

# Bolton Council Size Submission

1st October 2020

**Bolton  
Council**



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## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 This document has been developed in response to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England's Electoral Review of the Council size (number of elected councillors) and the number of wards and ward boundaries in Bolton. This submission is made by officers on behalf of Bolton Council.
- 1.2 Bolton Council was last reviewed in 2003, and the current boundaries and councillor numbers have not changed during this period. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the review process has been delayed, as a result of a need to focus officer and elected member time on dealing with the relief and support effort.
- 1.3 The following pages make up Bolton Council's size submission, and contain information about the following areas:
  1. Governance and decision making – determining the role of councillors in decision making, and how work and responsibilities are distributed across the council;
  2. Scrutiny – council structure, member involvement, the role of members on outside bodies and partnerships;
  3. Representation – evidence about how councillors represent and support people and communities, their caseloads, and any systems they use to carry out those responsibilities.
- 1.4 As a result of the work carried out to analyse a range of data and feedback relevant to the review, Bolton Council's recommendation is that the council size should remain at 60 councillors across 20 wards, i.e. 3 members per ward, elected in thirds.

## 2. Information Sources

- 2.1 The council has used a range of sources to understand the current and future needs of Bolton as a borough with regards to electoral representation. This includes:
  - Office of National Statistics (ONS) data, the English Indices of Deprivation
  - Public Health England (2020) Public Health Outcomes Framework
  - The Council's constitution
  - Association of Greater Manchester Authorities (AGMA) Constitution
  - Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) Constitution
  - A survey of all Bolton councillors

## Councillor Survey

- 2.2 Councillors were asked to complete a survey which included questions on responsibilities, membership of committees and outside bodies, and workloads. The survey provided an insight into how members engage with residents and other stakeholders and demands on their time. Given the timing of the Council review, members were also asked about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their work.
- 2.3 The headlines from the survey indicate that, although workloads differ, depending on the nature of councillor roles and responsibilities, most councillors felt that their workload is greater than anticipated when they first took office. Many felt that any reduction in council size would result in excess pressure and workloads, and that they would be unable to support constituents adequately should the council size be reduced. A summarised analysis of all responses is included at Appendix A.
- 2.4 37 councillors responded to the survey, which represents about 62%, and an individual discussion was held with the Leader, given the complexity of his role and responsibilities.

## Analysis and Conclusions: Councillor Workloads

As evidenced by the councillor survey, the majority of councillors felt that the level of work they were expected to deal with, be that case work, preparing for and attending meetings, surgeries, dealing with emails and social media, community initiatives etc, were certainly much greater than anticipated when they first became councillors. Whilst cabinet members and the Leader have a particularly heavy burden in terms of both portfolios and additional responsibilities in relation to Bolton Vision Partnership, outside bodies and the GMCA, many backbench councillors also reported higher than expected demands on their time as councillors. This was accentuated during the COVID-19 pandemic, with significant increases in requests for support from residents and businesses, exacerbated by ten years of financial savings in excess of £200 million, which has resulted in reduced services and much lower officer numbers to carry out greater volumes of work.

The advent of emails and social media in recent decades has also facilitated engagement between members of the public and councillors, which in turn has meant higher volumes of contact, particularly in areas where need is greatest. Those elected members representing Bolton's most deprived areas reported significantly more support needs for their electorates. Social media, in particular, has made it easier for members of the public to get in touch and raise issues, and often these can be dealt with quickly and efficiently online. However, this also puts additional pressure on members.

The COVID-19 pandemic has acted as a catalyst to move council meetings and engagement with residents and businesses online. After an initial hiatus which resulted in a backlog of decisions and meetings, the council has now dealt with this, and the frequency of meetings (eg planning meetings) has returned to normal, albeit online.

Holding meetings online has provided the benefit to elected members of not needing to travel to the town hall, both for (pre-)meetings themselves, and no longer needing to collect paperwork, saving time and making meetings more efficient.

Since the council has established alternative delivery models for certain aspects of its business (Bolton Cares, The Integrated Care Partnership, Towns Board etc.), additional meetings and workloads have been generated for elected members. These additional meetings have increased due to COVID-19, resulting in a number of other additional meetings and workloads, including the Health Protection Board, the Recovery Board (to update all political groups on the pandemic), as well as GM boards providing a GM response to the pandemic. Due to additional and separate meetings being required to oversee these, there is a need for councillors to be appraised of new governance and legal structures and their responsibilities within these, and the much more complex nature of these operating models. For example the ICP requires a number of different partner organisations to come together (eg CCG, Bolton NHS FT, the Council) and align complex and autonomous governance and decision making processes into a single body. Elected members need an understanding of health and social care services and legislation, pecuniary rules, constraints and options, governance matters, safeguarding, and need to stay on top of a complex field of work which is evolving at pace.

Bolton has already unsuccessfully tested a reduction in scrutiny committees to reduce councillor workload. It is difficult to see how a reduction in councillor numbers would support full representation at scrutiny committees, both in Bolton and at GMCA level, whilst avoiding overburdening the same councillors with excessive workloads.

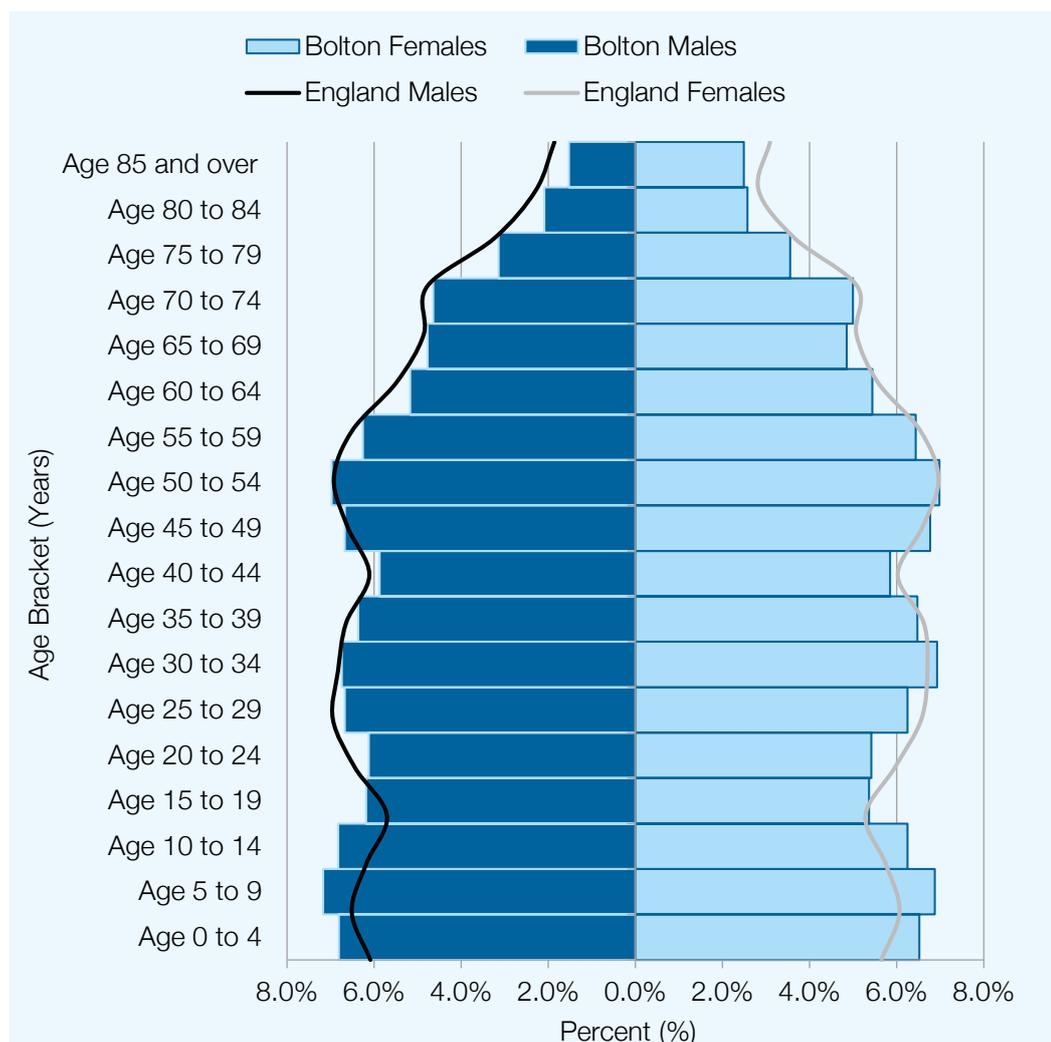
**Conclusion:** Although elected members have reported increased workloads throughout the pandemic, the ability to hold meetings online has freed up member time. These new ways of working will be available for some meetings, as online meetings will be available for informal meetings such as Executive Cabinet Member meetings going forward. Given the workloads highlighted by councillors, across a wide range of specialist and general areas, reducing officer numbers, and a need to make decisions faster, it is recommended that the council size is not reduced. More efficient ways of working, including smarter use of technology, such as online meetings, have created some capacity, and the development of a casework system for members will create further capacity. It is therefore not recommended that the council size be increased.

### 3 Council Profile

- 3.1 Bolton Council is a Metropolitan District council, one of ten local authorities which make up the Greater Manchester Combined Authority. The council gained borough status in 1974. It is currently composed of 60 councillors, with one third elected annually three years in four. The borough is made up of three Parliamentary constituencies: Bolton West, Bolton North East and Bolton South East.
- 3.2 About half the borough is urbanised, with the remainder consisting of agricultural land or open moorland. Urban development is concentrated on a spine through the town centre, leading into the rest of the Greater Manchester conurbation to the south.

