



North
Northamptonshire
Council

Council Size Submission

DRAFT

About You

This submission is made on behalf of North Northamptonshire Conservative Group and North Northamptonshire Labour Group. An initial submission was submitted previously by the Council however this did not provide evidence which the Boundary Commission felt they could decide a Council number upon.

Reason for Review

The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) has identified that this review is being conducted as a result of Local Government Reorganisation. North Northamptonshire Council became the unitary council for the areas previously covered by Corby Borough Council, Borough Council of Wellingborough, East Northamptonshire District Council, Kettering Borough Council, and the relevant part of the area of Northamptonshire County Council (made up of the areas of the other councils combined).

The current council size and boundary pattern were dictated by the Northamptonshire Structural Changes Order 2020 and reflected the division boundaries of the former County Council for the North Northamptonshire area.

The Context for your proposal

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

North Northamptonshire Council is a new unitary Council arising from Local Government Reorganisation. The Shadow Council established the governance arrangements for the new Council which were operational from May 2021 after the election to the new Council.

The Council adopted Executive arrangements; however, it is considered to be a hybrid governance model as the Executive are supported by cross party Advisory Panels. There was debate in the Shadow Authority about which governance model would be adopted, particularly as the Committee structure was prevalent in the predecessor authorities. It was agreed however that the Executive model would allow efficiency and clarity in its decision making and the addition of the Panels ensure inclusivity which is often cited as the advantage of the Committee system. There are no plans to consider the governance model adopted as it is still in its infancy.

The first year since transition has been challenging, particularly in a post pandemic society. The Council has focussed on delivering excellent services to residents and harmonisation of policies and procedures to ensure a seamless service for North Northamptonshire.

The Constitution was approved on the understanding that it would need to be reviewed in the first year. A cross party Constitutional Working Group has recommended a number of changes to governance, but these have been surface level (e.g., speaking arrangements) rather than detailed reviews of the governance structures. Until recently, there has not been an appetite to review structures at such an early stage since transition to the new authority.

There has recently been a decision of the Leader of the Council to align the Councils Executive Advisory Panels to the adopted Corporate Plan, this has resulted in an additional Panel. The Constitutional Review Working Group will also be considering a proposal from the Monitoring Officer to change the Scrutiny structure and create an additional Committee to ensure that there is enough capacity, particularly regarding health.

There is also a review of the Planning Committee arrangements as part of a wider review of the planning service arrangements which is supported by the Planning Advisory Service. This may lead to some consolidation of the governance when the service is aggregated into a single service.

In summary, North Northamptonshire Council is still at a formative stage in its governance arrangements, and it is inevitable that there will be changes as the organisation matures. Aside from the scrutiny and planning arrangements, there are no immediate plans to change arrangements.

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

The Council has several services which are subject to alternative delivery models or joint arrangements:

Shared Services – LGR led to the division of the former County Council into two Councils. The complexity of services (combined with the pandemic) made it difficult to carry out the

disaggregation in the time available and therefore a number of services continued to operate across the whole county area as a joint service. In order to manage the joint service, the Council established a Joint Shared Services Committee between NNC and WNC. This is an Executive Committee and meets regularly (usually monthly) to monitor performance of the joint service and to make decisions about proposed changes to service arrangements, amendments to the Inter Authority Agreement which governs the joint arrangements and also to oversee further disaggregation work.

Children's Trust – prior to LGR the County Council established a Children's Trust for the whole of the County area to deliver improvements to Children's Services. The Children's Trust is a separate legal entity, and its management is subject to separate governance arrangements. The Council has established a Joint Committee between NNC and WNC to manage the relationship between the two Council's in relation to the Children's Trust. This is an Executive Committee.

Health and Wellbeing Board – following the disaggregation both Councils are required to have a Health and Wellbeing Board and therefore there is now one for each Council.

The Council is a shareholder of Pathfinder Legal Ltd which delivers some of its legal functions for it. The legal functions are to return to an in-house delivery model in March 2023. The Council will also no longer be a shareholder of the company. Whilst this will have a positive impact for service delivery, it is unlikely to have a significant impact on the Council's ability to focus on its remaining functions.

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

The Council has not been subject to any inspections which have raised issues in relation to capacity or governance since April 2021.

A second OFSTED monitoring visit was conducted in November 2021 covering the local authority's children's services. The report summarised that "Despite the ongoing challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, senior leaders have continued to focus on improvement. This has resulted in steady progress in improving services for care leavers and 16- and 17-year-old children in care" ¹

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

The impact of LGR cannot be underestimated. This is particularly so due to the impact that the pandemic had on the preparation of the new authority. Due to the pandemic, transition arrangements were scaled back to ensuring that the new authorities were "safe and legal", therefore much of the work to bring together services was not commenced until the authority came into being. The impact of transition continues to be felt across all Council services and impacts the resource of both members and officers.

The Council has a transformation programme underway which seeks to implement the opportunities of a single tier of local government but also will enable the council to bring services from former councils together to operate as a single service. A key aspect of the programme is procuring and implementing single IT systems which will improve customer experience but will also allow staff to communicate and work as one team. Another aspect of the programme is the ongoing disaggregation of services jointly delivered by North and West Northamptonshire Council. In addition, the transformation programme includes work on creating unified teams and

efficient ways of working. This work in addition to business as usual continues to take up resource. The national challenges outlined below add to what is already a challenging period for an authority in its infancy.

There is a national recruitment and retention shortage following the pandemic. The pandemic affected how people work and accelerated new ways of working which has led to greater opportunities for employees. Increasing vacancies and falling unemployment data nationally indicate a tightening of the labour market, as there are fewer people to fill vacancies. Local government used to offer more attractive terms and conditions however these are now mirrored in private firms who are able to pay more. The difficulty in recruitment and retention continues to challenge the authority and its ability to deliver on its ambitions.

The challenge of the cost-of-living increases (particularly rising energy prices and interest rate increases) has a continuing impact for the council as an organisation but also for residents and businesses within North Northamptonshire. This will in turn have an impact on council services and budgets.

The added pressures arising from specific challenges like meeting expectations in relation to the response to the war in Ukraine and refugees will likely impact on the council in an intermittent way over the next six years.

Nationally, the funding regime is currently on a one-year basis, so any significant changes to the level of grants received, taxation and legislation in the near and medium future may require the Council to review its organisational processes going forward. Furthermore, the reduced funding envelope for local government means the ability to transform services effectively is hampered.

The pandemic changed the way that local authority meetings were held with legislation allowing remote meetings to happen lawfully. There is a national campaign for government to legislate for the Regulations that allowed remote meetings to be introduced permanently. The Council has identified its democratic hub for North Northamptonshire Council as Corby and has invested in audio-visual equipment to increase democracy. The distance from their home to Corby for some members is more than at previous authorities and adds additional time to their duties. If remote legislation was introduced, then this would likely have a positive impact upon members time and capacity to attend meetings.

There is a programme of legislative change including the new Health and Social Care Act 2022 which will have a significant impact on local authorities later this year, when its provisions start to take effect, and these will result in impacts on local authorities and the care sector particularly in terms of the cost of care. Members will receive briefings and support constituents.

In addition, the Government has announced a wide range of proposed legislation, relating to devolution, planning, council tax, education, energy, housing, health, crime and justice. The Queen's Speech also included measures of interest to councils on business rates, data reform, public procurement, local audit and post-Brexit regulation. In particular, the Levelling up Bill published on 11 May 2022 with an accompanying policy note, aims to drive local growth, empower local leaders to regenerate their areas, and ensure everyone can share in prosperity. It is intended to place a duty on the Government to set Levelling Up missions for a period of no less than five years, through a levelling up mission statement, and produce an annual report updating the country on the delivery of these missions. The Bill is also intended to create a new model of combined authority called combined county authorities and to streamline the process for authorities to bring forward proposals for combined authorities to move into directly elected leadership governance models more quickly, to support devolution deals. The Bill is also intended to introduce a number of reforms to the planning system, including strengthening neighbourhood

planning and digitalising the system to make local plans easier to find, understand and engage with; by making it easier for local authorities to get local plans in place, with a view to limiting speculative development. Until the legislation has made its way through Parliament it is difficult to know what precise impact this will have on elected members, but the programme of change has the potential to be significant for local members.

