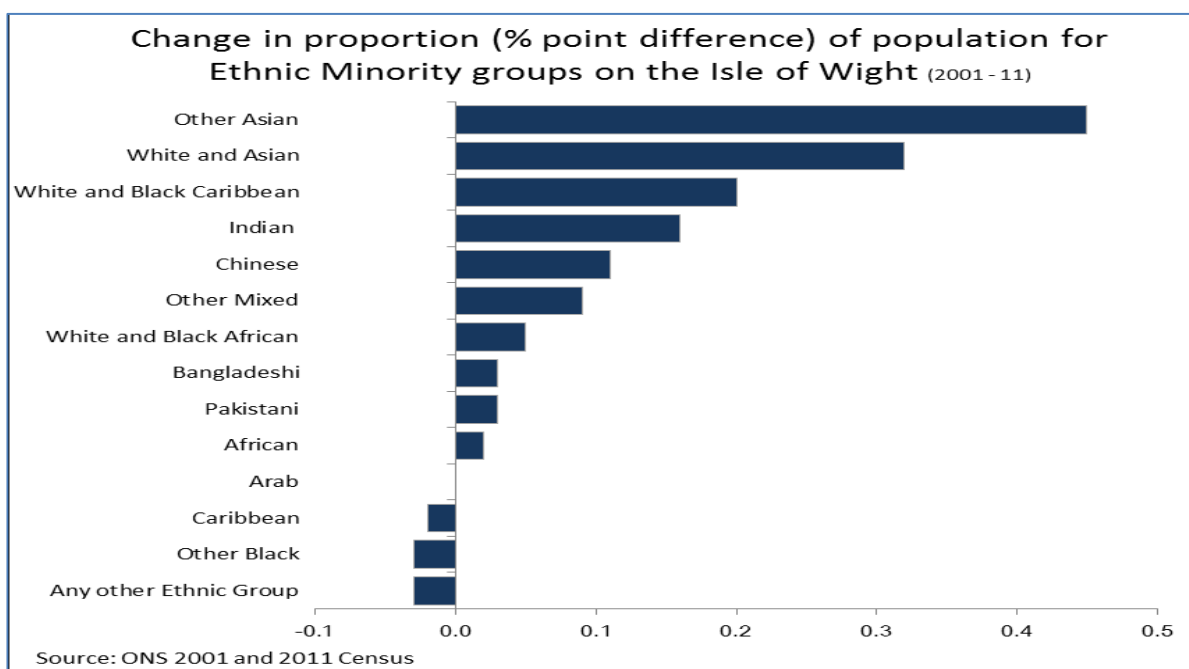
looking at the proportion of Island residents falling into the over 65s age category versus the population as a whole. At 27.1 per cent this has risen 0.5 percentage points since mid-2015. This places the Island as having the 4th highest level regionally, and 15th nationally, out of the 348 local authorities in England and Wales. For the under 65s, the national positions are reversed, with the Island ranking 332nd and 327th for under 15s and 15-64 age groups respectively.



13. It is predicted that over the next ten years the number of 65 to 79 year olds will increase by nearly 17 per cent, while the over 85s will increase by 40 per cent. The Island also has a higher proportion of people who say that their day to day activities are limited a lot or a little by long term health conditions (22.6 per cent), whilst figures in the South East stand at 15.7 per cent and 17.9 per cent in England and Wales as a whole.
14. The Isle of Wight, like other coastal areas, is popular as a retirement destination. There is a net outflow of age 15 to 29 year olds as young people leave for higher education and others for employment and career opportunities, and a net inflow at age 30 and above as people return to raise their families or older people retire to the Island.
15. This data highlights that whilst population growth is much slower against regional and national trends its growth in elderly population is an area of concern. Much progress has been made towards the integration of council services with those of the Isle of Wight NHS and following the introduction of Health and Wellbeing Boards (HWBs) by the Health and Social Care Act 2012, there have been regular meetings between the council, NHS and Public Health to promote greater integration. The drive to better integrate service provision is the consequence not only of shrinking budget provision and an increasing elderly population with the strain that this puts on public sector services; but also by a desire on the part of the council to deliver more effective and efficient, person-centred care.
16. There are currently 70,776 residential households on the Isle of Wight. Housing development on the Island has not been immune to the financial challenges in recent years, which have depressed the number of development sites coming

forward or being developed. An additional consideration for applications is the Island's unique natural and built environment which is protected with over 50 per cent of the Island designated as an Area of Outstanding Beauty and 28 miles of coastline designated as Heritage Coast. However, the demand for housing remains a key consideration (much the same as the nationwide picture), and there have been a number of large scale developments approved. An overview of the anticipated residential developments up to 2024 is provided at Addendum B.

17. Around 1 in 6 (16.5 per cent) of all households are single person occupied and aged 65 or over. This was the eighteenth highest rate for all of the authorities in England and Wales. A similar rate (16.2 per cent) was also given for other one person households. This is broadly in-line with England (17.9 per cent) and the South East region (16.1 per cent).
18. Most Isle of Wight residents (94.8 per cent) were born in the UK (England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland) and most of those who came from outside the UK have been resident in the country for ten years or more (3.2 per cent). Just 0.4 per cent of the resident population who were not born in the UK, had been resident for less than two years.
19. In regard to equality and diversity there are signs of a diversifying population on the Island, with the non-white ethnic population more than doubling from 1.3 per cent in 2001 to 2.7 per cent in 2011 (compared with an increase from 8.7 per cent to 14.1 per cent for England as a whole). The largest increase in ethnic minority populations on the Island between 2001 and 2011 identified themselves as "other Asian" with a small increase of 0.45 percent.



20. Deprivation is another important factor affecting the work of elected members. The Island is ranked 109 out of 326 local authorities on the overall Index of Multiple Deprivation 2015 scale, where 1 equals the most deprived. The Isle of Wight also has 13 Lower Super Output Areas within the 20 per cent most deprived in

England, two of which are within the 10 per cent most deprived. Whilst issues of deprivation and benefit dependency (which is also higher than the larger regions of Hampshire and the South East) are not unique to the Island, they clearly add to the pressure on the provision of public service delivery.