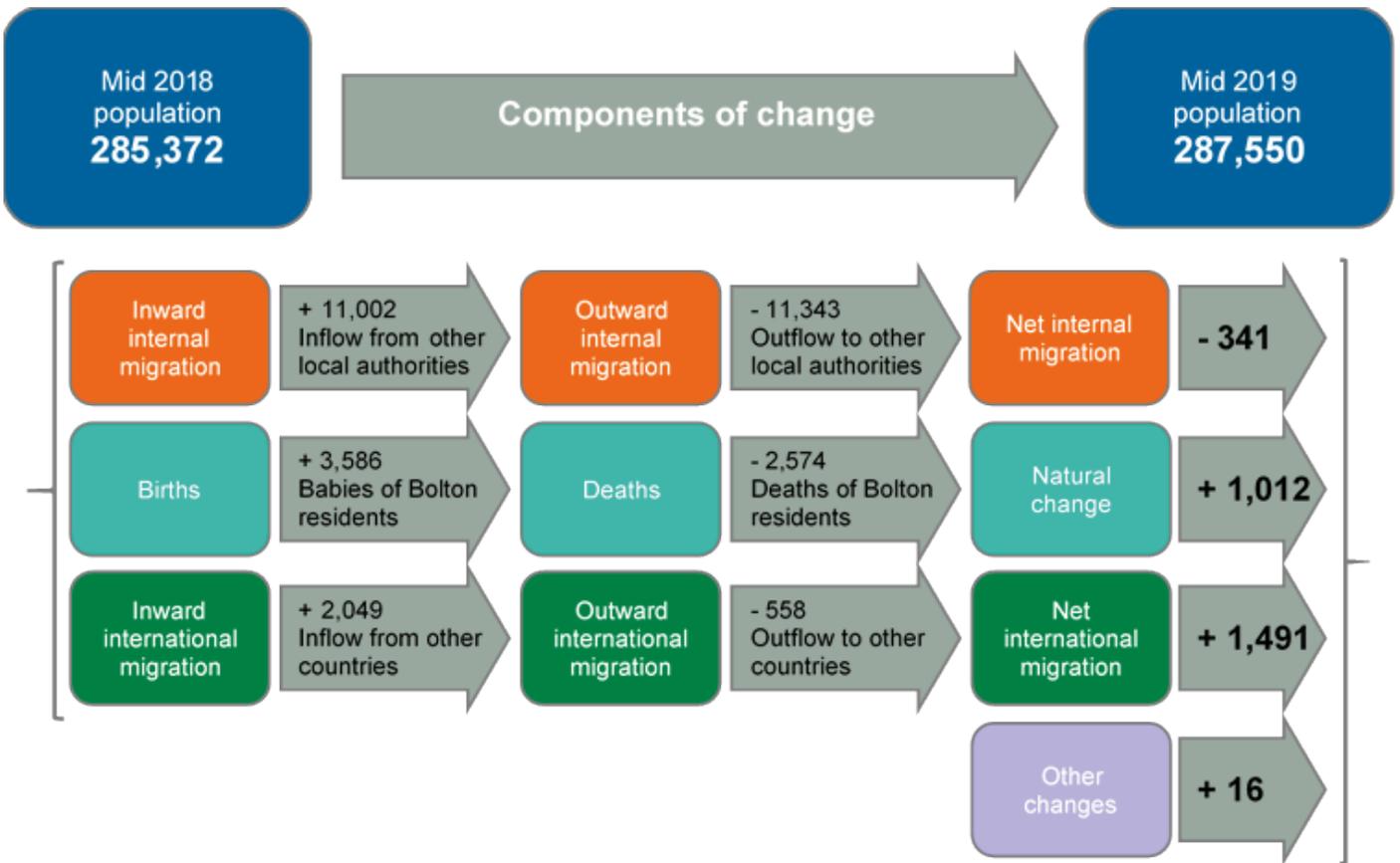
- 3.3 In mid-2019 Bolton's estimated population was around 287,550 people, which is around 10% of the GM population and 4% of the North West region population. There is an almost even split between male and female residents, with the overall population generally similar to the national profile, although the under-14 population forms a greater proportion in Bolton as compared to England as a whole.
- 3.4 Over the last decade Bolton's population has increased by about 14,500 people, from 273,049 in 2009, a change of approximately 5%. Bolton experienced a lower rate of growth than both Greater Manchester (7.4%) and England and Wales as a whole (7.8%). This compares to Manchester, which saw an increase of around 12.5% from 2009-19.
- 3.5 Between mid-2018 and mid-2019 net migration into and out of the borough resulted in a net gain of around 1,500 people. For the 12 months from 2018 to 2019, the biggest components of population change were international migration, with 2,049 people moving to Bolton from outside the UK, and over 550 moving out of the UK from Bolton.

**Figure 1: Population structure by age and gender in Bolton compared with England <sup>1</sup>**



<sup>1</sup> NOMIS (2018) Population estimates – local authority based by five year age band. <https://bit.ly/2U3OQMX>

**Figure 2: Bolton population - components of change, 2018 to 2019 <sup>2</sup>**



<sup>2</sup> Office for National Statistics (2020) Dataset: Estimates of the population for the UK, England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Mid 2019: 2020 LA boundaries. Table MYE2. [www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/datasets/populationestimatesforukenglandandwalesscotlandandnorthernireland](http://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/datasets/populationestimatesforukenglandandwalesscotlandandnorthernireland)

<sup>3</sup> Office for National Statistics (2019) Dataset: Population projections for local authorities. Table 2. [bit.ly/2HBym8H](https://bit.ly/2HBym8H)

3.6 Over the next ten years the highest projected population increases are expected amongst 15-19-year-olds and the over 60s. It is anticipated that the following age groups will see a reduction in proportions: 0-9, 25-34, and 45-54 (Table 1 and Figure 3).

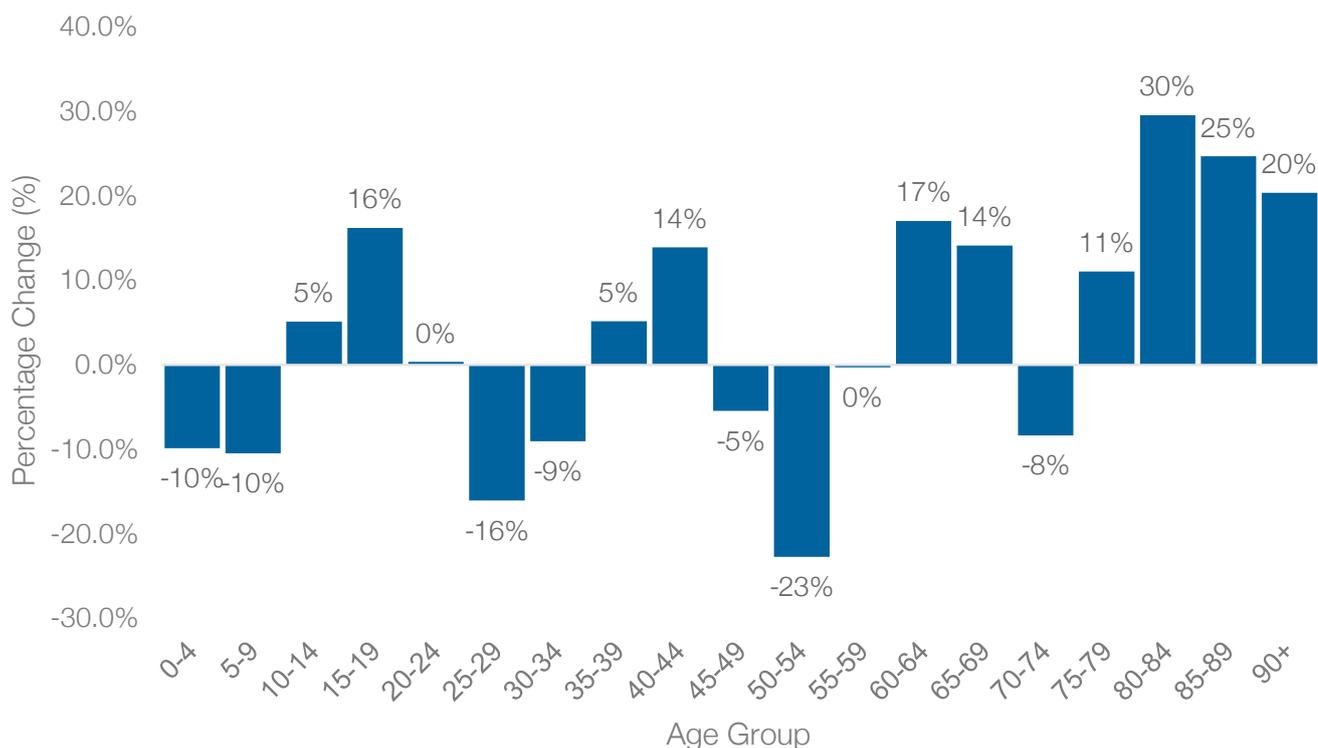
**Table 1: Past and estimated future population change by age in Bolton <sup>4</sup>**

Age group	2019	2024	2029	Change between 2009 and 2019 (numbers)	Change between 2009 and 2019 (%)
0-4	19,003	17,625	17,301	670	3.7%
5-9	20,160	19,617	18,256	3596	21.7%
10-14	18,697	20,296	19,705	742	4.1%
15-19	16,394	18,138	19,562	-1969	-10.7%
20-24	16,293	14,885	16,351	-1145	-6.6%
25-29	18,475	17,226	15,925	633	3.5%
30-34	19,432	19,048	17,822	2689	16.1%
35-39	18,403	19,634	19,405	-1342	-6.8%
40-44	16,849	18,447	19,571	-3898	-18.8%
45-49	19,268	16,666	18,277	-35	-0.2%
50-54	20,007	18,767	16,309	3333	20.0%
55-59	18,238	19,375	18,187	2642	16.9%
60-64	15,247	17,298	18,376	-1233	-7.5%
65-69	13,752	14,083	16,015	1258	10.1%
70-74	13,869	12,415	12,804	3679	36.1%
75-79	9,677	12,063	10,879	1931	24.9%
80-84	6,677	7,517	9,474	893	15.4%
85-89	3,724	4,314	4,942	99	2.7%
90+	2,032	2,168	2,550	603	42.2%
Total	286,195	289,581	291,709	13,146	4.8%

<sup>4</sup> Office for National Statistics (2019) Dataset: Population projections for local authorities. Table 2. <https://bit.ly/2HEIUoG>

<sup>5</sup> Office for National Statistics (2019) Dataset: Population projections for local authorities. Table 2. <https://bit.ly/2HBym8H>

**Figure 3: Projected population change between 2019 and 2029 by aged group <sup>5</sup>**



3.7 The age profile of Bolton’s population is very similar to the national profile, although the borough has a slightly higher proportion of children and a lower proportion of working age people than England as a whole. Just over one in six of the population is of pensionable age (65+). The proportion of the population aged 65+ is projected to increase from 17% in 2016 to 22% in 2041, an increase of almost 50%, with the increase in people aged 85+ almost 100%. The number of working age people has increased very slightly overall (1%), however the number of older people has increased dramatically, from 40,500 to 49,100, an increase of 21% over the last decade.

3.8 Alongside this Bolton has historically suffered a loss in the population from internal migrants, compared to other areas in Greater Manchester. In 2017-18 this loss was doubled from the previous year, from -600 to -1,400 people, or -0.5% of the population.

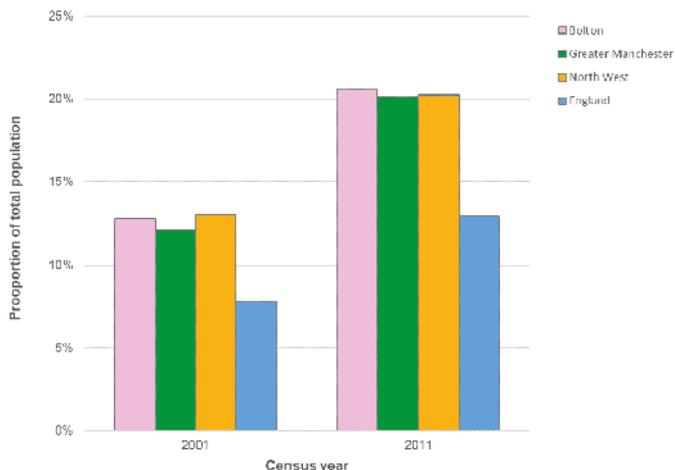
3.9 The proportion of dependent children is projected to increase, but only very slightly; the proportion of working age people is projected to slightly decrease, most likely attributable to lower birth rates, plus change patterns of both internal and international migration.

3.10 Bolton’s households are projected to increase from 118,500 in 2016 to 130,700 in 2041, making an extra 12,200 households. This is an increase of 10%, with an average gain of 487 households per year. Bolton’s increase is significantly below regional and national projections (15% and 17% respectively).

3.11 Bolton has an ethnically diverse population, with rising numbers identifying themselves as part of a Black and Minority Ethnic group (BME). However, the vast majority, around 79% stated in the 2011 census that they were White British, which is similar to the North West region figures, with an increase of 10% seen between the 2001 and 2011 Census. Bolton’s BME population is in general younger than the White British population.

3.12 The BME population in Bolton is extremely diverse, with the largest minority ethnic group in Bolton being Indian, at 8% of the population (about four times the national average of 2.5%). Pakistani was the second largest minority group, making up 4% of the population. The Bangladeshi (0.2%), Chinese (0.5%) and Asian Other (1%) populations remained quite small.

**Figure 4: Percentage of population from BME Group 2001<sup>6</sup> and 2011<sup>7</sup>**



3.13 When the last Census was completed in 2011 more than 91% of Bolton’s population spoke English as their first or preferred language. Other languages spoken in Bolton include Gujarati (3%), Panjabi (1%), and Polish (1%).

