

Cumberland Council

# Council Size Submission: Cumberland Council

## Contents

About You.....	2
Reason for Review.....	2
Local Authority Profile.....	7
Council Size.....	9
Summary.....	26

## About You

This submission is made on behalf of Cumberland Council. Engagement with all political groups that make up the Council has informed the development of this submission which has been approved by the full Council at a meeting of 27 September 2024. This has included regular engagement with group leaders throughout the process, discussion with all groups and a survey of all councillors.

## Reason for Review

This review is necessary following the reorganisation of local government in the county of Cumbria. Cumberland Council was created on 1 April 2023 to replace Allerdale Borough Council, Carlisle City Council, Copeland Borough Council and the relevant part of Cumbria County Council. Westmorland and Furness Council was created at the same time to replace the former district areas of Barrow, Eden and South Lakeland, and the remainder of Cumbria County Council.

The Cumbria (Structural Changes) Order 2022 made provisions about the council size and electoral arrangements. The Order provided for elections of councillors to the shadow Cumberland Council in May 2022, and stated that the area of each Cumberland Council electoral division be the same as those of Cumbria County Council (as they existed on 31 March 2022). This resulted in 46 electoral divisions in the Cumberland Council area. The Order also set out that one Councillor be elected for each electoral division. In May 2022, 46 Councillors were elected to Cumberland Council, which operated in shadow form prior to Vesting Day on 1 April 2023.

The adoption of the previously existing county council divisions by Cumberland Council represented a pragmatic and consistent approach in the interim, avoiding a potentially hurried review of divisions pre-Vesting Day and enabling the establishment and stabilisation of the new Council to take place with the commitment to a full review to meet the future needs of the communities of Cumberland before the next scheduled local elections in 2027.

The Council's objectives are that the outcome of this review will be electoral arrangements for Cumberland Council which:

- meet the future needs of communities across Cumberland;
- ensure representation for all residents is equitable and equal;
- enable councillors to meaningfully and fully represent, engage and work with all their residents;
- provide the leadership and governance capacity to ensure the complex disaggregation, aggregation, harmonisation and integration of policy and services following local government reorganisation is completed effectively and efficiently;
- provide the strategic leadership capacity to lead the implementation of the Council's ambitious plans to transform Council services, improving outcomes for all residents in Cumberland;
- ensure public accountability and transparency arrangements are effective;
- attract people to become councillors in the future from diverse backgrounds and experiences which reflect the communities they represent and serve;
- and take into account the needs of potential future changes, e.g. devolution opportunities.

In developing this proposal, the Council has considered a range of options and has concluded that a small increase in council size is necessary to deliver the objectives above.

**The Council's proposal is to increase council size from 46 to 55 Members.**

### The Context for your proposal

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

Cumberland Council is a new unitary council. The Shadow Council established the governance arrangements for the new Council following elections in May 2022. Since Vesting Day on 1 April 2023 the focus of the first year of the new Council has been on ensuring the transition has been smooth for our residents and communities, and establishing a brand new Council - embedding new values and culture across the organisation. Work has also begun on a major programme of transformation to secure the benefits of local government reorganisation and design innovative and sustainable services for the future.

The Cumbria (Structural Changes Order) 2022 required a Cabinet and Leader Model to be implemented. In addition to that, the Council established a number of decision-making, regulatory and accountability bodies. In doing this we took a streamlined approach where possible, for example, establishing one planning committee for the whole of Cumberland rather than multiple committees based on legacy planning authority boundaries as some other areas have done following local government reorganisation.

The Council's constitution has been kept under review over the first year by the Council's constitution working group, with limited changes being made to ensure effective operationalisation of the constitution whilst allowing arrangements to bed in.

It has been too early to undertake a full review of the Council's governance model to date; however, early considerations are reflected throughout this proposal.

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

The formation of a new council from 4 legacy councils is a vast and complex programme of work which we are continuing to implement. We were clear from the beginning of the process that this is a long-term task and would take at least 5 years to realise forecast benefits.

Cumberland Council has responsibility for all council strategic and service functions for the area of Cumberland. The Council took on all these responsibilities from 1 April 2023. The priority for Vesting Day, and the initial transition and stabilisation phases beyond that date, was that Council operations were safe and legal, and that our residents did not see disruption to services. This was successfully completed.

The large majority of strategic and service functions from the 4 legacy councils were transferred to Cumberland Council on Vesting Day; however, as there was not time for the full disaggregation of all Cumbria County Council services there were a number of hosted and shared services in place with effect from 1 April 2023. Over the last year,

disaggregation of some of these services has been completed, with some more scheduled over the coming months and years. There will be a very small number of services that will remain shared or hosted over the longer-term.

A Joint Executive Committee has been established by Cumberland Council and Westmorland and Furness Council to oversee and manage delivery and, in most cases, disaggregation of the services in line with the Inter Authority Agreement. A Joint Overview & Scrutiny Committee has also been established to oversee the decisions and delivery of the Joint Executive Committee.

Subsequent changes to Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) arrangements have resulted in the transfer of functions previously carried out by Cumbria LEP into the Council. These arrangements have been absorbed into existing governance arrangements via the Joint Executive Committee as an interim solution until appointments to the newly established Economic Growth Board are completed. This process is in progress.

A new Health and Wellbeing Board for Cumberland has been established which engages with the two Integrated Care Systems which make up the area's complex health landscape.

