

Fenland Electoral Review

Fenland District Council - Council Size Proposal

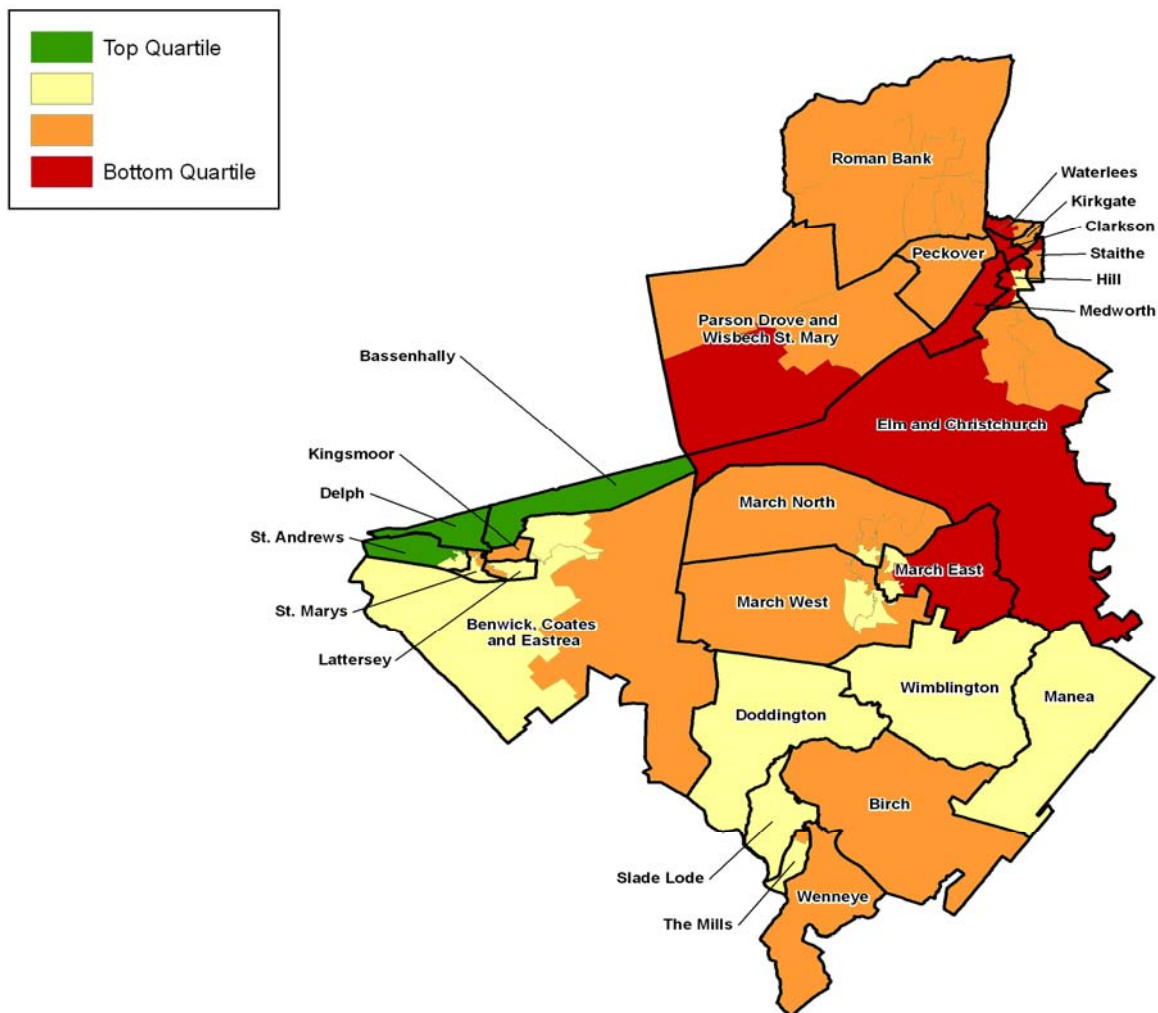


Welcome to Fenland

Located in East Anglia, Fenland covers approximately 200 square miles and is one of five districts within the county of Cambridgeshire. Fenland is a rural and sparsely populated district with many isolated rural communities. The mid-2010 population estimate for Fenland is 94,200 and the population has grown by an average of around 1,300 people per year since the 2001 Census. Fenland residents account for 16% of the population of Cambridgeshire.

There are around 42,400 dwellings in Fenland and 72% of residents live within the districts 4 market towns, with the remaining 28% scattered between the district's 29 villages. Fenland has an ageing population with 20% of residents aged 65 or over, and indications are that this trend will continue.

The area suffers from multiple deprivation and is ranked as 94th most deprived of the 326 local authorities nationally. This includes 3 areas in the top 10% most deprived wards in the country.



Fenland has a set of unique and varied challenges as a district that the Council is working proactively with its partners to overcome.

These challenges include:

- High levels of deprivation with wards in the bottom 10% of the most deprived wards nationally.
- Low levels of educational attainment, aspiration and skills - however, the number of pupils gaining 5 + A* - C grades in Fenland has increased, from 36% in 2000 to 62% in 2010.
- Lowest levels of healthy eating and exercise in the East of England.
- Highest levels of smoking in the East of England.
- High levels of migration into the district – particularly from Eastern Europe leading to issues of community cohesion, housing and access to services.
- One of largest populations of Gypsy Travellers in the country.
- Poor public transport links and infrastructure.