As described above, predicting the future for North Northamptonshire is more difficult considering the infancy of the new authority. There is a clear direction that services that are shared with West Northamptonshire should be disaggregated but clearly each decision will be looked at individually to ensure that best value is achieved. The sharing of services by its very nature increases governance arrangements and the overarching Joint Shared Services Committee between the authorities must remain whilst there are significant services still being shared. As the Councils disaggregate more services, these governance arrangements will likely reduce, and most would have ceased in 5 years if the blueprint agreed prior to transition is to be achieved.

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

This is set out in the summary which closes this document. The Council is operating effectively with a figure of 78 however there are still vacancies in some Committees and an over reliance on some members for informal groups.

Local Authority Profile

Brief outline of area - are there any notable geographic constraints for example that may affect the review?

Covering 986.5 km² North Northamptonshire is situated within the valleys of the Rivers Welland and Nene. It is characterised by a broadly rural landscape interspersed with a number of historic market towns and new urban areas including the main centres of Corby, Kettering, Rushden and Wellingborough, as well as the A6 towns of Rothwell, Desborough and Burton Latimer and those along the A45/A605 at Thrapston, Raunds, Irthlingborough, Oundle and Higham Ferrers.

North Northamptonshire is located in central England and benefits from exceptional rail and transportation networks, including the A14 'Trans European Route' and the Midland Mainline railway to cities including Nottingham and Leicester in the north, London St Pancras in the south, and on into mainland Europe via Eurostar, North Northamptonshire has a prosperous and diverse economic base which includes high performance technologies, logistics, manufacturing, agriculture, food and drink, tourism and retail. This results in a mobile population who will often spread their income between local towns and outside of area.

The area is distinctive in that there is not a central town which is the hub of North Northamptonshire and therefore residents will likely work, shop and visit local towns and range of other large cities which are accessible. This results in residents feeling no particular affinity to one central place in North Northamptonshire and the areas and populations continuing to be distinct from each other. As a result, there are different expectations and demands on members casework.

Situated at the centre of the national distribution network, North Northamptonshire provides a hub for the distribution of goods throughout the country and into Europe. Since the collapse of the local boot and shoe industry and the closure of the Corby steel works, the area has become particularly attractive to logistics companies which benefit the local economy, however, this can result in additional burdens. The volume of road haulage and freight transport has a significant impact on highway maintenance, underground utilities and the throughflow of traffic. There are

competing tensions between improving efficiency of freight transport, tackling the impact of road haulage on local communities and reducing environmental impacts and village intrusions. The pressures from out-commuting (around 31% of the employed labour force living in North Northamptonshire) into surrounding economic centres such as Northampton and further afield to Bedford, Milton Keynes, London, Cambridge Oxford, Leicester and Birmingham also places a significant pressure on the road and rail networks, as does the lack of an east-west rail-link and an inadequate rural bus network.

There are a number of ecologically important wildlife sites and Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) within the area including the ancient woodland of Rockingham Forest, and the internationally recognised wetland site of The Upper Nene Valley Gravel Pits which extends across the area from West Northamptonshire and on into Cambridgeshire. In addition, the Irchester Old Lodge Pit has identified connections to the middle Jurassic period and has been categorized as a site of national importance.

The delicate balance of having a number of wildlife sites and being at the centre of the distribution network can cause tension for affected areas, particularly around planning and environmental health. This may have an impact on members workload as they represent their communities with any matters arising.

The area of North Northamptonshire is fairly distinct in that there are significant variances across the area. The variances in diversity across the area include the average household income and the proportion of qualified residents. England as a whole has an average of 27% who have gained a higher education degree or professional qualification; however, the majority of the area is below this average. The East of the area has the greatest proportion of Level 4 qualified residents at 24%. 2.7 The proportion of residents with no qualifications is greatest in Wellingborough with 28% and Corby with 26% compared to 25% across the East Midlands and 22% across England.

In terms of income, the regional average is £36,120, however there is a disparity of approximately £10,000 between the highest earning areas in the East (£41,027) and Corby (£32,014) in the North.

When income is measured against house prices, the average affordability ratio for North Northamptonshire Council is around 7.15 compared to Northamptonshire at 7.73 and England at 7.84.

The most recent data suggests that Kettering and Wellingborough experience over 76% of residents (aged 16 to 64) that are employees compared to 66% across the East Midlands and 65% across England as a whole.

East Northamptonshire has a significantly higher proportion of self-employed individuals at 16% compared to the national average of 10%, however approximately 60% of East Northants working persons are those that commute to their jobs, out of the area.

The 2011 Census shows that East Northamptonshire residents travel an average 19.3 km to work compared to 15.4 km for Corby, 15.8 for Kettering and 16.3 km for Wellingborough residents. The average for England is 14.9 km and for Northamptonshire 16.5 km.

In addition, the North Northamptonshire Bus Service Improvement Plan 2021 reflects the ongoing development of enhanced partnership working with bus service operators to address issues around the provision of bus services across the council area. Less than half of bus service use is on urban services. Whilst the majority of passengers travel on interurban and rural services

linking the main towns and surrounding villages, in some areas issues around a lack of linking services geographically both within and between urban centres still exist. There are many villages that do not have access to a bus service and in some areas (including the larger centres) there is a heavy reliance on voluntary transport services.

Community characteristics – is there presence of “hidden” or otherwise complex deprivation?

Corby area has the highest concentration of the most deprived Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) being ranked 70th in the national tables, compared to Kettering and Wellingborough ranked 161st and 124th respectively. The area previously covered by East Northamptonshire shows the lowest levels of deprivation being ranked 226th in the table.

In 2021, North Northamptonshire Council’s Scrutiny Commission highlighted Avondale (Windmill Ward), Kettering, Kingswood and Hazel Leys, Corby and Queensway, Wellingborough as areas of North Northants which require attention, arising from the Government’s Levelling Up White Paper.

In the Government’s Levelling up the UK white paper published in February 2022 North Northamptonshire is identified as a local authority to benefit from the new Education Investment Area’s fund which aims to drive school improvements through funding directed at intervening in underperforming schools, supporting growth of strong trusts, and retaining high quality teachers.

In addition, North Northamptonshire has also been highlighted to benefit from the Community Renewal Fund whilst Corby was identified as one of 15 towns in the East Midlands to benefit from a share of the £346m Towns Fund.

The data also shows that 3 LSOAs have also become more deprived moving from decile 3 into decile 2:

Wellingborough: Ruskin Avenue, Goldsmith Road

Irthlingborough: High Street

Corby: Primrose Close, Dumble Close, Bernshaw Close, Catchpole Close, Waver Close area

Some rural areas have also seen a negative shift towards deprivation including the parishes of Pytchley and the area of Church Street in Broughton with a move from D6 to D4 and the parishes of Ecton, Sywell and Mears Ashby seeing a move from D9 to D7.

Across North Northamptonshire there is a wide variance in the ranking score in the Index of Multiple Deprivation. Whilst some areas demonstrate a level of affluence this is in contrast to other parts of the area which show much higher levels of deprivation. A link to the IMD 2019 profile prepared by the historic Northamptonshire County Council can be found below. ²

The closure of the steelworks in Corby had a detrimental impact upon it and a result has been a more dependent culture with the Council and its members. It is essential that the Council has adequate electoral representation for those residents who need it, but it is also recognised that the Council will need to support residents to have a different relationship with the Council and their communities and this will be a continuing priority for the Council in the years to come.

Demographic pressures - such as distinctive age profiles, migrant or transient populations, is there any large growth anticipated?

60.8% of the population in Northamptonshire is in the 16-64 age group with 22.9% in the 0-17 age range and 18.7% in the 65+ age group. Whilst the Council does not therefore have a distinctive age profile, North Northamptonshire is expected to see an increase in life expectancy rates with a greater proportion of the population in the 0-19 and 65-year-old age ranges.

In the 0-19-year-old age range the anticipated increase for Northamptonshire is expected to be 7.22% compared to 6.00% for England as a whole leading to greater pressure on school places particularly in North Northamptonshire where the increase is projected to be greatest. The increase in the over 65 population is expected to be greater with a 25.89% increase across Northamptonshire compared to 19.38% for England as a whole over the next 10 years. It is anticipated that by 2041 an estimated 26% of the UK population will be in the 65+ age group. This will have increased pressures on the services that the Council provides.

