

Electoral Review

**Wiltshire Council Submission to the Local Government
Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE)
Preliminary Stage - Council Size - 20 February 2018**

LD Amended Draft

Summary

1. That a council size of ~~99-86~~ members be submitted to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England ("The Commission). This number is considered to be the most appropriate to enable Wiltshire Council ("The Council") to provide effective and convenient local government within Wiltshire, taking into account the Council's governance arrangements, its regulatory and scrutiny functions and the representational role of councillors, in particular in relation to the community area system.

Introduction

2. On 15 September 2017 the Commission informed the Council of its intention to carry out an electoral review in its 2018/19 work programme.
3. This was because, as of 1 December 2016, 25 of the 98 electoral divisions in Wiltshire had a variance from the average division greater than 10% and 2 had a variance of more than 30%. The last review of Wiltshire Council by the Commission was in 2008 in preparation for the first unitary elections in 2009.
4. The aim of the preliminary stage of the electoral review is to determine the total number of councillors to be elected to the Council from the next elections in 2021. The figure will be determined after considering the governance arrangements of the Council, its scrutiny function, and the representational role of councillors in the local community, and consideration of the total number of councillors needed to most effectively take decisions, hold decision makers to account, discharge responsibilities and effectively represent local groups and people.
5. Additionally, a series of community governance reviews were conducted between 1 April 2014 and 18 October 2016, of a number of town and parish council boundaries and warding arrangements within parishes. A small number of reviews were not completed in advance of the May 2017 Local Elections and have been deferred for consideration while the electoral review of Wiltshire Council is ongoing.

Background

Local Authority Profile

6. Wiltshire Council's administrative area covers 3255km² of the Ceremonial County of Wiltshire, with a population of 488,409¹. The rest of the county is administered by Swindon Borough Council, who do not form part of this electoral review.
7. Wiltshire Council was formed in 2009 with the merger of Wiltshire County Council and four district councils: West Wiltshire, North Wiltshire, Kennet and Salisbury. The Council operates a strong Leader and Cabinet model of governance, along with a system of community areas for local engagement and decision making. This was a reduction from 244 councillors across the five councils to 98, and over £120m in savings and efficiencies have been achieved since 2010. As noted in the 2017 LGA Peer Review:

"Wiltshire Council used the opportunity of becoming a unitary council in 2009 to establish a strong and steadfast focus on establishing a modern council and delivering better outcomes for its communities. The creation of one council offered significant opportunities to rationalise assets, including the programme to reduce from 98 offices into 3 main administrative hubs, creating significant savings and headroom to invest in its community infrastructure plans and ambitions"

¹ Office of National Statistics Mid-Year 2016 estimates

8. Elections are held on a four-yearly cycle to 98 single-member divisions. The most recent election was on 2 May 2017, and the current political composition of the council is as follows:

Conservative:	68
Liberal Democrat:	20
Independent :	7
Labour:	3

9. Figures on the number of candidates at each election are as follows:

2009: 353 candidates stood for election to 98 divisions.
2013: 308 candidates stood for election and 6 divisions were uncontested. 70 councillors were the same as those elected in 2009.
2017: 322 candidates stood for election and 1 division was uncontested. 69 councillors were the same as those elected in 2013.

10. There are 253 town and parish councils within the Wiltshire Council area, the second highest number in the country. With most major urban areas around the edge of the council area, separated by Salisbury Plain in the centre and south, many parishes and communities are distant from the major hub towns and each other, emphasising the need for a strong community focus for representation and decision making.
11. There are 5 parliamentary constituencies within the Wiltshire Council area: Chippenham, Salisbury, Devizes, North Wiltshire and South West Wiltshire.
12. Wiltshire Council is the 8th largest local authority in England by population, and the 3rd largest planning authority by applications processed. It is home to the 3rd highest number of people aged 65+ and as a consequence adult social care is a particular challenge moving forward. The Council has nearly 4,500kms of road across the Council area. Over the last three years the Council has carried out additional work to resurface around 15% of the network per annum in order to manage and reduce the backlog of work.
13. Wiltshire is home to a significant military presence, and as part of the army rebasing programme an additional 4000 troops and their families stationed in Germany are due to move to Wiltshire by 2019, requiring significant development of housing, infrastructure and amenities in several areas and impacting on electoral division arrangements. Approximately 30,000 military personnel live and serve in Wiltshire, 6.4% of the population. Military-Civilian Integration forms a key part of the Council's goal of strong communities.
14. Employment levels in Wiltshire are above average, and though above average economically, significant pockets of urban and rural deprivation exist. Wiltshire is typified by the number of global innovators who have invested and prospered in the Swindon and Wiltshire area such as Honda, Intel and Dyson as well as the presence of a number of innovation-driven sectors including health and life sciences, pharmaceuticals, mobile telecommunications, digital and high value manufacturing in addition to the more established agricultural and tourism sectors. Wiltshire is home to some of the most ancient monuments in the United Kingdom with the World Heritage Sites at Stonehenge and Avebury as well as other Neolithic sites. There are also three Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, over 240 conservation areas and over 16,000 listed buildings in the Council area.