Other issues also exist within the district which are not as visible such as rural isolation, literacy levels and levels of caring for family members.

These complex challenges have led the Council with its partners to generate proactive and innovative solutions which have improved quality of life for the residents of Fenland. This includes a proactive approach to growth in the District to stimulate inward investment through the Council's Core Strategy.

Welcome to Fenland District Council

Fenland District Council (FDC) has 40 Councillors, representing 27 wards, with 3 political groups. The Council has majority Conservative control with 34 Conservatives, 2 Liberal Democrats, and 4 Independents. The Council has adopted a Leader and Cabinet structure, with an Overview and Scrutiny Panel, and a Corporate Governance Committee.

The Council's corporate priorities were developed, following comprehensive consultation with local people, to address the key demographic issues in the district. These priorities are reviewed every year as a part of the corporate planning process. Fenland's five Corporate Priorities are:

Neighbourhood Planning: To co-ordinate public and private sector investment to deliver sustainable growth so that homes, infrastructure and jobs grow in tandem to provide a great future for people living, working and visiting Fenland in years to come.

Localism: To work with partners to tackle key quality of life issues in Fenland by providing innovative services tailored to our diverse districts' needs so all our residents can live happy, safe and fulfilled lives.

Streets Ahead: Creating a clean, green and safe Fenland for all residents to enjoy by working with residents, businesses, community groups and partners to promote personal responsibility and foster community pride in our local area.

Open for Business: Fenland is an attractive place to do business in and the Council will do all that we can to encourage the economic recovery by supporting existing business and proactively encouraging new business and inward investment into the district.

Quality Organisation: The Council aims to train and develop our staff to put the right skills in place to deliver the excellent customer services our residents need and have prioritised through consultation, in easily accessible locations right across the district.

FDC is a highly performing District Council and is nationally recognised for the innovative services we provide to the Fenland community and for our distinctive organisational culture. We are a CPA Excellent Council that consistently punches above its weight. We are also an ambitious organisation which wants to achieve more for the local community.

Examples of notable achievements include:

- A number of national awards recognising excellent service delivery, including 3 Municipal Journal (MJ) Awards in 2010 and highly commended at the LGC Awards for Council of the Year in 2011
- Corporate Customer Service Excellence – the first organisation in the country to achieve overall corporate standard.
- Investors in People accredited.
- 98% customer satisfaction.
- 91% staff satisfaction.
- Major project delivery in a wide range of areas.
- Top performance and sound financial management in difficult circumstances. We were in the top 10 worst hit Councils in the country in terms of funding reductions.
- Focus on improving quality of life – not just District Council functions.
- Ambition for the future.

This ambition is to improve the quality of life of Fenland residents. To achieve this, the Council with its partners has developed a proactive and aspirational vision which will provide the catalyst for a successful and vibrant future for Fenland. This vision was developed through a robust evidence base which seeks to analyse future opportunities for the Fenland area to improve quality of life and increase prosperity over the next 20 years. This work has culminated in the production of the Fenland Communities Development Plan, the Council's draft Core Strategy which looks to ensure the future prosperity of the District through a positive and sustainable approach to growth which will also contribute to improving quality of life for all Fenland residents. This vision sets out how partners, through working together can influence the improvement of educational attainment, health outcomes, income levels, infrastructure and cohesion.

Councillors are at the centre of this vision in making Fenland an attractive place to live, work and visit for years to come.

This level of achievement has resulted in real outcomes for local communities and high levels of public satisfaction, which places the Council amongst the best in the country.

This has only been possible through strong political leadership from the Leader of the Council, Councillor Alan Melton and the Cabinet and support from all Members in setting an aspirational vision for the District to be delivered.

Introduction to Fenland's Electoral Review

This submission sets out the Council's response to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) request for us to submit a proposal regarding future Council size. This was the result of the Council triggering LGBCE criteria in relation to electoral equality. The issue of Council size is the key factor in determining the type and scale of the review to be undertaken by LGBCE.

The Council's submission has been developed by a cross-party Member Working Group which has been informed by solid evidence, contributions from all Members through specific Member Focus groups, a Member survey and informal feedback via briefings, email and face to face contact. The Council size proposal was also endorsed through a Full Council meeting on 1 March 2012.

The Member Working Group provided for a robust consultation process with all Members to ensure the views of all Members from across political groups and individual Councillors were sought and taken into consideration within this submission.

Members were also mindful of the LGBCE criteria in relation to Council Size to ensure appropriate and robust justification was provided within the proposal for the future size of the Council.

The Member Working Group also considered the current and projected electorate figures for Fenland.

Council Size submission and rationale

This section sets out the Council's recommendation for the future size of the Council and a summary for the justification for this proposal.

The Council welcomed the opportunity to examine its Council size and considered the following issues in its considerations:

- Demands on Councillor time including committees, outside meetings, and representative duties.