Alongside some continued disaggregation activity, the Council is also progressing the integration of services from the 4 legacy councils, including harmonisation and aggregation of services of the 3 legacy district councils.

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

At the time of writing, there have not been any substantial issues raised; however, the Council is in the very early stages of its operation.

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

At a local level, local government reorganisation has had, and will continue to have, a major influence as we complete transition and begin transformation. It was always clear that realising the benefits would be a long-term project.

Our broad approach to creating our new council is focused on:

- Achieving long-term Financial Sustainability - achieving £80 million financial benefit by 2027 by reducing overspend, avoiding cost and increasing income;
- Delivering high-performing quality services that deliver better outcomes for our residents – using data and insight, technology, innovation and efficient processes; and,
- Implementing a new operating model for Cumberland – by managing demand, setting a new culture, shifting to a prevention model, early engagement with residents, and focusing on pre-front door and self-service.

At its core, implementing our new Operating Model will:

- **Empower communities** - through partnership working and targeted community development, the Council will seek to strengthen support networks and respond to signs of need early to reduce pressure on public sector services;

- **Increase self-service** - an improved digital offering will allow customers to access services and resolve simple enquiries through self-service. Self-serve can also be used to capture more up-front information for customers that require more complex assessments. Channels such as the website, a customer portal or a customer chatbot can help customers access council services at a time and a place suited to them;
- **Improve Service Delivery** - a better digital service offer will enable staff to save time on administrative tasks and focus their time to support customers with complex needs or focus on delivering the service. Similarly, improving the internal support offered to Service Delivery employees will free up time to focus more on delivery of services and less on back-office activities; and,
- **Harness technology, data and insight** - providing employees with improved digital solutions will be key to transformation. Technologies such as a Customer Relationship Management system, which would be powered by customer data, can provide a single view of all customer interactions with the council. Insights and performance data can also be used to improve performance and prioritise service delivery and resources across the organisation.

These aspirations will drive the future structure and governance of the Council and new ways of working. Empowering communities through working with them – rather than 'doing to' them – puts the community leadership role of councillors front and centre and will demand different approaches to strategic leadership, transparency and accountability.

The wider context in which the Council is operating continues to pose significant challenges requiring difficult decisions to be made. Financial and budgetary constraints are likely to remain in the long-term as demand for services continues to increase in volume and complexity – particularly in respect of social care and support to the most vulnerable people in our communities.

The impacts of the cost-of-living crisis, as well as those of the Covid-19 pandemic, continue to affect our residents and the demand for services, as well as impacting our workforce and the local economy. These impacts will continue to affect the council in the long-term.

The new national government's policy intentions will provide some opportunities which will directly impact local governance in a fundamental way – including the potential for the area to progress negotiations with the government on devolution and a possible Combined Authority or other governance arrangements; and taking a more place-based or regional approach to national policy and funding.

The continued requirement for in-person council meetings has a direct impact on the time pressures on councillors in relation to travelling to and from meetings which are significant for many of our councillors due to the area's geography; however, we are also seeking to maximise the benefits of use of technology, a range of communication channels and remote meetings / working in the way our councillors operate within current legal constraints.

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

This proposal to increase the size of the council by a proportionate number of Members will achieve the balance between effective representation and efficiency. It will enable councillors to engage with their communities in a meaningful way; to support, represent and communicate with their residents; and to ensure this informs strategic decision-making. This will result in better decisions being made.

It will provide the strategic leadership capacity to drive and oversee the transformation required to achieve an efficient unitary council that is sustainable for the future; and the capacity to ensure there is effective overview, scrutiny and audit.

The analysis of the Council's current arrangements and those of other similar councils demonstrates that the proposal to increase council size from 46 to 55 councillors will be most likely to have a positive impact on the council's effectiveness in the future – completing integration of services and driving transformation to produce services which will meet the needs of local communities.

The current council size does not provide the required capacity and poses risks to the future effectiveness of the council, and a reduction in council size would exacerbate those risks.

## Local Authority Profile

### Outline

Cumberland is a mix of urban and rural communities and covers an area of 3,012 km. It contains some of the most picturesque landscapes in the UK and its natural assets are critical to the UK - landscapes which attract millions of visitors a year, a vibrant agricultural and food production sector, water supplied to major UK cities, and a world-leading energy sector.

Cumberland's population is currently 273,200, made up of 125,500 households. It has areas of deep and multiple deprivation alongside areas which are much more affluent. There are distinct communities throughout the area, each with their own unique heritage and characteristics.

The area includes parts of 2 World Heritage Sites (the Lake District National Park and Hadrian's Wall), an area of outstanding natural beauty, the city of Carlisle, the urban centres of Whitehaven and Workington, and a number of smaller coastal and market towns.

The geography, topography, rurality and the peripherality of Cumberland creates some challenges in relation to connectivity, transport and service delivery. Whilst the city of Carlisle in the north of Cumberland is a strategic transport hub with easy access to the M6 and the West Coast Mainline railway, the south and west of the area experiences significant barriers. There is no West to East rail link and only one main road route to connect to the M6. For example, from the town of Millom in the south of Cumberland to the city of Carlisle is on average a 2-hour journey in a car over a distance (via the A595) of 66.8 miles.

Many areas have also seen a decline of bus services over recent years with large parts of the area with very infrequent or no bus provision at all – with villages, smaller towns and other rural areas most affected.

