

Wokingham Borough Council: Full Council March 2022

Council Size Submission: Template

Wokingham Borough Council

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How to Make a Submission

It is recommended that submissions on future governance arrangements and council size follow the guidance provided and use the format below as a template. Submissions should be treated as an opportunity to focus on the future needs of the council and not simply describe the current arrangements. **Submissions should also demonstrate that alternative council sizes have been considered in drawing up the proposal and why you have discounted them.**

The template allows respondents to enter comments directly under each heading. It is not recommended that responses be unduly long; as a guide, it is anticipated that a 15 to 20-page document using this template should suffice. Individual section length may vary depending on the issues to be explained. Where internal documents are referred to URLs should be provided, rather than the document itself. It is also recommended that a table is included that highlights the key paragraphs for the Commission's attention.

'Good' submissions, i.e. those that are considered to be most robust and persuasive, combine the following *key success components* (as set out in the guidance that accompanies this template):

- Clarity on objectives
- A straightforward and evidence-led style
- An understanding of local place and communities
- An understanding of councillors' roles and responsibilities

About You

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| Full Council March 2022 |
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The Context for your proposal

Your submission gives you the opportunity to examine how you wish to organise and run the council for the next 15 - 20 years. **The consideration of future governance arrangements and council size should be set in the wider local and national policy context.** The Commission expects you to challenge your current arrangements and determine the most appropriate arrangements going forward. In providing context for your submission below, please demonstrate that you have considered the following issues.

- When did your Council last change/reorganise its internal governance arrangements and what impact on effectiveness did that activity have?
- To what extent has transference of strategic and/or service functions impacted on the effectiveness of service delivery and the ability of the Council to focus on its remaining functions?
- Have any governance or capacity issues been raised by any Inspectorate or similar?
- What influence will local and national policy trends likely have on the Council as an institution?
- What impact on the Council's effectiveness will your council size proposal have?

Wokingham Borough is a great place to live and work and as a consequence is growing and will continue to grow into the future. In this context, the Council's approach to its governance arrangements is one of evolution to respond to the changes in the community it serves. The Council formally reviewed our Executive governance arrangements in 2013.

In response to the transfer of Public Health responsibilities, the Council introduced a Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee and a Health and Wellbeing Board.

The recent LGA peer review has found that our governance arrangements are robust but highlighted that the Overview and Scrutiny function could be improved. We are reviewing our O&S function.

There is an ongoing consultation on the electoral cycle. In order to ensure that the Council size is appropriate for either outcome the Council has only considered Council sizes that are divisible by three.

Local Authority Profile

Please provide a short description of the authority and its setting, in particular the local geography, demographics and community characteristics. This should set the scene for the Commission and give it a greater understanding of any current issues. The description should cover all of the following:

- Brief outline of area - are there any notable geographic constraints for example that may affect the review?
- Rural or urban - what are the characteristics of the authority?
- Demographic pressures - such as distinctive age profiles, migrant or transient populations, is there any large growth anticipated?
- Community characteristics – is there presence of “hidden” or otherwise complex deprivation?
- Are there any other constraints, challenges, issues or changes ahead?

Further to providing a description, the Commission will be looking for a submission that demonstrates an understanding of place and communities by putting forth arguments on council size based upon local evidence and insight. For example, how does local geography, demographics and community characteristics impact on councillor casework, workload and community engagement?

Wokingham Borough is a unitary authority in the South East of England. It is situated 30 miles west of London in central Berkshire and has good transport links to the M4 and M3 motorways, Cross Rail, and the Waterloo/Reading line.

The Borough is semi-rural with three large established towns; Wokingham, Woodley and Earley. The Borough has experienced significant housing growth in recent years and this is projected to continue with an additional 4,815 completions by 2028. (Source 2021 5 Year Housing Land Supply)

Development has been focused in four Strategic Development Locations (SDL's). These areas have been in North Wokingham, South Wokingham, Shinfield and Arborfield. The Council has focused on ensuring that these are strong communities not just houses.

The Borough is bounded in the North and North East of the Borough by the river Thames and is bisected East to West by the M4 motorway and the A329M runs through the centre of the Borough. There is a substantial area of green belt in the north of the Borough.