21. Whilst housing and population make-up and growth, together with considerations of deprivation are factors that that will affect the volume and complexity of casework as well as decision making for elected members, these are issues with which the Island has been grappling over a number of years. From the data set out above, it is not anticipated that there will be any significant changes that would see a substantial impact on the capacity and time commitments of elected members and therefore impact on the number of members required.
22. The Isle of Wight Council as a unitary authority requires the discharge of all the statutory functions required of local government together with the commissioning and/or delivery of a wide range of non-statutory services for local communities.
23. The council has an agreed Corporate Plan for the period 2017 – 2020, which contains the vision for the “*Isle of Wight to be an inspiring place in which to grow up, work, live and visit*”. It also contains a number of key commitments:
  - Create opportunities for all
  - Deliver economic growth and prosperity
  - Preserve our environment
  - Protect our community
  - Plan for our future needs
  - Provide sound financial management.
24. The plan is an ambitious one and is written with a view to achieving the vision for the Island and the council over the next ten years and with a specific focus on activities necessary in the next three years. Some of the key indicators of success include:
  - A 30 percentage point increase in how satisfied people are with how the council runs things and a 27 percentage point increase in those who think it offers value for money.
  - More people being cared for at home and at least 700 units of new extra care facilities for our elderly residents.
  - All of our schools graded good or better by Ofsted and educational attainment in the top quartile when compared to similar authorities.
  - 5,000 more jobs on the Island and an 18 per cent increase in the average gross weekly wage.
  - A near 100 per cent reduction in the number of households in temporary accommodation assisted by the development of new affordable homes, some of which will be developed by the council itself.
  - A growth in our tax base from new homes and businesses to generate the income we need to continue provide key services to meet the needs of our communities.
25. Over the past 7 years (since 2011/12), the council has faced government funding reductions of some £40m in total as well as having to accommodate other inflationary and unavoidable cost pressures. Taken together, these factors have

seen the council make overall savings over the last 7 years of over £68m. This represents around 33 per cent of the council's controllable spending. The scale of these reductions has inevitably led to reductions in or ceasing of service provision.

26. With some £16m further reductions in spending to secure over the next three years, the financial challenge remains the single biggest risk to the future sustainability of public services on the Island, with continued uncertainty due to central government funding reforms, particularly from 2020/21 onwards. Improving the overall financial resilience of the council is therefore a major consideration for elected members. In response to this issue and aligned to the corporate plan, the basis of the council's medium term financial strategy is:

In the short term to:

- Create financial and operating capacity to transform
- Increase efficiency & effectiveness

In the short to medium term to:

- Develop entrepreneurial, commercial and collaborative activity (with managed risk)
- Withdraw from or offer minimal provision for low impact services
- Improve the Island Economy

In the medium to longer term to:

- Secure public service transformation

27. It has also been long acknowledged that being an Island, naturally creates unique "Island Factor" issues, which do not impact other mainland authorities. An independent study into the impact of Physical Separation from the UK Mainland on Isle of Wight Public Service Delivery was undertaken by Portsmouth University in 2016. The research and evidence highlighted three specific themes that add additional costs to the provision of local authority services and, therefore, impact the council's ability to deliver effective and efficient services, through being an Island. These were:

- self-sufficiency
- the Island premium and
- dislocation

28. Examples of the challenges faced by the authority and by default elected members when considering service provision and budget allocation includes monopoly market conditions, one example being that there is only one public bus operator on the Island, and despite an open competitive tendering process in 2012, only one company made a final bid. As such this has reportedly led to an additional payment (Island Premium) over the national average for home to school transport per student.

29. Additionally, the study identified that the price of goods and services delivered on the Island were influenced by the size of the market and the inherent potential for

restricted competition. This is evidenced by the limited interest in contracts for council services unless they are for a significant length of time.

30. Forced self-sufficiency is another key challenge for the Island and reflects the absence of 'spill-over' from neighbouring authorities whereby residents can easily access or be able to use public services provided by a neighbouring local government area, thus necessitating in statutory duties or circumstances that dictate local need they must be provided wholly on the Island. The study estimated that the council was required to spend an additional 3 per cent on public service provision as a result of being an Island.
31. The council is also one of 46 Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRA) in England, the provision of the service equates to 5 per cent of the council's controllable spend (£6.8m in 2015/16). Whilst this report does not consider the geographical separation issues in detail or the complexities of being an FRA, these factors must be taken into account when considering the parameters within which elected members are required to work, increasing the complexity of the decisions they make affecting the Island community. The future arrangements for the delivery of the fire service are currently under review, the result of which process may result in alternative arrangements being put in place, thus reducing the burdens in this respect.
32. The council is the administering authority for the Isle of Wight Pension Fund, part of the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) (one of 89 in England and Wales) with assets under management of £592m at 31 December 2017, and over 15,000 members (active, deferred and retired) from 30 Island employers. As a Fire and Rescue Authority, it is the scheme manager for the Firefighters Pension Schemes, increasingly complex given the changes to scheme regulations, but subject to the same governance requirements as the LGPS for just over 300 members (active, deferred and retired).
33. The council has entered into high value, long term contracts with suppliers for highways and waste management. Whilst the delivery of the service has been devolved to other companies, the council retains statutory responsibility for these services and for managing the quality of service under those contracts. The council has also utilised opportunities for strategic partnering with neighbouring authorities to increase its leadership and management capacity whilst reducing costs. Currently, there is a strategic partnership in place with Hampshire County Council for the delivery of children's services, Portsmouth City Council in the delivery of financial services and Hampshire Fire & Rescue Service in the delivery of the Island fire and rescue service.
34. The council is mindful of the government's ambition that local authorities are given more control of the taxes they raise locally, including the retention of Business Rates (NNDR). The council further considered that whilst the Retained Business Rates system was intended to be financially neutral, there would always be "winners" and "losers" across the country. Traditionally growth in NNDR income on the Island has been extremely low, with only 5.8 per cent growth between 2010 and 2015; compared to the South East which has seen growth of 14.2 per cent and 17.3 per cent across Great Britain. Such a situation further demonstrates the difficult financial constraints within which members (and officers) are required to

work. However, there has been a successful application to become a 100 per cent Business Rate Retention Pilot for 2018/19 in a pooled arrangement with Portsmouth City Council and Southampton City Council. The arrangement is one where both risks and rewards must be shared across all authorities. The scheme is intended to reduce volatility in the income from business rates as well as to maximise the incentive to grow the business rate base.