### Urban / Rural

Cumberland has a mix of urban and rural areas. Just over half of the population in Cumberland live in rural areas. Cumberland is much more sparsely populated than the national average. Cumberland has an average population density of 91 people per square km whilst the England and Wales average is 399 people per square km. This results in some very large rural divisions in terms of area covering a number of small towns, villages and hamlets.

### Demographic pressures

The population in Cumberland is getting older. The number of people over 65 is due to increase from 64,000 to 82,100 by 2040. The population is ageing much faster than in other areas of the country.

The working-age population is decreasing, which provides significant challenges. Cumberland does not have sufficient working-age population to support the local economy and future economic growth. Attracting working age people to Cumberland is critical to the future of the local economy and public services.

A super-ageing population impacts on rising demand on the council's services – particularly on adult social care services. Increasing demand for high-risk and high-profile services places increasing demands on councillors in relation to engaging with these services and vulnerable residents in their communities.

Population forecasts envision relatively small population changes which are irregular and uneven across different communities. The largest planned development over the long-term is the ambitious St. Cuthbert's Garden Village which has the potential for up to 10,000 new homes on the outskirts of Carlisle.

### Community characteristics

There are areas of high and concentrated deprivation across Cumberland – particularly in the urban areas of Whitehaven, Workington and Carlisle. There are also pockets of hidden deprivation across the more rural areas of Cumberland, alongside areas of very low deprivation. 14 out of 177 lower super output areas in Cumberland fall within the 10% most deprived areas in England (Index of Multiple Deprivation 2019, MHCLG).

Median household income is £28,794, lower than the national average. Weekly earnings levels are largely in line with the national average at Cumberland level; however, they vary substantially across the area. The predominance of a small number of large employers, particularly in the nuclear and advanced manufacturing industries, drives high wages in some areas; whilst other areas experience low earnings levels which are often resulting from employment in the hospitality, tourism, agriculture and food industries.

Child poverty is high in some parts of Cumberland. 18.1% of children in Cumberland live in relative low-income families. This is much higher in some wards, whilst in other wards 30% of children live in relative low-income families.

### Council Size

#### Strategic Leadership

This section provides the Commission with details as to how elected members will provide strategic leadership for the authority, indicate how many members will be required for this role and why this is justified, and demonstrates that alternative council sizes have been explored.

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<p><b>Governance Model</b></p>	<p><i>Key lines of explanation</i></p>	<p><b>Executive</b>  The Council adopted a Leader and Executive governance model in advance of Vesting Day in April 2023. It is early in the life of the new authority. Some minor changes have been made to governance arrangements over the last 18 months, as the constitution has been operationalised, to ensure governance and decision-making are working well. Whilst it is too early to undertake a full governance review, effectiveness is being monitored and changes made where necessary. The Leader and Executive model is working and there are no plans to do further work on alternative models at this stage.</p> <p>The Executive consists of 10 members, including the Leader. There are 2 Deputy Leaders appointed – one of these being the statutory Deputy Leader of the Council. Each Executive Member has a defined Portfolio of services and policy areas.</p> <p>Through an Executive and Scrutiny Protocol, Portfolio Holders also have specified responsibilities in respect of engagement with Overview and Scrutiny Committees and Members.</p> <p>There are also joint executive arrangements with the neighbouring new unitary council of Westmorland and Furness Council in relation to some medium and longer-term shared and hosted arrangements following the abolition of Cumbria County Council. These include a Joint Executive Committee. This Committee now also oversees some functions transferred from the Cumbria Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP).</p> <p>A small number of Executive Committees have been established. These are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Highways and Transport Strategic Board</li> <li>• Nuclear Issues Board</li> <li>• Budget Consultation Board</li> <li>• Shareholder Committee</li> </ul> <p><b>Full Council</b>  All Members of the Council meet as the Council (sometimes called “Full Council”). At these meetings, Councillors decide upon key strategies and policies for how the Council operates (as set out in the Council’s Policy Framework) and will set the budget each year. The Council appoints the Leader of the Council who in turn appoints councillors to be part of the Executive and may delegate powers and responsibilities to them. Each year, the Council also appoints Committees to carry out</p>
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certain local government functions, such as planning and licensing, and political groups will nominate councillors to be members of those committees. Most committees are politically balanced, which means that membership will reflect the political make-up of the whole council.

### **Council Committees**

The Council has the following Committees:

- 1 x Audit Committee
- 1 x Standards and Governance Committee
- 1 x Planning Committee
- 1 x Regulatory Committee (with ad hoc sub-committees established as required)
- 1 x Licensing Committee (with ad hoc sub-committees established as required)
- 4 x Overview and Scrutiny Committees
- 1 x Health and Wellbeing Board
- 1 x Staffing Committee
- 1 x Independent Persons Panel
- 1 x Harbour Committee
- 1 x Corporate Parenting Board
- 1 x Joint Executive Committee
- 1 x Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- 1 x Joint Police, Fire and Crime Panel
- 8 x Community Panels

### **Overview and Scrutiny**

The Council has 4 Overview and Scrutiny Committees – this has been reduced from 5 over the last 8 months following changes to Local Enterprise Partnership governance. The resulting roles and responsibilities have been absorbed into existing arrangements where possible.

In addition, there is a Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee established with Westmorland and Furness Council in relation to the activities of the Joint Executive referred to above, and a Joint Police, Fire and Crime Panel.