The Council is the largest Unitary Authority in Berkshire with elections by thirds. The total adult population forecast by the ONS projects for the Borough in 2028 is 141,358. The Borough is fully parished (with 17 town and parish councils). The Council currently has 54 Councillors who are elected from 25 wards. There is a mix of three, two and one-member wards. The Conservative group holds a majority of seats (31) and forms the administration. Other seats are held as follows; Liberal Democrat (18), Labour (2), Independent Group (2) and one vacancy.

The ONS forecasts that the Borough's total population will grow from 173,045 in 2020 to 182,846 in 2028. A high proportion (30%) of Wokingham residents are aged between 35-54 but there are fewer young adults. People are living longer and the forecast is for a higher proportion of older residents living in the Borough in future. The number of adults with a learning disability is higher than in other parts of the country. Wokingham is 87% White. While 92% of residents over 50 are white the 20-24 year old population is 31% from ethnic minorities.

The current Councillor demographic is older than the population (73% of Councillors are 55+) and contains a higher proportion of retired people (41% of Councillors are retired). The Council is engaging the community to ensure that Council candidates represent the diversity of the community.

A comparison of relevant electoral data showing Wokingham against other Local Authorities in Berkshire and its CIPFA Statistical Nearest Neighbours is attached as Appendix A to this Submission.

Council Size

The Commission believes that councillors have three broad aspects to their role. These are categorised as: **Strategic Leadership, Accountability (Scrutiny, Regulatory and Partnerships), and Community Leadership**. Submissions should address each of these in turn and provide supporting evidence. Prompts in the boxes below should help shape responses.

Strategic Leadership

Respondents should provide the Commission with details as to how elected members will provide strategic leadership for the authority. Responses should also indicate how many members will be required for this role and why this is justified. **Responses should demonstrate that alternative council sizes have been explored.**

| Topic | | |
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| Governance Model | <i>Key lines of explanation</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>What governance model will your authority operate? e.g. Committee System, Executive or other?</i> ➤ <i>The Cabinet model, for example, usually requires 6 to 10 members. How many members will you require?</i> |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>If the authority runs a Committee system, we want to understand why the number and size of the committees you propose represents the most appropriate for the authority.</i> ➤ <i>By what process does the council aim to formulate strategic and operational policies? How will members in executive, executive support and/or scrutiny positions be involved? What particular demands will this make of them?</i> ➤ <i>Whichever governance model you currently operate, a simple assertion that you want to keep the current structure does not in itself, provide an explanation of why that structure best meets the needs of the council and your communities.</i> |
| Analysis | <p>Wokingham Borough Council has been operating a Leader and Cabinet (Executive) style of governance since 2001, in accordance with the Local Government Act 2000.</p> <p>Full Council</p> <p>All 54 elected Councillors are expected to attend full Council meetings. Meetings are usually held in January, February, March, May, July, September and November. The February meeting is reserved for consideration of the budget and associated financial reports and the May meeting reserved for Annual Council.</p> <p>The main role of full Council is to approve the annual budget and the policies that make up the Council's Policy Framework as well as agreeing changes to the Council's Constitution.</p> <p>At the Annual Council meeting the Mayor and Deputy Mayor are appointed for the forthcoming Municipal Year and Councillors are appointed to committees, panels, working groups etc and outside bodies. In addition, the Leader of Council will be appointed (if applicable) and the Leader will advise the names of those Councillors of the Executive and their respective portfolios.</p> <p>Subject to prior notification Councillors and Councillors of the public can ask questions of Executive Councillors and Chairs of Committees etc and can present petitions.</p> <p>There is also a Special Council Executive Committee which deals with matters of urgency and has delegated authority to exercise all the powers and duties of Council. The Committee comprises of six Councillors,</p> |