3.14 According to the 2011 Census, 20% of Bolton’s residents have a long term health condition or disability, which is around 55,000 people. 11.1% of those with a physical disability fall into the 16-64 age group, which is similar level to the national rate.

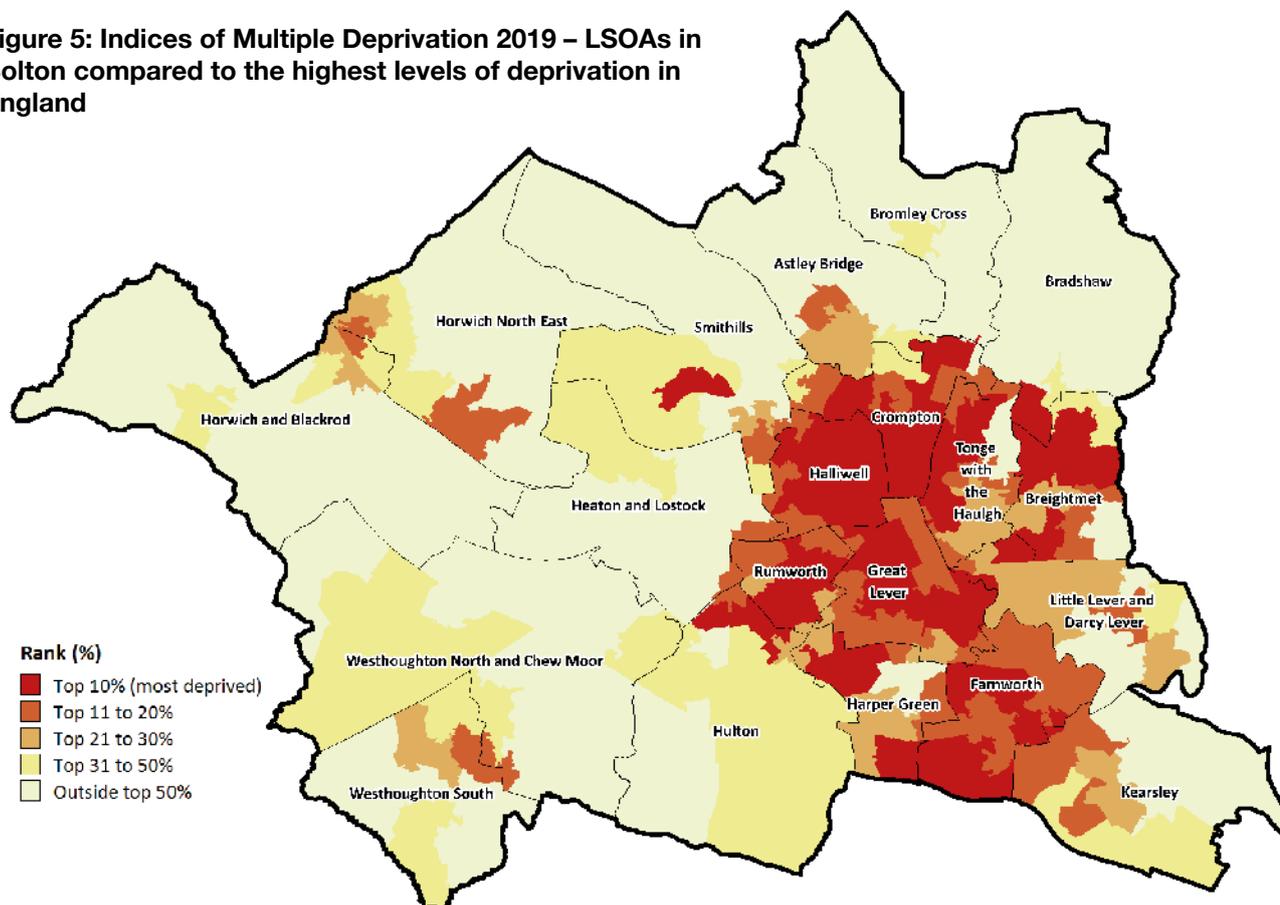
## 4 Social and Economic Conditions in Bolton

4.1 According to the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD), Bolton falls within the 20% most deprived local authorities in England, ranked at 46th out of 317. Within Bolton there is a large variation in IMD scores between Lower Level Super Output areas (LSOAs). According to the 2019 IMD, the most deprived areas in Bolton can be found in Halliwell, Crompton, Rumworth, Great Lever, Tonge with the Haulgh, Brightmet, Harper Green and Farnworth wards, with small pockets found in Westhoughton, Horwich, Smithills, Hulton, Little Lever and Darcy Lever, and Astley Bridge.

4.2 Increasing levels of inequalities are anticipated both during and following the pandemic. This increase, coupled with more diverse communities, is expected to place additional pressures on ward councillors working to support their communities.

4.3 **Employment, Education and Training**  
71% of adults in Bolton were in employment according to Public Health England in 2020 (NB this data predates the Coronavirus pandemic). 33% of Bolton’s working age residents have Level 4 qualifications (equivalent to an undergraduate degree) or higher, which is 6% below the England average. 31% had qualifications only below Level 2 (equivalent to 5 GCSEs at Grade C or higher), which is worse than the England average of 25%.

**Figure 5: Indices of Multiple Deprivation 2019 – LSOAs in Bolton compared to the highest levels of deprivation in England**



6 Census 2001 obtained from NOMIS (2003) Table KS006 - Ethnic group. <https://bit.ly/2ufWnPM>

7 Office for National Statistics (2019) Dataset: Population projections for local authorities. Table 2. <https://bit.ly/2HEIUoG>

8 Census 2011 obtained from NOMIS. Table QS204EW - Main language (detailed). <https://bit.ly/2uhoXAK>

4.4 **Health**  
Life expectancy is the average number of years a newborn baby would live if they experienced the age-specific death rates for a given area and time period throughout their lives. In Bolton Life Expectancy for women is longer than for men. In Bolton it is currently 82 years (83 years for England) for females and 78 years (80 years for England) for men.

4.5 Although life expectancy has been improving over the long term, and in Bolton it has been at a faster rate than the national and regional averages, in Bolton's most deprived areas life expectancy is 13.1 years lower for men and 8.9 years lower for women compared to the least deprived.

## 5 Bolton's Ambitions for Growth

### 5.1 Bolton Town Centre

Bolton is undergoing an exciting period of transformation, with many developments underway or planned to regenerate the town centre via a diverse mix of retail, housing and office accommodation, whilst preserving the historically important elements here.

5.2 Key developments include:

#### Trinity Quarter

This will comprise office and residential developments located south-east of the town centre next to the recently revamped transport interchange

#### Church Wharf

Church Wharf is a residential-led development which could also include leisure, offices, hotel, general work units and convenience retail facilities.

#### Cheadle Square

This development will deliver a combination of high quality residential and leisure accommodation, as well as a business offer.

#### Crompton Place/Victoria Square

Crompton Place is currently a shopping centre, with plans for demolition in the coming months to make way for an improved retail offer in the town centre zone.

#### Croal Valley

Situated to the north west of the town centre, Croal Valley will primarily be a development of residential accommodation with diverse housing types and tenures.

5.3 Whilst the pandemic required the council to re-evaluate these plans, Bolton Council remains determined to press ahead to regenerate the town centre, making Bolton a place where people want to live, work and visit.

5.4 A second (see below) Future High Streets Fund (FHSF) bid is being submitted for the town centre to the value of £24m. This focuses on the north eastern side of town, which is poorly connected to existing facilities. The proposals include the redevelopment of a brownfield site as a centre for music and arts, a new footbridge, public realm improvements and preparation of development sites in Church Wharf and wider public realm improvement to better connect the areas into the town centre.

5.5 Bolton has been nominated as one of 101 towns in the country to receive up to £25m under the government's Towns Fund. The council has identified a range of projects that are focussed around the civic and cultural quarter of the town centre, and include the redevelopment of the former bus station, an office block and improvements to the market and library and museum for completion by 2026. Work is underway to develop the Town Investment Plan, and a Towns board has also been established to oversee this. The council should also receive £1m to accelerate projects by the end of March '21.

#### Outside Bolton town centre

5.6 In 2019 Bolton Council created a £16m fund to support the regeneration of four further areas in the borough – Farnworth, Horwich, Little Lever, and Westhoughton. In January 2019, the Cabinet approved a £12m allocation of funding from the £100m Town Centre Strategy Fund, and in February 2019 Full Council approved an additional £4m of funding from the 2019/20 Capital Programme for further investment in district centres.

5.7 A new masterplan had already been commissioned for Farnworth, and it was agreed that the same process should be undertaken across the other three areas. Consultation on proposals was undertaken prior to the Covid-19 lockdown, and reports are currently being finalised.

#### Farnworth

5.8 The masterplan was approved in July 2019 and this has formed the basis of the Future High Streets Fund (FHSF) submission. The council has recently exchanged contracts for the acquisition of the Market precinct and retail units on Brackley Street, which will enable a comprehensive redevelopment of Farnworth town centre. The FHSF submission seeks £19.2m grant funding to bring forward the redevelopment of the former market site and precinct, improvements to the leisure centre and a Streets for All programme.

## Housing

- 5.9 In 2018 Bolton Council, Bolton Community Homes and Bolton at Home commissioned a ten-year Housing Delivery Plan to support the development of Bolton's Housing Strategy and our ambitions for housing growth and balanced communities.
- 5.10 Bolton has its own distinct housing market, with a range of housing markets. In developing the Housing Delivery Plan we have taken into account household needs, aspirations and expectations, demographic changes and demand for particular housing types. The provision of appropriate housing is crucial to the sustainable economic growth that we wish to see here, and will need to include a mix of tenures, sizes, prices/rental income levels, and suitable to different types of households eg older people, families etc.
- 5.11 Significant trends being observed for Bolton include a move from owning to renting, price changes and demographic trends, the latter being especially due to the ageing population and low birth rate.
- 5.12 Over the last decade housing provision has ranged between 330 and 660 new homes per year, with a five-year average of 446. In order to meet in full the mixed requirements of the borough in terms of suitable housing, 726 homes will need to be delivered each year going forward, and 155 existing homes will need to change to affordable rent or shared ownership tenure.

## Analysis and Conclusions; Population, Growth and Socio-Economic Data

Population data and predictions indicate that, although Bolton's population has increased over the last decade, and continues to do so, there are also significant migration levels within the borough. It is true that there are parts of the borough which, should planned developments go ahead, will see significant home building and expansions and increases in the numbers of business sites. However, Bolton has not seen the levels of population increases that have been experienced in other parts of Greater Manchester (GM), such as Manchester.

Bolton's population is also aging, i.e. the proportion of older people living in the borough, as a percentage of the whole, is increasing at a significant rate. At the same time deprivation data indicates that the life expectancy gap between Bolton's most and least deprived areas is widening.