### **Community Panels and Networks**

The Council has established 8 Community Panels across Cumberland. Each is made up of the division councillors for that area – so all councillors are members of one panel. The panels meet four times a year to understand the needs of their communities, and to direct investment and resources to local priorities.

The Panels are helped in that process by community networks. These involve residents, businesses, partners and third sector organisations and support engagement

		<p>in communities through events, consultations and other methods to find out exactly what investment is needed in each neighbourhood. That is then fed back to the Community Panels to inform their spending and decision-making.</p> <p><b>Policy Development</b>  The Council’s Policy Framework is being developed with the ambition of having a rationalised Framework of a small number of top-level strategic strategies and policies which collectively set out the Council’s ambitions, adopted by the full Council.</p> <p>The Executive will be responsible for approval of the next layer of strategies and policies which set the direction of travel and strategy for delivery of the ambitions set out in the Policy Framework. Engagement and input of Executive Members throughout the strategic strategy and policy development process is vital – this is through regular engagement between lead officers and the relevant Executive Portfolio Holders, and with the Executive collectively at key stages in the process.</p> <p>The Council’s approach to Strategy and Policy development also sets out expectations of meaningful engagement with, and input from, Overview and Scrutiny Members; and through Community Panels or networks as appropriate as part of wider engagement with residents, businesses and partner organisations.</p> <p>The approval of operational and service level policies, procedures and plans is delegated to Chief Officers through the Council’s Scheme of Delegation. However, a Council-wide approach is in place setting out expectations and good practice on development and management of operational policies and procedures.</p> <p>The Officer Scheme of Delegation is accessible at <a href="http://modern.gov.co.uk/Part2Section6-OfficerSchemeofDelegation.pdf">Part 2 Section 6 - Officer Scheme of Delegation.pdf (modern.gov.co.uk)</a></p> <p><b>Political Make-Up</b>  The Council is currently made up of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 29 Labour Party Councillors</li> <li>• 8 Conservative Party Councillors</li> <li>• 4 Liberal Democrat Party Councillors</li> <li>• 3 Independent Councillors</li> <li>• 2 Green Party Councillors</li> </ul>
	Analysis	The governance model described above will remain under review as the council continues to develop its

	<p>operating model and implement transformation. Changes will be brought forward if and when the need is identified. However; the Council considers that the current model is fundamentally the right one for the future of Cumberland Council.</p> <p>In establishing this model, the Council has prioritised a streamlined and efficient governance model and approach to decision-making. For example, establishing a single Planning Committee, and single Regulatory and Licensing Committees from April 2023. Many other Councils who have undergone reorganisation have, initially at least, maintained these committees on former district boundaries, resulting in usually 3 or more planning committees and regulatory and licensing committees. The approach taken in Cumberland has been important in establishing a 'One Cumberland' culture, and also in reducing the number of permanent committee places to be filled; whilst also enabling flexibility through sub-committees for additional capacity when and where needed.</p> <p>As a unitary council responsible for the full scope of local authority services in Cumberland, it is critical that the Executive maintains sufficient Members so that the scope of each Portfolio is manageable for individual Executive Members. Reducing the number of Executive Members significantly would reduce strategic leadership capacity, posing risks to the implementation of the Council's new Target Operating Model and Transformation Plans.</p> <p>The biggest challenge with the current council size is the relatively low number of non-executive councillors. This is in the context of a much streamlined governance model compared with those of the legacy councils. There are 36 non-executive councillors to undertake a range of decision-making, representative and scrutiny activities.</p> <p>There are 106 committee places in total (excluding full Council, Executive and sub-groups, and Community Panels). The number of committees each Member is on varies due to a number of factors including councillor role and political proportionality. Most Councillors are members of between 4 to 8 committees and are substitute members for up to 5 other committees.</p>
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		<p>In terms of alternative governance models. a committee governance model would result in additional decision-making committees (undertaking responsibilities which currently sit with executive Portfolio Holders). An increase in the number of committee seats could require a substantial increase in the number of councillors. A committee system is, therefore, not considered to be an optimal model for decision-making at this time.</p> <p>The current 10-member Executive model, with an increase of 9 non-executive members to ensure sufficient capacity for input into policy development and decision-making, and effective scrutiny and accountability, is considered the most efficient and effective option for the future.</p>
<p><b>Portfolios</b></p>	<p><i>Key lines of explanation</i></p>	<p>The role of a Portfolio Holder is (in addition to their role as a division councillor) to be responsible for their particular area of the Council’s activities, to ensure they are fully briefed on all activity and decisions being made, and to be a champion for that area of work.</p> <p>Portfolio Holders have delegated decision-making powers in accordance with the Leader’s Scheme of Delegation, unless a particular matter has been reserved to the Executive sitting as a whole.</p> <p>The current executive portfolios are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leader’s Portfolio</li> <li>• Governance and Thriving Communities</li> <li>• Childrens and Family Support</li> <li>• Lifelong Learning and Development</li> <li>• Adults and Community Health</li> <li>• Sustainable, Resilient and Connected Places</li> <li>• Financial Planning and Assets</li> <li>• Digital Connectivity and Customer Focus</li> <li>• Cumberland Policy and Regulatory Services</li> <li>• Vibrant and Healthy Places</li> </ul> <p>Between 1 April 2023 and 14 August 2024 individual Executive members have taken 35 decisions under delegated powers.</p> <p>The Leaders Scheme of Delegation is accessible at <a href="#">Microsoft Word - Cumberland Leader's Scheme of Delegation.docx</a>.</p> <p>The Executive currently meets every 8 weeks.</p> <p>Executive Members are expected to regularly attend meetings of Overview and Scrutiny Committees when matters relevant to their Portfolio are being considered.</p>

