

EXTRACT FROM DRAFT SUBMISSION

2. COUNCIL SIZE

2.1 As part of its submission to Government the Council demonstrated how it would ensure that it was close to its communities and that there would not be a democratic deficit when the District Council tier of local government was removed.

2.2 It has therefore reviewed its political management arrangements to demonstrate that in terms of governance arrangements it could cope both with the additional responsibilities inherited from the District Councils but also to demonstrate that it could work both strategically and locally.

2.3 Community Area Boards

2.3.1 A fundamental building block of this review and its submission to Government was the creation of 20 area boards which would provide the mechanism for delivering within each community, effective local democratic governance with the strong accountable leadership envisaged within the Government's white paper "Stronger and Prosperous Communities".

2.3.2 The Wiltshire model for the future recognises the importance of building trust in local government through effective and accountable local community leadership. This model has been recognised nationally in achieving Beacon status for "Getting Closer to Communities". The status recognises the good work of the Council in planning and delivering services to its communities and in engaging local people in these processes.

2.3.3 These area boards are based on a strongly established pattern of 20 community areas which has been used as a basis for all community planning work since 1997 (see Section 4 on Community Identity).

2.3.4 The Boards will provide the foundation for delivering neighbourhood empowerment and community leadership.

2.3.5 The new local arrangements will give a positive and higher profile for all councillors in local community work. They will be the advocates for local people, understanding their needs and aspirations, acting as the champions for their area, and promoting customer first principles through making tough choices to shape services around customers. This enhanced and developed role for all councillors would see them acting as true community leaders and place shapers.

2.3.6 The front line councillor will play a significant part in the success of the area boards. The boards will act as the single point of contact for decision making in the communities bringing together elected front line councillors with other key partners including the Police and PCTs as well as representatives of community and voluntary groups and parish and town councils. The aim will be to bring together and drive forward multiple agendas. Front line councillors will be put back into the driving seat as the elected and accountable local representatives ensuring that when decisions are made, particularly those with significant local impact, local people know who made them and why.

2.3.7 The unitary councillor role has been reviewed and a new unitary job description, which has been agreed with Group Leaders and the Implementation Executive for the new authority, is attached as Appendix 1 to this submission. This is a significant role which all members of the new Council will have to perform. It is closely aligned to the role envisaged within the Government's white paper and the LGA "Closer to People and Places" campaign.

2.3.8 The Community Area Boards will involve significant responsibilities for all members as front line councillors but in particular a unitary councillor will chair meetings of the board. The chairman will have a pivotal role in agreeing the board's priorities with the Partnership and ensuring that the board concentrates and focuses its energies in these areas. The chairman will have a significant role in ensuring that the boards operate in an open and inclusive way, engaging with partners, stakeholders and local people on issues of concern to the local area and involving them in the development of solutions. The chairman will also have an important role in promoting effective communication with the media and local people on the work of the area board and the unitary council.

2.3.9 Area Boards will:

- Have a key role in forming and influencing strategic planning policies which will set the framework for local decision making
- Direct the allocation of development funding within the community area
- Influence the Council's Corporate Plan and Wiltshire's Local Area Agreement by holding a "State of the Area" debate annually and ensuring that these reflect local concerns and circumstances
- Support the community to deliver the local priorities in the community area plan
- Ensure that the public is well informed about what is going on in its area by being the focus of local issues for the area
- Provide a means by which local councillors can influence the development and shape of local services
- Provide a forum where multiple agendas can be brought together to drive forward local projects
- To enable joined up responses from partners to councillor calls for action
- Agree local actions and targets associated with the county-wide local area agreement and the sustainable community strategy

2.4 Overview and Scrutiny

2.4.1 The Government in its white paper “Stronger and Prosperous Communities” states its clear intentions to strengthen overview and scrutiny arrangements. Indeed in its impact assessment of the Bill its aspiration is recorded as an increase of 50% with £25 million nationally to fund this. The two key areas in which the Government intends to strengthen scrutiny are local area “place shaping” scrutiny and secondly, scrutinising more strategic issues such as the LAA and other key strategic plans.

2.4.2 The County Council’s current scrutiny arrangements are held in high regard nationally and several events have been hosted for other county authorities to present our model for scrutiny. This in summary form includes a central Management Committee which commission’s further work through ad hoc task groups and which monitors key corporate priorities such as performance, budget and customer access, through standing task groups. In addition to the Management Committee we currently have a statutory Health Scrutiny Committee and a Children’s Services Scrutiny Committee.