Electoral Review Committee

15. On 17 October 2017 the Council established an Electoral Review Committee (“The Committee”) to progress the review on its behalf, and to formulate recommendations on any submissions to be made to the Commission during the review process. The Committee’s terms of reference are attached at Appendix A.
16. The Committee is comprised of 10 elected members appointed in accordance with the rules of political proportionality as follows:

Conservative:	6
Liberal Democrat:	2
Independent:	1
Labour:	1
17. The Committee is supported by an officer project board headed by one of the Council’s four Corporate Directors.
18. The Committee met on the following occasions: 12 December 2017, 11 January, 25 January and 7 February 2018. Committee workshops were also held on 20 December 2017 and 3 January 2018. Previously all elected members were invited to a briefing on the review from the Commission, which was held on 28 November 2017. The Committee’s report and recommendations were subject to endorsement by Full Council on 20 February 2018.

Main Considerations

19. In developing its recommendation and proposal the Committee had regard to the following considerations and data:

Governance Arrangements

Cabinet

20. As noted in paragraph 8 the Council operates a Leader and Cabinet style of governance. The Leader plus 7 Cabinet Members (within a maximum of 9) comprise the Executive of the council, with the Portfolios currently as follows:
 - Leader (including Economic Development)
 - Adult Social Care, Public Health and Public Protection
 - Children, Education and Skills
 - Communications, Communities, Leisure and Libraries
 - Corporate Services, Heritage, Housing, Arts and Tourism
 - Finance, Procurement, ICT and Operational Assets
 - Highways, Transport and Waste
 - Spatial Planning, Development Management and Property
21. Cabinet meets at least 11 times per year and, alongside two former Cabinet committees, met for 99 hours across 73 meetings in the council term 2013-17. There is no anticipation within the Council’s 10-year business plan that there will be a change from a Leader and Cabinet model.
22. Cabinet Members give political direction to officers working within their Portfolios and support them in the implementation of policy. They are accountable for individual delegated decisions and performance within their Portfolio both internally and to partners and the community. Approximately 40 delegated decisions are taken per year in total. As part of the business plan commitment for flexible and efficient decision making at the right level, whether Cabinet, Cabinet Members, Committees, Full Council, Area Board, or

delegated to officers, it is expected that this number will increase in future years. In response to a councillor survey, Cabinet Members worked an additional 27 hours per week on average on top of the hours for the basic role of a councillor.

23. In addition to the Cabinet Members, who are the formal members of the Executive, 16 'Portfolio Holders' assist the Cabinet Members. The current positions cover:
- Leisure and Sport
 - Communities and Youth
 - Libraries, Campuses and Hubs
 - Education and Skills
 - Children's Safeguarding
 - Disabled Children and Adults
 - Flooding and Military Covenant
 - Heritage, Arts and Tourism
 - Adult Social Care Transformation
 - Public Health and Public Protection
 - IT and Digitisation
 - Housing Stock
 - Transport
 - Streetscene
 - Waste
 - Strategic Highways, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, European Structural Investment Fund, Canals and Military-Civilian Integration
24. The Council sees the non-decision making Portfolio Holders as an essential part of ensuring a member-led authority. Their role includes working with services and external partners and other activities such as press communication and public representation. A councillor survey indicated that this represents an average of at least 12 hours on top of the basic role of a councillor.
25. The Independent Remuneration Panel on Members' Allowances noted in [2013](#) during a review that they were "*an additional resource providing extra capacity to Cabinet Members' work, undertaking in-depth work with Service Directors and also functioning as an extra contact point for non-executive Councillors*" and considered that the role was "*a sensible addition to the structure*". A review by the Independent Remuneration Panel in [2017](#) maintained the level of special responsibility allowance for the role, recognising their importance to the structure, with the remuneration for Portfolio Holders exceeded only by that for the roles of Cabinet Members, the Chairman of the Council, and the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee.
26. The number of Portfolio Holders is not fixed but has ranged from 11-16 councillors. The principal impact on other council governance is that Portfolio Holders, like Cabinet Members, cannot serve on scrutiny committees, and this therefore requires sufficient numbers of non-executive councillors to undertake appropriate and extensive scrutiny activities.
27. The Council is strongly member led, with a Local Government Association Peer Review in 2017 commenting on the political leadership as strong, visible and accessible to partners, public and staff, and setting a clear direction for the Council. The Council maintains this is in part a result of the presence of Portfolio Holders assisting the formal executive membership, with the LGA Peer Review commenting:

“There is great strength in the people and processes underpinning the political leadership of the council. We were particularly impressed with the Cabinet and portfolio holders’ structure which is strong, inclusive, increases capacity and provides opportunity for succession planning”.