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| | | including the Mayor and Deputy Mayor. The Committee meets as and when required. |
| Portfolios | <i>Key lines of explanation</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>How many portfolios will there be?</i> ➤ <i>What will the role of a portfolio holder be?</i> ➤ <i>Will this be a full-time position?</i> ➤ <i>Will decisions be delegated to portfolio holders? Or will the executive/mayor take decisions?</i> |
| | Analysis | <p>The Executive, which usually meets nine times per year, is a single party committee comprising up to 10 Councillors (including the Leader) from the majority party (Conservative) and is chaired by the Leader of Council.</p> <p>The role of the Executive is to make key decisions of the Council within the policy and budget framework of the Council. Decision making is usually undertaken collectively by the Executive, although there are some matters which have been delegated to individual Executive Councillors.</p> <p>Being an Executive Member represents a significant time commitment. During 2021 13 Executive meetings were held, including 5 Extraordinary meetings. There were 64 Executive decisions considered at these meetings and 22 Individual Executive Member decisions taken during this year. In addition, Executive Councillors have regular briefing meetings with the Council's senior leadership team (CLT) and meetings with the Directors and senior staff responsible for services within their portfolios. From the questionnaire responses the average time commitment of an Executive Member was shown to be at least 13 hours a week on top of their role as a Councillor.</p> <p>Executive Councillors liaise with partners and represent the Council externally on several organisations/joint committees/boards and outside bodies. Executive Councillors also attend overview and scrutiny meetings to be held to account for their actions and decisions. These requirements are in addition to their role as a ward councillor.</p> <p>The Executive currently comprises of the Leader and nine Executive Councillors with the following portfolios:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deputy Leader of the Council, Finance and Housing • Business and Economic Development • Children's Services • Environment and Leisure • Health and Wellbeing and Adult Services • Highways and Transport |

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| | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Neighbourhood and Communities • Planning and Enforcement • Resident Services, Communications and Emissions <p>In addition, four Deputy Executive Councillors are appointed to assist the Executive by focusing on particular tasks and projects. In accordance with legislation Deputy Executive Councillors do not have any formal decision-making powers. They are able to attend Executive Councillors and speak or answer questions on behalf of an absent Executive Member. Currently there are four Deputy Executive Councillors who are leading on the following areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equalities, Poverty, the Arts and Climate Emergency • Insight and Change • Health, Wellbeing and Adult Services • Environment and Communities <p>There are currently no committees or sub-committees of the Executive.</p> <p>Given the wide range of services and responsibilities covered by the Council it is believed to be important that each main area has a dedicated Executive Member overseeing the work of that area. It is therefore felt that the number of Executive Councillors should not be reduced but remain at 9 plus the Leader</p> |
| Delegated Responsibilities | <i>Key lines of explanation</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>What responsibilities will be delegated to officers or committees?</i> ➤ <i>How many councillors will be involved in taking major decisions?</i> |
| | Analysis | <p>There is an Officer Scheme of Delegation which is set out in Chapter 11.3 of the Constitution. The majority of decisions, particularly operational matters, are made by officers under delegated powers.</p> <p>Council delegates several responsibilities to Committees.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audit • Standards • Licensing and Appeals • Planning • Overview and Scrutiny • Personnel Board • Health and Wellbeing Board <p>More details on these committees are given below.</p> <p>Major decisions.</p> |

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| | | All councillors are involved in agreeing the policy framework and all items include in it and in setting the budget at meetings of the full Council. They support policy development at overview and scrutiny. Attendance at Council and Committee meetings is consistently high. |
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Accountability

Give the Commission details as to how the authority and its decision makers and partners will be held to account. The Commission is interested in both the internal and external dimensions of this role. **Responses should demonstrate that alternative council sizes have been explored.**

| Topic | |
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| Internal Scrutiny | The scrutiny function of authorities has changed considerably. Some use theme or task-and-finish groups, for example, and others have a committee system. Scrutiny arrangements may also be affected by the officer support available. |
| <i>Key lines of explanation</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>How will decision makers be held to account?</i> ➤ <i>How many committees will be required? And what will their functions be?</i> ➤ <i>How many task and finish groups will there be? And what will their functions be? What time commitment will be involved for members? And how often will meetings take place?</i> ➤ <i>How many members will be required to fulfil these positions?</i> ➤ <i>Explain why you have increased, decreased, or not changed the number of scrutiny committees in the authority.</i> ➤ <i>Explain the reasoning behind the number of members per committee in terms of adding value.</i> |
| Analysis | <p>The role of Overview and Scrutiny is to provide independent ‘critical friend’ challenge and to work with the Council’s Executive and other public service providers for the benefit of the public.</p> <p>Wokingham Borough Council currently has an Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee which comprises of 12 non-Executive Councillors and meets approximately 8 times per year. The Management Committee and the other three Overview and Scrutiny Committees also establish, as required, time limited task and finish groups to undertake reviews on particular matters. Currently there is only one task and finish group in existence, the Tree and Biodiversity Task and Finish Group which is due to finalise its report during this municipal year.</p> <p>During 2021 Overview and Scrutiny undertook two in-depth reviews: one relating to Climate Emergency and the other on the Council’s response to the Covid-19 Pandemic.</p> |