35. In July 2017, the council launched a major regeneration programme with the key aim of securing improvements in the Island economy and of transforming the financial position of the council through an increase in the base budget for business rates. This is an ambitious programme which plans to utilise council assets and work with the private sector to identify sites which, if delivered to their full potential, could bring in over £15m per annum in increased council tax, business rates and new homes bonus. Such a programme will naturally draw on both officer and political resources to deliver these outcomes.
36. There are many challenges facing the Island. Its geography and make up lends itself in continuing to be a popular tourist destination, particularly with its areas of outstanding natural beauty, although to improve the Island economy it is necessary to secure business growth to secure additional income for the local authority at a time when central funding continues to diminish. There are also unique factors that place additional costs on public services simply because of our Island status. These issues are not new, but have become more difficult as a result of shrinking resources and increased demand. These will continue to be factors with which members will grapple in years to come, but again, this may not have a direct effect on the overall number of members required to deliver effective and efficient local government on the Isle of Wight.

#### **Governance and decision making:**

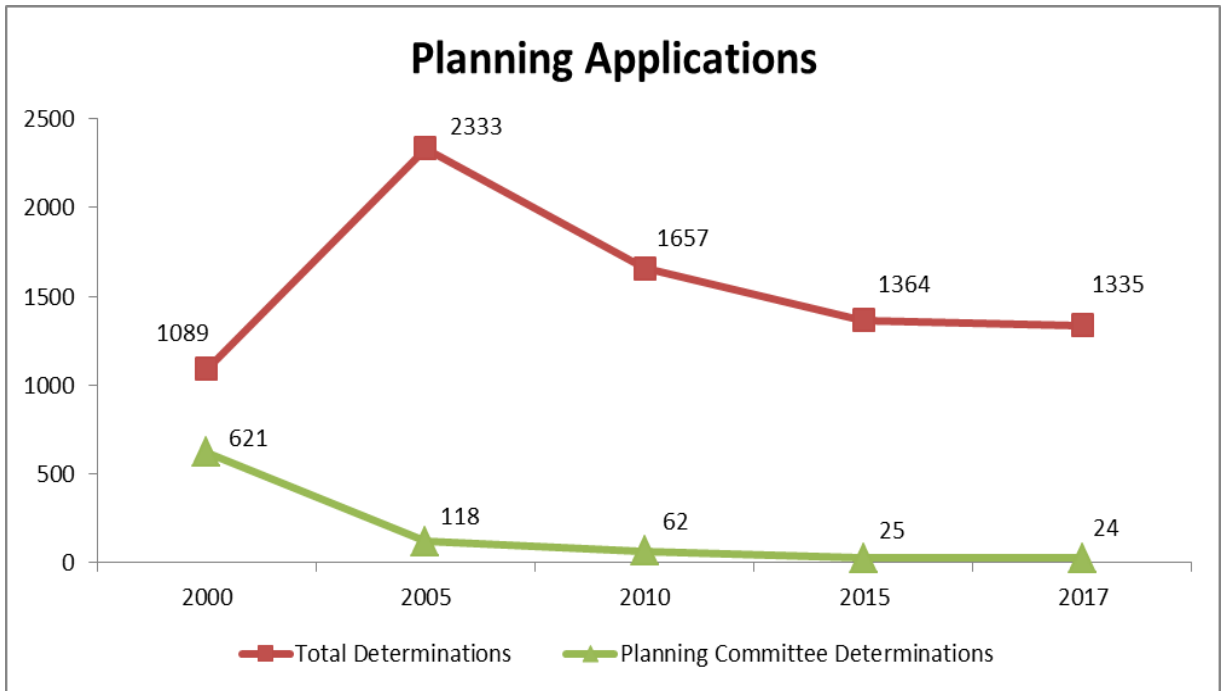
37. The last electoral review undertaken on the Isle of Wight in 2007 resulted in a reduction in the number of councillors from 48 to 40. It was considered at that time, that the proposal to reduce the number of councillors would increase electorate sizes by an average of 20 per cent which would inevitably increase the amount of time members spent on community engagement from approximately two days to two and half days per week. That increase in demand was considered to be offset in part, by the effectiveness of the executive decision making model of governance that had been adopted which would reduce the time elected members (both executive and non-executive) would spend on routine decision-making activities. It is important to note that during the early stages of the review, consideration was given by the council to reducing the number of elected councillors to 32 but was rejected on the basis that it was considered that it would provide insufficient members to discharge all of the necessary functions in an efficient manner.
38. The council now comprises of 40 elected members across 39 wards; one ward, has two members. The cycle of election for the Isle of Wight is the first Thursday in May every four years and all seats are open to election against this timetable (with the possibility of by-elections in term).