- Changes in demography
- Current and future governance structures
- Changes in political composition
- Future growth in the District
- Needs of the Fenland population
- Town and Parish Council event comments
- LGBCE criteria

The following table summarises the evidence available against LGBCE Council Size criteria which helped to formulise the proposed figure for future Council size:

Evidence against Council Size criteria

Criteria	Evidence
<p>Managing the business of the Council: To what extent is council size influenced by the council's decision-making process or, conversely, the decision making structure fitted around the council size?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the overall structure of decision making? Do Councillors match the work to fit the time available to them, or stretch/shrink the time they spend according to how much work they want to need to do? • Has the Council studied how much time their members spend on Council business? • What assessments have been made of how many members it needs to function effectively, particularly since the introduction of executive arrangements? In a hypothetical scenario where the council size was increased or reduced by 10%, how would you do things differently? • To what extent is the current council size a factor in determining the political management, scrutiny and governance arrangements or is it the other way round? • If you had a free hand, are there any changes you would make to the political 	<p>Full Council are the highest level of decision makers within the organisation, taking decisions on all major strategies, policies and plans which have a significant impact on the community. Some decision making is then delegated to the Leader, Cabinet and Portfolio Holders who provide strong political leadership through Councillor Alan Melton. Other decisions are delegated to regulatory committees such as Planning and Licensing, and other committees such as Staff and Corporate Governance. Some decisions are also delegated to officers. The decision making process is subject to local choice and is therefore independent from the Council's size.</p> <p>A comprehensive review of the Council's Constitution was recently conducted by a Member Working Group led by Cllr Mrs French. This reviewed the entire Constitution including the scheme of delegation to ensure a greater degree of transparency, accountability of officers and to ensure Members were at the forefront of Council decision making. This review concluded the levels of delegation within the Constitution were appropriate and in keeping with the running of an effective Council.</p> <p>An Independent Remuneration Panel recently reviewed Members' Allowances (November 2011). This review researched and analysed the workloads and time commitments of all Members. The Panel concluded there was a range of commitments all Members fulfilled, which took from 5-65 hours per week to fulfil; however, an average time commitment for a Member to fulfil their role effectively was 38 hours per month. This was an increase from 35 hours per month in 2007. This recognised that some Members committed substantially more time than the average due to the demands of the role in individual areas. This was taken into account when considering an increase or decrease to</p>

Criteria	Evidence
<p>management, scrutiny and governance arrangements? If so, how might that impact on the number of councillors required.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How are decisions ‘cascaded’ down the structure? Is the balance between member decisions and officer delegated decisions effective? Is there any duplication of work? 	<p>Council size.</p> <p>Commitments for Councillors are wide ranging and for example include: *Committees – preparation, report reading and analysis, attendance at meetings, attendance at briefings, attendance at training *Community work – supporting community groups and town/parish councils, attending Neighbourhood Forums, resolving proactive and reactive requests from residents with FDC and other agencies, research, advice, surgeries and other interactions with residents</p> <p>Recent (January 2012) survey information and focus group feedback has indicated that Members find time to fulfil their roles effectively and it is appropriate within the time they have to dedicate to the role. To effectively sit on Committees, this includes training, briefings, report reading, research, and meeting attendance, which is time consuming.</p> <p>However, many Members are self employed or retired. These Members reported they would find it difficult to fulfil all aspects of the role effectively if they had to cover a wider electorate and/or balance other substantial commitments.</p> <p>Councillors were concerned if the workload increased due to a reduction in Members then this would deter other members of the community from standing as a Councillor and this would reduce the number of views available to set policy for the area.</p> <p>Also, for Licensing Committee, Members cannot sit on a hearing in relation to their area, reducing the pool of Members available. Reducing Members will exacerbate the issue of servicing Licensing issues.</p>

Criteria	Evidence
	<p>The governance structure of the Council was explored and discussed within the context of the upcoming demands of the Localism Act, the legislative framework and the current arrangements are sound for carrying this forward.</p>
<p>Scrutiny of the Council, outside bodies and Others</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What's the structure? An overview and scrutiny committee, or several scrutiny committees? How do subjects get tackled – in Committee or Task & Finish Groups? How many subjects at any one time? What's the time-span for a particular study? • Is Scrutiny just the Councillors doing meetings or do they take external evidence? • If the former, what do the members do between meetings? • How is the Council handling health scrutiny – who is involved? How much work do they do? • How many twin-hatted members sit on outside bodies and how are conflicts of interest resolved? 	<p>The Overview and Scrutiny Panel has a challenging, wide ranging and in depth work programme which is set on an annual basis, led by Councillor Jolley. This reflects the level of ambition within the Council and includes scrutiny of the Council's corporate priorities, council policies, Cabinet decisions and partners responsible for delivering services to the people of Fenland.</p> <p>The Panel takes a range of evidence from FDC Members and officers as well as officers and Members from other organisations. The Panel uses this information to make recommendations to Cabinet or to other organisations for implementation. This is followed up to ensure action or the Panel have made use of 'call-in' procedures to emphasise their viewpoint on particular policies.</p> <p>Working groups are convened on a regular basis to scrutinise or review particular aspects of Council or partner organisation policy. There is also a substantial commitment to partnership working through scrutiny which includes District Council scrutiny Members sitting on County wide scrutiny committees and joint scrutiny with the County Council or other Cambridgeshire District Councils on particular common issues affecting each organisation. These reviews involve intensive analysis of policy areas over a focused amount of time, usually around 3-6 months. This requires additional meetings for the Members involved and has most recently included themes such as Domestic Abuse and Educational Attainment.</p> <p>Special meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel are called to address emerging local issues. An example of this was scrutiny of the Chief Fire Officer</p>