		<p>The expectations of constructive and regular engagement between Executive Portfolio Holders and Overview and Scrutiny Chairs and Committees are established in the Council's Executive and Scrutiny protocol.</p>
	<p>Analysis</p>	<p>Portfolio Holders have a significant level of delegated decision-making responsibilities. This enables streamlined, transparent and timely decision-making.</p> <p>This also means that Portfolio Holders are required to engage with the relevant service directors and senior officers on a regular basis and be closely involved in all relevant and appropriate policy decisions from start to finish. This includes time spent collectively as an Executive as well as on individual portfolio matters.</p> <p>In addition, Portfolio Holders are expected to sit on a number of committees and represent the Council on a number of other bodies at local, regional and national level.</p> <p>A significant reduction in the number of portfolios and Executive members is not considered viable due to the wide-ranging and strategic nature of Executive decision-making in the Council and the other roles and responsibilities placed on Executive Members.</p>
<p><b>Delegated Responsibilities</b></p>	<p><i>Key lines of explanation</i></p>	<p>Most major decisions are taken by either Full Council (consisting of all members of the Council) or the Executive. Policy and Budget Framework decisions are reserved to Full Council.</p> <p>The Executive takes most other strategic decisions. Some Executive responsibilities are currently delegated to specific Executive committees, individual Executive Members and senior officers. The specific delegations are as set out in the Council's constitution and are kept under review.</p> <p>The specific Executive Committees and Executive Members to which responsibilities are delegated are referred to above. Other Council committees such as planning and licensing have their own schemes of delegation</p> <p>Responsibilities for the general management of the Council and the day-to-day delivery of Council services are delegated to the Chief Executive and Chief Officers, unless delegated or reserved to another body or individual.</p>

		<p>Directors may take executive decisions up to a value of £1,000,000. Over that threshold, Portfolio Holders may take decisions up to a value of £5,000,000. Above that threshold, the decision must be made by Executive sitting as a whole.</p> <p>There are also a significant number of specific responsibilities delegated to other officers, as set out in the Officer Scheme of Delegation.</p> <p>The Council's constitution is available at <a href="#">Council Constitution</a></p>
	<p>Analysis</p>	<p>The Council has significant levels of delegated decision-making in place. This enables effective and timely decision-making at the appropriate level, whilst ensuring appropriate checks and balances are in place.</p> <p>In the future, as the Council's new Target Operating Model is further embedded, it is anticipated that further devolution of decision-making to the appropriate local level will be considered.</p> <p>Decision-making within local communities is one of the cornerstones of our Community Panel approach and we will look to strengthen engagement and involvement of local communities in decision-making, service design and delivery.</p> <p>This locality-based approach will mean that councillors are likely to spend an increasingly larger proportion of their time engaging and making decisions within their local areas.</p> <p>Balancing this with ensuring strategic decision-making capacity on a Cumberland-wide and Council-wide basis is critical to the need for the proposed increase in the number of councillors.</p>

## Accountability

Topic	
<p><b>Internal Scrutiny</b></p>	<p>The Council currently has 4 Overview and Scrutiny Committees with 8 members each and one Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee with 12 members (6 of which are Cumberland Councillors).</p> <p>The 4 internal Overview and Scrutiny Committees are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Business and Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee</li> <li>• Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee – which also exercises the Council’s health scrutiny functions</li> <li>• People Overview and Scrutiny Committee</li> <li>• Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee</li> </ul> <p>The Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee, with Westmorland and Furness Council, scrutinises the decisions of the Joint Executive which is primarily concerned with overseeing shared and hosted services.</p> <p>The Council also has a Joint Cumbria Police, Fire and Crime Panel with, and hosted by, Westmorland and Furness</p>



Council. The Panel is made up of 5 Cumberland Councillors, 5 Westmorland and Furness Councillors and 2 Independent members.

There is a single Audit Committee (6 members) and a Standards and Governance Committee (8 members). Together, these Committees will hold the Executive, the wider elected Members and Council officers to account.

Since the Council was established, it has reduced its number of Overview and Scrutiny Committees from 5 to 4. Following the transfer of Local Enterprise Partnership functions into the Council, the separate LEP Overview and Scrutiny Committee was removed. The scrutiny of former LEP functions is now embedded into existing council overview and scrutiny committees and in shared arrangements with Westmorland and Furness Council.

During the shadow arrangements in the year before Vesting Day, a Shadow Council Scrutiny Committee completed an investigation and made recommendations about future Cumberland Council Overview and Scrutiny arrangements. The Task and Finish Group recommended that there should be 4 Overview and Scrutiny Committees with 9 members per Committee.

These recommendations were considered when decisions were made about governance arrangements. Whilst initially 5 Committees were put in place, this was reduced to 4 Committees for 2024/25. The figure of 8 members on each Overview and Scrutiny Committee, rather than the recommended 9, was reached having regard to Members' time and capacity.