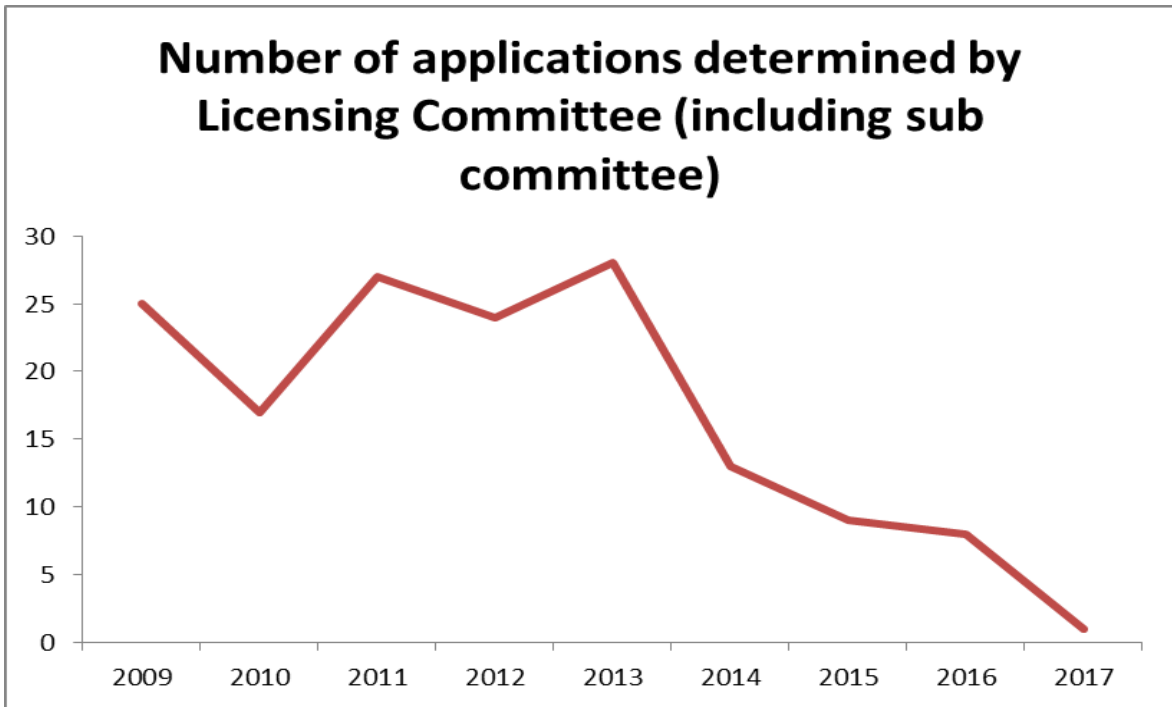
39. In 2017, the Isle of Wight had an average of 2,732 electors per councillor (though this varies ward to ward). The highest number of electors represented by a single member is 3,328 and the smallest number being 2,217.
40. The current council is made up of the following political make-up:
- 25 Conservative
  - 9 Island Independents
  - 2 Liberal Democrats
  - 2 Others
  - 1 Green
  - 1 Independent Labour
41. In accordance with the Local Government Act 2000, the council moved to operating executive arrangements based on the Cabinet model shortly thereafter under a Liberal Democrat/Independent alliance. Since then the controlling group has changed from Conservative to Independent and subsequently back to Conservative in the most recent election in May 2017.
42. Annual Council on 25 May 2016, made a recommendation to establish a constitutional working party in recognition that there had been numerous changes and amendments made over a period of time, some of which had created ambiguity with other sections of the constitution. The aim was to ensure that the appropriate level of governance and 'checks and balances' were in place to ensure the effective and efficient operation of the council. Annual Council on 17 May 2017 approved the revised constitution which included a number of constitutional changes to decision-making arrangements, (including revised arrangements for overview and scrutiny; the removal of the Employment Committee through transfer of responsibilities to the Cabinet and establishing an Appointments Committee which would meet as and when required; reduction in the number of Full Council meetings; removal of Cabinet reports to Full Council and re-introduction of cabinet member delegated decision provisions), thus affording greater streamlining and efficiency in the conduct of council business.
43. In total, there are 16 formal committees that make up the framework for conducting the business of the council. In addition to formal meetings, members participate in a number of internal organisational meetings to fully discharge their duties and responsibilities, including group leaders meetings, senior leadership team meetings, adoption panel and other similar panels. Cabinet members in particular will participate in regular meetings with their respective chief officers and related departmental meetings in the delivery of their portfolio responsibilities.
44. An analysis of members' commitments to formal committees is shown at Addendum C. This shows that on average, each elected member sits on three committees. Only four members participate in Full Council alone and seven members sit on five or more committees.
45. Full Council remains the supreme policy making body of the council, agreeing such matters as the annual budget, the corporate plan and the Fire and Rescue Authority integrated risk management plan. More details of these responsibilities are laid out in Article 4 of the council's constitution. There are currently 6 Full

Council meetings a year, reduced from 9 although there remains the facility for extraordinary meetings where required to deal with urgent matters that arise not able to wait until the next ordinary meeting. This format was agreed to ensure the meetings were cost effective and an efficient use of both elected member and officer resources. A requirement for Cabinet members to provide reports to each Full Council meeting was removed and members can now use electronic communication to raise matters with Cabinet members on issues of budget or policy.

46. The Cabinet comprises of 9 members, plus the Leader, each of whom have clearly defined areas of responsibility (portfolios). Whilst Full Council sets the budget and policy framework, the vast majority of decisions are made by the Cabinet. There are two routes of political decision making; by delegated decision or at a formal Cabinet meeting. There are 9 scheduled Cabinet meetings in the 2017/18 council year, with the provision to hold extra-ordinary meetings for urgent decisions. In the 2016/17 council year there were 8 scheduled meetings of the Executive (Cabinet), although they actually met for 11 meetings in total. Following the re-introduction of delegated decision making, it is anticipated that there will be a reduction in the length of Cabinet meetings and in the number of reports presented or the need for additional extra-ordinary meetings, leading to further efficiency and speed in decision making. For an administration to operate effectively, members consider that it is necessary to have a broad pool of talent upon which to draw so as to ensure that there is adequate access to the skills and experience necessary for the efficient operation of the council's required decision making.
47. An important role undertaken by councillors is undoubtedly local decision making on issues regarding development, as it affects the rights of individuals, and the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of the community. Members are required to carefully balance local opinion against the demand for more affordable housing and development, as defined by changes in national planning guidance to promote development. Planning applications can be particularly contentious and require careful mediation by members, whilst ensuring any advice or representations made are within the scope of national and local policies.
48. Adjustments have recently been made (September 2017) to the Isle of Wight Planning Code of Practice which contains the criteria for items being referred to the Planning Committee. Such adjustments would ensure that applications considered by the committee were of a more strategic, island-wide, or complex nature, in place of more minor applications where there were largely local issues to resolve and so to reduce the number of applications considered by the committee. It is unlikely that the actual number of meetings will be reduced, as it is important to retain a spread of meetings across the year, to ensure decisions are made within the performance criteria for determinations. The following table provides an overview of the number of planning determinations compared with Planning Committee determinations that demonstrate how they have decreased over time.