Community Areas and Area Boards

28. The Wiltshire Council area incorporates 20 community areas as shown in the map at [Appendix B](#), focused on natural communities with strong senses of local identity. This community area system has, with minor variations, been employed since 1997 by county and district councils following historical analysis as summarised in [Appendix C](#) (from the 2008 submission). As noted by the Commission in its [July 2008](#) recommendations, it has *“been used as the basis of all community and service delivery planning work”* as well as the focus for local engagement with town and parish councils, public bodies and the role of councillors as leaders of their local communities.
29. Three community areas, owing to their low populations and lack of a significant centre for South West Wiltshire are combined into a single area board, meaning a total of 18 Area Boards. The boards range from 3-10 members.
30. The community area system was described as a *“fundamental building block”* in the successful bid for unitary status and the 2017 LGA Peer Review noted:
- “The council has a well-established and respected community area model with 18 Area Boards which reinforces their ‘strong communities’ mantra. Led by Wiltshire councillors, but managed in partnership with the local key public services partners they are active forums which meet 8 weekly and focus on tackling local issues and delivering local solutions.*
- Each community area is furnished with a subset of the joint strategic needs assessment providing a detailed evidence base on which each area consults and sets local priorities. This then helps focus activity on those things that matter most to local communities based on robust facts...*
- It was the team’s view that this sound basis of an area model could be used to influence still further activities to support ‘place based’ delivery of services so that co-ordination of activities between communities, parishes and towns across a larger geographical footprint can be exploited to the full”.*
31. Area Boards comprising local unitary councillors within a community area have delegated executive authority to determine £1.3m of funding in 2016. This funding includes community grants, local highways, youth services, health and wellbeing, older peoples’ services, digital inclusion and Voluntary Community Sector. It is also a strategic priority of the business plan to devolve further powers and responsibilities to local areas, thereby increasing the workload and responsibility of local members as well as increasing the significance of the community area.
32. Additionally, the areas boards influence the current net council spend of £327m through local consultation on major issues, for example:
- Salisbury area board managed the £3.1m improvements to Salisbury Market Place, working alongside its contractor. The area board asked for local people to provide their input into revamping this important area in the city and the improvements were developed in consultation with a Market Place working group, shaped by more than 1,500 responses to the proposals.
 - Corsham area board managed the design and construction of the £14m

Springfield Campus. The board worked alongside key stakeholders, users and Midas Construction to develop a scheme that best reflected the wishes of local people. The new facility has been highly acclaimed with visits from other local authorities and government ministers.

- In 2014, the Council devolved responsibility for the provision positive leisure time activities for young people to the area boards. Since that time, the area boards have supported nearly three times the number of young people each year than had previously engaged with the Council's youth centres and at the same time facilitated savings of £800k per annum. As an example, Salisbury area board has worked with Salisbury Rocks CIC to provide a new £100k music facility in an underground WW2 bunker in the City.

33. The Council, recognising the continuing and increasing significance of the community area structure to council governance, operation, service delivery and engagement with partners and public, is strongly of the view that any new divisions should be contained inasmuch as is possible within the existing community area boundaries. It was recognised and accepted that in some community areas this would inevitably require alterations to existing division boundaries in order to achieve electoral equality.
34. In the Council's 2008 submission, which was broadly accepted by the Commission, it was argued that the most effective and democratic arrangement would be for a minimum of 4 unitary councillors per Area Board. In recognition of the need for overall electoral equality it was accepted that 2 of the 18 Area Boards would only be able to have 3 members, and substitution arrangements were put in place in the interests of administrative efficiency of decision making. They are the neighbouring boards of Pewsey and Tidworth, who share many characteristics, including being large areas with many parish councils, with similar population sizes.
35. ~~Given Whilst acknowledging~~ the increasing devolved powers granted to community areas via the Area Boards, and their continued focus as the hub of local decisions and engagement for individual councillors, the ~~Committee Council~~ considered that a reduction any overall in council size to 86 and the consequent which increased in the number of 3-member area boards would unacceptably impact the integrity of the community area system and increase the risk of boards not being quorate for determination of executive allocated funding by two would be acceptable.
36. Furthermore, the Council considered that other community areas which were neighbouring and had similar characteristics, could be joined together, where appropriate, such as already happens in the case of Pewsey and Tidworth. ~~the Committee considered that while alternative arrangements were in place for Pewsey and Tidworth, it would not be democratically appropriate for local decision making or reflect the community appropriately to join together other community areas which were not neighbouring and/or lacked such similar characteristics.~~
37. ~~The Committee, after initial consideration of the evidence, examined the impact on community area boards for various council sizes as well as whether electoral equality could be acceptably achieved within those community areas at various council sizes².~~
38. ~~The evidence demonstrated that by distributing Area Board councillor numbers based on the average council electorate as projected to 2024 per community area, any number below 99 would result in Marlborough Area Board dropping to 3 councillors. Additionally, by the same method, any number below 87 would result in one board, Pewsey, dropping~~

² After initial consideration of the evidence the Committee directed the Project team to work within a council size range of 93-99, before determining the optimum size of 99

to only 2 councillors and therefore requiring its absorption or abolition as it would be unable to meet the requirements of quoracy for decision making.