**Conclusion: Analysis of this data indicates that there is no justification from a population or socio-economic perspective for increasing or decreasing the number of councillors.**

# Council Size

## 6 Governance Model

- 6.1 Bolton Council has 60 councillors and twenty wards, each with three councillors. The council elects its councillors by thirds, with elections held over a four-year cycle. The fourth year is a fallow year with no elections. The current political make-up of the council is as follows:
- Conservative: 18**  
**Labour/Labour & Co-operative: 18**  
**Liberal Democrats: 7**  
**Farnworth & Kearsley First: 4**  
**Independents (A): 3**  
**Horwich and Blackrod First Independents: 2**  
**Independents (B): 3**  
**UKIP: 2**  
**Others: 2**  
**Vacancy: 1**
- The council currently has a minority Conservative administration.**
- 6.2 Following the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act of 2007, Bolton's review of governance resulted in a move from a committee-based system to an executive model of governance. It was unanimously agreed at the time that the committee system was too slow and onerous, and created a lot of administration. Although the committee system may have provided a higher degree of transparency, due to all decision meetings being public and allowing contributions from all groups, these benefits were felt to be outweighed by the level of administration and the associated time required to progress a decision from, say a sub-committee, to a committee and then on to full council. In the current climate, with significant reductions to officer capacity and further austerity impacts on the horizon, it would be very challenging to return to this system.
- 6.3 The council therefore operates an executive model of governance, with a Cabinet consisting of ten Executive Cabinet Members. Please see Appendix C for a diagram illustrating the decision-making process. The Cabinet meets at least monthly and in public, with additional meetings arranged as required. Each meeting can last up to two hours. The administration also sends four non-voting members to Cabinet meetings. Members of the opposition groups are permitted to send a spokesperson. The majority opposition group may send four members and the minority opposition groups may send one each. There are currently seven groups in opposition, although there is an agreement between the administration and four of the minority opposition groups setting out their agreed 25 priorities/objectives (the "25 point plan").

- 6.4 Executive Cabinet Members cannot be members of scrutiny committees, so this removes ten members from the pool available for this.
- 6.5 In addition, there is a briefing for the Cabinet every week, which is attended by the ten Cabinet members, and generally lasts about two hours. This meeting receives information and briefings ahead of the formal Cabinet meeting, to allow for discussion of issues coming forward and amendments to final reports.
- 6.6 Currently the members of the Cabinet also meet informally every week for two to three hours to discuss council business and agree approaches. (There is no officer involvement in these meetings.)
- 6.7 The Leader of the Council currently also meets
- Weekly with GM Conservatives currently for two hours (was monthly pre-pandemic);
  - Fortnightly with the two main party opposition leaders;
  - Fortnightly with the leaders of the groups signed up to the 25-point plan.
- 6.8 There is no elected mayor for Bolton, instead there is a ceremonial mayor, which means that one elected member is performing this role at any given time for a year, and does not participate in any of the democratic processes other than the chairing full Council meetings.
- 6.9 It is important to note that there is very limited delegation of decision to officers in Bolton. This means that elected members need to maintain in-depth knowledge and understanding of their portfolio areas, supported by officers.
- 6.10 The council no longer has sufficient officer capacity, following a decade of austerity measures, to support a committee model of governance, and it would also place more demands on elected member time to attend more meetings and deal with programmes of work.

## 7 Portfolios

- 7.1 The Council meets every six weeks, and meetings can normally last a maximum of three-and-a-half hours, as there is a guillotine for meetings, which start at 7pm and end at 10.30pm. The Mayor can extend the meeting beyond the 10.30pm cut-off if they consider it necessary to do so.

7.2 The Executive Cabinet Member (ECM) meetings take place at least every four weeks and are a formal decision-making body with an agenda. Additional meetings are arranged as required. The ECM as decision-maker, a monitoring officer representative, and a Section 151 representative attend these meetings. Each opposition group is also entitled to send a spokesperson to these decision-making meetings. These meetings used to be face to face, but will continue to be online meetings once the pandemic has come to an end, as they have worked well and it is legally possible to do so.

7.3 There is no intention for the foreseeable future to change the number of meetings, as the council has a key priority to promote transparency and inclusivity. All ten ECMs hold a weekly informal briefing meeting where they are briefed on papers for the next formal meeting and other work that is in development. The ECM meetings are as follows:

- ECM The Leader**
- ECM The Deputy Leader**
- ECM Adult Social Care**
- ECM Children’s Services**
- ECM Stronger Communities**
- ECM Wellbeing**
- ECM Strategic Housing and Planning**
- ECM Environmental Regulatory Services**
- ECM Environmental Service Delivery**
- ECM Highways and Transport**

## **8 Delegated Responsibilities**

- 8.1 ECMs play a significant role in decision making. Please refer to the Scheme of Delegation provided as an appendix for the extent of officer delegations.
- 8.2 ECMs do make major decisions individually but will often refer more sensitive decisions to the Cabinet for decision as described earlier.

## Accountability

### 9 Internal Scrutiny

- 9.1 There are four scrutiny committees, each made up of seventeen councillors. The size of the committee is to ensure that at least one representative from each political group is a member of each scrutiny committee. The council did try for a period to reduce these in number to three, but it was not feasible to cover scrutiny of all the other areas of council business in the detail required for meaningful scrutiny. As a result, there are a total of 68 places to be filled for scrutiny committees alone.
- 9.2 Scrutiny committees are chaired by members of the opposition groups, who are appointed by the Council. Members of the cabinet are expected to attend committee meetings relevant to their portfolios. The four scrutiny committees cover the following areas: Place, Children's Services, Health Overview and Adult Social Care, Corporate and External Issues.
- 9.3 There are currently six scrutiny meetings per year for each committee, although it could be argued that more are required, given the increasing demands around external partnerships and new governance arrangements, such as the newly established Integrated Health and Care Partnership/ Alliance and a significant programme of physical regeneration across the borough.
- 9.4 As a result of the direction of travel of the council politically, the level of call-in had significantly increased, with member and officer time required not only for the scrutiny committees, but also for the subsequent referrals to other meetings as part of the scrutiny process. This has also resulted in additional member and officer time required to deal with high profile, contentious reports, for example by holding additional informal meetings, or dealing with petitions and emails from members of the public and union representatives, for example, relating to the reports.
- 9.5 Bolton Council also operates a policy development group (PDG) approach, whereby cross-party representatives come together to develop an approach to an issue or area of work before formal proposals are worked up. The membership of these groups is determined by the group leaders, and the meetings are set up on an ad-hoc basis. The Leader or lead member is responsible for agenda-setting with officers, and the meetings take up about a half day for the chairs, and around two hours for the other members.
- 9.6 Officer time is also taken up co-ordinating diaries and setting meetings up, as well as issuing papers and recording minutes. Officers publish a Forward Plan providing details of all reports coming forward for decision at the Executive Cabinet Member meetings and Cabinet. This is updated monthly, and provides visibility to members of the public of council business, and enables them to contact their representatives in advance of decisions being made.
- 9.7 In the past, Bolton Council operated task and finish groups, and although these ceased due to a lack of officer capacity, this situation is currently under review following a push from elected members. A reinstatement of this approach would require elected member and additional officer capacity.
- 9.8 In addition, the council has an Appeal Panel for staff disciplinary and grievance matters. There are currently seventeen elected members on the panel, and three are used for each appeal, wherever possible applying a politically balanced make up. At least two members of each panel must have completed relevant training, with an expectation that the Chair has a level of experience. Make up also depends on availability. It is difficult to predict future volumes, as this depends on case work, dismissals and how many employees are minded to appeal, however, over the last four years there have been eleven dismissal cases and one grievance case.

## Analysis and Conclusions on Governance and Accountability

In order to support an efficient and faster decision making process, particularly within the current context of the pandemic and Brexit and the levels of capacity required to contribute to the GMCA work programmes and business, a move to a slower committee-based system of governance would seem counter-intuitive, and would create increased workloads for some members and staff. It is felt that the executive model of governance far outweighs the committee model.

Bolton does not currently have an elected mayor model of governance nor does it intend to hold a referendum to determine whether the electorate would like to have one, nor has a petition been received to request one. Given COVID-19 this is not a priority.

**Conclusion: The Executive model of governance remains the most suitable model for Bolton for the foreseeable future.**

# Statutory Function

## 10 Planning

10.1 Before the pandemic, the Planning Committee met every four weeks for a half day, plus a half day of site visits prior to the meeting. During the pandemic meetings took place every two weeks to address the backlog caused by a hiatus in activity in the first few weeks of the pandemic, and there are still no arranged site visits. Although the meetings were more frequent, less items were dealt with at each meeting due to them being online. Planning Committee could sit for up to four hours depending on the agenda, but it would be unreasonable to expect councillors to sit at their computer screens for such a length of time. The online meetings are more difficult for the Chair to manage. Normally the Chair is in the same room as a Democratic Services Officer and Lawyer, who help the Chair in noting speakers. The Chair has to manage the process and check in the application to see if there are speakers on an application. Also, rather than the applicant and objectors just attending the meeting and being present from the beginning of the meeting, they must be telephoned and invited to join the meeting.

10.2 As of September, the Planning Committee had returned to monthly meetings, held online.

## 11 Licensing

- 11.1 In Bolton we have the following Licensing Committees:
- Licensing and Environmental Regulation Committee – there are currently ten members of this committee, however there can be up to fifteen;
  - Licensing (Licensing Act 2003) Sub Committee – three elected members;
  - Licensing Sub-Committee (Sensitive Cases); and
  - Licensing Sub-Committee (Traffic Offences) – five elected members cover both.
- 11.2 There are about 30 meetings per year in total.

## 12 Other Regulatory Bodies

- 12.1 Audit Committee  
This committee meets 3-4 times per year and has 5 elected member representatives at present.

Audit and Scrutiny Sub-committee

- 12.2 **Chief Officer Appointments Panel**  
This panel meets as part of the recruitment and selection process for Chief Officers of the council. The panel is made up of five members from three groups, and meets on an ad hoc basis in line with recruitment requirements. The time commitment for members is between half a day and a whole day plus preparation time, depending on the number of shortlisted candidates and the number of posts being recruited to at a particular time.

## Analysis and Conclusions on Statutory Function

The various statutory committees that are required to enable the council to discharge its legal requirements, their frequency to manage the busy workload, and, the representation and workload required for many of these mean that a reduction in council size would lead to an excessive workload for elected members. The current council size enables the council to have representation from a pool of councillors from across the political groups. A reasonable workload for councillors is necessary to attract future councillors who ideally should come from a wide range of backgrounds representative of their communities. Numbers of councillors need to enable a fair work-life balance and consider members being unavailable due to life events, sickness, taking leave etc.

**Conclusion: a reduction in council size would place an excessive burden on elected members to support the council in discharging its duties around statutory functions. The current size of the council is sufficient to manage council business without placing an excessive burden on members, and so the number of councillors does not need to increase.**

## 13 External Partnerships

13 Elected members are appointed to 72 different external bodies. These include the following:

- Bolton Active, Prosperous and Connected Board (merged Health & Wellbeing Board and Vision Steering Group).
- Bolton Care and Support Ltd Steering Committee
- Integrated Health and Care Partnership/Alliance
- Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) and its various committees and the Associated Group of Manchester Authorities (AGMA).
- Audit and Scrutiny Sub-committee (YPO)
- Central Safety, Health & Welfare Joint Consultative Committee
- Single Local Joint Consultative Committee
- Education Assistance Panel
- Bolton at Home

Further information about these bodies is provided below.

### 13.1 Bolton Active, Prosperous and Connected Board

The Board is relatively new in its current format. It was formed in 2020, when the Health and Wellbeing Board and the Vision Steering Group (the council's Local Strategic Partnership) were brought together.

13.2 Bolton has very robust partnership working arrangements, which were highlighted in the council's LGA Peer Review in 2018. We have a strong tradition of working together across the business/private, community, higher education, faith, public (including health, police, fire, council), and the voluntary sector.

13.3 The ACPB meets four times per year, two of these meetings being formal ones, with the press and public able to attend, and two informal meetings of just the Board. Full ACPB meetings take up to two-and-a-half hours and are co-chaired by the Leader of the Council and a local business leader. The Leader, the Leader of the Opposition, and another member from the administration currently sit on the ACP Board. A Vision Action Group currently meets monthly and is attended by the Leader, and the meeting takes up to two hours.

13.4 Within the ACPB a number of sub groups have been set up, which are run by partners and are quite dynamic in terms of membership and focus. These sub groups are tasked with the development and delivery of specific workstreams within the Vision 2030 plan.