Criteria	Evidence
	<p>regarding the potential closure of a local fire station.</p> <p>Partnership working has substantially increased since the last Boundary Commission review due to the increased role of local Councils through the introduction of powers of well being which has increased the number of partnership meetings and outside bodies. Councillors are required to attend. This has also increased due to the multiple issues which exist within the District which requires substantial partnership working with the County Council, NHS, Police, Fire and housing association colleagues to attempt to address these issues.</p> <p>Legislative changes with the introduction of Local Enterprise Partnerships and Health and Well Being Boards also require a substantial amount of policy focus and input with other agencies around the key issues affecting Fenland.</p> <p>A large number of our Members are either twin or triple-hatted and therefore represent their communities at County Council and Town and Parish Council positions. 40 members is sufficient to ensure conflicts of interest do not arise too often, however, this could potentially increase if the number of Members are reduced resulting in it becoming difficult to manage Council business effectively.</p>
<p>Representational Role: Representing Electors to the Council</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What sort of engagement is there between front-line councillors with electors? One-to-one when there's a customer complaint, or gathering views about policy from the whole community? If the latter, how? • What is the structure of local area 	<p>There is a high level of engagement between Councillors and electors which varies across the District according to the requirements of electors. This takes a variety of forms including corporate communications through the weekly Fenlander page within the local newspaper, the Council's website and social media networks.</p> <p>Councillors also engage personally through a variety of methods such as regular surgeries whereby a member of the community attends 'drop-in'</p>

Criteria	Evidence
<p>committees. What are their responsibilities? Is membership limited to councillors? – is it open to district councillors or co-option from the wider community?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do Councillors fix day-to-day problems by taking them to officers or by representing elector issues as policy views in meetings of the Council? • How does the Councillor engage? Surgery, newsletter, blog, public meetings, or not at all? • What do officers do to facilitate councillor engagement? 	<p>sessions or street surgeries whereby Councillors speak to residents in the street. Street surgeries are effective in areas of low literacy levels. Some Members have set up their own websites for their particular wards which shows what issues they are currently dealing with and what resolutions they have completed. Face to face contact with residents is important especially in areas of low literacy and where English is a second language. These techniques are effective but also time consuming.</p> <p>Members are reactive to customer complaints and issues raised and often complete their own research to resolve issues. An extensive amount of time is also involved in contacting relevant officers within the District Council but also various other organisations such as the County Council, NHS, Police and housing associations to help to solve issues raised.</p> <p>Councillors attend and participate in local Neighbourhood Forums in partnership with the Police and other agencies. At these Forums, Councillors are able to interact with the community and gather any issues raised to initiate a response.</p> <p>Councillors are informed of events, planning applications, licensing applications within their wards via a system of ward alerts, and regularly support a range of meetings and forums.</p> <p>Cabinet and Chairmen attend regular meetings with Council officers through regular CMT/Cabinet meetings, monthly Portfolio Holder briefings and other regular briefings.</p>
<p>Representing the Council in the community</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the councillor go to meetings of community bodies, parish councils? If so, 	<p>Fenland is a unique and diverse area with strong traditions and a variety of strong identities. This is characterised and supported by historical traditions and the isolated and sporadic geographical layout of the different settlements</p>

Criteria	Evidence
<p>how many? What for? Do councillors feel obliged to go to meetings of each individual parish council in their respective divisions or is it to meetings of “clusters” of parishes? Where the former, is this an effective use of an elected members time?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the Council attract candidates and retain members? • Are Councillors “go-betweens” between clients/customers/electors and paid service staff to fix service delivery complaints? • What happens when a Councillor is absent? Formal taking on of responsibility by other elected members, informal contact point for electors, or nothing? (Maybe different in multi-member wards). Do front line councillors take the strain of, for example Executive members whose time maybe limited? • Do Councillors learn and develop on the job or in formal training? • Has the Council experienced any statutory or other failures because there weren't enough councillors? Are Councillors bored or “inventing” work to do? 	<p>across the District. It is important to maintain effective elector representation within all communities' right across the District to take account of the variety of values, perspectives and outlooks, which can vary substantially from town to town and village to village.</p> <p>The majority of Fenland District Councillors are also Town and Parish Councillors or County Councillors. District Councillors regularly attend Town and Parish meetings. This can be a substantial commitment for Members who have a number of Parish Councils to attend, especially in the rural areas. Attendance at Town and Parish Council meetings is important to keep in touch with local issues and developments and to support Councillors and residents at the local level to achieve the aspirations they have for their area. These meetings are an important two way communication between town/parish councils and the District Council.</p> <p>Councillors are often a focal point for the community and therefore they are asked to participate in numerous community groups to provide advice and to lever in support from the District Council or other organisations if appropriate. With the introduction of the Localism Act, this role will increase as Members are looked to by the community to support them to take on new roles and responsibilities.</p> <p>Councillors lead initiatives in the community to reach certain sections of the population. Councillor Mac Cotterell has created and implemented an innovative ‘Golden Age’ programme which engages with our older residents particularly in rural locations to offer dedicated advice and support through multi agency Golden Age Fairs. These events are also offered through the Fenland @ Your Service shops on a monthly basis too.</p> <p>Our Youth District Council, led by Councillor Steve Garratt looks to engage</p>