39. ~~At 92 councillors, Bradford on Avon would drop to 3 councillors, with no similarly constituted community areas with which to create appropriate neighbouring arrangements such as exists with Pewsey and Tidworth. At 102 councillors Tidworth would obtain another councillor, as would Pewsey at 122. While this would raise them to the preferred four councillors, the Council did not feel other evidence in relation to council governance suggested such an increase was justified or necessary.~~

40-37. ~~At 99-86 councillors it is not possible for all divisions across all area boards to be within 10-15% of the electoral average using the projected electorate for 2024. Consequently, appropriate changes to existing division boundaries will have to be made in the next stage of the boundary revision process. In three Area Boards, it is acknowledged it would result in up to 11 divisions with such variations even if perfect equality is achieved within that area. By comparison, the divisions created by the Commission in 2009 included 1 division at 17% from the average, and 14 divisions between 10-15%. Minor changes to community areas could also reduce the level of variance further.~~

Table 1

Number of Councillors Per Area Board

Area Board Variance (%)

Council Size	98	9986	Area Board Variance (%)	
	98	99	98	99
Area Boards	Cllrs Area	Per Board	% per Area	Variance Board Division
Amesbury	7	76	-3	-2
Bradford on Avon	4	43	-7	-6
Calne	5	54	-4	-3
Chippenham	10	108	-4	-3
Corsham	4	4	11	12
Devizes	6	6	7	8
Malmesbury	4	4	2	3
Marlborough	3	43	16	12
Melksham	6	65	4	5
Pewsey	3	3	-6	-5
Royal Wootton Bassett and Cricklade	6	65	2	3
Salisbury	9	98	-5	-4
South West	5	54	-6	-5
Southern	5	54	-5	-4
Tidworth	3	3	12	13
Trowbridge	9	98	0	1
Warminster	5	54	2	3

Westbury	4	4	4	3
Average Voters Per Division	4246	<u>4203</u> <u>4838</u>	4246	4203

Council and Committee Overview

41.38. Full Council has 4-5 scheduled meetings per year and has met for 110 hours across 20 meetings in the council term 2013-17.

42.39. At its first meeting in 2009 the Council allocated 172 committee places, including joint committees with Swindon Borough Council and others. As of the end of 2017, the Council has allocated 174 committee places, demonstrating stability and robustness of council governance during this period. The schedule of committees based on current political proportionality is detailed below:

Table 2 - Schedule of Committee Places

Council Committee	Total Number of Places for Elected Members	Conservative Group Allocation (68 seats)	Liberal Democrat Group Allocation (20 seats)	Labour Group Allocation (3 seats)	Independent Group Allocation (7 seats)
Strategic Planning	11	8	2	0	1
Northern Area Planning	11	8	3	0	0
Southern Area Planning	11	7	1	1	2
Eastern Area Planning	8	7	0	0	1
Western Area Planning	11	7	3	0	1
Licensing	12	8	3	0	1
OS Management	15	10	3	1	1
Children's Select	13	9	3	0	1
Environment Select	13	8	3	1	1
Health Select	13	9	3	0	1
Standards	11	8	2	0	1
Police and Crime Panel	7	5	2	0	0
Audit	11	8	2	1	0
Appeals	8	5	2	0	1
Staffing Policy	9	6	2	1	0
Officer Appointments	5	4	1	0	0
Pension Fund	5	4	1	0	0
TOTALS:	174	121	36	5	12

43.40. Committee places are appointed in accordance with the principles of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989, being to prevent domination by a single group, to ensure a majority group has a majority on all committees, aggregating all committee places and allocating fair shares, and ensuring as far as practicable fairness on each committee.

44.41. Chairmanship of committees is determined by Full Council at its annual meeting, with the exception of the scrutiny committees, police and crime panel and area boards, who appoint their chairs at their first meeting after the annual meeting of Council.

45.42. Excluding members from the calculation who cannot serve on some committees,

such as scrutiny committees, each councillor is appointed, on average, to 3.1 committees as a full member and 1.9 committees as a substitute. Data collected for the review indicated councillors were expected to attend on average over 23 formal committee meetings per year.

46-43. Details of the operation and structure of each committee is provided in the following sections, but the table overleaf indicates the Council's recommended view on minimum number of councillors required to fulfil roles on these committees.

47-44. The calculation has been made by identifying unique roles that are required such as Leader, Chairman and Vice-Chairman of Council, Cabinet Members and Portfolio (in part) Holders, before moving on to the consideration of committee places. A factoring element is applied to allow for these unique roles and to take into account that each councillor will fill several roles.

48-45. The calculation also recognises that as detailed in paras 64-71 the current scrutiny function has been operating effectively and therefore at least 48 councillors are required to fulfill that function. At least 24 members are then required to operate regulatory functions, particularly planning due to its significant and highly visible activities. It is of great interest to the public and councillors and requires sufficient distribution of members to ensure decisions are taken at the appropriately local level. The remaining committee places can then be filled by those already involved in other committees.