2.4.3 The Task Group method of operation has been reflected in our plans for scrutiny of the transitional governance arrangements having been agreed with our District Councils and it is intended for these to be replicated in the new Council. This would place all non executive councillors at the disposal of the scrutiny function and depending on their skills, experience and interests, they will be asked to serve on relevant task groups.

2.4.4 Task Group work involves periods of concentrated work and the key to success in this area is the commitment and capacity of Councillors to fulfil these roles. Councillors will have key roles within task groups in helping to develop policy and this will involve working with stakeholders and partner organisations.

2.4.5 The new Council will facilitate the local area scrutiny role through the councillor’s calls for action process which will be led by front line councillors with the community area boards providing the vehicle and the conduit for the collection of evidence and the springboard for action. If an issue cannot be resolved locally through the area board process, then councillors will be able to ask one of the three scrutiny committees referred to in para 2.4.2 to consider the matter.

2.4.6 These three Committees will also perform the strategic scrutiny function examining key issues within service areas and through task groups, undertake key areas of work within the LAA.

2.5 Standards

2.5.1 There will be increased workloads for the Standards Committee dealing with the local investigation of complaints under the code of conduct. Plans are already in place to increase the size of this committee to provide capacity for

the consideration of complaints both for the increased number of unitary councillors but also for parish and town councillors who will fall within the remit of the committee.

2.5.2 Members serving on the Standards Committees will have key roles in promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct for councillors and for determining any complaints of misconduct brought before it.

2.5.3 The size of the committee and its component membership will have to be such that it is capable of forming sub committees that can hear complaints and appeals with specific and exclusive memberships.

2.6 Current District Council Functions

2.6.1 In addition to the enhanced community leadership role, all members of the new council will have additional responsibilities arising out of unitary status. They will be accountable to their electorate for the combined responsibilities of the county council and district council services as well as additional roles arising out of district council responsibilities such as licensing and development control.

2.6.2 As with the standards committee, the licensing committee will have to be capable of being divided up into sub committees to consider specific applications and to allow the authority to discharge its statutory functions. This is a significant workload across the whole county.

2.6.3 We are well aware of the Government's current proposals to streamline the planning process. However it is still anticipated that at least 3 committees will be needed to discharge this responsibility across the county.

2.7 Decision Making Structures - Analysis of Roles

2.7.1 In addition to the unitary councillor role described in Appendix 1 to this report, all councillors will have specific roles to perform within the decision making structures. The following roles would need to be performed:

Roles	Number of Places
Cabinet	Up to 10 places
Overview and Scrutiny	45 places (based on 3 main committees)
Scrutiny Task Groups	40 places (based on 4 standing and 4 ad hoc groups at any one time)
Community area boards	20 chairmen and all councillors to be members of their local area board
Regulatory Committee	45 places (based on 3 regional committees)

Licensing Committee (including sub committees)	15 places
Final Audit and Accounts Committee	15 places
Staffing Committee	10 places
Pension Fund	10 places
Standards Committee (including sub committees)	5 places
Total	215 committee places

(NB; IT SHOULD BE NOTED THAT THIS IS AN INDICATIVE STRUCTURE AND ONE WHICH THE NEW COUNCIL ITSELF WOULD HAVE TO ENDORSE. IT REPRESENTS HOWEVER A VERY LIMITED INCREASE IN THE NUMBER AND SIZE OF COMMITTEES)

2.8 Number of Members

2.8.1 Currently county councillors serve on average on 2 committees and attend on average 2 formal committee meetings a month. This estimate is based on the number of committee places available multiplied by the number of committee meetings and then divided by the number of non-executive members of the council ie 40.

2.8.2 In the past, when county councillors have been surveyed for the purposes of informing the setting of members' allowances, the time spent on county council duties has remained consistent at around 15 to 20 hours a week, or 70 hours a month. This is very similar to data collected nationally.

2.8.3 Nationally the data indicates that almost half of this time is spent attending formal meetings (9.8 hours), more than a third is spent engaging with constituents (7.2 hours) and about a quarter attending external meetings and training etc (5.6 hours).