Criteria	Evidence
	<p>young people in council decision making and encourage the Councillors of the future through events such as democracy day and visit to the houses of parliament.</p> <p>The Council has a high retention rate for Councillors, however five new Councillors were elected in May 2011. New members also come on to the Council as a result of by-elections.</p> <p>The Council is 'One Team' with Councillors and officers working together for the benefit of the community. Councillors set policy which officers work to implement, and are accountable to Members for this delivery. Residents contact Councillors regarding service issues which are passed to officers for resolution. Councillors will respond to the residents involved. Other mechanisms available to residents are our Fenland @ your service shops, telephone contact centre and 3C's (Correspondence, Compliments and Complaints) system for resolution of issues.</p> <p>Councillors are also the focal point for resident issues with other agencies which Councillors research, contact relevant officers and follow up on issues if required on behalf of residents.</p> <p>Councillors often proactively work together, especially in multi member wards, to fulfil their responsibilities when a Councillor is on holiday or ill.</p> <p>Councillors undertake a variety of formal and informal training to carry out their roles effectively. All Councillors participate in a Member Induction Programme which sets out what the Council does, committee responsibilities, the role of Members, the roles of Officers etc. Training is an important aspect of a Councillors role to ensure effective decision making. Compulsory training is set out in the Council's constitution for Planning and Licensing Committees which</p>

Criteria	Evidence
	<p>must be carried out before a Councillor can participate in the decision making process. For all other Committees, there is training associated with the role which is incorporated either before a meeting or within a separate session and is delivered by either an FDC officer or external trainer. Briefings on particular issues and legislative changes etc are incorporated on an as and when basis. Portfolio Holders, Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen of committees will be consulted and briefed on a regular basis regarding on going or new issues affecting Council business.</p>

Summary of Council Size proposal

Following consideration of the LGBCE criteria and evidence above against this criterion, the Member Working Group spent a significant amount of time considering the different issues which would impact upon future Council size. The Member Working Group considered a range of Council Size figures and concluded that anything significantly below 38 Councillors or above 42 Councillors would be damaging to the effective future operation of the Council because of the various roles the Council and Councillors are expected to perform.

Therefore, this led the Member Working Group to consider and analyse in more depth the range of **38 to 42** which looked at the relevant implications for an increase in Council size, a decrease in Council size or maintaining the current Council size number.

The Member Working Group considered that a reduction to 38 would compromise the effective running of the Council and effective representation of the community in the following ways:

- Effective representation from the different geographical areas would be significantly reduced thereby disenfranchising electors from Council decisions.
- There would not be sufficient Councillor capacity to service the different committees appropriately due to the significant workload ascribed to each committee.
- Due to the significant levels of need, a reduction in the level of capacity and support Members provide to these communities will lead to an even greater reduction in engagement and a higher level of disenfranchisement, amongst communities who find it difficult to engage to begin with.
- A smaller pool of Members to conduct the scrutiny of the Council would be significantly detrimental to the Council as it would reduce the pool of skills, attributes and experiences available to effectively analyse and review the decisions of the executive, thereby potentially affecting the quality of the decision making of the Council.
- It would be a significant barrier to the recruitment of new Councillors as the workload ascribed to each individual Councillor would need to increase to accommodate the reduction. This would exclude potential Councillors from different backgrounds and situations due to the level of commitment required to complete the role effectively.

The Member Working group considered that an increase to 42 was inappropriate because:

- During the current economic climate, the cost associated with an increase in Councillors can not be justified.

- Members reported the current level of workload associated with all aspects of a Councillors role was appropriate, indicating a greater number of Members is not required to fulfil the business of the Council.
- Growth within the District in the initial period does not so significantly increase the number of electors that additional Members would be required.

The Member Working Group therefore concluded that a Council size of **40 would be the most appropriate** because:

- 40 Councillors are required to effectively complete the governance, scrutiny and representational role of the Council.
- Fenland is a unique and diverse area with strong traditions and a variety of strong identities. It is important to maintain effective elector representation within all communities' right across the District to take account of the variety of values, perspectives and outlooks, which can vary substantially from town to town and village to village.
- The role of a District Councillor is vast and workloads are currently appropriate within the current cohort of Councillors. However, many Fenland District Councillors are retired or self employed. The Council does not wish to exclude or deter future Councillors from different backgrounds or situations, especially if a reduction was implemented. This would prevent other residents from standing as a Councillor because the role is too vast to be accommodated alongside full time employment or other commitments.
- The Council's projected electorate shows the number of electors will increase by around **5,526** by 2018. This is a conservative and prudent estimate based on previous trends, planning permissions granted and the current economic climate. The current number of Councillors needs to be maintained to support an increased electorate effectively.
- In addition to the projected growth up to 2018, the Council is in the process of adopting a proactive and flexible approach to growth through its Core Strategy with up to 11,000 homes to be built by **2031**. An increase in house building will attract more electors to the area as our previous trends have shown, therefore any reduction in Council Size will be damaging to effective representation in the future.
- FDC is an ambitious District Council with a high level of aspiration for the area and its residents against a backdrop of multiple deprivation. The Council, with its partners, has been and continues to be proactive in tackling the multiple issues which affect Fenland residents. This ambition requires a substantial amount of input from Members from working with partner agencies, policy setting and assisting residents directly within their wards who have a high level of need. A change in Council size, especially a reduction, would negatively impact on the ability of the Council to implement ambitious policies to alleviate deprivation, improve quality of life and negatively impact on residents who are in the most need, as set out in the Council's Corporate Plan.
- Fenland is a rural area with significant differences in identity from community to community. The Council needs to maintain the current number of Members to ensure effective coverage and representation across the rural areas