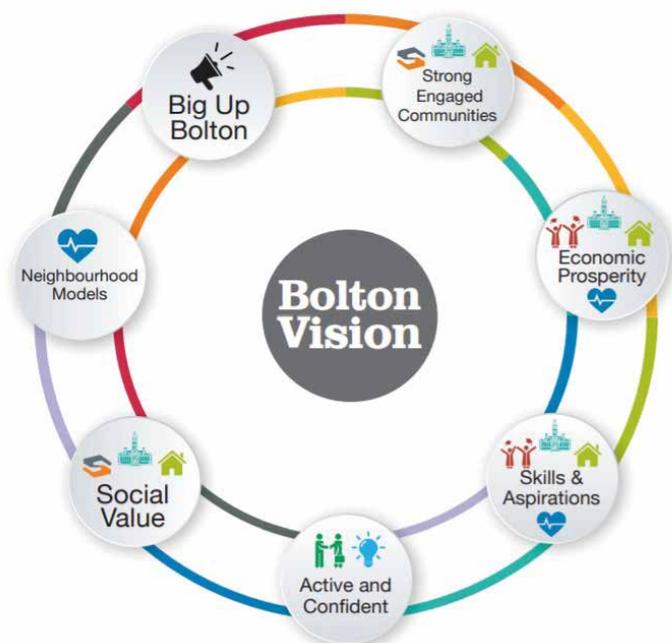
13.5 The commitment required to enable these groups to progress these programmes is significant, and this does impact in terms of attendance/task completion and focus from time to time. The benefits outweigh these considerations, however, and it is testimony to the strength of partnership working and local political input that the structures flourish and continue.

### 13.6 The Vision Delivery Plan

The Bolton2030 Vision Delivery Plan plays a pivotal part in recognising what the council, together with key partners, wants to achieve within the borough. The plan is led by the Vision Action Group, which was set up to lead and deliver on the seven task and finish groups identified below, each chaired by leaders from across the relevant sectors:

- Big up Bolton
- Strong and Engaged Communities
- Skills and Aspirations
- Active and Confident
- Social Value
- Neighbourhood Models
- Economic Prosperity

**Figure 6: Bolton2030 Vision Delivery Plan Task and Finish Groups**



- 13.7 The Bolton2030 plan is informed by the Greater Manchester Strategy, which was developed by the GMCA, and outlines priorities for the ten member local authorities. In turn, the Bolton2030 plan indicates the priorities for the council's Corporate Plan, broken down across the four directorates. A corporate dashboard is used to report to members and residents on how well we are delivering against these priorities and actions. Each directorate has an individual plan which provides details of how workstreams contribute to the overarching plans.
- 13.8 Bolton's aim through the corporate plan is to be an effective, confident council, and the values underpinning this are Working Together, Accountability, Making a Difference, Honesty and Respect, and Determination.
- 13.9 There is also a Youth Vision which is connected to the ACPB. It was originally set up to develop stronger links with Youth MPs/Youth Voice in Bolton and encourage young people to engage with and shape the Vision Delivery Plan, by inviting them to feed back at the Vision Steering Group meetings. Youth MPs and young people from Youth Voice ensure that all young people's voices are listened to. Young people attend Head Teachers' conferences, communicate with all schools and colleges, and contribute to Bolton's prosperity by developing a clear involvement mechanism.
- 13.10 In 2017 the first Youth Vision conference took place, providing a safe environment for young people to take part in shaping the future vision for the borough and has been followed up annually pre-pandemic. At the last conference, groups of budding entrepreneurs pitched proposals about improving prosperity on the themes of health, physical activity, recycling, raising aspirations and future career choices to a Bigger, Better Bolton panel, made up of cabinet members, the Mayor of Bolton, council officers, Public Health and CCG staff, and a Bolton La ds and Girls Club representative. Cabinet members are invited to take part at every event, and either observe the event and chat to young people, or take part in some of the panel type activities. A wide range of Bolton partners is also involved.
- 13.11 Until last year, an annual Vision Conference brought together Bolton's key partners from across the business/private sector, community organisations, the university and college, faith groups, emergency services, health, voluntary sector, and the council. The Council's Cabinet and the opposition spokespersons were invited to participate. The conference was used to review progress against the Bolton Vision 2030 strategic delivery plan, and to set out future plans and ambitions for the borough, and how member organisations contribute to and lead on these.
- 13.12 Clearly with the arrival of the pandemic and a refreshed ACPB, there is a need to review this event and potentially deliver an alternative approach.
- 13.13 **Bolton Cares Ltd Steering Committee**  
Bolton Cares is an arm's length management organisation set up by the council in 2016. It delivers care to adults in the following areas: extra care housing, disability day care, Jubilee Pool and leisure, older people's day care, outreach and dementia support, shared lives, short breaks, and supported living. There are five elected member representatives, including the chair, and meetings take place 4-6 times per year, lasting around an hour. The meeting often considers complex information such as budgets, employment and staffing issues, performance reporting, and new business developments.
- 13.14 **Bolton Integrated Care Partnership (ICP)**  
Since April 2019 Bolton Council and NHS Bolton's Clinical Commissioning (CCG) Group have pooled their individual budgets to buy health and care services for adults and older people. The ICP brings together health and care providers in Bolton to provide the most appropriate services for local residents which will help them stay well for longer and in their own homes. These partners include Bolton Council, NHS Bolton CCG, Bolton NHS Foundation Trust, and Greater Manchester Mental Health NHS Foundation Trust, as well as partners in the voluntary and community sector.
- 13.15 They have collaborated to produce a locality plan for Bolton, which looks at the challenges facing our health and care system and sets out how and why changes must be made if we are to have effective and sustainable services in the future. The Partnership Board, an advisory board which sits below the ICP, normally meets on alternate months (after a pause due to the pandemic), and three elected members are included in its membership. These same members also sit on the Joint Commissioning Committee, which sets the outcomes for the ICP. This is council and CCG constituted, and is a decision-making committee which makes decisions about the joint pooled budget for adults health and care. This committee meets monthly. Governance arrangements across health and social care are being developed further, and are likely to see further member representation.
- 13.16 In addition, two of the same councillors also sit on the CCG's Primary Care Commissioning Committee.
- 13.17 **GMCA**  
The ten Greater Manchester local authorities have a longstanding tradition of working collaboratively. This collective working is embodied in the current combined authority, with an elected Mayor.

- 13.18 The GMCA (and the Association of Greater Manchester Authorities - AGMA) has its own constitution, and is made up of eleven indirectly elected members, each a directly elected councillor from one of the ten metropolitan boroughs of GM, plus the Mayor. It forms the first formal administrative authority for GM since 1986. The GMCA has powers over public transport, skills, housing, regeneration, waste management, carbon neutrality and planning permission, with executive bodies such as Transport for Greater Manchester having responsibility for relevant service delivery. The GMCA is part-funded by a precept collected from the ten member local authorities, who also contribute towards a Mayoral precept, which includes funding for GM Fire and Rescue and GM Police.
- 13.19 Due to the nature of the GMCA's structures and protocols as set out in the constitution, there is a significant demand on elected members from across the sub-region to represent their individual boroughs and/or political groups on a range of committees and bodies. These bodies include:
- The GMCA itself
  - Joint GMCA and AGMA
  - GM Economy, Business Growth and Skills Overview & Scrutiny committee
  - GM Corporate Overview and Scrutiny
  - GM Joint Health Scrutiny Committee
  - AGMA Statutory Functions Committee
  - GM Health and Care Board
  - GM Health & Care Joint Commissioning Board
  - GM Culture and Social Impact Fund Committee
  - GMP & Crime Panel
  - GM Transport & Green Issues
- 13.20 Preparation for, attendance at, and development work to support GMCA meetings places significant (and increasing) demands on elected member and officer time. The business of the GMCA covers a very wide range of subjects and themes, and often the nature of the work is extremely complex and requires a good understanding of subject matter. Much of the work is ground-breaking in terms of governance, legislation and ways of working, and requires members to be up to speed on a range of topics within their portfolios. Members also need to constantly balance local priorities against the GM-level, regional and national picture.
- 13.21 Before the pandemic the Leader attended at least three meetings per month, as does the Chief Executive, and Bolton Council elected members are represented on a range of committees and bodies, including Greater Manchester scrutiny committees. Please refer to the separate document provided. During the pandemic the Leader, and Chief Executive, have attended meetings on a much more frequent basis to respond to local and national issues which have arisen. With Bolton having its own local restrictions this has also led to a further increase in demand.
- It is important to have sufficient councillors so that they can respond to issues affecting the borough.
- 13.22 Bolton's Leader holds the Culture Portfolio at the GMCA. Due to the pandemic and its impacts there have been weekly meetings to support the sector, including two big round tables.
- 13.23 **Audit and Scrutiny Sub-Committee**
- 13.24 **Central Safety, Health & Welfare Joint Consultative Committee**  
This meets 3-4 times per year.
- 13.25 **Single Local Joint Consultative Committee**  
This meeting convenes four times per year normally.
- 13.26 **Education Assistance Panel**  
This meets two to five times per year, depending on the number of requests for assistance, and lasts between 45 minutes and 2 hours. The meetings tend to be concentrated in the Autumn and early Winter. The panel considers applications for home to school transport assistance in accordance with the council's policy. It is chaired by an elected member, and two other councillors also sit on the panel. Parents and carers attend to make representations and ask questions in respect of their applications for assistance.
- 13.27 **School Governor Appointments Panel**  
This panel meets between once and three times per year, and has five elected member representatives, with at least three being required per meeting. The panel considers nominations for Local Authority governor positions for Bolton and meetings last between 30 minutes and 1½ hours.
- 13.28 **Bolton at Home**  
Bolton at Home is the arm's length housing management company set up in 2002 to provide quality housing. It is a charitable community benefit society, and has created subsidiaries within its group structure to acquire more properties, deliver contracts and training opportunities, and provide the means to invest in more communities. The organisation owns, manages and maintains over 18,000 homes across Bolton. It also works to tackle poverty with debt and money advice, provides food and clothing initiatives, and helps people to stay warm in their homes. It supports residents into training and employment, deal with anti-social behaviour, and remain independent in their own homes, working in partnership with volunteer groups to build sustainable communities. It has an elected member representative from Bolton Council on the Board, the Audit and Risk Committee, and another elected member on the Operations Committee.

## **Analysis and Conclusions from External Partnerships information:**

Bolton's reputation for strong partnership working has been developed over a long period of time. These partnerships require ongoing and intensive engagement across all parties, but particularly from the political leadership of the council. The devolution agenda has greatly increased the level of input and engagement required from elected members, both day to day, and more recently in the context of the ongoing pandemic.