The Management Committee is responsible for agreeing the annual work programmes for itself and the other three Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

The other three Overview and Scrutiny Committees are:

- Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committees – consists of 8 Councillors and meets approximately 5 times per year
- Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee – consists of 10 Councillors and meets approximately and meets approximately 6 times per year
- Community and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee – consists of 8 Councillors and meets approximately 8 times per year. This Committee takes on the role of scrutinising the forthcoming budget each year, which usually necessitates the holding of additional meetings.

The Chairman and Vice Chairman of each of the above Committees are also Councillors of the Management Committee. Given that Executive Councillors and Councillors of the Audit Committee cannot sit on any Overview and Scrutiny Committees and Deputy Executive Councillors cannot sit on the Management Committee or the Overview and Scrutiny Committee that reviews matters relating to the areas they are responsible for it is often difficult to find sufficient Councillors to take up all the Overview and Scrutiny seats, including substitute roles.

The Democratic Services' Team is relatively small therefore although the Council has a Statutory Scrutiny Officer that person also covers other areas of work within the Team as do the Clerks who service the three Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

From the questionnaire responses the average time commitment of Councillors of O&S was an additional 7 hours a week

The LGA peer review found that the Council can strengthen Overview and Scrutiny however the Council does not believe that this will be achieved by reducing the number of Councillors involved in O&S. Benchmarking data relating to the O&S function across Berkshire can be found at Appendix C. This shows that WBC are broadly in line in terms of structure and committee composition. The Council does not feel that a reduced Councillorship would enable it to improve O&S arrangements in the way that that it wishes.

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| Statutory Function | This includes planning, licencing and any other regulatory responsibilities. Consider under each of the headings the extent to which decisions will be delegated to officers. How many members will be required to fulfil the statutory requirements of the council? |
| Planning | <p>Key lines of explanation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>What proportion of planning applications will be determined by members?</i> ➤ <i>Has this changed in the last few years? And are further changes anticipated?</i> ➤ <i>Will there be area planning committees? Or a single council-wide committee?</i> ➤ <i>Will executive members serve on the planning committees?</i> ➤ <i>What will be the time commitment to the planning committee for members?</i> |
| | <p>Wokingham Borough Council has one Planning Committee which carries out functions relating to town and country planning (including the determination of planning applications), highways and public rights of way which have not been delegated to Officers. For political balance reasons the Planning Committee has been increased from 9-11 Councillors and meets on a monthly basis. Executive Councillors can sit on the Planning Committee and there are two who do so this Municipal Year.</p> <p>Most planning applications are delegated to Officers for decision with only 2.8% of planning applications received by the Council being determined by the Planning Committee in 2021. This figure has been consistent over several years and there are currently no plans to change the delegation arrangements.</p> <p>In addition to attending Committee meetings Councillors of the Planning Committee also attend site visits as required and often have significant reports and plans to review prior to every meeting. The average time spent by Councillors was 7 hours per week.</p> <p>The current Councillorship is at the lower end of the Berkshire benchmarks as can be seen in Appendix C. The Councillorship of the Planning Committee could be reduced back to 9, subject to political balance requirements, which might shorten the length of meetings, however it would be unlikely to reduce the workload of its Councillors.</p> <p>There is also a Commons Registrations Committee which comprises the same membership as the Planning Committee and only meets as and when required. This Committee has not met since 2018.</p> <p>Due to the geography of the Borough area planning committees would not be suitable. There is no natural north/south or east/west split in the Borough. To reflect the</p> |