Table 3 - Council Elected Member Numbers (to operate a functional council)

	<i>a</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>c = a x b</i>	<i>d</i>
	Committee Places and roles	Factor %	Calculated Members (rounded)	Cumulative Total
Leader	1	1	1	1
Chairman	1	1	1	2
Vice-Chairman	1	40.4	40.4	32.4
Cabinet	9	40.9	98	4210.4
Portfolio Holders	12	40.3	3.642	2414
Overview & Scrutiny Management	15	1	15	3929
Children's select	13	0.9	12	5441
Environment select	13	0.8	10	561
Health select	13	0.8	10	6172
Strategic planning	11	0.8	9	8470
North area planning	11	0.3	3	7384
Southern area planning	11	0.3	3	7687
Eastern area planning	8	0.3	2	7889
Western area planning	11	0.3	3	8193
Licensing	12	0.3	4	8596
Audit	11	0.1	1	8697
Standards	11	0	0	8697
Appeals	8	0	0	8697
Pensions	5	0	0	8697
Staffing policy	9	0	0	8697
Officer appointments	5	0	0	8697
Police & Crime	7	0	0	8697
Area Boards	97	0	0	8697

~~49-46.~~ While building from a base of 0 this calculation arrives at a minimum number of councillors of ~~9786~~, but needs to be considered in the context of other relevant factors. As explained in paragraphs 28-~~4138~~, the well-established community areas should not be altered and divisions should not cross community areas, as far as is possible. The case is also made that 4 members are ~~needed-preferred~~ for an efficient and functioning area board system, but with appropriate arrangements between neighbouring Area Boards it is proven and practicable for a small number of Area Boards to operate successfully with 3 and members. Therefore the evidence suggests a number of ~~99-86~~ becomes more suitable in respect of local community governance and representation. ~~Additionally, demonstrated in Table 1, electoral equality is more appropriately maintained at 99 councillors.~~

Regulatory - Planning and Licensing

~~50-47.~~ The Council has five planning committees: A strategic planning committee covering applications defined as significant countywide, and four area planning committees to enable more localised decision making. For the council term 2013-2017 the planning committees met for a combined total of 489 hours across 225 meetings.

~~51-48.~~ All the committees are presently scheduled to meet 12-13 times per year. 52 committee places are allocated to the planning committees out of the total of 174, in recognition of the importance of the planning function to residents and the challenges involved in supporting appropriate development whilst protecting the rich natural and historical environment of the county.

~~52-49.~~ The most recent available figures indicate that 96% of planning application decisions were taken by officers under delegated powers³.

~~53-50.~~ The Licensing Committee, comprised of 12 members, meets quarterly to oversee all licensing functions that are the responsibility of the Council. Sub-Committees of three members are arranged on an ad hoc basis to determine applications and reviews. For the Council term 2013-2017 there were 45 sub-committee hearings in addition to 12 hours of the full committee.

Governance Committees

~~54-51.~~ The Council maintains Audit and Standards Committees to oversee various aspects of its governance. Each is scheduled to meet quarterly and has 11 members.

~~55-52.~~ In addition to meeting for 43 hours across 31 meetings for Audit and Standards for the council term 2013-2017, 30 Standards Review Sub-Committee meetings and 1 Standards Hearing Sub-Committee were held to consider matters relating to Code of Conduct complaints under the Localism Act 2011.

Other Committees

~~56-53.~~ The Staffing Policy Committee, which has 9 councillors and meets quarterly to consider council staffing matters. It met 23 times for 26 hours across the council term 2013-2017.

³ Jul-Sept 17 figures reported to DCLG

~~57-54.~~ Other committees include the Officer Appointments Committee contains 5 councillors and interviews and selects council directors, and the Appeals Committee of 8 councillors, which is responsible for rates relief and school transport appeals, both of which meet on an ad hoc basis, 32 times for the council term 2013-2017.

~~58-55.~~ Additionally, 8 places each are allocated to the standing working groups of the Corporate Parenting Panel and the Safeguarding Children and Young People Panel.

Joint Arrangements

~~59-56.~~ The Council operates a number of different arrangements with other authorities and bodies. The Joint Strategic Economic Committee was established in 2015 and meets 4-5 times per year and consists of representatives from the executives of Wiltshire Council and Swindon Borough Council to monitor the work of the Swindon and Wiltshire Local Enterprise Partnership (SWLEP). Additionally, joint scrutiny of the SWLEP is included in the Overview and Scrutiny arrangements of both Wiltshire Council and Swindon Borough Council, and is recognised as among the more advanced in the country in respect of Local Enterprise Partnerships⁴.

~~60-57.~~ The Wiltshire Pension Fund Committee meets 5-6 times per year and consists of 5 representatives from Wiltshire Council, 2 from Swindon Borough Council, as well as other voting representatives from employers invested in the Fund, and union observers. The Local Pension Board monitors the management of the Fund.