In Northamptonshire 68.8% of people live in urban areas. With a growing proportion of the population in North Northamptonshire being in the over 65s age group and living in the more rural areas there will be increased pressures in terms of health services and the provision of social care. Poor transport links in the rural areas may add to the isolation of vulnerable groups leading to a greater reliance on voluntary transport services, and an increased need for public open spaces and the provision of more accessible spaces and services. The hamlet of Pilton (which is grouped with the parishes of Stoke Doyle and Wadenhoe) to nearly 5600 electors in the market town of Thrapston.

Situated in the southern part of the East Midlands, the area forms part of the Milton Keynes and South Midlands Growth Area and has one of the fastest growing populations in the country. Corby, Kettering, Rushden and Wellingborough have all been identified as growth towns in the Growth Area Strategy and North Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy.

The North Northamptonshire Variant Migration Model and Joint Core Strategy estimated that 40,000 additional homes would be delivered across the council area which translates into a 23% increase in population between 2011 and 2031. With this additional population comes significant additional infrastructure pressures in terms of considering planning and housing development schemes, other housing issues, school provision, provision of health and leisure facilities, additional mineral extraction from quarries, and environmental concerns and issues associated with flood alleviation.

The table below shows the Office for National Statistics population forecasts from 2021 to 2041. North Northamptonshire shows a growth rate of 13% over this period of the next 20 years. This is higher than the growth in the East Midlands of 9.2% and England 7.11%.

ONS 2018-based subnational population projections

AREA	2021	2031	2041	Increase	% Increase in population
Corby	74,467	83,138	89,610	15,143	16.9
East Northamptonshire	97,429	106,357	112,680	15,251	13.53
Kettering	104,797	113,984	121,208	16,411	13.53

Wellingborough	81,290	85,218	88,486	7,196	8.13
North Northamptonshire	357,983	388,697	411,985	54,001	13.1
Northamptonshire	770,276	824,281	863,771	93,435	10.82
East Midlands	4,917,711	5,219,026	5,446,988	529,277	9.72
England	56,989,570	59,389,102	61,353,965	4,364,395	7.11

During the Joint Core Strategy period, large scale housing developments are planned as follows:

Corby – 14,200 homes
 East Northamptonshire – 8,400 homes
 Kettering – 10,400 homes
 Wellingborough – 7,000 homes

Population estimates suggest the highest percentage increases in population will be in the Corby urban area with an estimated growth rate of around 17% between 2021 and 2041.

Looking forward to 2041, North Northamptonshire is expected to see a 13% increase in population from 2021 equating to an additional 54,000 people. Approximately 28,000 properties are anticipated to be built during the period 2021-2031. Sustainable Urban Extensions are already underway in the following areas:

North East Corby - Priors Hall and Weldon Park

Corby West

East Kettering - Hanwood Park

Rushden East

Rothwell North

Irthlingborough West

Wellingborough East - Stanton Cross

Wellingborough North - Glenvale Park

In addition to the SUEs listed above there is the development of the Tresham Garden Village ³ of 1,500 homes and there are also a number of smaller developments either in progress or allocated in local and neighbourhood plans.

Are there any other constraints, challenges, issues or changes ahead?

The Council alongside other Councils nationally is currently establishing an Integrated Care System (ICS). This will result in a statutory health and care partnership which brings together NHS organisations and local councils in a partnership of equals, alongside the statutory ICS bodies which will allow the NHS and local government to act as strong partners.

The Health and Social Care Act 2022 abolishes CCGs and sets out new governance requirements. There will be an Integrated Care Board with leaders from across the system which

³ [Our Proposals – Tresham Garden Village \(treshamvillage.uk\)](https://www.treshamvillage.uk)

is accountable for overall performance and use of resources and Integrated Care Partnerships (ICPs).

ICPs will be established which have a central role in the planning and improvement of health and care. They support placed based partnerships and coalitions with community partners. The format of ICPs is not prescriptive but guidance sets out the role of ICP's and encourages each area to develop its own partnerships based on the needs of each area and involving key players in the area. ICP's should bring the statutory and non-statutory interests of places together.

The structure of the arrangements is a series of hubs in each placed based area and agreement has been reached with health colleagues that the existing ward boundaries will be used as the building blocks for the areas.

Elected members are expected to have a role in contributing directly to discussions about the needs of their areas. The existing ward boundaries have been used because these have been based around existing communities. This enables local members to have a role in the ICS through the proposed governance.

There will also be new responsibilities for Health and Wellbeing boards which already act as a forum in which key leaders from the local health and care system work together to improve the health and wellbeing of their local population.

Under the Health and Care Act 2022 the Health and Wellbeing Board (HWBs) has some additional responsibilities and duties. The ICB and ICP will also have to work closely with local HWBs as they have the experience as 'place-based' planners, and the ICB will be required to have regard to the Joint Strategic Needs Assessments and Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategies (JHWSs) produced by HWBs.

There will be specific roles for those members who sit on the HWBs but there will also be additional responsibilities for local members representing their local areas. The proposals about the specific size and nature of the arrangements are still being developed.

Electorate Forecasts

The Council has provided electorate forecasts by separate cover to this document. This is based upon significant growth and the formulas provided by the LGBC. The proposal for Council Size is reflective of the challenges outlined above which consider the situation now but also recognise the challenges that are likely to arise in the coming years.

The submission recognises that its residents will be going through a period of hardship as a result of national and worldwide issues. It is accepted that this will have an impact on the support that residents will require, and it is at the forefront of members minds that the most vulnerable residents must be able to adequately get the support and member representation that they require.

The proposal on Councillor numbers is largely based on ensuring that there is an appropriate ratio of elected member to electors. Clearly, comparison with other authorities will not be the only

way to demonstrate what is appropriate but it is recognised that this is a good way of assessing what is likely to be reasonable and will allow effective representation.

The submission includes a table below from Councils that have recently undergone local government reorganisation. West Northamptonshire Council has been included but it is noted that the number has not yet been confirmed.

The average ratio as set out in the table is 4,316 per member. The submission therefore proposes that a ratio of between 4,016 and 4, 616 is appropriate.

Bristol	Bucks	Dorset	BCP	Wiltshire	West Northants
2020	2027	2023	2023	2024	2028
<u>70</u>	<u>98</u>	<u>82</u>	<u>76</u>	<u>98</u>	<u>77</u>
341,607	443,064	308,050	309,792	417,228	339,281
4,880	4,521	3,757	4,076	4,257	4,406
Average Ratio- is 4,316					

Strategic Leadership

Executive Arrangements- Hybrid Arrangements

What governance model will your authority operate?

The Council adopted Executive arrangements; however, it is considered to be a hybrid governance model as the Executive are supported by cross party Advisory Panels. The Council believes that this provides clear leadership and efficient decision making whilst still ensuring cross party involvement in policy formulation and decision making. It is likely that this governance structure will remain in place and is the best governance model for North Northamptonshire. A diagram of the council’s full governance structure can be found at Appendix 2.

There was debate in the Shadow Authority about which governance model would be adopted, particularly as the Committee structure was prevalent in the predecessor authorities. It was agreed however that the Executive model would allow efficiency and clarity in its decision making and the addition of the Panels ensure inclusivity which is often cited as the advantage of the Committee system. There are no plans to review the governance model adopted as it is accepted that the Council should focus on efficient decision making and delivery of services which the Executive model allows.

The monthly Executive meeting is the main forum for taking executive decisions. Decisions are taken collectively by a majority vote of members of the Executive. Decisions which are politically contentious, will attract media attention or are “Key Decisions” as defined in the Constitution must be taken in this forum.

Compared to other unitary authorities, Executive agendas are large and whilst it is accepted that large agendas are in part due to the business as usual of a large local authority, a high proportion of decisions directly relate to local government reorganisation, e.g.- harmonisation of policies. The work prior to, during and after the meetings is extensive for members. The Council notes that agenda items will likely reduce in the coming years as less LGR decisions are required, and more decisions are delegated which will positively impact on workloads. Executive meetings are well attended by the public and members, all of whom ask questions, make statements, and hold the Executive to account as decisions are considered.