especially due to isolated nature of these areas. It would be impractical to expect a Councillor to effectively represent a rural ward which is any larger than the current wards of Elm and Christchurch or Benwick, Coates and Eastrea.

- As a district, Fenland is extremely rural with poor infrastructure and transport links, which can make effective representation significantly more difficult as electors can be spread across a significant area. This is hampered by a poor road, rail and public transport networks, which makes travelling around the District difficult and extremely time consuming. This is exacerbated by the fact many residents do not have access to their own transport. The area does not have complete broadband coverage and a series of 'not-spots' exist whereby internet access is non-existent. The internet is also not the communication channel some residents prefer to use with the Council. This can hamper effective engagement and communication with residents as well as increase the workload of Councillors who have to travel significant distances to engage with residents face to face. These issues have diluted, to some extent, the advantages of technological advances which Members in other areas have benefited from more fully.
- Fenland will experience population growth in the coming years. This is characterised by inward migration from other areas, especially by older people looking for an area to retire to. The area already has a significant ageing population and this trend is set to continue, which will impact on how Members can effectively represent its electors.
- Fenland has experienced a high level of inward migration from EU accession countries. Many EU nationals have registered with the relevant agencies therefore, their existence is known through processes such as the annual canvass and national insurance registrations. However, there are also a number of EU nationals who are not accounted for within any official statistics, therefore this section of the population is larger than we can account for in any current and projected population statistics. However, this section of the community still require and access Council services as well as Councillor time. This is another factor that would not support a reduction in size.
- Councillor roles have substantially changed since the last Boundary Commission review of ward boundaries with the introduction of executive arrangements and introduction of new powers of well-being to promote the economic, social and environmental welfare of the area. This has substantially increased the workload of executive Members but also of all Councillors in fulfilling the broader welfare role central government has now assigned to local Councils.
- A further impact of changes to Councillor roles is the requirement for greater knowledge and expertise in all areas of the Council and partner organisation business to effectively fulfil the role. This has also been increased due to a greater level of legislative change and increased expectations of the electorate of a Councillors' knowledge.
- Accessibility of Councillors to the electorate has increased substantially which has also increased the level of expectation and responsiveness the electorate expect from their Councillor.

- Councillors are well known within their communities and as a result there is a high level of demand from different community groups for Councillors to become involved in the various different aspects of community interest, which is a significant element of a Councillors workload within their ward.
- In 2010, the national average elector per District Councillor ratio was 1825. The Fenland average number of electors per Councillor in 2010 was very closely aligned at 1844.

Appendix 1 - Governance

Model of local governance

The Council operates a Leader and Cabinet model of governance which has been in operation since 2003 following a change from operating a traditional committee system. A referendum regarding the introduction of an elected mayor was triggered and held in 2003 in which the public voted 'No'. Since May 2011, the Council has moved to the 'Stronger Leader' model.

The role of a Councillor within this model of local governance is substantial due to the varying aspects of a Councillors role.

Committee structure

Council

The Council has 40 councillors, elected every four years at a single set of elections, the last being in 2011. Councillors have a duty to the whole community of Fenland and are democratically accountable to residents of their ward. All councillors are members of Full Council and meet on average 6 times per municipal year (normally in May, July, September, November, December and February). Full Council is responsible for appointing the Leader and Chairman of the Council, setting the overall policies of the Council and its budget, and approves the Policy Framework which comprises a series of major plans. The Council also receives recommendations from other committees and petitions from the public.

Cabinet

The Council appoints the Leader for the four year term of the Council through the Stronger Leader model. The Leader appoints the Cabinet, which is where most of the day to day decisions of the Council are made. Cabinet consists of the Leader and nine other councillors. The Cabinet meets collectively on a monthly basis.

Major decisions to be made by Cabinet are detailed in the Forward Plan of Key Decisions, which is updated on a monthly basis.

Individual members of the Cabinet are known as Portfolio Holders and are allocated particular service responsibilities aligned to the Council's corporate priorities. They have wide ranging decision-making powers in relation to these responsibilities. Portfolio Holders are able to make individual decisions within certain restrictions, which are documented, published and circulated to members of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel, and can be subject to the call-in function.

Portfolio Holders also have monthly briefings with their responsible Corporate Director, as well as joint meetings collectively with members of the Corporate Management Team around six times per year. Portfolio Holders also become involved with events and other meetings associated with their portfolio area, ie. opening of play parks, award ceremonies, etc.