~~61-58.~~ The Health and Wellbeing Board brings together health and social care system leaders to agree the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (shared evidence base), a Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy (shared priorities) and encourage integrated commissioning and provision of health and social care. It is currently chaired by the Leader of the Council and includes cabinet member and opposition councillors, as well as Clinical Commissioning Group and other health partners and meets 4-5 times per year. In the council term 2013-2017 it met 21 times for over 33 hours.

~~62-59.~~ The Police and Crime Panel meets 6 times per year and includes 6 Wiltshire Councillors as well as 4 Swindon Borough Councillors to review and scrutinise the work of the Police and Crime Commissioner. In the Council term 2013-2017 it met 26 times for over 66 hours.

Shared Services

~~63-60.~~ The Council shares many services with external partners, including IT, Systems Thinking and a Programme Office with Wiltshire Police. Children's commissioning is shared with the Clinical Commissioning Group, with a new senior officer structure being negotiated with the Secretary of State to include a joint Corporate Director of the Council and the CCG. Others include the shared history centre and archiving service with Swindon Borough Council. In relation to partnership working, the LGA Peer Review in 2017 stated Wiltshire in several instances such as the One Public Estate Programme was the "go to exemplar site for effective partnership and implementation".

Scrutiny Arrangements

~~64-61.~~ Since a major review in 2012 Wiltshire Council's Overview and Scrutiny Structure has comprised a Management Committee and three service focused Select Committees: Children's Select, Health Select and Environment Select. The Management Committee comprises 15 members and meets approximately 8 times per year, with the Select

⁴ <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmcomloc/369/369.pdf>

Committees comprising 13 members and meeting approximately 6 times per year. Across the council term 2013-2017 they met for a combined 107 meetings and 219 hours.

65-62. The Committees consider an average of 5 substantive agenda items per meeting. More in-depth work is undertaken in task groups, rapid scrutiny exercises, and by appointing representatives to corporate programme boards at the invitation of the executive.

66-63. There are currently 11 active task groups with an average of 5 members on each, including 3 standing task groups and a mixture of medium to long term groups lasting between 6-12 months. There have been 3 rapid scrutiny exercises since May 2017 with a further 2 planned, and three representatives sit on programme boards.

67-64. The Scrutiny forward planning is extensive and involves significant coordination with the Executive, including close work with the portfolio holders, to identify suitable topics for scrutiny engagement. These focus significantly on developing policy and the delivery of the Business Plan. This also includes annual consideration of the Administration Budget, and any opposition amendments ahead of Council. Call-ins of executive decisions are rare, with only 3 in the past 4 years due to the extent of open dialogue and constructive reporting that takes place between Cabinet Members, Portfolio Holders, Directors and leading Overview and Scrutiny councillors.

68-65. In 2015 the Council invited the Local Government Association to undertake a peer review of the Overview and Scrutiny arrangements, which was the first in the country. In addition to noting the "*mature approach*" in respect of Call-ins, the overall outcomes of the review were positive, with the alignment of its work programme with the Council's business plan, positive relationship between executive and scrutiny, work with partners, and clear understanding of the role of scrutiny among councillors and officers, as well as "*good opportunities for opposition members to provide leadership to the function*" were highlighted.

69-66. Around 100 recommendations are made by task groups per year, and committees had involvement with 59% of cabinet decisions. In order to continue to have meaningful, long term involvement in the development of council policies and scrutinise decisions, the Council argues that there needs to be sufficient numbers of non-executive councillors to perform this key function.

70-67. In 2016/17 88% of non-executive councillors had involvement with the scrutiny process. However, many of those will not have been involved with more than one activity, so should the number of councillors be reduced it would be difficult to maintain the present level of effective scrutiny activities, particularly in light of other committee requirements the reduced number of councillors would be required to perform.

71-68. There are no plans at this stage to further review the scrutiny arrangements apart from any appropriate reaction to the findings from the Department of Communities and Local Government's recent review of scrutiny.

Representational Role of Councillors

72-69. The need to reflect the identities and interests of local communities is a key factor in any review, and the ability of councillors to represent those communities is essential.

73-70. The Council's arrangements prioritise the role of councillors as community leaders. Area Boards are an integral part in providing a focus for community leadership, local

influence and delegated decision-making, through the democratic mandate of elected councillors. The Boards provide formalised engagement with the local community, local groups, public bodies and parish council's formal partners within a community area. Formal partners are listed in Part 3B of the constitution and include the police, fire service, clinical commission groups, housing associations, local youth networks, the military, local businesses and more. The police, CCG and others use the area board as their main forum to interact with local communities.