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?

The Executive is advised by six cross party Executive Advisory Panels that are chaired by the relevant Executive Member, with other Executive Members attending as necessary. They are able to influence policy development in line with the approved Corporate Plan.

The Executive Advisory Panels align with the Corporate Plan to ensure that policy development is in line with the priorities adopted by Council. The only exception to this is the Planning Policy EAP.

The EAPs were held monthly but have recently reduced to bi-monthly to ensure that they are able to consider items that will add real value to policy development.

There is no intention to review the existence of EAPs at the current time as they are an effective way of allowing cross party involvement in the strategic direction of the authority. If the Council did not have the EAPs then it would be difficult to engage members in the way that it does. As the authority matures, the EAPs will continue to be reviewed.

The Scrutiny function of the Council is essential to holding the Executive to account. The Council is currently reviewing its Scrutiny function following a review. The Council currently has two Scrutiny Committees which undertake the statutory scrutiny role. It is proposed that an additional Scrutiny Committee is created, and the current Committees are renamed, and functions re-aligned. This will result in a Corporate Scrutiny Committee, Place and Economy Scrutiny Committee and a Health Scrutiny Committee. The work of the Committees will be overseen by a Scrutiny Management Board consisting of the Chairs and Vice Chairs of the Committees. The Committees have struggled with capacity to meet statutory requirements and add value to the organisation, particularly with regard to health scrutiny and the revised arrangements will assist.

The Committees have the ability to call in any executive item on the Forward Plan (Key Decisions). They focus on key priorities for the Council and make recommendations to the Executive/Council in relation to those areas.

The Scrutiny Committees may also contribute to policy development as part of their regular work plans and have held a number of Task and Finish groups for this purpose. Portfolio Holders will attend Scrutiny Committees where necessary to answer questions on policy development. They will also lead briefings for members on activities undertaken by the Council in relation to policy development.

Executive members will have regular one-to-one meetings with their Director and their leadership teams to provide political leadership on the various matters that need to be considered and decided upon within their own portfolios and across the Council.

Executive members meet every week as a group and monthly with the Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) where emerging issues, specific policy, future decisions and overarching strategy are discussed.

The Leader of the Council has regular meetings (sometimes involving other Executive members) with members of CLT on a one-to-one basis.

The Executive has delegated responsibility for Shared Services and the Children's Trust to two joint executive committees with West Northamptonshire Council – details of these are set out in

Joint Arrangements below and these committees are made up of Executive Members from both Councils.

How many portfolios will there be?

The Executive is made up of the Leader and nine other Executive Members. This includes a Deputy Leader who is chosen and appointed by the Leader.

The Cabinet comprises ten portfolio holders including the Leader.

Name of Councillor	Portfolio Area
Cllr <u>Jason Smithers</u>	Leader of the Council
Cllr <u>Helen Howell</u>	Deputy Leader - Sport, Leisure, Culture & Tourism
Cllr David Brackenbury	Growth & Regeneration
Cllr Lloyd Bunday	Finance and Transformation
Cllr Scott Edwards	Children, Families, Education & Skills
Cllr Helen Harrison	Adults, Health & Wellbeing
Cllr David Howes	Rural Communities & Localism
Cllr Graham Lawman	Highways, Travel & Assets
Cllr Andy Mercer	Housing and Community
Cllr Harriet Pentland	Climate & Green Environment

The Council considers that this structure and allocation of portfolio responsibilities allows effective oversight of services. There are no strong drivers to change the number of portfolio holders. The maximum number of Executive Members allowed is ten and this number already leaves some Executive Members with significant responsibilities. Areas such as Place and Economy and Transformation are particularly large portfolios which has resulted in Assistant Executive Members being required to support some members.

The Leader has appointed non-Executive Members as Assistant Executive Members. Due to the size of the portfolios, it is likely that they will continue to be appointed to in the longer term. Assistant Executive Members will advise and assist Executive Members in the discharge of their duties within their portfolio(s). They do not have decision making powers but are expected to attend Executive meetings.

What will the role of a portfolio holder be?

Portfolio holders (as Executive members) have individual and collective responsibility to deliver integrated services and deal with the opportunities and challenges of local government re-organisation. They are responsible for providing strategic direction to the Corporate Leadership Team and individual directors, who in turn are responsible for delivering operationally.

Key duties of portfolio holders include

- Driving strategic direction and policy within their portfolio
- Liaison with partners
- Representing the Council externally on outside bodies and joint committees/boards
 - Shared Services Joint Committee.
 - Children’s Trust Joint Committee.
 - Environment Agency Flood Committees

○ SEMLEP

- Attending formal monthly Executive meetings
- Representing the Council at political meetings of local government associations
- consulting and communicating with members of all-party groups, council officers and key partners to make sure decisions are well formed and that council policies are widely understood and positively promoted.
- acting as spokesperson within and outside the council for matters within the portfolio.
- having responsibility for liaison with Chief Officers and other senior officers responsible for the services within the portfolio.
- answer and account to the council, the community, and the press for matters within the portfolio.
- responding within agreed timescales to the recommendations of relevant scrutiny committees and panels
- seeking to involve and consult non-Executive members in the area of work for which they have responsibility, particularly through chairing of, and attendance at, monthly meetings of Executive Advisory Panels.
- representing the council and the political administration in the community and elsewhere as required by the Leader.

Will this be a full-time position?

Whilst there is no formal requirement that Executive Members undertake full time hours, the scale of the role and the responsibilities necessitate attendance at a much greater number of committee meetings within the Council and associated organisations (i.e., SEMLEP, LGA, Highways etc). Where there are national or local matters that require a response from the Council. E.g., Ukrainian Refugees, the work of the Executive Member will significantly increase. They will have to respond in a quick and efficient way whilst balancing their other ward commitments.

The role of Executive Member also necessitates undertaking work in partnership with other local authorities and external organisations.

Executive members have to attend a significant amount of both informal and formal meetings, liaise with fellow councillors and officers and provide strategic direction to senior officers.

Executive members chair Executive Advisory Panels which are held monthly.

Based upon the above, it would be difficult for an Executive Member to commit to anything less than full time to be effective in their roles.

Will decisions be delegated to portfolio holders? Or will the executive/mayor take decisions?

North Northamptonshire Council operates a scheme of delegation to committees and officers. The Constitution is clear that managerial and operational decisions should be taken, at the most appropriate level, usually the closest point of contact to citizens.

The scheme of delegation to officers is set out in the Council's Constitution. The effective operation of the delegation scheme relies upon close co-operation and liaison between officers and Members.

The scheme of delegation ensures that Council Members are involved in decisions which are of a sensitive or political nature or are Key Decisions. Within the Scheme there are exceptions to where delegated authority should not be exercised by officers.

Portfolio Holders do not have delegated authority to make decisions within their portfolios unless specifically authorised by the Executive. It is likely as the Council stabilises and executive arrangements bed in that an Executive Scheme of Delegation will be implemented which will increase accountability of the Executive Members and will allow a reduction in heavy Executive agendas. At the current time, whilst they are not exercising authority regularly, they are involved in high level decision making and are consulted as appropriate.

The Police Fire and Crime Commissioner is a separate elected role and employs their own staff. Both North and West Northamptonshire Council are responsible for administering the Police and Fire Panel which is responsible for holding the PFCC to account. The Committee meets regularly and reviews the work of the PFCC. Members sit on the Joint Committee and complaints about the PFCC are dealt with by the Joint Committee. The Committee also requires annual reports in relation to both the Police and Fire Service and these are scrutinised by the Committee with the attendance of the PFCC and his staff. The support to the Committee is provided entirely by WNC however North Northamptonshire members sit on the Committee.

There is an Inter Authority Agreement between the West and North Northamptonshire Councils which governs the services which have not disaggregated. There were 52 services which were shared on 1st April 2022 and there have been several services which have disaggregated. Some of the shared services are the largest and most significant Council services for example the Highways Service is in the process of disaggregating, and this includes the contract for the delivery of the majority of Highways repairs and maintenance. Adult Social Care is also a largely shared service.