49. The 2000 Local Government Act placed a duty on councils to determine such matters as liquor licensing and gambling and this function remains. The council has an overarching Licensing Committee, with powers delegated from Full Council to determine matters such as policy. Any licensing determinations are referred to a Licensing Sub-Committee, which is made up of 3 members from the Licensing Committee (as defined by statute). Officers endeavour to overcome any objections from statutory consultees, such as the Police or the public through applying reasonable conditions. The application of such conditions often overcomes the objections and negates the need for the sub-committee to meet. The table below demonstrates the effectiveness of such an approach and which has seen a dramatic reduction in the number of applications being determined by the Licensing Committee.



50. Since the last boundary review, there have been significant changes in the approach to complaints made against elected members and in 2010 the Government announced that the Standards Board regime was to be abolished. Prior to this, it was necessary to maintain a local Standards Committee to undertake investigation and determination of any complaints against members received. Since the abolition of the Standards Committee, any such complaints have been dealt with through the Monitoring Officer. Thus a further committee has been removed.
51. In contrast, members have been advised by officers that the number of meetings of the Isle of Wight Pension Fund Committee will need to increase in the future to meet the requirements of the ACCESS (A Collaboration of Central, Eastern and Southern Shires) pooling agenda set by Government. Alongside that there will be a need to cover broader governance requirements for the LGPS, with increased external scrutiny. The council is also about to see the introduction of an additional committee to manage the duties and responsibilities the local authority has in respect of its harbours.
52. Over time, the governance framework for discharging the functions of a local authority and to conduct the business of the council has been substantially streamlined to secure the best possible efficiency and effectiveness in decision making. The committee structure has recently been further reviewed in the context of financial pressures, and has been determined as the most effective structure within the current and future operating constraints of the council. Whilst there will be additional pressures on those members serving on the Pension Fund Committee together with the introduction of an additional committee to deal with matters relating to the council's harbours, it is considered that this will make relatively little difference to the time commitments of members nor will these changes necessarily affect the overall number of members required to deliver effective and efficient local government on the Isle of Wight

## **Scrutiny and outside bodies**

53. Scrutiny is the method used by elected members, who do not sit on the Cabinet, to evaluate and make recommendations on almost any matter that affects Isle of Wight residents. Scrutiny serves to make sure the council is delivering services efficiently and effectively, and that the council is responsive to the needs and opinions of the Island's residents. As with Cabinet, members consider that it is necessary to have a broad pool of talent upon which to draw so as to ensure that there is adequate access to the skills and experience necessary for the efficient operation of scrutiny activity.
54. The current arrangements for overview and scrutiny provide for an overarching Scrutiny Committee, with eight members appointed on a reverse politically proportionate basis and three policy and scrutiny committees, covering children's services, adult social care and health and regeneration, housing, planning and the environment. Each policy and scrutiny committee has seven members appointed on a political proportionate basis. Each committee sets its own work programme and undertakes a number of reviews each year.
55. Cabinet agenda papers are routinely considered by the council's Scrutiny Committee prior to a Cabinet decision being taken. Cabinet members attend meetings of Scrutiny and actions recommended by Scrutiny Committee in relation to proposed Cabinet decisions are reported to Cabinet and taken into account, prior to decisions being taken.
56. In addition, the Scrutiny Committee is responsible for exercising "call-in" functions in respect of decisions made by Cabinet. Where a request for 'call in' is made, an additional meeting of the Scrutiny Committee is held to consider the reasons and to make recommendations.
57. The council also has an Audit Committee consisting of seven elected members which meets four times a year to provide independent assurance to the council on the adequacy of the risk management framework and the internal control environment in addition to overseeing the financial reporting and annual governance processes. It also oversees Internal Audit and External Audit, helping to ensure efficient and effective assurance arrangements are in place.
58. To assist members in their role, the council operates a monthly member briefing programme. This is so that members can receive timely and topical updates on matters relevant to their roles and in the discharge of their duties. The programme covers a wide range of topics including emerging legislation and policy developments.
59. The council is invited (and, in a few cases, required) to nominate members to the governing bodies of other organisations. The time commitment required from elected members nominated to such organisations can vary from a few hours per year to substantial monthly meetings that require preparation. At the last boundary review there were 75 outside bodies to which members could be appointed. This

has now been reduced to 20, although some of these bodies have more than one councillor appointed.

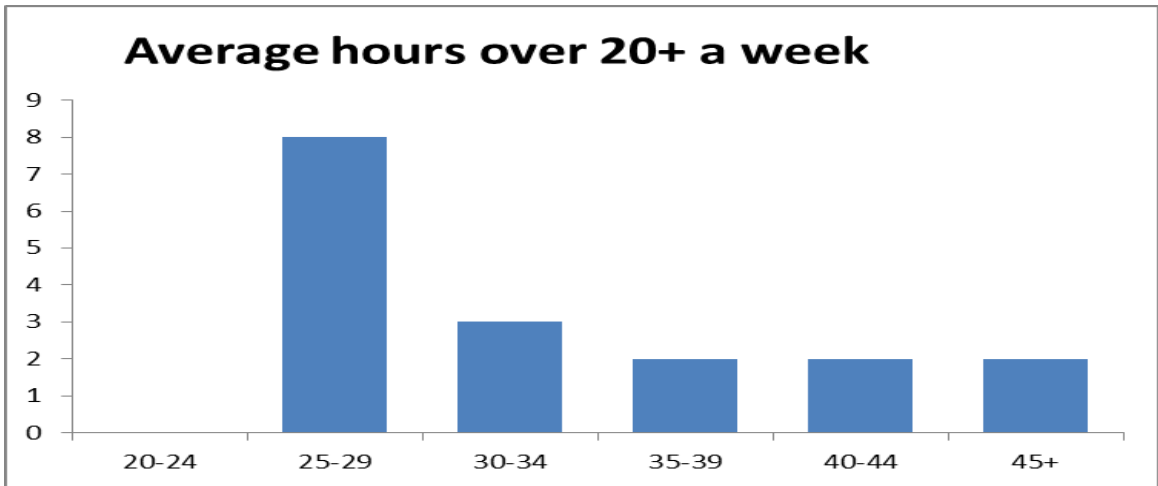
60. At present, within the new term of administration, scrutiny is still very much in its infancy. This is more a matter of growth and development than whether there are sufficient numbers of members to conduct effective scrutiny. Training is underway to assist in this respect and with the wider functions and responsibilities required of members. The number of outside bodies upon which the council undertakes a representative role has been significantly reduced suggesting that there are no considerations in this area that will affect the future number of members required by the council.