Portfolio Holders are also required to work in partnership with other agencies on issues and policies within their service area

The Cabinet delivers reports to Full Council on their respective Portfolio areas at every meeting and also to the Overview and Scrutiny Panel on a regular basis.

Overview and Scrutiny Panel

The Local Government Act 2000 required each local authority to set up a scrutiny process as a statutory function of the Council. The Council currently has a single Overview and Scrutiny Panel that covers all of the statutory scrutiny functions. No member of Cabinet can be a member of the Panel as it holds Cabinet to account for its policy decisions, monitors progress against the corporate priorities and contributes to policy making in the Council.

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel comprises of 11 councillors and meets on a six weekly basis. Places are allocated according to political proportionality rules and there is a Chairman and Vice-Chairman. Review Groups are established periodically by the Panel to undertake proactive and reactive reviews of Council and Partner organisation policies. A recent example of this is a review undertaken on the Council's Tourism Strategy and scrutiny of the Chief Fire Officer regarding plans to close a local fire station. This requires additional meetings, research and analysis by the review group and panel members.

The Panel also uses the "call-in" function periodically to scrutinise decisions made by Cabinet, whereby members can accept the decision, refer it back to Cabinet for comments, or refer the decision to another decision-making person or body for reconsideration.

The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 has also introduced the right for any councillor to refer a local matter affecting his or her ward to the Overview and Scrutiny Panel. This is called the 'Councillor Call for Action', and the Panel is required to put the matter on its agenda and discuss it at a meeting.

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel also works in partnership with other agencies to undertake joint scrutiny. This includes a standing member on the County Council Adults, Wellbeing and Health Scrutiny Committee and periodic joint scrutiny projects, most recently on Domestic Violence Educational Attainment.

Planning Committee

Planning Committee is a regulatory committee of the Council and consists of 15 members of the Council, which can include up to three members of Cabinet. Places are allocated according to political proportionality rules and there is a Chairman and Vice-Chairman. Members of the Planning Committee appoint substitutes to attend in their absence.

The committee meets on a four weekly basis. All members of the committee and substitutes are required to undertake internal and external training on an annual basis and no new member of the committee is able to participate at a meeting until they have completed the internal and external training requirement. Training for Planning Committee members is also an on-going commitment during the municipal year.

Members also undertake Site Inspections the week prior to committee on a four weekly basis. These Site Inspections are normally pre-empted site visits looking at sites and applications that will be considered by the committee at its meeting the following week.

The Chairman of the committee meets with the Chief Planning Officers on a monthly basis to discuss applications to be considered at committee and to agree a list of site inspections.

A Scheme of Delegation exists and the Planning Committee determine applications whereby they:

- involve Fenland District Council or Councillors
- are called-in by Councillors
- have 6 or more written opinions from 6 or more separate sources which differ from the officers' recommendation
- a Town/Parish Council view is in conflict with officers' recommendations and the application is for more than two dwellings.

The number of applications determined by committee varies from month to month, with on average 12 applications being considered per month.

Licensing Committee

Licensing Committee is another regulatory committee of the Council. The full Committee consists of 12 members of the Council and meets 4-5 times per year to consider changes to policy. These places are allocated according to political proportionality rules and there is a Chairman.

The committee has the power to appoint panels of up to 3 members with 1 substitute to hold hearings considering individual cases in relation to the

Licensing Act 2003, Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing and other miscellaneous licensing. These panels are formed from a rota of Licensing Committee members on a frequent basis (40-50 per year), with the Chairman of Licensing Committee normally sitting as Chairman of the Panel. However, members cannot sit on a panel if the matter is in relation to something within their own ward or neighbouring area.

A new member appointed to the committee cannot take part in or vote on any decision until they have attended at least one internal and one external training session on Licensing related topics. Existing members should complete at least one internal and one external training session on an annual basis. Training for Licensing Committee is also an on-going commitment during the municipal year.

Corporate Governance Committee

Corporate Governance Committee has 9 councillors, consisting of up to 3 members from Cabinet (but not the Finance Portfolio Holder), up to 3 members from the Overview and Scrutiny Panel and 3 other members. It is not subject to political proportionality rules. There is a Chairman and Vice-Chairman.

The committee meets 5 times per year on approximately a two monthly basis and considers functions relating to corporate governance, audit, the regulatory financial framework and accounting policies.

Staff Committee

Staff Committee consists of 8 councillors; up to 3 members of Cabinet, up to 3 members of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel and 2 other members. It is not subject to political proportionality rules. There is a Chairman and Vice-Chairman.

The committee normally meets on a quarterly basis and considers staffing issues and Human Resources Policies.

Standards Committee

Standards Committee consists of District Councillors, Town and Parish Councillors and Independent Members. This Committee will shortly be abolished under the national framework.

Working groups

In addition to Overview and Scrutiny Review Panels, the Council has planned and ad-hoc working parties and groups. Some are established on an 'as and when' basis and some to assist Portfolio Holders in managing their portfolio area.