Some services have long-term sharing arrangements. For example, the Head of Coroners and Registration is a joint post hosted by the West, however North Northamptonshire Council have oversight and regular engagement takes place with officers in the North on key decisions affecting provision, such as the arrangements for death management in the event of excess deaths which is in the North. The Registration Service is disaggregated. Both services report into the Head of Coroner's and Registration.

Members sit on the Shared Services Joint Committee and the Joint Committee is also subject to Scrutiny.

Support to the Lord-Lieutenant is undertaken by WNC on behalf of both WNC and NNC. Other shared services include IT Operations and Services Delivery, Street Lighting PFI, County Archives, the Countywide Traveller Unit and Payroll are all operated by WNC on behalf of NNC. NNC provide adult learning, safeguarding, school admissions, virtual school, country parks for WNC.

The Children's Trust is a separate entity and provides services for Children (excluding Education) for the County. The Children's Trust buys support services from the Councils. There is a Support Services Agreement which governs these arrangements. Executive Members sit on the Children's Trust Joint Committee, and it is also subject to Scrutiny.

It is recognised that, the Council is still working across the county of Northamptonshire and delivering services in that way in a number of areas. Therefore, although members maybe elected to North Northamptonshire Council, their remit and responsibilities span a much greater area. Whilst that may reduce in time, there are some areas as outlined above that will remain a county wide function due to legislative requirements.

The Executive model, for example, usually requires 6 to 10 members. How many members will you require?

The Council discharges its functions through a number of standing committees as follows. This is a lean structure (apart from planning functions) and to reduce it any further would not enable the Council to operate efficiently.

Licensing Committee	13 members	Responsible for determining licensing policy and applications where not delegated to officers.
Strategic Planning Committee	13 members	Responsible for dealing with large-scale major developments, large commercial developments or strategically important developments.
Local Area Planning Committees	9 members	There are four committees at the current time. These committees consider applications that fall below the threshold for Strategic Planning Committee but above the threshold for delegation to officers. The committees are in the predecessor authority areas and have 9 seats. It is noted that there is a review ongoing which will consider whether there should be a reduction in Committees. The Council will need to adopt a Local Plan for NNC in the future and when this is adopted, it is likely that the Area Committees will no longer be required.
Democracy and Standards Committee	13 members	Overall responsibility for the Council's Constitution, elections and community governance/boundary reviews and the Council's Code of Conduct.
Audit and Governance Committee	13 members	Responsible for overseeing the Council's governance and risk management framework and associated control environment and to provide independent scrutiny of the Council's financial and non-financial performance and financial reporting process.
Pension Committee	7 West Northamptonshire Councillors and 2 North Northamptonshire members - 13 members in total	Responsible for the Council's statutory function as administering authority under the Local Government Pension Scheme Regulations and associated legislation. West Northants is the administering authority for Northamptonshire.
Health and Wellbeing Board.		Statutory committee that enables leaders from across North Northamptonshire to secure better health and wellbeing outcomes for the local population, better quality of care for all patients and care users, better value for the taxpayer and

		reduce health inequalities by shaping the future of services through a more integrated approach to commissioning health and wellbeing related services
Employment Committee	13 members	Approves strategic structural reviews and recommends to the Council the appointment and, where appropriate, the dismissal of chief officers.

The Executive has delegated authority to the West and North Northamptonshire Shared Services Joint Committee. The Joint Committee’s role is to oversee the management of those services which are provided on a Northamptonshire-wide basis on behalf of North Northamptonshire and West Northamptonshire Councils to ensure effective delivery of such services and to provide strategic direction.

Children’s Services functions are currently carried out by the Children’s Trust following a government direction. West Northamptonshire and North Northamptonshire Councils have established a Joint Committee to oversee functions that relate to the joint ownership of, and commissioning of services from the Northamptonshire Children’s Trust which manages the relationship between the authorities.

There are also joint arrangements in relation to Northamptonshire Police, Fire and Crime Panel. The Police, Fire and Crime Panel is responsible for carrying out the powers and duties of the of the Police and Crime Panel as provided for within the Police Reform & Social Responsibility Act 2011 and the Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner for Northamptonshire (Fire and Rescue Authority) Order 2018.

The Council utilises Task and Finish Groups, Working Groups and Boards to assist with advisory and operational matters. These include the Member Transformation Board and the Constitution Working Group. These are only created where there is a necessity and therefore there is not an excess of them which could be reduced.

Members will also attend meetings such as Corporate Parenting Board, Adoption and Fostering Panels, Safeguarding Board delivered through the Northamptonshire Children’s Trust, Local Pension Board and Investment Subcommittee.

The Council also appoints Members to a number of outside bodies. As a result of unitary transition, there were many instances of duplicate membership of Outside Bodies arising from predecessor council arrangements. The Scrutiny Commission undertook work to ensure that the list of outside bodies was appropriate for North Northamptonshire and that membership added value to the area, approved by the Leader or Council, as required. Representation on outside bodies is therefore at an appropriate level and will be maintained through requirements for Outside bodies range in frequency, location and complexity, with some appointments more onerous than others. It should be noted that outside of the formal Outside Body process, a number of councillors, both Executive and ward councillors, will also sit voluntarily on local boards, committees and working groups in contributing to the local area. A full list of the Outside Bodies appointed to is available at Appendix 3.

The Council is currently able to resource most Committees and other meetings currently.

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.

Internal Scrutiny

How will decision makers be held to account?

The principal means of accountability within the authority is delivered through the Council's scrutiny function. The Council has Scrutiny Committees which support the Council. Scrutiny's role is to hold Council to account and provide reviews into Council functions where appropriate. The Committees are essential to good governance and making sure there is challenge to decision making where appropriate. Scrutiny has a duty to scrutinise other organisations, particularly Health Bodies, however, whilst in the Scrutiny work programme, to date there has not been sufficient time to fulfil this.

How many committees will be required? And what will their functions be?

Since May 2021 (shortly after the Council was created) two Scrutiny Committees have operated.

The overarching Scrutiny Commission (with input from Finance and Resources Scrutiny Committee) agrees an annual workplan which is informed by matters of concern raised by the public/ members/ stakeholders, the Corporate Plan, the strategic risk register, performance data, the Forward Plan and published decisions. It is able to establish task and finish groups completing work on the agreed workplan, that includes for instance, Assets, Levelling Up and Outside Bodies. This means that not only will the Commission take on its own substantive work, but it will also provide co-ordination of a number of task and finish groups for matters that have been identified as important within the organisation. The Council believes that this will allow scrutiny to have real impact on the organisation and its external scrutiny responsibilities under the Police and Justice Act 2006 and National Health Service Act 2006.

The Finance and Resources Scrutiny Committee is a standing Committee which focuses primarily on the budget, as well as reviewing and scrutinising regular monitoring reports on the revenue budget, the capital programme and the housing revenue account. Task and Finish Groups are established to scrutinise draft budget proposals and for the 2022/23 budget there have been eight meetings of the Groups. The Committee receives feedback and formulates proposals which are presented to the Executive for consideration before they submit their budget to full Council for approval in February. Executive members have been in attendance for their relevant portfolios.

The terms of reference for both Committees are attached as Appendix 5.

Both Committees are able to call in those decisions that have been included on the Executive Forward Plan in relation to their respective terms of reference. However, the inclusion of Executive Advisory Panels, which provide important overview work for policy and development and important decisions, have likely reduced the number of call-ins as a result of cross-party consideration of Executive reports in advance of them being decided upon. To date, the Council has received one call in of its decision, but it is still early in the life of the Council and the Council is fully supportive of call-in as a process. The Council considers call-in to be a key tool of scrutiny and welcomes the principles behind it and the ability for the Executive to re-consider policy as may be required. This is reflected in the low number of councillors required to instigate call-in as a request shall only be considered to be valid if it is signed by at least 8 members of the Council

(10% of the total number of members). Of the 8 members signing, none can be members of the Executive.

Whilst data could be provided about call ins at the predecessor authorities, three of the five councils operated a committee system where call in was not available and neither of the other two remaining councils had similar hybrid governance arrangements.

Whilst providing the opportunity for elected Members to hold the Executive to account it also provides a forum for residents to seek answers to questions from Executive Members and in some cases external organisations, and to challenge proposals. Public participation is now being added to all committees.