**Conclusion: Given the numbers of external bodies at which Bolton councillors are represented, and the levels of work arising from these, it would be very challenging for councillors to discharge their responsibilities and ensure that Bolton is represented and heard effectively if the council size was to be reduced. The current size of the council is sufficient to manage council business without placing an excessive burden on members and so the number of councillors does not need to increase.**

## 14 Community Involvement

- 14.1 The council has a long track record of working closely with its communities, both directly and via partner organisations such as Bolton CVS, representative groups such as Bolton Solidarity Community Group (a Somali group), and the Faith Leaders' Forum.
- 14.2 The council set up Area Forums around twenty years ago as a mechanism for members of the public, businesses, elected members, council officers and partner organisations to come together to share information on and discuss a range of topics, and for residents to have the opportunity to ask questions and share their views.
- 14.3 Work is currently underway to develop more effective and efficient mechanisms to engage with our communities which will enable wider and fuller representation from across the borough.
- 14.4 **Area Forums**  
At present, one area forum is held in each ward per year, with the exception of two two-ward area forums – Horwich & Blackrod Two Towns, and Westhoughton & Chew Moor. The forums are attended by all the ward members; the Neighbourhood Development Manager (NDM) for those areas with significant levels of multiple deprivation, as based on the IMD, or the Area Co-ordinator (AC) for all other areas; and relevant officers and partner agencies, depending on the agenda. These meetings normally take place in the early evenings or on a Saturday morning. Area Forums have delegated powers to allocate funding to projects in line with guidance/criteria. The current arrangements are subject to a Local Government Association review which may lead to greater interaction between councillors and their communities.
- 14.5 **Member Only Meetings (MOMs)**  
To support the area forums and area working, regular "Member Only Meetings" take place, with one for each ward, apart from the two two-ward areas which meet as a single meeting, but sometimes also as single ward MOMs. Most of these meet quarterly, but can meet more often as and when required, and particularly more frequently two months prior to a forum. Sometimes there is an additional meeting after the forum. The MOMs are used to aid decision making and sometimes they are held more frequently to help progress decisions on projects. This tends to work better face-to-face than by email.
- 14.6 The MOMs provide elected members with the opportunity to meet informally with their ACs/NDMs, and council officers, and representatives from partner agencies (Greater Manchester Police, the NHS, Bolton at Home etc) are also invited as and when required.
- 14.7 MOMs are used to discuss and plan for ward priorities and specific issues that members want to address. They are used to prepare for the area forum meetings (agenda setting, discussing presentations, covering anticipated issues etc.) They are also used to discuss issues raised at previous area forums and responses/follow up, and provide an opportunity to discuss and update projects that have been funded or are being considered for funding.
- 14.8 The MOMs help the members gain a better understanding of service delivery issues and influence priorities at a local level, by discussing these with officers. MOMs are also used to resolve issues impacting across ward boundaries, by calling joint MOMs (eg recent joint Brightmet/Little Lever & Darcy Lever MOM to resolve issues in Leverhulme Park).
- 14.9 Mailing lists are used for area forums to share information outside of meetings – members of the public can sign up for these. There is also information about the forums on the council's website.
- 14.10 **Full Council Meetings**  
Members of the public may attend the full Council meetings. Petitions may also be handed in to be considered by the full Council. Meetings are live streamed via the council's website, and can also be accessed at a later date.
- 14.11 Changes resulting from the Coronavirus Pandemic  
Since the pandemic, the council has moved to holding as many meetings as possible online. As the council increasingly returns to day-to-day business we will need to work through the challenges presented by needing to maintain social distancing and safe working practices, whilst ensuring that residents and other stakeholders are able to participate and have their voices heard. Given the particular challenges that some areas of Bolton face around deprivation and lack of, or limited access to, online channels, councillors will need to be supported to connect with their residents in different ways in future.
- 14.12 **Other Councillor Meetings**  
Members may request ad hoc and planned public meetings to engage and consult with residents and businesses on a single issue basis, particularly since the area forums have become annual meetings. Recent examples include meetings about the Farnworth town centre development. These meetings are sometimes organised and/or facilitated by external partners, such as developers.

#### 14.13 **Member Surgeries**

The council pays for one meeting per councillor per month.

#### 14.14 **Public Accessibility**

All public council meetings are now live streamed and recorded for later viewing, including full Council meetings, Planning Committee meetings, and Cabinet Meetings. A forward plan of decisions, all agendas and non-confidential reports are published on the council's website in advance of meetings. In the interests of transparency, although most savings review reports are initially confidential, once staff and/or stakeholders have been briefed, the council publishes all of them, apart from where other confidentiality exemptions apply. Minutes of all Executive Cabinet Member and Cabinet meetings are published within 48 hours. All relevant reports require an Equality Impact Assessment and consultation with staff, partners, residents and other stakeholders takes place where appropriate.

#### 14.15 **The changing role of the councillor**

Already before the COVID-19 pandemic began, the role of councillors was evolving. Many had already adopted social media and emails as a way of engaging with and communicating with their communities. The mechanisms have enabled councillors to become more visible within their electoral areas, both in terms of being contactable and also in terms of messaging and awareness raising of their roles and the services and initiatives the council provides and delivers. The rise of hyper-local parties in Bolton has also driven changes in how ward members work together. For example where previously there might have been single political party representation in a ward, allowing responsibilities in the area to be divided amongst councillors, now there may be two or three different political parties/groups in a single ward. This means that members are likely to need to have a good awareness of local issues across the ward, and attend more meetings than in the past.

14.16 The pandemic has also hastened the move to councillors becoming community champions for wards. Many have engaged with and supported relief efforts for those who were shielding or otherwise vulnerable, or advocated for support or resources. Elected members have had a critical role to play in conveying complex and constantly-changing messages from central government, health authorities and the council, working both independently and together with partner organisations such as faith groups and voluntary and community groups.

### **15 Casework**

15.1 Elected members in Bolton deal with their own casework, and the council does not currently have a case management system in place, although a system is being developed. Members call on officers to provide information to support their case work. Members who represent residents in our most deprived areas tend to have higher caseloads, due to the inherent nature of the issues being experienced by people living there. This is supported by comments received as part of the elected member survey which forms part of this submission.

### **16 Training and Support**

- 16.1 All elected members have an initial half hour induction when newly elected, then a half day induction with the Corporate Leadership Team. Mandatory training is provided to members of the planning and licensing committees, but is offered to all councillors. Some training is now being provided by the council's Organisational Development Team, for example on using MS Teams.
- 16.2 Because there is no dedicated secretariat or member support, members contact the democratic services team for support on a wide range of issues.
- 16.3 All elected members have a laptop provided so that they can participate in virtual meetings. Some members have individual personal social media accounts.

## **Analysis and Conclusions: Community Engagement and the Role of Councillors**

The need for councillors to respond to their changing role and find alternative ways of engaging with and supporting their communities means that a reduction in council size is not recommended, due to the capacity demands this would place on them. However, the range of tools available to members to engage with their communities, including the use of social media, online meetings and so on, means that there are sufficient members within the current size of the council to manage this effectively. Whilst social media can be a valuable tool to help with engagement, the corollary is an increase in councillors being available/contactable by members of the public.

**Conclusions: in order to ensure that there is sufficient capacity to meet the challenges around new ways of working and supporting communities, it is not recommended that the council size be reduced. New technologies and the introduction of a case management system mean that the workload can be managed within existing numbers.**

## 17 Other Issues

### The financial impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic

- 17.1 The council's response to the pandemic has been significant and complex, and has resulted in a high level of unexpected expenditure and pressure on budgets. Although the council already had large budget pressures as a result of the loss of more than £200 million from its budget over the last decade, with a savings programme totalling over £150m overall, the pandemic has severely exacerbated this position. The level of cuts now being faced is unprecedented as a proportion of overall budget, and it is inevitable that a key consequence of this situation is a requirement to reduce staffing levels across the council, as well as stopping or reducing services across the board.
- 17.2 The impacts of this on councillors are multiple: councillors will be under increased pressure from their communities to communicate and explain decisions around reducing services, consult and engage with them, and deal with those who are unhappy about the situation; they will need to work with fewer staff and reduced services to deliver, even though demand in many areas is increasing, and new duties and responsibilities are given to council's frequently; councillors will need to make more difficult decisions about which services to prioritise, and they may also need to learn about and make decisions on alternative delivery models with which they may be unfamiliar at present; councillor casework is likely to increase further, particularly in our deprived areas; the number of complaints sent to councillors is likely to increase.

### Analysis of and Conclusions from the financial impact of COVID-19:

The pressures and demands on councillors to continue to ensure that service users' needs are met as far as possible and to remain up to speed with the changing situation locally, sub-regionally and nationally indicate that a reduction in council size would result in too much pressure on individual councillors. The level of cuts required to council budgets as a result of austerity and the pandemic are severe, and will inevitably lead to significant reductions in staffing to support service delivery and support to elected members.

**Conclusion: the role of elected members is changing and the impact of the budget reductions required will mean that elected members will need to deal with higher volumes of support needs in their communities and less resources to do so, and with fewer staff. Elected members will need to become more self-sufficient. A reduction in numbers at a time when demand is increasing is not recommended. However, the range of tools available to members to engage with their communities, including the use of social media, online meetings and so on, means that there are sufficient members within the current size of the council to manage this effectively.**

## 18 Summary

- 18.1 Drawing on all the evidence and information provided in this document, it is clear that a significant level of elected member capacity is required to ensure that the council's duties and responsibilities are discharged effectively and efficiently. The survey of elected members demonstrates that work demands exceed the expectations held prior to starting the role, and this hard work should not go unrecognised. The complexities of the social, governance and political landscapes in which the council operates require significant levels of knowledge, understanding, preparation and participation from members to ensure that Bolton is able to serve its electorate well and represent the borough across local sub-regional, regional and national partnerships.
- 18.2 The changing nature of politics in Bolton has also meant that there is more diversity of political parties/groups, leading to a need to ensure appropriate representation in our democratic processes. This inevitably means that capacity is required to ensure that the various decision-making meetings, scrutiny, statutory functions, community and partnership meetings are covered.
- 18.3 Whilst Bolton's population is growing overall, the borough is also subject to negative net migration at present. With an increasing older population, high levels of multiple deprivation in many parts of the borough, and increasing support needs as a result of the pandemic across areas such as health, social care, employment, welfare support, business support and housing, the need for councillors to be dynamic and flexible, and work in new ways has never been greater. New technologies are helping to mitigate the increased workloads they are facing, and the council is working hard to put in place further measures, such as a case management system, to facilitate more efficient working processes.
- 18.4 Bolton has considered and implemented different governance models over the years. Given the pressures on us to work as efficiently and quickly as possible, the executive-based system is felt to be the most appropriate mechanism to continue utilising. An elected mayor model is not an option for us in Bolton at present, and although the committee system can be seen to be more transparent, Bolton has built in additional measures, such as Policy Development Groups, to work as transparently as possible.
- 18.5 All this points very strongly to a council which is based on having 60 elected members, with three councillors per ward. Any reduction in council size would make it extremely challenging for members to discharge their duties, especially given the anticipated increase in inequalities and diversity of communities. Any increase in size would be disproportionate to requirements. Although workloads are heavy, technology is enabling members to save time by increasingly attending virtual meetings and using emails and social media.
- 18.6 **The recommendation from Bolton Council is to retain 60 elected members, three per ward.**

## Appendix A - Headline summary for submission of Members' Survey responses

37 responses were received in total to the survey, plus an individual discussion was held with Leader (detail still to be added). The personal information only includes some of the information from the 37, as these questions did not require a response.

Of the 37 respondents:

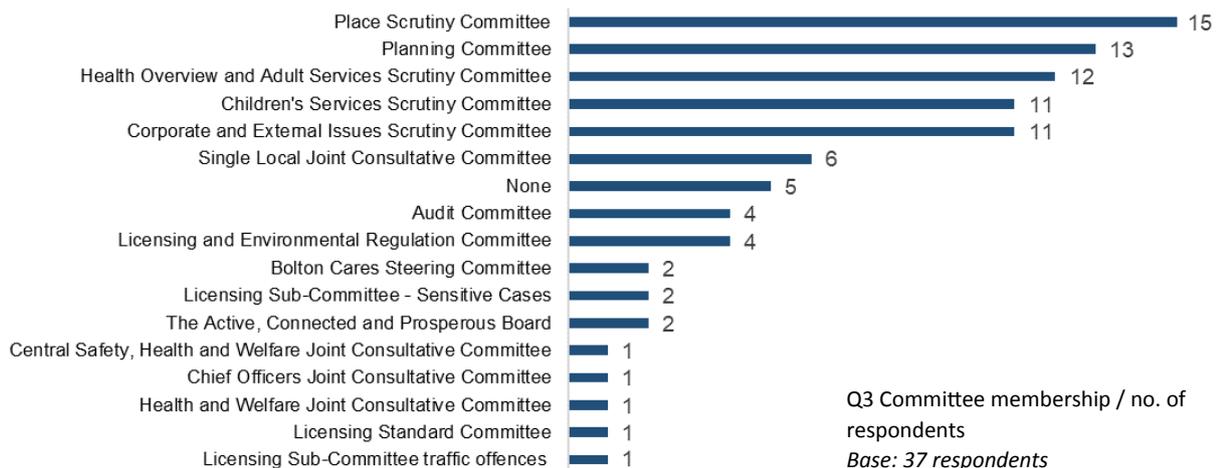
21 male, 13 female

21 were in the 40-64 age bracket, with two aged 26-39, ten aged 65-74, and three aged 75 and over.