Task and Finish groups are set up by individual Committees, for example, the Standards and Governance Committee has established a Constitution Working Group which meets every 4 weeks to review the Constitution. Overview and Scrutiny Committees set up Task and Finish Groups as and when required for specific inquiries.

In 2023/24, each Overview and Scrutiny Committee met 8 times (every 6 weeks). For 2024/25, this has been reduced to 6 meetings a year (every 2 months) to enable Members and officers to undertake more work and preparation between meetings.

During 2023/24, there was limited additional scrutiny activity undertaken outside of meetings - 2 formal Task and Finish Groups and a small number of informal briefing / discussion sessions, one full day of formal training plus a small number of one-hour online training sessions.

	<p>With the reduction in the number of meetings, it is envisaged that there would normally be approximately 4 formal Task and Finish groups a year but also more informal briefing / discussion work between meetings so that in the 6 formal meetings a year each committee adds maximum value whilst ensuring scrutiny is carried out in public.</p> <p>It will also be important that regular training and development activity for Overview and Scrutiny Members is made available, in line with the agreed Scrutiny Development Plan.</p> <p>In addition, the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of all the Overview and Scrutiny Committees, and the Chair of the Audit Committee, meet 4 times a year to ensure effective co-ordination of activity.</p> <p>In the context of the wide remits of each of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees and the need to ensure scrutiny is carried out in public, it is not considered practicable to reduce the frequency of meetings further at this stage.</p> <p>The Council does have an aspiration to increase the number of Councillors on each Overview and Scrutiny Committee to at least 9, in line with the original recommendations made, when Councillor numbers allow.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Analysis</p>	<p>The internal and external Overview and Scrutiny arrangements total 43 committee places, and the Audit Committee and Standards and Governance Committees are an additional 14 committee places for Members playing key roles in the Council's accountability arrangements.</p> <p>At a total of 57 committee places, the streamlined accountability arrangements place large time and capacity pressures on the 36 non-executive Councillors.</p> <p>In response to the survey recently undertaken with all Cumberland Councillors, 45% of Councillors who responded said that they think there are not enough councillors on committees.</p> <p>An increase in the number of councillors on committees encourages a wider and more diverse input of views and experience into the Council's decision-making. It is important that we harness the experience and knowledge of all our councillors about their areas, and their engagement with their residents, to contribute fully to council decision-making.</p> <p>Increasing council size to 55 rather than 46 members (with 45 rather than 36 non-executive councillors) would enable these small increases to the membership of some key committees, and improve the quality of contributions to</p>

		decision-making and the scrutiny of decisions and decision-makers.
	<b>Statutory Functions</b>	
<b>Planning</b>		<p>Cumberland Council established a single Planning Committee covering the whole of Cumberland straight away. Whilst other areas experiencing unitarisation have often established a number of planning committees based on previous district geographies, Cumberland Council took a positive decision to create a single Planning Committee which takes a Cumberland-wide perspective. This approach makes best use of resources and capacity, as well as embedding a new Cumberland approach.</p> <p>The Planning Committee comprises 10 members; however, the Council has an aspiration to increase this to 12 members.</p> <p>Cumberland Council Planning Committee considers a higher proportion of planning applications than the national average – with up to 95% of applications being decided by the Committee.</p> <p>This means that the volume of work of the Planning Committee is high, with less decisions being made by officers under delegated powers. This is largely due to the unique and sensitive landscapes in the area.</p> <p>The Committee has a Scheme of Delegation in place which is accessible at <a href="#">Planning Committee Scheme of Delegation</a></p> <p>The time commitment for Members of the Planning Committee is significantly bigger than for some other Committees due to the legal and specialist training that Members are required to complete before taking part in planning decisions. In addition, site visits are also often necessary as part of the Planning Committee’s decision-making processes. This adds travel and visiting time to Members’ schedules.</p> <p>Due to the nature of the planning system and the decisions being made about local communities, there are also a higher number of declarations of interest made by Members of the Planning Committee than in other Committees. This means that local Members are often not taking part in the decision-making process. The aspiration of increasing the number of Committee Members to 12 should mitigate some of these issues.</p>

	Analysis	<p>A single Planning Committee for Cumberland is the most efficient model for decision-making in this area.</p> <p>It is recognised that the time commitments for Members of the Planning Committee are particularly substantial due to the technical and high-profile nature of the issues being considered, Cumberland’s particularly sensitive landscapes, the requirements for site visits and additional activity.</p> <p>In 2023/24, the Planning Committee met 14 times in addition to the requirement for Members to undertake significant amounts of mandatory training. This frequency of meetings is likely to be an average over future years.</p> <p>Increasing the number of Committee Members to 12 is a priority to enable effective functioning of the Committee in the future.</p>
Licensing	<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<p>The Licensing functions of the Council are carried out by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a full Regulatory Committee comprising of 10 Councillors</li> <li>• Sub-Committees established by the Regulatory Committee on an ad hoc basis, comprising 3 cross party Councillors drawn from the Regulatory Committee. These sub-committees deal with Taxi, Gaming, Food, Miscellaneous Licensing and registration functions and Health and Safety functions</li> <li>• a full Licensing Committee comprising of 10 Councillors (the same Councillors as the Regulatory Committee);</li> <li>• Sub-Committees established by the Licensing Committee on an ad hoc basis, comprising 3 Councillors drawn from the full Licensing Committee. These sub-committees deal with matters under the Licensing Act 2003 and the Gambling Act 2005</li> </ul> <p>Committee Members are required to complete mandatory legal and specialist training before participating in the decision-making process.</p> <p>The time commitments and nature of the decisions being taken make sitting on these Committees an intensive and time-consuming role for the relevant Members.</p> <p>Based on experience in 2023/24, much of the work is done through Sub-Committees. Licencing sub-committees are particularly intensive with around 10 meetings a year.</p>