A review is ongoing to consider a proposal to change Scrutiny Committees to ensure that it is as effective as possible and to ensure that statutory requirements are met, particularly with regard to health. It is important that the Council has appropriate scrutiny considering the history of Northamptonshire and the added scrutiny that the county has on its finance and governance arrangements. It is proposed that an additional Scrutiny Committee is established, and the functions of the existing Committees are realigned.

The Council would therefore have a Corporate Scrutiny, Place and Environment Scrutiny and a Health Scrutiny. The Workplan would be managed by a Scrutiny Management Board whose membership consists of the Chairs/Vice Chairs of the Committees. There are currently 13 members of each Committee, but it is proposed that this is reduced to 11 members on each to ensure that there are sufficient members to fill the seats. Call in would be to the relevant Committee if it is required

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?

If an item is added to the workplan then a Task and Finish Group is created to scrutinise and provide in depth review. In 2021/22, there have been five Task and Finish Groups established to complete matters which are key priorities for the Council.

The Task and Finish Groups that have taken place are Levelling Up, Maintained Nursery Funding, Budget Setting, Review of Outside Bodies and Assets. The Annual Scrutiny Report for 2021/22 is at

<https://northnorthants.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s11912/Scrutiny%20Annual%20Report%202021%2022.pdf> and sets out the meetings that took place and the functions of the Groups. Task and Finish Groups are only established where they will have real value to North Northamptonshire and therefore, they are time intensive for members and dependent on the review, members may be required to not only attend meetings but attend sites, interview the public/organisations and collect data.

In terms of how often meetings take place, it depends on the topic and how the topic has been scoped. The budget Task and Finish for example had 6 lengthy meetings in quick succession to meet tight budget deadlines however the Levelling Up Task and Finish was spread over a longer period of time to allow detailed analysis and collation of data.

One off items are also included on the workplan as necessary and recurring items, such as performance, are considered to ensure that there is adequate scrutiny of the organisation.

How many members will be required to fulfil these positions?

Each scrutiny committee has 13 member places. There are currently 13 members of the Scrutiny Commission (with six reserve members) and 13 members of Finance and Resources Scrutiny Committee (with seven reserve members). All reserves members are expected to undertake the same training as full scrutiny members, and to keep abreast of scrutiny activity throughout the year. This is likely to change to 11 members per Committee (3 Committees in total) if the current proposals are adopted.

Explain why you have increased, decreased, or not changed the number of scrutiny committees in the authority

As explained above, the current level of Scrutiny is not considered to be sufficient for the size and functions of the authority. Whilst the scrutiny function has worked well and has produced reports which have been of real benefit to the authority and North Northamptonshire, the statutory functions of crime and disorder, health and flooding are not prioritised due to time constraints. There is also duplication between the two Committees at the current time which is not a good use of officer/member time. The changes as outlined above will provide better governance, compliance with legislative requirements and outcomes for North Northamptonshire.

Explain the reasoning behind the number of members per committee in terms of adding value.

Each Committee has 13 members however this is likely to be reduced to 11. 13 was a consistent number throughout the Constitution and was agreed following benchmarking with other authorities. To reduce to below 11 would likely have a detrimental effect on debate at Committees.

Statutory Function- Planning

What proportion of planning applications will be determined by members?

From 1 April 2021 to 31 January 2022, 133 planning applications have been considered by members. From the period of 1 April to the 31 December 2021, 1705, applications have been considered under delegated powers. Our Planning Policy was recently changed by the Democracy & Standards Committee to ensure a smoother and consistent approach throughout our planning process.

Although the dates sourced are slightly different, this gives an approximate total of 7.24% of applications determined by members.

Has this changed in the last few years? And are further changes anticipated?

Comparative data is not readily available from the predecessor councils for this purpose, noting the differences in delegation arrangements following local government reorganisation, however changes to the approach adopted by North Northamptonshire Council are not currently expected.

It is worth noting however that (in government figures released in December 2021) in England the total number of district level planning applications has risen year on year by 19% (after a large dip in 2020 following the start of the pandemic and a subsequent recovery in early 2021). It is not known how quickly this is likely to return to historical averages, but at present puts a pressure on the local authority planning system. ⁴

⁴ [Planning applications in England: July to September 2021 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)

The delegation scheme is not restrictive and seeks to ensure that decisions are made as efficiently as possible and not unnecessarily escalated to Committee.

Will there be area planning committees? Or a single council-wide committee?

The Council has a Strategic Planning Committee, comprising 13 councillors, which relates to town and country planning and development management in respect of applications for large scale major development, including residential developments over 250 dwellings, non-residential of 10,000m² or more, all minerals and waste developments, energy production of 10MW or more, significant highway infrastructure implications, and cross boundary applications (relating to area committee boundaries).

The Council currently has four Area Planning Committees, comprising 9 councillors whose wards are situated within the defined local government boundaries of the predecessor Borough and District Councils. The purpose of the Area Committees is to consider area-based planning matters not otherwise reserved for consideration by the Strategic Planning Committee or else dealt with by planning officers under delegated powers.

The Shadow Authority did consider establishing two area Committees instead of four as officers presented this as a potential solution based upon data, workflows and demographics. However, members believed that planning applications should be determined as close to residents as possible and therefore four have been in operation since transition.

As the Boundary Review changes the ward boundary it will be necessary to redraw the areas of the Planning Committees. A review of planning arrangements and the planning service is underway, and it may result in a reduction of the number of committees. It is unlikely however that there will be a significant reduction of work for members in relation to planning matters.

Will executive members serve on the planning committees?

Executive members do not serve on the Planning Committees of the Council due to the workloads they undertake and also not wishing to influence members undertaking regulatory decision making.

What will be the time commitment to the planning committee be for members?

On average, the time commitment spent at each planning committee meeting (excluding travel time) is as follows: -

Committee	Average length of agenda setting meetings	Average length of each meeting	Total number of meetings as of 15 February 2022.
Strategic Planning	1 hour	1 hour, 12 mins	5
Area – Corby	1 hour	1 hour, 15 mins	5
Area - Kettering	1 hour	1 hour, 7 mins	7
Area – Thrapston	1 hour	2 hours, 20 mins	7

Area - Wellingborough	1 hour	1 hour, 18 mins	7
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Chairs and Vice Chairs of Planning Committees will also spend additional time in preparing for agenda setting meetings, briefings and liaising with Democratic Services on matters such as public speaking on applications.

All planning committee members (including substitutes) are required to undertake six hours of training (1 day) prior to participating on the committee, with annual refresher training also required. Substitutes are also expected to keep abreast of planning matters at their designated committees through the year. All members on average will also spend up to half a day's preparation time on average to read the papers in advance of the meeting

Following approval by Council of a site visit protocol for Planning Committees in December 2021, it is expected that additional time will also be required of members to undertake site visits in advance of committee meetings, on an ad-hoc basis. Each member of a Planning Committee is also required to spend a significant amount of time reading through papers to enable them to exercise their quasi-judicial responsibilities effectively.

Licensing

How many licencing panels will the council have in the average year?

The Council has a Licensing and Appeals Committee dealing with functions relating to licensing registration, enforcement and duties and powers contained within relevant Licensing Act 2003, functions under the Gambling Act 2005, responsibilities under the Criminal Justice and Police Act and the Violent Crime Reduction Act 2006 and other relevant legislation.

Over the first nine months that the Council has been in existence, the Committee, comprising 13 councillors has met once, with the majority of its business undertaken through 11 ad-hoc licensing sub-committees and taxi licencing panels; equating to average of 15 such meetings per annum.

All licensing committee members and substitutes are required to undertake six hours of training (1 day) prior to participating on the committee, with annual refresher training also required. Substitutes are also expected to keep abreast of licensing matters through the year.

And what will be the time commitment for members?

Each sub-committee/panel consists of three members, with up to half a day's preparation time to read the papers in advance of the meeting and two hours required on average to conduct the panel's work (excluding travel time).

Will there be standing licencing panels, or will they be ad-hoc?

Licensing panels are held on an ad hoc basis, as and when required, with any trained licensing committee member able to participate in an individual panel.

Will there be core members and regular attendees, or will different members serve on them?

To date, the majority of licensing sub-committees and taxi licensing panels have been served by a core membership of the Chair and Vice Chair of the Licensing and Appeals Committee, together with a third ad-hoc committee member. Other members are being encouraged to participate in future meetings, to widen the experience and pool of available members.