The vast majority (25) of respondents described themselves as White British, with 2 identifying as Kashmiri, and one each as Indian, Pakistani, White and Asian and White – Irish. The rest did not provide a response. Three members considered themselves to have a disability, whilst 30 didn't. Impairments included mobility, hearing and MS.

18 councillors had been in office at Bolton for 1-5 years, four for 6-10 years, seven for 11-15 years, and four each for 16-20 and over 20 years. Although the biggest single group had, therefore, been an elected member for 1-5 years, the majority of respondents overall had been councillors for more than five years.

### Committee Membership responses were as follows:



## Other roles within the Council

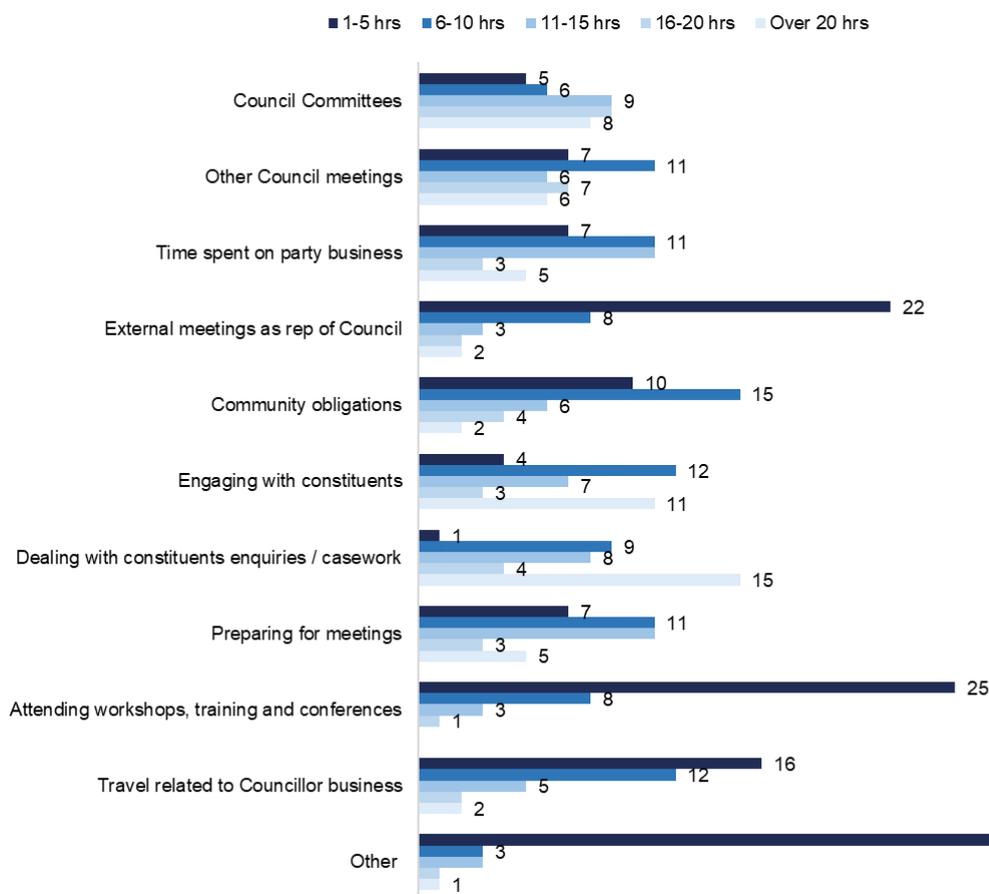
Eleven members said they also acted as a spokesperson, ten of the respondents were Executive Cabinet Members at the time of the survey, three were Scrutiny chairs, two were committee chairs, six said they had other positions, and eleven said they didn't have another position in the council. Roles identified as "other" included: Chair of Town Centre Regeneration Steering Group, Deputy leader of Labour Group, Mayor, Group Leader, Leader of Opposition and Policy Development Groups.

Number of positions held	Number of Councillors holding these positions
None	11
One	22
Two	2
Three	2
Base	37

Of the 37 respondents, 29 said they were members of outside bodies, and eight said they weren't. Not all the appointments were on behalf of the council.

## Pre-Pandemic Councillor Hours per month

The table below shows the responses received:



Q6 Time spent before pandemic / no. of respondents  
Base: 37 respondents

### Comments included:

"...The Attendance is the shortest bit. The pre-work reading and formulating a successful input takes longer...Please note, travel is a bit more for me as I use the buses in the ward purposefully to experience the journeys constituents have to use."

"Attending appeals or Tribunals." "Attending meetings of local community organisations which I am invited" "Campaigns"

"Casework & reporting residents issues – bins, flytipping etc"

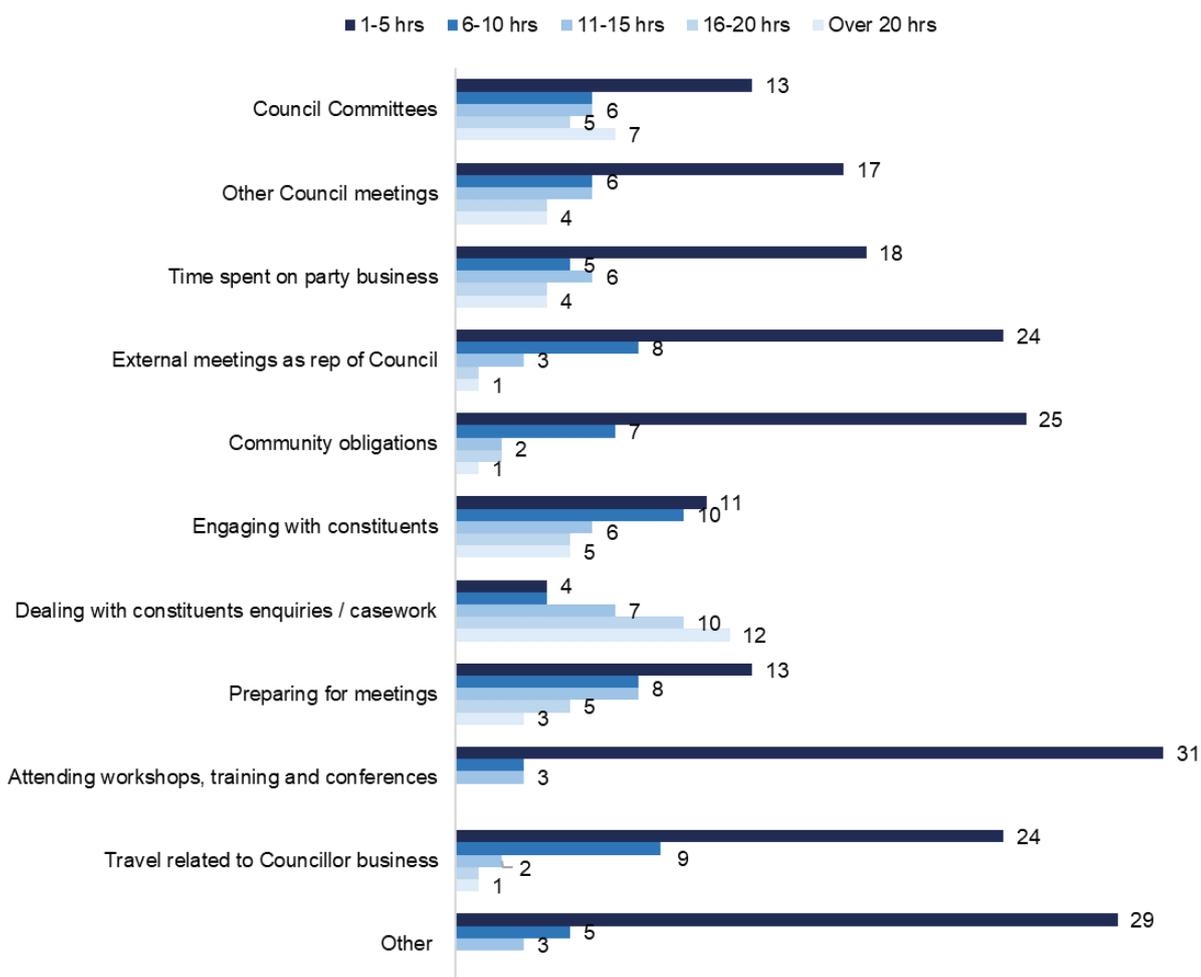
"Council requests such as filling in surveys (such as this one) or declarations"

"Doorknocking" "Fundraising" "Governors meetings"

"Research and assistance of local community groups"

"socialising" "volunteering aspects"

## Councillor Hours Since the onset of the pandemic



Q8 Time spent after pandemic / no. of respondents

Base: 37 respondents

### Comments included:

“virtual meetings with other GM Group Leaders”  
 “Following up residents association issues”  
 Getting used to Microsoft Works, Zoom on my own PC for community groups contact” “Lockdown has restricted many community activities” “Meeting landlords to see social distancing measures” “Organising and delivering Food Parcels to Residents who have been in need during the pandemic, registering local residents as vulnerable, helping local business to apply for grants, helping people in hardship to access Universal credit and local housing support, signposting people to HMRC, local support services such as Homeless UK, forming and supporting new groups.” “Virtual meetings of outside bodies”  
 “Volunteering supporting isolated shielding individuals over the telephone”

## Casework

Respondents reported a range of levels of casework, from one member indicating 1-5 cases or issues per month, to three reporting over 50. The highest responses were 11-15 cases/issues per month (8) and 16-20 cases/issues per month (8).

Members were asked about specific themes for casework: Unemployment, Income, Benefits, Mental Health Support, Housing, General Health, Other. Since the pandemic the picture indicated by the responses has been very mixed, with some members reporting significant increases in casework on some areas of work, whereas others reported the same or less for the same issues.

20 members reported an increase in Income casework, 23 an increase in Benefits casework, 16 in Mental Health Support casework, 19 in Housing casework, 16 in General Health casework, and 13 in other areas of work.