	Analysis	The quasi-judicial nature of the role of Members of Licencing and Regulatory Committees, and the focus on individual applications and reviews of licences, etc. mean a significant time commitment from Members.
<b>Other Regulatory Bodies</b>	<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	The Council has a Harbour Committee which exercises the Council's functions in relation to Workington Harbour Authority. This Committee comprises 7 Members and meets 4 times a year.
	Analysis	This is a key regulatory body for the Council. There are no plans to reduce the membership of this Committee
<b>External Partnerships</b>		
	<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<p>The Council is continuing to review its representation on a range of outside bodies. Following local government reorganisation, the Council has ceased appointments to a number of outside bodies. Appointments are currently made or under review to approximately 80 bodies.</p> <p>These bodies range from national representative bodes and organisations, countywide and Cumberland wide partnerships and partner organisations, very local organisations and institutions, and issue specific bodies. These bodies have a varying range of responsibilities and decision-making roles.</p> <p>Council Members are appointed to some particularly significant decision-making in the area, for example the Lake District National Park Authority, the Economic Growth Board, the Integrated Care Board, the Integrated Care Partnership.</p> <p>The workload attached to the Members' involvement in these Outside Bodies and partnerships vary. Some are particularly intensive and involve large time commitments, whilst some are less so.</p>
	Analysis	Council representation and involvement in national, regional, sub-regional and local external partnerships and organisations is critical to ensuring effective representation of Cumberland residents in these decision-making and

	<p>engagement fora, and in Cumberland's ability to influence and collaborate with partner organisations.</p> <p>The Council is reviewing its involvement in some bodies, to ensure that time and resources are prioritised.</p>
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### Community Leadership

Topic		Description
<b>Community Leadership</b>	<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<p>The community leadership role of Councillors is central to the new Council's Operating Model and aspirations. Councillors use a range of methods to engage with and serve their residents.</p> <p>Structurally, the Council has established 8 Community Panels. These Panels comprise of all the division Councillors in the relevant geographic area, and up to 3 co-opted members.</p> <p>The Panels have a key role in identifying priorities for their local area, and also have a devolved neighbourhood investment fund to be allocated in the area in line with agreed priorities.</p> <p>The Panels have also developed community networks around each of them, which brings a range of stakeholders together to support and contribute to the work of each Panel. Each Panel is also supported by a member of the Council's Senior Leadership Team to strengthen the connectivity between strategic and local decision-making and engagement</p> <p>The Panels meet formally quarterly; however, Members undertake significant amounts of work outside of formal meetings with the local communities team to progress the work of the Panel and engage with residents on the issues important to them.</p>

		<p>In addition to the Panels and networks, Members also engage with residents through a range of other mechanisms. These include attending Town and Parish Council meetings, other community and public meetings, residents groups, local events and other opportunities.</p> <p>In the survey of all Councillors 27 out of 29 respondents said they engage with residents through community and public meetings.</p> <p>Councillors also increasingly use digital technology to engage with their communities. 21 out of the 29 respondents to the survey stated that they regularly used social media to engage with residents.</p>
	<p>Analysis</p>	<p>The establishment of Community Panels, and the expectation that Councillors and staff commit to this work at the most local level is central to the Council's Target Operating Model and aspirations.</p> <p>They involve all the Council's Members and are the basis for the continued development of the Council's reimagined relationship with residents. Working with residents, including exploring how elements such as co-production and co-design of services and solutions can be maximised, is central to the new Cumberland approach as set out in our Council Plan.</p> <p>It is envisaged that the role of Community Panels and their networks will expand and develop over the coming months and years.</p> <p>Engaging with residents in other ways is also a key time commitment for Members. Whilst digital technology and social media is increasingly used, and can save travel time for Councillors and residents, it is not always the best or most practicable way. Digital only channels can be challenging for Cumberland's ageing population and areas of deep deprivation in particular. The Council is committed to inclusivity and providing a range of channels for contacting Councillors and officers.</p> <p>Attendance at Town and Parish Council meetings are a key part of the expectations on Councillors in respect of their work in their communities. The particular characteristics of Cumberland mean that there are a small number of larger Town and Parish Councils, but there are also a large number of very small parish councils.</p>