Other Regulatory Bodies

What will they be, and how many members will they require?

The Council has three additional regulatory bodies, as follows; -

i) Democracy and Standards Committee.

The purpose of the Committee, comprising 13 members (which only recently has increased from an original number of 7, in part due to its large amount of casework).

Much of the work of the committee is in making necessary recommendations in relation to decision making governance, elections, Community Governance and Boundary Reviews on behalf of the Council. The Standards responsibilities of the Committee are to oversee and develop the Council's Code of Conduct and the overall standards of conduct for Council Members, co-opted Members, and Parish and Town Councillors of North Northamptonshire.

The Committee has established a standing Constitution Working Group, comprising six members of the Committee on a cross party basis. The Working Group meets monthly and reviews the operation of the governance of the Council, making regular recommendations for changes to improve the operation of the Constitution, as is to be expected from a living document at an early stage of the Council. Such recommendations are considered by the Committee and in turn, full Council. The Monitoring Officer is able to make changes to the Constitution utilising her delegated powers, where such changes are minor and/or consequential (for example, as a result in the change of legislation).

ii) Audit and Governance Committee.

The purpose of the Committee, comprising 10 members and 3 external independent persons, is to act as an advisory committee to the Council and the Executive on audit and governance issues. The functions that are discharged by the Committee are not Executive functions and cannot be discharged by the Executive. Responsibilities include the audit functions, the regulatory framework, accounts, and risk management of the Council,

The Committee meets bi-monthly, six times per annum, on average for two hours (excluding travel time) at each meeting.

iii) Employment Committee

The purpose of the Committee, in general, is to deal with employment matters relating to specified senior officers. It also determines pay awards on locally agreed Pay Conditions and approves significant staffing and organisational reviews.

The Employment Committee is able to appoint Sub Committees and in its first year of operation has appointed two such Committees, delegating to them the power to make senior officer appointments.

Explain the number and membership of your Regulatory Committees with respect to greater delegation to officers.

The number and breadth of regulatory member bodies that the Council has is considered the correct number required in order to support delivery of the Council's strategic vision. In this, managerial and operational decisions are taken at the most appropriate level, which is usually the closest point of contact to the resident. Officers are empowered through the Officer Scheme of Delegation to carry out regulatory functions and deliver the Council's services within the Budget and Policy Framework set by the Council, and subject to the guidelines set by the Council, the Executive and the Corporate Leadership Team. Decisions taken by Officers carry the same weight as any decision taken by the decision-making body.

External Partnerships

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?

Members are appointed by North Northamptonshire Council to serve on a range of Outside Bodies. An "Outside Body" covers organisations such as national and regional Key Strategic Bodies, Trusts, Voluntary Bodies, Charities, Community Associations, and Companies. Service on Outside Bodies is an established part of a Councillor's role and a Member appointed to an external body will be able to use their knowledge and skills both as a Council Member, and as a representative of their communities, to assist the organisation to which they are appointed, as well as the Council which they represent.

A Panel, established by the Scrutiny Commission, drew up a list of notified Outside Bodies for the Council in its first year. Due to the size and scale of the Authority, and member commitments, it has been necessary to be as strategic as possible on deciding which Outside Bodies to appoint to, with there currently being 63 such Outside Bodies. The list will be reviewed on an annual basis as to whether the appointment is a statutory requirement, is consistent with the Council's strategic objectives and/or adds value to the Council's activities.

A copy of the full list of Outside Bodies appointed to by the Council is at Appendix 3.

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?

The Leader and three other members of the Executive are members of the Local Government Association, and the Leader is also a member of East Midlands Councils.

The leader appoints to 37 strategic bodies that require at least 42 appointments in total, many of which are taken up by portfolio holders, with a further 10 significant partnership register bodies that require appointment to as well.

In terms of community outside bodies, the Council appoints to 14 such bodies (one member for each). In surveying across all members, the average time spent on outside bodies per month is 11 hours, however when focussing specifically on portfolio holders the average rises to approximately 20 hours.

What other external bodies will members be involved in? And what is the anticipated workload?

As well as participating in the activities of the Council, members also have a vital responsibility at the centre of community life, including working with a variety of local organisations such as health services, schools, police, local businesses, town and parish councils, and voluntary organisations. Members are expected to develop a shared understanding of local issues and ensure that communities make the most of all the opportunities available to them.

Whilst the workload will vary for each elected member depending on their ward and responsibilities. A survey found that councillors spend seven hours per month preparing for/attending community boards and their working groups.

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.**

Community Leadership

In general terms how do councillors carry out their representational role with electors?

North Northamptonshire Council is still in its infancy and whilst it has achieved a lot during the first year since transition, it still needs to develop and nurture its relationship with residents and partners. Key decisions such as the creation of community hubs has started this process but there is more to do and defining the Council of the future will be a priority in the coming years. It is important to note, that the Council was created from a failure of a County Council and this task is even harder as a result of the circumstances in which it came into being. Elected members are key to defining the relationship with residents and businesses and establishing it.

Councillors take their representational role with electors extremely seriously, engaging with their constituents in a number of ways to participate in the work of the Council, for example: -

- i) Bringing the views of their communities into the council's decision-making process.
- ii) Effectively representing the interests of their ward and of individual constituents.
- iii) Dealing with individual casework and acting as an advocate for constituents in resolving their particular concerns or grievances.
- iv) Responding to constituents' enquiries and representations, fairly and impartially.

Promoting and bringing to the attention of constituent's ways of participating in decision making, such as through formal consultation, presenting petitions, asking questions at meetings, and applying for grants through individual ward councillors' Member Empowerment Funds.

It should also be noted that a number of councillors have very rural wards and have to travel large distances, not just to carry out council meetings, but to attend parish meetings and deal with constituent enquiries that require face to face liaison.

As circumstances change, so does the representational role with electors. This paper sets out the challenges faced both locally and nationally and this will have an impact on the role that members

have in the community. Residents are facing unprecedented financial challenges with a rising cost of living and many businesses still recovering from the effects of the pandemic. The national picture will likely result in a slowing of economic growth and community cohesion will be even more important. In addition, significant legislative change and re-organisation in areas like social care and health will likely increase demand for services, place a strain on communities and the elected members who represent them.

Does the council have area committees and what are their powers?

The Council does not have area committees, other than those for local planning decisions. This remains open to the Council though should it be required. The ICF structure does support an area-based approach as outlined earlier. However, a Member Empowerment Fund is being established which will provide each of the 78 ward councillors a fund of circa £2000 per annum from 2022/23 onwards to support local projects.

How do councillors seek to engage with their constituents? Do they hold surgeries, send newsletters, hold public meetings or maintain blogs?

Based on a recent survey responded to by half of the current North Northamptonshire Councillors, the average time spent on casework is 15 hours per week, the vast majority of which are via email and telephone. To a lesser extent, councillors also receive and respond to letters, hold surgeries, visit schools and other community groups, conduct walk-about and meet in person – however direct interactions have necessarily been curtailed during and arising from the pandemic.

Increasingly, councillors are utilising social media channels, such as Facebook and twitter as alternative and new methods of communication with, and to gain the views of, their constituents.

The average number of constituent contacts is 13 per week, per councillor.

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?

The Council is considering the introduction of a Youth Forum to ensure that it engages with young people.

Councillors receive a copy of the electoral register and a monthly list of electoral roll changes and so are able to monitor changes to their electorate over time and help them engage in canvassing. Councillors also address schools, minority groups and other representative bodies to encourage electoral participation and visiting officers will engage on the doorstep in the months outside of the annual canvass to maintain the accuracy of the electoral register and provide the opportunity for constituents to engage in the electoral process.

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?

Councillors are involved at all levels of the community, this can involve representing their constituents at commemorative events and services, local markets, community fetes, welcoming and encouraging new and existing business owners to understand and apply for grants, supporting local residents to increase the wellbeing of the local area, such as addressing crime, flood risk, health messaging etc.

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?

The Council does not currently have an area governance structure and there are no plans to put one in place at the current time.

Casework

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?