Of the 37 respondents, only 12 (32%) felt that the amount of time spent on council business was in line with what they had expected when becoming a councillor, and 34 of the 37 felt that the time they spent on council business had increased over the years. Reasons for this included the following:

Members were asked to comment why they felt that their workloads had increased, and the main issues raised fell into the themes below:

Issue/Theme	No. times raised
24/7 culture	3
Austerity/cuts/staff reductions/financial pressures	13
More visibility/awareness of cllr role	10
Reputation for helping	3
Additional responsibilities and duties	11
Additional expectations from constituents	1
Social Media	7
increase in workload/casework/reporting of issues/engagement by residents	11
Desire to be hands on	1

When asked which aspects of their duties had increased the most, the main themes that emerged were as follows:

Being involved with residents/community commitment/visits/community work or activities/community issues	7
(Complex) case work	11
Meetings (council, party, with residents, with officers/leadership)	4
Exec Member and Cabinet role	5
Preparing for meetings	2
Antisocial Behaviour issues	3
Environmental issues (street cleaning/fly tipping etc) and complaints	9
Emails and phone calls	1
Social services, social welfare	3
Town centre regeneration	1
Education	1
Planning matters/complaints	2
General matters	1
Uncertainty about future services	1
Housing	1
Highways and traffic	3
Scrutiny	1
Council services and reductions	2
Attending meetings	3
Ward/Area Forum work and area specific projects	1
Supporting residents with process/understanding the processes eg planning	2
Unable to get through to council services, Bolton at Home, non-urgent police contact details.	1
Desire of residents to speak to someone rather than email	1
Lack of awareness of how best to contact services	1

## Communication with Constituents

All but one respondent communicates by telephone, and all but two by email. Face-to-face meetings and other meetings are used by most councillors (33 and 30 respectively). Social media is used by 28 of the 38, text messages by 26, newsletters by 20, letters by 13 and other forms were cited by six councillors.

In terms of the amount of time spent using different methods over the last 12 months, social media had seen the greatest gains, followed by email and telephone. Although some members reported increases in time spent using some methods, significant numbers indicated that the level was about the same for text messages, letters and newsletters (22, 22 and 21 respectively) and "other" methods also saw 25 responses of "about the same". 26 of the respondents felt the balance was right to allow effective communication, with 11 disagreeing. Comments included:

"Able to utilise all media to engage with residents"  
"according to circumstances the balance is about right"  
"All methods of communication are required as residents use different methods themselves so a Councillor has to be increasingly adaptable with all methods"  
"Demands and expectations have increased with 24/7 instant culture; though it's important to acknowledge that varied points of contact make councillors more reachable which is positive for public-council engagement."  
"Due to the covid crisis, face to face meetings and group meetings are now less common"  
"Emails increasing because people are more computer literate"  
"Face to face meetings are vital, much more information learning and sharing takes part when people come together"  
"I am not active on social media but I think that in the modern world this is becoming essential."  
"I have a lot of elderly in my community and with COVID-19 lockdown I have not been able to deal face to face with these constituents. I am involved in a lot of local community and voluntary work which has been severely hampered because of the Coronavirus outbreak."  
"I just think that because there are now so many different forms of contact that the balance is difficult and a constant job to maintain and ensure is properly checked, responded and addressed."  
"I like to make each constituent feel they are receiving my individual attention, hence face to face, phone calls and email."  
"I live in the ward. My office is my surgery. Most people in the ward know so for me it is just right."  
"I prefer meeting constituents face to face"  
"I spend a minimum of 60 hours per week on councillor duties, this is much more than I anticipated when I was elected in 2018."  
"I think due to the fact we are unable to resolve issues at the same rate prior COVID – although I have only been a Cllr for over 12 months it is difficult to equate or quantify due of pandemic. However I will say social media now makes access to Cllrs much easier & thus peoples expectations with responses & delivery in much more demand."  
"Insufficient time to meet everyone so online methods are preferred by constituents"  
"Residents expect their Cllrs to be available 24/7 and expect responses on a commercial timetable basis but the wheels of Council administration move very slowly which means Cllrs often bear the brunt of abuse fo the Council's failure to respond on a timely basis."  
"Residents increasingly using social

media to raise issues, with an expectation that councillors are always available including evenings and weekends."  
"Since the introduction of email it has been quicker and easier to carry out my duties."  
"Up until December 2019 I hadn't used social media and I need to increase this further as this is what people want more and more."  
"Would like to spend more face to face time with constituents but time restraints don't always allow."  
Finally, councillors were asked if they had any other comments that were relevant to the council size submission:

"A reduction of council size (below 60 councillors) would place more pressures on fewer people to deliver council business - the 'machine' can creak at times with current number of members. Councillors' wellbeing needs to be considered. The ability to provide a service for constituents and also fulfil all roles delivering council business can be a difficult balance - again, fewer councillors would tilt balance away from constituent public-facing work and more towards unseen council business."  
"As an executive member I also attend the scrutiny meetings, PDGs, briefings, plus several internal meetings, managing my portfolio and multiple external appointments. I am concerned that if numbers decreased my workload would increase further to provide political balance."  
"Bolton Council appears to me to have the right balance of people to run well, why alter it"  
"Certainly in Horwich which I represent, the population has increased since I was first elected to the Ward in 2011. This in due course adds more work for a Councillor with an increase in the population. I believe overall, the Borough will have seen an increase in the population. This is another reason why Council size should not be reduced."  
"Due to deprivation levels and demographics, some Wards need targeted resources which doesn't exist and therefore some Cllrs have a greater workload burden than others."  
"Due to running the council as a minority party (less than 20 councillors) we are stretched in covering our responsibilities."  
"Given the workload, the current numbers seem to make the balance of casework manageable. I couldn't cope if I had fewer colleagues."  
"I am well known in my area & know my Ward thoroughly. I am responsive to enquiries "  
"I have no knowledge of the other 2 ward member's workload but am aware one also holds a full time job which I would find impossible. "  
"I know I work extremely hard, I don't know how a full time worker can do the role of a Cllr to the best of their ability"  
"I think I am saying that size is only one factor and possibly other factors matter more. There is no performance management of councillors except every four years when the voters decide. In most organisations, that spend public money, the four year period of time would be judged as too long for poor performance - in terms of serving a ward, the hours put in, to go on unchecked. This is just an observation. "  
"I think that the balance is about right with 3 councillors per ward, any reduction on this would create an unrealistic increase in workload (both casework and the number of committees that individual councillors have to sit on) this would reduce the diversity and depth of experience with in the council as only unemployed and retired people would have the requisite time available to sit on the council"  
"My Ward (Horwich and Blackrod) will be expanding by around 20 to 25% in size during the next 10 years, there will be a lot of people who will be in need of

advice and support from their local Councillors.” “My workload is increasing and I presume it is the same for my other 2 ward councillor colleagues. If reductions were made it would increase greatly and this would be difficult and stressful.” “Need to try and maintain communities in the same ward - very difficult when a community is split between two or more wards and residents from a different ward contact you with an issue which is common to the whole community” “Non-cabinet members expected to do more case work.” “Since the last boundary review (2003) the Council has lost control of several functions - a lot of education, Council housing, Property Services is outsourced. Planning Committees have moved from fortnightly meetings to monthly meetings. Area Forum Meetings have reduced from four a year to one a year. Scrutiny Committees have been reduced from five to four.” “Social media I do think the overall split of Farnworth Kearsley Haper green is very difficult for members of the constituent to understand as parts of the areas streets do not make any sense to the people of the borough needs to be made much simpler” “Some wards due to demographics will generate more case work than others” “Some Wards produce very little casework whereas other Wards, especially deprived Wards, produce a lot of casework.” “The current setup is right. Its good to have three per ward. My colleagues spend similar time as me and constituents can get anyone of at anytime. “ “The role has changed more direct contact now than before which was probably more surgery based than walk about.” “The role of councillors hasn't reduced over time, as duties have been transferred. They have just changed. The expectations

of constituents if anything is much higher.”

“There is no way could the council effectively function politically or serve it's residents fully with a reduction in councillors numbers.” “When I think of the area I cover, the different types of communities I represent, the number of engagements I am asked to attend to I am glad I have a team of 3 (for the ward) where people can get in touch with one or another of us and where we as a team can discuss different, joined up solutions. I feel having a full-time job while being a Cllr offers a rounded experience. I understand that others may solely be a Cllr and have that as their only role. I think that there is a place for both and that a balance of life experience such as that is good for any particular Ward.” “Working out in community has increased over years as people have more problems and need more help and advice, due to Austerity and loss of many council preventative services. Many find different ways of engaging all as valid and time consuming. The many Scrutiny committees and responsibility of Exec members and Shadows very demanding in fast moving times as council business is speeded up and preparation for briefings take up great deal of time to ensure Cllrs have an understanding of their briefs. More Council Champions too now. Children's/Mental Heath/Domestic Abuse. Adoption and Fostering Panel membership very demanding too with rise of LAC.Councillors now share responsibility for joint Commissioning for Health with health colleagues. As move further to Integration massive increase in role and responsibility. As councils have to be catalyst for Regeneration this leading role places much more responsibility time and effort on Cllrs to resurrect town centres. Devolved responsibility to townships means need for other local Cllrs to increase their roles. Communities are going to need even more help and support in coming months as we emerge from Covid pandemic, unemployment rises and we see a Poverty Pandemic develop. Vital Cllrs with responsibility know their brief extensively so important to keep an Exec of at least 10 to do all areas justice.”

## Appendix B – Summary of Council Meetings

Meeting	Frequency	Attendees
Cabinet	Monthly	Cabinet Members
Cabinet Briefing	Weekly	Cabinet Members
Cabinet – Informal	Weekly	Cabinet Members
Minority Groups	Monthly	Leader, Minority Groups
Council	Every 6 weeks	All council members
Executive Cabinet Member - The Leader	Every 4 weeks	ECM, Monitoring Officer Rep, Section 151 Rep
Executive Cabinet Member - The Deputy Leader	Every 4 weeks	ECM, Monitoring Officer Rep, Section 151 Rep
Executive Cabinet Member - Adult Services	Every 4 weeks	ECM, Monitoring Officer Rep, Section 151 Rep
Executive Cabinet Member - Children's Services	Every 4 weeks	ECM, Monitoring Officer Rep, Section 151 Rep
Executive Cabinet Member - Stronger Communities	Every 4 weeks	ECM, Monitoring Officer Rep, Section 151 Rep
Executive Cabinet Member – Wellbeing	Every 4 weeks	ECM, Monitoring Officer Rep, Section 151 Rep
Executive Cabinet Member - Strategic Housing and Planning	Every 4 weeks	ECM, Monitoring Officer Rep, Section 151 Rep
Executive Cabinet Member - Environmental Regulatory Services	Every 4 weeks	ECM, Monitoring Officer Rep, Section 151 Rep
Executive Cabinet Member - Environmental Service Delivery	Every 4 weeks	ECM, Monitoring Officer Rep, Section 151 Rep
Executive Cabinet Member - Highways and Transport	Every 4 weeks	ECM, Monitoring Officer Rep, Section 151 Rep
Scrutiny Committee – Place	6 per year	Opposition party members, relevant Executive Cabinet Members
Scrutiny Committee - Children's Services	6 per year	Opposition party members, relevant Executive Cabinet Members
Scrutiny Committee - Health Overview and Adult Services	6 per year	Opposition party members, relevant Executive Cabinet Members
Scrutiny Committee - Corporate and External Issues	6 per year	Opposition party members, relevant Executive Cabinet Members
Policy Development Group	Ad-hoc	Representative from all groups
Appeal Panel - Staff disciplinary and grievance matters	Ad-hoc	At least 3 cross party members
Planning Committee	Every 2 weeks	Planning Committee Members
Licensing & Environmental Regulation Committee	30 per year across the committees	10-15 Committee Members
Licensing Sub-Committee (Licensing Act 2003)		3 Elected Members
Licensing Sub-Committee (Sensitive Cases)		3 Elected Members cover the 2 meetings
Licensing Sub-Committee (Traffic Offences)		
Audit Committee		
Area Forums	1 per ward annually	NDM or AC, Relevant Officers, Partner Agencies
Member Only Meetings	At least quarterly	Elected Members, NDM/AC, Council Officers, Partner Agencies
New Active Connected Prosperous Board	4 times annually	Leader, 2 Elected Members,
Vision Action Group	Monthly	Leader, Vision Action Group Members

## Appendix C

### Diagram of Democratic Decision-Making

The table below illustrates the existing decision making process both for Executive Cabinet Members and the Cabinet.