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| | | communities that we have at least 3 sub-committees would be required and this would result in more Councillors being required. |
| Licensing | Key lines of explanation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>How many licencing panels will the council have in the average year?</i> ➤ <i>And what will be the time commitment for members?</i> ➤ <i>Will there be standing licencing panels, or will they be ad-hoc?</i> ➤ <i>Will there be core members and regular attendees, or will different members serve on them?</i> |
| | Analysis | <p>The Licensing and Appeals Committee, which comprises of 15 Councillors and meets four times per year, is responsible for carrying out functions relating to licensing and registration as set out in the relevant legislation.</p> <p>In addition, there is a Licensing and Appeals Hearings Sub-Committee which determines hearings and appeals held under the Licensing Act 2003 and other relevant legislation. The Sub-Committee consists of three Councillors drawn from the Licensing and Appeals Committee and meets as and when required. In 2021 the Hearings Sub-Committee only met on three occasions, in 2020 on one occasion and in 2019 four occasions.</p> <p>The Committee was set up in 2003 and it was agreed at that time that given the number of licensing hearings envisaged that it would be prudent to have 15 Councillors on the Committee.</p> |
| Other Regulatory Bodies | Key lines of explanation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>What will they be, and how many members will they require?</i> ➤ <i>Explain the number and membership of your Regulatory Committees with respect to greater delegation to officers.</i> |
| | Analysis | <p>Audit Committee</p> <p>The Audit Committee provides independent assurance over the governance, risk management and the systems of internal control operating within the Council. It oversees the Council's financial reporting processes and approves the Council's financial statements and the Annual Governance Statement.</p> <p>The Audit Committee consists of seven non-Executive Councillors and meets five times per year.</p> <p>The Council has considered amalgamating Audit with the Standards Committee but feel that this would dilute the critical role both committees play in ensuring good governance.</p> <p>Standards Committee</p> <p>The Standards Committee's role is to promote high standards of behaviour amongst Councillors from both the Borough Council and Town and Parish Councils. In addition, it monitors the operation of various codes of conduct and</p> |

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| | | <p>procedures, including the Councillors' and Officers' Codes of Conduct.</p> <p>The Standards Committee currently consists of seven Council Councillors and three co-opted non-voting Town and Parish Councillors and is scheduled to meet four times a year.</p> <p>Personnel Board</p> <p>Personnel Board is responsible for discharging the Council's functions relating to the appointment, dismissal or disciplinary action in respect of certain Council Officers and considers major reorganisations within the Council as well as determining certain requests for early retirement or redundancy.</p> <p>Personnel Board consists of seven Councillors and meets as and when required. 16 substitutes are also appointed to the Board who can substitute for Board Councillors when the appointment, dismissal or disciplinary action of an Officer is being considered. New processes for the appointment of permanent Assistant Directors, which are currently under consideration, are likely to increase the workload and number of meetings that Councillors of the Board are required to attend.</p> <p>Wokingham Borough Wellbeing Board</p> <p>The Wellbeing Board identifies the current and future social care and health needs of the Borough to provide a framework for the commissioning of health and social care services as well as driving integrated working between commissioners of health services, Public Health and social care services, for the purposes of advancing the health and wellbeing of Wokingham Borough residents.</p> <p>The Wellbeing Board consists of four Council Councillors and a number of outside representatives and meets on a monthly basis. Half of these meetings are formal meetings of the Board and half are informal meetings.</p> |
| External Partnerships | <p>Service delivery has changed for councils over time, and many authorities now have a range of delivery partners to work with and hold to account.</p> | |
| <i>Key lines of explanation</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>Will council members serve on decision-making partnerships, sub-regional, regional or national bodies? In doing so, are they able to take decisions/make commitments on behalf of the council?</i> ➤ <i>How many councillors will be involved in this activity? And what is their expected workload? What proportion of this work is undertaken by portfolio holders?</i> ➤ <i>What other external bodies will members be involved in? And what is the anticipated workload?</i> | |