### **Local Democracy and the representative role of elected members**

61. In order to better to understand the level of commitment required from elected members, in both undertaking council business and ward duties, all serving members were asked to complete a survey. The questionnaire covered various aspects of the elected member role, including time spent on council duties, constituent enquiries, attending public meetings and any other related activities. The results of which have informed the deliberations of optimum council size. The full set of results can be found at Addendum D. A high response level was received with 75 per cent (30) members providing feedback. Respondents provided a good mix of those new to being an elected member and those with more experience and longevity in the democratic process as well as a variety in the different types of role undertaken.
62. The table below sets out in broad terms, how much time is spent on council duties and as can be seen, the majority of members indicate that they spend on average over 20 hours per week.

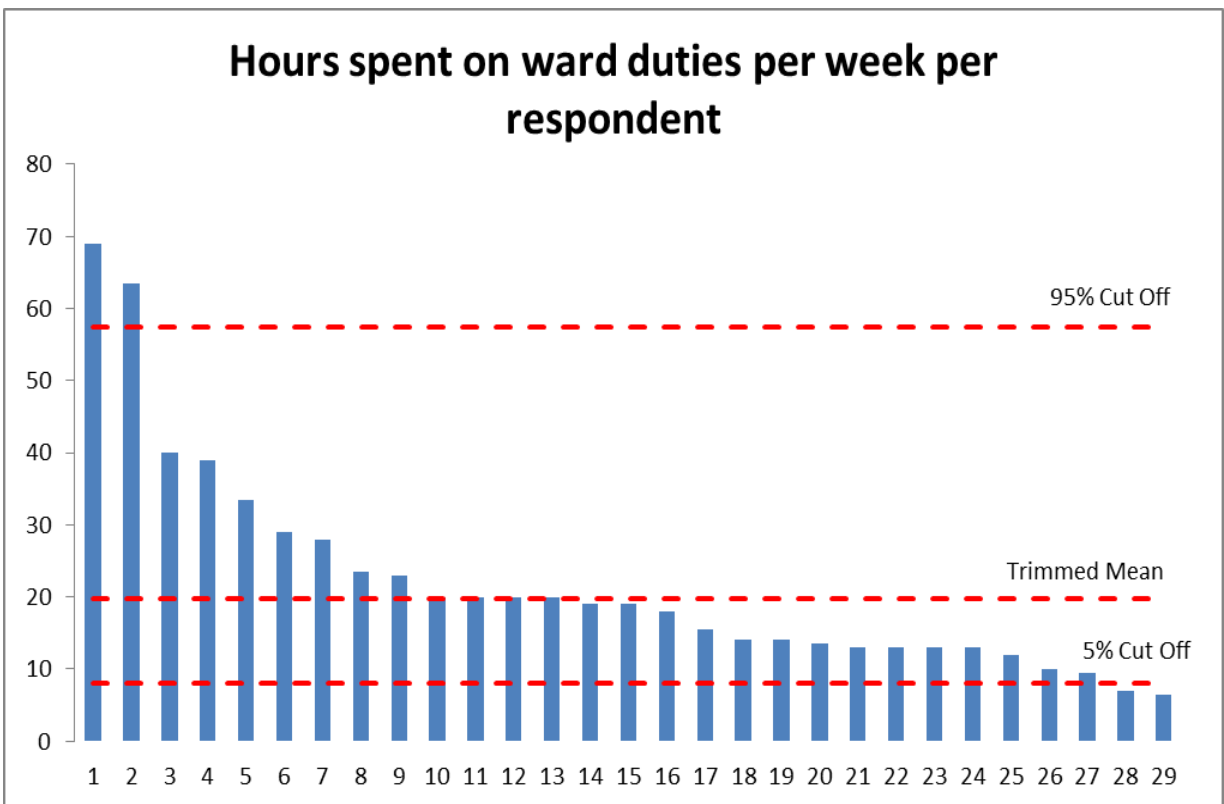
<b>In a typical week, how many hours do you spend on Isle of Wight Council duties?</b>	
Up to five hours	1
Between 5-10 hours	1
Between 11-15 hours	4
Between 16-20 hours	7
Over 20 hours	17

Members who reported that they were spending over 20 hours a week on council duties were asked to provide an indication of the average hours considered applicable. The results of which are shown in the table below:



Those reporting higher levels of time commitment, tended to be Cabinet members or those with committee chairing responsibilities.

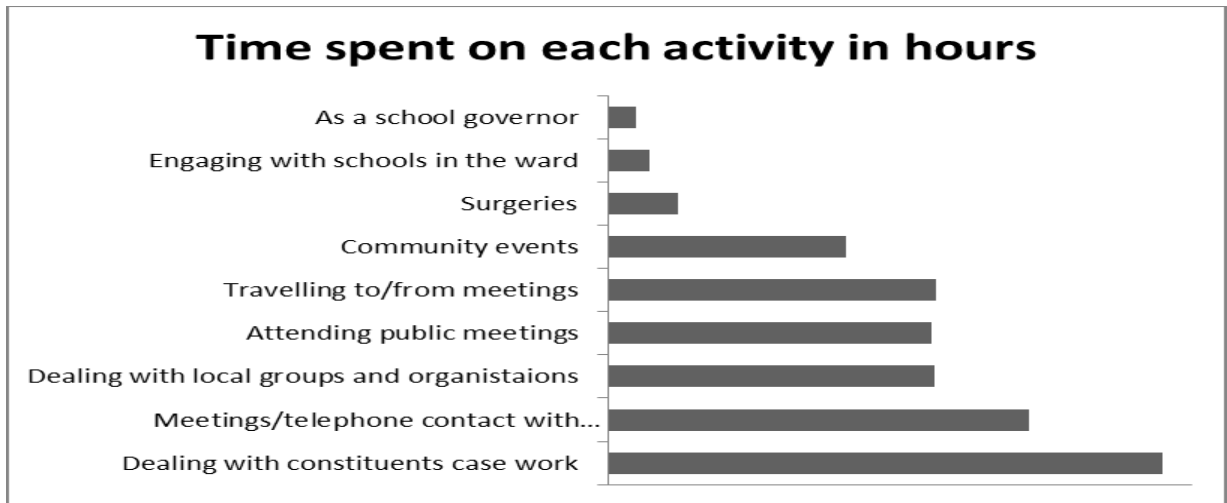
63. When asked about the amount of time spent on ward duties, there is again a wide variance which is likely to be influenced by the nature and type of ward members represent. To remove any statistical outliers the trimmed mean has been calculated, which has removed 5 per cent off the totals at each end. In simple terms, totals below 8 or above 57.39 have not been included. With this filter applied, the average total amount of time members spend on their ward activities is 20 hours (rounded) a week.