- 74-71.** The councillors on area boards are supported by a team of Community Engagement Managers to coordinate work with local bodies and groups to enhance their leadership of their communities through public and other meetings, as well as setting strategic priorities, collaboration with partners and examining local issues.
- 75-72.** For the council term 2013-2017, the area boards met on 450 occasions for 918 hours, an average 25 times each for a total of 51 hours per area board, not including associated meetings such as Local Youth Network and Community Area Transport Group meetings to meet with local groups to involve them with grant funding decisions. Area Board attendance varies but is generally much higher than other council meetings, and as the central focus for the community with matters of great importance such as development of local campuses can be as high as 180 (Melksham 24 Feb 2016), 112 (South West Wiltshire 8 Oct 2014) and 148 (Pewsey 21 Dec 2015).
- 76-73.** The Committee undertook surveys to determine both the type of activity undertaken by councillors in their representational role, and the amount of time allocated to specific activities. The questions on the representational role were taken from the Commission's technical guidance and collated as part of the papers for the meeting of the Committee held on 11 January 2018.
- 77-74.** In summary, from the responses received it was clear councillors carry out their representational role in a variety of ways. Some held regular surgeries and public meetings whilst others did so as and when needed on major issues, particularly in larger, rural divisions. While referral to officers and other agencies often form part of their casework process, responses indicated many councillors undertake extensive work to attempt resolution in the first instance. While training and information updates are provided, no dedicated administrative support is given for casework beyond the wider Community Engagement Manager at Area Board level.
- 78-75.** On overall workloads, councillors indicated on average 24 hours per week were spent on council business, an increase of 3 hours since the last survey in 2013. From the responses, it was indicated 5.1 per week was taken up with committee work (from a range of 0-14), 5.6 hours on casework (from 1-15), 2.9 hours on parish council engagement and other work (from 0-10), 7.3 hours working via email or social media (from 0.5-16 for emails and 0-7 for social media), and 3.7 hours travelling on council business (from 0-8.8). All these figures were for the basic role of a councillor only, therefore those with additional responsibilities such as Cabinet Members and Committee Chairs would be expected to have significantly more time spent on committee preparation and other council work, emails and travel on council business.
- 79-76.** There are presently approximately 150 outside bodies on which councillors are represented. Some of these bodies are locally based with an expectation that the local member be involved. Others are county wide, whilst some are appointed by areas boards, and some allocated by political group leaders. Of those around half involve formal voting rights on decision making. The amount of involvement by councillors on these outside bodies varies, but in some cases, this can lead to a significant additional workload. Some councillors may be on as many as 6 or more outside bodies, and meet

quarterly or more frequently.

Population and Electorate Data

~~80-77.~~ The Committee considered several approaches to calculate a projected electorate for 2024. The impact of that projection under the current division boundaries is shown at Appendix D. The data will be provided subsequently to the Commission at polling district level in time for Stage 1 of the review.

~~81-78.~~ The calculation method that has been used applies both the Office for National Statistics (ONS) population projection increase (3.8% for Wiltshire) and the proposed growth in housing numbers from April 2017 to March 2024. This is likely to include a certain element of 'double-counting' as a proportion of the population increase will also reside in the new housing.

~~82-79.~~ Proposed new housing figures used in the calculation by the committee included:

- Planning permissions granted and resolutions to grant planning permission up to 31 March 2016 (Source: Wiltshire Council, Housing Land Supply Statement Update, March 2017)
- Additional large sites (>10 units) identified beyond 1 April 2016 (Table 3, Wiltshire Council, Housing Land Supply Statement Update, March 2017)
- Outstanding allocations (Wiltshire Core Strategy, Chippenham Site Allocation Plan, emerging Wiltshire Housing Site Allocations Plan and former district council saved policies)
- 'Made' and post-examination Neighbourhood Plan allocations (as at 31 March 2016)
- Army Basing Service Family Accommodation with planning permission
- An allowance has been included for 'windfall' housing development in Wiltshire

It is also known that there will be additional growth in some areas post 2024, particularly in Chippenham, and that the figures would be updated for 2024 as further sites are identified.

~~83-80.~~ A ratio of number of electors per dwelling to convert the additional housing numbers into a projected electorate was then calculated as follows, though it remains a priority for the council to improve its electoral registration and so for the ratio to potentially increase:

Table 4 - Elector ratio

Total dwellings in Wiltshire (1 April 2016 <i>Source: DCLG – Live tables on dwelling stock: "Table 100: number of dwellings by tenure and district, England"</i>)	211,580
Total Electorate (December 2016)	364,167
Average number of electorate per dwelling	1.72

~~84-81.~~ The table below shows the total projected electorate, and the average of electors per Councillor as the council currently stands.

Table 5 - Projected Electorate Total

	Electorate Dec 2017 (a)	Electorate 2024 applying ONS population projection only (3.8%) (b)	Planned new residential units 2017 – 2024 (c)	Estimated additional electorate from planned residential units and including windfall (d) = (c) x 1.72	Total Electorate Estimate 2024 (e) = (b) + (d)
Wiltshire Total	367686	381658	22611	38890	420549⁵

2017 Average Electors per Councillor (98)	3752
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2024 Average Electors per Councillor (98)	4291
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85-82. The table below shows the present figures as compared to the council's statistical neighbours, derived from the CIPFA family group⁶.