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| Analysis | <p>Councillors provide community leadership in a number of ways. The Council appoints to the following Panels/Working Groups/Joint Committees and various other bodies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adoption Panel – 1 Member • Adopt Thames Valley Regional Adoption Agency Governance Board – 1 Member • Berkshire Local Transport Body – 1 Member and 1 substitute • Borough Parish Liaison Forum – 5 Councillors and 3 substitutes • Community Safety Partnership – 2 Councillors • Constitution Review Working Group – 4 Councillors • Fostering Panel – 1 Member • Highwood Management Conference – 2 Councillors • Joint Public Protection Committee – 2 Councillors and 1 substitute • Joint Waste Disposal Board – 2 Councillors • Schools Forum - 1 Member • Secure Accommodation Panel – 1 Member plus substitutes • Tenant and Landlord Improvement Panel – 4 Councillors • Thames Valley Police and Crime Panel – 1 Member and 1 substitute • Wokingham Learning Disability Partnership – 1 Member <p>Councillors also sit on outside bodies. The Council appoints 46 Councillors to 34 outside bodies and each Member appointed is expected to report back to the Council on an annual basis on the activity of that body. WBC is keen to maintain and enhance its role in leading the community and would not want to reduce the level of Member involvement.</p> <p>39% of those appointed to outside bodies are Executive Councillors. Executive Councillors also sit on sub regional and regional partnerships</p> <p>Currently 89% of the appointments are Councillors of the Conservative Group and 11% are Councillors from the Opposition Groups.</p> <p>The Council owns four local authority owned Housing companies where Councillors sit on the boards as Non-Executive Directors. Three Councillors sit on the Board of WBC (Holdings) Limited which is the parent company that provides strategic direction and performance oversight on behalf of the Council (as shareholder) over the operation of the remaining three companies in the group. Two Councillors are on the board of Loddon Homes Limited (registered housing provider), one Councillor is on the board of Berry</p> |
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| | <p>Brook Homes Limited (private housing provider) and Wokingham Housing Limited (housing developer).</p> <p>Wokingham also jointly owns three Adult Social Care companies with the Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead. There is Member representation on the Boards of Optalis Holdings Ltd and Optalis Ltd</p> <p>Councillors spend an average of 11 hours a month on their role as a Non-Executive Director. These roles are currently unremunerated by the companies. Given the level of risk around the services to residents that our companies deliver and the critical role of Council NED's in ensuring the Council's interests are understood by the LATCo's the Council does not feel that reducing representation would be prudent.</p> |
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Community Leadership

The Commission understands that there is no single approach to community leadership and that members represent, and provide leadership to, their communities in different ways. The Commission wants to know how members are required to provide effective community leadership and what support the council offers them in this role. For example, does the authority have a defined role and performance system for its elected members? And what support networks are available within the council to help members in their duties? The Commission also wants to see a consideration of **how the use of technology and social media by the council as a whole, and by councillors individually, will affect casework, community engagement and local democratic representation. Responses should demonstrate that alternative council sizes have been explored.**

| Topic | | Description |
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| Community Leadership | <i>Key lines of explanation</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>In general terms how do councillors carry out their representational role with electors?</i> ➤ <i>Does the council have area committees and what are their powers?</i> ➤ <i>How do councillors seek to engage with their constituents? Do they hold surgeries, send newsletters, hold public meetings or maintain blogs?</i> ➤ <i>Are there any mechanisms in place that help councillors interact with young people, those not on the electoral register, and/or other minority groups and their representative bodies?</i> ➤ <i>Are councillors expected to attend community meetings, such as parish or resident's association meetings? If so, what is their level of involvement and what roles do they play?</i> ➤ <i>Explain your approach to the Area Governance structure. Is your Area Governance a decision-making forum or an advisory board? What is their relationship with locally elected members and Community bodies such as Town and Parish Councils? Looking forward how could they be improved to enhance decision-making?</i> |

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| | Analysis | <p>The Council does not currently have area Committees.</p> <p>Councillors are proactive in engaging with their constituents. 49% of Councillors hold regular local surgeries, 83% write blogs and newsletters and 94% go door-to-door (spending on average 2 hours a week). Councillors are high profile in their communities and are actively engaged with electors. 62% of Councillors spend more than 3 hours a week responding to contacts from residents. In addition Councillors “walk the ward” identifying, reporting and escalating issues with the Council and other partners.</p> <p>Wokingham is part of the Unicef Child Friendly Community Programme and places the voice of the child at the heart of policy making. The Borough has a youth MP and a Youth Council which includes secondary school pupils from each of the Borough’s Schools. This provides a formal route for young people to engage with the Council. Wokingham has also established a Residents’ Equality Forum that promotes equality, diversity and inclusion and enables underrepresented groups to engage with Councillors.</p> <p>41% of Councillors are also town and parish councillors so provide a vital link between towns and parishes and the Borough Council. Councillors also attend Neighbourhood Action Groups and identify, escalate and resolve issues.</p> <p>The Borough is fully parished. The Council has a Town and Parish Forum where Borough and Town and Parish Councillors meet to formally discuss matters of mutual interest.</p> |
| Casework | <i>Key lines of explanation</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>How do councillors deal with their casework? Do they pass it on to council officers? Or do they take a more in-depth approach to resolving issues?</i> ➤ <i>What support do members receive?</i> ➤ <i>How has technology influenced the way in which councillors work? And interact with their electorate?</i> ➤ <i>In what ways does the council promote service users’ engagement/dispute resolution with service providers and managers rather than through councillors?</i> |
| | Analysis | <p>For 37% of Councillors Individual case work takes between 3 and 5 hours a week, with 31% spending between 1 and 2 hours a week. This involves speaking to residents, officers and others to identify resolutions to residents’ problems. The approach varies greatly depending on the matter. More complex matters require an in-depth approach to supporting complex or cross cutting issues that require a whole resident perspective.</p> <p>WBC have a small Democratic Services’ Team whose focus is mainly on effective governance and committee management. Councillors are supported in the high-volume areas of work. For example, the Highways Team have an</p> |