		<p>Particularly in the larger rural wards, Councillors can have a high number of parishes within their division, all having regular evening meetings the Councillor is expected to attend. Many Cumberland Council wards contain between 5 and 10 parishes, with one containing 15.</p> <p>Attending Town and Parish Council meetings is a substantial time commitment for many Councillors, particularly for Councillors representing larger, rural wards.</p>
<p><b>Casework</b></p>	<p><i>Key lines of explanation</i></p>	<p>Casework – investigating and seeking to resolve issues raised by residents - is a critical part of the work of all Councillors.</p> <p>Based on responses to our survey of Members, the top 3 issues Members are contacted about are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Street cleaning and streetscene issues;</li> <li>• Highways issues, including potholes; and,</li> <li>• Planning issues</li> </ul> <p>Councillors are contacted in a number of different ways:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 28 out of 29 Members who responded to the survey are regularly contact by residents via email;</li> <li>• 27 are regularly contacted by phone;</li> <li>• and 27 by direct face-to-face contact.</li> </ul> <p>The Council has in place leadership support officers and group administrators who provide support to Councillors with their work as division Members as well as strategic leaders. These staff can facilitate the liaison on casework between the Councillor and relevant officers to resolve specific issues. Councillors are supported to signpost residents to appropriate information sources, or complaints or other processes as appropriate; however, some pieces of casework require in-depth work by Councillors over substantial periods of time.</p>
	<p>Analysis</p>	<p>Casework is a large part of a Councillor's workload. Whilst email and social media can make communication on issues easier in some cases, a lot of casework still requires time and face to face contact.</p> <p>The Council has officer support in place for each political group; however, this is limited and means that Councillors undertake much of this work individually.</p>



## Summary

Cumberland Council's proposal is to increase council size from 46 to 55 Members.

Cumberland, in initially adopting Cumbria County Council divisional boundaries, currently has a ratio of electors to councillors of 1;4715 with an electorate of 216,891 (2024).

Alternatively, using a current electorate figure based on a 3-year average (2022-2024) of 212,846, Cumberland has a ratio of electors to councillors of 1:4627. This method of using a 3-year average as a baseline is more likely to accurately reflect long-term trends in electorate numbers.

In both these methods of calculation Cumberland has a high ratio compared to other similar predominantly rural council areas.

Local Authority	Number of electors	Number of Councillors	Ratio of Electors to Councillors
Rutland	29,841	27	1:1105
Westmorland and Furness	175,500	65	1:2700
Herefordshire	147,429	53	1:2782
Durham	390,322	126	1:3098
Shropshire	250,146	74	1:3380
Dorset	297,542	82	1:3629
<b>Cumberland (2030) - on basis of forecasted electorate and this proposal</b> <i>(This is based on a forecasted range of electorate – subject to final confirmation of Boundary Commission guidance)</i>	214,775 – 221,333	55	1:3905 – 1:4024
Wiltshire	382,740	98	1:3906
East Riding of Yorkshire	270,089	67	1:4031
<b>Cumberland (2024)</b>	216,891	46	1:4715
Cornwall	431,186	87	1:4956
North Yorkshire	478,427	90	1:5316

## Proposal

An increase in the number of Councillors to 55 would result in a ratio within a range of 1:3905 to 1:4024 (2030 electorate forecasts to be confirmed by the Commission following this submission), compared to the current 1:4715.

The Council has ambitious aspirations for transformation, for place-making and for working with residents, communities and partners to improve outcomes for everybody in Cumberland. The Council should not 'do to' residents.

To achieve this we recognise that we need:

- The strategic leadership capacity to lead a large-scale organisation responsible for all council services in Cumberland, and to transform services to realise the benefits of local government reorganisation and provide excellent and sustainable public services for the future;
- To ensure that decision-making is robust, transparent, inclusive, easy to understand and efficient;
- To enable Councillors to have the time and support to build on the early development of Community Panels to develop our community-based approaches to their maximum potential; alongside the other responsibilities and expectations placed on Councillors;
- To increase the numbers of Councillors on our key regulatory and overview Committees, and ensure they have the time and capacity to prepare, to undertake important training and development, and to contribute fully to the Council's decision-making processes;
- To recognise that the size and geography of Cumberland means that some Members are travelling up to 2 hours each way to attend meetings; and to minimise these burdens as much as possible through use of technology and other means – but understanding the additional time pressures this places on some Councillors in some parts of Cumberland;
- To recognise that many of our Councillors, particularly those representing our larger more rural wards, have to commit significantly more time than others to engage with residents, e.g. meaningfully engaging with up to 15 Parish Councils in one division;
- To recognise that if we are going to continue to be able to attract a diverse range of people to become Councillors in the future, we need to give them the time and resources to fulfil their role alongside other time commitments, e.g. employment, caring responsibilities, etc.

To achieve the above, a relatively small increase in council size to 55 Members is critical to provide the capacity to support high quality decision-making, meaningful engagement and representation, and excellent public service delivery.

### **Other options considered:**

#### **Reducing the number of Councillors**

The Council has considered this option and assessed the impact of a reduction in council size.

The Council's current size is relatively low when compared to similar authorities as set out above. In this context, the Council has in place streamlined governance arrangements. The number of Committees have been streamlined as much as possible, as has membership of committees.

Following the first year of operation since Vesting Day, the Council has identified a number of areas where the aspiration would be to increase the number of committee members – particularly in respect of Planning, and Overview and Scrutiny.

Considering the scope of the Portfolios held by Executive Members, we also consider that reducing the size of the Executive would have negative impacts on the strategic leadership capacity of the Council.

Any measure to reduce the number of non-executive Members of the Council would pose severe risks to the Council's regulatory decision-making and accountability processes.

### **Maintaining the current Council Size**

The Council has considered this option.

As set out above, the Council has identified a number of governance areas that would benefit from a small increase in capacity.

Maintaining current Council size in the long-term poses significant risks to the Council's capacity for transformation, to achieving the Council's aspirations for community-based leadership and working with our communities, and to being able to attract a diverse set of councillors for the future.