Table 6 - Statistical neighbours

Unitary Authority	Population (ONS mid 2016 estimates)	Geographic Area (square km) ONS	People per square km	Number of Councillors	Number of Wards	Electors (1 Dec 2016)	Average electors per councillor (current)	Average electors following implementation of recent boundary reviews
Cheshire East	376,695	1166	323	82	52	296,368	3614	na
Central Bedfordshire	278,937	716	390	59	31	205,961	3491	na
Shropshire Council	313,373	3197	98	74	63	240,412	2245	na
Cheshire West and Chester	335,680	917	366	75	46	264,798	3531	4027 (2023)
Herefordshire Council	189,309	2180	87	53	53	138,719	2617	na
Bath and North East Somerset	187,751	345.9	543	65	37	134,037	2062	2367 (2023)
East Riding of Yorkshire Council	337,696	2405	140	67	26	260,403	3887	na
North Somerset	211,681	374	566	50	35	161,880	3238	na
Cornwall Council	553,687	3546	156	123	122	408,453	3321	5163 (2023)
Bedford	168,751	476	355	40	27	128,199	3205	na
South Gloucestershire	277,623	497	559	70	35	210,251	3004	3773 (2023)
Northumberland County Council	316,002	5014	63	67	66	235,556	3516	na
West Berkshire Council	156,837	704.2	223	52	30	120,464	2317	3100 (2023)
City of York	208,367	271.9	766.3	47	21	147,099	3130	na
Average	279,456	1557.9	331	66	46	210,900	3084	na
Wiltshire Council	488,409	3255	150	98	98	361,567	3689	na

86-83. It was noted that the Council's present electorate to Councillor ratio was exceeded by only 1 of its statistical neighbours, and that would still be the case on the projected ratio of **42034838+** per councillor if a council size of **99-86** was adopted.

⁵ This total includes windfall figures, which could not be included in the community area model as it would be unknown where the windfall may occur.

⁶ Nearest neighbours as identified at <http://www.cipfastats.net/resources/nearestneighbours/profile.asp?view=select&dataset=england>. Although that table listed Rutland Council as the 15th statistical neighbor it has not been included due to its far smaller scale to all others listed.

Conclusion

~~87-84.~~ 87-84. The Electoral Review Committee undertook a review of council size based on the briefing and guidance given by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England. It considered evidence as detailed in this submission over a 2-month period for the preliminary stage of the electoral review.

~~88-85.~~ 88-85. In respect of governance arrangements, the Council's committee structure is arranged to meet its statutory and other obligations. The evidence provided suggested a reduction in the number of councillors ~~below 97~~ to 86 would not have an adverse effect on the operation of those committees.

~~89-86.~~ 89-86. The evidence also clearly demonstrated the central importance of the community area system to council governance, and the need to maintain an optimum council size to provide enough councillors to operate effectively at area boards.

~~90-87.~~ 90-87. Area boards also serve as hubs for meetings between parish council representatives and division members. Councillors are central to the Council's operating structure and with the reduction in council staff they now often act as the primary liaison between residents and particularly Parish Councils on many operational matters as well as providing advice and support on many more. As more services are delegated to parish councils this role will increase and develop over time.

~~91-88.~~ 91-88. In relation to scrutiny arrangements, the evidence demonstrated an effective scrutiny function with substantial levels of activity and positive outcomes, and that to enable this to continue it is important to retain sufficient numbers of non-executive councillors to perform this valuable task.

~~92-89.~~ 92-89. Travel time is a significant factor for councillors in a large rural county such as Wiltshire and has an impact on their representational role. In order to fulfill their governance roles councillors are required to travel to the council's main administrative hubs, but to devote appropriate attention to their representational role, divisions should not become too geographically large to impact on their ability to engage locally. It is highlighted that one division already currently has 11 parish councils within it, and as liaising with parishes is regarded by the Council as an important function of the community leader role, it would risk diminishing this relationship if more divisions were to contain a higher number of parishes.

Recommendation

~~93-90.~~ 93-90. On the basis of the deliberations and evidence the Council recommends a council size of ~~99~~ 86 in order to maintain and secure effective and convenient local government in terms of both its central governance function and community area delivery and engagement model.

~~94-91.~~ 94-91. The Council also expresses a strong preference to retain the Council's present single member division structure, with no multi-member divisions, as this arrangement provides clearer, more accountable and focused representation.

Appendices

Appendix A - Terms of Reference of the Electoral Review Committee

Appendix B - Area Board Map

Appendix C - Extract from 2008 Submission - Community Areas

Appendix D - Electorate Projection by Division including variance

Background Papers

LGA Peer Review 2017

[Wiltshire Council Business Plan 2017-2027](#)

[Overview and Scrutiny Peer Challenge 2015](#)

2008 Submission to the Boundary Commission for England

[BCE 2008 Final Recommendations](#)

Independent Remuneration Panel Reports [2013](#) and [2017](#)

LD Amended Draft