Given that in the previous electoral review in 2007, anticipated that the amount of time members spent on community engagement would increase from

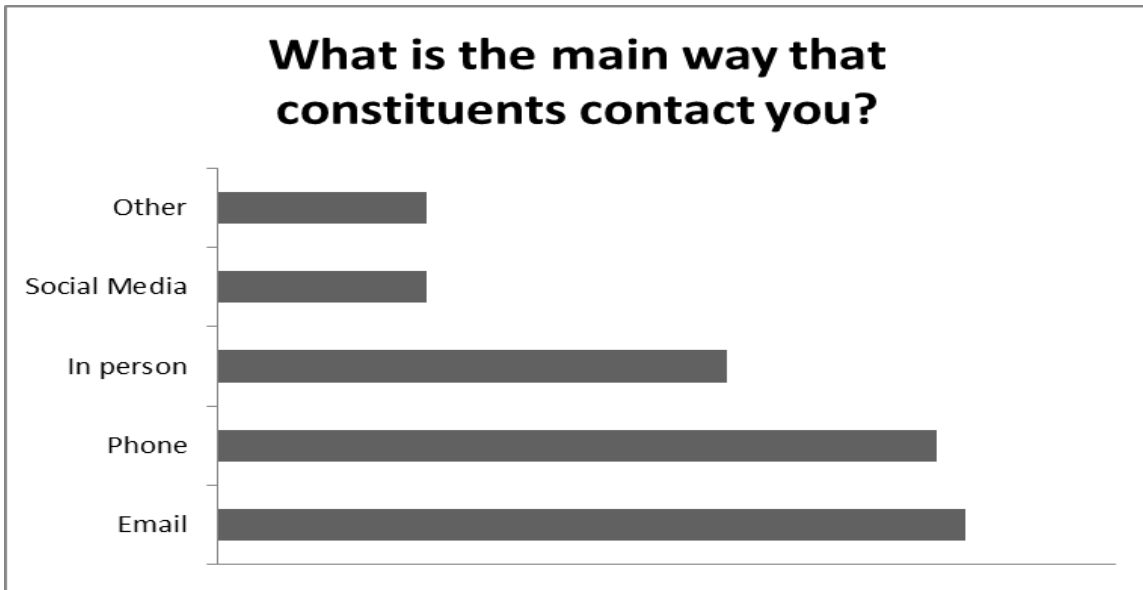
approximately two days to two and half days per week, this latest evidence obtained from members would appear to substantiate this proposition.

64. Additional information was sought as to the amount of time spent on specific activities as set out in the table below. As can be seen, the substantive amount of time is spent dealing with constituent's case work and related activities.

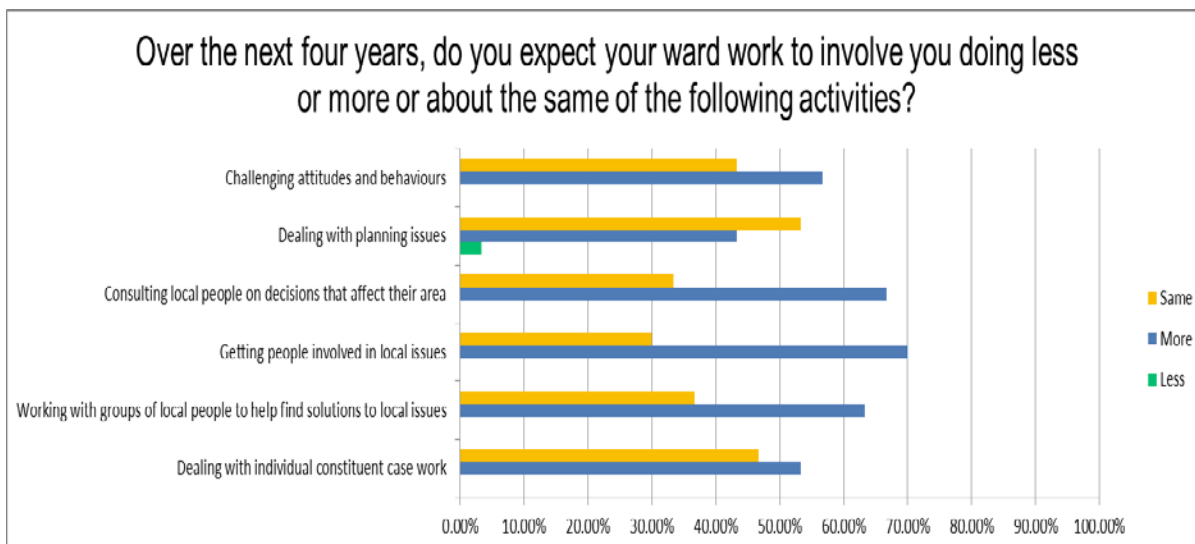


65. In addition to the Isle of Wight Council, the Island has 33 town and parish councils, covering a wide range of different communities, each with different needs, priorities and issues. This means that the Island is fully emparished. Since the last review in 2007, responsibility and management of more local services (such as beach cleaning and public conveniences) have been transferred to town and parish councils. While these transfers have been mostly successful, it has increased the workload of those local representatives and their local ward councillor. Of the 30 respondents, 21 indicated that they were members of a town or parish council and a number of those who were not elected to serve on a town or parish council highlighted that they attended meetings as part of the local representative role. Liaison with town and parish councils and other local organisations and groups is something that members take seriously and most members report to have a high local profile in liaising with local residents and organisations and a number of members also hold surgeries within their wards. Another element of the local community role is involvement in local schools and members will often be acting as school governors.
66. Members were asked to identify the methods constituents used to contact them, the results of which are shown in the table below.