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| | | <p>email address for Councillors to raise queries directly. There are two political assistants that provide support to the Conservative and Liberal Democrat groups.</p> <p>The use of Teams during the pandemic has supported Councillors to attend more meetings including those held on the same night at different locations. Teams has also had beneficial impacts on those with work or caring responsibilities. However due to the Local Government Act requirement for decisions to be made in person there is limited ability in the current legislative environment to hold meetings on Teams.</p> <p>Councillors receive an IT allowance as part of their Basic Allowance which is conditional on them being accessible via email and other electronic means. All Councillors are signed up to this.</p> <p>Social media has increased the accessibility of Councillors and more enquiries are directed to Councillors via these routes. Residents often expect a rapid response to their queries.</p> <p>The Council has a strong approach to communications, uses engagement software to consult with residents and utilises service user groups to improve its services. The Council has a Customer Services Strategy, including customer feedback mechanisms and a complaints procedure that residents utilise. However due to the high level of community engagement amongst Councillors residents often see them as the face of the Council and engage directly with them on service issues and dispute resolution.</p> |
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Other Issues

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

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

Summary

In following this template respondents should have been able to provide the Commission with a robust and well-evidenced case for their proposed council size; one which gives a clear explanation as to the governance arrangements and number of councillors required to represent the authority in the future.

Use this space to summarise the proposals and indicate other options considered. Explain why these alternatives were not appropriate in terms of their ability to deliver effective Strategic Leadership, Accountability (Scrutiny, Regulation and Partnerships), and Community Leadership.

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| <p>The Council has considered four options for the size of the Council.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Option A – 48 Councillors |
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- Option B – 51 Councillors
- Option C – 54 Councillors
- Option D – 57 Councillors

Given that the ONS forecasts the population will increase by 9,800 there is an increased workload on Councillors. To retain the current Councillor to Resident ratio the number of Councillors would need to increase to 57 Councillors.

In terms of the electorate per Councillor our current ratio of 2,436 is marginally less than the Berkshire average of 2,496 but factoring the growth of the electorate to 2028 the current figure of 54 Councillors would give WBC an average number of Councillors. Although the Council has considered the CIPFA Statistical Nearest Neighbours benchmarking to inform its work, it feels that due to the large variation in electorate (29,990-377,981), geographical areas (109km squared – 3,485 km squared) and number of Councillors (27-98) that this information provides a guide but is not definitive.

Using the benchmarks with our neighbours as a guide the Council has evaluated the impact that the changes would have on the governance of the authority and the workload for Councillors. The Council believes that allowing the increase in the ratio of Councillors to Residents to the Berkshire average would enable Councillors to still perform their role effectively.

The consensus amongst Councillors is that the current workload of Councillors is high. 75% of Councillors felt that they would not be able to dedicate more time to the role and among those that could only one (11% was employed full time). This reflects the active role that they play in their communities and beyond. Councillors play a significant role in the leadership role in the authority. They lead the Council's engagement with the community and ensure that it is able to influence the Berkshire, Regional and National policy in the areas that matter most for our residents. Many 41% of Councillors of the Council are also Town and Parish Councillors and provide a strong link to the local community. Councillors are keen to continue to perform this important role.

The Council is concerned that an increase in workload for Councillors would reduce the diversity of candidates. Councillors are conscious of the age demographic of the current Councillors and are keen to ensure the diversity of Councillors is preserved and that those with full time jobs and/or caring responsibilities are still able to represent the community.

The Council believes that 54 Councillors would support our commitment to robust governance arrangements while managing the workload for Councillors.