There is a mixed provision throughout the Council reflective of the predecessor areas. The Council is starting to work towards a corporate approach to dealing with Member Enquiries. This is not only to set standards but to also work with members on how they can help residents to get their query dealt with as efficiently as possible. Many queries are simply signposting to the correct service. Members are generally passionate about casework and will take a more in-depth role where required.

Based on the same councillor survey described above, councillors spend an average of 15 hours per week dealing with constituents' casework, representing/supporting the community and/or attending Town/Parish Council meetings.

What support do members receive?

North Northamptonshire Council has comprehensive member development programme for Councillors that is aimed to equip them with the required knowledge and skills to enable them effectively to carry out their various roles. Councillor training and development comprises both core and mandatory development sessions. LGA resources are sent to members where relevant. Core training includes a general introduction for all Councillors – “Hitting the ground running” - to bring them up to a good basic understanding of their remit and key local government context.

Councillors undertake their own casework, but are encouraged to contact Democratic Services staff, who can direct them to the appropriate support that may be needed, should officer engagement be necessary. Councillors are also provided with the contact details of the relevant senior managers in each service area should they need to access them.

How has technology influenced the way in which councillors work? And interact with their electorate?

On the basis that more and more interactions between councillors, constituents and officers are online, all councillors are offered either a laptop or iPad (including peripherals such as a mouse, keyboard, headsets, protective covers and laptop bags) to undertake their constituency work, almost all of whom have taken up this offer, and interact with their electorate.

Councillors are provided training and access on their laptop/iPad to be able to use modern communication methods such as MS Teams and Zoom, which they can use to access their electorate remotely, they can also make use of outlook to assist them with diary management, email management and their workload generally.

As the Council tries to channel shift for the benefit of its residents, the ability to signpost by members and find information on the website will be even more important. The more data that is available will assist members to deal with queries at the first contact.

As a result of the covid pandemic, online interactions, emails, social media interactions with constituents has increased significantly and this is expected to be the case in the long term. In

the modern media landscape, the expectation of constituents is that councillors will respond immediately which increases pressure of Councillors time.

In what ways does the council promote service users' engagement/dispute resolution with service providers and managers rather than through councillors?

The Council promotes in the first instance for service users to contact the Council directly with any suggestions, queries, concerns, complaints via its website, utilising an increasing number of accessible online forms to initiate interaction across its service areas. Recognising that a number of users do not (or are unable to) use online technology, constituents are also able to telephone the council, Monday to Friday, 9.00am to 5.00pm, as well as an emergency out of hours service. They are also very welcome to access the Council's services in person at any of the council's access points, including the main council offices in its largest towns of Corby, Kettering, Wellingborough, Thrapston and customer service centres in Rushden and Oundle.

The Council offers a direct compliments, comments and complaints service for constituents to use, either through general complaints, or specifically in relation to one of its 16 service areas. Where a complaint arises a senior member of staff will provide a written response within 20 days. If the complainant remains dissatisfied, a review of that complaint will take place by an independent senior manager. If the complainant is still dissatisfied, then they have the right to ask the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman to investigate the matter.

Where a councillor is approached by a constituent, they are encouraged to direct them to the council's primary communication channels, however it is recognised there are times when matters need to be directly escalated by councillors and they can do this either by contacting named senior managers within each of the service areas, or by emailing a dedicated enquiries email address set up for members. The Council is commencing work on Councillor Queries and how this can be improved will form part of the remit.

Summary

North Northamptonshire is a new unitary council which was created following a best value inspection of Northamptonshire County Council. It was also created in unprecedented times, in the midst of a pandemic. Northamptonshire was the most significant Local Government Reorganisation of recent times which disaggregated large county wide services into two new councils. Splitting the County Council frontline and support services created significant complexities in data management, in staffing, finance, accommodation, the provision of technology solutions and direct service provision to customers. The ongoing work of merging four Councils and the disaggregation of the County should not be underestimated. There is still significant work that the new Council needs to do to ensure that it is operating in an efficient way for the benefit of North Northamptonshire, and this will continue for the foreseeable future. The Council is still responding to LGR, recovering from the impact of the pandemic, and responding to national challenges whilst still maintaining business as usual.

The impact of LGR was that there was a reduction from 158 councillors to 78 councillors. There has therefore already been a reduction in democratic representation in the past year.

There is a need to maintain sufficient councillors to represent residents and carry out the community leadership role effectively. Wards currently have 3 members per ward and whereas that is required in some areas and members caseloads are anecdotally large, in others they could tolerate a loss. Particularly in deprived areas which are outlined in the submission, the electorate are heavily dependent on member support. Considering the demographics of the Council, there is significant risk to the electorate where there isn't sufficient support. The loss of half a member in

each ward would result in a loss of 13 members and a total of 65 members. It is proposed that the Council would be able to carry out its community leadership role with any less than this number. In some areas, even the loss of half a member would likely have an impact on the electorate.

The submission has set out a number of areas where future governance needs remain uncertain. There is a scrutiny review ongoing which will likely increase member seats, the planning service is under review which may result in reductions to area planning committees, increased governance for the ICF will continue to have create additional demand and the disaggregation of the services between North Northamptonshire and West Northamptonshire Council will likely reduce demand over time. The relationship between the new authorities is in its infancy and will continue to develop, this will have an impact on both Councils in both the immediate and ongoing. As a result, there will be increases in service and member demands in some areas and reductions in others.

It is foreseeable that as the Council matures there could be a requirement for more members however in the round, the Council could accommodate a reduction based upon current arrangements and those within its foresight.

The clear disparity between the local areas within North Northamptonshire Council and the deprivation that is in some areas but not in others should be considered when determining Council size. The Executive Advisory Panels are essential if all areas and perspectives are to be taken into consideration in developing policy and to reduce the number of Councillors further than the range identified would result in changes having to be made which would not benefit North Northamptonshire. In areas with greater deprivation there is a natural culture of dependency from electors which can increase member caseload, and this is unlikely to significantly shift in the next 5 years.

In terms of community support, the Council (like all local authorities) will move to digital solutions which will enable service users to self-serve effectively. Whilst it is understood that this will not be appropriate for all, it will for the majority. This will ensure that members direct their support to the most vulnerable and those matters that they can add real value to. This will likely reduce the demand on members caseloads.

Whilst it is difficult to set out definitive governance arrangements to inform the size of the Council it is proposed a reduction to 70 could be achieved without impacting negatively on the governance of the Council. This submission therefore proposes a range of between 65 being the figure below which the council feels representation would be compromised and 70 being the figure which could be readily achieved without having an impact on governance arrangements. Whilst a range is identified, the Groups believe that 70 is the figure which would ensure the best representation for electors based upon the challenges set out within the report.

The proposed reduction to 65 would see the total number of Councillors available to residents reduce between 2021 and 2025 by 92 and a reduction to 70 members of 88.

A table is included below from Councils that have recently undergone local government reorganisation. West Northamptonshire Council has been included but it is noted that the number has not yet been confirmed.

Bristol	Bucks	Dorset	BCP	Wiltshire	West Northants
2020	2027	2023	2023	2024	2028
<u>70</u>	<u>98</u>	<u>82</u>	<u>76</u>	<u>98</u>	<u>77</u>

341,607	443,064	308,050	309,792	417,228	339,281
4,880	4,521	3,757	4,076	4,257	4,406
Average Ratio- is 4,316					

The average ratio as set out in the table is 4,316 per member. The Groups therefore believe that a ratio of between 4,016 and 4, 616 is appropriate for NNC. Considering the disparate areas in NNC, the demographics is some of those areas and the unique challenges of LGR, it is proposed that a lower electorate number per member is appropriate.

The Council size submission is supported by electorate forecasts and growth data which shows a significant increase in growth. The Council must be in a position to maintain electorate representation in the future and to reduce below the proposed range would not benefit the

	60	65	70
260,827 (2021 population figure)	4,347	4,012	3,726
281,713 (2028 electorate forecast)	4,695	4,334	4,024

electorate. The Groups therefore refer to the 2028 figure as the appropriate figure.

In comparison to other comparable councils, the ratio of electorate per member within the size proposals in this submission would put the Council within the mid-range of the average member to electorate ratio.

This submission therefore concludes that based upon strategic leadership, accountability and community leadership considerations outlined in the report that a council size of 70 will meet the needs of North Northamptonshire.