The Council currently has four such groups:

- Community Development Plan Review Group - consisting of 5 members considering documents that make up the Fenland Community Development Plan, the Council's Core Strategy.
- Tourism Partnership Board – consisting of 4 members plus 7 outside appointees (currently being commissioned).
- Senior Citizens Advisory Group – consisting of 4-6 members with the aim of enhancing the delivery of services to older people to ensure they are aware of what services are available and how it can be obtained. Surgeries are also held on a monthly basis in one of the Council's four Fenland@Your Service Shops and periodic 'Golden Age Fairs' are held in community locations.
- Boundary Commission Member Working Group – consisting of 5 members to consider the Council's approach and submissions within this project.

Whilst they are not official committees of the Council, they are important meetings and the membership can include councillors from cross-party groups.

Partnerships and Outside Bodies

The Fenland Strategic Partnership (FSP) coordinates strategic partner collaboration through the Sustainable Community Strategy. This body is made up of a mixture of public, private and voluntary sector organisations.

There are a series of other notable partnerships in existence which play an important role in coordinating work in specific policy area:

- Safer Fenland Partnership – coordinates partnership resources to address key strategic issues regarding crime and anti social behaviour, chaired by a District Councillor.
- Local Health Partnership – coordinates local health strategy with a range of partners within the new health arrangements to contribute to the new Health and Well being Boards at a County level.
- Children's Trust coordinates partnership resources to address key strategic issues regarding children and young people.
- Local Enterprise Partnership Board – Fenland is a member of the Greater Cambridge, Greater Peterborough Enterprise Partnership.
- Leaders/Chief Officers Group – a county wide Leaders group to coordinate strategic resources and projects across Cambridgeshire.

Each of these groups has Member representation. This is not an exhaustive list and other important partnerships are listed as Outside Bodies.

There are currently 78 Outside Bodies appointments for councillors which means on average each councillor has 1.95 places. There is not, however, an equal spread of appointments across all 40 members which means that some councillors have a number of appointments. The frequency with which these Outside Bodies meet and the time commitment required from councillors appointed to them varies. These appointments have recently been reviewed, and are kept under regular review.

Neighbourhood Panels

The Council works very closely with the Police through Neighbourhood Panels. Therefore, when a Neighbourhood Panel occurs, the relevant ward members are notified and attend to address any District Council issues that may arise.

Town and Parish Councils and the County Council

Fenland has 16 Parish and Town Councils. These councils provide a key link to local communities for District Councillors, with a number of Fenland District Councillors also being Town or Parish Councillors. Those Members who are not Town or Parish Councillors normally attend meetings of the Town or Parish Council for the area which they represent. This can result in District Councillors attending a number of Parish Councils especially in the rural areas.

Many District Members are County Councillors for their respective areas.

Civic Duties

The Council has a Chairman and Vice-Chairman elected annually each year. The role of the Chairman is to act as the Civic Head, ambassador and representative of the Council and is the figurehead at Full Council meetings.

The Chairman attends Civic functions within the district to promote the Fenland area, promote and recognise business in the Fenland area and to raise the Civic profile publicly. Since elected in May 2011 to December 2011, the Chairman and Vice-Chairman have represented the Council at 60 civic events. This has included hosting a Twinning visit from Nettetal, Germany, a Civic Reception, a Macmillan Coffee Morning, Remembrance Day Parades and a Community Carol Concert.

As many District Councillors are also Town and Parish Councillors, these Members often undertake civic roles within their other representative roles.

Appendix 2 - Council Committees and Frequency

Committee	Normal Frequency
Council	6 per year
Cabinet	11 per year
Corporate Governance Committee	5 per year
Licensing Committee	4-5 Committees per year 40-50 Hearings per year
Overview and Scrutiny Panel	9 per year
Planning Committee	13 per year 13 site inspections per year
Staff Committee	4 per year
Standards Committee	4 Committees per year 5 hearings per year

Appendix 3 - Member Attendance at Council Committee meetings 2010/11

The following table records Member attendance at meetings of the Council for which they are members. The table does not take into account the various working groups, outside bodies and community meetings Councillors attend within their roles.

Councillor Name	Attendance at Meetings	
	Possible	Actual
Archer, M I	37	32
Bellamy, C B	32	30
Butcher, T R	26	23
Chambers, J	18	17
Clark, J F	18	15
Cotterell, MBE, M F J	22	21
Count, S	32	32
Cox, Mrs C R	9	8
Curtis, M J	18	10
Farmer J R	35	26
French, Mrs J	35	35
Garratt, S	17	15
Green, A R	19	15
Griffin, R L	23	20
Harper,CBE, G F	6	3
Hatton, P	30	28
Humphrey, M J	40	32
Keane, B M	29	28
King, S J E	6	4
Mayor, Mrs K F	6	4
Mayor, K G	31	29
Melton, A K	17	16
Murphy, P	38	36
Newell, Mrs F S	52	51
Oliver, D C	27	21
Owen, K	31	31
Patrick, D R**	12	10
Peachey, K G	31	24
Potts, Mrs P M C	29	17
Quince, T E W	19	17
Scrimshaw, R	33	33
Seaton, C J	20	18
Speechley, R C	33	30
Tuck, Mrs J M	6	4
Tunley, P A	9	8

Webb, P J	18	18
Wegg, H B	19	15
West, J F*	19	18
Wheeler, D A	18	16
Yeulett, F H	18	13