67. It is clear that email takes precedence as the most popular means used by residents to contact their local member. The reasons for such an increase are inevitably as a result of the developments in information technology systems in recent years and which were not so apparent during the last review in 2007, making the sending of an email to be of relative ease compared to that of writing a letter. Whilst technology can be said to have improved case handling efficiency, the volume of cases can also be said to have increased as a result of such ease of access and so there is no evidence of any reduction in the time commitment required by members in this respect.
68. Other technological advances have been in the use of social media although for residents this method of communication still has some way to go before it meets the level of other preferred mediums of communication. However, one respondent did state *“social media is a significant driver of my workload. It’s relentless, 24/7”*. In the main, it is clear that elected members exploit an array of different forms of communications but contact with constituents through traditional face to face meetings and telephone calls remain an important means of communication. New technology has simply not replaced previous methods of contact, rather it has added to the conventional modes of communication used.
69. Members were also asked to predict how they believed their ward work could alter over the next four years. Members believe that generally, they consider that all aspects of their role will increase over time.



70. Finally, members were asked to comment on whether they considered the current number of councillors was sufficient for the level of work required. 90 per cent stated that the current number was about right, with 10 per cent saying it should be increased.
71. A large number of councillors apply significant amounts of time each week to both council duties and to engage with or resolve matters concerning ward issues. Any reduction in the number of councillors is likely to impact on the time that remaining councillors will be required to allocate to such matters. The question is whether that time increase would be so significant that it would fundamentally impact on the ability of an elected member to fulfil his or her strategic council role whilst also acting as the local representative for constituents. Based on the findings of the survey, it is the view that it would and as such, any reduction in councillor numbers would be detrimental to the Island electorate and lead to a more diluted level of representation on local town/parish councils, local forums and on an individual basis. This would impact directly and adversely on the level of service residents can expect from their local representative.

## **Conclusions**

72. To complete this review and ensure that any possible changes are sustainable in the medium to longer term, a number of factors have been taken into account, including the Island's geography and implications of being an Island; population trends and make up; potential housing and plans for regeneration and economic growth together with other key corporate plan ambitions; current and future challenges faced by the local authority and the impact this may have on the governance role of elected members; the role of scrutiny in its important function to assist the council in delivering efficient and effective services as well as the views of members themselves about the time commitments and nature of their role as elected members.
73. Since the last review in 2007, much has changed in local government and in the role of elected members in conducting their representative role. However, the challenges faced by the Island remain broadly similar although made more complex by reducing resources and increasing demand, both of which will require

significant public sector transformation to be delivered to ensure that they are resolved. The advances in technology have meant that members are faced with being more accessible through the use of email and social media, thus increasing the amount of time spent on their representational role although it is clear that the traditional methods of face to face or telephone contact remain important. Underpinning the future role of elected members will be the ability confidently to engage with diverse communities across a range of platforms, both face to face and digitally. So, a key area of work is developing the skills and confidence of members to engage effectively with digital communities. The council's governance framework has continued to be streamlined to ensure that decision-making is as efficient as it can possibly be within the confines of required democratic functions, thus reducing the overall commitments of members as a balance to the increasing demands and expectations of ward residents. The following table provides an overview of these key issues and considerations:

<b>Reduces workload</b>	<b>Workload unchanged</b>	<b>Increases workload</b>
Developments, confidence in and uptake in the use of technology, leading to more efficient methods of working, such as webinars, skype and social media.	Trends in the use of technology remain unchanged with the local population continuing to prefer personal contact with their local representatives.	Increased take up in the use of technology/social media for communication purposes, leading to more of the population having easier and more frequent access to local members without a clear framework for members confidently to engage effectively with digital communities.
Public sector transformation and integrated service provision that reduces the strain on and costs associated with public services and which delivers more effective and efficient person-centred care.	Population and housing growth projections and emerging diversification of population.  Issues of deprivation and complexity of resident needs for local representatives and demands for public services remain broadly unchanged.  Delivery of corporate plan and agreed council priorities and activities to achieve desired outcomes for the Island.	Inability to resolve future financial sustainability and potential increase in the impact of physical separation from the UK Mainland that results in a rise of complexity in decision making to balance public expectations against available resources.  Unexpected consequences of population or business growth increases as a result of the delivery of the council's regeneration programme.
Constitution review and further rationalisation of committee structures, reduction in membership to outside bodies, introduction of Cabinet member delegated decisions and improvements to the council's planning code of practice and licensing	Review of the governance arrangements for the role of the council as a Fire and Rescue Authority.  Change in political leadership.	Changes to pension governance arrangements as a result of pension fund pooling requirements and the introduction of a new committee to manage the council's statutory responsibilities in being a harbour authority.

<b>Reduces workload</b>	<b>Workload unchanged</b>	<b>Increases workload</b>
approval processes, resulting in fewer meetings and more efficient decision making.		Additional meetings over and above those agreed within the annual meeting cycle (extra-ordinary meetings)
Full emparishment of the Island which has enabled the devolution of some local services to town and parish councils.	Engagement of members in town and parish council business.	Improving engagement channels for Island residents and local communities, including town and parish councils.

74. The general consensus of members is that the amount of time spent by them in undertaking their representational roles has, on average, not reduced significantly in recent years. However, the nature of the role has changed and continues to evolve. Overall, their view is that with all things considered, the current number of elected members is about right and should not be changed. Indeed, against the background of the wide range of changes in local government, it's funding and its way of operating, as well as the way in which new media are demanding new skills and approaches it would be premature to suggest any changes to the number of members of the Isle of Wight Council at this time.

**Addendums:**

- A – [Isle of Wight electoral ward variances](#)
- B – [Projected number of electors per ward up to 2024](#)
- C – [Elected member meeting analysis](#)
- D – [Elected member survey results](#)