2.8.4 If one disregards the cabinet places in the table at 2.7.1 above, as these are full time positions performed by specific councillors, this leaves in excess of 200 committee roles to be performed by councillors in the new Council.

2.8.5 Taking into account the community leadership role each councillor will have to perform, including the very important role of liaising and supporting parish and town councils, their role within at least one community area board and within the full council, it is difficult to imagine councillors having the time to engage in any more than two or three of the above roles.

2.8.6 To expand this further, discounting places on area boards and on the full council which all councillors will have, this number of committee places translates into approximately 15 meetings per year per councillor (based on

the number of committee meetings multiplied by the number of committee places and divided by 90 councillors). When you add in 5 full council meetings per year and up to 8 meetings of area boards each year, this in practical terms means 3 to 4 formal committee meetings a month. Some of these meetings will be more demanding than others with some quasi judicial and regulatory work being particularly intensive with lengthy meetings.

2.8.7 Nationally the data indicates that the average time spent on council business for a County Councillor is 27.2 hours a week and 17.8 hours for a District Councillor. It is accepted that you cannot simply add these two figures together to come up with the time commitment required for a new unitary councillor. There has however to be an acceptance that the role will increase hugely with more time being spent in meetings and a significant increase in the time spent on the constituency role.

2.8.8 The number of roles that each councillor could reasonably perform, as outlined in paragraph 2.8.5, points towards the need for approximately 90 councillors in addition to up to 10 cabinet members. This number of councillors would also enable each of the area boards to be of a viable size in terms of membership.

2.8.9 The workload envisaged for the new unitary councillor is such that unless the council size figure is set at a reasonable level, and consequently the number of constituents that each councillor has to represent, the constituency workload each councillor will have in terms of hours required to perform the role, will be intolerable and lead to fewer people wishing to stand for office and in turn may lead to candidates from less diverse backgrounds.

2.8.10 The original submission to the DCLG was based on a council size of 98 and this has subsequently been confirmed by the County Council. However the boundary review will enable this type of figure to be tested and analysed against the statutory criteria and public consultation.

2.9 Comparators

2.9.1 It is accepted that equality of council size between councils is not a material factor and consequently neither is electoral equality between councils. However it does provide a benchmark against which to deal with the issue of remoteness and the ability of the new Council to deliver both strategically and locally. Therefore we are guided in our calculations around council size by other current unitary councillor representational ratios.

2.9.2 The following authorities have been in place for numerous years and presumably have tested their council size against their ability to deliver its numerous services effectively.

Council	Council Size	Electorate	Ratio Cllr/Elector
East Riding	67	262,500	1:3917
North Lincolnshire	43	124,545	1:2896

Herefordshire	58	133,679	1:2305
Isle of Wight	40*	109,008	1:2725
North Somerset	61	154,219	1:2528
South Gloucs	70	199,115	1:2844

* proposed within current PER

2.9.3 Wiltshire's electorate as at 1 December 2007 is 347,649. More importantly for the Boundary Review purposes, the projected electorate for 2012 is 362,123. Dividing this electorate by the Council size originally proposed by the County Council as set out in para 2.8.10, gives a councillor/electorate ratio of 1:3695.

2.9.4 This fits neatly within the comparator authorities, if a little on the high side.

2.9.5 The new council will cover a large rural area and will need a reasonable number of councillors to meet the needs of the rural population, Under the existing 2 tier system of local government for each 7500 electorate there is approximately one county councillor and 4 district councillors. Under the unitary arrangements there will be 2 unitary councillors based on the proposed council size. Whilst some could argue that this means less democratic representation it is the Council's view that a single unitary councillor will give more effective representation as there will be less confusion and duplication. However a smaller council size would lead to a larger councillor/electorate ratio and intolerable workloads for the new unitary councillor.

2.10 Conclusion

2.10.1 When coupled with the challenges faced by a rural councillor in supporting and liaising with a large number of parish councils, there is a huge agenda and job description for the new unitary councillor. This points towards the need for additional councillors.

2.10.2 Both the additional workloads envisaged for councillors within the decision making structures and within their constituencies, and the representational ratios of other councils, points us in the direction of a council size in the region of 95 to 100.

2.10.4 This number of councillors would enable the new council to deliver on its vision for community and local governance, for bringing decision making closer to communities and for better engagement with those communities